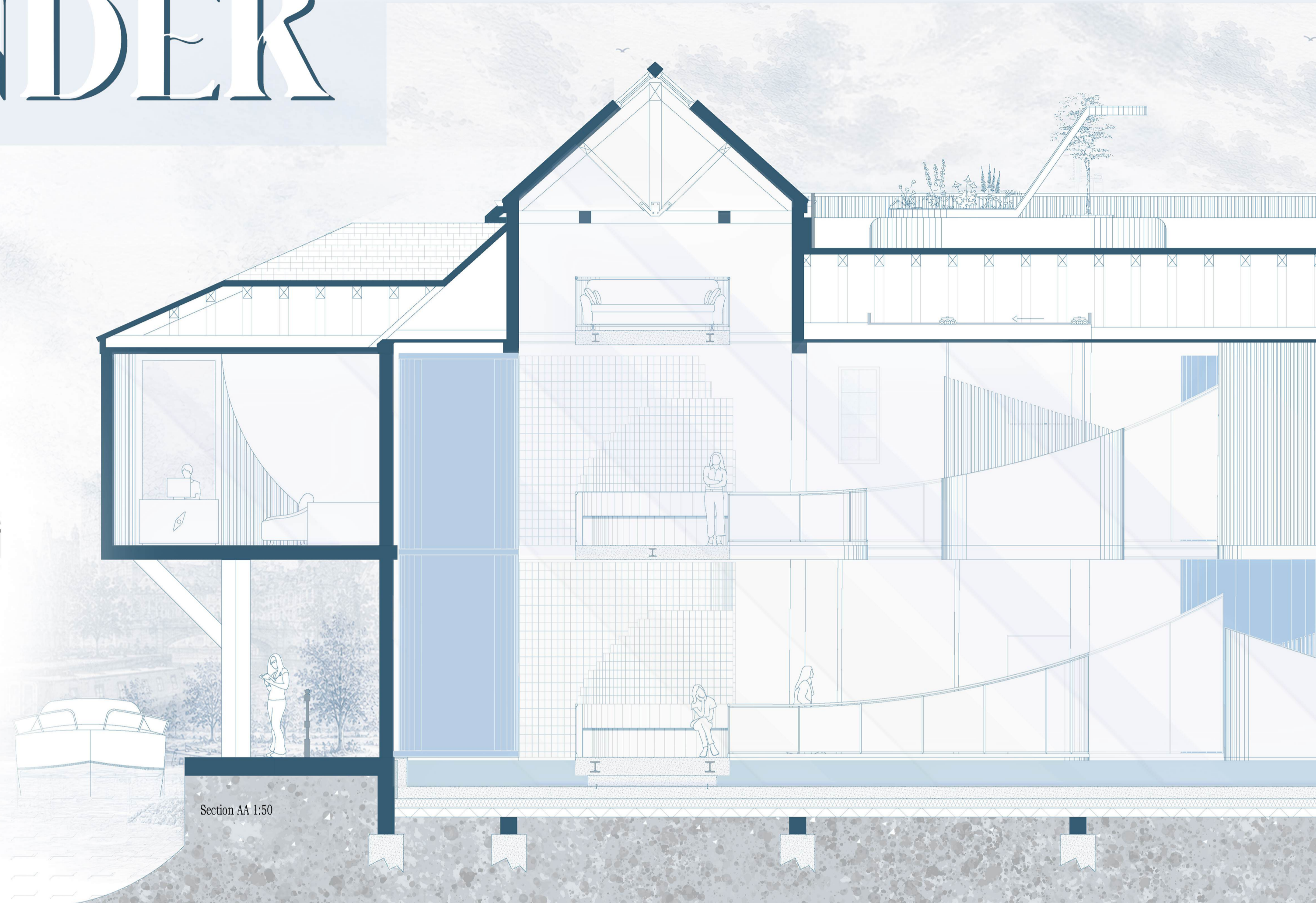


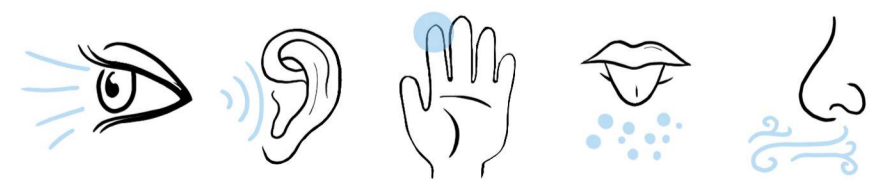
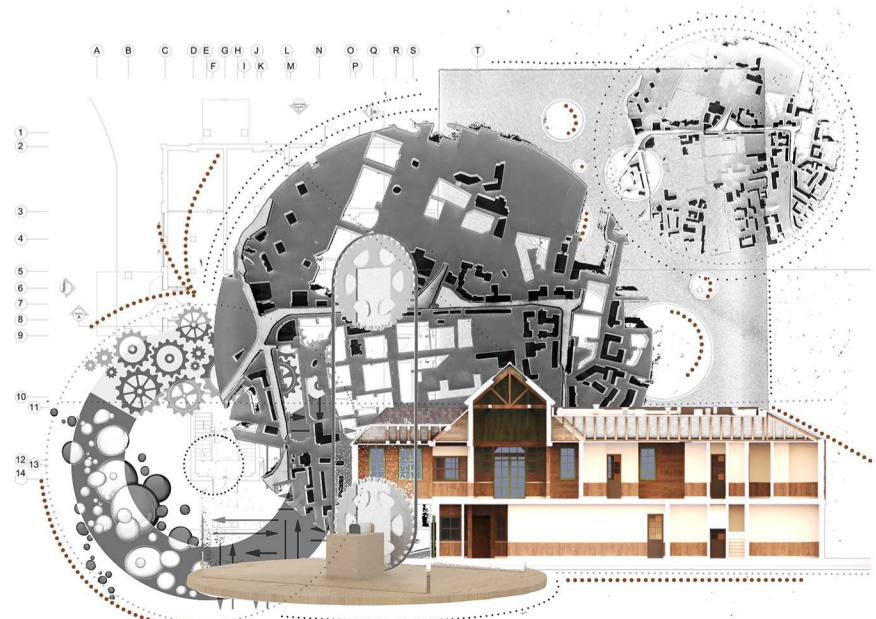
# WAYFINDER



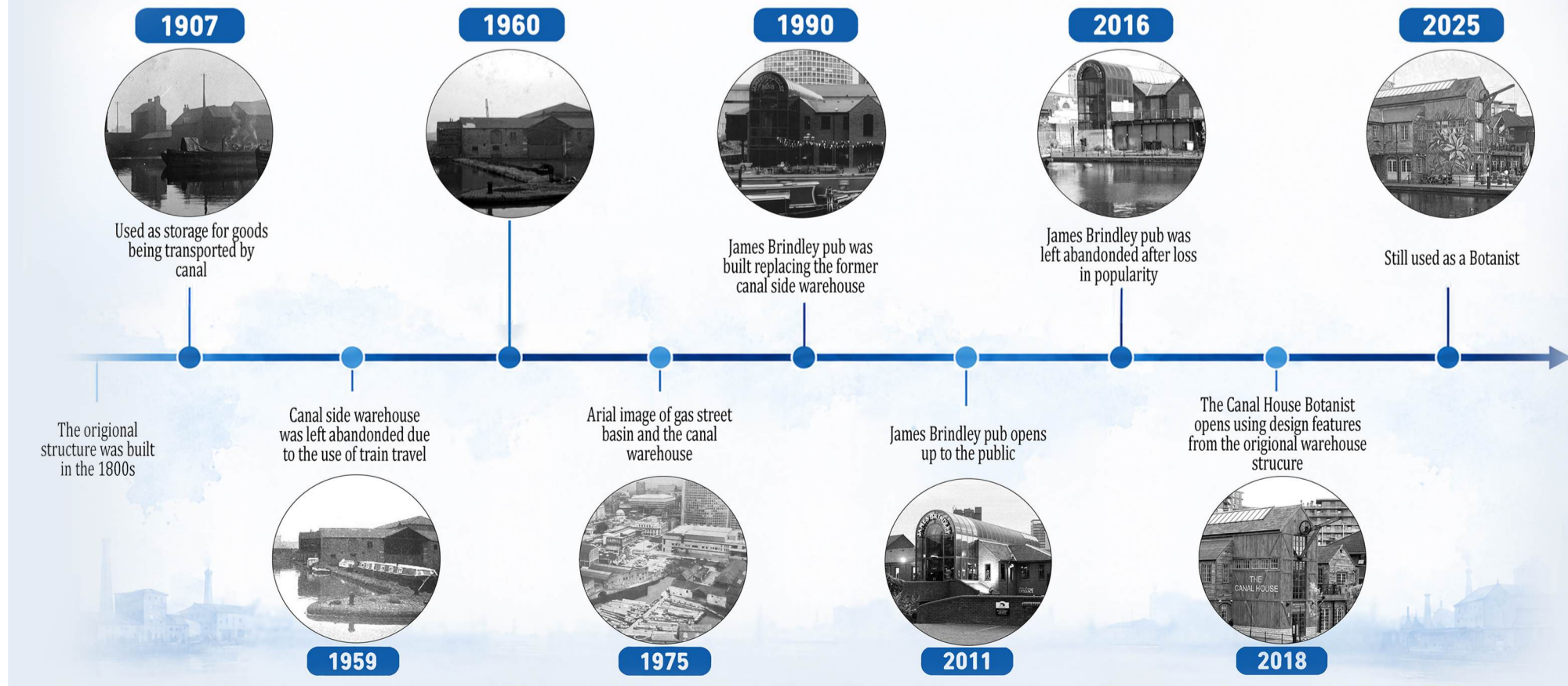
**Brief:**  
Wayfinder is a grief support and communal centre designed for young adults aged 18-29 who have experienced the loss of a parent or guardian. It responds to the lack of accessible grief support services while creating a sense of community through shared experiences. Rather than a clinical facility, Wayfinder is designed as a human-centred, emotionally supportive environment that promotes healing, connection and belonging.

The project is located at 12 Bridge Street, Birmingham, directly alongside the Gas Street Basin canal. Historically, the building formed part of Birmingham's canal warehouse infrastructure during the Industrial Revolution. Its position beside the canal creates a strong relationship to water, movement and heritage, which became key conceptual drivers for the design.

Water also engages the senses through sight, sound, touch, taste and smell creating light reflections, movement and atmosphere creating a soothing and grounding experience. These sensory qualities can help reduce stress, encourage mindfulness and provide comfort during grief, allowing users to feel more present, supported and emotionally at ease.



## Historic Timeline



# DIRECT 80 %

# SECONDARY 20 %



**18-29 year olds who are grieving**  
 - Recent loss of a parent  
 - Previous loss of a parent  
**60%**



**Support Network**  
 - Family  
 - Friends  
 - Carers  
 - Partners  
**20%**



**Mental Health Professionals**  
 - Specialised Therapists  
 - Counsellors  
 - Psychiatrist  
**10%**



**Administration Staff**  
 - Receptionists/ Front Desk  
 - Paperwork Clerks  
**5%**



**Hospitality Staff**  
 - Chefs  
 - Baristas  
**3%**



**Building Maintenance**  
 - Cleaners  
 - Tech professional  
 - Maintenance workers  
**2%**



Wayfinder was developed in response to the need for a accessible emotionally supportive space for young adults experiencing grief. Central to the design is the presence of water, inspired by both the site's canal-side location (gas street basin) and Birmingham's industrial history. Historically, the canals represented movement, connection and transition throughout the city. While within the project water becomes a therapeutic element that encourages pause, reflection and emotional healing.

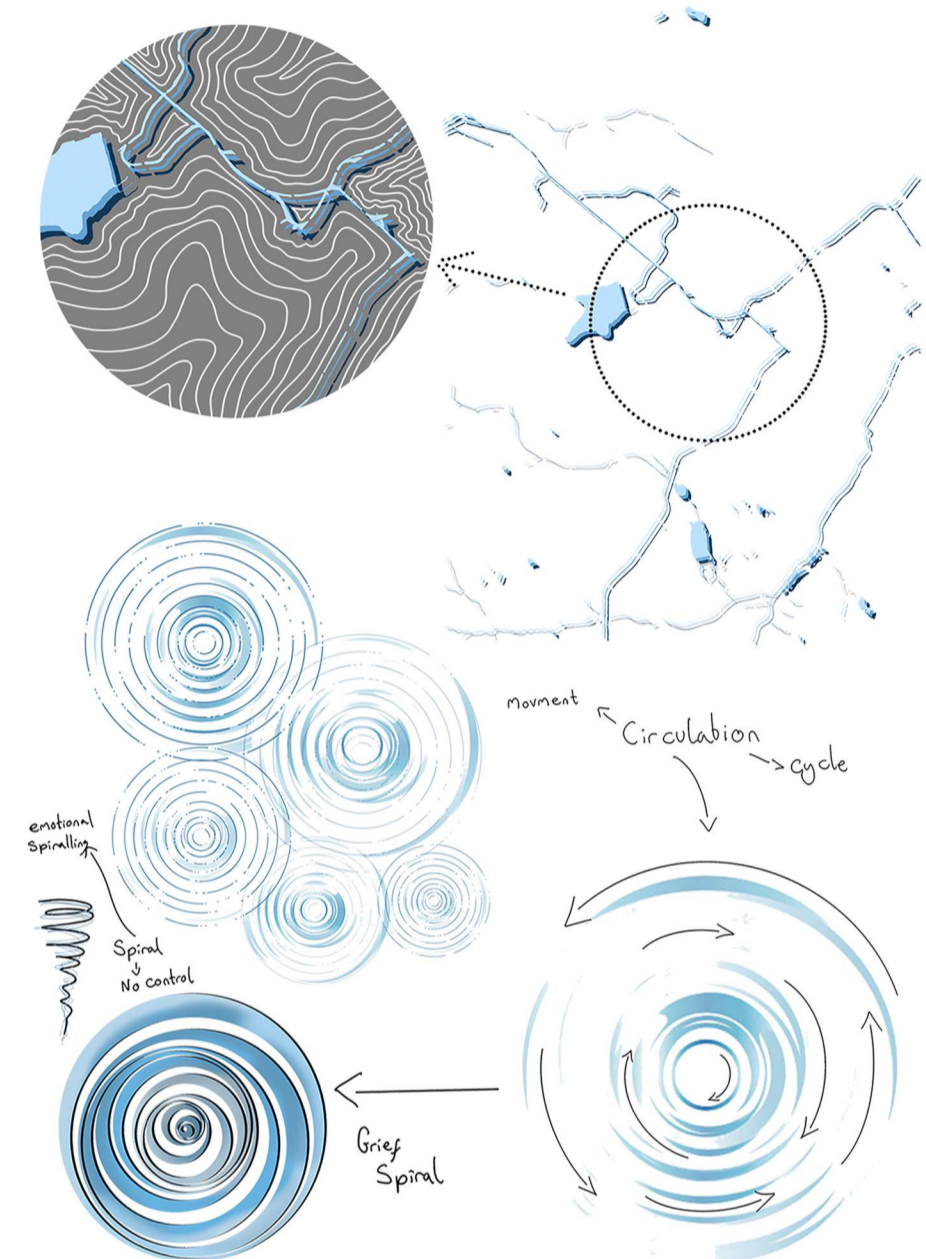
The changing nature of water mirrors the evolving experience of grief, allowing the design to create an environment that feels calm, restorative and deeply connected to both history and wellbeing.

The site benefits from excellent links including bus, tram, train, car, cycling, walking routes and canal access by boat. It is also positioned between two universities, placing the project within a young adult demographic that aligns directly with the target users.

The primary client is the Canal & River Trust, through their Wellbeing by Water programme, supporting wellbeing spaces near water.

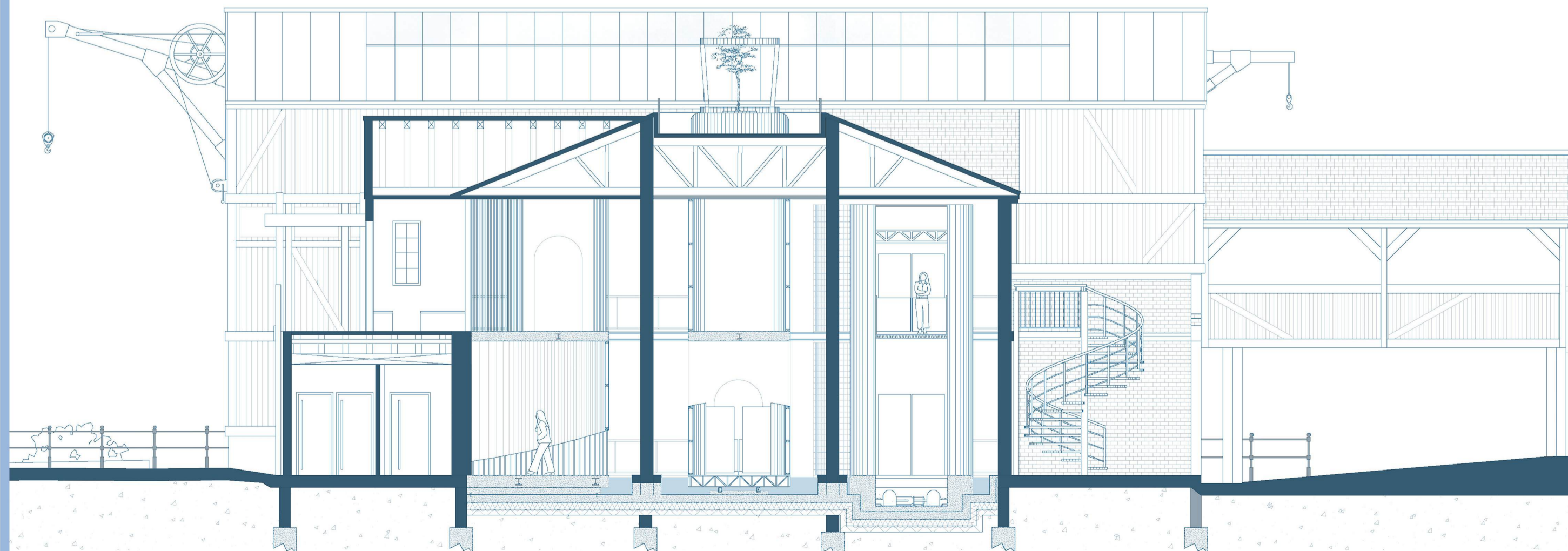
The secondary partner is the NHS, providing therapists, counsellors and mental health professionals to deliver structured support within the building.

## THE STAGES OF GRIEF

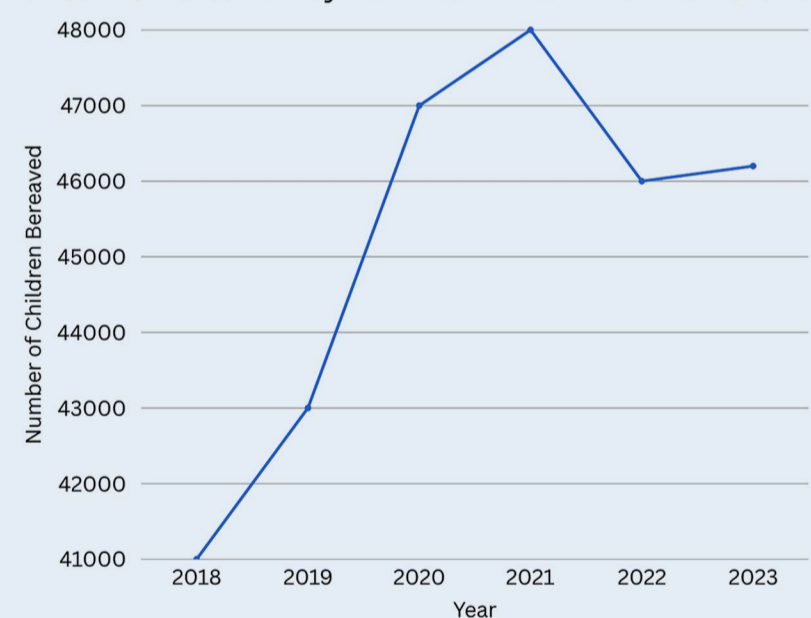


Birmingham has one of the highest mortality rates in the UK, yet there are very few dedicated grief support spaces. Existing services are often difficult to access due to long NHS waiting lists or the cost of private therapy. Wayfinder addresses this need by creating an approachable, inclusive environment where users can access support without stigma.

## Section DD1:100



Children (0-17) Bereaved by Parental Death in the UK (2018-2023)

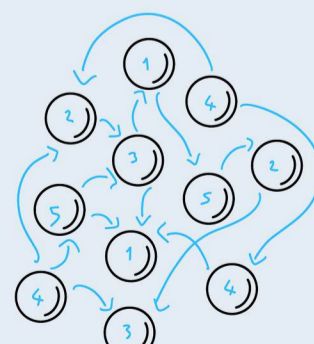


## Concept Development

The project explores grief as a non-linear process. It does not move neatly from one stage to another and every individual experiences it differently. This understanding led to the study of systems based on continuous movement. The paternoster lift became a key influence. Users can step on or off at any point, remain in place, repeat stages or move continuously. This reflects grief, where there is no fixed route, no correct order and no final destination only movement through highs and lows.



Grief isn't linear



You can repeat, skip and stay on steps for as long as you need.



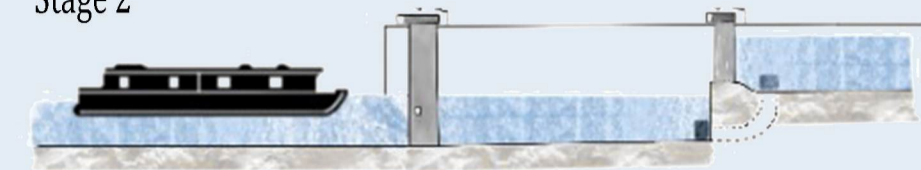
Stages of a canal boat travelling uphill through a lock with one level change

Stage 1



Gentle ripples in the water upon approach to the lock

Stage 2



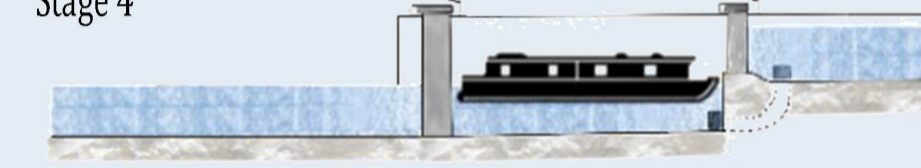
Calm water when waiting to enter the lock

Stage 3



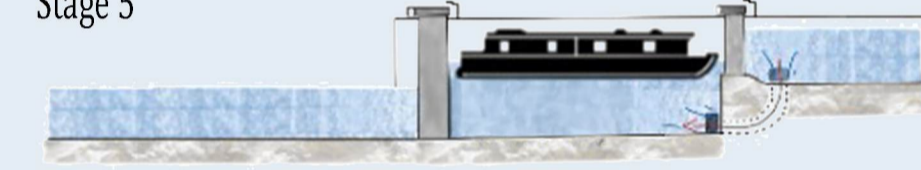
Gentle ripples in the water as lock doors begin to open taking 1-2 minutes

Stage 4



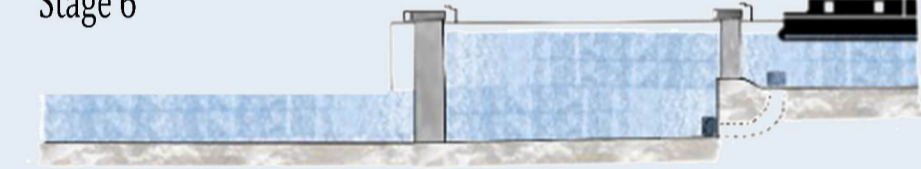
Still water once boat has entered the lock and lock doors have closed

Stage 5



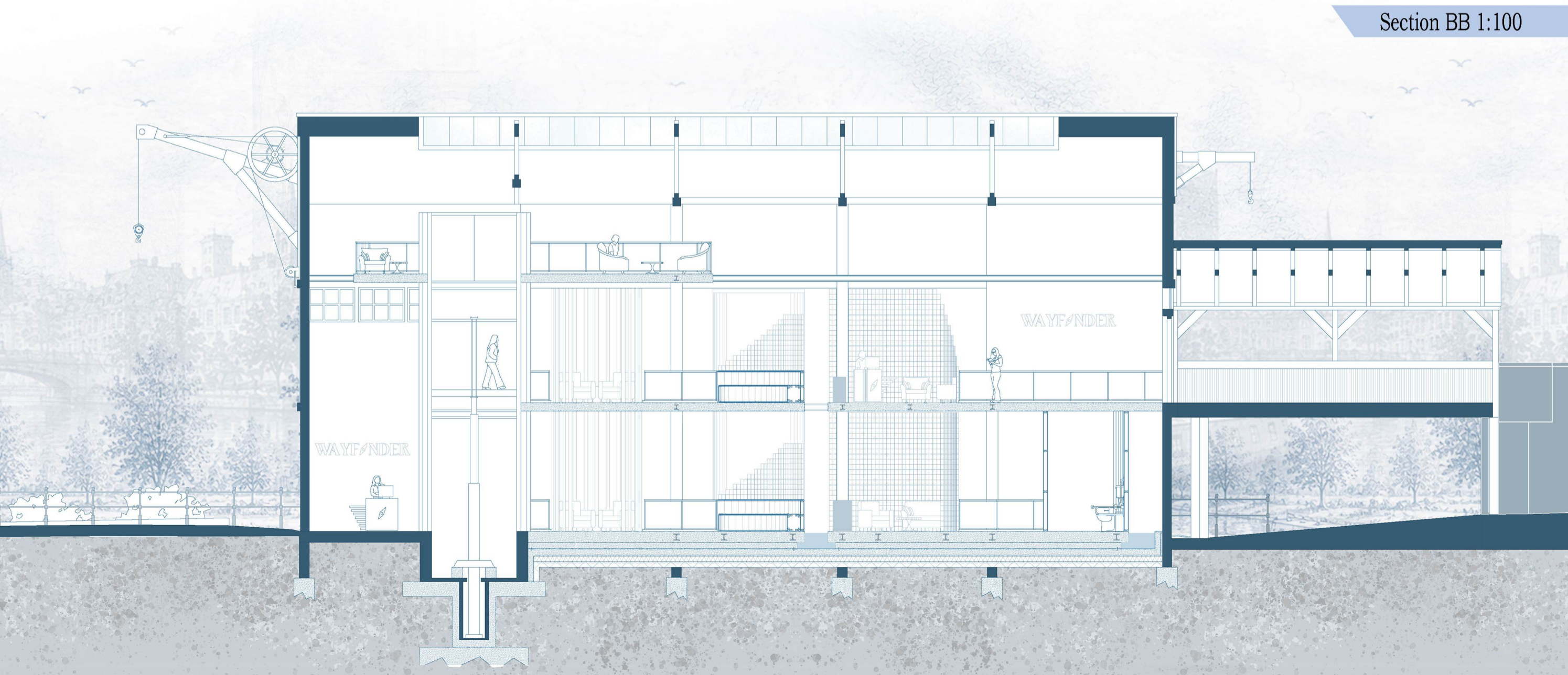
Turbulent water as the chamber of the lock begins to fill raising the boat taking 3-5 minutes

Stage 6

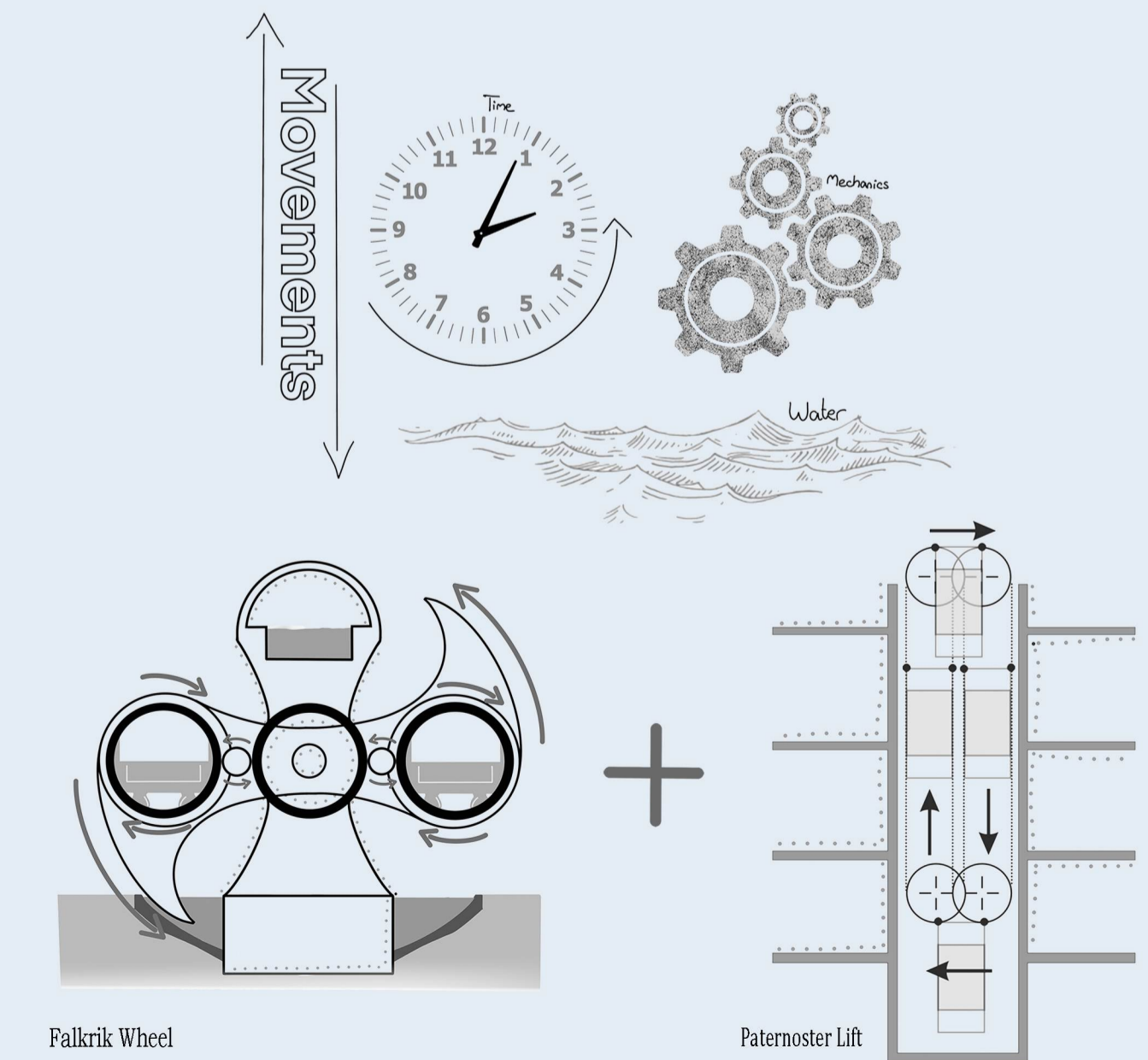


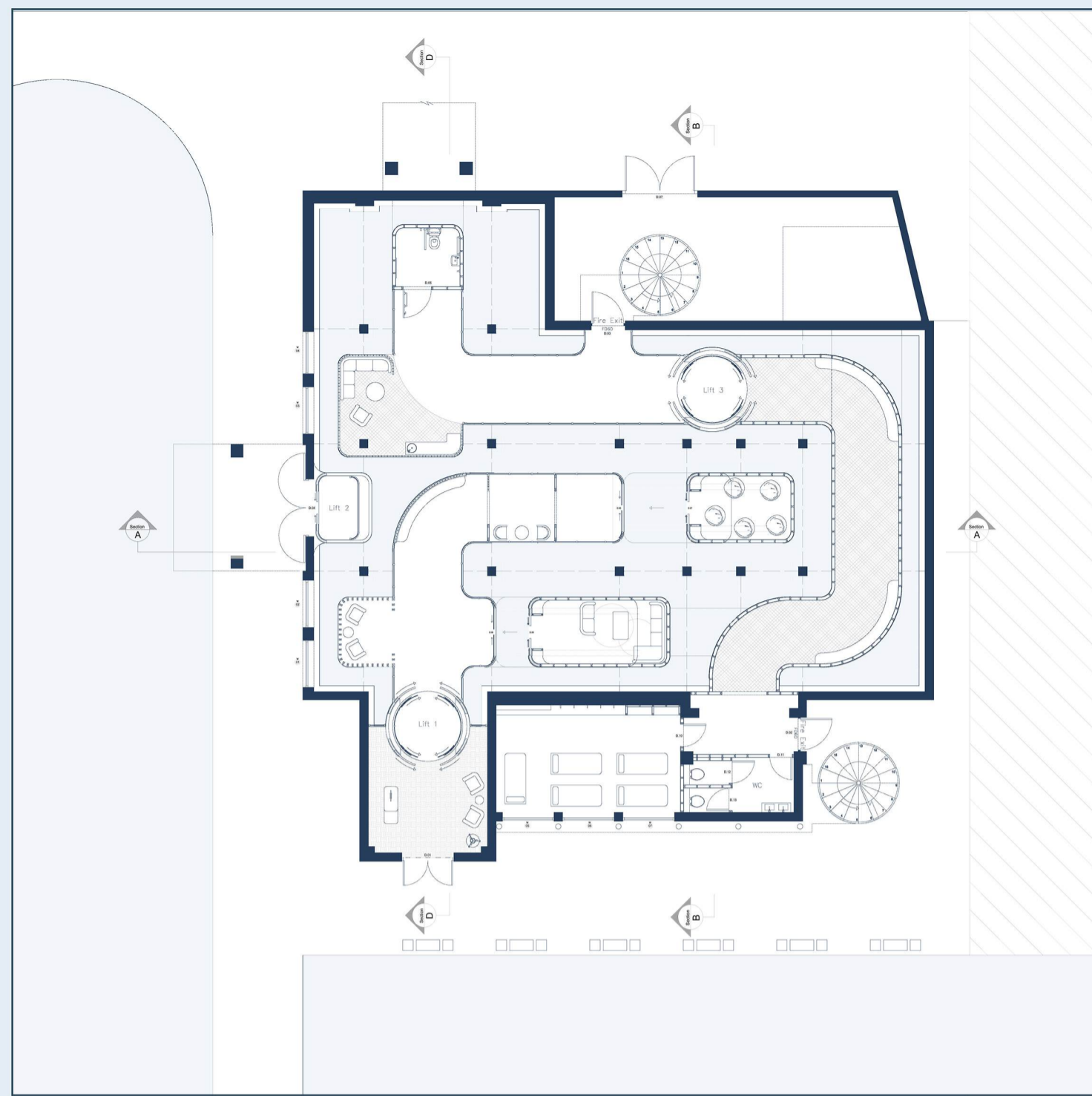
Gentle ripples in the water as the lock doors close and canal boat continues

Section BB 1:100

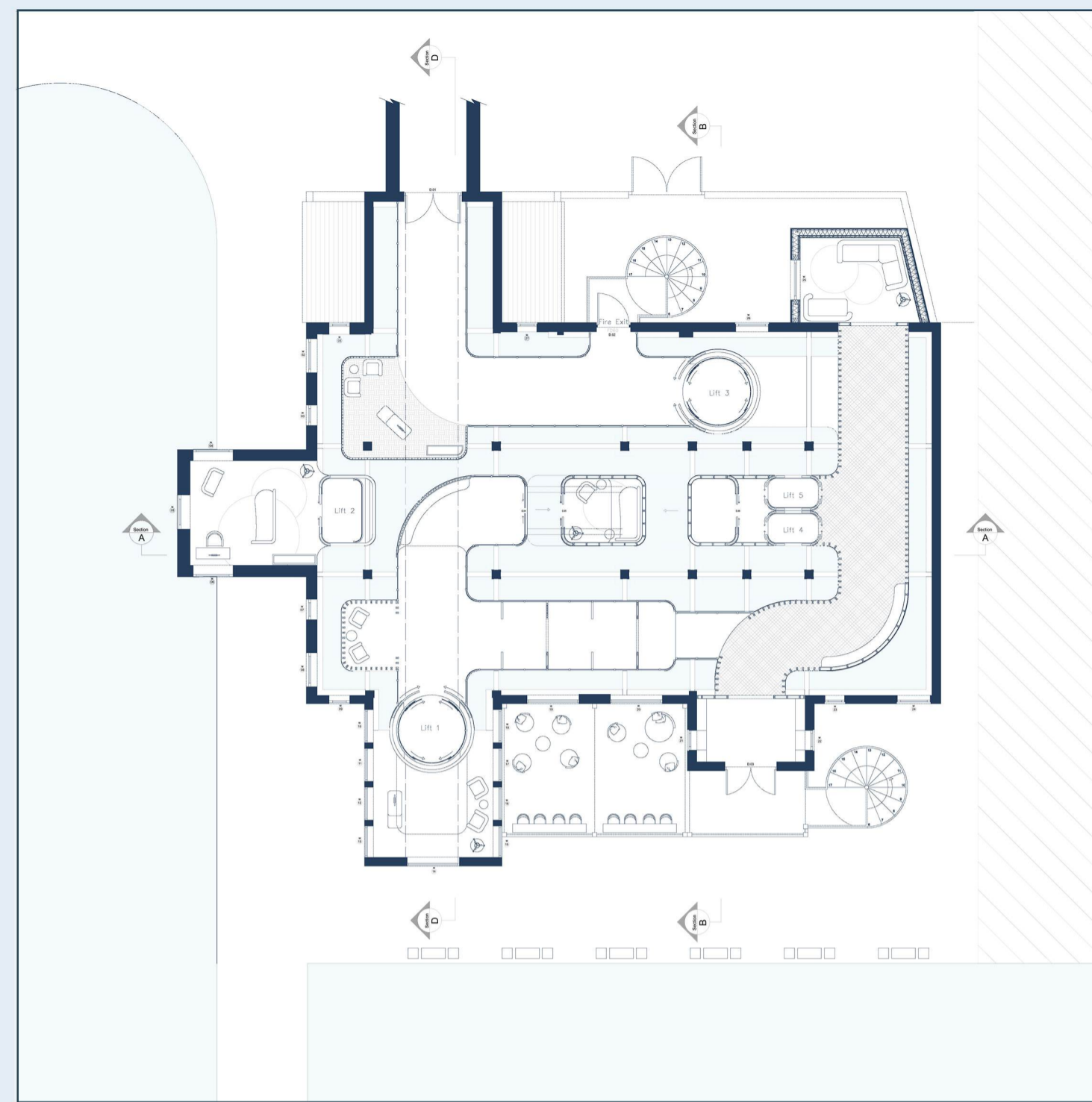


Stages of a canal boat travelling uphill through a lock with one level change

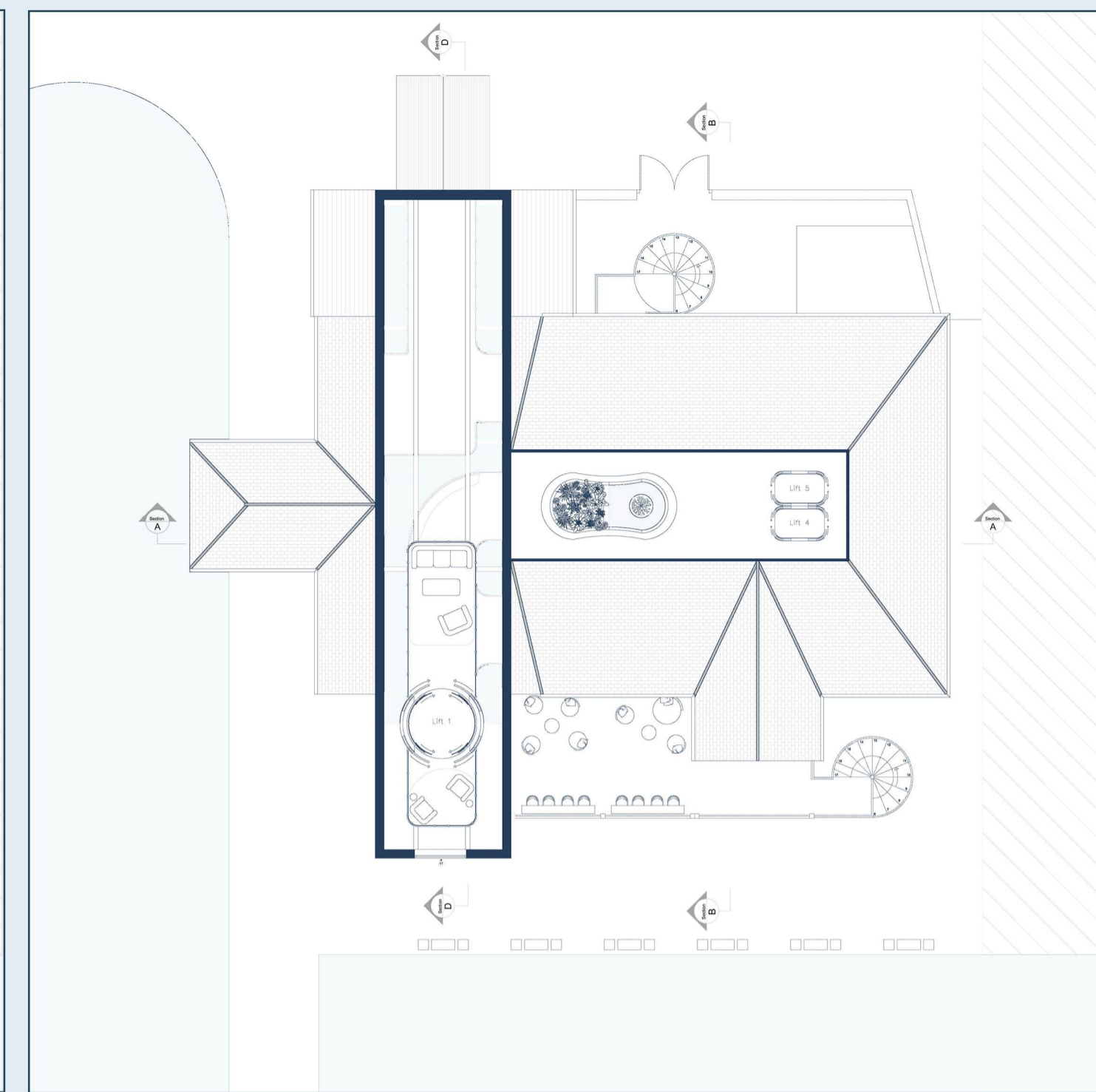




Ground Floor 1:200



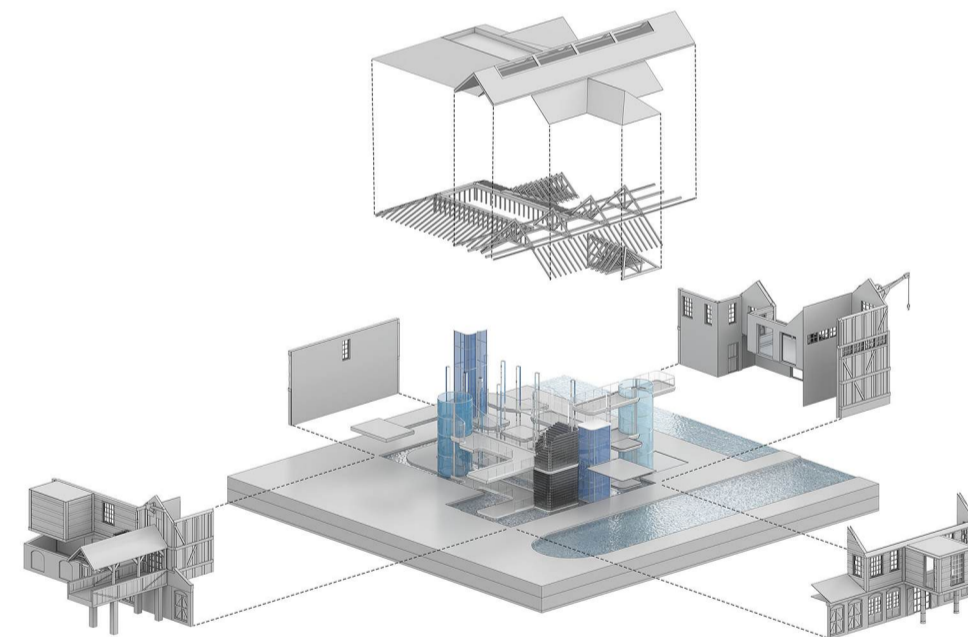
First Floor 1:200



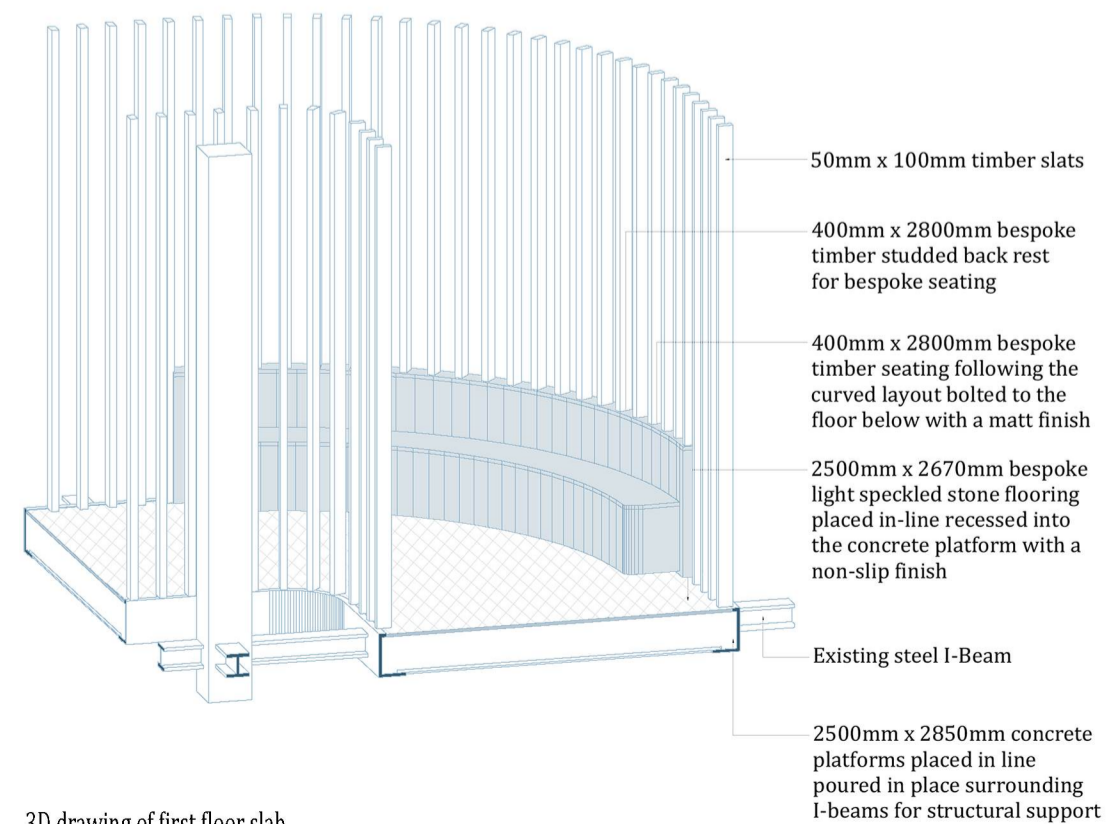
Second Floor 1:200

The concept informed the architectural design through vertical movement and circulation. The building encourages non-linear movement, allowing users to choose their own path, where to pause and how they progress through the space. The ground floor is intentionally flooded with water, creating both a physical and symbolic connection to the canal. Circulation paths weave around and across the water, encouraging users to slow down, move mindfully and become aware of their surroundings. All three floors are vertically aligned, creating visual continuity throughout the building. A central skylight draws natural light through every level, connecting water, light and space in one continuous experience.

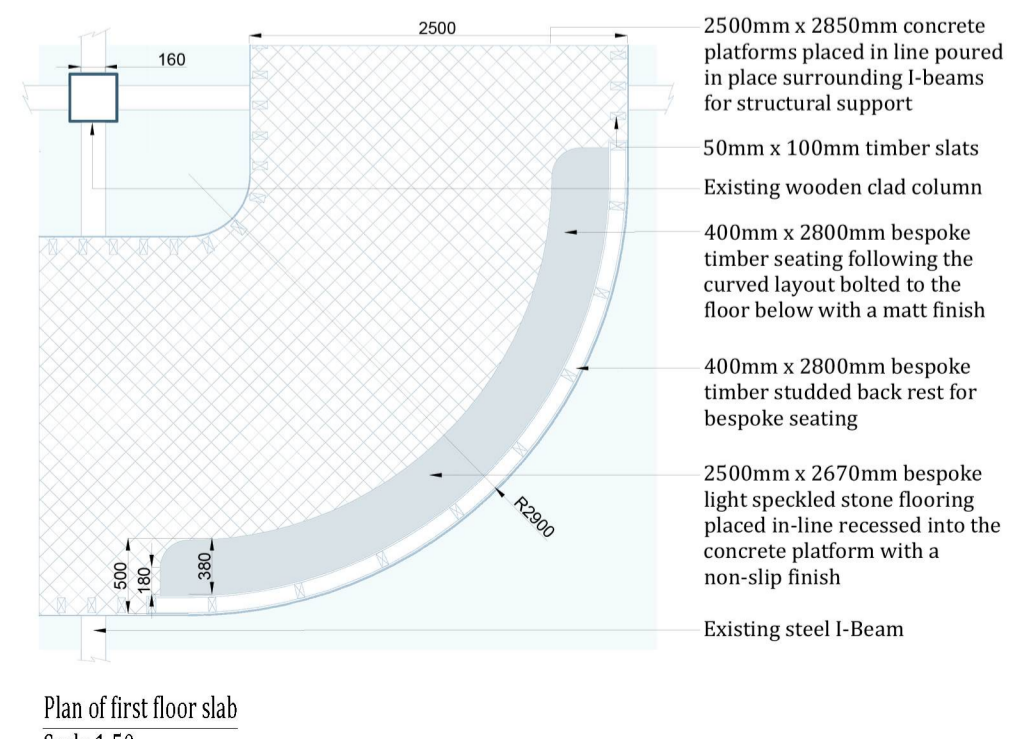
The main spaces in the communal centre are the varying types of therapy rooms. The movement studio, individual therapy room, group therapy room, 1-1 therapy room and communal areas are all designed to help people work through and navigate their own grief, either using professional support through therapy / counselling in the individual or group therapy rooms, peer support in the group therapy rooms or communal areas and holistic support in the individual therapy room and movement studio which utilizes a practice called mindful grieving which can be done through meditation and yoga creating a connection between the mind and body.



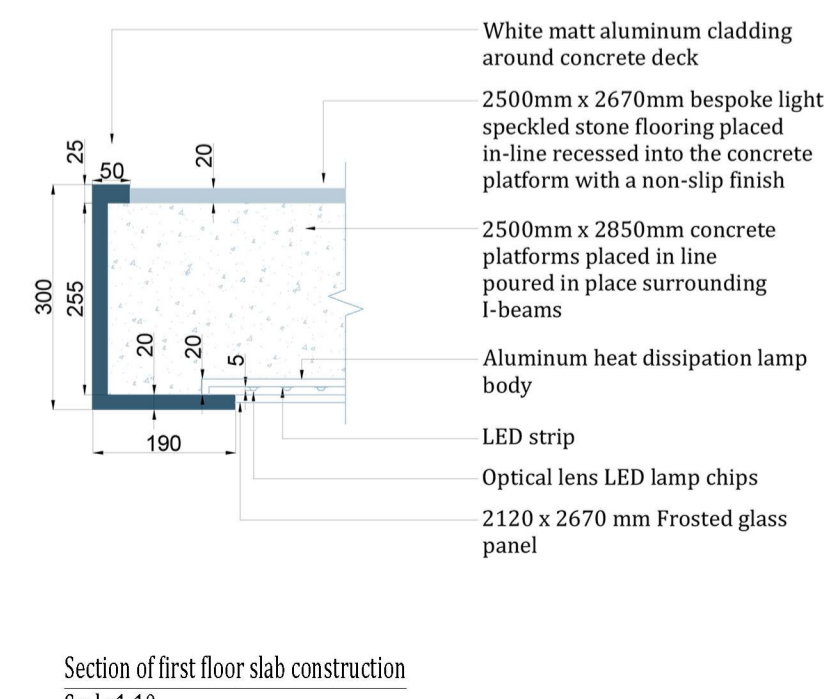
The seating design creates a calm, semi-enclosed space for reflection and quiet connection within a grief support centre. The curved timber slats offer a sense of shelter without isolation, while the softly lit bench provides a warm comforting place to sit, talk or pause whilst walking around the grief centre. Located on the first floor allowing the users to hear the water below on the ground floor.



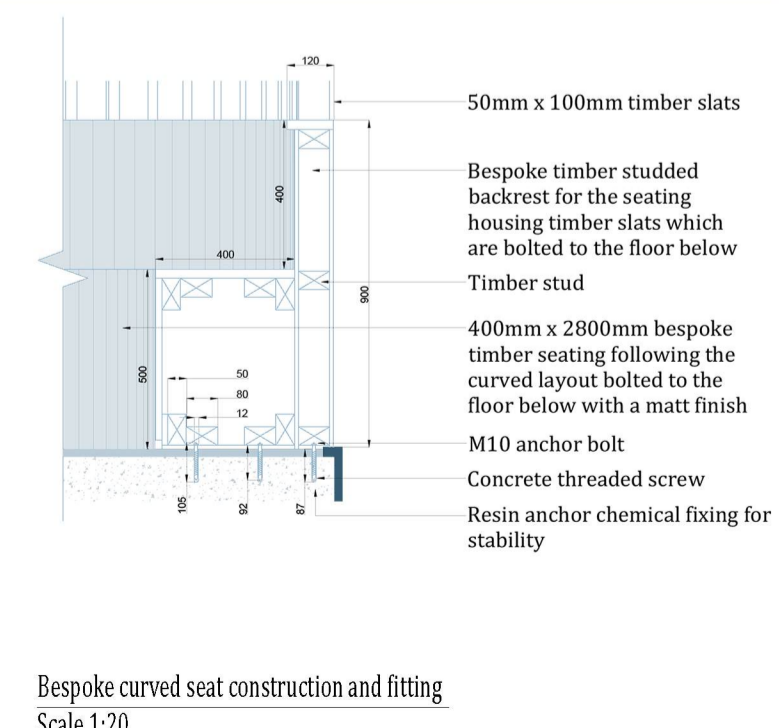
3D drawing of first floor slab  
Scale 1:50



Plan of first floor slab  
Scale 1:50



Section of first floor slab construction  
Scale 1:10



Bespoke curved seat construction and fitting  
Scale 1:20

Dual traction lifts number 4 & 5 going from the 1st floor to the rooftop terrace

Hydraulic lift number 3 going from the ground floor to the 1st floor

1-1 Therapy room

Group therapy room

Main reception / entrance area

Main entrance

Communal area

The axonometric drawing showcases the movement and circulation within the space, highlighting the relationships between the different levels, pathways and transitional zones. It is collaged with subtle repeating patterns inspired by elements found throughout the design as well as geometry found within canal locks, reinforcing themes of flow, connection and layered spatial experience.

1-1 therapy room

Communal area

Piston lift number 1 going from the ground floor to the 2nd floor

Communal area

Private therapy room

Secondary entrance

Private hydraulic lift number 2 going from the ground floor to the 1st floor

Wayfinder challenges traditional clinical approaches to bereavement care by creating a welcoming environment that combines therapy, community and wellbeing. The project reimagines grief as a journey without a fixed route, inspired by the continuous movement of a paternoster lift. Users can pause, revisit, skip or repeat experiences throughout the building, reflecting the personal and ever-changing nature of grief. Through non-linear circulation and communal support, Wayfinder imagines a future where grief support is accessible, social and centred on human connection.

