

GRACEMOUNT COMMUNITY LIBRARY

A PLACE TO GATHER & GROW



PROJECT OVERVIEW

This project breathes new life into an abandoned Georgian mansion house on the southside of Edinburgh. The proposal responds to the real and current needs of the local community, with data gathered through live research including resident consultations.

Drawing inspiration from the surrounding woodland, the design aligns the context of the user and site to provide an accessible and inclusive facility to promote confidence, autonomy and community engagement, with a particular focus on children and teenagers.

Connected to the walled community garden, the library creates opportunities for a range of activities and events, where users can interact in a safe and supported environment, with a human-centred focus on relaxation, learning, connection and growth.



HISTORICAL TIMELINE Information from Gracemount Heritage Report, 2023.

c. 1788-1796

Gracemount Mansion is built by Luitenant Colonel Gilbert Waugh and his wife, Grace Waugh. The original architect is unknown, although there is some unsubstantiated speculation it was Robert Adam.

Charles Edward Green, 1866 - 1920.
Publisher



1907-1922

Charles E. Green and his wife Maggie Anne Dalrymple Green make a number of changes to the mansion, including the 1909 addition of the south wing (lower ground and upper ground levels) which was designed by Gothic Revival architect Hippolyte J. Blanc.



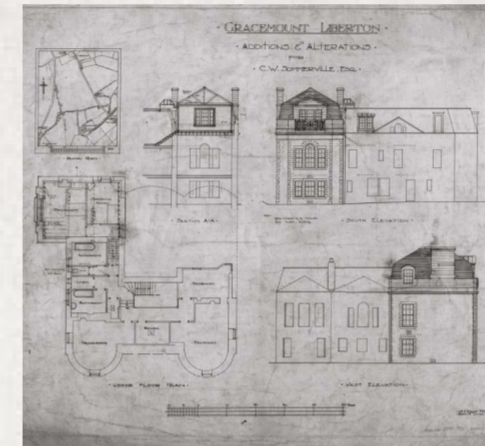
1957-1963

Edinburgh Council purchases Gracemount Mansion as part of the Gracemount Housing Scheme. It was decided in 1960 by the local community that it would be used as a youth centre.



1852-1895

Owner Maurice Lothian joins the estates of Gracemount and St Catherine's in 1860, which he purchased from a rare seedsman named Alexander Wright. Around this time he plants the Jeffrey Pine tree which still grows to the north of the building.



1923

CW Somerville and his sisters Louisa, Evelyn and Frances make a further addition to the south wing, extending it to the first floor. This will later become part of a small self-contained flat occupied by the Boag family.



1963-2018

Gracemount Youth Centre was run by John Boag (MBE) who lived with his family in the small flat on the first floor of the south wing. It was one of Scotland's longest-running youth clubs and only closed due to the deteriorating condition of

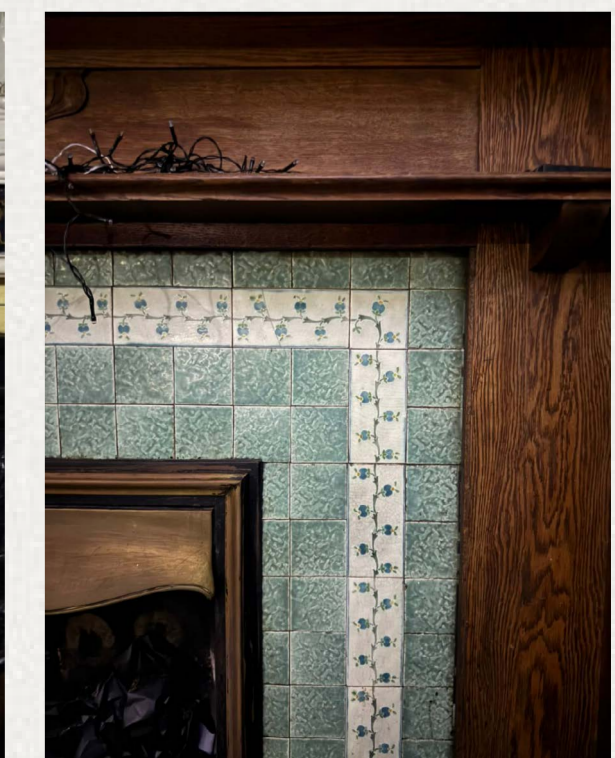
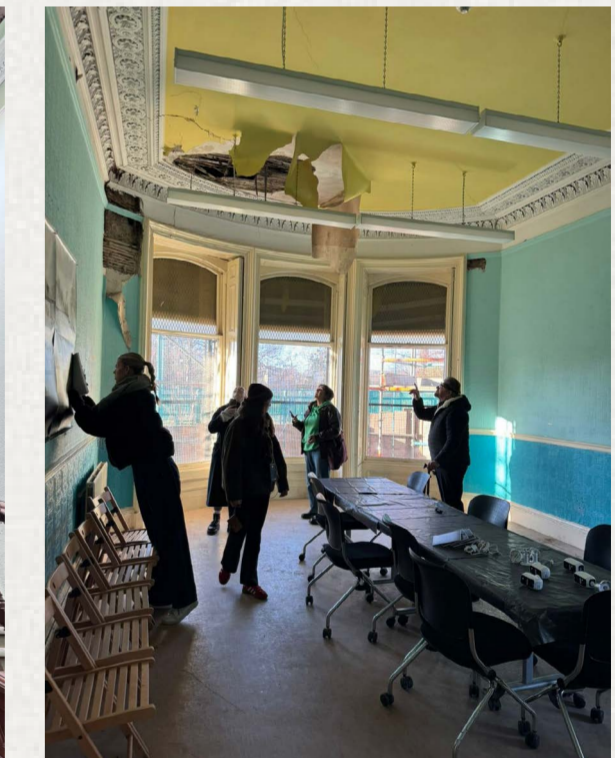
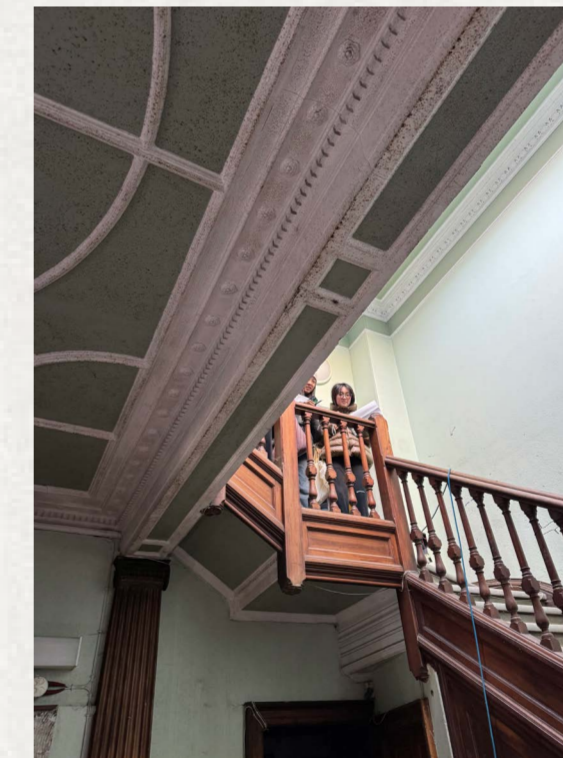
SITE CONTEXT & ARCHITECTURAL CHARACTER

Located in the Gracemount and Liberton ward of Edinburgh, Gracemount Mansion is a Georgian villa constructed in the late 1700s. The building was a private residence until the mid-20th century when it came into public ownership, subsequently becoming a cornerstone of the local community housing one of Scotland's longest running youth clubs.

The upper ground floor of the building lends Gracemount Mansion its most recognisable characteristics through a number of architectural details - plasterwork, fireplaces, large windows and high ceilings typical of the Georgian period.

The 2023 'Have Your Say' community consultation indicated that, of all the questions asked about potential approaches to repairing and adapting the site and surrounding area, community members responded most strongly in favour of retaining the existing building.

All photos except top middle: Nui, K. (2026).



GRACEMOUNT MANSION

SPACE WITH A SENSE OF PLACE

The site is located in close proximity to several schools. Gracemount Nursery and Gracemount Primary School are right outside the gates along with a small play park, and Gracemount High School, Kaimes Special School and Carebears Nursery are within a 10 minute walk. The 2024 Edinburgh Poverty Commission Report found Gracemount and Liberton to be the third most deprived area of the city, with an estimated 22% of children living in poverty (The Edinburgh Partnership, 2024, p.9).

While the site is currently in a state of disrepair that might suggest it having been abandoned - it was only vacated in 2018 due to safety concerns and there is an ongoing campaign led by local residents to repair and restore the building to use. Community consultations undertaken in 2021 and 2023 indicate a strong desire for a community hub with a focus on youth development, social support and a connection to the community garden and woodland.



A Warm Embrace



Ideas for the Space

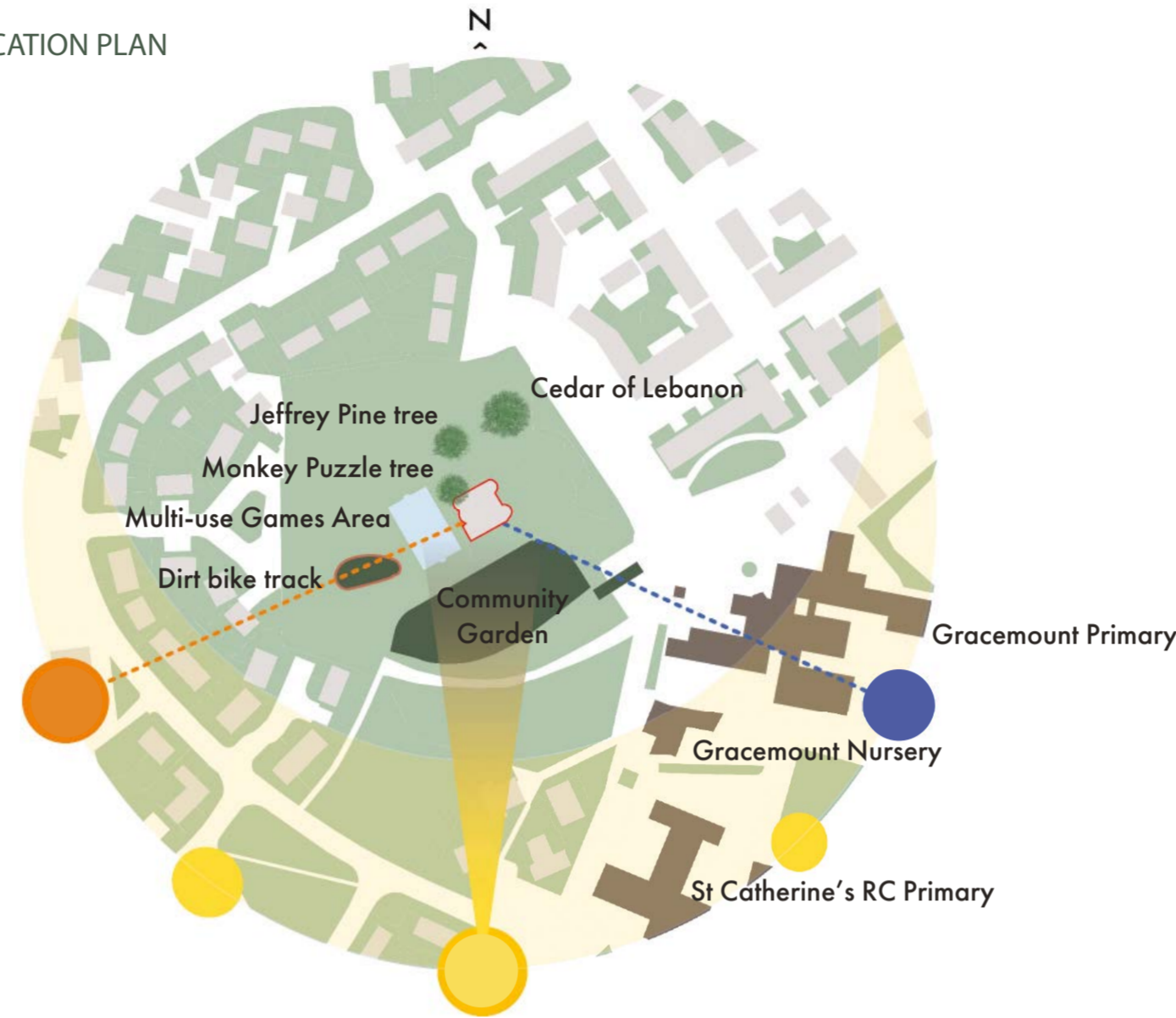
- Mansion**
- 79% of respondents would like the mansion to be used for youth projects
 - 67% for a community garden hub
 - 66% for an after-school facility
 - 66% for apprenticeships and skills training
 - 56% for an environmental education centre
 - 56% for arts/performance/music;
 - 39% for pre-school childcare
 - 26% for a local history hub
 - 25% for Gracemount Community Church.



Residents responses to a community consultation for the Development Trust (Our Gracemount report, 2021, p.11).

Sunpath for 20 Feb. 2026. The south exposure benefits from both daylight and a connection to the surrounding outdoor spaces even during the coldest winter months.

LOCATION PLAN



EXISTING SITE SECTIONS



ADAPTIVE RE-USE STRATEGY

Community consultations have highlighted how residents would like to be able to use the building. While residents clearly have a sense of place as a community, there is a strong desire for a gathering space (Gracemount Mansion Development Trust, 2023, p.11).

The building has undergone a number of alterations and requires the addition of a lift, a new enclosed fire stair, as well as a proposed new entrance to improve accessibility and to adhere to building regulations.

Historic fireplaces are to be retained but decommissioned, with trickle vents installed to improve thermal efficiency while allowing ventilation. The lower ground and first floors are to be levelled to further improve accessibility for all users of the building.



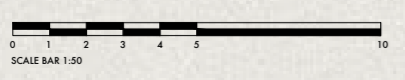
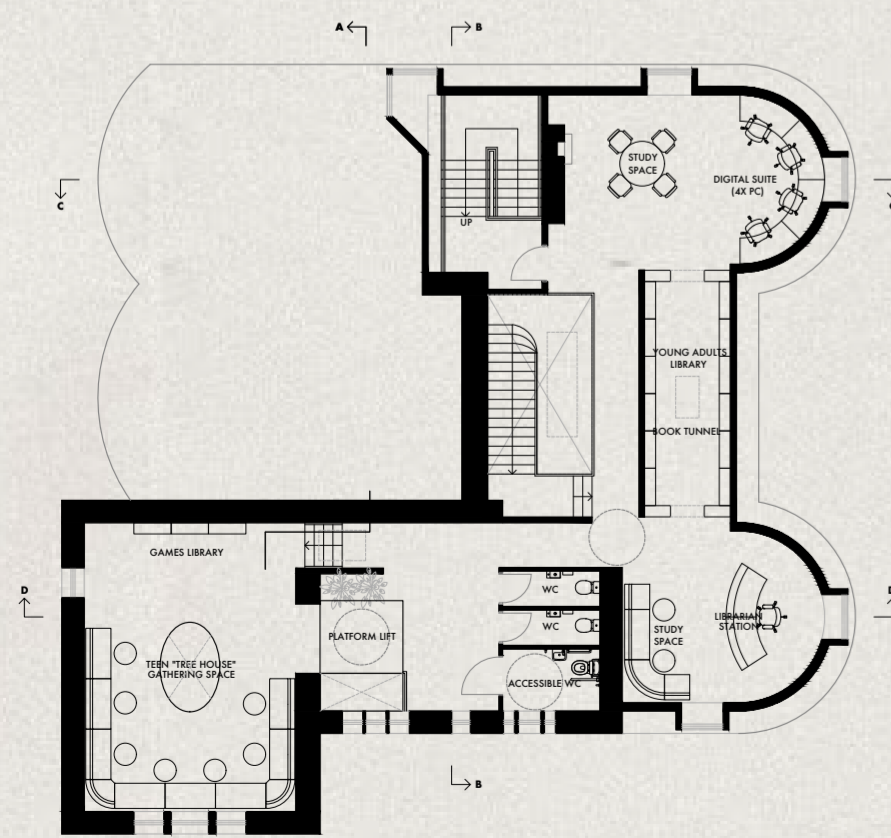
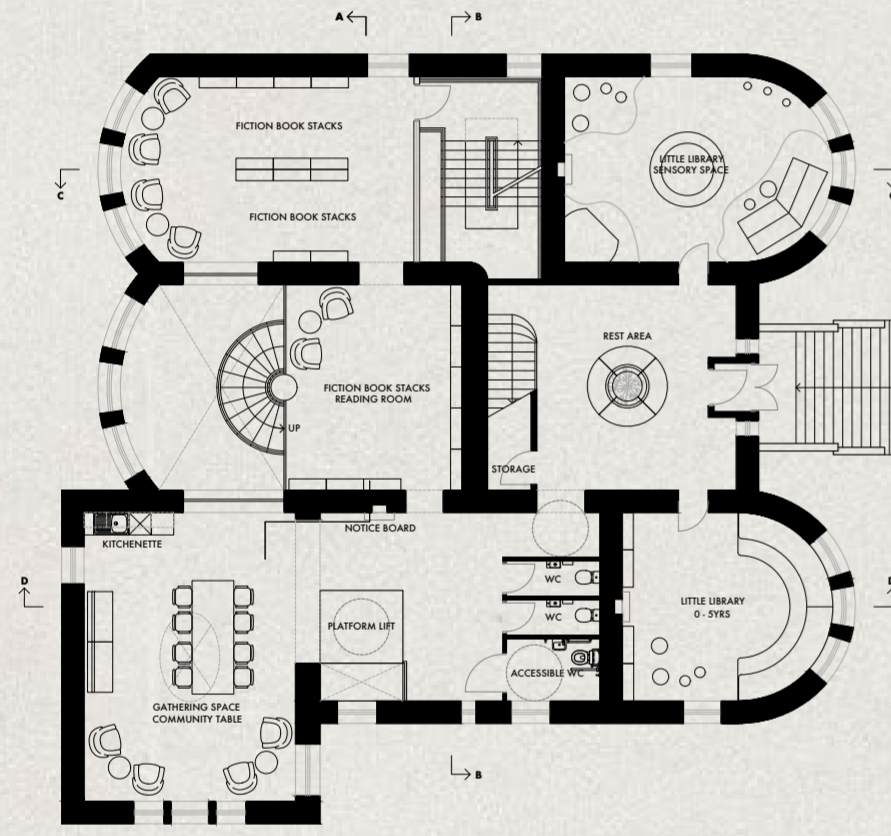
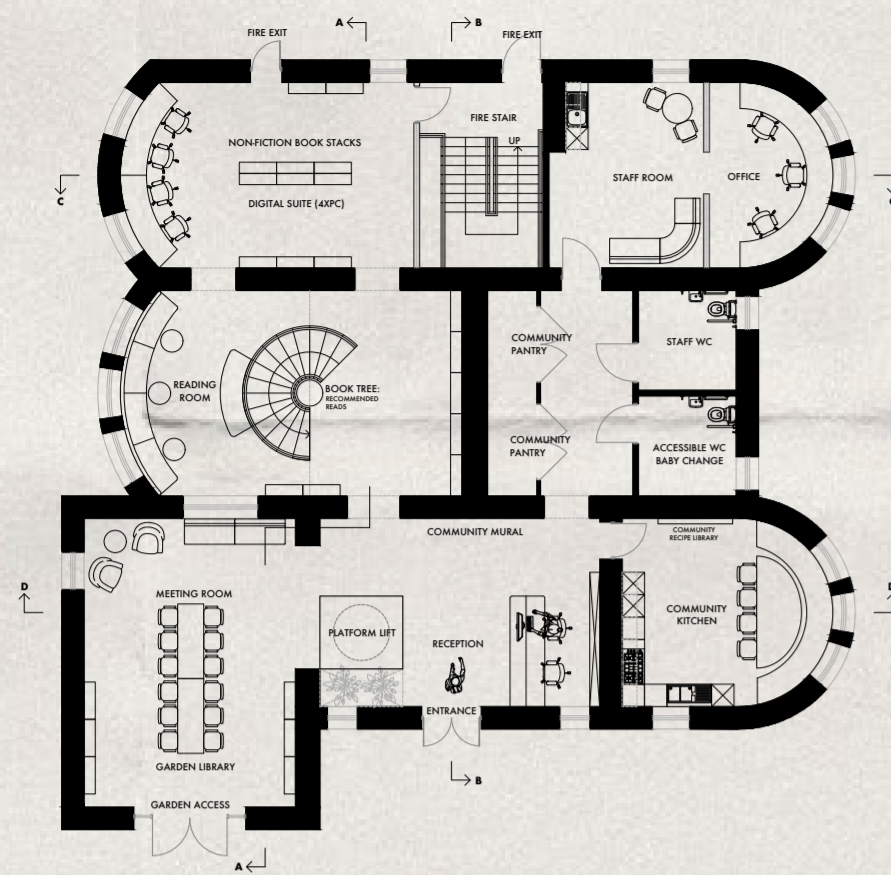
A CONNECTION TO THE OUTDOORS

The approach to the site is framed by a number of specimen trees dating back to the 19th century, possibly planted by Maurice Lothian who owned the house from 1852-1895, and who had connections to a local rare seedsman named Alexander Wright (Bohn & Burt, 2024, pp.8-19). Three trees planted in the community woodland on the north side of the house frame the view on approach - a Monkey Puzzle, a Cedar of Lebanon and one of only two Jeffrey Pines in Scotland (Gracemountmansion.com, 2026).

The community walled garden to the south of the building is operated by Transition Edinburgh South, with plans to turn the old stable block into a community cafe, garden tool library and events space (Transition Edinburgh South, 2023). A small dirtbike track and multi-use games area to the southwest of the building offer potential for connecting the interior to a number of outdoor activities.



FINALISED FLOOR PLANS

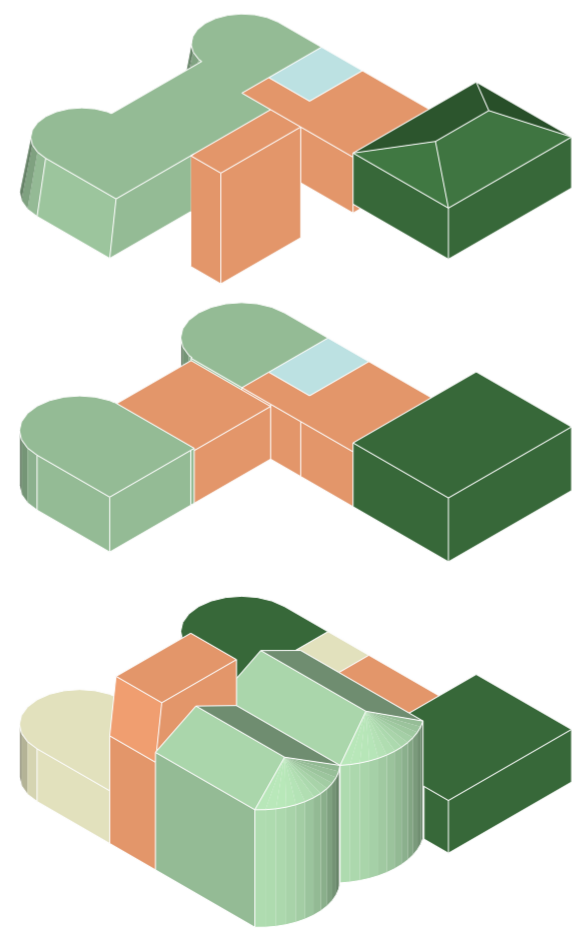


ZONING & CIRCULATION

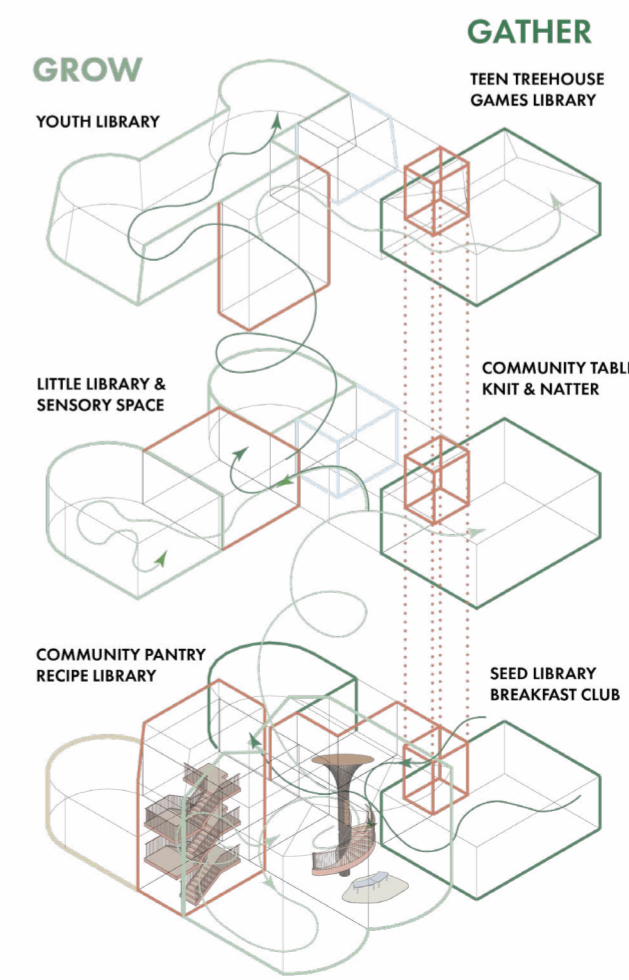
The building is largely organised around two kinds of spaces: community spaces where people can gather, relax and connect. Lending library spaces where people can grow their knowledge through curiosity, and the cultivation of hobbies such as gardening and cooking.

Circulation is non-linear - encouraging exploration, and offering a series of spaces that nurture younger library users as they grow and become confident and autonomous members of the community

The architectural layout remains largely unchanged, allowing the building to remain a site of familiarity and comfort for those who attended prior to the closure in 2018. The addition of a lift as well as levelling the floors improves accessibility for users of different abilities.



- LENDING LIBRARY SPACES
- COMMUNITY GATHERING
- CIRCULATION
- STAFF AREAS
- WCS



A SPACE TO GATHER

THE COMMUNITY TABLE

Located in the former ballroom and dance hall, the community table acts as the heart of the library where residents can gather for knit & natter, after school club and other group activities. Furniture is loose, lighting softly supplements the daylight and the Palladian window frames views out to the community garden.

Wood panelling is painted in white linseed-oil based paint to brighten the space allowing users to benefit from the natural light pouring in throughout the day. The atrium balconies create sightlines between this historic room and modernised areas of the library, maximising natural light throughout the day as well as providing cross ventilation through the building on sunny days.



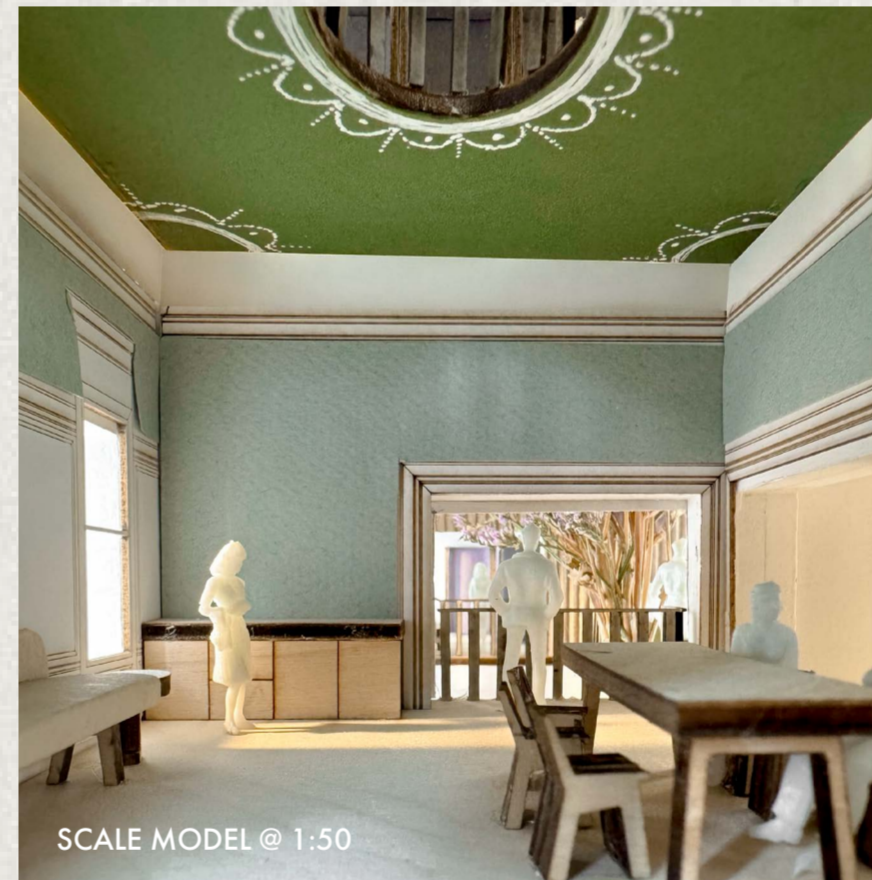
LIGHTING SCHEME: SECTION VIEWS



VIEW ACROSS COMMUNITY TABLE



VIEW ACROSS ATRIUM TO COMMUNITY TABLE



SCALE MODEL @ 1:50



SCALE MODEL @ 1:50

MOOD, MATERIALITY & SPECIFICATION

A 21st century take on a traditional palette, blending a traditional Georgian palette of sky blues, pea greens, soft neutrals and splashes of 'Pompeian Red' with tones drawn from the surrounding community woodland as well as the key historic elements of the interior to create a seamless transition from garden to library.

Materials and FF&E specification has been made with durability & circularity in mind. Reclaimed and refurbished finishes, natural and plant-based materials and surfaces have been specified where possible.

Furniture specification centres around manufacturers that offer robust repair and maintenance options and user experience is top of mind through ergonomically designed furnishings intended to support well-being. Modular, loose furnishings allow potential for flexible use of spaces with the ability to be re-arranged as required.



MUUTO 'FIBER' RECYCLED PLASTIC & WOOD COMPOSITE CHAIRS



SIXTEEN3 'LINK' SYSTEM



REFURBISHED ORANGEBOX 'RECUR' TASK SEATING



ORANGEBOX 'LIBRARY' TABLE WITH INTEGRATED LIGHTING



CAMIRA FABRICS RE-SKU 2.0 RECYCLED WOOL SHADE 'REINVENT'



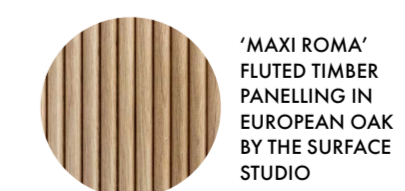
CAMIRA FABRICS RE-SKU 2.0 RECYCLED WOOL SHADE 'REDEEM'



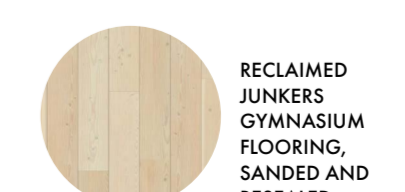
FORBO FURNITURE LINOLEUM MANUFACTURED IN FIFE NO CHEMICALS REQUIRED



RECLAIMED FLAGSTONE FLOORING, WAXED



'MAXI ROMA' FLUTED TIMBER PANELLING IN EUROPEAN OAK BY THE SURFACE STUDIO



RECLAIMED JUNKERS GYMNASIUM FLOORING, SANDED AND RESEALED



BIRCH PLYWOOD SEALED IN LINOLEUM BASED LINSEED OIL SHADE 'CAIRO'



SCOTS' PINE SEALED IN LINOLEUM BASED LINSEED OIL SHADE 'NAIROBI'

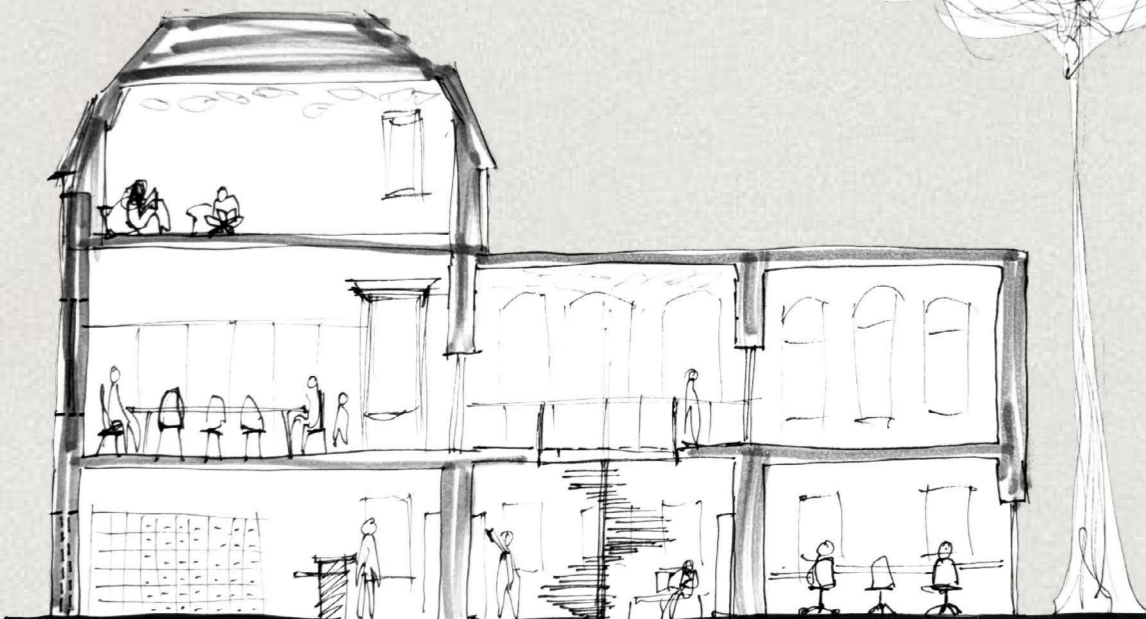


ECOWORX 100% RECYCLED CARPET - INDOOR AIR COMFORT GOLD CERTIFIED

A VISUAL ANCHOR

THE BOOK TREE

Visible upon entry to the library, the book tree creates a dedicated shelving unit for librarian's recommended reads, inviting users to follow the winding stair and explore the spaces surrounding it while. The open atrium creates an open space for group or solo reading for community members of all ages. Fluted timber panelling makes for soft acoustics and a comfortable, relaxing experience in the reading room.



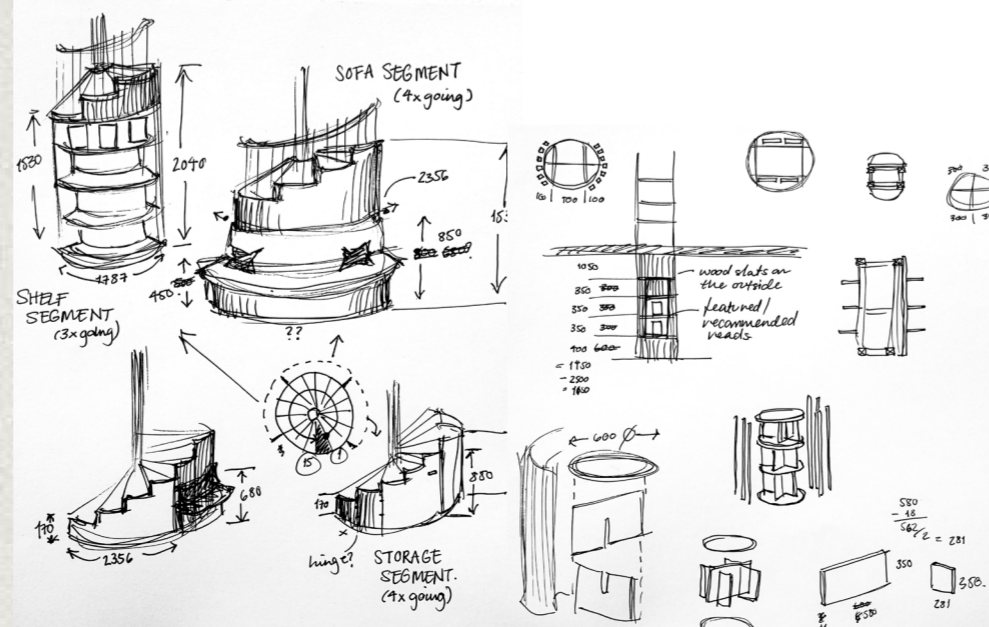
TEEN TREE HOUSE AND BOARD GAME LIBRARY



THE TEEN "TREE" HOUSE

GROWING CONFIDENCE

A boardgame library and dedicated space separate from the teen library space, this offers teens a space which is solely intended for leisure and allows them a hangout space with no financial barriers to access where they can relax and socialise without feeling watched but with nearby support of library staff.



TEEN TREE HOUSE IN AFTER SCHOOL WINTER LIGHT CONDITIONS