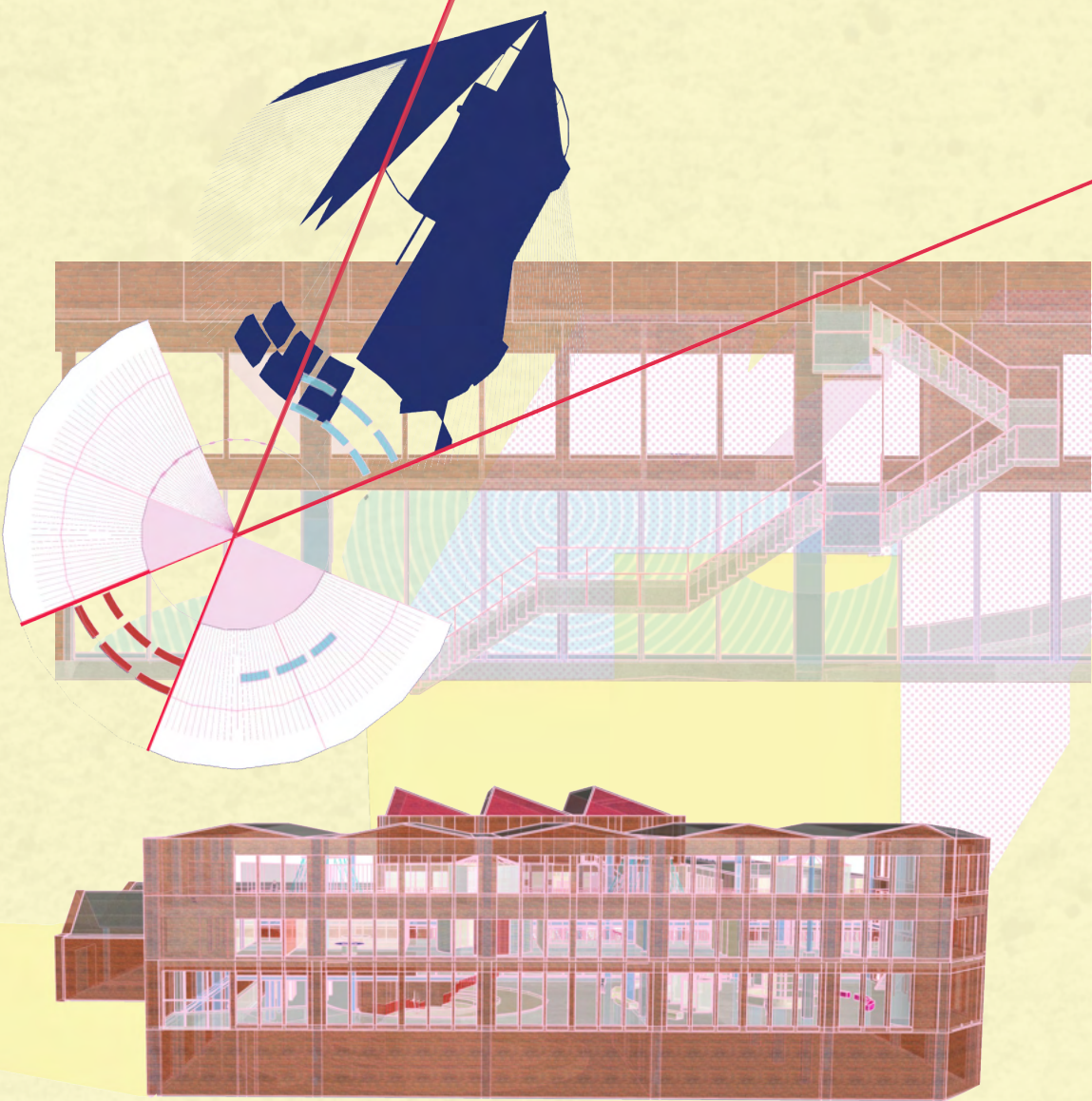


the closey

Women’s health and wellbeing has historically faced stigma and limited research, resulting in a general lack of understanding that persists today. It is therefore vital to provide a safe and empowering environment that can take steps to address this issue.

Located within West Ward Works, a former jute spinning mill and print works, ‘The Closey’ aims to create such a space. It takes influence from the industrial past of Dundee, and embodies the strength, empowerment and strong sense of community of women at this time - the women of She Town. Thoughtful spatial elements and environments in the design aspire to represent the social atmosphere of ‘the closey’, specifically the interactions between women in this context. ‘The Closey’ caters to the variety of unique needs of women and wider society, including interactive information zones, activity workshops, areas for socialising, opportunities for holistic therapy, consultation and medical treatment rooms, and a refuge space for more delicate situations.



This project takes influence from a selection of Dundonian phrases relating to community life around the 19th century - some phrases are still heard today.

‘the closey’

the stairs and streets between tenement flats.

‘the washie’

the public steam laundry of the 19th century.

‘hingy oot’

the name given to being in the closey’s hive of activity, and observing and gossiping.

women’s health

Women’s health, like any area of healthcare, is a multi-faceted topic, and when considering how to tackle the stigma and issues within it, this must be taken into account. As stated by the World Health Organisation: **“Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.”**

Additionally, it is important to recognise that women’s health is not just a women’s issue. When women and girls are supported to lead healthy lives and fulfil their potential, the whole of society benefits.

The Women’s Health Plan for Scotland for 2021-2024 provided a lot of insight into the various factors within womens healthcare. It also outlines key methods and considerations in how the issues within womens healthcare can be addressed:

- + provide consistent, reliable and accessible information, empowering women of all ages to make informed decisions
- + supporting health in women and girls allows for more choices and opportunities to be available, in order to achieve their full potential.
- + healthcare for women should be holistic, inclusive and respectful. centred around the individual, responsive to their needs and choices
- + health and social care sectors working together to improve care

The Health Plan also outlines how there needs to be more awareness and wide spread knowledge for everyone, and that more open discussion about women’s health can help tackle the stigma associated with it. There too needs to be more knowledge within the healthcare system, as most medical education sees the ‘male’ as the norm, and everything else is ‘atypical or ‘abnormal’.

51% of Scotland’s population are women

+ 1 in 3 people don’t feel prepared for their first period

+ 1 in 10 girls have been unable to purchase menstrual products and 15% have struggled to access them

+ in the UK, 1 in 3 women will experience a reproductive or gynaecological health problem

+ around 1 in 10 women in Scotland have endometriosis, yet the average time from the start of symptoms to diagnosis is 8.5 years

+ gender based violence is a major issue and is experienced unequally: 17% of women and 7% of men having experienced a use of force from a partner

+ 20% of women have experienced sexual abuse before the age of 18

statistics taken from the Women’s Health Plan for Scotland, 2021 - 2024



1:100 final scale model



the site: west ward works

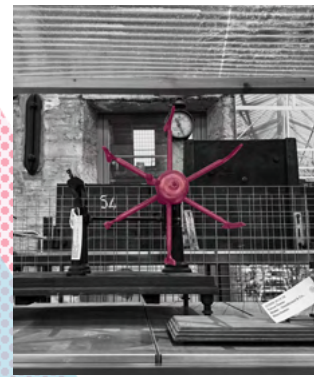
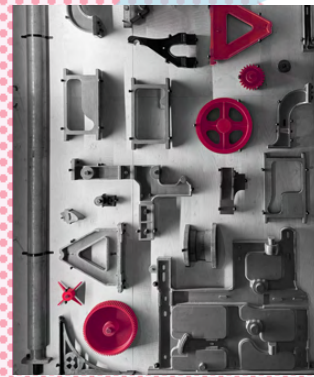
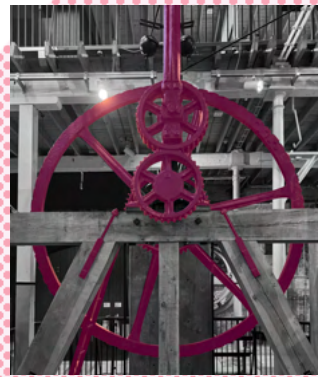


I have chosen the old West Ward Works as my site for this project. This building is situated in the heart of Dundee, and therefore is easily accessible. The large size of West Ward Works ensures that it can accommodate a variety of spaces to cater to the many factors within women’s healthcare.

A further reason that I chose this site was due to its history as a part of Dundee’s rich industrial past, this memory and narrative lending itself to the development of this project. West Ward Works saw many changes and adaptations throughout its years, being part of both the jute industry and Dundee’s deep-rooted history with printing. It was originally constructed as Dundee’s first fireproof mill in 1806, and subsequently became a weaving shed for jute. Following this, the Dundonian media company DC Thomson took over, transforming the factory into a printing works from the 1950s until 2010. Many books and magazines were printed here, including the famous Dandy, The Beano, and Oor Wullie.

[link to ‘the closey’ film](#)





the industrial history of dundee

West Ward Works has a significant connection to the world of printmaking, once being a factory for media company DC Thomson. However, Dundee had a rich history with printing before this, and though the craft wasn't an immediate success, by the mid-18th century Dundee became a major printing centre. This subsequently resulted in the city establishing itself as one of Scotland's leading printing hubs.

Furthermore, Dundee was well known throughout the world as a hub for jute production - also being referred to as 'Juteopolis'. At the peak of its power, around 40,000 families were dependant on the jute industry for their livelihoods. For many years this was a lucrative business, but the industry was hit by a series of slumps and booms in the 19th century, before eventually declining in the 20th century. There has been a great deal of demolition work, and around 50 former mill buildings have seen second lives as homes and commercial buildings. Though this era is over, it played a huge role in shaping Dundee into what it is today. It is crucial to cherish and respect this history, and representing it by reusing old mills but maintaining their integrity is a way to do so.

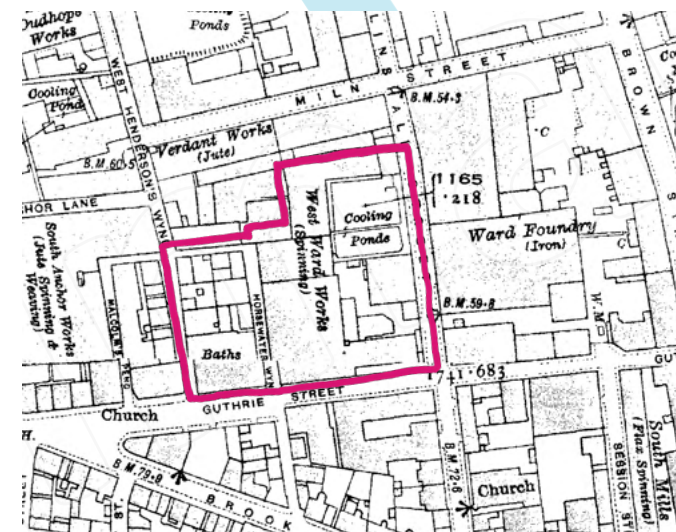
I drew on the forms and elements of these practices to design 'The Closey', noticing the many circular forms within the machinery as well as other tools like spools, bobbins, rolls, and the linearity within the wrapping and reeling of paper and fabric.



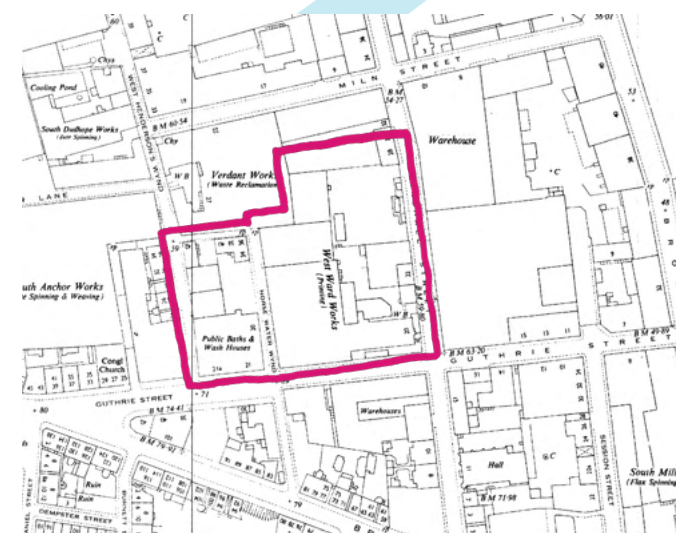
blackness

Dundee is known for its rich industrial history, particularly in jute production, and this is especially true for the Blackness area, home to West Ward Works. Now a Conservation Area, Blackness once held the highest concentration of mills and industrial buildings in the city and was among Scotland's earliest urban industrial hubs. In researching West Ward Works specifically, I examined maps from the 1920s and 1940s, which showed its evolution from a jute spinning works to a printworks. The site also once included public baths, cooling ponds, tenements, and was crossed by Horsewater Wynd.

Workers also typically lived near their factories, so Blackness had many tenement flats to house them. It was once a vibrant community, not just an industrial zone, although much of the housing was lost during the slum clearances of the 1960s.



1920s



1940s

she town

Women formed the backbone of the 19th century jute and textile industrys, with a third of Dundee's female population being employed in the mills in 1901.

A unique breed of women evolved from the hardship of life in the mills and factories, garnering a certain independence as the main wage earners for the family which was uncommon at the time. In the face of such circumstances fixed ideas of what constituted as 'normal' male and female behaviour was dismissed, and Dundonian women gained the freedom to act in a which challenged and ignored traditional standards. They were seen as:

'Overdressed, loud, bold-eyed girls'



community

While drawing inspiration from the strength of the women of She Town in the 19th century, I was also fascinated by the sense of community in the tenement flats surrounding the mills and the central role women played in this environment.

Tenement living had its challenges - overcrowding, poor health, and substandard buildings - but it also helped shape a unique Dundonian identity, echoed across Scotland. The 'closey', the shared stairs and streets between flats, buzzed with life: children played, and women gathered to chat and watch the goings-on in the street - a practice known as 'hingy oot'.

Laundry was typically women's work, and as mentioned by Lily, would encourage interactions. When hanging up and gathering laundry that was strung across the tenement flats, women would catch up on local news. The public steam laundry, or 'washie', was another social hub where women would gossip thrived - no one wanted to be the 'talk of the washie'!

These washing lines also inspired a visual language of linear connections, tactile, suspended, and full of movement, offering the potential for an immersive, therapeutic experience.

interview with lily thomson



I got the opportunity to interview Lily Thomson, who once worked in the jute mills of Dundee as a weaver. She describes her experience of working the mills mainly as not enjoyable; it consisted of long hard days with minimal breaks, and was a loud and dangerous environment to work in. This all testifies to the resilience of Lily and others working in the mills.

Despite the hard work, Lily expressed that there was a strong connection between the women working there, traditions and activities being born between them. Lily also particularly recalled how her mum and others living in the tenement flats surrounding the mills had pulleys to hang out their washing, and this prompted neighbours to catch up and communicate.



interviews



dr kirsty brown
doctor of obstetrics and gynaecology for tayside

Key issues in women’s health include lack of awareness, stigma, NHS strain, unwelcoming clinical spaces, and poor access. Opportunities lie in community-based care, trauma-informed practices, better environments, and interactive tools to encourage conversation and reduce stigma.



danielle wylie
prevention worker with dundee women’s aid

Importance of vital preventative care, which Danielle does through school workshops, professional training, and community outreach. She supports young women via programs like ‘Empower Her’ and recovery groups. Key challenges include stigma, access gaps, online misogyny, and limited resources - highlighting the need for broader, inclusive awareness.



hafsha zaveri
volunteer coordinator at dundee international women’s centre

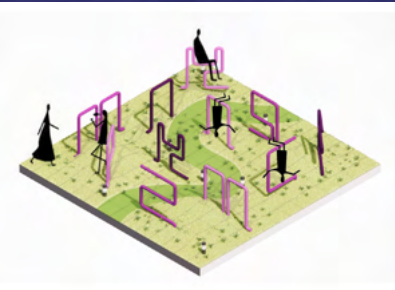
Importance of a welcoming, multicultural space for all women, offering social connection, language and skills training, health checks, creative activities, and childcare. It fosters confidence, inclusion, and community, but needs greater public awareness and support to expand its vital impact.



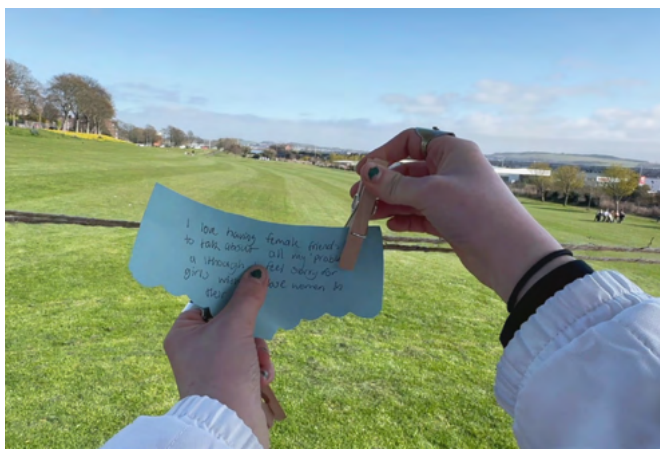
‘The Closey’ also draws on the hub and spoke model, aiming to be a hub for women’s health in Dundee whilst acknowledging and working with the other organisations that already exist in Dundee - the ‘spokes’. ‘The Closey’ is a large, open, accessible space, bringing conversations about women’s health out into the open and including the whole community.

make space for girls

‘Make Space for Girls’ are an organisation in the UK who campaign for parks and public spaces to be designed for girls and young women, not just boys and young men. They place teenage girls at the centre of all their work, and aim to support opportunities for teenage girls, as well as improve their mental and physical well-being and their access to public space. Recurring themes are the use of circular and interconnected forms to create social spaces, and a variety of seating and lying down opportunities that are comfortable and playful.

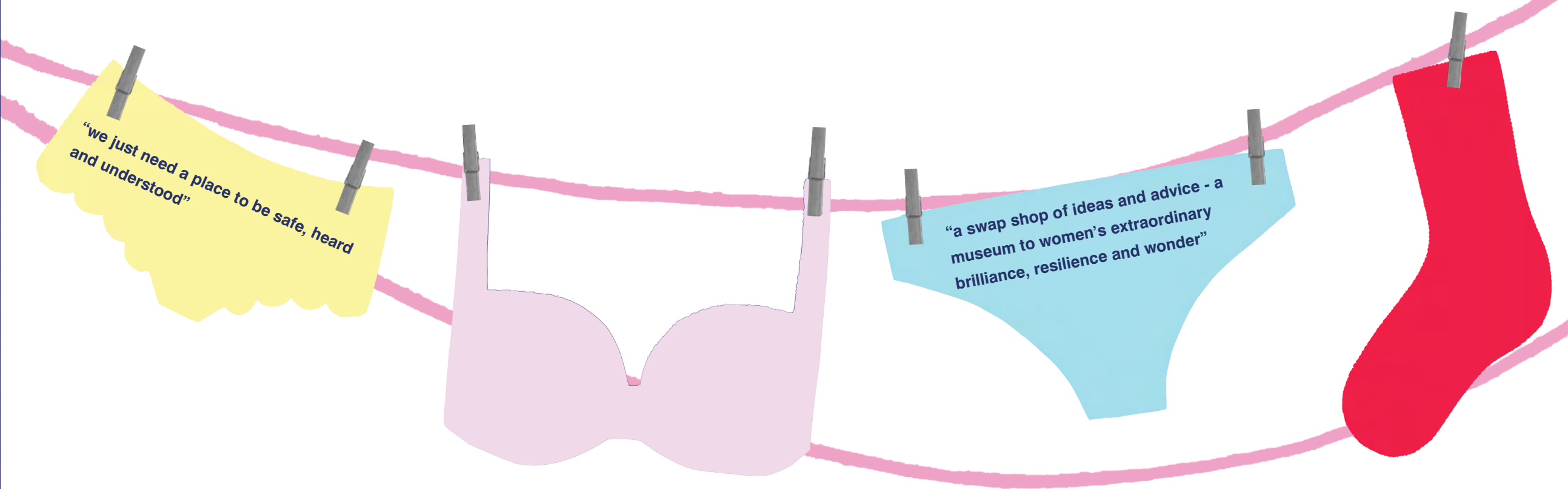
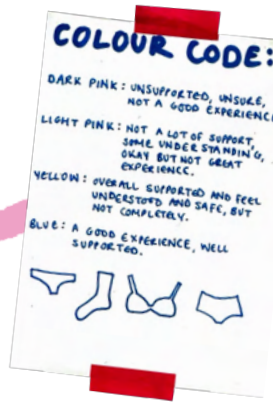


‘air it out’ engagement research tool



In order to gather insights into the experience of individual women and girls regarding their reproductive health, and experiences in general, I carried out a community engagement activity. This consisted of meeting with three different age groups of women, and talking with them about their experiences and views on how supported they feel, as well as their general opinion on women’s health. Along with revealing unique personal experiences, this helped me find trends, common concerns and issues women face at certain ages. I asked everyone to write down their thoughts, using the colour according to how they perceived the experience, before pinning their answers on the washing line. Just as women pulled the washing line back and forth across tenements as they talked, everyone hung up and ‘aired out’ their thoughts, and pulled the line to one another.

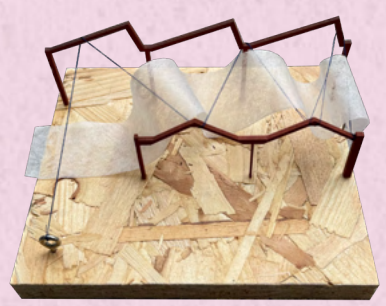
This activity revealed both positive and negative aspects of the female experience and the support that is available. The majority of the feedback concurred that there is not enough existing support for women, and there is without a doubt still a stigma that exists.



concept visualisation



Depicting thread around bobbins and spools to form semi enclosed seating.

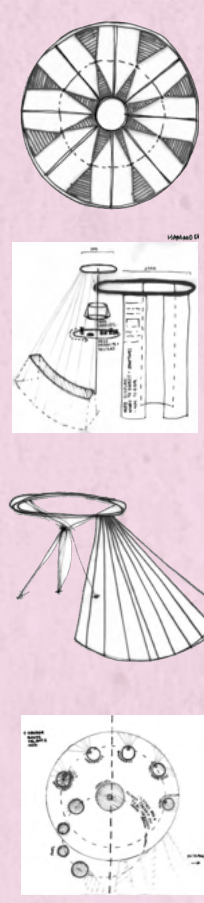


Exploring mezzanines and the weaving of interactive inbetween spaces.



Representing weaving and winding of textiles and paper around cogs and rollers.

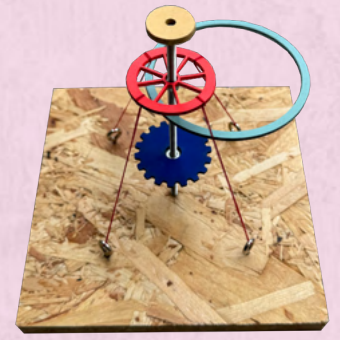
I created sketch models which combined features and elements of the industrial practices of Dundee, and tied in the forms of West Ward Works. I experimented with the general forms, also focusing specifically on the development of 'the closey steps' and 'the hub', and finding ways to encourage socialisation and interaction in these spaces. I also explored the use of circular forms, suspension and tactility as information displays, pods and social connections in the 'hiny oot'.



the hiny oot

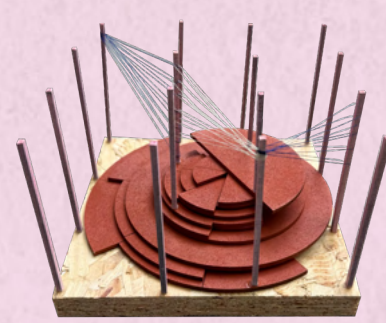


Experimenting with incorporating linearity and thread to represent the washing line, and forming connections to possible mezzanines, in order to symbolise the closey and the act of 'hiny oot' in the socialise and inform zone.

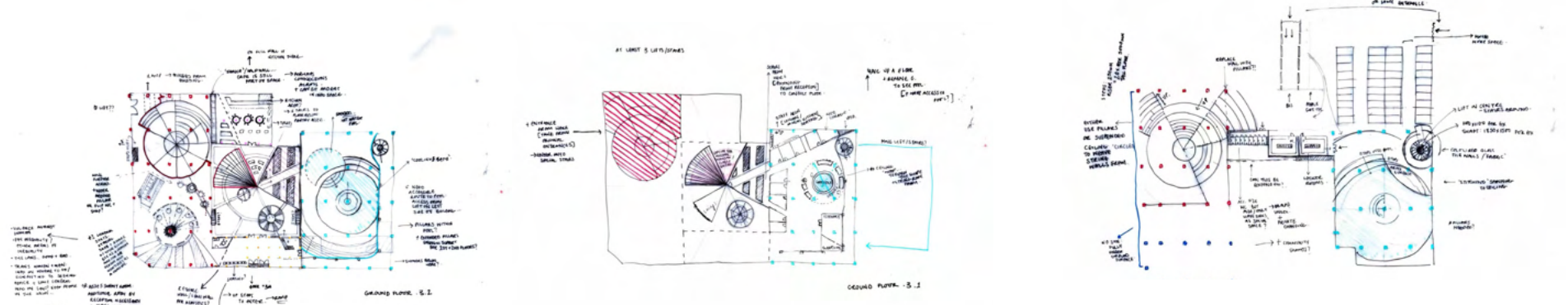
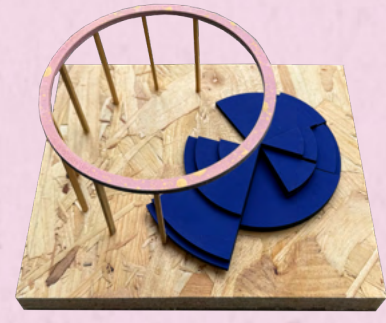


Combining elements of forms and cogs to introduce motion and tactility to possible information and interaction zones.

the closey steps

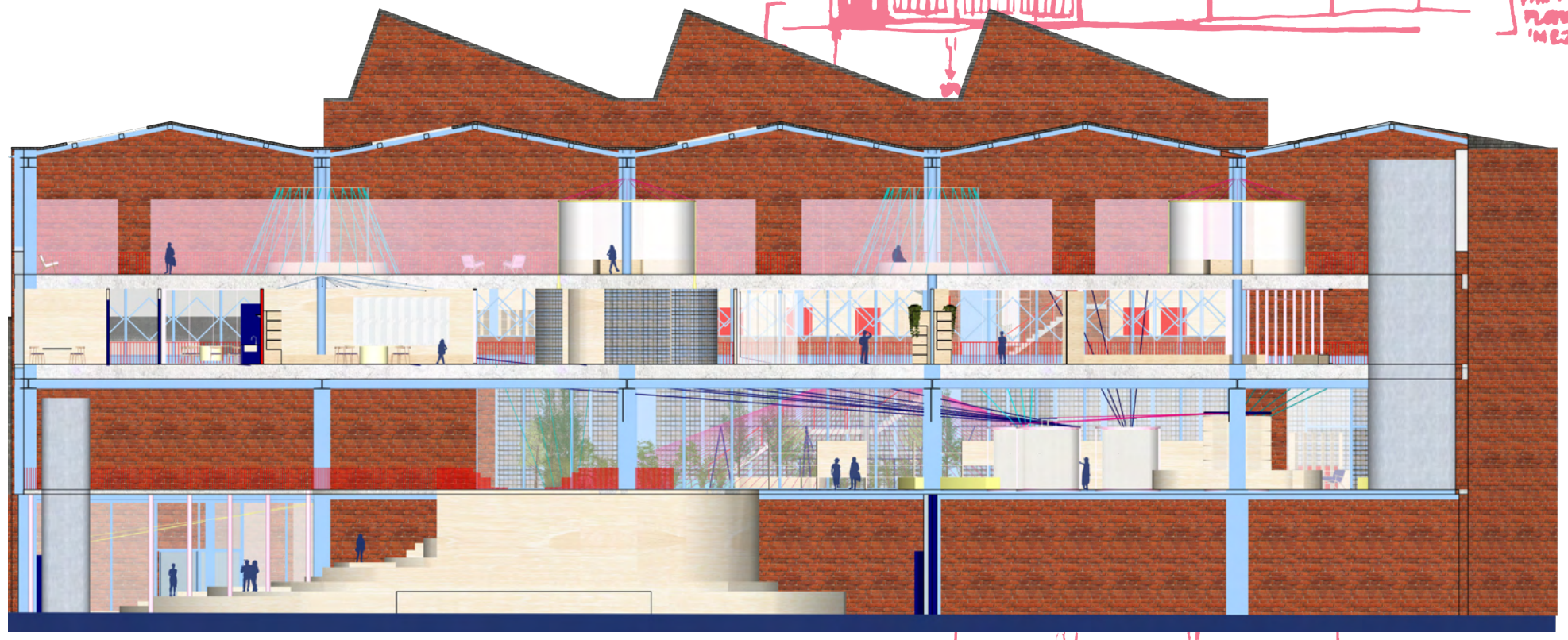
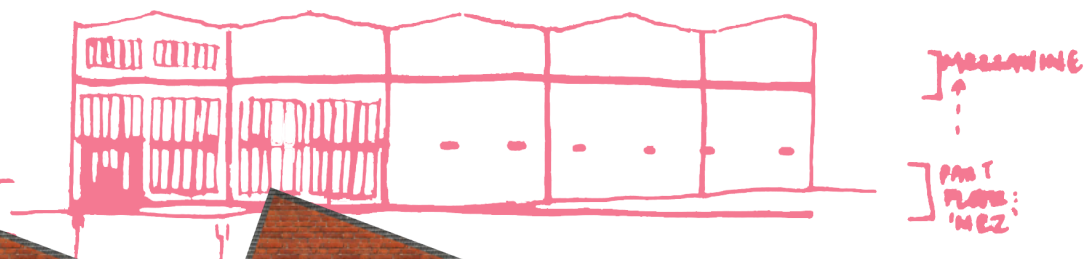
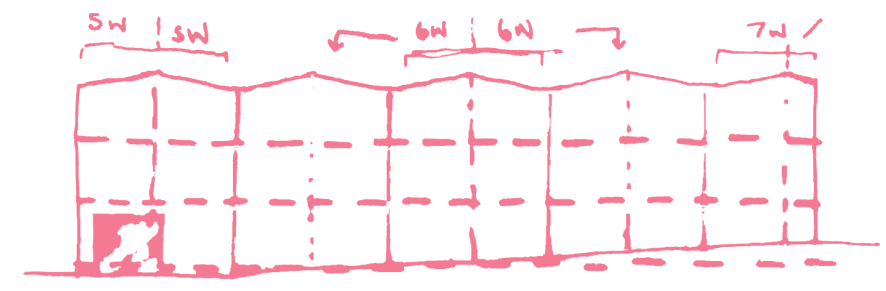


Steps have been used throughout the design, and some more accurately depict the forms of stairs found within old tenement flats, and some bring in the circular forms from other areas of inspiration. I looked at different types of staircases to experiment with how to make them a feature and playful places to stop and chat due to their relevance within the history of social interaction, rather than simply a necessity.



spatial zoning

Looking at how different zones might interact with one another, and experimenting with different layouts to ensure privacy where needed, as well as large and exciting open spaces. Using wheels, cogs and other circular forms as spatial planning influence. The central 'hub' is inspired by a wheel form, the triangular shapes extending out and influencing the layout of the rest of the building, in a 'hub and spoke' concept.



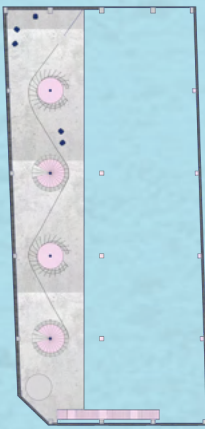
east wing section



west wing section

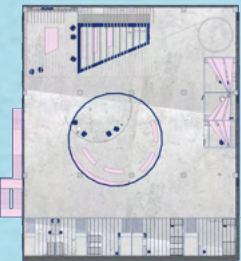
design outcome

5.



second floor

7.

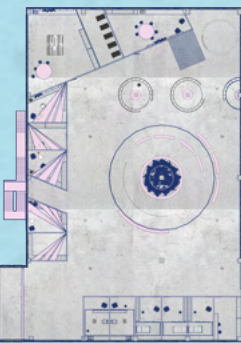


first floor

5.



6.



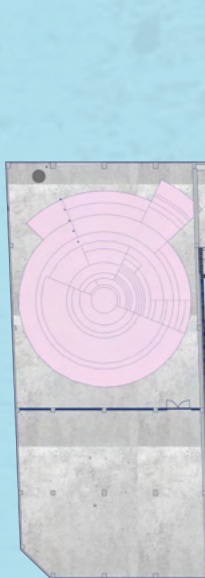
ground floor

4.



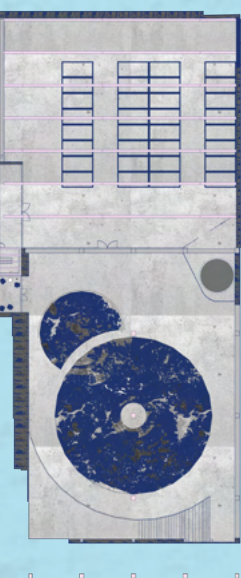
3.

2.



basement

1.



indoor carpark and drop off area for added privacy



1. cooling ponds

Inspired by the old cooling ponds which used to be found here in the buildings history. This area includes a large leisure pool, a cold plunge pool and massage therapy rooms. These spaces provide holistic methods of mental and physical therapy. The cold plunge pool is also an added benefit, as cold water swimming offers a range of physical and mental health benefits. The plunge pool and leisure pool are open for public use, but certain days of the week will allow for various classes to be held and for 'women only' days.



2. the closey steps

The social steps take influence from the closey steps, and through this aim to encourage socialising. The variation of steps provides many options for lounging and seating. A circular hole has been punched in the floor, opening more of the building up to view this space of connectivity and exciting interaction. The steps bridge the gap between the basement floor and the ground floor, and the woven walkway leading up to them from the carpark and drop off entrance begin to introduce this linearity and sense of being embraced and drawn in.



3. the hub

The central courtyard provides opportunities for seating and socialising, taking influence from the circular forms of industrial processes, and the findings of 'Make Space for Girls' showing that circular seating encourages socialising. Along with this, hammocks and swings have been incorporated, creating fun and relaxed ways of sitting and interacting. A café is found north of the courtyard, along with a communal kitchen and greenhouse which offer cooking classes and health and nutrition classes to teach new skills and provide opportunities to meet new people.



4. the hinky oot

Inspired by the name for observing, chatting with others and being in the hive of activity in 'the closey'. It is the primary interactive and informative social space, open to anyone and everyone. There are 5 movable and adaptable information pods, each displaying information on different topics:

1. general information on issues concerning women around the world
2. menstruation and sexual health
3. pregnancy
4. menopause
5. endometriosis, breast disease, and other things a woman might experience



5. the mezzanines

The placement of these mezzanines is reminiscent of Horsewater Wynd previously running through here. The 'Washie Workshops' are found on the first floor mezzanine, and include spaces for many activities in which women can meet others going through the same things, look after themselves, seek advice and support, and talk about their experiences. Indirect therapy is an important factor - doing activities while talking to take away some of the pressure and uncomfortableness. The 'Woven Seating Pods' on the second floor mezzanine are inspired by the 'wrapping around' of spools and creating comfortable and more private seating spaces.



6. consultation rooms

The west wing of the first floor houses the consult rooms and medical examination rooms. The consult rooms can be used for advice, and provide a welcoming and comfortable alternative to visiting a hospital or doctors office setting. A crèche is also provided here, which is beneficial as it allows women to take a minute for themselves, and perhaps to go a class, go for a swim, or relax for a bit. The waiting area is a comfortable and inviting space, with draped fabric and woven seating pods providing a range of both open and more private places to sit.



7. mary's living room

Inspired by the many influential Mary's of Dundee, to create an empowering and connected refuge space. This is a safe refuge space for women, offering a place to wash clothes, a communal kitchen and opportunities for advice and consultations. Women can come by here in times of need, and if required there is also emergency accommodation. Five bedrooms, which range in size to accomodate women with children, offer a stay of up to a week within which counselling will be available and next steps will be discussed. The central 'living room' is a space to sit, chat and relax. The entrance to the lift leading to 'Mary's Living Room' is accessible directly from the carpark and drop off area for quick and discrete access. All entrances to this refuge space are semi-veiled and layered through the use of fabrics and glass blocks.