

DRAWING IN SHELTER

TACKLING ISOLATION THROUGH CREATIVITY

This project re-imagines an interior for those without a permanent home, by initiating and supporting activities for the 'whole self' within the community. Research revealed that those experiencing homelessness often lack any opportunity to participate in art based activities or connect with and become part of a positive social community.

"Drawing in Shelter" imagines an interior environment that responds to this issue, demonstrating practical application of design concepts through the inclusion of designed activities to specifically foster social connections and creative enjoyment for people facing homelessness. This project aims to provoke our assumed image of a day centre for the homeless. It justifies the need for life beyond basic survival, allowing everyone to imagine and cultivate opportunities to enjoy a fully enriched life, by attending to the needs of our complete identities.

The 'Shelter' houses a public cafe and social lounge, a bicycle workshop, quiet spaces, and facilities including a laundry room, showers and a clothing donation. Users can discover new hobbies or re-engage with old, learn practical skills, and find community. Three art studios encourage different levels of socialisation : a private studio with individual pods, a communal table where users can work alongside one another, and a community canvas for collaborative art practice.

The project follows a user-centred approach, as each design choice is informed by research findings about the experiences of those facing homelessness. The design concept and approach utilise movement and transition to respond to the traumatic experiences of homelessness. Clients, visitors and staff are guided by the 'Key Threshold' intervention, which physically connects activities throughout the site, encouraging a sense of belonging, ownership, trust, safety and choice. Rice's "doubleness" can be defined through the fully engaged participant, and the passive, tentative, onlooker as they re-imagine their image of themselves. All are welcome.

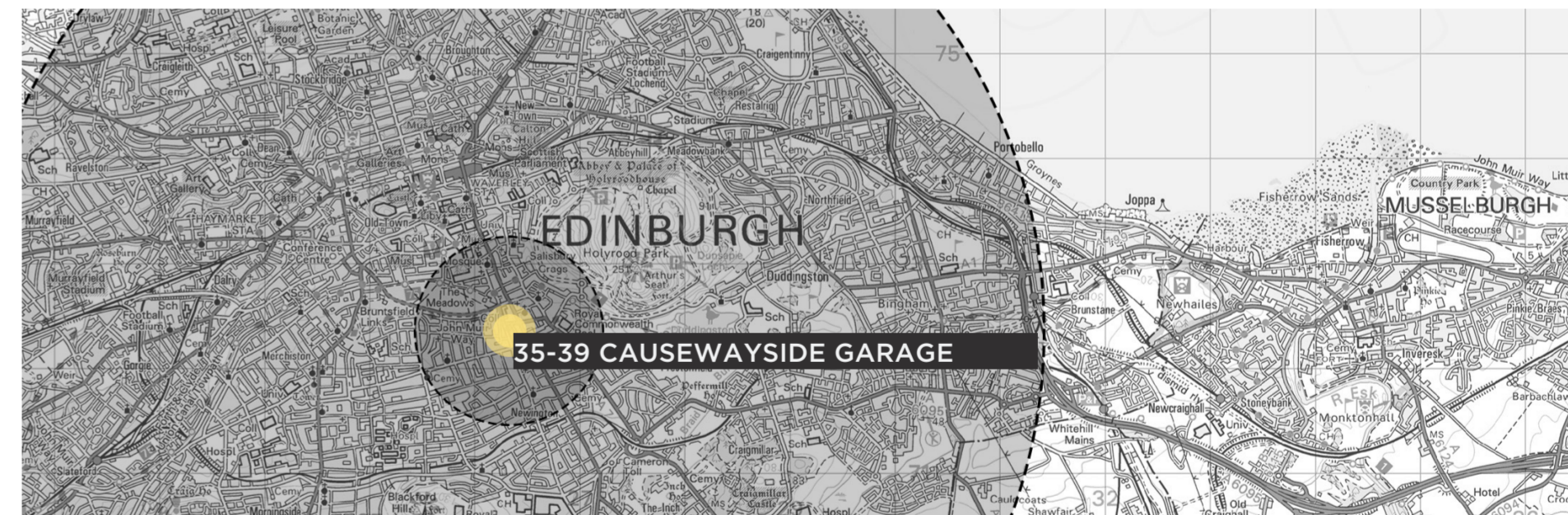


Interview transcript visual and key extracts.

Throughout the project, it was important to consider that each individual user will have unique experiences which might impact how they interact with the project and others. Early on, I conducted an insightful and encouraging interview with two employees at the Bethany Christian Trust, who confirmed my initial research into the user group.



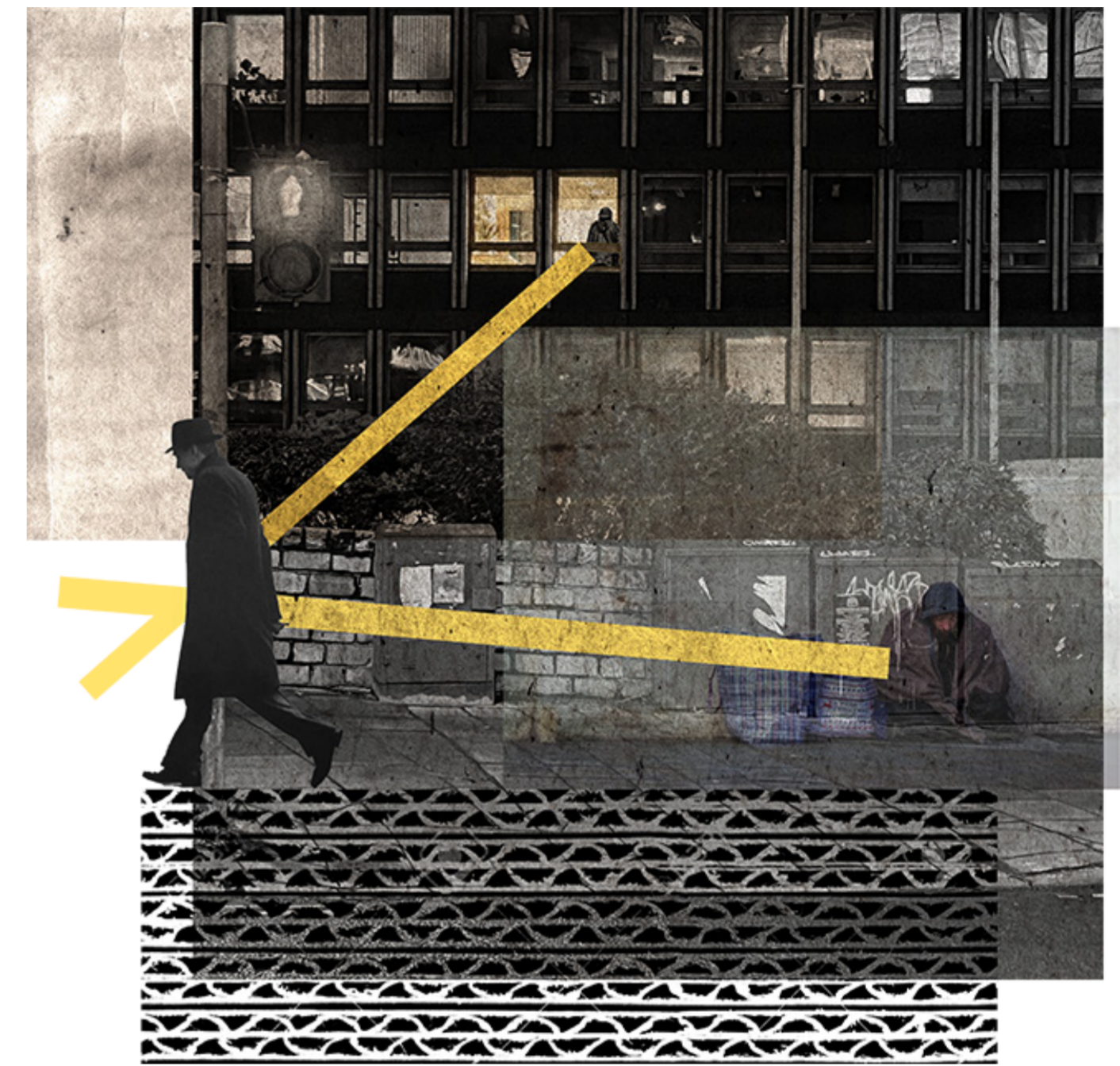
35-39 Causewayside street view, looking north-east.



Site location.

The building was designed by William Kininmonth and Sir Basil Spence in 1933. The original building housed a filling station on the ground floor and a repair workshop on the first floor. Today, the site is a Category B listed building.

The site is surrounded by residential buildings to the south and commercial streets to the north-east. At street level, neighbouring residential buildings house a mix of restaurants, bars and retail stores. This makes Causewayside busy with foot traffic throughout the day, which creates a sense of community in the area.

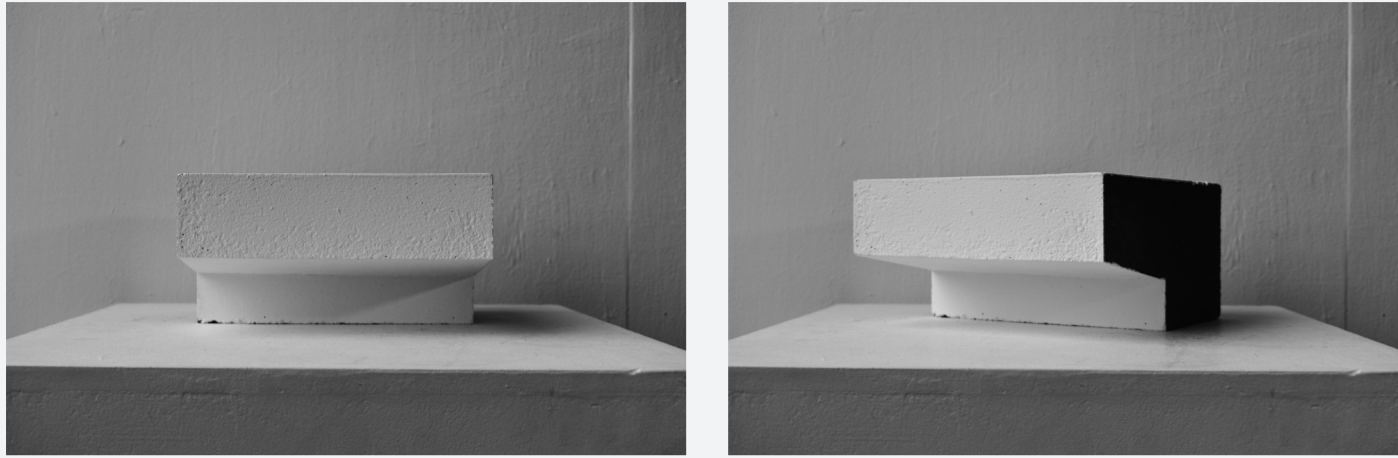


Digital collage of the existing situation for people facing homelessness.

People experiencing homelessness face significant trauma due to co-occurring issues, including the loss of social connections, stigmatizing and disrespectful treatment when dealing with institutional support systems. This negatively affects an individual's confidence, relationships and feelings of self-worth. Users might feel powerless, excluded or territorial, and a sense of danger often leads to violence or substance abuse as a coping mechanism.

For the project's users, there may be an element of intimidation and feeling unwelcomed when approaching such a strong existing community. Currently, there are no temporary/emergency accommodations, crisis centres or community hubs, which would directly anchor the homeless community to this area. Therefore, the Garage has the potential to become a bridge that connects homeless individuals with the existing wider community and instill a sense of belonging.

MATERIAL MAQUETTE



To understand the existing materials of the site, I made a material maquette in the form of the building. I was inspired to make strong use of recognisable features from the building's identity, including horizontal shapes and the cantilever structure that creates the forecourt. I made this by pouring a concrete mix into an MDF mold.

TARGETED QUESTIONNAIRE

Alongside the interview, I sent a short questionnaire to various homeless organisations in Edinburgh to get first-hand accounts of their day-to-day experience working alongside the user group. Both the interview and questionnaire were encouraging in the initial stages of the project, highlighting a real need for creative daytime spaces for people facing homelessness in Edinburgh. Both gave the project some initial direction and provided a solid foundation for developing design concepts.

SAFETY

The site must define clear boundaries throughout the space, whilst creating protected areas in which users feel secure to manage their own stresses. Permanent barriers - a door and solid walls - help to make the space feel secure and confidential, addressing issues of personal space and territoriality.

A 'Quiet Room' on the ground floor will also provide users with a safe, private space to regulate their emotional response to the site after first entering.

TRUST

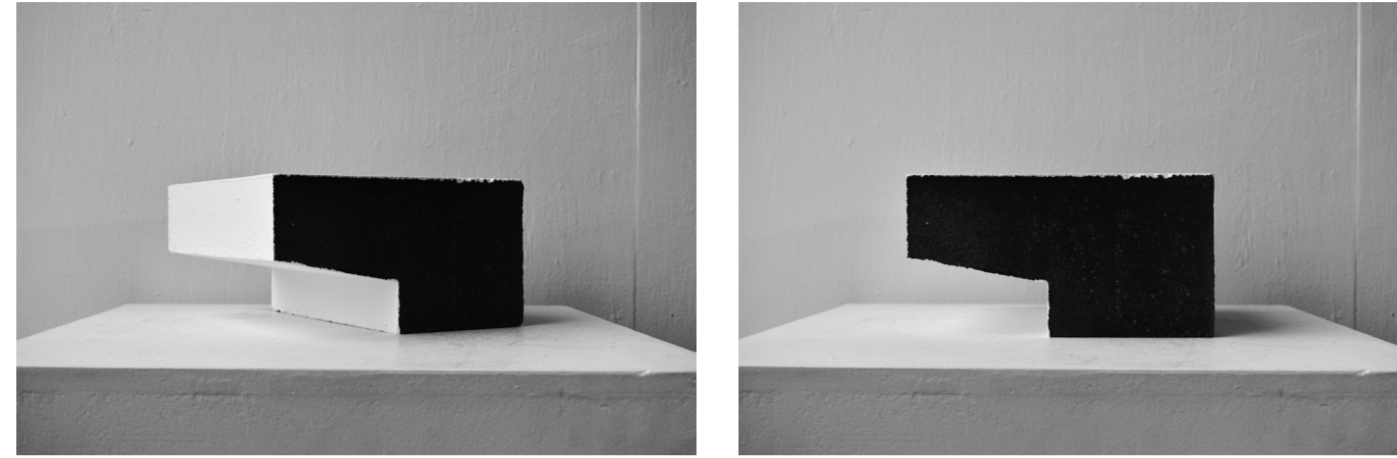
Trust is built through consistency, reliability and transparency. Users can feel powerless in a new environment, triggering previous trauma and discouraging participation. To avoid this, clear and consistent communication throughout the space manages users' expectations and allows them to enter activities with confidence.

In the project, the use of transparent partitions with curtains on the inside builds trust by creating a barrier which participants can control to provide optional privacy and thresholds.

CHOICE

Providing people facing homelessness with a choice restores autonomy and dignity. Users should be offered varied access to services and information, as well as several routes to each key area within the site to respect each individual's pace of progress.

A choice of how a user approaches and enters the building - through three separate entrances - demonstrates a deep respect for each individual user's rate of passage.



QUESTION

From your experience, what kinds of activities or programmes do people facing homelessness engage with during the day in your facilities?

ANSWER

1. *Art activities, music group, cooking group, gardening group, sculpture workshop, circus skills/flow arts, woodworking, jewelry making, external visits (zoo, dungeons, art galleries etc)*
2. *Art therapy and health and wellbeing programs. therapists and art/music groups*

QUESTION

In your opinion, which types of spaces do people facing homelessness seem to feel valued and most comfortable (e.g., open communal areas, smaller quiet rooms, etc.)?

ANSWER

1. *Ambient lighting (no ceiling lights, ideally colourful aurora/sunset lamp, floor lamps, natural light), sofas, multiple places to sit, cosy corners to curl up in, side rooms to escape to if need be, lots of fidgets/toys/art materials/things to play with, vibey music on a speaker (not radio), lots of cushions and soft surfaces, maybe a screen with arty fractals/cool animals/slow motion macro videos etc*
2. *Smaller quieter spaces*

QUESTION

In your experience, what kind of interior design responses have been put in place when considering health and safety and safeguarding at your facilities (e.g., materials, colours, etc.)?

ANSWER

1. *Colourful walls, cushions, space for activities. Leaving doors open by default between communal spaces so groups of young people aren't left alone with each other without staff being able to see or hear them*
2. *We try to promote a PIE (psychologically informed environment) we have active groups around achieving this way of working*

MATERIAL SMAPLES



Compressed cardboard.

I wanted to explore the idea of using strong forms of cardboard as structural interior elements as a primary material in my design. Therefore, I collected cardboard from my own recycling and glued these together in layers. Then I compressed these layers to strengthen the material.

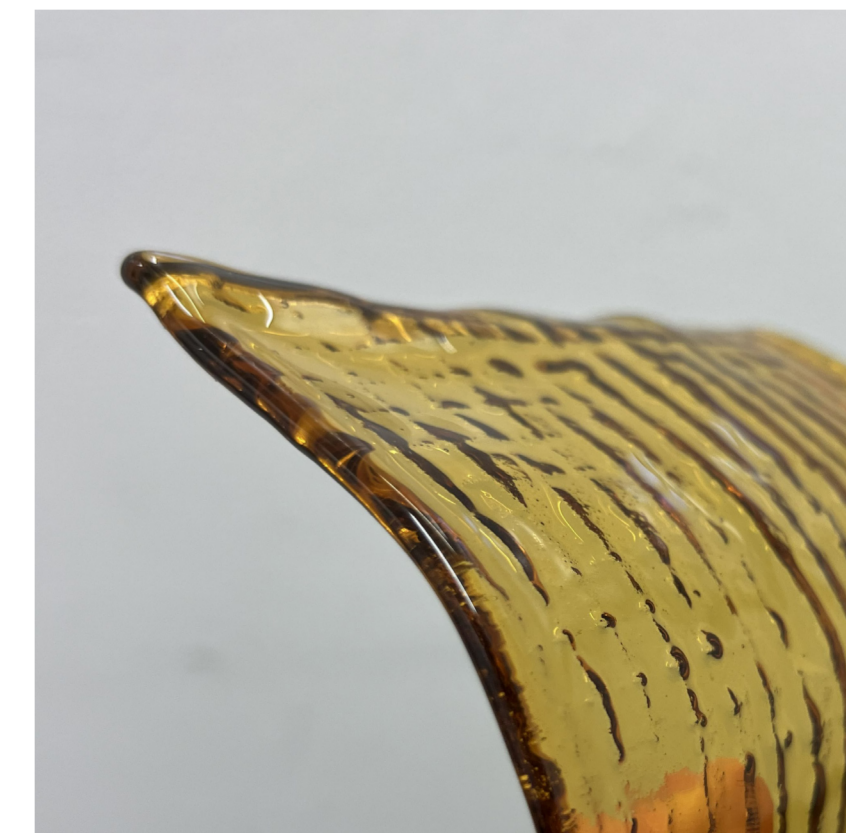
The resulting material came out as a solid block, which was able to be machined. Unfortunately, however, due to the glue, the resulting cardboard appeared damp and unfinished. This could communicate a lack of dignity for users and therefore, I chose to explore existing commercial cardboard materials.



Silicone concrete.

I wanted to create a material that kept the character of the original building, but had a soft tactility in response to the user group. Therefore, I mixed concrete powder into a silicone mixture, which would produce a rubber-like material which looked like concrete.

The resulting material was fairly durable and could be used as floor tiles. However, the yellow dye wasn't very effective and faded in the sun and so would probably be removed for the design concept.



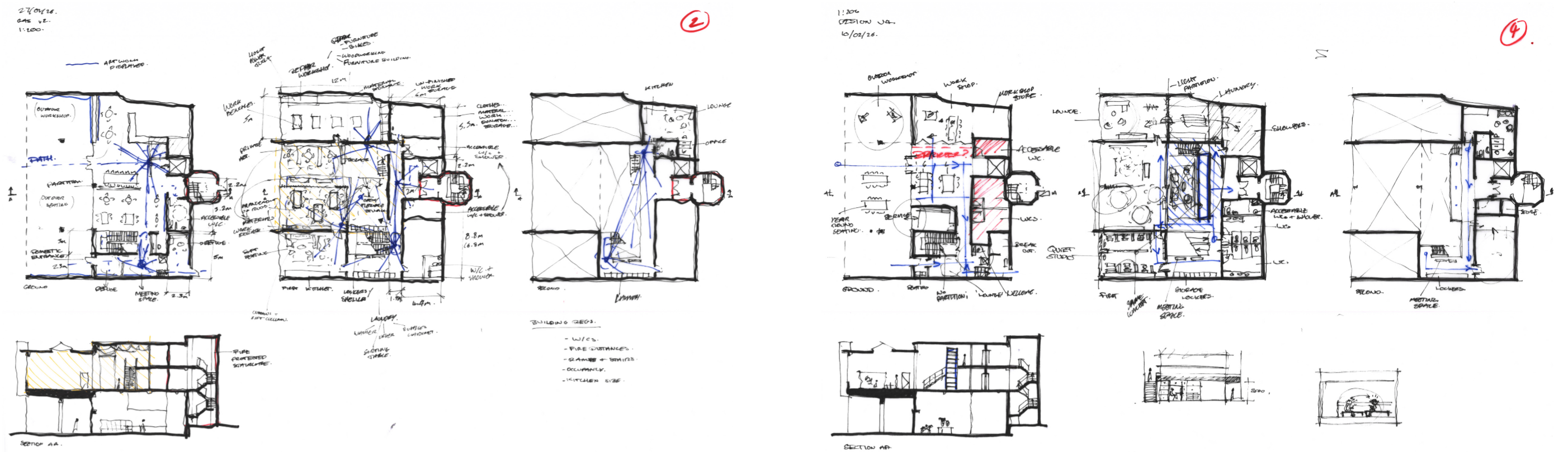
Textured glass.

Building on the idea of balancing transparency with privacy, I wanted to create partitions which would allow light and transparency in the space, while also creating barriers for user privacy. I made a textured glass sample to demonstrate how I could achieve this.

The resulting material was semi-transparent which successfully blurred objects located behind it, providing the ideal balance of privacy and transparency that I was keen to create.

DESIGN DEVELOPMENT

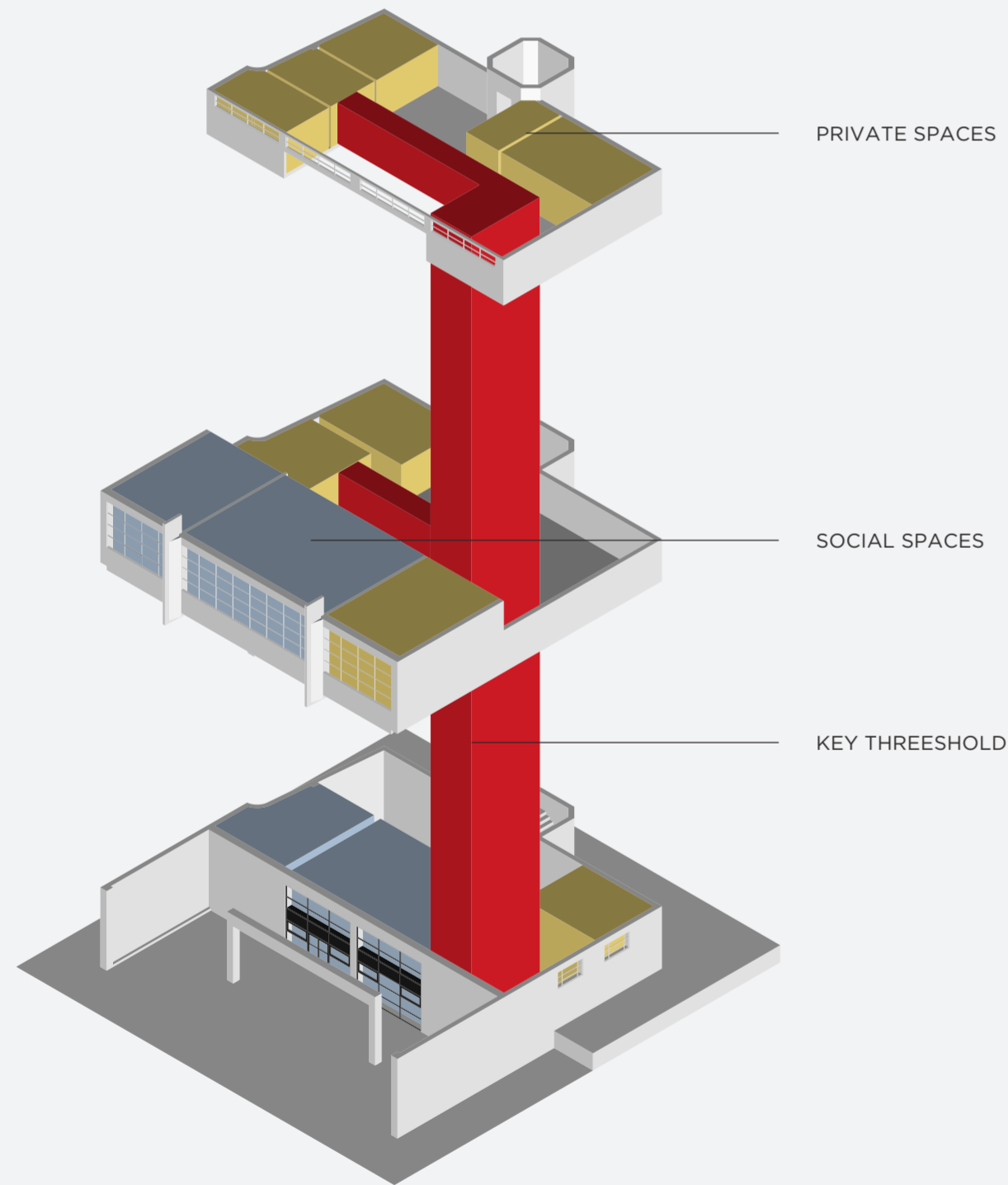
Throughout the design development, I worked through various scales to explore where activities and spaces could sit within the building, as well as how they might connect to each other. The concept of the Key Threshold started to take form in the drawings to the right, as well as the idea that the greatest challenge would be encouraging users to move between different activities at the site. The Key Threshold would combine theory and practice to help the most vulnerable users and allow them to access the support they need.



Layout iteration 14.

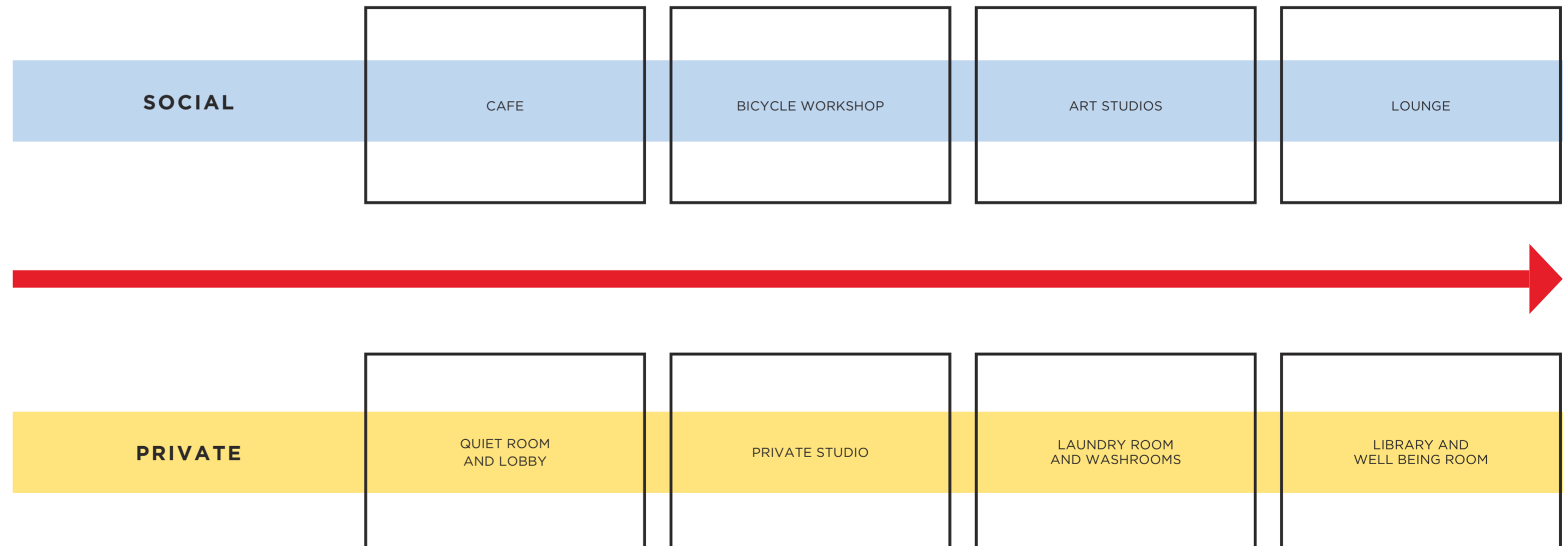
Layout iteration 15.

RADIAL SPATIAL STRATEGY



A radial spatial strategy throughout the building will allow users and staff to navigate and access the spaces. Social and private activities will be connected by the Key Threshold - a central, informal meeting space for users entering the site through different entrances. The fact that the Key Threshold is extended to each floor within the building means that this 'hub' of social activity will support all of the spokes by facilitating user movement and engagement between the various activities throughout the site.

PASS-BY-CIRCULATION



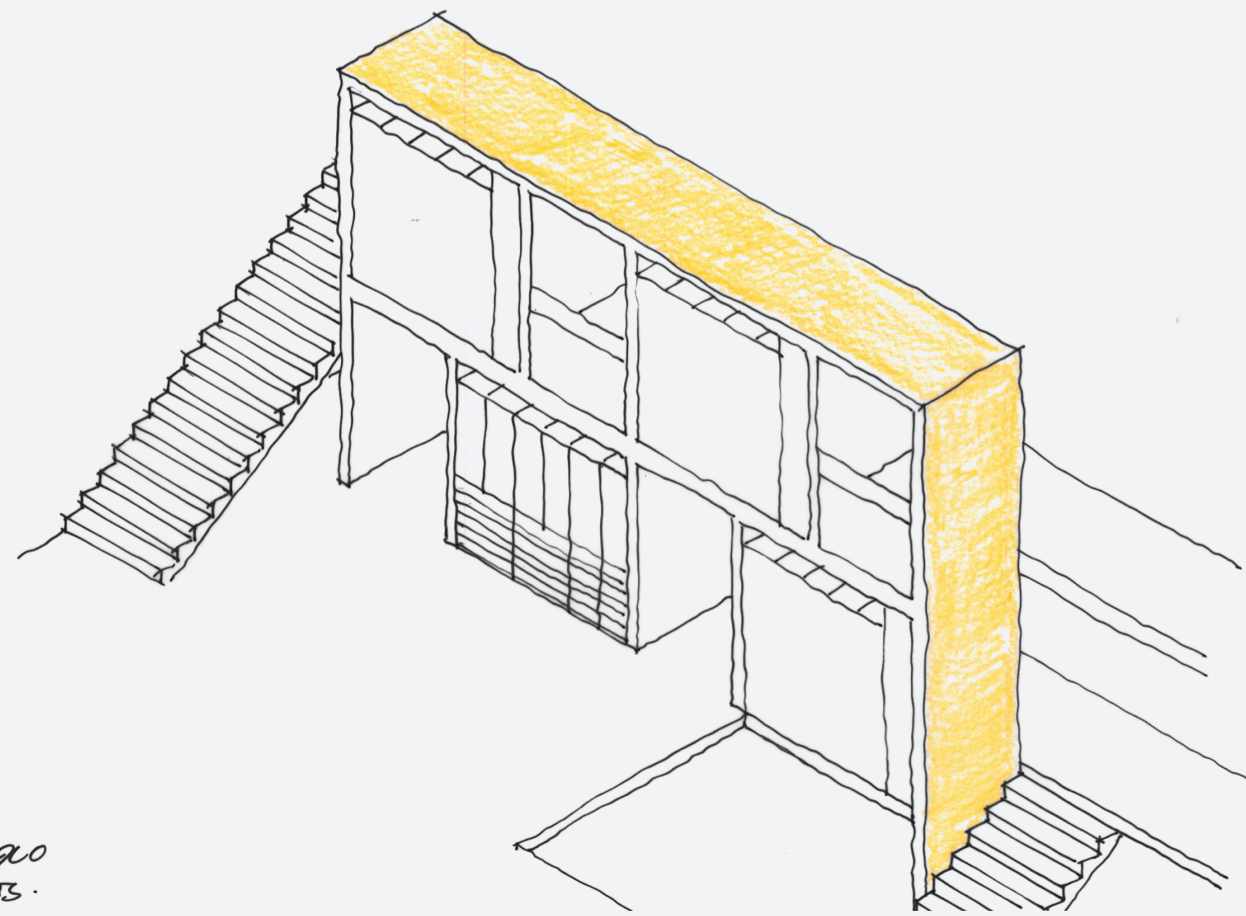
Throughout the building, pass-by-space circulation should be used. This ensures activities maintain a level of privacy, while also providing users with a choice as to which areas to approach, enter and participate in. Enclosed staircases and corridors should connect the activity areas within the building to provide both access and protection. Using this strategy, users should be able to understand the intended flow of the space, access the various activities (both private and social) on offer, and choose in which order to approach them.

KEY THRESHOLD

Thresholds hold a critical role in the initial step of encouraging user engagement with creative and social activities in the project. Threshold spaces build trust between users and staff, helping users feel safe in an unfamiliar environment by providing privacy, gently guiding them through a space, and signposting expectations of behaviour and involvement in each area of the project. Along the trauma-informed care guidelines laid out by the Scottish Government in 2023, the Key Threshold aims to ultimately create a sense of security and social belonging, and prompt user acceptance, engagement and participation.

During my interview with the staff at Bethany Christian Trust, they mentioned that users might be carrying harmful objects with them when they visit the site, including needles, which could get lost between seat cushions and cause harm to other users. Therefore, I decided to focus on the corners of the seating - where the cushions touch. As a result, I have created a gutter-like system between the cushions to catch falling objects and prevent injury. A curved aluminum element would line this to make cleaning the gutter easy, preventing objects getting stuck in corners. This design element can be seen in Detail A, bottom right.

1:50 CONCEPT MODEL



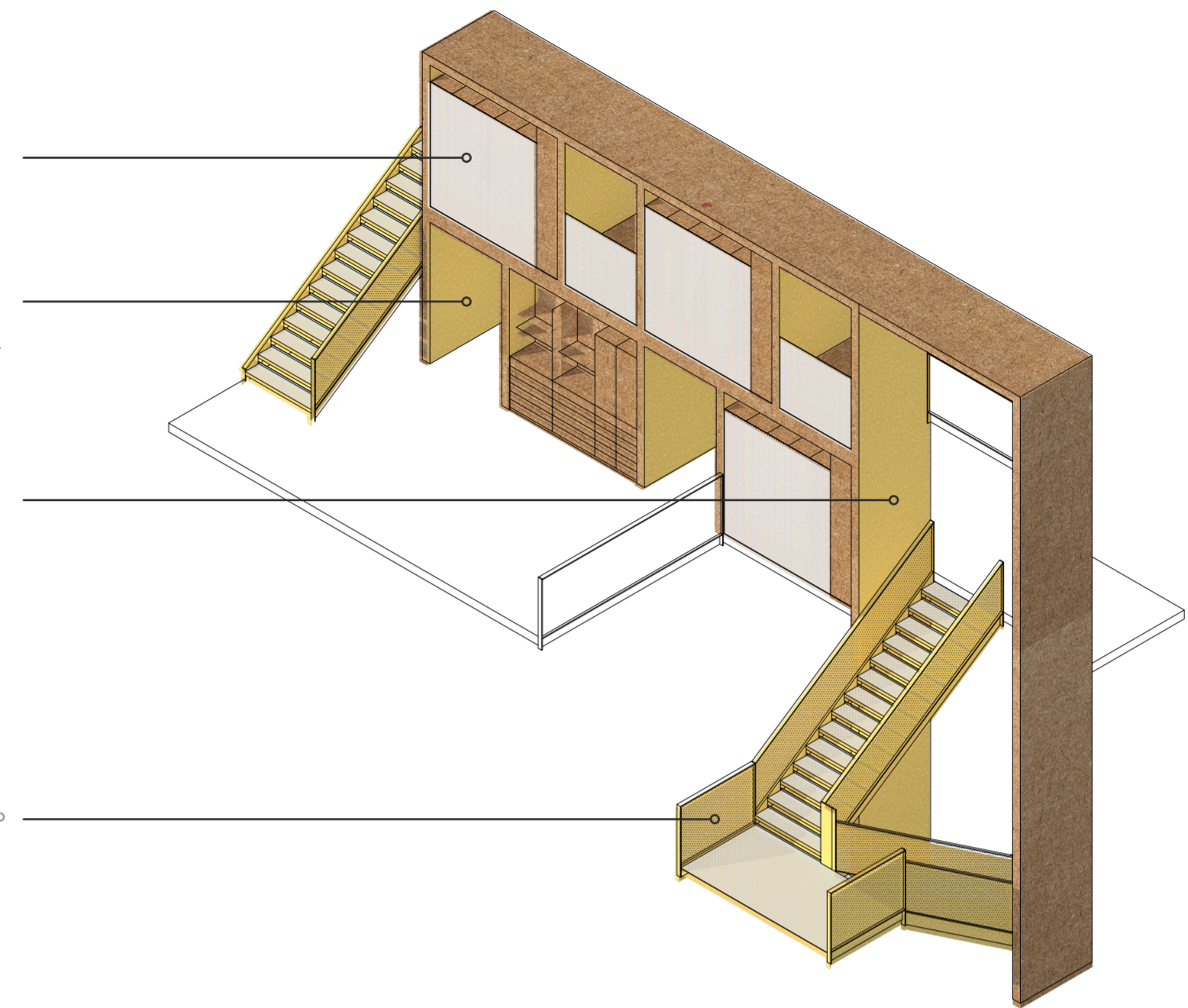
Initial key threshold axonometric sketch.

Lockers on the rear of the 'Key Threshold' are set back from the corridor, providing security.

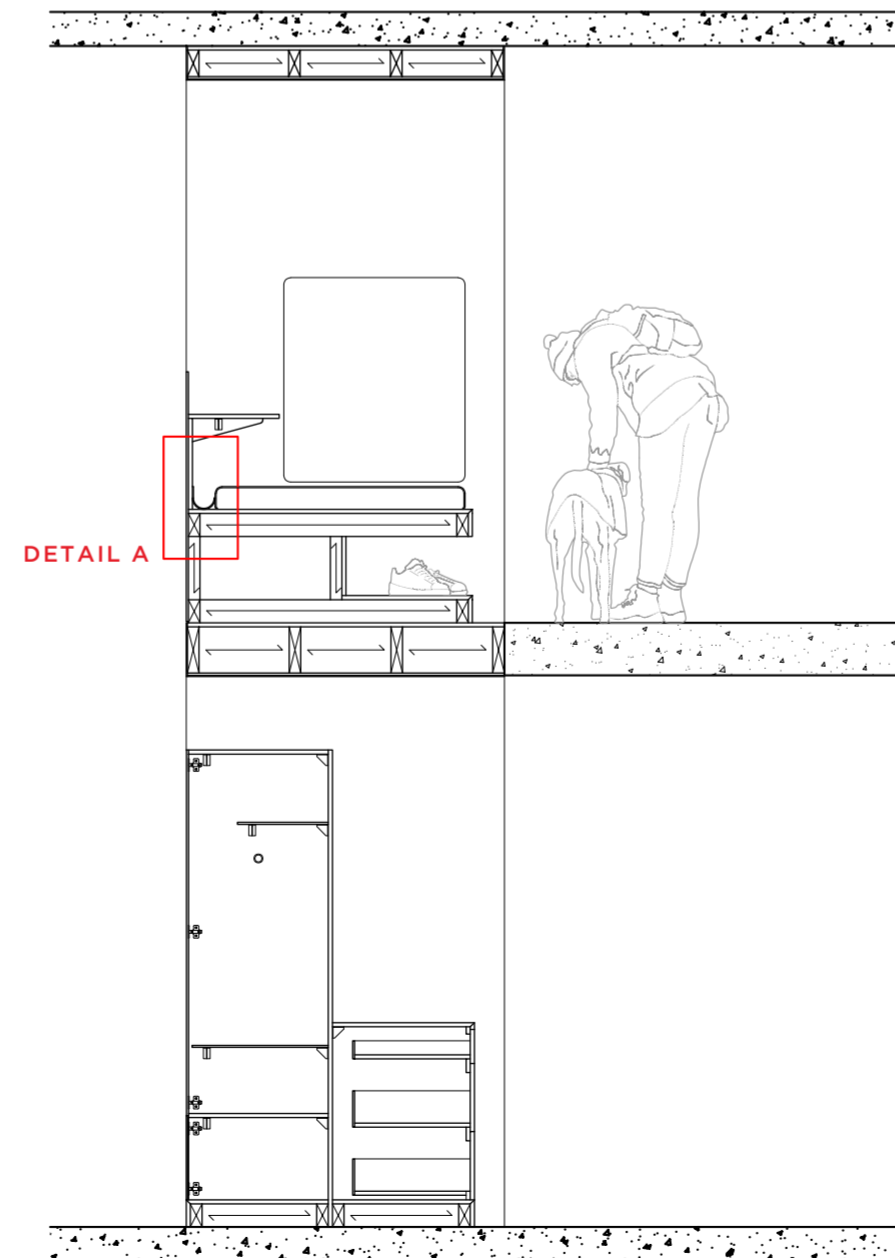
Protected space within the 'Key Threshold', which offers views into the 'Art Studio' space on the first floor, allowing users to first observe the activity.

Colour acts as a physical threshold to signal a transitional area of change. I will use this throughout the site to narrate the space to users without the need for signage. This will help users approach each different activity with the expectation of something new.

Mesh balustrades provide a solid barrier, while giving users views into other areas of the site.



Key Threshold axonometric.



Key Threshold section, Detail A callout.

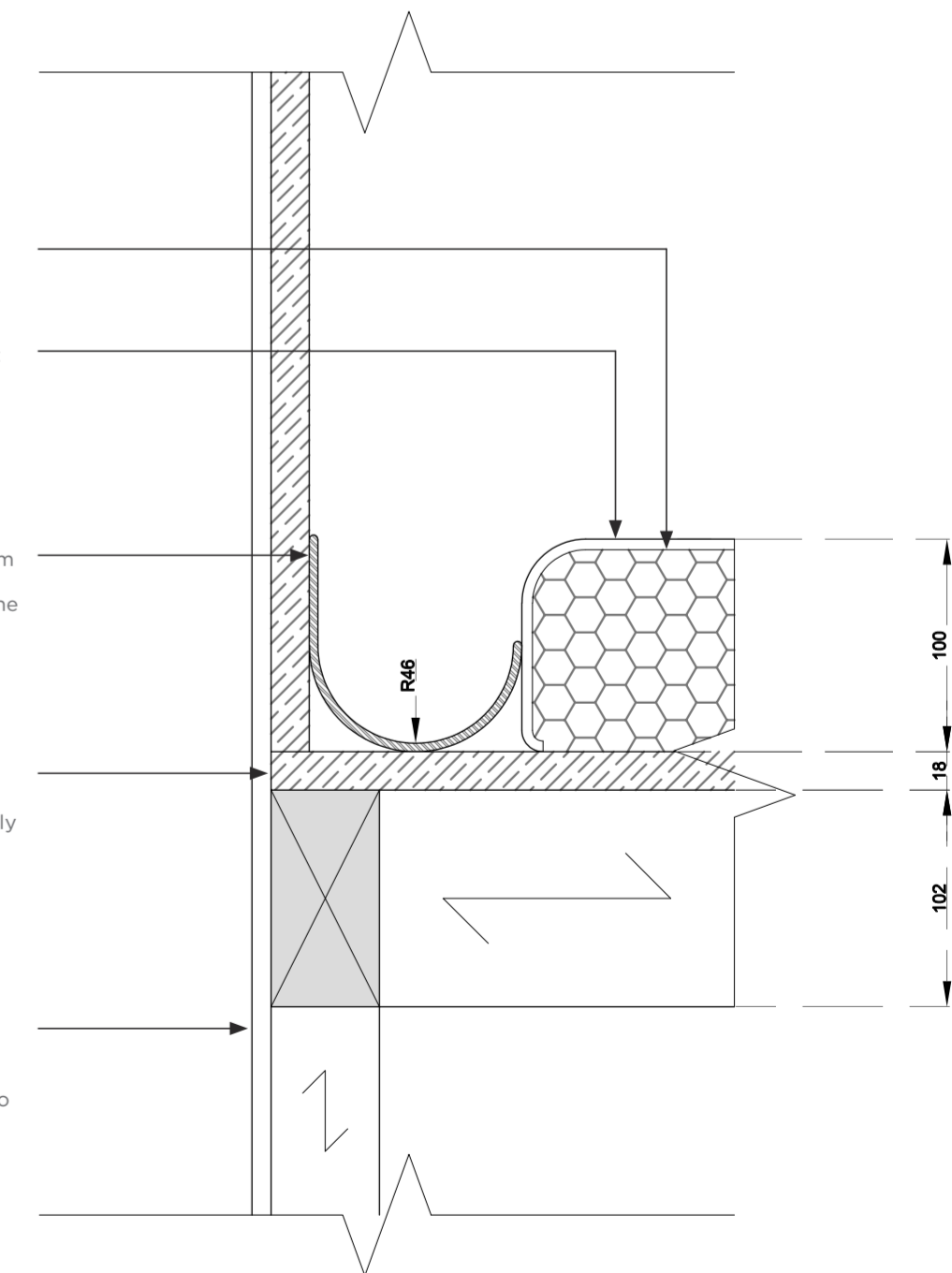
M18. High density foam seat padding, 1100mm x 800mm x 100mm

M17. Cotton denim upholstery stitched onto seat padding, wrapping around the sides and back. Denim tight twill weave creates a durable fabric more resistant to tearing.

M16. 4mm aluminum sheet curved into an R46mm gutter. Fixed with screws on the side walls (avoiding the trough) to the Valchromat sheet. The gutter collects objects that could be harmful for other users of the project. Without the gutter, objects could get lost within the upholstery.

M13. 18mm fire retardant Valchromat. Fixed with screws to the timber stud frame. Used as a structural and durable material that is aesthetically similar to the TechniPaper (cardboard) cladding.

M15. 8mm Fourwall polycarbonate sheet. Fixed with screws (relaxed not taut, to allow space for thermal expansion) into the timber stud frame and capped with a polycarbonate U-end profile to secure and finish the edges.



Detail A.

RESOLVED DESIGN

The spaces and activities in the project all respond to the user. Each space and the layout of the activities encourage comfortable participation and support for individuals facing homelessness.

The main space on the ground floor is the cafe. This space is designed for both members of the public and individuals facing homelessness to create a stronger sense of community with the local area.

Alongside the cafe is a bicycle workshop. This space aims to give people facing homelessness skills and knowledge that they can take with them.

The main entrance is through the cafe which can be intimidating for some users, therefore I have designed a second entrance for more vulnerable users. This entrance by-passes the cafe and provides a more direct route to the other facilities. There is also a breakout room in the entrance for users to gain composure and be comfortable before entering the main spaces of the project.

The main spaces on the first floor are the three art studios encourage different levels of socialisation: a private studio with individual pods, a communal table where users can work alongside one another, and a community canvas for collaborative art practice. Each studio is connected through sightlines to encourage movement between the spaces.

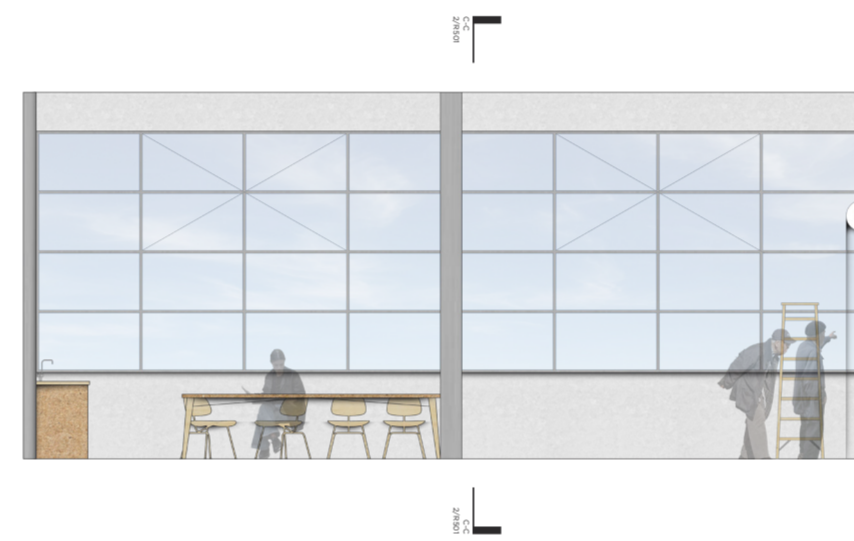
The lounge gives users a comfortable space to sit down and socialise without art activities.

The laundry room is where users can wash their clothes and also take new clothes from the donation space. This facility and the showers allows users to be more comfortable in their day-to-day lives.

The second floor is focused on the most vulnerable users. There is a well being office for users to access professional guidance and help. Nearby is the library which is an individual space for users to rest without any pressure to participate in any activity or socialise. This space ensures users that don't want to participate in the activities in the project still have a private space indoors.



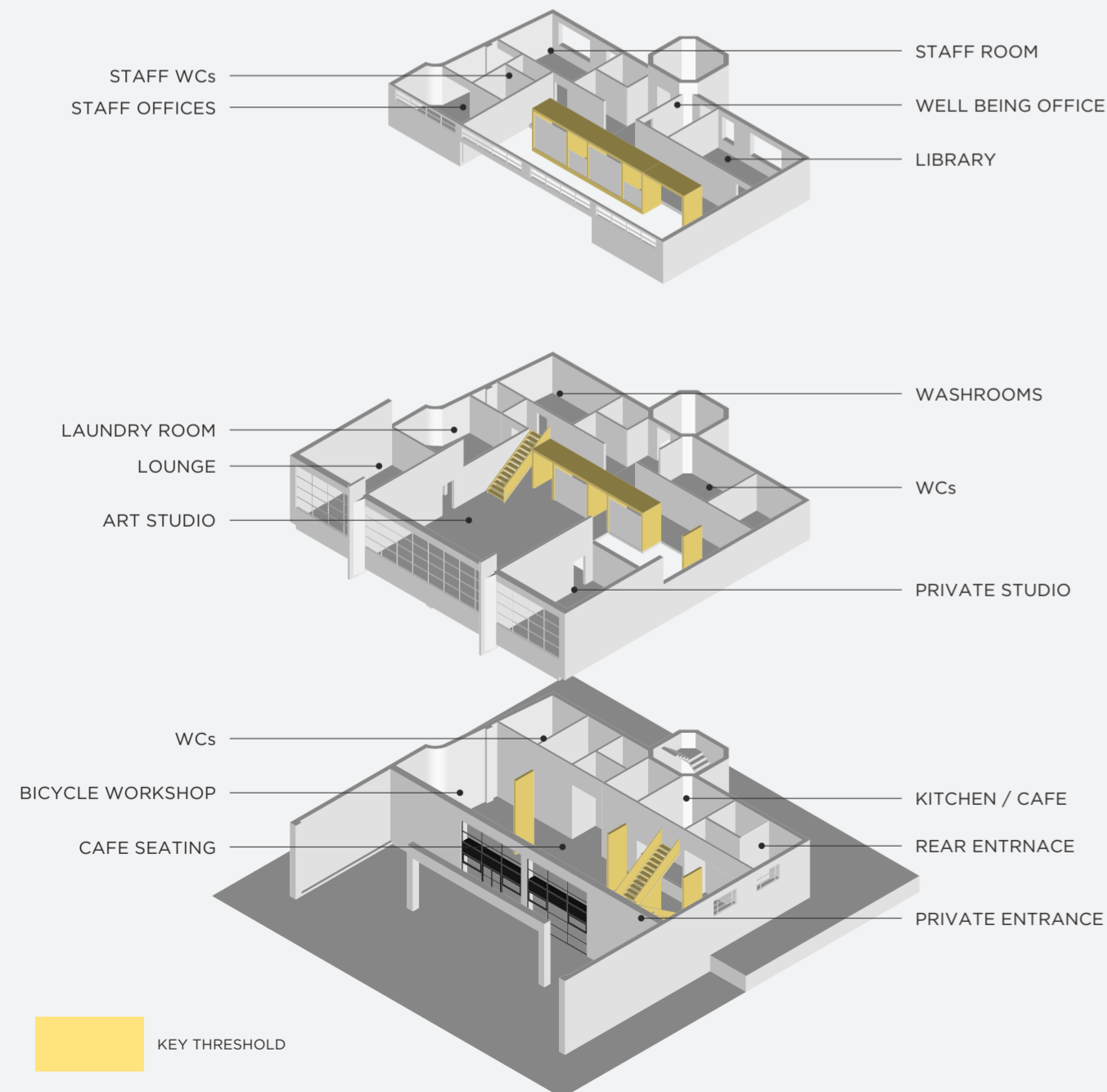
Section through the art studio.



Interior elevation of the art studio.



Interior render of the Key Threshold.



Interior render of the art studio.