*"I laugh when they do. But I don't think they'd notice if I stopped showing up..."*

*"A state in which the individual lacks a sense of belonging socially, lacks engagement with others, has a minimal number of social contacts and they are deficient in fulfilling and quality relationships"*
(Nicholson, 2009, p. 1346)

Research shows that social isolation, defined by a lack of meaningful ties and a sense of disconnection, negatively affects both mental and physical health.

In Oxfordshire, 40% of 16-24-year-olds and 27% of those over 75 report frequent loneliness (Oxfordshire Community Foundation, 2018). The pandemic, urbanisation, and technology have intensified this issue while stigma stops many from seeking help. Oxford City Council responds with strategies to build social bonds, enhance rural access (affecting 38% of the population), and promote digital inclusion. Community programmes like "Move Together" and inter-agency partnerships are central to reducing loneliness and creating stronger, healthier communities (Gov.uk, 2022).



St. Thomas' St. · Hub's Bridge · Castle Mill Stream · Tidmarsh Lane

GROUND FLOOR PLAN

# THE OXFORD HUB

Emily Pedersen

## LONELINESS & SOCIAL ISOLATION

The design brief focuses on utilizing design as a mechanism for **resilience** and **conflict resolution** by fostering **ethical and inspiring** spaces that encourage respectful dialogue and debate. Grounded in Engleberg & Wynn's (1997) conflict-resolution framework, the brief emphasizes understanding the causes and **social impacts** of conflict and developing innovative solutions. By incorporating creative "furnitecture" and enhancing spatial permeability, the projects aim to address specific social challenges, reduce tensions, and create more harmonious environments for both residents and temporary users.

**Loneliness and social isolation** are common and growing issues in **modern society**. While often interconnected, they are distinct: loneliness is the unsettling emotional experience of **feeling alone** or disconnected, whereas social isolation refers to having **limited social interactions** or **few meaningful relationships**. One can live alone without feeling lonely, just as one might feel lonely in a crowd. These conditions can affect anyone and have a profound impact on **mental and physical well-being**.

*"First life, then spaces, then buildings – the other way around never works."*
*- Jan Gehl*

In **Oxford**, as in many cities, some residents face these challenges. A major difficulty is that social isolation is **often invisible – hard to measure, and easy to overlook.** The Oxford Hub proposes a space that fosters **connection and shared purpose**. It aims to bring together people with aligned goals, encouraging a **sense of belonging** and **participation** in a new kind of community.

This project was born from that belief - a response to the growing tension between our deeply social nature and the rising tide of loneliness and isolation in our cities. The Oxford Hub is not just a building - it's a **carefully designed space that recognises our need for connection, for belonging, and for purpose within a community.**
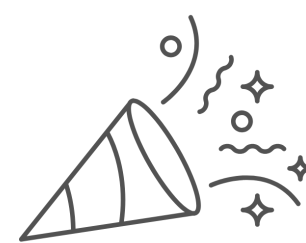
## SPACES THAT SHARE CONNECTION

### A Meet-Up Place

A cafe, a bar and a lovely outside space for a perfect places to socialise. Activities that these will hold: Music gigs, cinema sessions, vintage sales and more!
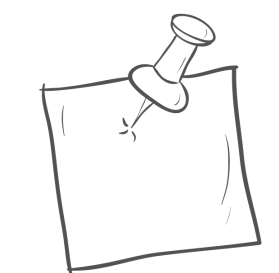
### A Co-working Space

An area where people can come and work individually or in a group with a sense of a community and free Wi-Fi
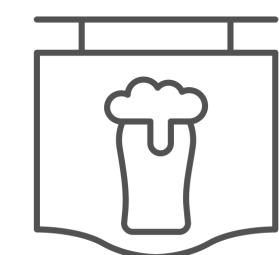
### A Venue Space

A rentable place for any events for citizens (work parties, birthdays, weddings). A space for large lectures & workshops

### Exhibitions

In collaboration with Oxford's organisations & universities exhibitions of different types and style will have space

### Local Business Support

To cherish the past of the Malthouse there will be a partnership with Tap Social Brewery. Moreover, partnerships will be established with New Ground Coffee roastery and Common Ground



ENTRANCE

The Oxford Hub
# A STRATEGY FOR BELONGING

The Oxford Hub aims to create an environment that encourages people to become the **best version of themselves** through **spacial design and social agenda.** This creates opportunities for people to establish new friendships and tackle the loneliness issue.

One of the ways to help the social isolation problem is by taking **small changes** in life, by triggering **affection** and **gratitude** though **new social interactions** (Hortulanus, Machielse and Meeuwesen, 2009).

People who are struggling with social isolation and social loneliness need:
- change in their routine
- change in interactions
- change in worldviews
- new relationships
- inspiration, new experiences

Humans need change as a stimuli to thrive, develop and be happy.

## STRATEGIES

**Individual-Level Interventions:**
Programs to rebuild self-esteem, improve social skills, and encourage meaningful connections.

**Community-Level Interventions:**
Creating inclusive, supportive environments through community centers, group activities, and local networks.

**Policy-Level Interventions:**
Government policies that address housing, public transportation, and access to social services to reduce isolation.

## MARSLOW'S HIERARCHY

### SELF-ACTUALISATION
Through social interactions, events, skill exchange, worldview expansion and a sense of value one develops a desire to become the most that one can be

### ESTEEM
The Oxford Hub skill exchange and activities allow people to show their expertise and thus gain respect, status and recognition

### LOVE & BELONGING
The Oxford Hub presents opportunities for establishing new relationships and forming a new social circle, a sense of connection

### SAFETY NEEDS
The Oxford Hub provides job positions as well as security on the perimeter

### PHYSIOLOGICAL NEEDS
The Oxford Hub provides necessary facilities such as the toilet, opportunity to buy food and lastly, shelter

*"I can understand words, but I don't feel part of the conversation"*

UNITED KINGDOM

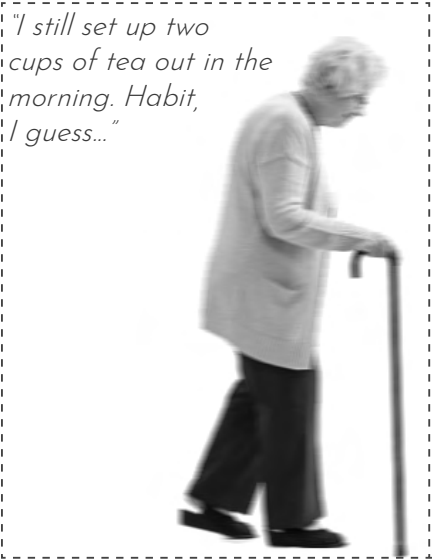OXFORD

THE MALTHOUSE

MASTER PLAN

NEW GROUND COFFEE
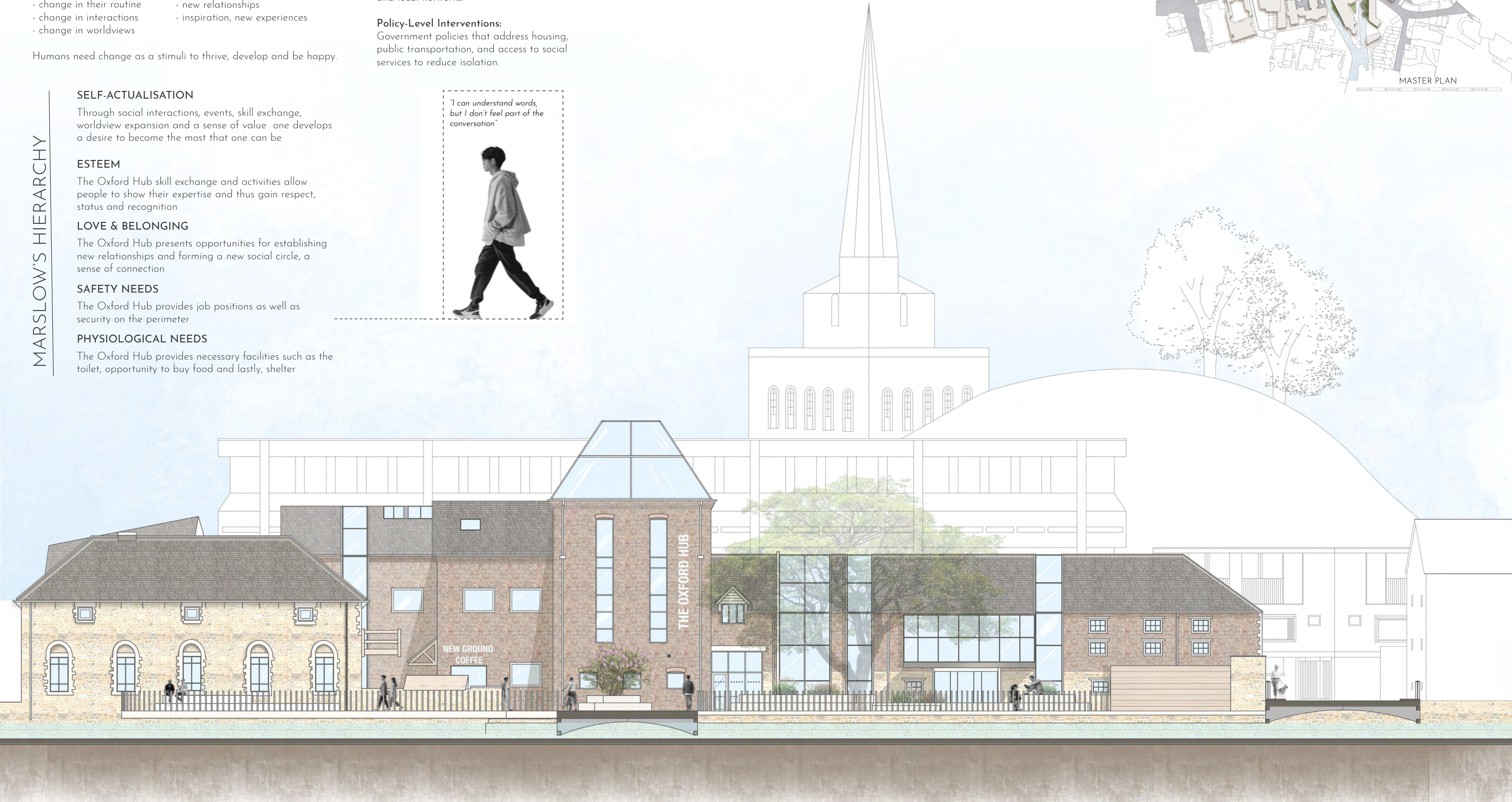
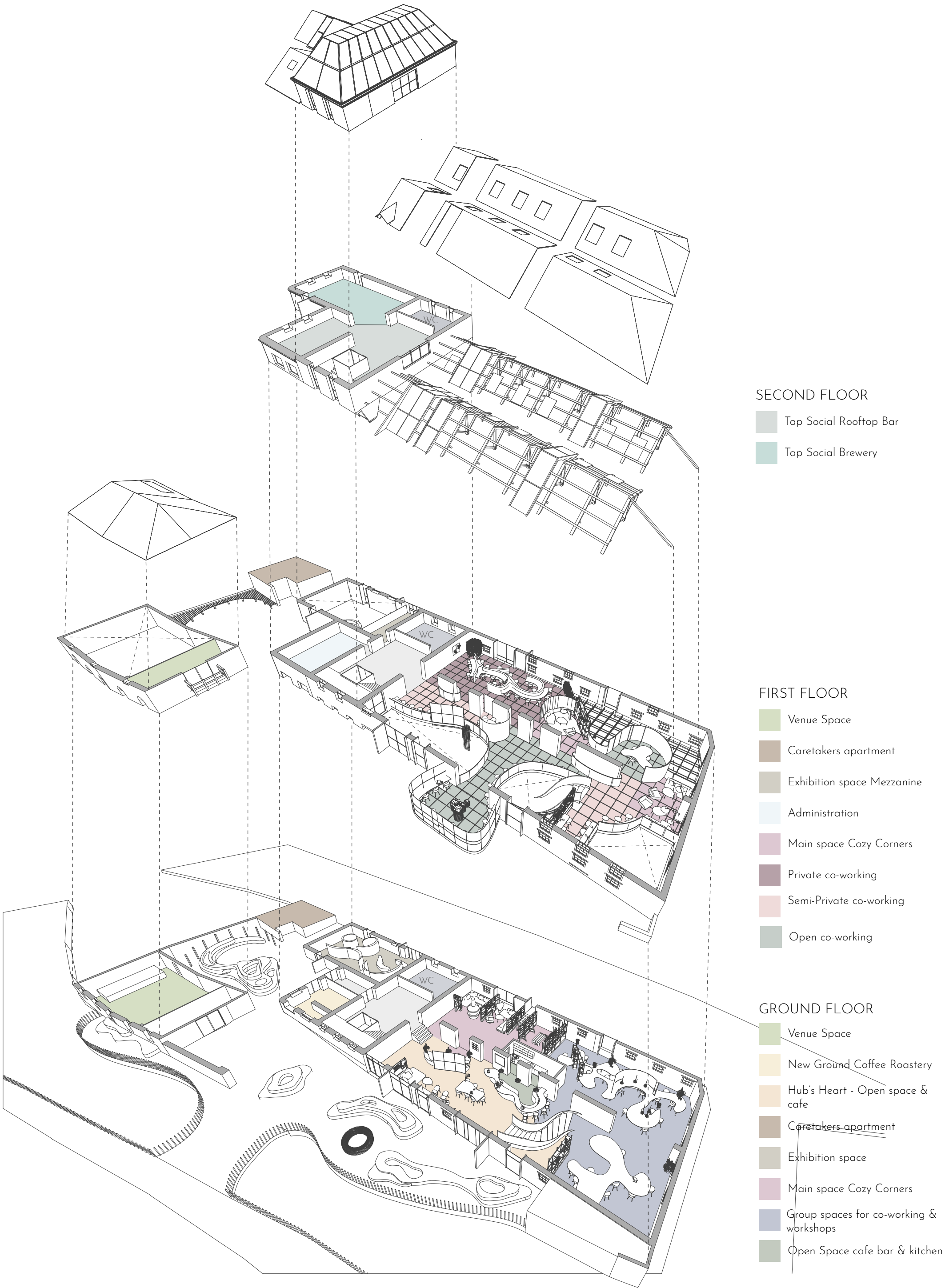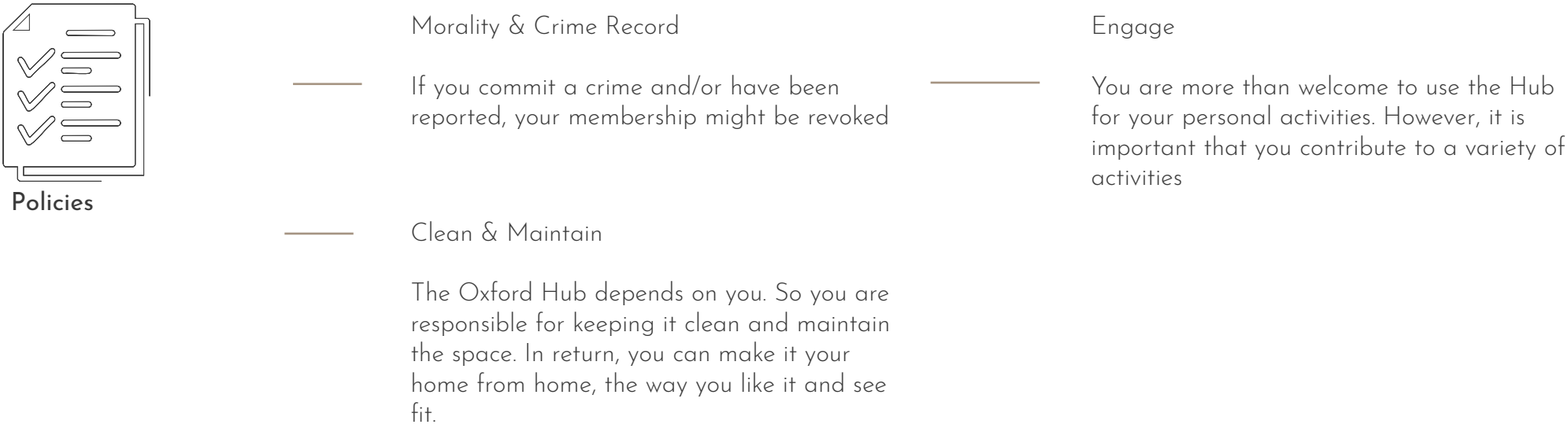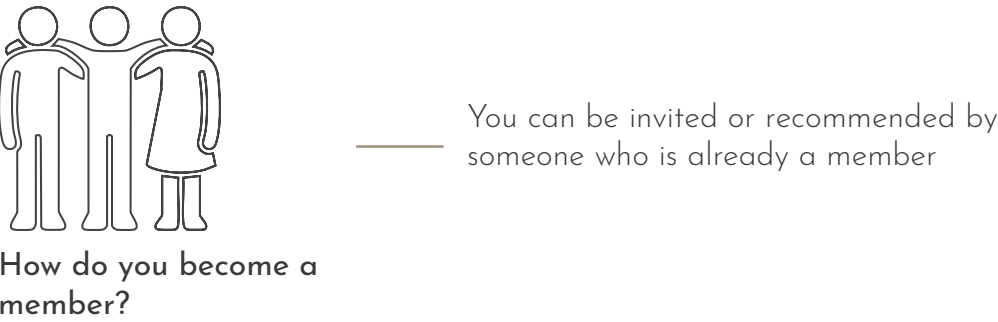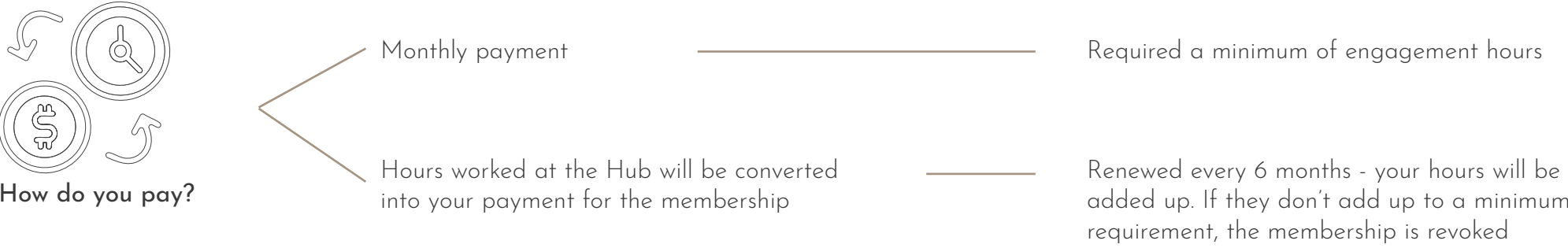THE OXFORD HUB

The Oxford Hub

# THE ECONOMY OF EXCHANGE

The Oxford Hub offers a variety of spaces for occasions that encourages different interactions & atmospheres for people to overcome loneliness

*'I still set up two cups of tea out in the morning. Habit, I guess...'*


GROUP THERAPY SESSION

## A MEMBERSHIP
Introducing a time exchange currency

A membership will ensure that The Oxford Hub will be alive and will prosper. It will also be a filter for people who aren't as passionate, enthusiastic and with bad moral standards. There are several criteria that will ensure the best community.

**How do you pay?**

Monthly payment ———— Required a minimum of engagement hours

Hours worked at the Hub will be converted into your payment for the membership

Renewed every 6 months - your hours will be added up. If they don't add up to a minimum requirement, the membership is revoked

**Trial Membership**

When getting a membership, you have a 2 month trial period, where you can show your activeness and engagement with the Hub



**How do you become a member?**

You can be invited or recommended by someone who is already a member

**Policies**

Morality & Crime Record

If you commit a crime and/or have been reported, your membership might be revoked

Engage

You are more than welcome to use the Hub for your personal activities. However, it is important that you contribute to a variety of activities

Clean & Maintain

The Oxford Hub depends on you. So you are responsible for keeping it clean and maintain the space. In return, you can make it your home from home, the way you like it and see fit.



### SECOND FLOOR
- Tap Social Rooftop Bar
- Tap Social Brewery

### FIRST FLOOR
- Venue Space
- Caretakers apartment
- Exhibition space Mezzanine
- Administration
- Main space Cozy Corners
- Private co-working
- Semi-Private co-working
- Open co-working

### GROUND FLOOR
- Venue Space
- New Ground Coffee Roastery
- Hub's Heart - Open space & cafe
- Caretakers apartment
- Exhibition space
- Main space Cozy Corners
- Group spaces for co-working & workshops
- Open Space cafe bar & kitchen

# The Oxford Hub
# MOMENTS, MOVEMENT, MAKERS

The Oxford Hub **spaces and complex social agenda** takes into consideration that people's **transformation** from loneliness and social isolation to a sense of purpose and belonging is **gradual and takes time**. The spaces allow a **smooth flow** through their usage depending on what a person is **comfortable with** in the transformation stage they are at.



## ELDERLY RETIRED WIDOWER REDISCOVERING PURPOSE

**MALCOM, 68**

Backstory:

Malcolm recently lost his wife of 40 years. Since her passing, he has struggled with loneliness and a sense of purposelessness. Once socially active, he now spends most days at home, overwhelmed by the idea of reengaging with life alone
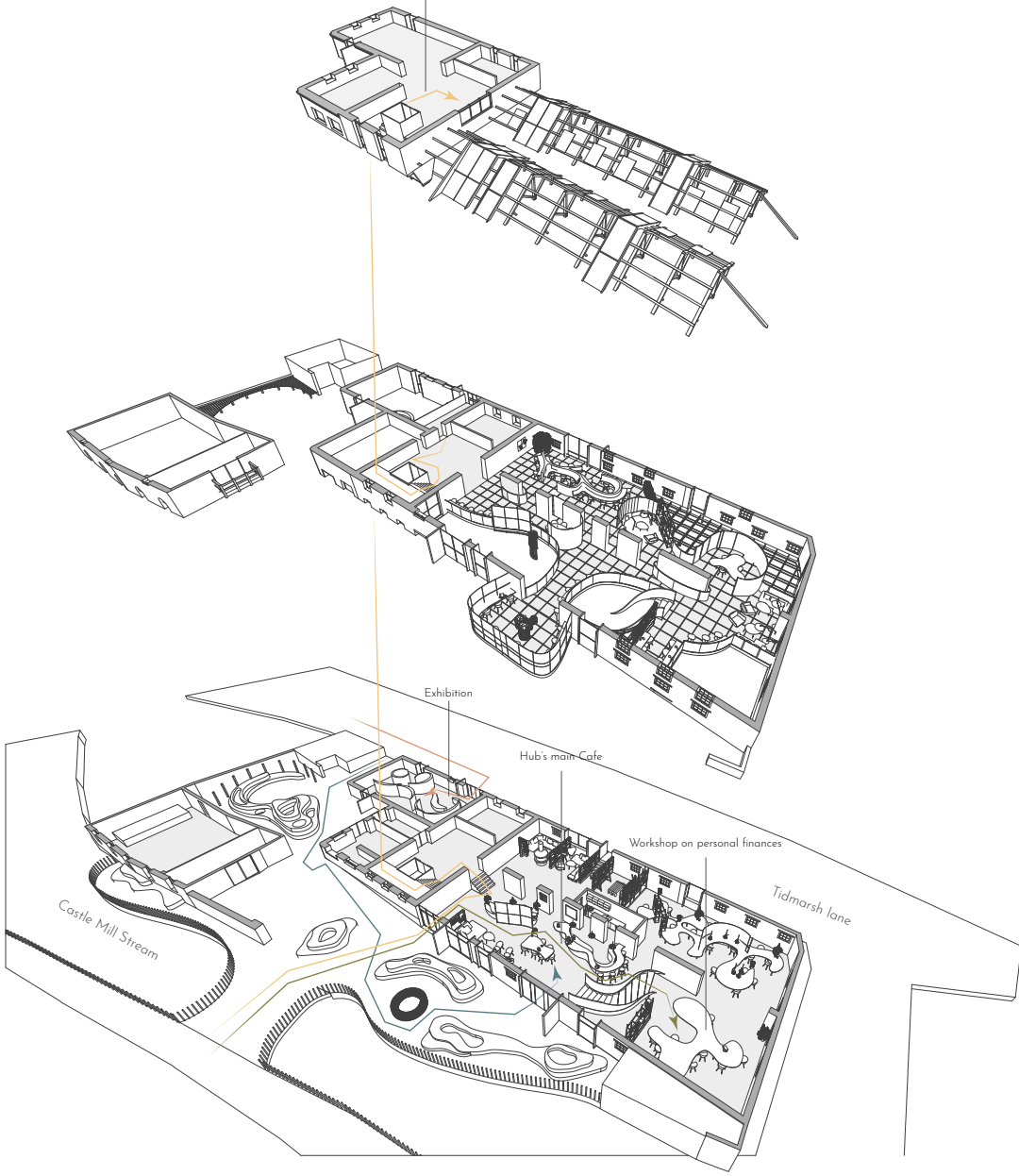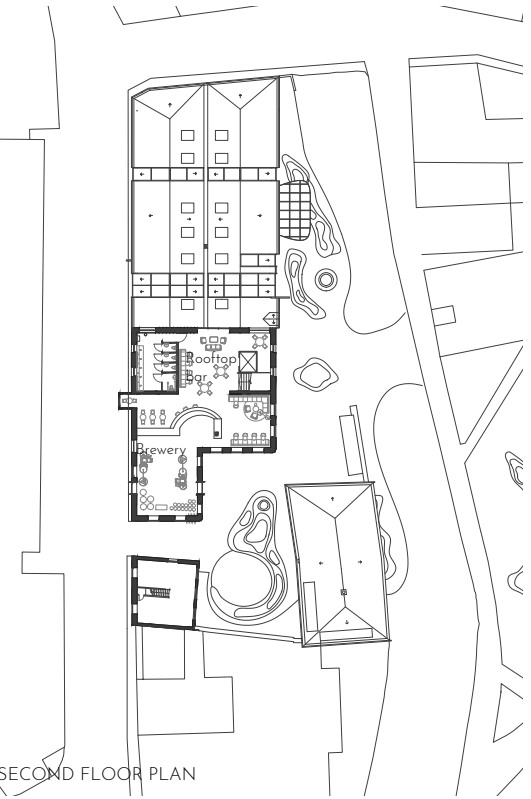
Current Social Environment:

- Mostly isolated at home
- Occasional phone calls from family
- Previously involved in local groups but no longer attends

Reasons to Engage with Oxford Hub:

- A comfortable, low-pressure space to be among people
- Public events and exhibitions that align with his past interests
- Opportunities to contribute his knowledge or volunteer

Barriers to Entry:

- Emotional hesitation — fear of not finding connection without his partner
- Perception that the Hub is 'for younger people'
- Difficulty navigating a new routine alone



SECOND FLOOR PLAN

MAIN SPACE CAFE

**OVERCOMING ISOLATION**

STAGE 1 - Strolling Through
Wanders into an exhibition space one afternoon. No pressure to interact, but finds it soothing.

STAGE 2 - Comfort in Familiarity
Becomes a regular at the coffee shop, chats with baristas and slowly gets to know familiar faces.

STAGE 3 - Finding Purpose
Joins a community engagement group and begins volunteering at events.

STAGE 4 - New Routine, New Life
Attends talks and rooftop events, hosts a storytelling evening in the standing venue, and helps welcome new visitors to the Hub.

## YOUNG MAN OVERCOMING SOCIAL ANXIETY
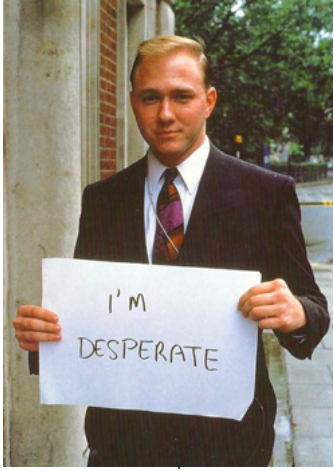
**SAM, 24**

Backstory:

Sam has struggled with social anxiety since secondary school, where bullying left him withdrawn and distrustful of group settings. Now at university but living at home, he finds it hard to make friends or engage with campus life.
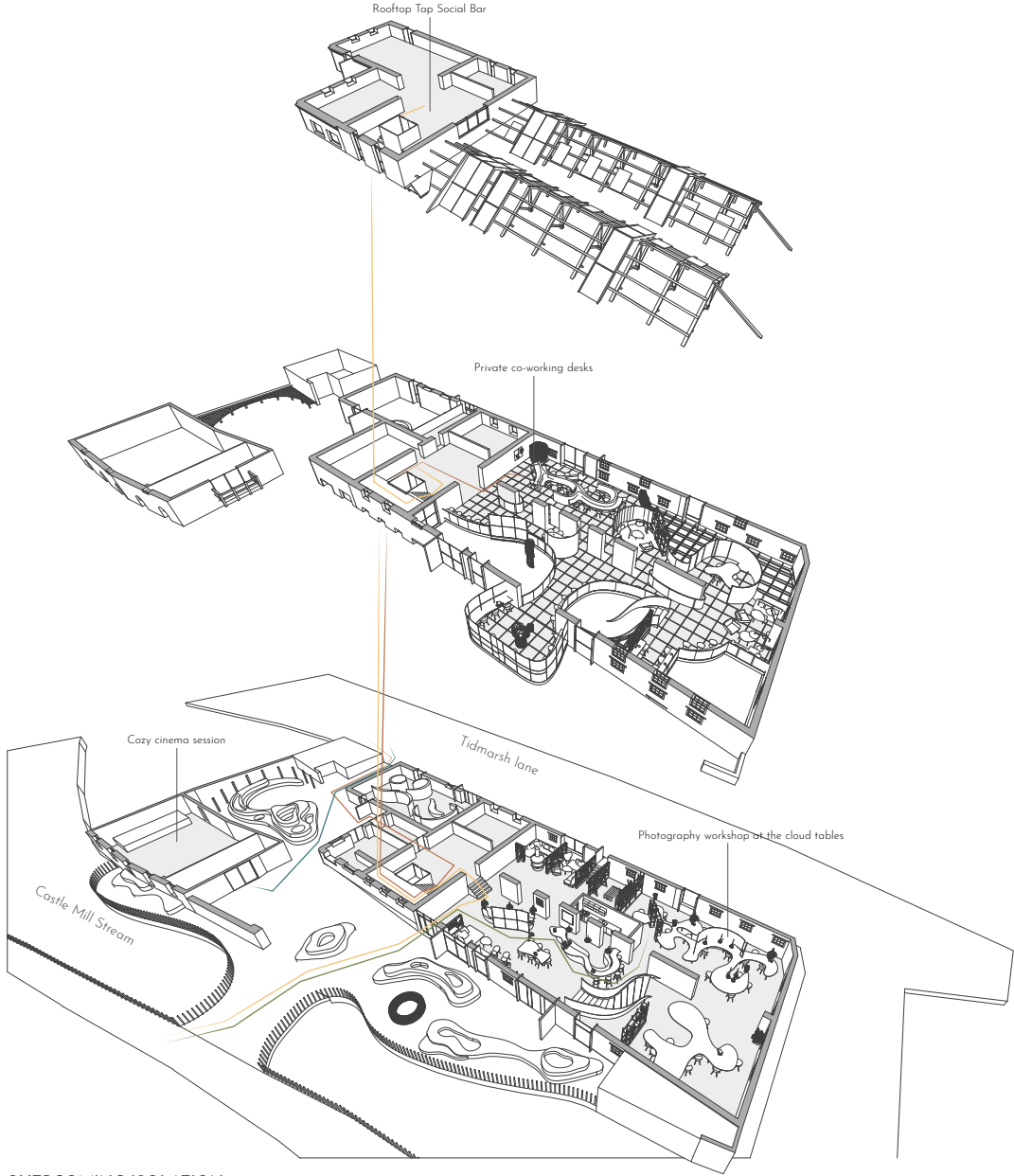
Current Social Environment:

- Minimal interaction outside of online spaces
- Avoids crowded places and structured events
- Feels safe only in familiar environments

Reasons to Engage with Oxford Hub:

- Quiet individual co-working space for studying
- Casual, inclusive atmosphere of the courtyard and cafe
- Events like open-mic or stand-up nights to observe and gradually engage
- Volunteering or charity-related activities with low-pressure socialization

Barriers to Entry:

- Fear of judgment or not fitting in
- Anxiety about initiating conversation
- Overwhelm from too much stimulation or unfamiliarity

THE CANTILEVER TERRACE



**OVERCOMING ISOLATION**

STAGE 1 - Observation
Begins visiting the individual co-working area during quieter hours

STAGE 2 - Passive Participation
Attends a cinema night and quietly observes, sitting near the back. Feels safe and welcomed.

STAGE 3 - Stepping In
Joins a skill-exchange workshop on photography. Uses the courtyard as a quiet buffer space between activities.

STAGE 4 - Confidence & Contribution
Offers his own beginner workshop in digital art, meets others with shared interests, and occasionally attends events at the rooftop bar.

## MOTHER OF THREE RECLAIMING HERSELF
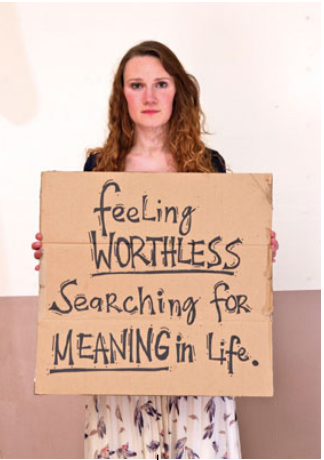
**RACHEL, 34**

Backstory:

After spending the last decade focused on raising her three children, Rachel suddenly finds herself with long hours of solitude when her youngest starts school. With her days once filled with tasks, noise, and routines, the silence now feels overwhelming. She's not used to having time for herself and isn't sure where to begin.
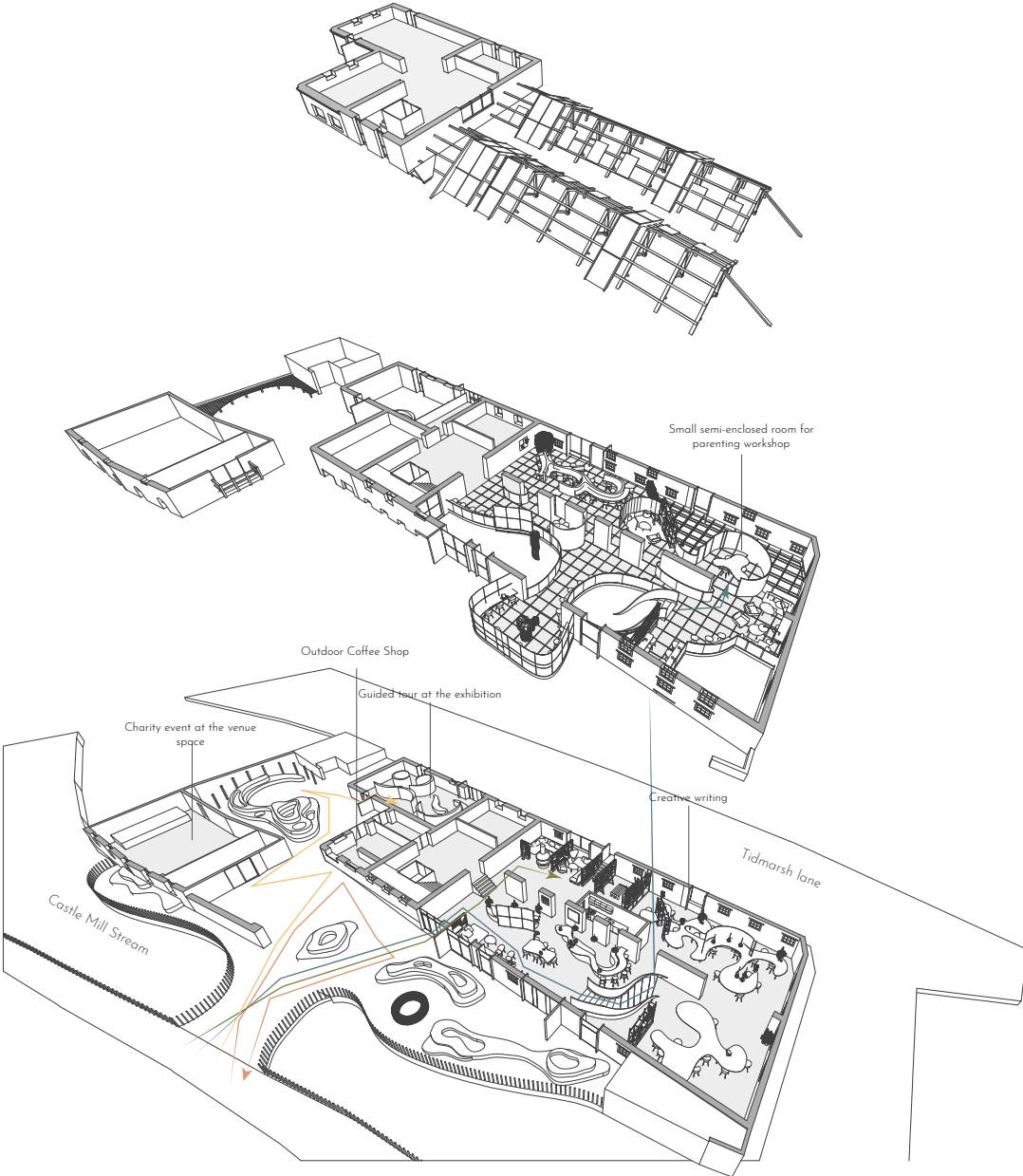
Current Social Environment:

- Home-based routines focused on child care
- Limited adult interaction outside of school gates
- No structured time for personal or creative pursuits

Reasons to Engage with Oxford Hub:

- A calm, welcoming cafe to ease into public spaces again
- Skill exchange workshops to rediscover hobbies and learn from others
- Group co-working space to try freelance work or creative projects
- Opportunities to connect with other parents or locals

Barriers to Entry:

- Guilt around taking time for herself
- Anxiety about entering alone or not knowing anyone
- Worries she might not 'fit in'



CREATIVE WRITING WORKSHOP

**OVERCOMING ISOLATION**

STAGE 1 - Discovery & First Visit
Visits the café after school drop-off, feels at ease in the open, friendly environment.

STAGE 2 - Dipping In
Joins a small parenting workshop hosted by another member

STAGE 3 - Engagement
Signs up for a skill exchange workshop in creative writing

STAGE 4 - Belonging
Begins attending sessions and contributing to community charity events

# INVISIBLE ISOLATION - LOCAL NETWORK







**Small private and local businesses** also suffer from their own social isolation - the struggle and the overpower from **large competitors** makes it difficult for them to survive. The Oxford Hub will offer **space and services from local providers**. Such as, for example, bakery goods, wine from local wineries and wine shops, pro bono collaboration with charity organisations.

The outer network includes engagement with the city, outside of the Hub. This will involve interacting more with the Oxford and helping to improve a variety of areas of life. These are some examples of possible contributions.

- Cleaning Oxford and being  enthusiasts to make a better city
- Housing and other projects to help those in need, such as the less fortunate area of Oxford - Blackbird Leys
- Arranging cooking workshops to prepare meals for homeless people as well as for families in need

### Engaging and supporting local businesses

Common Ground Cafe, Oxford

A beloved Oxford spot, Common Ground is more than a café – it's a co-working space, event venue, and local business collaborator, valued for its simplicity, honesty, and sense of community.

Tap Social Brewery

A popular local brewery known for its community impact, Tap Social provides jobs and training for ex-offenders and collaborates with many Oxford venues. Despite its strong mission, its out-of-centre location makes it less accessible.

New Ground Coffee Roastery

Supplying distinctive blends to cafés across Oxford, New Ground is growing steadily. With a new café in the city centre, its founders now aim to bring the roastery itself closer to the heart of Oxford.







*"The city throughout the history of mankind has been the meeting place for people. Much of the culture of mankind has happened in the public space. Public space is a very important aspect of a good and well functioning city."  - Jan Gehl*