

# COMMON GROUND

## How can a communal winter garden within a contemporary later-living setting reduce loneliness and promote active ageing for older women?

Later life should not mean shrinking worlds. Yet across the UK, increasing numbers of older women are living alone, facing reduced daily interaction and declining physical activity. Loneliness is no longer understood as simply emotional; it is associated with increased risk of cardiovascular disease, cognitive decline, and premature mortality. At the same time, many older adults express a desire to remain independent, socially connected, and active within their communities. Rather than designing for passive care, this project asks how shared space can actively prevent isolation. How might architecture support everyday encounters, movement, creativity and mutual support, enabling residents not only to live longer, but to live well?

The proposal is situated within a contemporary later-living development inspired by co-housing principles. Residents, ranging from active "third age" adults to those requiring light support, occupy fully self-contained apartments while sharing a network of communal amenities. The winter garden forms the social heart of this community, operating as a semi-public space for residents, visitors and programmed events. The project is informed by 4 key pillars:

01

### WOMEN + LATER-LIFE LONELINESS

Women represent the majority of older adults living alone, with social isolation associated with increased mortality and dementia risk. Design must therefore support everyday visibility and low-pressure interaction, embedding opportunities for connection within routine movement rather than relying on scheduled care.

02

### CO-HOUSING + SHARED GOVERNANCE

Co-housing reframes later living from service provision to collective participation. Shared spaces become sites of governance, contribution and informal support, fostering belonging and reinforcing identity beyond care.

03

### ACTIVE PARTICIPATION + HEALTH

A large proportion of older adults do not meet recommended activity levels, accelerating cognitive decline and increasing risk of falls and physical ill health. Spaces that integrate movement, creativity and learning into daily life support autonomy by allowing residents to choose how they participate.

04

### BIOPHILIA + THE WINTER GARDEN

Connection to nature supports stress reduction, attention restoration and emotional wellbeing. By bringing seasonal variation, daylight, elevated vantage points, sheltered niches and planting indoors, environments can offer restorative experiences regardless of mobility or climate. A winter garden allows for year-round accessibility to this.

### DESIGN DIRECTION

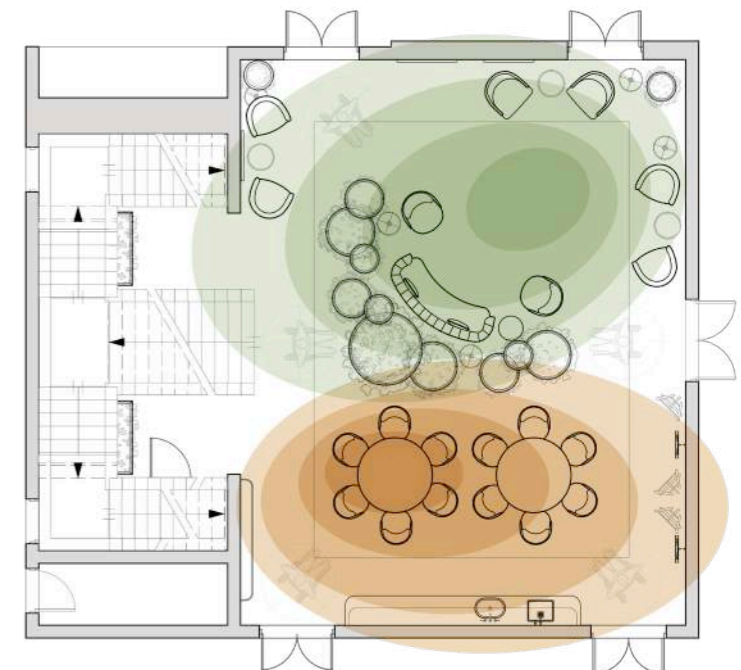
The project repositions shared space within later living as an interior social landscape (left) - balancing movement, creativity and rest within a continuous environment. Drawing on courtyard typologies and hospitality settings, the design prioritises visibility, choice and everyday use over fixed programming.

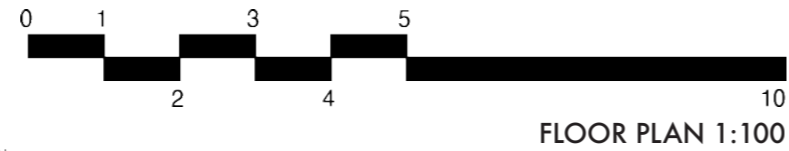
Layered planting, tonal colour and flexible furniture arrangements establish a winter garden atmosphere that supports varied interaction while accommodating differing physical, sensory and cognitive needs.

### PARTICIPATION GRADIENT

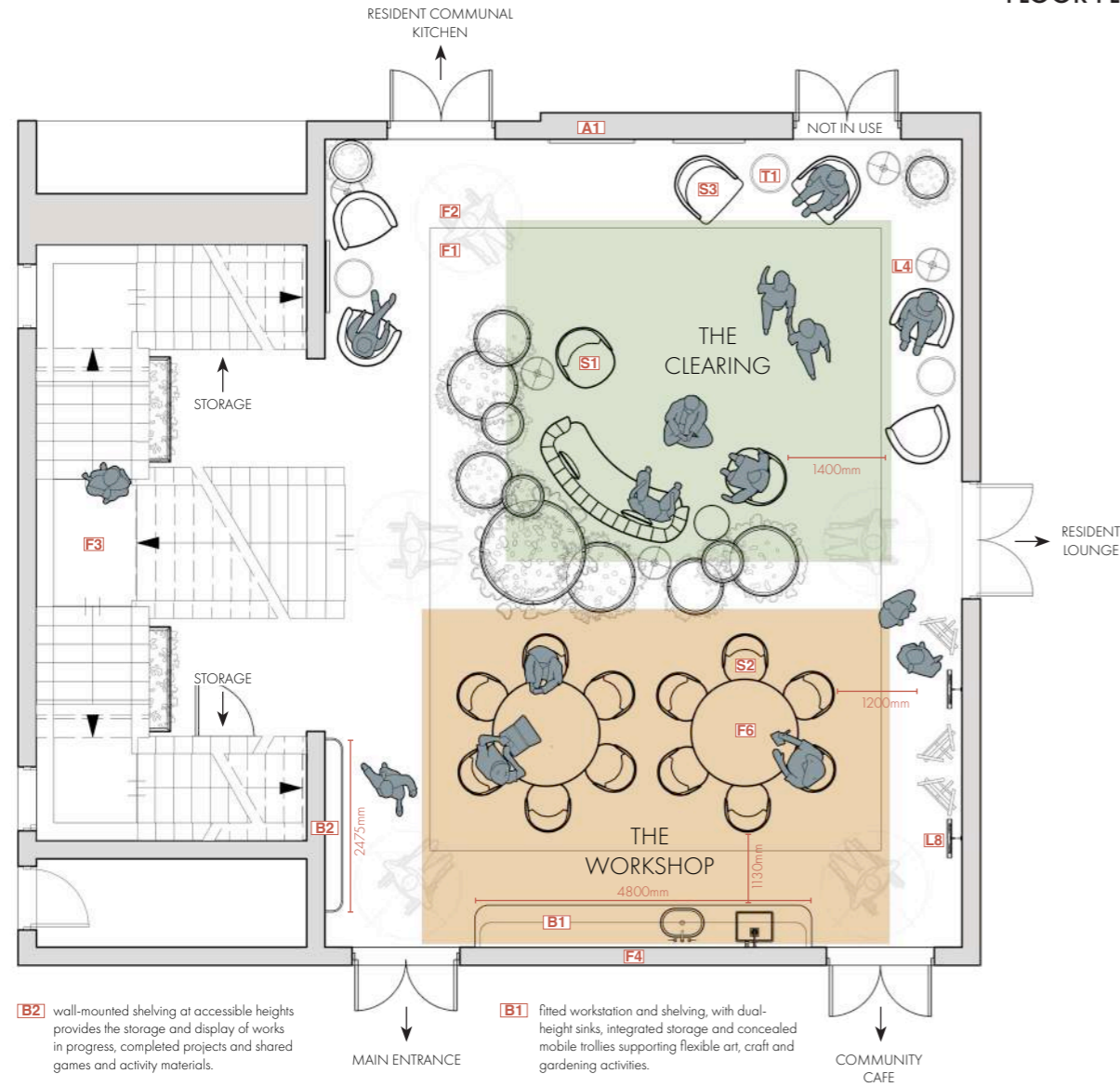
A layered participation gradient (right and below) enables residents to observe, join or lead activity, supporting evolving capability across later life.

LEAD | JOIN | VIEW





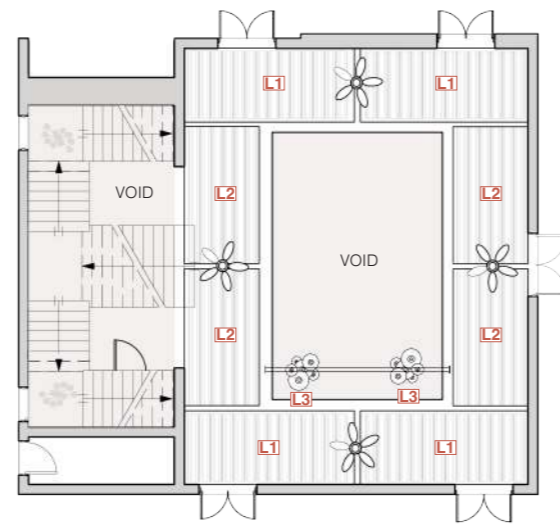
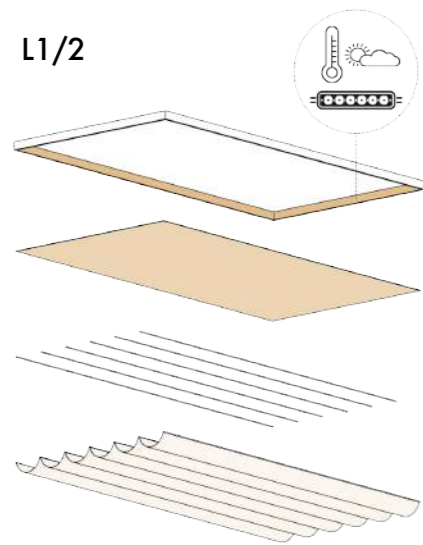
FLOOR PLAN 1:100



**B2** wall-mounted shelving at accessible heights provides the storage and display of works in progress, completed projects and shared games and activity materials.

**B1** fitted workstation and shelving, with dual-height sinks, integrated storage and concealed mobile trolleys supporting flexible art, craft and gardening activities.

L1/2



REFLECTED CEILING PLAN / 1:200

The Luminous Canopy (above left) combines diffuse lighting, acoustic softening and spatial definition to recreate the qualities of shaded daylight within the atrium. This bespoke programmable system compensates for limited direct daylight at ground level, supporting daytime activity, evening ambience and circadian comfort through variable light temperature and intensity while creating visual softness within the historic volume.

The ground floor winter garden translates the project's research pillars into a spatial framework that supports varied participation throughout the day. Rather than a single programmed room, the plan operates as an activity gradient: an open movement clearing (green), a creative making zone (yellow) and softer social edges (white) connected through continuous circulation. Flexible furniture, mobile storage and layered planting allow the space to shift between self-directed exercise, workshops, informal gathering and public community events, enabling residents to choose how and when to engage.

Colour zoning and subtle spatial thresholds divide the wide plan without enclosure, supporting differing energy levels, abilities and social preferences. The environment encourages both visibility and retreat, allowing residents to observe, join or lead activity. Designed as a transitional space within the wider site plan rather than solely a destination, the winter garden promotes repeated daily use and incidental encounters. Inclusive detailing and clear spatial legibility support confidence for ageing users, including those experiencing early cognitive change.

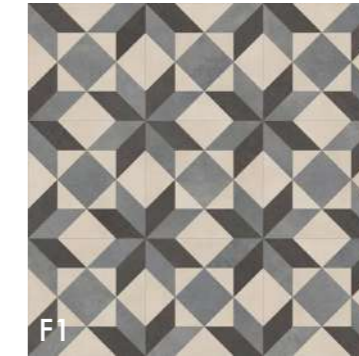
Material and spatial language draw from cloistered courtyards, covered plazas and contemporary hospitality interiors, combining tiled surfaces, layered use of pattern, naturalistic planting and warm tonal colour to create a sheltered yet active social landscape.



LICK PAINT COLOURS  
G13 / R01 / Y02



RHA FURNITURE / AGUA  
RUNO / FIREZZA  
a relaxed armchair covered in senior living standard velvet in chilli + clay



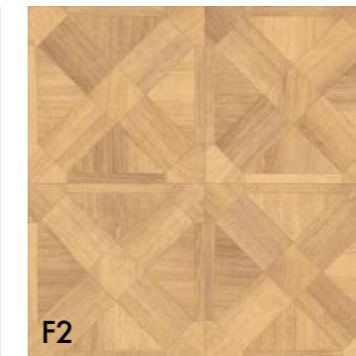
AMTICO FLOORING  
DC624 VICTORIAN STAR  
commercial 20 year warranty / referencing victorian winter garden influence



CHELSOM  
BD/3/FS  
aged brass + ebony wood accents / offers soft task lighting over armchairs + side tables



ASTRO LIGHTING  
FLOW 500  
subtle reference to seed pods / bespoke multi-light pendant + tracks spanning void



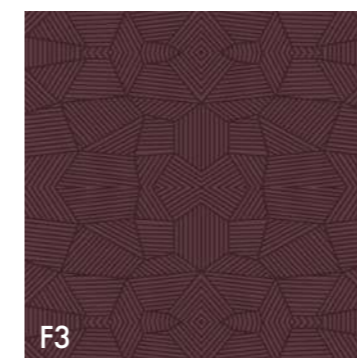
AMTICO FLOORING  
AKARI LATTICE  
honeysuckle finish / composite floor with 1mm wear layer in white oak / 304mm pattern repeat



BOSS / AGUA  
ISLA / CARTELLA  
Seat height 470mm / faux leather / wipeable for workshop area / mixture of arms + no arms



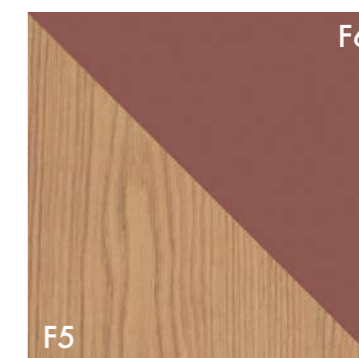
BOSS  
TRI/3  
D540mm x H725mm / oak



EGE CARPET  
PSI PURPLE  
a low-contrast geometric stair carpet adds interest while not confusing tread edge definition



JOHNSON TILES  
CASABLANCA HONEY  
used behind the craft/garden workstation / easy to clean



EGGER LAMINATE  
H1316 OAK / U335 RED  
rusty red used for table tops in the creative area, oak used as worktop, 1F desktop and table

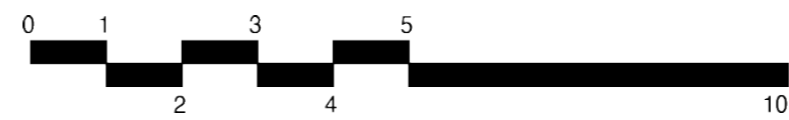


RHA / AGUA  
WINGS M / PRIMEIRA  
seat height 475mm / covered in stain and microbe resistant velvet suitable for senior living

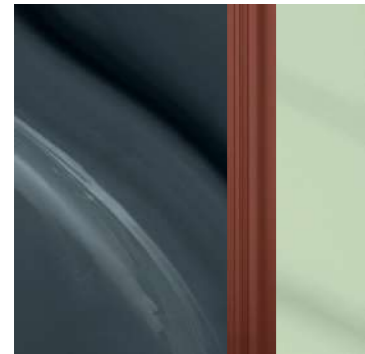
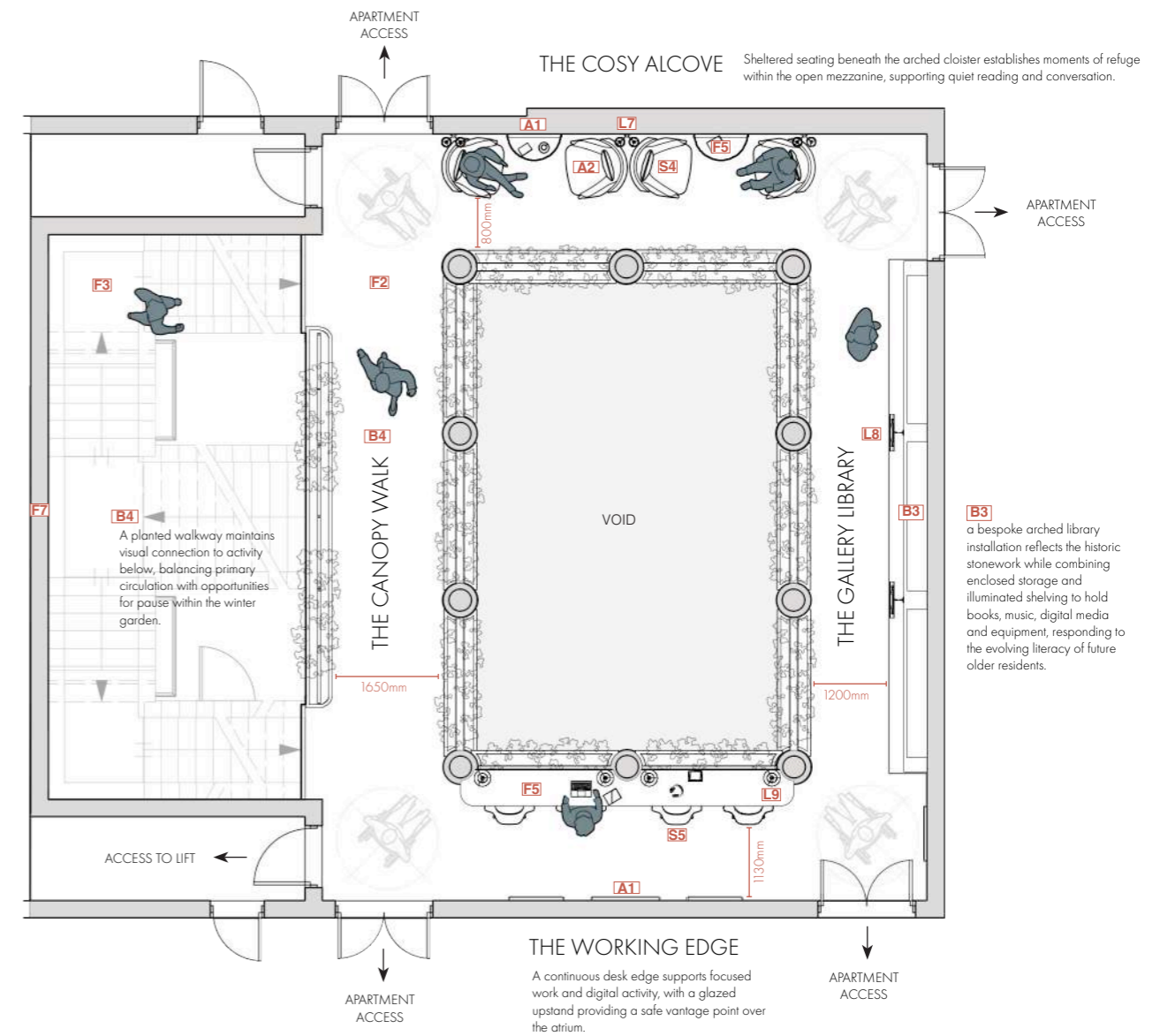
The mezzanine reinterprets the atrium as a quieter layer of participation, supporting reading, working and informal social interaction while maintaining visual connection to activity below. Within a constrained circulation width, bespoke shelving, continuous desk space and carefully positioned seating maximise usability without obstructing movement or wheelchair passing. Planters line the void edge, softening the boundary and reinforcing the winter garden identity across both levels.

Activity is organised into 3 sections: focused desk work, multimedia library browsing and sheltered lounge seating. High-back chairs and recessed lighting create moments of refuge, allowing residents to withdraw without isolation. A layered lighting strategy combining ambient ceiling fixtures, task lighting and shelving illumination introduces intimacy within the large historic volume.

Material and colour proportions shift from the ground floor to establish a calmer atmosphere. Darker blues support concentration and introspection, while warm timber, brass details and abstract artwork maintain continuity with the social character below. The mezzanine demonstrates how shared space can support cognitive activity, rest and everyday autonomy alongside more active communal use.



FLOOR PLAN 1:100



LICK PAINT COLORS  
B20 / R01 / G13



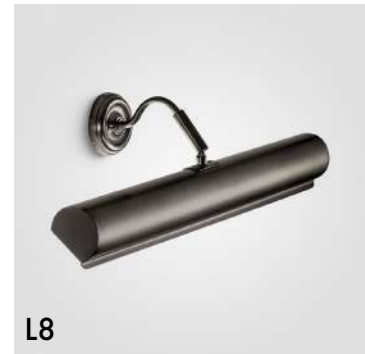
ORIGINAL FEATURE  
SANDSTONE



BOSS / AGUA FABRIC  
AME/1 / PRIMEIRA  
S4  
modern wingbacked chair / primeira velvet suitable for senior living, stain + microbe resistant



CHELSOM  
SLOANE  
L7  
wall light + chandelier / a subtle reference to biophilic forms



CHELSOM  
PL/8/550/BB  
L8  
classic picture wall light / 550mm wide x 210mm projection / lighting library and music shelving



EDINBURGH WEAVERS  
DUNE  
A2  
contract fabric for soft furnishing / 100% trevia cs / tonal fabrics in a subtle organic pattern



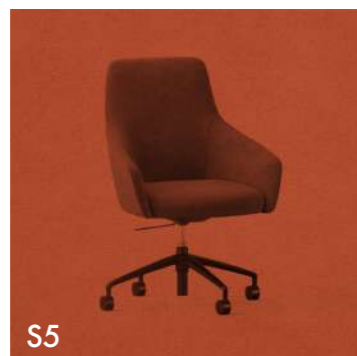
CHELSOM  
VN/3/FF/BL  
L5  
black satin + opal acrylic ceiling light / H140mm x D400mm / main general light source



TEXTURA  
ZINTRA PARCHMENT  
F8  
12mm felt acoustic panelling fitted to ceiling. Source a bespoke solution to colour match paintwork.



SPIRES ART  
ABSTRACT ARTWORK  
A1  
procure a range of abstract art works suggesting naturalistic forms and landscapes



BOSS / AGUA FABRIC  
UMA/MB/4 / FINEZZA  
S5  
variable seat height / finezza chilli resistant to microbial growth + excellent stain removal



MURASPEC  
ESCHER 12001  
F7  
connecting the ground floor and first floor via the main wall of the staircase

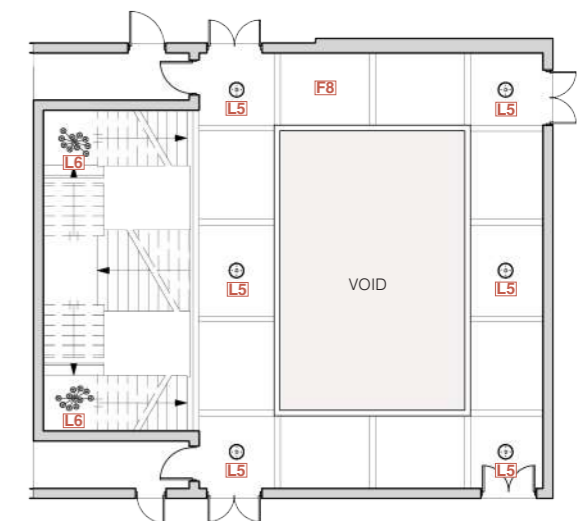


CHELSOM  
CT/12/TL/CV3/BRB  
L9  
reeded brushed brass lamp with USB-C + 3 pin plug for ease of access to power while sitting

ACOUSTIC CONSIDERATIONS

The vertical atrium creates significant reverberation, particularly at upper levels where hard surfaces and height amplify sound transmission. Acoustic strategy is therefore important to embed within architectural elements rather than applied as secondary treatment. Ceiling-mounted felt panels, suspended lighting baffles, planting and upholstered seating collectively absorb and diffuse sound while preserving openness and sightlines.

Library shelving also contributes to acoustic moderation by introducing depth, varied surface geometry and material density along the perimeter. This integrated approach allows the mezzanine to function as a calm working and reading environment while remaining visually and socially connected to the activity below.



REFLECTED CEILING PLAN - 1:200



The winter garden atrium acts as the social heart of the co-housing community, bringing movement, creativity and quiet retreat into a shared interior landscape. Flexible furniture, layered planting and tonal colour zoning support optional participation - allowing residents to observe, join or lead activity throughout the day. By combining hospitality warmth with inclusive spatial principles, the design promotes independence while fostering everyday connection. Across both levels, light, material and acoustic strategies work together to create an environment that remains active yet comfortable, supporting varied physical, social and cognitive needs.



(top left) 1F Working Edge looking towards the Library Gallery  
 (bottom left) 1F Cosy Alcove looking towards the Library Gallery  
 (top right) GF looking right as you descend the stairs to the creative Workshop  
 (bottom right) GF Workshop workstation with accessible sink and mobile trolley storage

### DESIGNING FOR SENIOR LIVING

The design integrates principles of later living environments through careful material and furniture selection. Soft, tactile, yet easy to clean fabrics, supportive seating profiles, rounded edges and consistent lighting contribute to physical comfort and confidence, while tonal contrast and spatial zoning support intuitive wayfinding. These considerations are embedded throughout the scheme, ensuring the environment remains welcoming, legible and adaptable for residents with varied mobility, sensory and cognitive needs.

**Rather than providing care, Common Ground supports participation. The project demonstrates how shared environments can adapt alongside residents, sustaining independence, connection and everyday life as people age.**

