

The River Street

Gentrification continues to reshape our cities, often displacing the most vulnerable, forcing people out of stable housing and, for some, onto canal boats. While a few choose this lifestyle, for many it's a matter of survival. The River Street is a direct response to this overlooked reality, proposing a new kind of urban infrastructure rooted in care, access, and community.

Set along Regent's Canal, the project provides everyday essentials; launderette, toilets, showers, a corner shop, post office, butcher, fishmonger, and repair spaces. These services are brought together within a shared social space that supports both the canal boat community and the wider public.

Unlike polished, exclusive developments like King's Cross, The River Street uses a raw, skeletal timber structure that reflects the resilience of the people it serves. It challenges the sanitised, profit-led image of regeneration and instead puts forward a bold, honest alternative.

Rooted in the research strand **Health Through Empathy and Lost Community Services**, the project functions as a Social Co-op, a space built on mutual aid, proximity, and everyday support. It reintegrates an often invisible community into the heart of the city.

This is a future-facing, socially grounded model for urban space—one that responds to real economic and political shifts by prioritising people over profit, and rebuilding the infrastructures of care we've lost.

Coals Drop Yard site



Regent's Canal.

This project began with walks along Regent's Canal, where I became increasingly drawn to the canal boat community—living at the edge of the city, yet often invisible within it. Their way of life is marked by resilience and independence, but also by disconnection. What struck me most was how isolated they felt from the rest of urban life, despite being just metres away from it. The River Street is my response to that divide: a space designed to meet their everyday needs, while creating new points of connection between the canal community and the city around them.

Users



Canal boat users.



Canal River Trust representatives.



Local business owner.



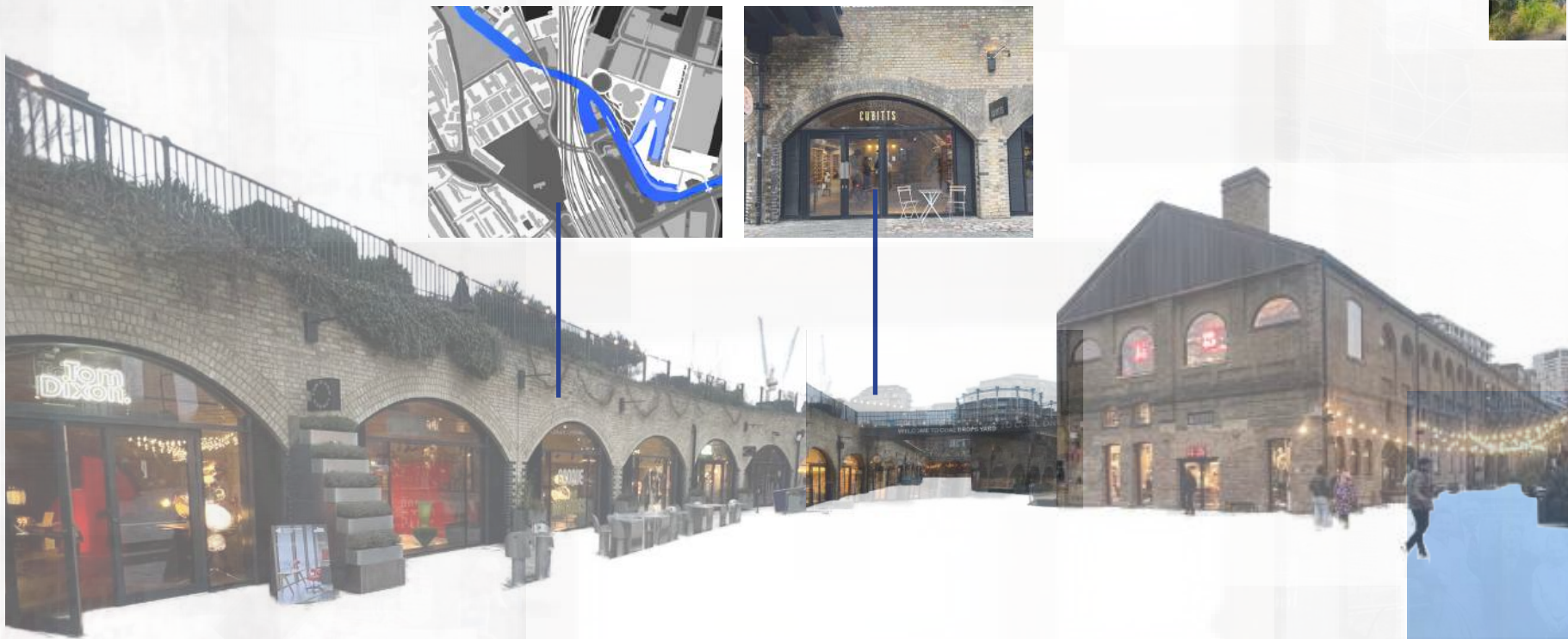
Local residents.



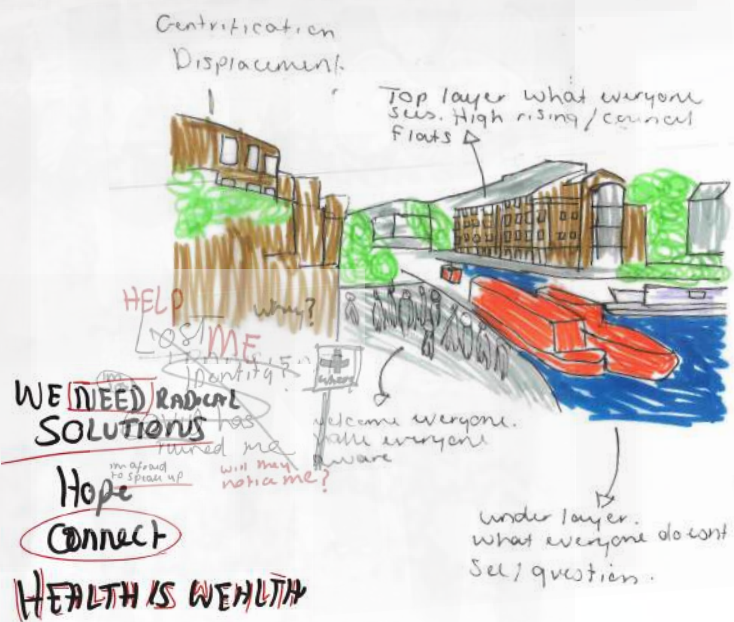
Environmental activist.



Manifesto image of the canal community.

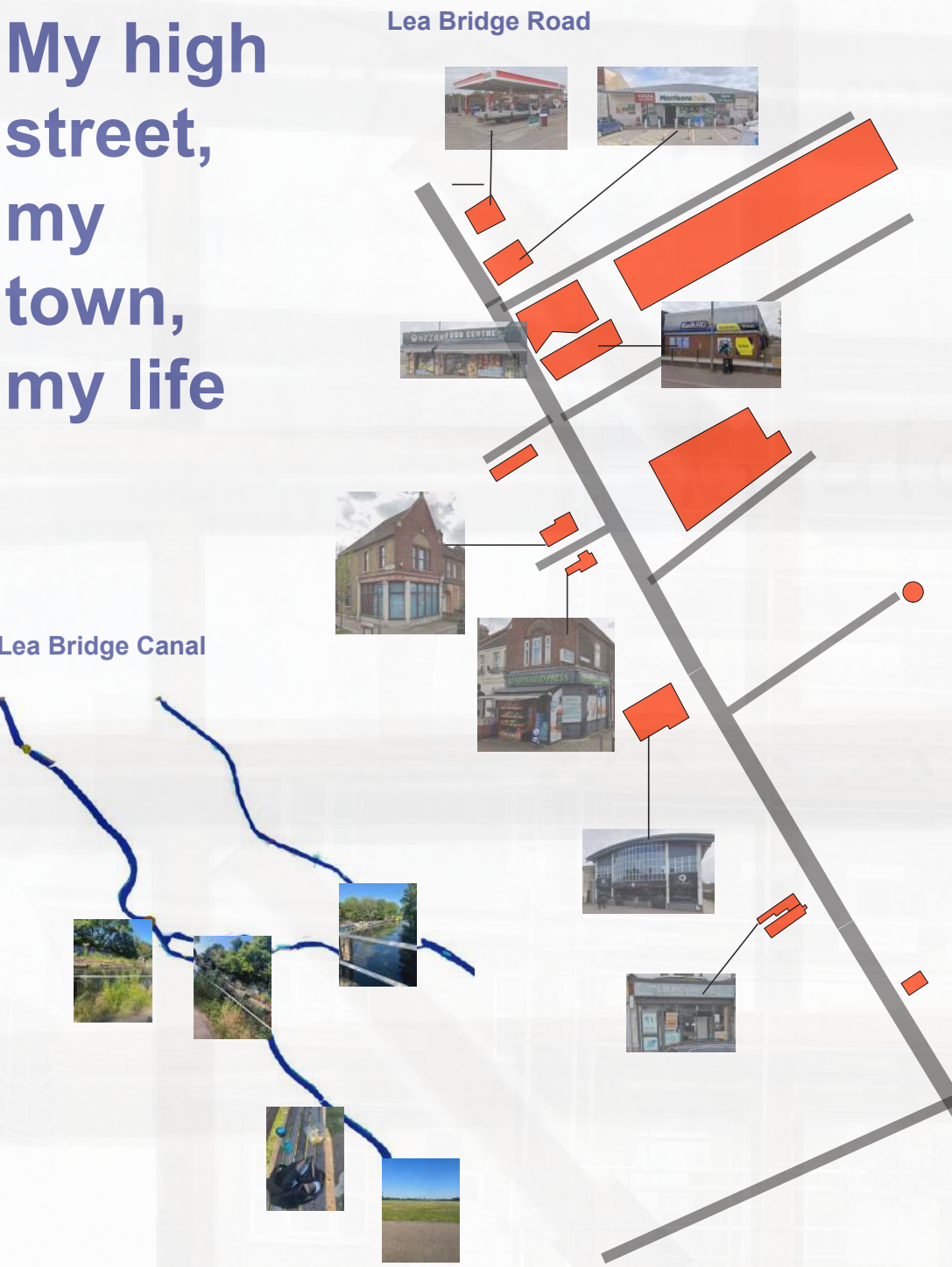


Over view of Coals Drop Yard site with assigned arch, Cubitts.



Collage of the user group.

My high street, my town, my life



Teaser image of The River Street.

Concept

My concept focuses on supporting the everyday maintenance of life for those living on canal boats.

I drew inspiration from my hometown of Walthamstow, where I'm lucky to have everything I need within a 2-5 minute walk—corner shops, GP surgeries, supermarkets, and a high street full of vibrant, accessible amenities. It's a place where convenience and modern living are seamlessly integrated, making life feel easy and secure.

In contrast, the canal boat community along Regent's Canal faces a very different reality. While they're close to the high street, access to essential services is far less straightforward. For many, the basic necessities are harder to find, often more expensive, and require greater resourcefulness. The canal boat residents have to balance the proximity to urban amenities with the challenges of living on the water.

A short walk from my home brings me to this canal boat community, where they have a long high street nearby with affordable shops and services, but still face a daily struggle with accessibility.

While Walthamstow is undergoing gentrification, it still retains a strong sense of community—blending urban vibrancy with the town-like charm that makes it feel familiar and grounded.

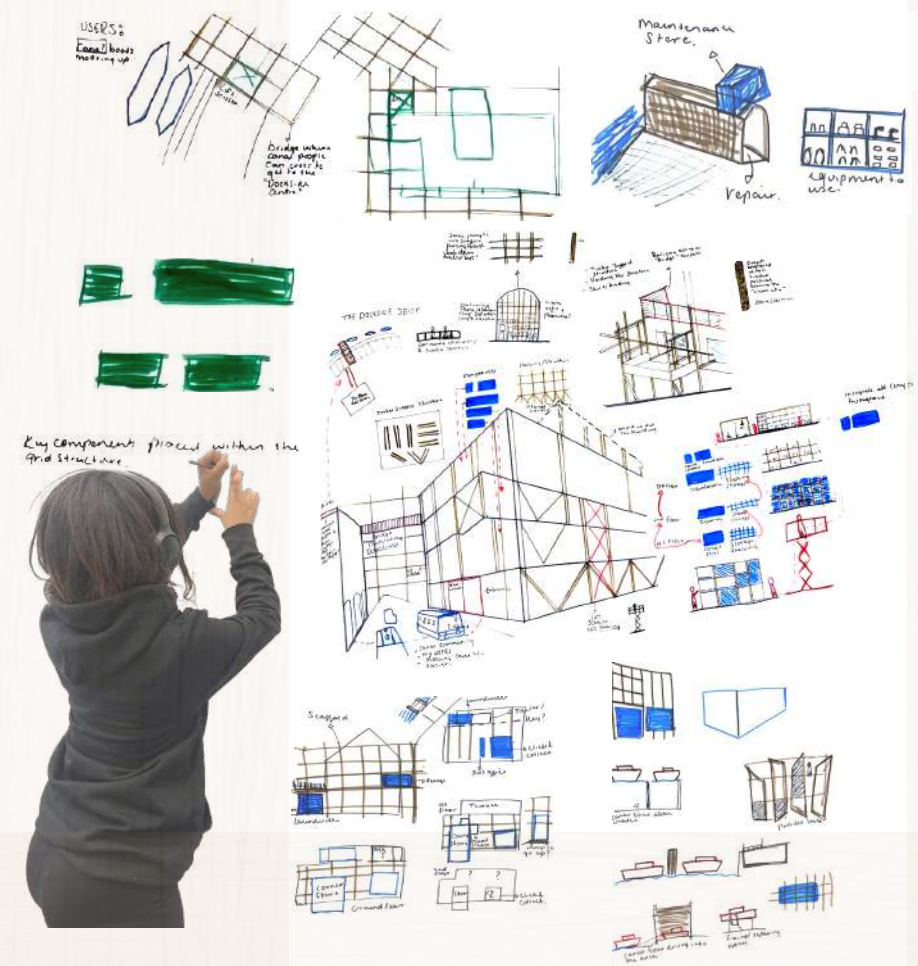
I also looked at Somers Town, a close-knit community that, although slowly gentrifying, still holds onto some elements of a life that's less dominated by technology and more focused on real, human interaction. This sense of community is what I aim to preserve and bring into my project.



Walking along the quiet South Street, I noticed there was a lot of scaffolding, then I realised the wonder is that it's not just the scaffolding, it's the people. I saw people, I saw life. I saw a community that is still there, still thriving, still fighting for its right to be there. I saw a community that is still there, still thriving, still fighting for its right to be there. I saw a community that is still there, still thriving, still fighting for its right to be there.

Exploration of the River street

I was exploring how the design delves into how the canal community will seamlessly integrate into the site, with the timber grid scaffold structure serving both as a functional element and a striking architectural feature. The programmes within the arch and Uniqlo building are thoughtfully tailored to meet the needs of the canal users, whilst enhancing the experience for the wider public. By carefully considering circulation flows, the design ensures that movement between spaces is intuitive and accessible, enabling both the canal community and city dwellers to interact, connect, and navigate the site with ease and purpose.



Initial sketches exploring how to disrupt the smooth city King's Cross has built through scaffolding.



Diorama inspired by the Ai imagery.



Maquette modelling. Looking at how the timber scaffold frame structure will work with the slotted in containers.

A day of visiting the Dockside Centre

Olivia, 25, moved to King's Cross for work but found rent too high, so she began living on a canal boat. Since leaving her hometown, she's struggled to feel at home or make friends. Now, with the new Dockside Hub opening, she hopes things will finally improve.



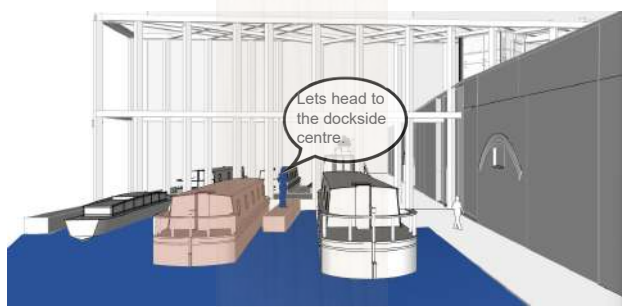
03 Lets go inside and start the day



06 The Dockside launderette/stich & go



01 Entering the Dockside Hub



04 What to do, where to go



07 Viewing the cafe



02 Dockside Hub



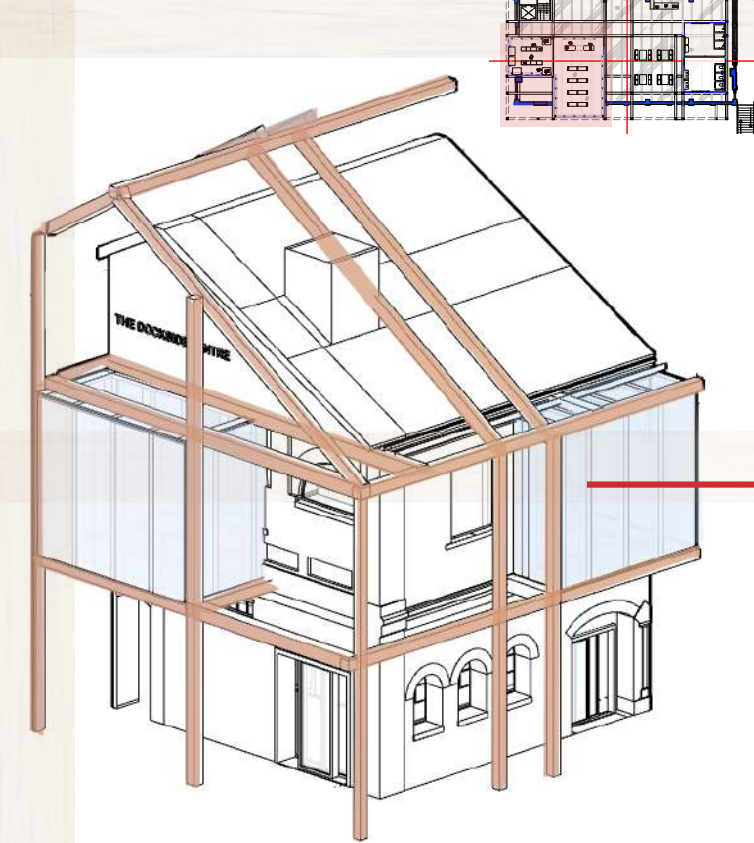
05 The Dockside Post



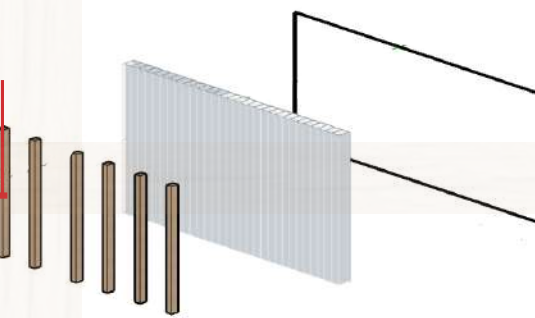
08 The Dockside refill & Remedies



Device detail - The Exoskeleton

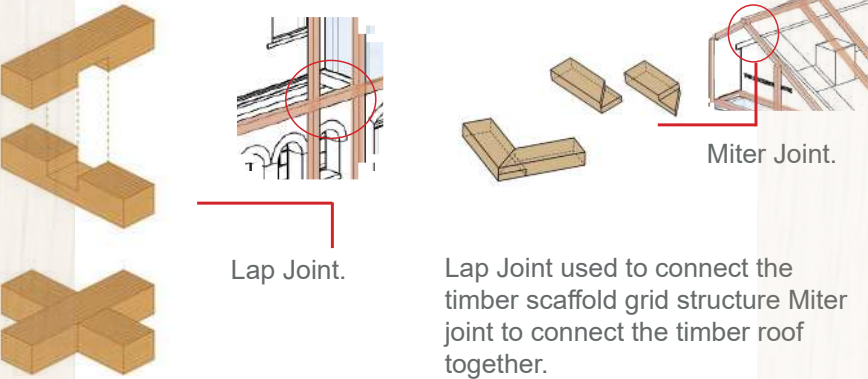


The Co-op Sectional is a sustainably focused corner store at the Dockside Centre, offering fresh local meat and fish. It supports nearby food businesses and promotes eco-friendly practices, contributing to a connected, sustainable community. Its central location makes it a convenient hub for both residents and visitors.

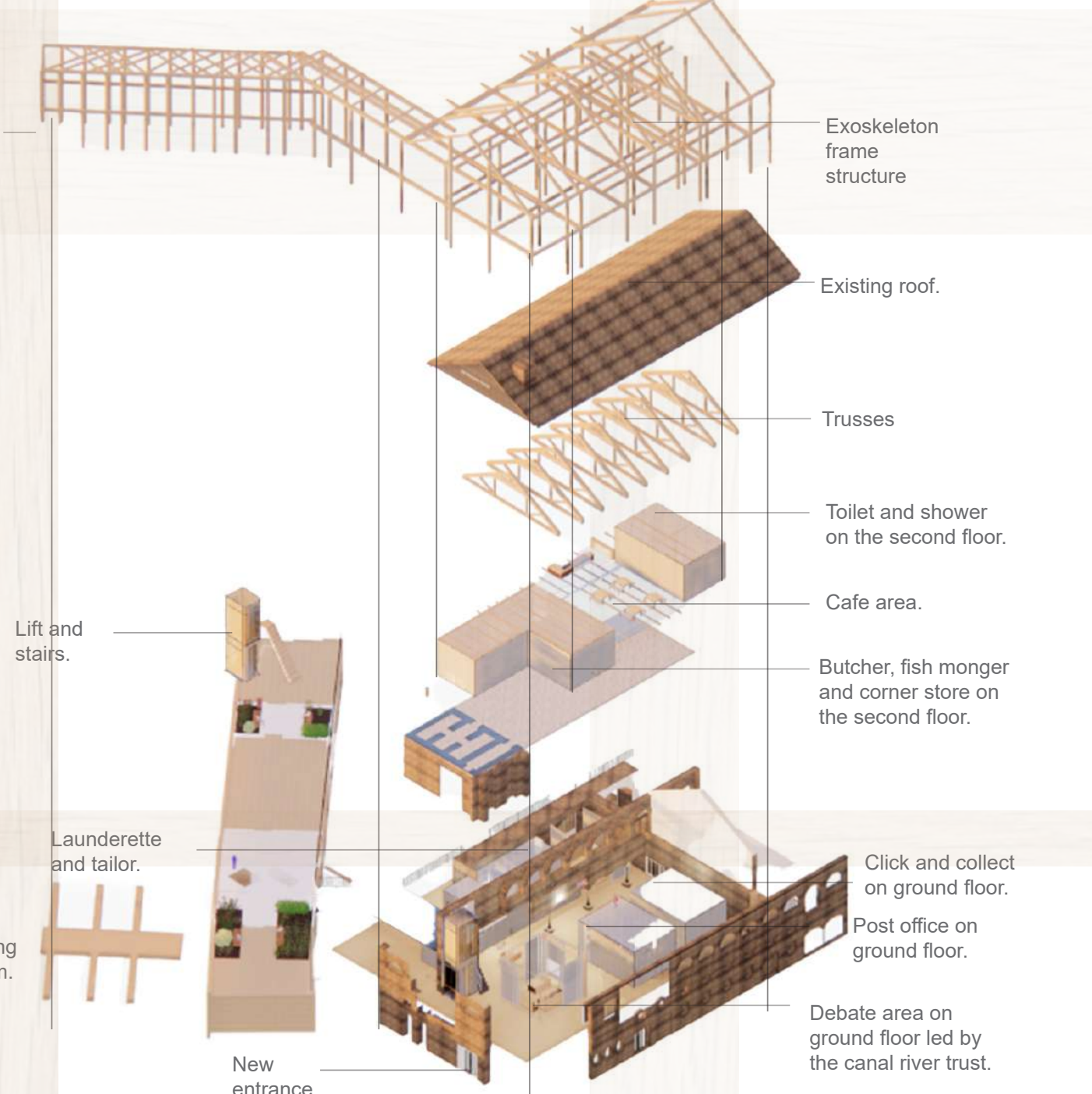


- 1) Timber joist used for the floor, ceiling and walls
- 2) Polycarbonate panels - 50mm
- 3) Steel frame to hold the polycarbonate panel together.

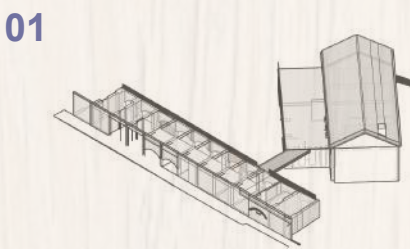
Joinery



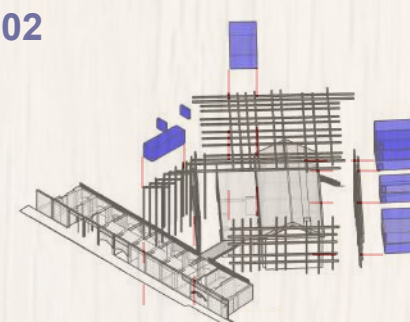
Axo diagram



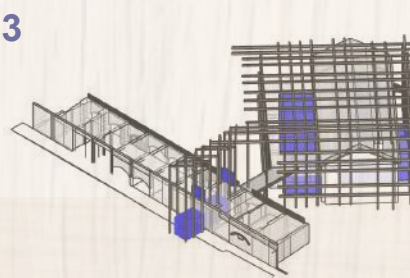
Sequential diagram of The River Street's transformation



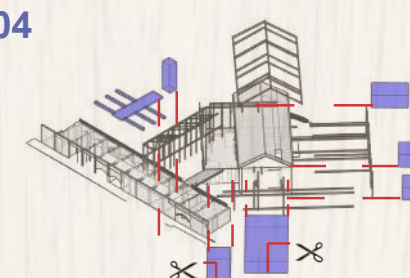
Original site of Coals Drop Yard.



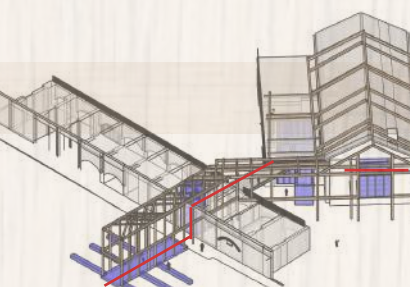
Scaffold grid structure coming to site, disrupting the smooth city



The scaffold structure placed onto site.



Reshaping/transforming the structure. It is now called the Exoskeleton.



The Exoskeleton final version, creating a connection between the canal and the site.

An orthographic exploration of The River street

For my design, I reintroduced a high street inspired by my own in Walthamstow into the heart of the city. I aimed to disrupt the polished landscape of King's Cross using bold timber scaffolding as both structure and statement.

The centre's key programmes are shaped by what I observed in my hometown and what is lacking for the canal community in the city. The scaffold acts as a guide for boat users, signalling that this is their place now, and directing them towards the centre.

Built mainly from timber, the design draws from canal boat interiors and ethos. It resists gentrification and reflects the spirit of small-town life, offering a sense of home for canal dwellers.

This is a place for young people, especially as rising housing costs make the city less accessible. As flooding increasingly affects urban areas, the centre also provides a safe, supportive space for those who need it most.

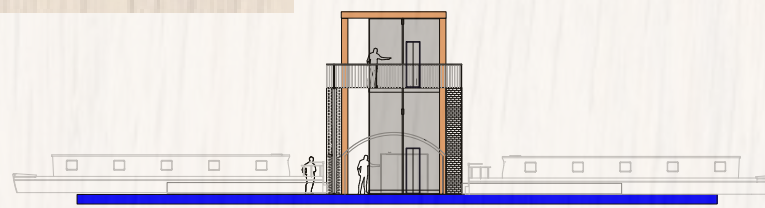
The Dockside Hub

The Dockside Hub is a new transport link that makes life easier for canal boat users, connecting the water level to the upper viaduct. It also features a dedicated mooring dock, so boaters can stop by for the day and enjoy the Dockside Centre—no stress about space or fees. This has all been developed in collaboration with my client, the Canal & River Trust.

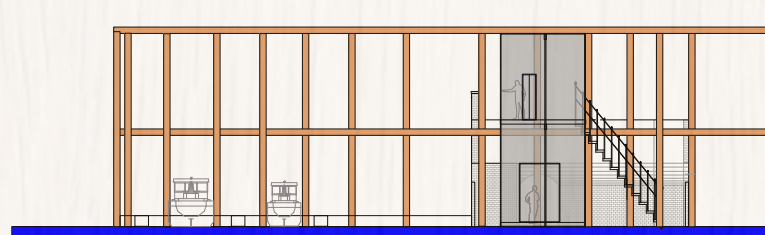
Front elevation



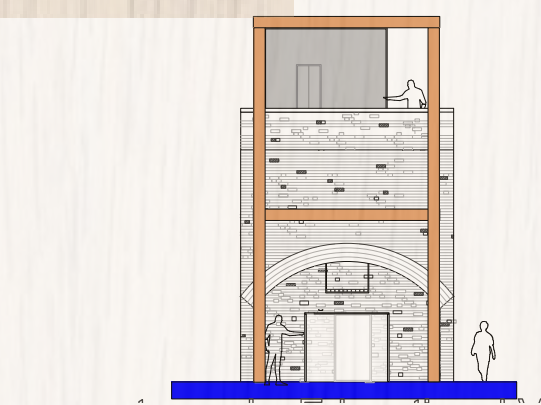
Rear elevation



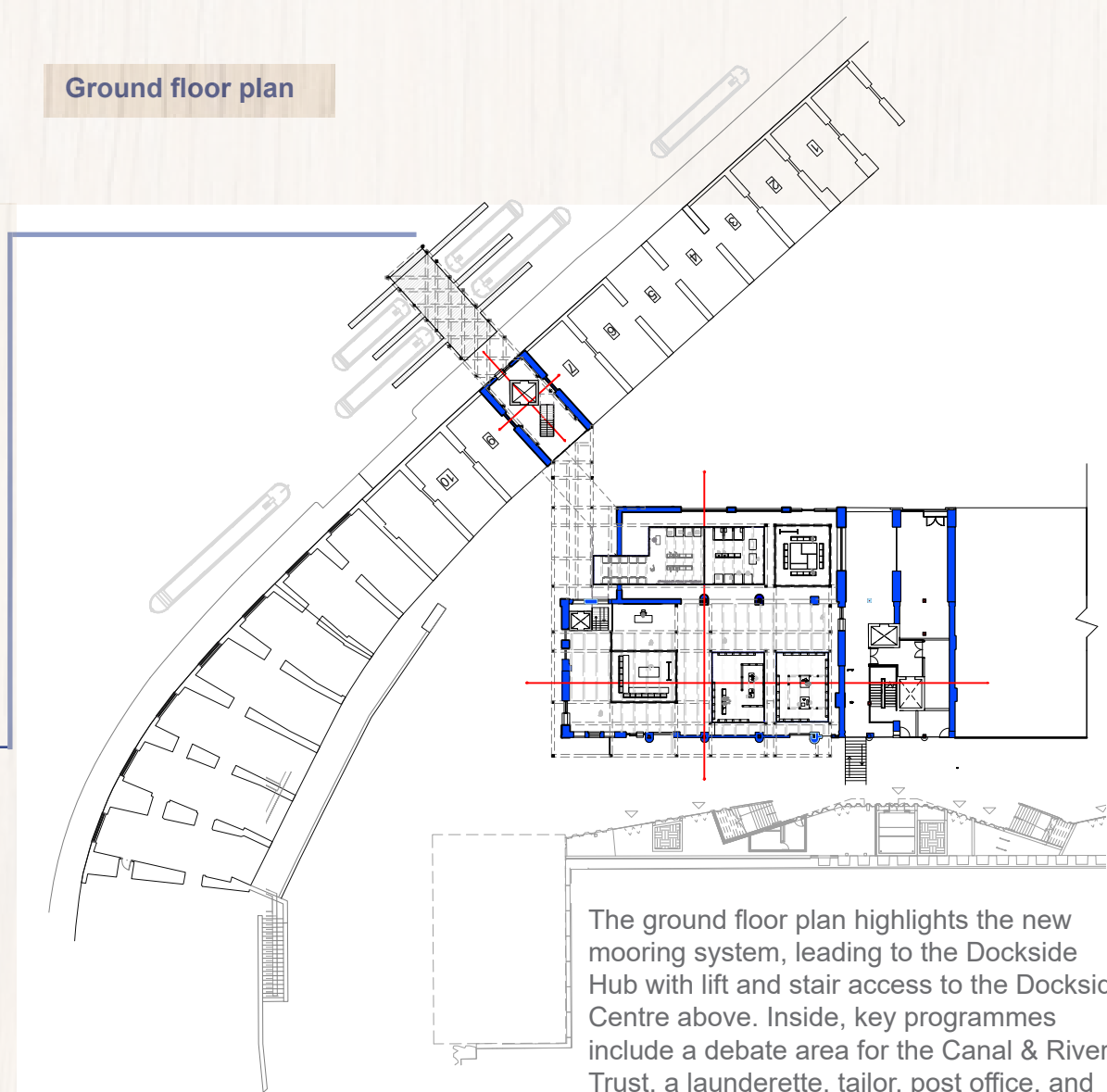
Section dd



Section cc

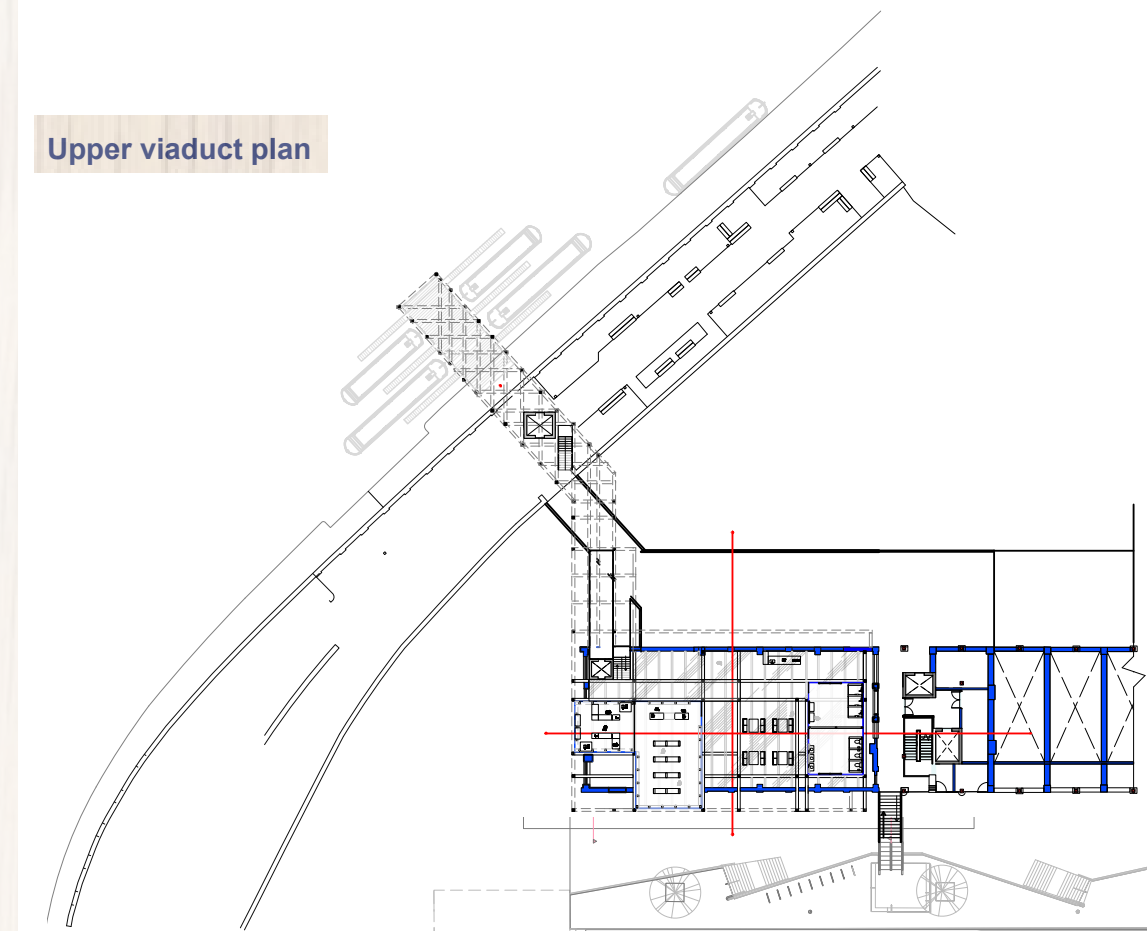


Ground floor plan



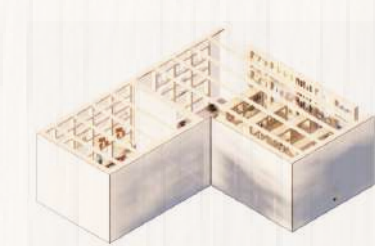
The ground floor plan highlights the new mooring system, leading to the Dockside Hub with lift and stair access to the Dockside Centre above. Inside, key programmes include a debate area for the Canal & River Trust, a launderette, tailor, post office, and a click-and-collect point—offering essential services tailored to the canal community.

Upper viaduct plan

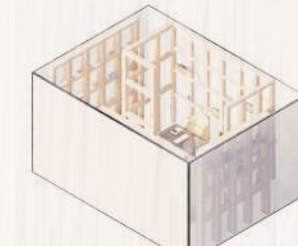


The upper viaduct features a timber scaffold structure guiding the elevator and stairs from the canal. This level includes a combined corner store, butcher, and fishmonger, along with a café, public toilets, and showers—creating a practical and welcoming space for both locals and boaters.

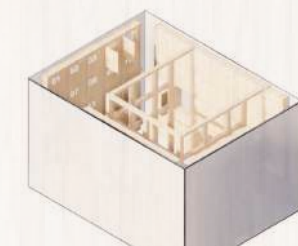
Key programmes placed within the Dockside Centre



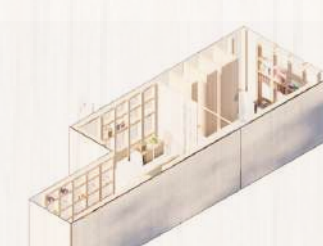
Corner store, fish monger and butcher.



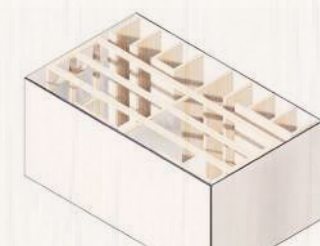
Post office.



Click and collect.

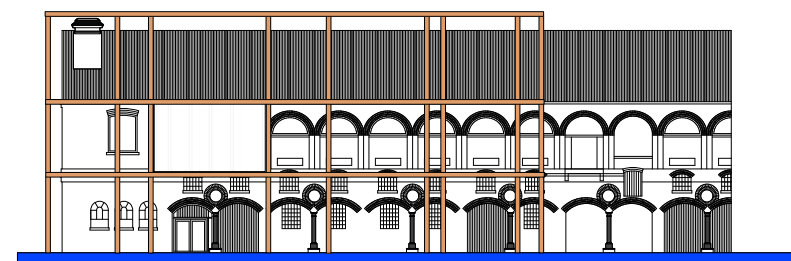


Launderette and tailor.



Shower and toilets.

West elevation

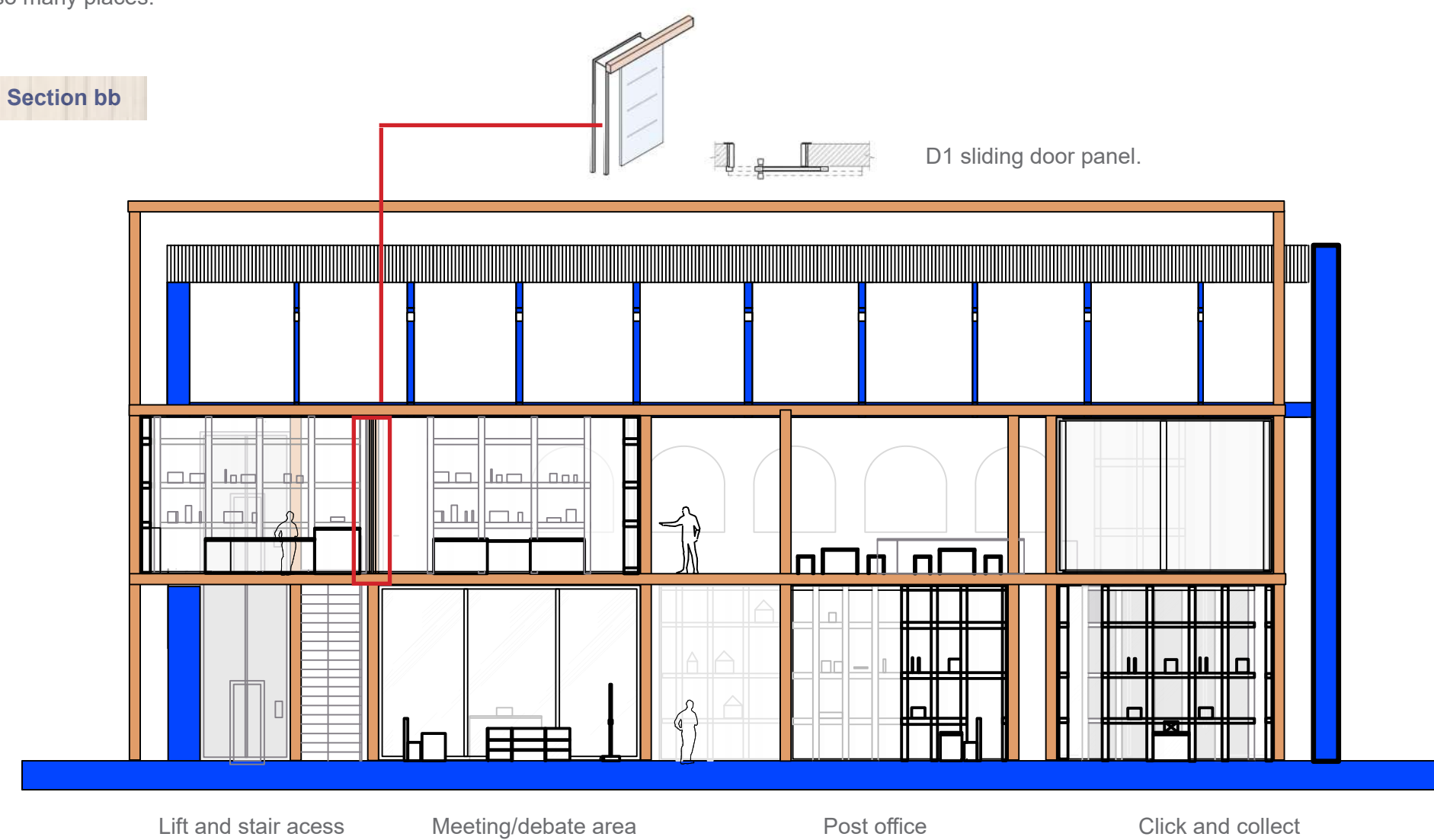


Each room is carefully designed to reflect the character and interiors of a canal boat. Polycarbonate walls create openness and translucency, sparking curiosity and encouraging passers-by to pause and observe what's happening inside. A skeletal timber frame runs through each space, echoing the scaffold-like structures found around the site.

The interiors take inspiration from my high street shops, shaped by community rather than gentrification. Timber wall joists double as shelving and storage, blending function with craftsmanship. Sliding polycarbonate entrances mirror the movement and transience of canal boats, reinforcing a sense of fluidity and change.

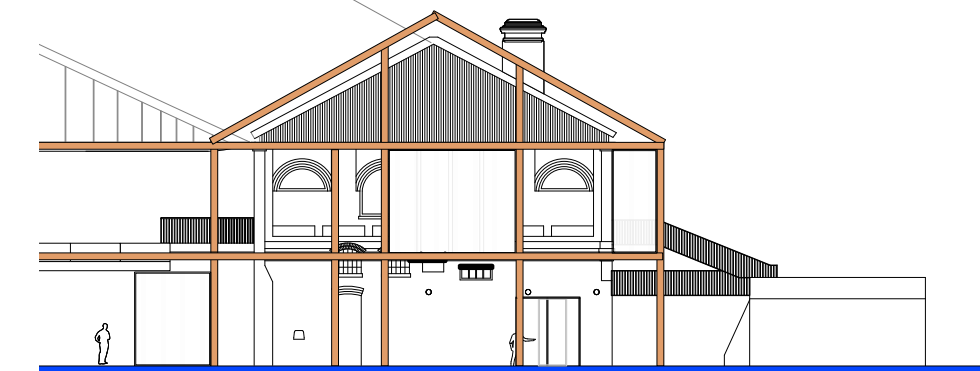
Technology is intentionally kept to a minimum, encouraging genuine social interaction between the canal community and the general public—two worlds that often exist side by side but rarely connect. The space rekindles the town-like atmosphere where conversation, rather than screens, takes precedence. Benches throughout invite people to sit, talk and engage, fostering the spontaneous connections that once defined everyday life before gentrification reshaped so many places.

Section bb

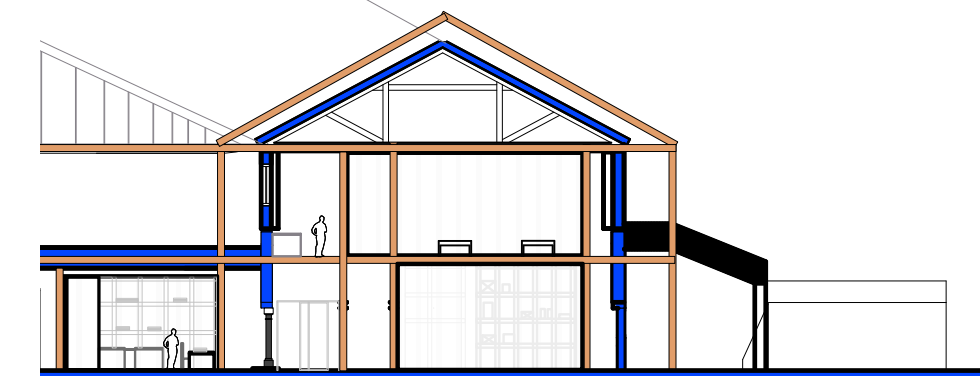


D1 sliding door panel.

Front elevation



Section aa



Showing how the polycarbonate boxes fit within the timber scaffold grid structure known as the Exoskeleton.

The Rise of The River Street

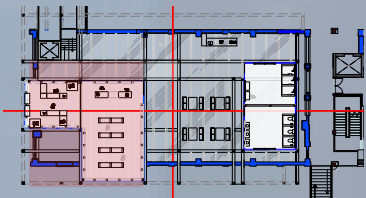
Views around the River Street



View from the bridge looking over at the Regent's canal new moor



View of the Dockside Centre from the terrace



1:50 section model

I chose scaffold timber and translucent polycarbonate boxes to reflect the canal community's resilience and adaptability—materials that feel as resourceful and unpretentious as the people they represent. The open, flexible exoskeleton structure mirrors the fluid, ever-changing life on the water, while the translucent cladding invites light in, symbolising visibility and inclusion. This design is a statement of belonging, placing canal boaters at the centre of the city rather than its edges.

Building a 1:50 sectional model as my device was key to exploring these ideas in detail—it showcased the exoskeleton and the co-op corner store, including a butcher and fishmonger, and helped me deeply understand how structure and community values intersect through materiality and spatial design.



Sectional view showcasing the corner store, butcher and fish monger.



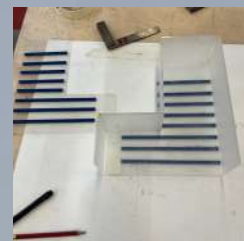
Approaching the Dockside Centre.



Inside the Dockside Centre.



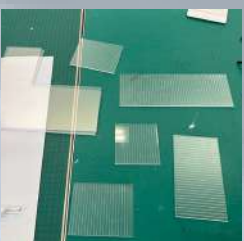
Short section looking at the co-op.



Short section of the Dockside Centre.

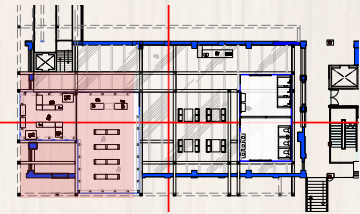


Front elevation. This is also my detail device, the exoskeleton, showcasing the co-op and timber skeletal frame structure.



Model making process

The Dockside Centre

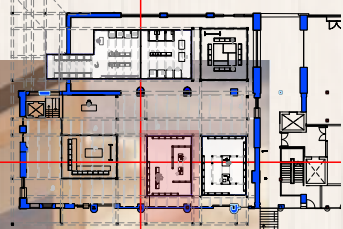


The corner store



The corner store promotes health and well-being with essentials and a pharmacy, while the butcher and fishmonger, designed as market stalls, encourage community and local shopping.

The Post office

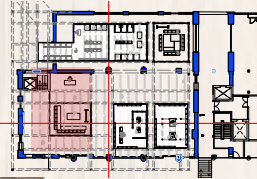


The post office features an open skeletal frame structure, fostering direct interaction between the worker and the customer.

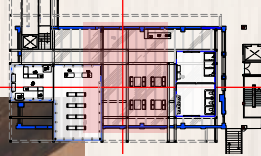
The interiors prioritise adaptability, well-being, and social connection through the use of natural, durable materials and intentional design. Timber elements serve multiple purposes, acting both as structural supports and flexible shelving or seating, creating a handcrafted and approachable environment that supports everyday life.

By minimising technology, the space encourages authentic human interaction, bridging the canal boat community with the wider city and fostering meaningful face-to-face connections in a society increasingly dominated by screens. Movable entrances and an open, flexible layout respond to the fluid, transient nature of life on the water, allowing the space to adapt as needs change.

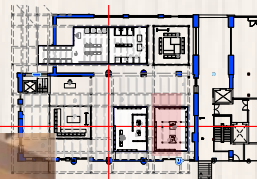
Soft, warm lighting and natural textures create a comforting atmosphere that invites visitors to slow down, engage, and feel a sense of belonging. This interior reimagines future spaces as vital social infrastructure—addressing political and social shifts by centring care, resilience, and community well-being over efficiency or commercial spectacle. It offers a practical and empathetic model for how shared spaces can support marginalised communities and foster genuine connection in evolving urban environments.



Reception and meeting area.



Upper viaduct level featuring cafe.



Click and collect.

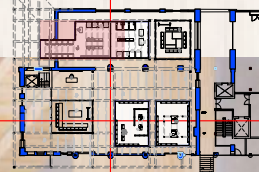


SDG Goals



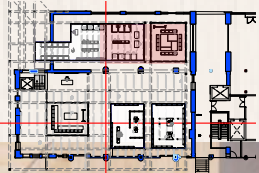
The River Street project strongly aligns with several of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals, envisioning a more inclusive and sustainable urban future. It supports SDG 11 by reimagining city spaces as people-centred, inclusive, and community-driven, inspired by the warmth of the traditional high street. Addressing SDG 10, it integrates the often-overlooked canal boat community into the urban fabric by providing access to essential services. With SDG 3 in focus, the design fosters mental and physical well-being through calm, empathetic environments. The innovative scaffold timber structure promotes adaptability and low-impact construction, contributing to SDGs 9 and 12. Finally, the project champions SDG 13 by encouraging slower, more connected, and climate-conscious living through walkability and reduced car dependence.

The launderette



The launderette and tailor are positioned side by side, enabling seamless collaboration between the two owners and offering convenient access if any issues arise with the clothes.

The tailor



The post office features an open skeletal frame structure, fostering direct interaction between the worker and the customer.