Saving Jacobs Wells Baths

Community Learning and Participation Report

Made possible with Heritage Fund

TRINITY

Myers-Insole Local Learning CIC
www.locallearning.org.uk

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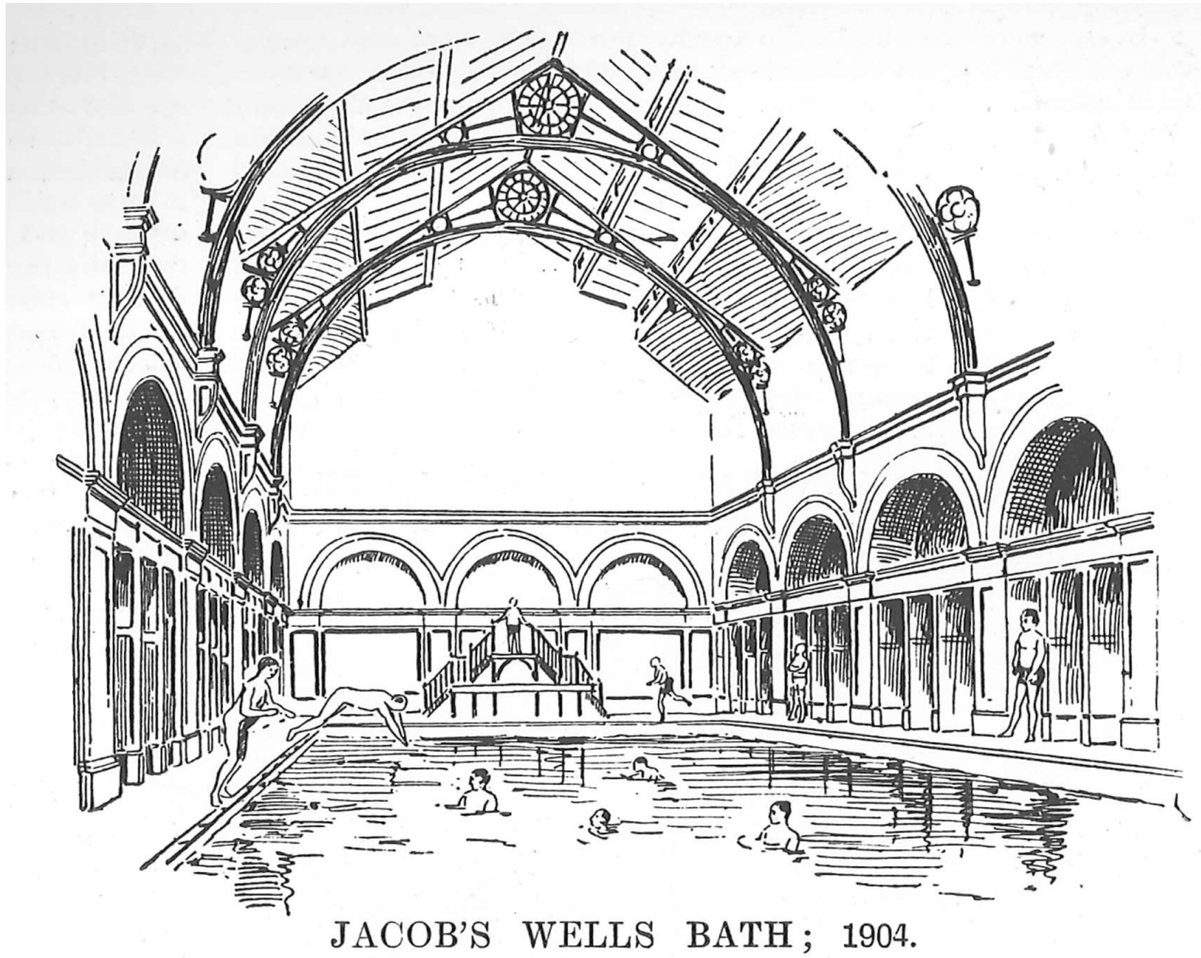
Report written by Ruth Myers and Pete Insole,
Myers-Insole Local Learning CIC

Cover image a colourised version of Samual Loxton's early 20th century drawing of Jacobs Wells Baths, from the UWE Masters Architecture students' report, 2025.



The Baths in 1904, drawn by Samuel Loxton

Overview

"Conserving and valuing heritage, for now and the future. Heritage has a unique role in bringing people together where they live, work and visit." (National Lottery Heritage Fund, first investment principle, Saving heritage)

As part of the Saving Jacobs Wells Baths development phase, funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund, Local Learning were commissioned by Trinity Community Arts to engage with communities, students and accessibility practitioners to explore how a complex historic building can become a truly inclusive civic space.

This work has been grounded in the NLHF principles of Inclusion and Heritage, using co-design, storytelling and lived experience to shape understanding of Jacobs Wells Baths as both a historic site and a future cultural hub.

About the project

Building on our earlier National Lottery Heritage Funded project, *Washing in the Well* which explored the history of the Baths and surrounding neighbourhood through community storytelling and mapping (https://www.locallearning.org.uk/washing-in-the-well/), this phase 2025-2026 focused on dance heritage, civic memory and accessibility, reflecting the building's longer history as public baths and more recently as Bristol Community Dance Centre. Working with communitieds associated with Jacobs Wells Baths, local schools, colleges, university students and accessibility practitioners, the project explores how heritage can be co-produced across generations.

Key themes

Jacobs Wells Baths is a Grade II listed building with a complex history and significant access challenges, including multiple level changes and no lift provision. Across our activities programme, a central question has been:

Who gets to access heritage and who gets to shape it?

Key learning includes:

- accessibility is essential to participation, not an add-on
- physical access directly shapes creative and interpretive outcomes
- lived experience must inform design and heritage decision-making
- youth and community engagement benefits from intergenerational exchange

Partnership & legacy

The project builds on over a decade of collaboration between Local Learning and University of the West of England, alongside schools, disability practitioners and community partners. It connects to wider Local Learning projects exploring mapping, displacement, and civic memory across Bristol, including work in St Pauls, Easton and Southmead.

Reflections

This work demonstrates that, in line with NLHF principles of Inclusion and Heritage:

- heritage sites are shaped by who can access them
- accessibility is fundamental to co-creation
- community knowledge is essential to design and interpretation
- historic buildings can become spaces of shared civic learning

Jacobs Wells Baths continues to evolve as a site where heritage, architecture and lived experience meet, informing a more inclusive future for the building and the city.

Washing in the Well

When Jacob's Wells Baths was opened in 1889, the area around it was one of great poverty and social need. Very few people had running water in their households, and the water in nearby Bristol docks was heavily polluted. In the tenements built into the hillside lining Jacob's Wells Road and Hotwell Road, typhoid and cholera were rife. But the area had a clean water supply from the Jacob's Well which has influenced its history.

Jacob's Wells Baths was built at a time when very few people were fortunate enough to have running water in their households, a time when locals didn't appreciate the risks they were taking swimming in the dirty docks, a time when the whole family would have to take turns washing in a tin bath, in ever-murkier water.

St Brendon's College boys at Jacobs Wells Baths, 16th July 1936, Know Your Place Community Layer

Introduction

About Us

Myers-Insole Local Learning is a small, Bristol-based community interest company that aims to explore local heritage with all members of the community to uncover and share what we learn about our past. We enjoy working closely with a variety of partners in neighbourhoods across Bristol, using heritage as a vehicle to help strengthen community cohesion.

Ruth Myers and Pete Insole have been delivering place based community learning projects in the Bristol region as Local Learning CIC for the last 20 years. Inclusive inter-generational creative activities lie at the heart of these projects that have recently included working with Bristol Disability Equality Forum to create an online learning resource about Bristol Disability Activism in the 1980s, and Mapping the Unmapped neighbourhoods with local communities in Stockwood, Southmead and St Pauls as part of a project coordinated by Alive Activities, a charity dedicated to improving the quality of life of older people and their carers.

Ruth Myers co-produces and co-designs community learning cultural heritage projects with Local Learning. She builds on over 30 years' experience of teaching English in secondary and further education, working together with adults and young people. Ruth is passionate about making learning accessible, relevant, engaging and meaningful to all and particularly enjoys exploring new ideas with local communities, shaping projects and developing new concepts that inevitably emerge through each collaboration.

Pete Insole is an historical and archaeological specialist with over 30 years' experience of working in the heritage sector in Bristol. He is currently the Urban Design Team Manager for Bristol City Council with a responsibility for the city's historic environment. Pete devised and manages the multi-award winning Know Your Place web mapping resource and now advises on its various developments within and beyond the city such as Know Your Place West of England, Bristol University's Know Your Bristol and the Worcester Life Stories project.

For the last 15 years, Pete has been using Know Your Place to develop a story of place concept that provides a platform for multiple voices to collectively share and define Bristol's heritage through historic photos, oral histories, postcards and other formal and informal archives.

Ruth and Pete work collaboratively with other specialists to create engaging and inclusive learning experiences for all participants. In all Local Learning projects, we ensure that the people best placed to tell the story are at the heart of our projects, steering its direction from the outset and build on their specialist knowledge and experience to inform the process and shape final outcomes.

Ruth Myers was present at all activities, co-designing and co-delivering the project with partners.

"My first impression was Ruth's ability to open a conversation and keeping it going naturally. Learning to lead a conversation that invites people to tell their stories is such a skill to have for a successful community engagement and for daily conversation" Nghi, UWE Masters Architecture student.

About our partners in education:

- **Hotwells Primary School** is "a small, nurturing Bristol Primary School" closest to Jacobs Wells Baths. "*Nestled in a historic corner of Bristol, Hotwells is a vibrant and creative, community-focused primary school. We are small in size but bursting at the seams with creativity, warmth and a curiosity to learn! We pride ourselves on our ambitious curriculum, our strengths in the Arts and our wonderful local and global community of children and families.*"

  "*We are constantly looking for ways to enhance our curriculum through trips and visits and we love to use our local environment and the fantastic resource of the harbour at every opportunity.*"

  This project has been supported by **Matt Edwards**, Hotwells assistant headteacher leading on Teaching and Learning and Curriculum.

- **Willow Park Primary School** (formerly St Michael on the Mount Primary School) is a "'*village school' in the heart of the city. As a diverse school we pride ourselves that every child is valued and given the opportunity to achieve their full potential no matter their background.*"

  "At Willow Park there are many languages spoken by pupils and staff. Our staff are very proud of children who have arrived at Willow Park with very little English and who now have the skills to support others as young interpreters."

  This project has been supported by **Claire Jones**, Willow Park headteacher who promotes the school vision, "the ultimate worth of each person in our school is at the centre of all we do. We value the, 'light' of every individual and we seek to nurture that light and encourage each of us to be the light to others."

- **City of Bristol College** is one of the largest further and higher education colleges in the South West, offering a wide range of academic and vocational courses across multiple campuses in Bristol. With a focus on inclusivity and lifelong learning, the college supports learners of all ages and backgrounds. City of Bristol College (CoB) works closely with local employers to deliver industry-relevant qualifications and apprenticeships. Their facilities include modern workshops, labs, and learning environments tailored to prepare students for real-world challenges.

  The college is committed to ensuring every student has the opportunity to thrive, regardless of their starting point, delivering transformative education in dynamic learning environments.

  This project has been supported by **Roxanne Butler**, program management at City of Bristol College, dedicated to transforming learning environments into spaces where inclusion, accessibility and empowerment thrive.

- **University of the West of England (UWE)**. Since 2012, Local Learning have developed an excellent relationship with the University of the West of England having 3rd year History undergraduates on placement with us each year as part of their History in the Public Space module and teams of Masters Architecture (MArch) students developing significant elements of our projects as part of an annual Live Brief. University placements and community volunteers underpin our projects and are a valued asset.

"***I think another really unique way that we work with our live client facilitators is that the students in the facility get to co-create a brief and there's been a really strong element of exploring the way that a Victorian building can be made accessible and inclusive to all. And the process that Ruth has fostered of taking our students and bringing them into the community, bringing them up into schools and giving them contact with users or people who have memories and the community that surrounds Jacobs Wells to really explore what inclusivity really is, and to expand it from a simplistic reading limited to physical accessibility into something that engenders more how a community can become involved and feel ownership and belonging in somewhere that makes it accessible to them. So, they're taking down, removing the barriers of how a building feels and how it's approached and accessed.***

So, I think the way that this project works has enabled that process to happen for our students and they have expanded this idea of what accessibility and inclusion can be and try to apply that to the way that Jacobs Wells could offer itself to the communities that need it and that want it." Louise Ciotti, Senior Lecturer in Architecture, Retrofit and Conservation, UWE

ACTIVITY 1 - Dance Stories at the Baths

Participants:

- 17 x Year 6 pupils + teacher
- 20 x Year 5 pupils + teacher
- Deputy head and learning support staff
- UWE History student
- 4 x UWE MArch students
- 6 x visitors with dance memories

Hotwells Primary, UWE MArch and JWB community

Local Learning's involvement began with the initial community engagement event – *I Danced at Jacobs Wells Baths* – coordinated by Dr Edson Burton and project manager, Jude Hutchen.

Stories and memories gathered at this event helped to inform activities with Hotwells Primary School in close proximity to JWB and the wider community.

"I came to Bristol in 2000 and was invited to join African Dance at the [JWB] Dance Centre – Alan said, 'did you know this was the last class?' Yes I did, but when I went to the car I cried like a baby," Louis.

Working with Years 5 and 6 combined, Ruth provided a series of sessions preparing the children for an intergenerational sharing memories event to gather stories from teachers, students, dancers, audiences, organisers etc with a connection to JWB and its dance community. The preparation sessions involved games and activities focusing on interview techniques, questionnaire design and note taking skills as well as sharing Jacobs Wells Baths heritage and history and the students undertaking their own informal research, interviewing family and friends with a connection to the Baths. The event was held at Hope Chapel and was part documented by filmmakers creating a promotional film for the school.

Visitor's stories:

"I did a lot of ballet and tap dancing in my 20's. My favourite dance move were the spins, though I could never keep up with the funky dance workout at Jacob's Wells Baths. Dancing felt like freedom, being able to move around to the flow of music and surrounded by others was therapy for me." Melanie.

"I came to Bristol and started teaching German at UWE. I did quite a lot of ballet in my early 20s. Back then, I was involved with a group of people to find a community dance centre. Unfortunately, it didn't work out for the two places we found. It was a blessing that we found Jacob's Wells Baths at the end" Ann.

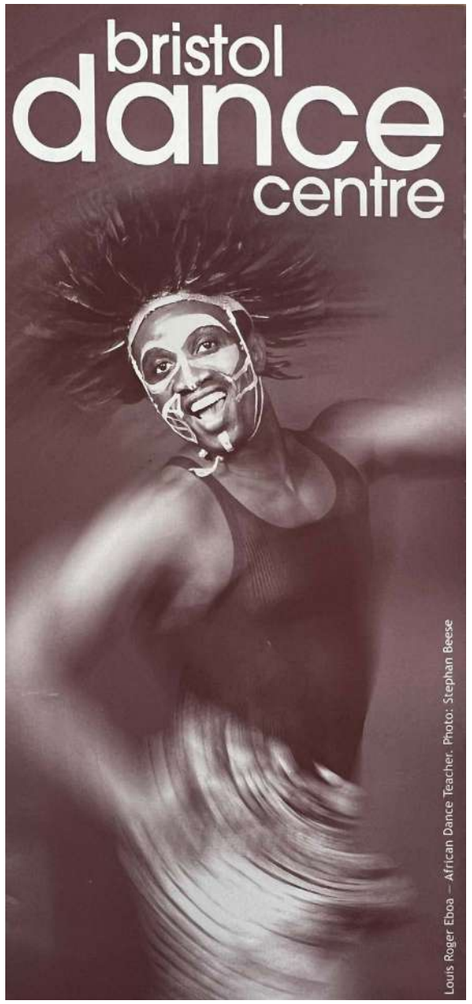
"I remembered in 2016, working on a project where I spent two months in and out of Jacob's Wells Baths. We had a show there, where there were spotlights shining on the dancers. I loved the feeling of celebrating dance together, felt like I was back home" Edson.

"I started ballet in my early 20s and have been doing it for years. I remembered Jacob's Wells Baths was a dance centre for 35 years. The original swimming pool was transformed into a big studio. Most of my memories in Jacob's Wells Baths were the dance sessions, including circle dancing, ballet and contemporary dance." Alexandra.

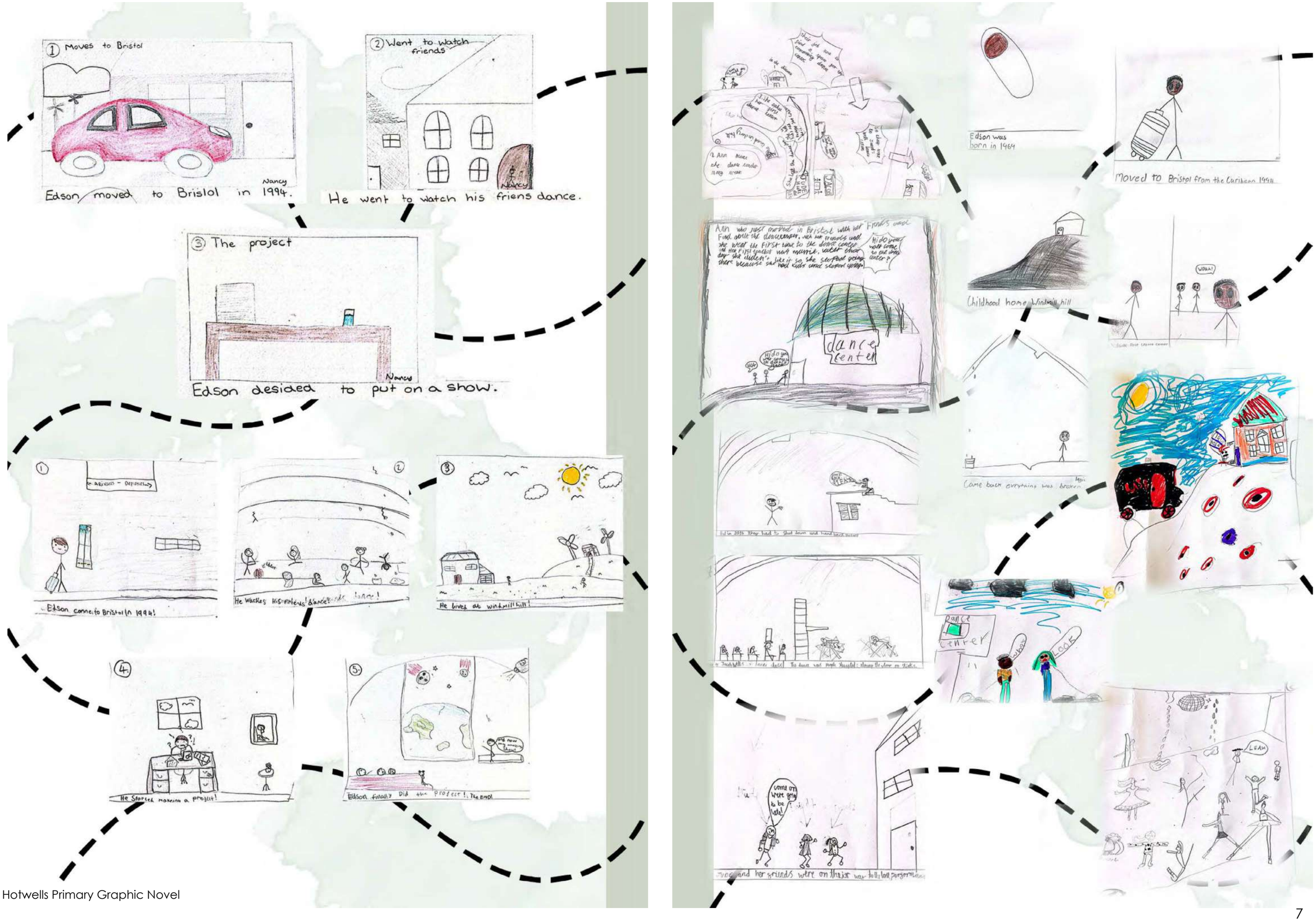
"My friend asked me to join her for a dance session at Jacob's Wells Baths. Although I was not fond of that idea, I went anyway. Things went downhill when I got stagefright and stood frozen in the middle of the stage while others were dancing cheerfully around me" Hannah.

Pupils reported most enjoying ***"hearing the fun stories"*** and ***"meeting new people", "talking to all the friendly people, they were all so nice", "the people we met made us laugh and we enjoyed listening to them".***

The UWE MArch students helped the pupils to illustrate the stories and represent them as graphic novels.



Dance Centre
African Dance flyer


1 Moves to Bristol
Nancy
Edson moved to Bristol in 1994.
2 Went to watch friends
Nancy
He went to watch his friens dance.
3 The project
Nancy
Edson desided to put on a show.
Edson came to Bristol in 1994!
He watches his friends dance!
He lives at windmill hill!
He Started making a project!
Edson finally Did the project!. The end!
Edson was born in 1964
Moved to Bristol from the Caribean 1994
Childhood home Windmill hill
dance center
Came back everthing was broken
dance center
LEAM

ACTIVITY 2 - Co-designing an Accessible Youth Space at the Baths

Participants:
- 6 x CoB students + teacher and learning support
- 2 x BSL interpreters
- 2 x access consultants and co-designers
- 5 x UWE MArch students

City of Bristol College students, UWE MArch and Access and Inclusion participants

This activity with students from City of Bristol College (CoB) on the Pathways to Independent Living course, built on a previous collaboration, Disability Activism Bristol, a NLHF project coordinated by Bristol Disability Equality Forum (BDEF).

It was a lovely opportunity to work again with CoB students, revisiting the Disability Activism Bristol (DAB) learning resource, this time building on the activity developed by City Academy students and members of the West of England Centre for Inclusive Living (WECIL) Access and Inclusion Team (WAIT) to co-design an accessible youth space. And this time, instead of an abstract concept, to work with a tangible, existing heritage building, Jacobs Wells Baths.

DAB learning resource co-creators Daisy Holder and David Ellington joined students from CoB and UWE MArch to assess their designs for a fully accessible youth space and help build 3D models of their concepts. Part 2, MArch student, Najah Mohammed who had played an active role in developing the learning resources for Disability Activism Bristol when on placement last year, very kindly volunteered to continue supporting Local Learning in her second year and returned to CoB to work with some of the same students on this new development.

The first Disabled people led protest in Bristol at the Arnolfini in 1989

"Disability Activism Resource: They [CoB students] started off by going through the disability activism learning document provided by Local Learning, Daisy Holder and David Ellington. Throughout the presentation the students gave insights into their experiences with their disabilities, and we focused on how we should design a space that allows a disabled person to utilize the space like anybody else.

During this part of the day the students really focused on what factors could be seen as negatively impacting disabled people such as areas being overstimulating due to loud TV's, crowds of people as well as more traditional access issues such as counters and furnishings being too high for wheelchair users, pillars in walkways etc.

We made an important note that windows should be on pulley systems to ensure that anybody can open them. They also mentioned that staff and students should be trained in sign language to allow easy communication. This input really helped us to ground our ideas and started to help us put together the beginnings of a proposal.

... two of the students focused on designing an accessible cinema space while the other student began master planning the Youth Space before then focusing on the quiet/calming spaces.

Some key takeaways from the session were that all doors and access points should be automatic; all hallways and social spaces should be able to fit a mobility scooter through.

The student designing the quiet space was very thorough in how he wanted his quiet space to be designed with subtle lighting to ensure comfort and minimal stimulation. Sensory and fidget toys to support those with cognitive disabilities or neurodivergence. Soft carpets and furnishings to make the space comfortable and noise cancelling headphones for those that want them. He also wanted to integrate the reading nook into this space." UWE MArch final report.

Disability Activism Bristol

In 2020, Local Learning (MILL) was commissioned to co-create learning resources based on stories from people who had played key roles in the Disabled People's Movement from the 1980s to 2010. Bristol was a central place for Disability Activism during this period and the Social Model of Disability became widely used here long before it did in many other cities.

A Research Group of Disabled young people (under 25s) volunteered to gather the stories of Disabled activists who campaigned for equality and independent living and worked to see the Social Model implemented in Bristol's services.

In collaboration with BDEF, Disability History researcher, Daisy Holder and Deaf filmmaker, David Ellington, Local Learning used these stories to underpin the creative process and inform digital learning activities aimed at secondary school and beyond.

Students from three educational institutions were key to the process, their thoughts and insights invaluable in shaping the final version and associated films that were then embedded into the free accessible online learning resource.

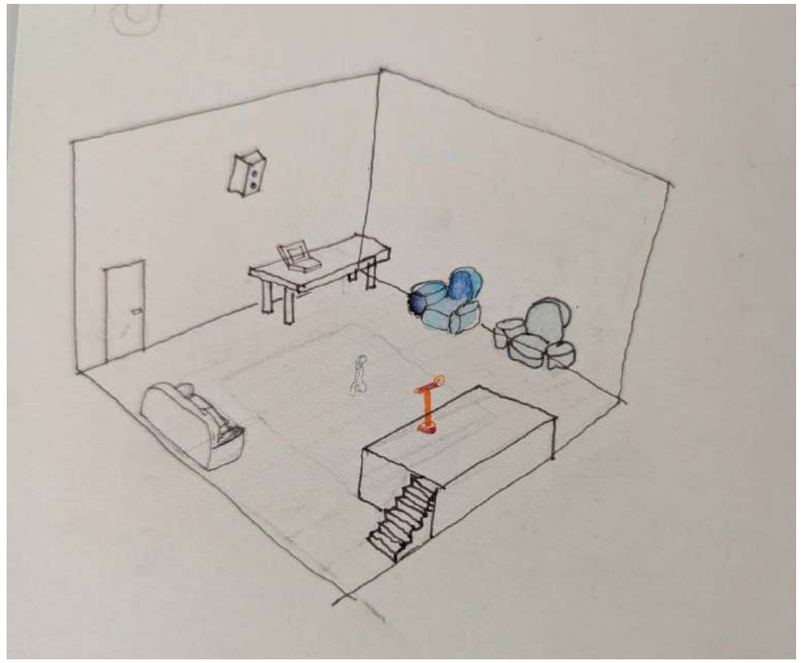
The creation of the learning resource was continually shaped by the activities with young people and the inter-generational conversations that were at the heart of the process.

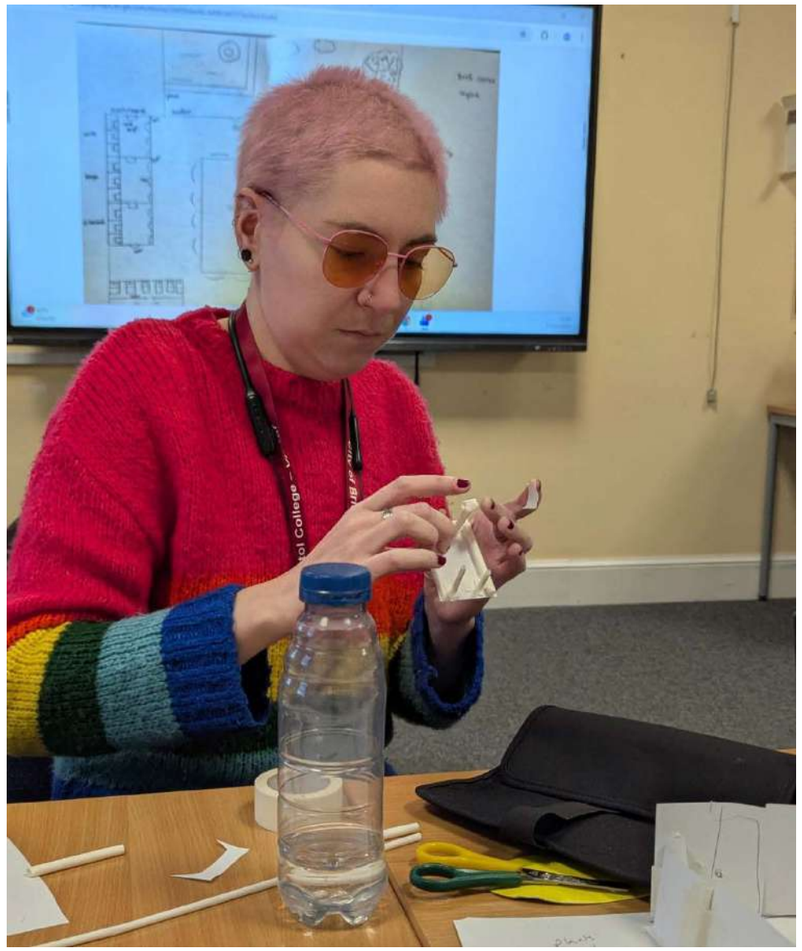
https://www.locallearning.org.uk/disability-activism-bristol/

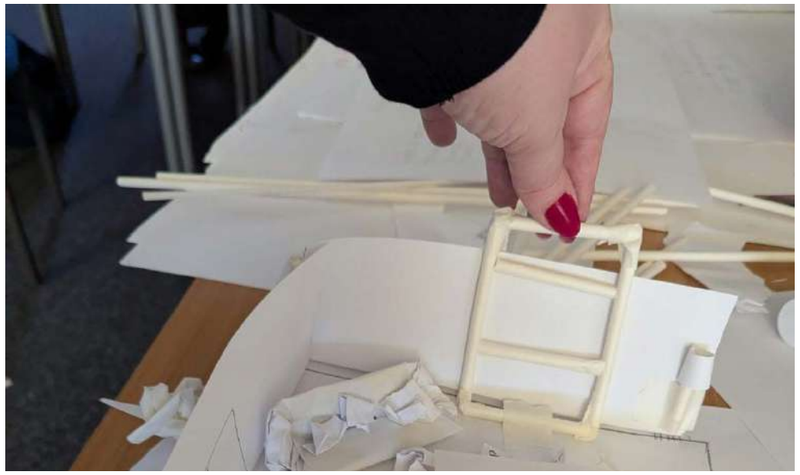
When exploring ideas for a co-designed accessible youth space it became apparent that many young people today did not fully understand the concept of a youth club, having had no personal experience themselves. This flagged up the value and importance of a dedicated youth space in central Bristol and building on the important work being carried out by the Trinity team into youth provision.

It was unfortunate that the building was unsuitable for disabled students on the Pathways to Independent Living to visit the site. It would have been more engaging to consider what would make for an accessible youth space being inside the building. The UWE MArch students provided architectural floor plans and photographs of the building's interior and the CoB students acquired some architectural skills and terminology, orienting themselves using the architectural plans of the building, but it would have been a more meaningful experience if the CoB students had been able to access the building themselves and explore the space, imagining its potential.

"As part of our aim to produce a youth centre within Jacobs Wells Baths we visited the local college to garner some design input from the students on the pathways to independent living course. This co-design session was invaluable to our progress on the project, and the students came up with some insights that we definitely would have overlooked." UWE MArch Final Report autumn 2025.







ACTIVITY 3 – Capturing Swimming Memories in Clay

Participants:

- 12 x Year 5 and 6 pupils + teacher and learning support staff
- UWE History student
- 4 x UWE MArch students
- Alan Dyte and personal assistant

Willow Park Primary School, UWE MArch and History students and recollections from Alan Dyte, Royal School for Blind Children alumnus

Willow Park (formerly St Michael on the Mount Primary School) were involved in the initial Washing in the Well project, given their close proximity to the Baths and also, regarding the Jewish history, their very close proximity to Park Row Synagogue. Pupils then produced an illustrated historic map of the area and considered the significance of the well in the past. We explored the significance of water and ritual in the many cultures represented at the school.

Together with the UWE MArch and History students, we worked again with pupils from the school and had the opportunity to interview Alan Dyte who had learned to swim at JWB in the 1950s, whilst a pupil at Bristol's Royal School for Blind Children. He also shared memories of dance classes and competitions later on when it was a dance school. Alan was also a participant in the Disability Activism Bristol learning resource, sharing his thoughts about what would make for a fully accessible youth space with City Academy students.

UWE MArch students supported the pupils in creating tactile clay tiles depicting some of the memories Alan shared with the children.

Alan Dyte in conversation with Willow Park pupils

"I used to use Jacob's Wells Baths to go swimming from 1948 through to 1953. At that time, I was going to school in a special school for the blind, which used to be in Bristol, which closed in 1969. And they used to bring us down here on a bus, and we had to walk from the Triangle or Queen's Road all the way down to Jacob's Wells in a crocodile. Now, if you're going swimming as a blind person, there are things you have to know, or you can't do it.

Now, for instance, I could see quite a bit when I went swimming, so I was in charge of people with no sight. So the first thing you had to point out to them was the fact that the distance between the changing rooms where they're getting their costumes on and the edge of the pool was not very wide. If you took two or more steps, two wide steps, you would definitely be in the pool.

You need to know where the shallow end is and the deep end. And when you're standing underwater, if you can't see, it's all the same. You can touch any side you like, and it all feels the same. So you've got to know where you're facing, else you're going to go, like that girl said, turn around and get clogged into the side of the pool. So it's vitally important you get in the pool and you learn where you are.

Because blind people...may want to be with their friends, but they don't know where their friends are. So lots of people try shouting out, and you have to stop that because, yes, you can have fun, but if everybody's shouting out, then nobody can hear anything."

Which blind school did you go to?
"The Bristol Royal School for the Blind, as it was called, was on the corner of Henleaze Road and Southmead Road. And it was a huge, big building. It was built in 1909, and there was 120 boys and girls there, plus staff."

How many years were you swimming for?
"Oh, I loved swimming. I carried on swimming once I was taught it. So, as I said, I got my miles certificate, which not many people got. I also did life-saving, which meant that you had to do special tests set up by the Lifeboat Institute for saving someone. You had to literally go and save somebody in the pool. My life-saving thing, what did I do? I used to have to dive into a person that was in the pool, dressed in their pyjamas. I had to catch hold of them without taking their pyjamas off, catch hold of them by their ears and put their head on my chest and then swim on my back to the shore and get them out on the shore and do mouth-to-mouth resuscitation."

How many years were you in the blind school and when did the blind school have its own pool?
"Yeah, the blind school had its own. Once we got swimming in 1952, the blind school had extra facilities because I can't remember if there were diving stages at Jacob's Wells, but we had them at the blind school and I was taught high diving and I used to dive for competitions off of the 10-metre board at the outdoor pool at Weston-super-Mare. 10 metres high. Everybody was frightened to death except me."
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Reflections from MArch autumn cohort:

"This project has been incredibly engaging and a unique experience that has allowed us to deep dive into local communities across Bristol and the ideas behind co-creation. I think having Local Learning as a client guide us through some of the nuances of the project has been invaluable, yet we have still had many opportunities to flourish our creative input and design through play.
…we have a strong project and I look forward to seeing how the consultation turns out in the future." Andrew.

"The Jacob's Wells Bath project provided me with a valuable opportunity to immerse myself in a wide range of engagement activities. As architects, we are frequently required to present our thoughts, ideas and designs, yet this particularly through working with Local Learning helped me develop equally important skills as a listener and observer. I was continually fascinated by the creativity of the children involved: the way they perceive the world, approach problems, and propose imaginative solutions.
This experience encouraged me to push beyond conventional limits and explore architectural ideas through creative processes and play. Clay provided a significant role in the project, serving as a tactile and expressive medium that allowed ideas to be translated into physical models. These models often conveyed a deeper level of understanding than words alone. Through these activities, I gained a stronger appreciation of the architecture of Jacob's Wells Baths and the rich history embedded within it.
Overall, I am deeply grateful for this experience, which reminded me that understanding a building extends beyond drawings, plans and sections. Architecture is also shaped by memory, storytelling and the lived history of a place, all of which are essential to truly engaging with the built environment.
…it was a valuable experience working with new people and having a real client. All in all, this project was really insightful and gave me a better concept of how socially engaged architects can be for their future practice." Annabelle.

"The Jacob's Wells Baths project was a valuable experience that allowed me to work closely with the local community and better understand the idea of co-creation. Working with Local Learning helped me see how important it is for architects to design with people rather than simply designing for them. listening to the ideas and perspectives of the children and other participants showed me how creative and insightful community input can be.
…the experience improved my confidence in working collaboratively and highlighted the importance of clear communication and shared responsibility when completing a group project, especially when working with a real client.
This project also highlighted the importance of using playful and hands-on activities to share ideas and encourage collaboration. These methods made it easier to communicate design ideas and allowed everyone to take part in the process. Through this experience, I developed a stronger understanding of the history and meaning of Jacob's Wells Baths and how places are shaped by memory and lived experience as well as by design. Overall, the project helped me appreciate the social role of architecture and the impact it can have on communities." Morgan.

"For the first time, I had the opportunity to work with a community, which enabled me to understand the goal of Local Learning. I'm happy to have been involved in the design ad consultation process of the project, as well as exchanging ideas with my colleagues, which gave me a different and unique perspective on how to work with other individuals. It's been a beautiful learning experience, and I'm immensely grateful for the opportunity." Abdulazeez.

Clay models/tiles created by pupils representing some of Alan's stories

WILLOW PARK PRIMARY

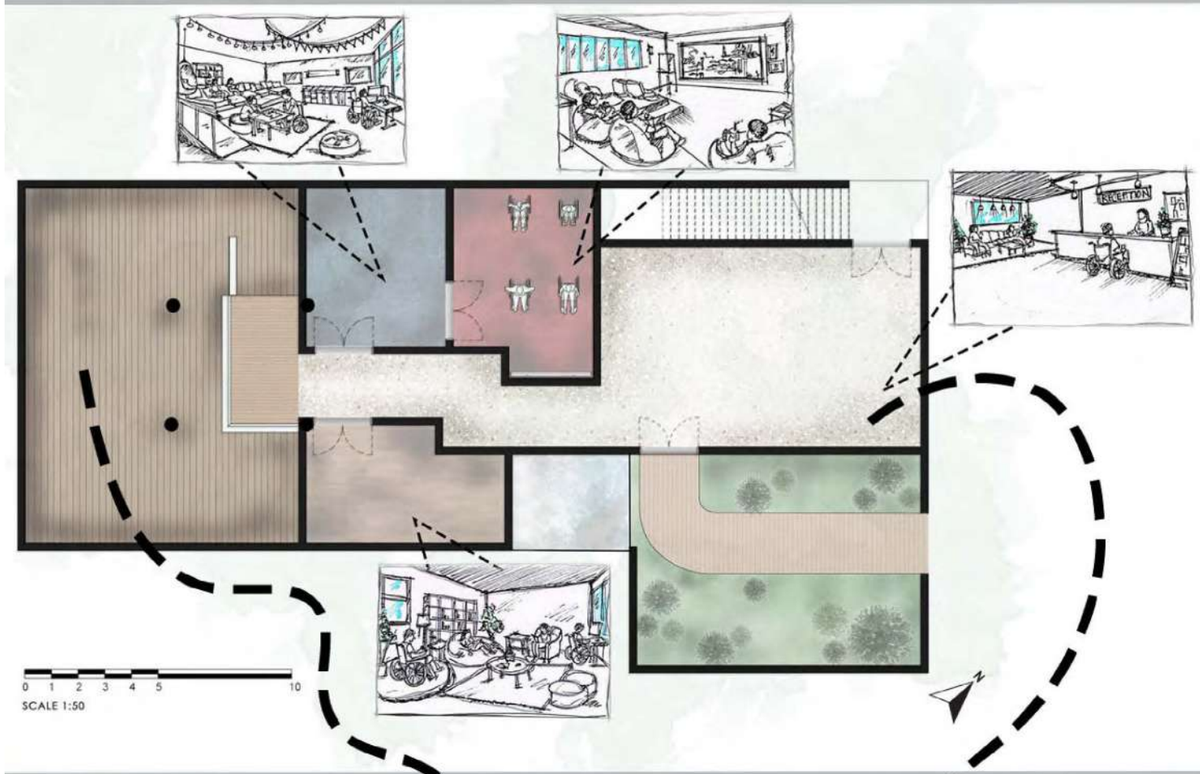
THE RHYTHM OF WATER AND DANCE

Our time at Willow Park was incredibly insightful both thanks to the students and especially the first-hand accounts from Alan Dyte about his time swimming and dancing at Jacob-wells baths as a blind individual. The day started off with Ruth introducing us to the children and then going into what they think Jacobs wells baths might be from the name alone, this gave us some inspirations for some subtle nods that we can include in our proposal to pay homage to the children's ideas. They thought the building could be a Bird bath, an Artist, a water well or a bakery. Perhaps the final proposal could include some sculptings of these within the garden space out the front.

The students were then asked about their first times swimming, and they spoke about feeling scared that they sometimes avoided their lessons, but they also felt pressured, eventually they did say it was fun. We can draw parallels between the children's feelings while swimming and the way that Alan felt when he was swimming and its especially interesting how mired his experience was in safety constraints and risks before even getting into tthe pool. I think that while designing the youth club that Bristol city college came up with, we should focus on ensuring these feelings are accounted for via the quiet space. We could potentially do this via colour theory and lighting.

After this Alan began to recount his history with Jacobs-wells Baths; he went swimming there from 1948 – 1953. He spoke about the struggles they had to deal with from being guided around the bath so that they can get a feel for the layout of the space, this was to make sure they dont fall in. He also spoke about how when he was swimming it's impossible to tell which direction he is in due to the water, so they had to tie a rope around him. The most difficult part of going swimming for him as a blind person was getting into the water as he was not able to see the stairs. They felt their own shoes when trying to find their cubicle as they were just tents, not a proper room, this meant there was nothing else they could use to identify their cubicle. One aspect I found interesting was his memory of his body when he was getting into the pool he will never forgot the feeling of the cold water slowly creeping up his body and how uncomfortable that made him feel.

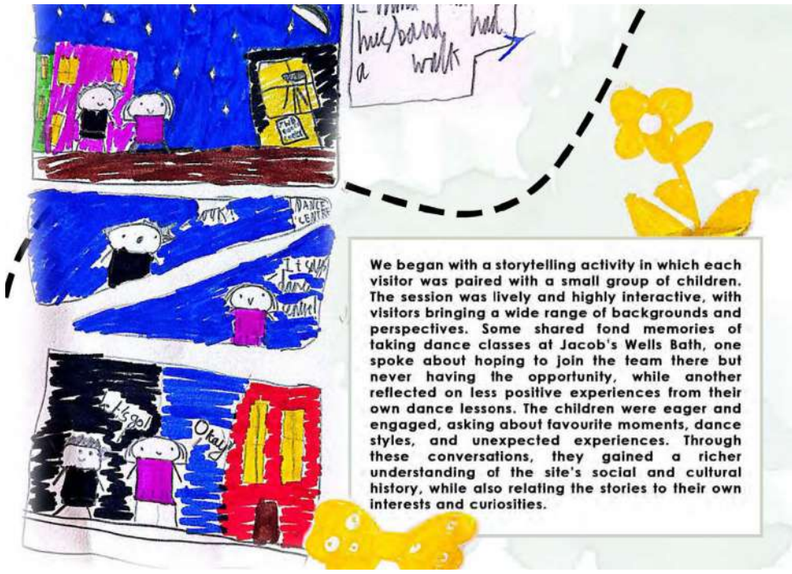
YOUTH CLUB PLAN

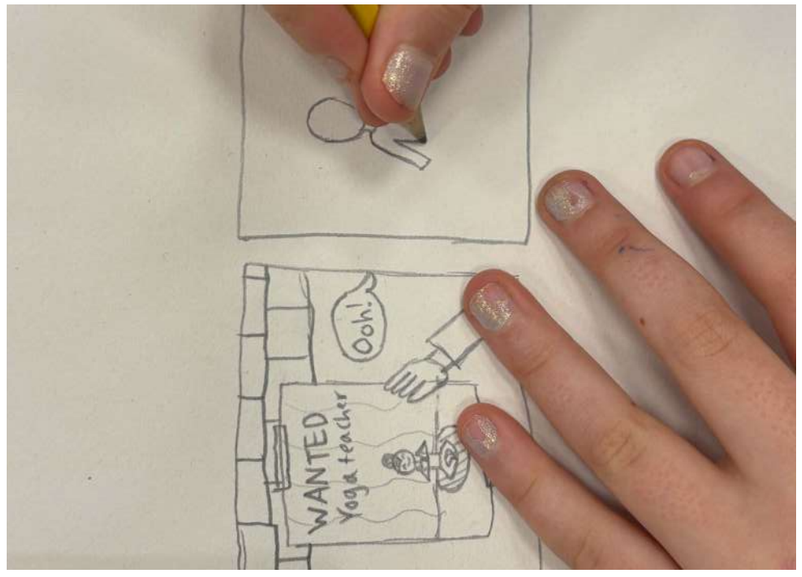


YOUTH CLUB SECTION

Pages from the UWE Masters Architecture students' final report

ACTIVITIES 1-3





ACTIVITY 4 – Storytelling through Dance (Spring 2026)

Participants:

- 12 x Year 5 and 6 pupils + teacher and learning support staff
- 5 x UWE MArch students
- 2 x RISE Dance facilitators

Following a restructuring within UWE's School of Architecture, we were fortunate to have, for the first time, a new cohort of UWE MArch students in the spring term. They began their placement by visiting Trinity Community Arts and drawing parallels between this Grade II listed church in Old Market and the Victorian Jacobs Wells Baths. As with the previous autumn cohort, they liaised closely with the JWB designated architect when considering activities and fulfilling their course commitments. Their ideas and reflections are included in an interim report

Willow Park Primary School, UWE MArch and RISE Youth Dance Company

There is a strong international theme to the Dance Centre and another potential activity is celebrating the multicultural demographic of Willow Park through dance and similar to a previous collaboration with the school (celebrating abolitionist, philanthropist and high wire walker Carlos Trower – aka 'the African Blondin' who lived nearby on Christmas Steps and used his platform to promote the emancipation of oppressed people), children enhance the final outcomes and contribute to our understanding of the universality of dance with their own experiences.

Working with:

- Helen Wilson, artistic and strategic leadership of RISE Youth Dance Company
- Sarah Franke, Trinity's Children's Programme Manager, co-leading the Cultural Alliance programme, an arts-education initiative designed to enhance creative opportunities for children in local primary schools
- A new spring cohort of UWE Masters Architecture students on placement focussed specifically on Jacob's Wells Baths as a repurposed building.

We devised a programme of activity around community and heritage arts that can potentially be built into the curriculum and revisited in future years as a legacy of this project.

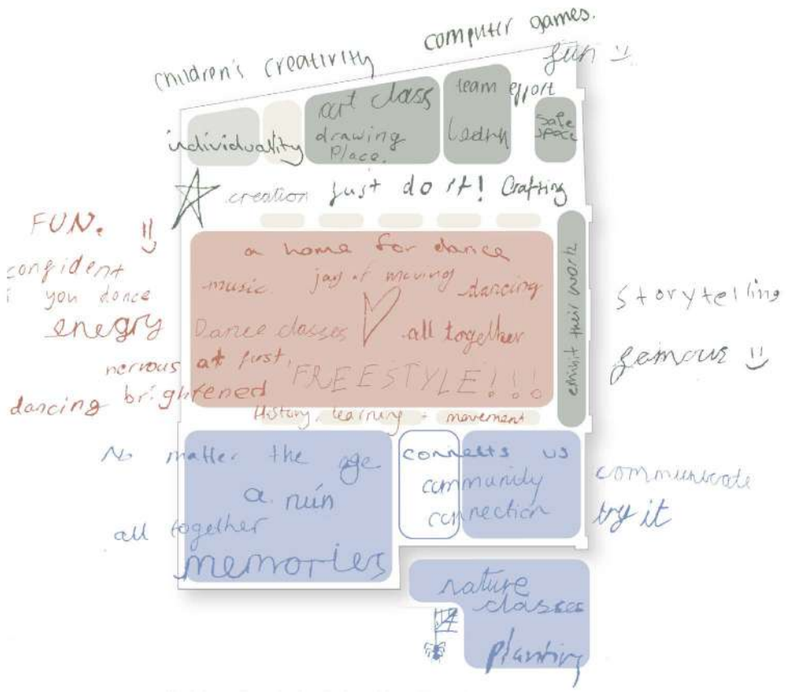
Building on activities in the autumn term, we recapped JWB's history and Helen shared stories of her first dance class there and subsequent explorations into Contemporary, Breakdance, Capoeira, Salsa and African dance before leading a warm up incorporating movements from her early dance classes.
We gathered everyone's earliest memories dance memories and Helen created bespoke movements representing each individual's contribution. This was followed by gathering everyone's dance inspirations and curated into a final dance piece.

Embedding Arts into the curriculum with Years 5 and 6, exploring varieties of dance reflected in the multicultural demographic of the school and choreographing together a performance piece to be shared with families and friends, with an original ambition of contributing to a final exhibition co-curated by UWE Masters Architecture students.

"A recurring ambition across these discussions was that Jacob's Wells Baths should not become an exclusive or single-use venue. Instead, it should remain open, welcoming and useful to the community over time. This became central to my own proposal, which explores the main hall as a flexible civic interior supported by a reversible plug-in scaffold." Anirudh, UWE Masters Architecture student

"It's important to tell the history and stories through movement – it connects us." Helen Wilson, RISE Youth Dance Company

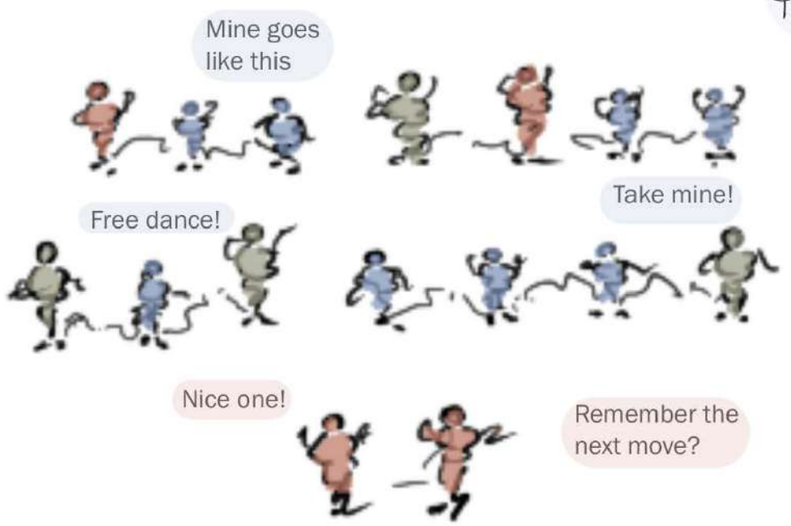
"History, learning and movement can all intertwine compliment each other" Charlie, RISE Youth Dance Company



Words the pupils used to describe the activity and future of Jacobs Wells Baths overlaid onto the building zones, UWE Masters Architecture student, Mae Blower

4

LET'S PUT TOGETHER A PERFORMANCE MADE FROM YOUR MEMORIES' DANCE MOVES



5

WHAT MADE YOU SURPRISED AND ENJOYED THE MOST?

creating our own dancing
The cool dancing

Storytelling through dance
creating own dances

confidentiality
made our own dance moves

I thought it was boring but it wasn't :)

I was nervous at first, but then the dancing brightened me up

everyone can keep the energy
The effort of dancing

making a dance all together
That i didnt know we were dancing

the Giddy

freestyle dance creation
FUN :)

"It's important to tell the history and stories through movement, it connects us. Dance is a part of everyone." - Helen

"Dance is part of everyone lives in some way shape or form." - Charlie

6

WHAT COULD JWB BE FOR YOU IN THE FUTURE?

Ballet hall
art class

a farm

a ruin

famous :)

a gymastic class

nature classes
Dance classes

cooking centre
swimming pool
drawing Place

Reflection

The workshop showed that communication does not always require words, with dance acting as a shared emotional and social language. It reinforced that architecture should also support interaction, expression, and collective identity.

This experience significantly shaped my understanding of co-creation and informed my proposal. Instead of designing the main hall as a purely functional space, I began prioritising atmosphere, openness, and collective interaction, considering how circulation, visibility, and adaptable space can encourage participation and social connection while respecting the building's heritage.

Extract from UWE Masters Architecture student Nghi Tran's final report

Storytelling through Dance Evaluation

Willow Park Primary: Engagement Through Dance

Storytelling through dance; Creating own dances

Overview of Acitivity Embedding Arts into the curriculum with Years 5 and 6, exploring varieties of dance reflected in the multicultural demographic of the school and choreographing together a performance piece to be shared with families and friends potentially at the school, in Jacobs Wells Baths or on Brandon Hil.

Name	**Role**	**What did you most enjoy about this activity ?**	**Tell us something that surprised you about this project?**	**What would you tell someone else about this project?**	**What have you learned through being involved in this project?**	**What would you like to happen at JWB in the future?**
Anase	Year 5/6 student	Everyone can keep the energy	The effort of dancing	The memories of dancing	Communicate in a different way of dancing	Ballet hall and art class
Siemon	Year 5/6 student	The Griddy	Quickly learned	I was dancing	How to dance	A ruin
Elijah	Year 5/6 student	The dancing	We made out own dance moves	That it was good	Different types of dances	A farm
Zeynep	Year 5/6 student	Dancing and music	That I was nervous at first, but then the dancing brightened me up	That it was fun =)	That when you are nervous, you will be more confident as you dance and just do it!	Swimming pool, cokking center, and drawing place
Basil	Year 5/6 student	The cool dancing	Creating our own dancing	They should try it	Types of dances	A farm
KK	Year 5/6 student	The freestyle	The freestyle because I've never done freestyle	The dance creation part	FREESTYLE!!!	Dance classes and nature classes.
Angel	Year 5/6 student	That we made out own dance	That I throught it was boring but it wasn't =)	That I had fun of dancing =)	To dance booty :)	That is will be famous =)
Mubairg (spelling unsure)	Year 5/6 student	It was fun	I hava creating own dances	Have fun	Storytelling through dance	
Vashthi Valentina	Year 5/6 student	Making a dance all together	That I didn't know we were dancing	That it is fun and that we can learn different moves	Big '?'	To turn it into a gymnastic class

Name	Role	What did you most enjoy about this activity ?	Tell us something that surprised you about this project?	What would you tell someone else about this project?	What have you learned through being involved in this project?	What would you like to happen at JWB in the future?
Zayanah	UWE M.Arch	Getting to move and have fun dancing. Enjoyed the energy and collaboration	Surprisingly easy to get into. The dance came together quickly	That this is a collaborative effort, telling out collective series	The joy of moving. I should be moving in dance and dance creation more.	We live a very stiff and rigid life, having JWB incorporate spaces to move/dance included in its redevelopment
Fatemeh	UWE M.Arch	Everyone's energy and involvement	How memories make movements	That dance is more than just random moves	No matter the age, everyone can bond and connect with others through dance	Art + painting + swimming; being with friends + safe space + with family; seeing and playing sports; you could go to everyday; playing games; being green; place to make difference with like minded people; exhibit their work.
Mae	UWE M.Arch	Everyone's enthusiasm and energy. Seeing the children's creativity	Team effort. Children helped choreograph	Unique way of capturing memories. Dance to tell history	Different ways to engage and communicate, not always communicat through words	Active activities; class with different ages; computer games; gymnastics; capturing/ showcasing art; being seen/famous; environmental activist art (WP school curriculum)
Nghi	UWE M.Arch	Getting back to being a child with free movement - freestyle. Making the dance together. Everyone energy	How to make the dance out of memories. Helen can remember all the memories, and with Charlir turned all iinto dance movement	Using dance to tell history of JWB	Dance brings everyone together without much talking - matching energy like music. That turning memories to dance is possible. Communicate through dance	Dance as culture (freestyle; contemporary; ballet); Crafting; Garden for planting and nature class. Environmental Activist Art (WP curriculum)
Charlie	Dance teacher	Seeing all of the movements the young people came up with and putting them all together in the dance	How well we worked and how much the young people were able to make in a short time	History, learning and movement can all intertwine compliment each other	Dance is part of everyone lives in some way shape or form. They all had a dance memory. Dance is part of life	Space for community connection using dance
Helen	Dance teacher	Watching the children be creative and confidence growing	How much dance we made in such a short space of time	That it's important to tell the history and stories through movement - it connects us. That dance is a part of everyone.	What inspire others and how individuality can be part of building something together	Keep dance, movement and culture in the space. Keep a home for dance so it can grow in the city.

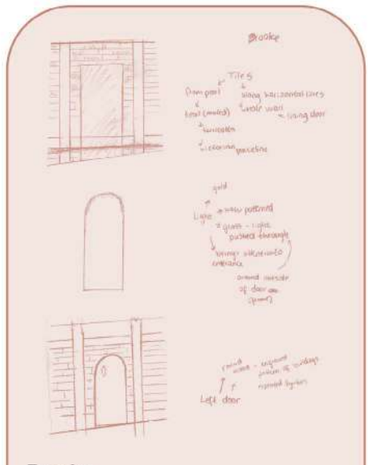
ACTIVITY 5 – Making an Entrance (Spring 2026)

Participants:
- 4 x CoB students + teacher and learning support
- 5 x UWE MArch students

City of Bristol College and UWE MArch

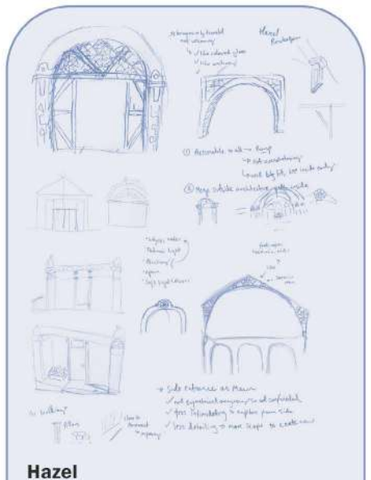
This time working with Art and Design students at the College Green site, the architecture aspects are of particular interest as next year they are launching a pathway of applied design, in which architecture will be an element. The new cohort of Masters Architecture students have proposed using materials from the JWB site that are not being reused in the renovations to create art installations reflecting the heritage of the building.

A recent idea is to reference the Making an Entrance section of the Disability Activism Bristol learning resource and co-design an entrance to the newly renovated JWB that presents the venue as an attractive destination, conveying the social history and a clear message that all are welcome.



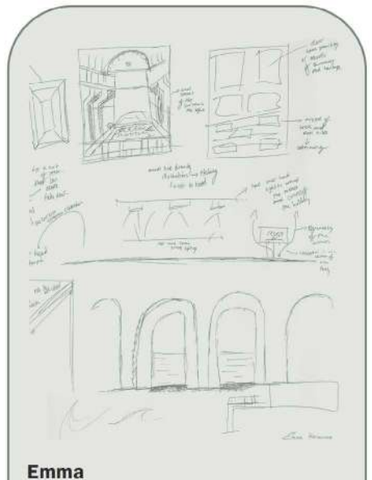
Brooke

- Reflect pool materials (tiles) on the exterior of the building to give an insight of its previous use
- Muted teal, terracotta, victorian porcelain
- Glass with water patterns engraved



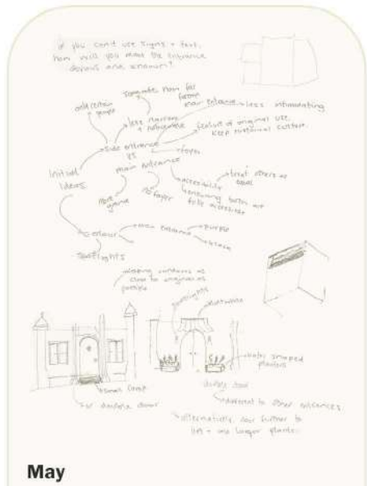
Hazel

- Side Entrance as main entrance is less intimidating
- Well lit space so can see inside early on
- Coloured glass and arch possibilties



Emma

- Murals/ Artwork of buildings historic uses
- Lighting used strategically around areas and curves of the building
- Addition of an awning to create a spill out space



May

- Bath shaped planters outside
- Use of spotlights to light up the entrance
- Keeping windows as close to original

Making an Entrance Evaluation

What did you most enjoy about this activity?

- Learning more about the space and development/ speaking to the MA students
- Liked talking to the Architecture students as they were nice and liked their art. Useful for knowing future pathways too
- Talking and curating with the architecture student and building an idea together/ talking new ways to relevel the building
- Thinking in a different way about simple things like entrances - brainstorming

Please tell us something that surprised you about this project

- The history of the site/ how much the interior had been improved
- Liked improvement of old building and its presentation/ I really like old buildings and the inside especially the beams gave a nice ambience
- I didn't building existed how about the history of the building/ how only having a few hours of the piece got so caught up and passionate with the project
- That there's so much history in this place/ the dysfunctional way it was before

What would you tell someone else about this project?

- It's a good experience and enjoyable to learn about the history/cultural aspects of it
- Good experience, I like the idea of creating community space, especially accessible to all
- Yes
- That linking the history doesn't just involve using existing shapes – have to change it

What have you learned through being involved in this project?

- Different ways of creating focal points – my ideas were challenged so had to think of alternatives
- More about architecture and details behind decisions about buildings
- How important the style and whereabout the entrance/ to help collaborate with other Masters students and other artists to bounce off ideas
- That there is a lot of thought and detail in this project. It's about how it feels/ before talking to architecture students I thought it was more cold and logistic but you have to think creative

What would you like to happen at Jacobs Wells Baths in the future?

- Market stalls? / group/community activities or events
- It's in good hands. I'll like whatever happens especially if a light welcoming community space
- To see the history on the inside and outside of the building within the design in a full and visual way that doesn't block and takeaway the focus of the building
- To become a more known and used place that keeps its heritage while allowing creatives to redesign the space in their way

Wider Connections and Legacy

As with all Local Learning projects, our approach is community led and participation underpins the creative process, ensuring that the diverse demographic of the city is accurately reflected throughout.

Many of our projects overlap or connect as conversations go beyond the principal project theme. These wider connections enrich the stories in unforeseen ways.

During a recent project focussing on the Bristol Airplane Company (BAC) in Filton during the Second World War, we met Miriam Edwards. Miriam's family had long time connections with the BAC and described how generations worked at the factory, often without the health and safety considerations that we would have today.

During the conversation it also emerged that there was a very early family connection to Jacobs Wells Baths.

"My grandmother was born Brandon Hill [in 1890]. She lived with her mum, two brothers and a sister. She did have a job in Jacob's Wells Baths because she told me that people used to go there to have a bath and she used to clean the baths. She was left a widow because her husband was injured in the First World War, which is my mum's father, obviously. He took a bullet, but he didn't die in the war. He died when my mum was eight, after the war. He contracted, because of the injury that he'd had, he had TB. And my gran lost him. My mum was eight. Her youngest, her daughter, her sister was three. So, he died then in 1927. Her sister was three, and they had a baby, Mavis, who was six months old. She buried her husband because he had TB, and they say it was due to the weakness. He was very, very weak after the First World War because of the injury. I believe he had a shot in the shoulder, if I can remember right. I can't swear to that bit. And the baby caught the TB off her father and died at six months old. So, my gran was left with three children, and that is when she worked in Jacob's Wells Baths." Miriam Edwards.

https://www.locallearning.org.uk/aerospace-bristol-ve-80/

Parallel project with Willow Park - Whatever Happened to Milk Street?

Alongside JWB activities, Local Learning co-delivered a parallel project with Years 3 and 4 from Willow Park exploring Our Neighbourhood Heritage with a grant from Historic England. As with many Local Learning projects, there were unforeseen overlaps and synergies, this project drew on the Jewish history of the Baths. We used a community derived map of 1930s St Pauls, Bristol that shows the Jewish population and their streets and businesses as a starting point to explore community displacement, the social ingredients for cohesion and help grow a sense of place. With participants, we explored how cultural activation in the public realm can bring a diverse community together in a digitally dominated world.

The 1930s map was created by former resident and member of the Jewish community, Julius Burke, born in 1923, grandfather to former Willow Park pupils (then St Michael on the Mount). His hand drawn map not only shows the physical streets and buildings, but through the memories that we were fortunate to collect before his passing, captures a sense of the community cohesion in the area at the time. Many of the families attending Willow Park have recently arrived to the city seeking refuge or asylum and are currently housed in the hotels that now stand in the area mapped by Julius.

The homes, shops and streets that this map depicts were largely removed during the post war re-planning process that created the present Broadmead shopping area and associated inner ring road. The prewar community was displaced with minimal, if any consultation. Broadmead and its road system is undergoing a process of change as defined by the City Centre Development Delivery Plan and Broadmead design guides including the recently adopted Growth Through Culture toolkit.

The overarching objective of the project was to reconnect former and present communities to this process of change through a series of four artist led workshops. This helped people understand the past changes and how they can contribute to a future place that reimagines our shopping streets as places of social cohesion. The final workshop brought together longstanding Bristolians and recent arrivals into an intergenerational conversation that explored cultural activation of the high street, helping to provide a platform for underrepresented groups to help shape future public spaces.

We worked again with Daisy Holder as accessibility adviser and disability history and heritage researcher. Her strong commitment to inclusive practice helped to promote meaningful representation of disabled people in heritage.

Jess Baum was our project artist and art psychotherapist, who co-founded Bristol-based Muslim-Jewish dialogue group, Common Ground.

https://www.locallearning.org.uk/what-ever-happened-to-milk-street/

Parallel project Mapping the Unmapped:

The UWE MArch students on placement with us in autumn 2025 were also involved in another intergenerational project, Mapping the Unmapped, a collaboration between Local Learning and Alive Activities (a charity dedicated to improving the quality of life of older people and their carers) supported by the National Lottery Community Fund. Though were a number of parallels, both anticipated and unexpected that brought the two projects together and culminated in a final sharing event.

Mapping the Unmapped was inspired by Irish playwright, Brian Friel's play Translations – a 19th century story set in rural Ireland, that charts the impact of the British army as they descend on a fictitious town near Donegal to map the area. In creating this colonial Ordnance Survey, they anglicised the placenames, disregarding all the cultural heritage captured within the original Irish names. He uses language as a tool to explore power and identity, and how a sense of belonging can be betrayed and undermined.

Our modern maps, particularly in our digital world, are potentially disconnecting us from our local placenames, many of which are colloquial memories of an event or person. There are often names that have been passed down through the generations, that everyone can locate but never appears on a map.

We mapped forgotten and remembered Bristol, working with local artists in three neighbourhoods (St Pauls, Stockwood and Southmead) holding a series of intergenerational community mapping events to capture local placenames and associated stories, literally putting them on the map, illustrated by local communities. Young and old came together to share their perceptions of the area, recent and long remembered childhood landmarks and the unofficial names that local people have for places to inform a co-created map.

Previous neighbourhood participants as well as citizens of all ages from across the city were invited to a final drop in event at Sparks (formerly Marks and Spencers, Broadmead) showcasing the community maps and work with UWE Masters Architecture students and our artists to map meaningful landmarks and participate in activities exploring our connections with the city centre and beyond.

"Sparks Bristol, a vibrant centre for creativity, sustainability, social impact and education in Broadmead's main shopping district. Created by Artspace Lifespace and the Global Goals Centre, Sparks brings together ethical retailers, creative studios, co-working desks, and affordable event hire across three floors, making it a leading destination for people and organisations driving positive change."

The event coincided with Local Learning's 20th birthday and was used as an opportunity to celebrate previous mapping projects (including the previous and current NLHF projects around Jacobs Wells Baths) and two decades of exploring together our shared heritage. UWE MArch students designed a series of activities to engage visitors of all ages in considering stories of place and connections with Broadmead – a neutral, central space with which Bristolians across the city have some form of association.

We had 150 visitors of all ages to this final event; people from across the city who have previously contributed to Local Learning projects, passers by and people interested in our shared heritage, artists and creatives, students, families, from different social backgrounds and reflecting the multicultural demographic of the city. There were a variety of interactive activities for people to engage in and opportunities for conversation and reminiscences.

https://www.locallearning.org.uk/mapping-the-unmapped/

Mapping the Unmapped event at Sparks

Wider Connections and Legacy

Well meaning

well (adv.)

This is from Proto-Germanic *wel- (source also of Old Saxon wela, Old Norse vel, Old Frisian wel, Dutch wel, Old High German wela, German wohl, Gothic waila "well"), which in Watkins is reconstructed to be from PIE root *wel- (2) "to wish, will" (source also of Sanskrit prati varam "at will," Old Church Slavonic vole "well," Welsh gwell "better," Latin velle "to wish, will," Old English willan "to wish;" see will (v.)).

It has come to be used as the adverb of good. From late 12c. as "in a state of good health, soundly." Also used in Old English as an interjection and an expression of surprise. By mid-12c. as a mere intensifier (may well be).

well (v.)

"to spring, rise, gush, issue forth," as water from the earth, Middle English wellen, from Old English wiellan (Anglian wœllan), causative of weallan "to boil, bubble up, rise (in reference to a river)" (class VII strong verb; past tense weoll, past participle weallen), from Proto-Germanic *wellanan "to roll" (source also of Old Saxon wallan, Old Norse vella, Old Frisian walla, Old High German wallan, German wallen, Gothic wulan "to bubble, boil").

well (n.)

Middle English welle, "hole dug for water; natural spring of water," from Old English wielle (West Saxon), welle (Anglian) "spring of water, fountain," from wiellan (see well (v.)). The figurative sense of "abundant source" from which anything is drawn or flows was in Old English.

https://www.etymonline.com/word/well

Well wishes

Jacobs Wells Baths was created at the end of the 19th century as a municipal health and well-being facility, providing an alternative to the filthy water of the working docks, where the community could bathe safely and wash in communal baths. As a feature of the late industrial city, the building is one of the many stepping stones towards municipal care for the populous culminating with the introduction of the Welfare State after the Second World War.

Previously, most health and well-being facilities were provided by philanthropists, charities or religious communities. The Baths are situated in an area surrounded by earlier and later buildings associated with these efforts to address the health and wellbeing of the neighbourhood:

- Jacobs Well itself, a medieval water feature. A Hebrew inscription on the stone lintel above the well has been revealed to possibly be Sochalim which can be translated as 'flowing' a reference to the water from the well. This is arguably the oldest remains of written Hebrew in Europe. This well likely originated as a Beth Tohorah, a ceremonial place for preparing the dead, serving the earliest Jewish community in the area before the 13th century. A medieval Jewish burial ground is known to lie on a site opposite.
- The 18th century, Hotwells Bath House and Spa facility was a short distance to the west and the loosely associated Strangers Burial Ground lies close by.
- Susannah Winkworth established some of the first dwellings for the working classes just up the hill and Lucy Read supported by Eliza Dunbar developed the Reed Dispensary at the bottom of the hill providing the first health care facility in the city that solely cater for women.
- Relatively early post war council housing blocks; St Peter's House and Brandon House (the latter built on the site of Winkworths earlier dwellings) represent the 1950s inner city version of the Housing Acts that began in 1919 after the First World War. These Acts were introduced to provide healthy living environments for the working classes.

After the swimming pool closed, the building took on a new role serving a different health and wellbeing aspect as the Dance Centre. During this period, the use of the building had arguably a wider more diverse reach as evidenced from the collected stories.

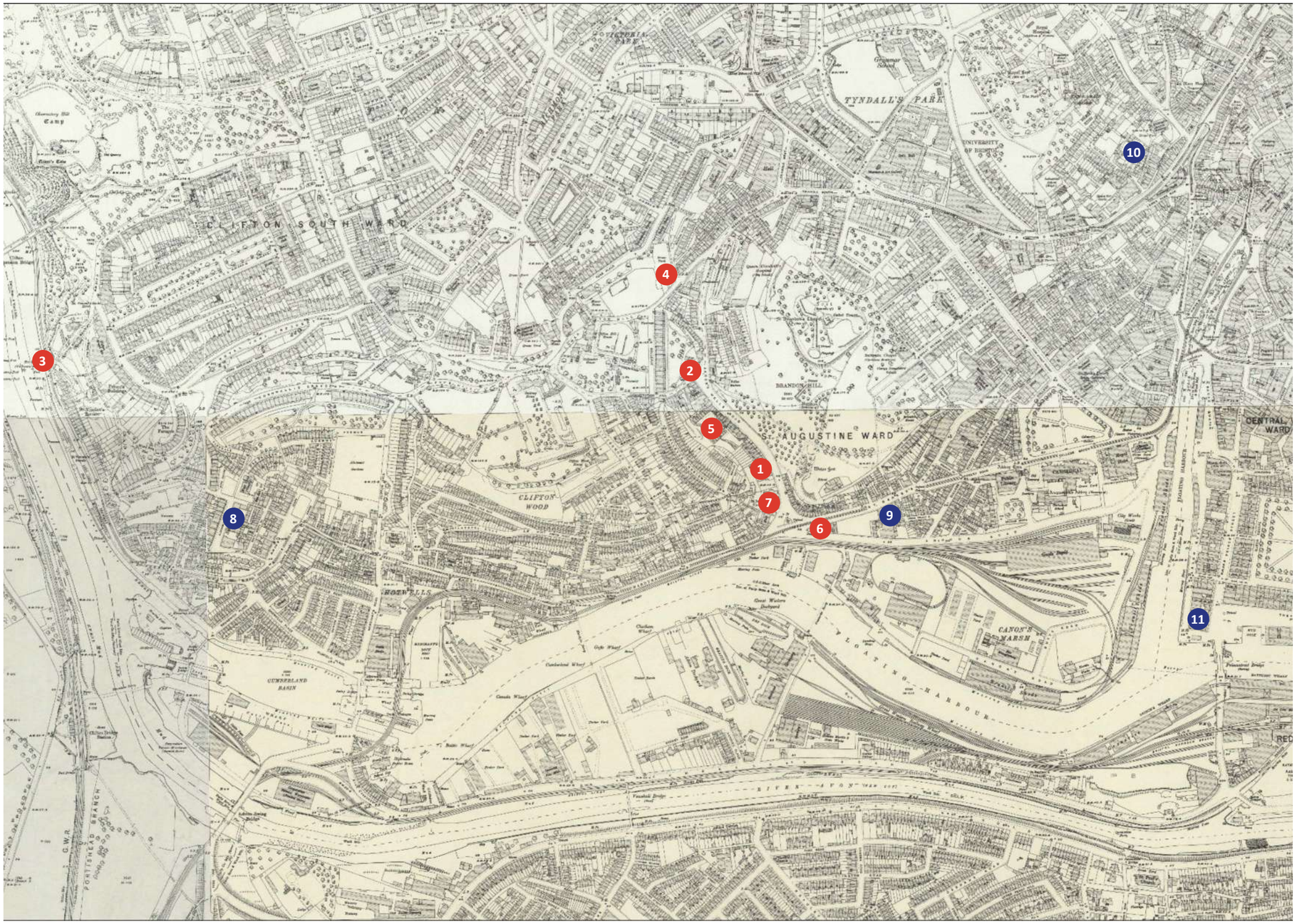
These series of engagement activities have demonstarted that the future of Jacobs Wells Baths and the process of creating this future will continue to address the NLHF Investment Principles of Saving Heritage and Supporting greater inclusion, diversity, access and participation in heritage.

"It is a building that has value and has significance beyond the people in the room, beyond the people who are making the decisions about that building, because that building has been there for a while, and it has a cultural history, as well as an architectural or evidential history." Louise Ciotti, Senior Lecturer in Architecture, Retrofit and Conservation, UWE

Health and Wellbeing around Jacobs Wells

Ordnance Survey map published in 1918

1. Jacobs Wells Baths
2. Jacobs Well - Beth Tohorah
3. Site of 18th century Hotwells Bath House and Spa
4. Strangers Burial Ground
5. Site of Sussanah Winkworth's Industrial Dwellings, housing for the working class, now the site of Brandon House
6. The Read Dispensary
7. St Peter's House, council housing
8. Hotwells Primary School
9. City of Bristol College, College Green site. Ashley Down CoB site (originally Muller's Orphanage in the 19th century) lies off the map to the northeast
10. Willow Park Primary School
11. Arnolfini, formerly the Bush Warehouse and now part of UWE



Final Sharing Event

This phase of Saving Jacobs Wells Baths was brought together at Trinity for a celebratory event sharing outcomes from our engagement activities with the local college, university, schools and the wider community.

The programme for the day began with an informal presentation from UWE Masters Architecture students conveying their ideas for an inclusive, accessible, welcoming and engaging community space, drawing on conversations and activities with young people around heritage interpretation.

It was an opportunity for visitors to learn more about:

- a dance performance from Years 5 and 6 from Willow Park Primary School collectively choreographed with RISE Dance Company incorporating movements representing their earliest dance memories. In the autumn term, pupils had the opportunity to interview Alan Dyte who had learned to swim at JWB in the 1950s, whilst a pupil at Bristol's Royal School for Blind Children
- intergenerational sharing memories with Hotwells Primary School and illustrated stories gathered from teachers, students, dancers, audiences, organisers with a connection to JWB and its dance community
- co-designed accessible youth space with students from City of Bristol College
- how students, children and young people have helped to inform the design process and business plan and how their voices will continue to be heard as we move forward.

The event finished with Laura Clifford from Colourful Minds facilitating an art workshop using recycled materials to represent the Baths.

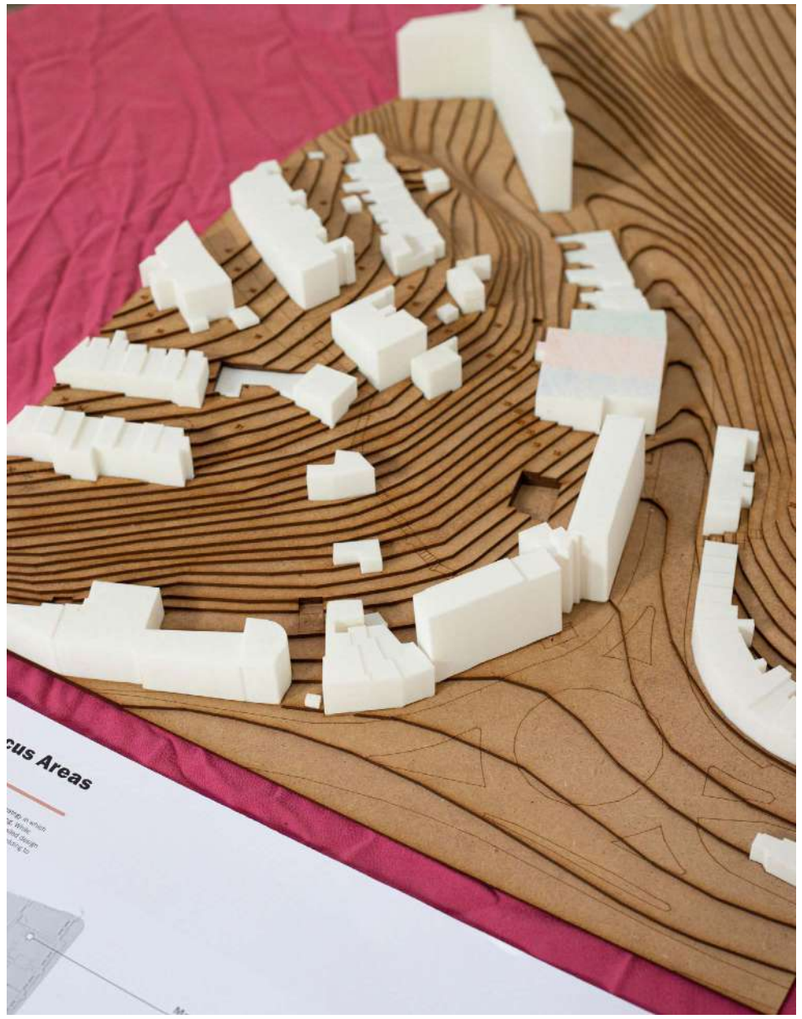
"I've enjoyed interacting with many people, even though community engagement was outside my comfort zone. Interacting with the JWB team including everyone from Trinity" Anirudh

"It's a good opportunity to work on a real project and understand how design connects to actual users and communities … the importance of observing how people use space and listening to their feedback, even small details can influence design decisions." Fatemeh

"I have enjoyed the challenges of working with a building with such important heritage, engagement opportunities with community and youth of different ages, working as a group, opportunities to meet the wider JWB Team" Mae

"I've learned quite a lot about community focused organisations. How they navigate policy and economics to protect heritage, shared spaces and people's ability to have access to places that help shape and inspire them. Most importantly taking feedback from real users" Zayanah

"The event at Trinity, updating on the project, gave the group and me a great chance to showcase our latest work in progress, which concludes the engagement we had with the school community and invites the wider community to share their thoughts and feedback. It is a joy and a privilege to work and collaborate with Local Learning, Trinity, and consult the related community, who will be the future end users" Nghi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Acknowledgements

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