

Touchstones Cultural Hub

Supplementary Planning and Conservation information

13/10/2023

This document has been prepared with input from the professional team appointed by RBC to deliver the DCMS (administered by Arts Council England) funded redevelopment of Touchstones:

- BB Heritage Studio – Heritage Specialist
- Architectural Emporium – Architect
- Sutcliffe – Structural Engineer
- Identity Consult – Cost Consultant
- Hive Projects – Project Management

1. Fire Escape Viability Analysis

Overview

Following submission of the Planning and Listed Building Consent applications for the redevelopment of Touchstones into a multi-disciplinary cultural hub, the project team have been asked to consider an alternative position for the fire escape door that is essential to achieve the desired capacities from the performance space that forms a vital part of the proposed redevelopment.

This document captures the thorough analysis conducted by the team to explore the viability of 4 options for relocating the door, in addition to the position submitted in the original planning application. **Following this analysis, the position shown in the resubmitted drawings is in the location agreed with the planning officer in the meeting 07/09/23 (option 2).** This document, and the resubmitted drawings should be read in conjunction with the business planning analysis, heritage statement, design and access statement, and fire engineering analysis submitted with the original application (REVIEW OF MEANS OF ESCAPE IN PERFORMANCE AREA).

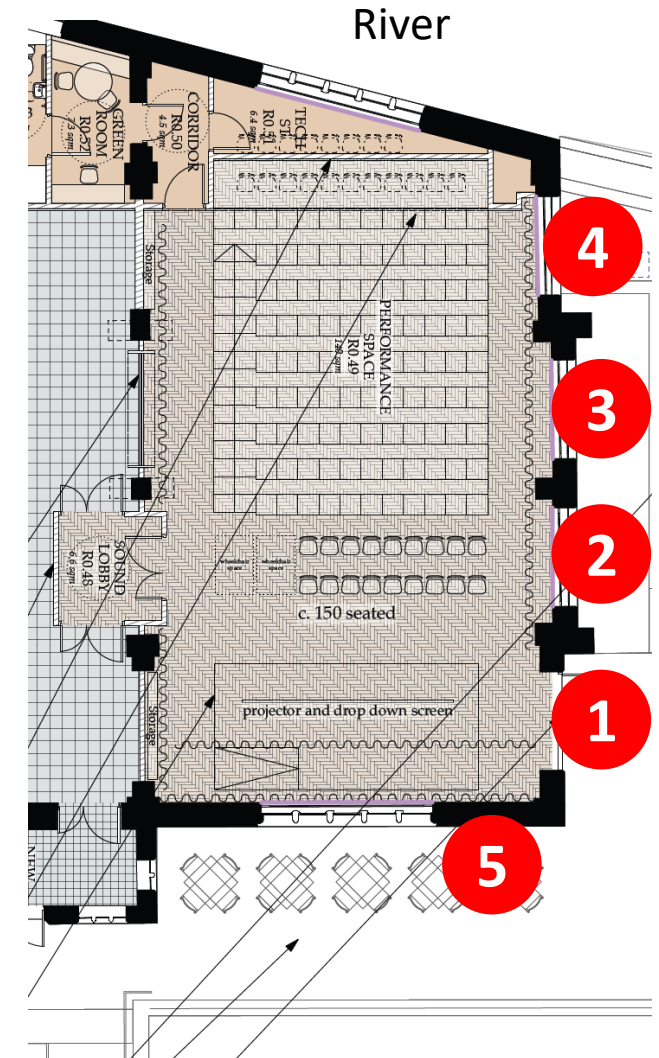
As highlighted, the key reason this fire escape needs to be accommodated is due to UK Building Regulations, which require a second exit to allow the capacity of the space to exceed 60 people (including staff and actors). This is essential to delivering the functionality agreed in the Grant Funding Agreement, as well as achieving the business plan targets and running the programmes and activities in the space required of Touchstones in their 'National Portfolio Organisation' agreement with the Arts Council. This same fire engineering constraint requires the second exit from the space to be sufficiently far from the first exit to avoid both being blocked if a fire were to start in the same area of the space.

The options considered in this document are therefore:

1. The location submitted in the original application
2. The window one to the right of this location
3. The window two to the right of this location
4. The window three to the right of this location, closest to the river
5. A new opening in the front facade

Each option has been assessed in terms of:

- Heritage / conservation impact – important in respecting the historic building
- Business planning impact – important in delivering a viable offer, and meeting grant funding requirements
- Structural implications – important in making sure a solution is structurally viable
- Programme implications – important in meeting the conditions of the grant funding agreement
- Cost implications – important in achieving a solution that is viable



Option 1 – Option Submitted

The original proposal is for a door in this location for the following reasons:

1. This is the position that works best for the fire strategy (please refer to document REVIEW OF MEANS OF ESCAPE IN PERFORMANCE AREA) whilst it is technically possible to have the escape in the adjacent bay the clear line of site from all areas of the room makes this position extremely advantageous in ensuring we can increase capacities.
2. This position also allows for potential interaction with the external terrace which will be vital as part of the overall theme of 'opening up' Touchstones and making it more approachable.
3. In this position the opening is relatively simple to deal with structurally. The team are confident they can keep the stone surround and insert the door within the opening so that the proportions of the original opening are not lost.
4. The team are very confident that this could be detailed in a way that is both in keeping with the architecture of the existing building yet provide the vital connection needed to unlock the building as described above.

Heritage / conservation impact – important in respecting the historic building

- The view of the professional team and heritage architect is this can be accommodated in a manner which is sensitive to the historic building, and as part of a set of measures that represent a net-positive impact on the historic building fabric.
- However, planning and conservation officers have advised they have concerns regarding the selected location due to this being the most prominent and visible location from the wider setting and conservation area. As such the options for the location of the fire existing are being revisited.

Business planning impact – important in delivering a viable offer, and meeting grant requirements

- This option allows the required capacity of 150 people seated in the bleacher seating unit to be achieved, and required programming to be viable.

Structural implications – important in making sure a solution is structurally viable

- This is the easiest and least intrusive position to make work structurally, as is furthest from the river, and makes use of the existing opening with the least amount of stonework to support above.

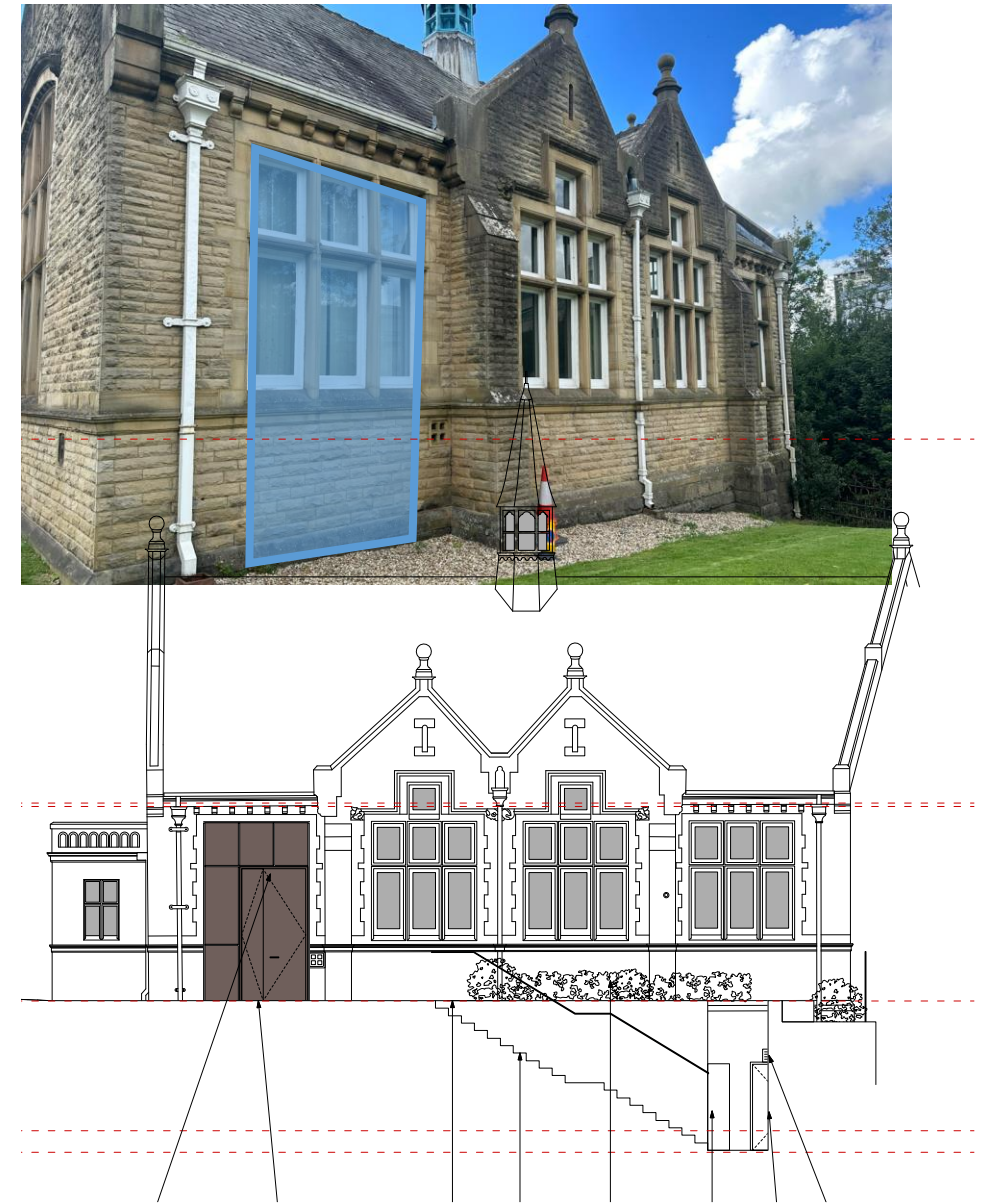
Programme implications – important in meeting the conditions of the grant funding agreement

- Due to the relative ease of making this location work structurally, and the design work that has been carried out to date, this option does not have an impact on programme.

Cost implications – important in achieving a solution that is viable

- The costs for this option have been factored into the cost plan, and is achievable.

For the LPA concerns highlighted, we have therefore explored alternative positions



Option 2 – One to the right (submitted in new drawings)

This is the option that was agreed with the planning officer in the meeting 07/09/2023, and has been submitted as part of this revised application. Whilst there are impacts on cost, and the time taken to develop this alternative has impacted programme, **if the solution submitted cannot be accepted then this has been determined to be the only viable option that would be acceptable to the LPA.**

Heritage / conservation impact – important in respecting the historic building

- Compared to the originally submitted location this alternative would require some additional physical impact. The complexity of this bay compared to the one to the right will require additional works to enable the retention of the top window, and a larger terrace is required to configure access. The visual impact on the asset itself will be comparable to the location currently proposed. However the visual impact from the wider setting and conservation area will be slightly less than the currently proposed location due to this being a less prominent location.

Business planning impact – important in delivering a viable offer, and meeting grant requirements

- This option allows the required capacity of 150 people seated in the bleacher seating unit to be achieved, and required programming to be viable.

Structural implications – important in making sure a solution is structurally viable

- Accommodating a door in this location represents structural challenges, due to the additional window and stonework above. The revised proposal seeks to retain the smaller top window, and new structure to support this will be required. This is the furthest right bay where the door can be accommodated without requiring significant structural works to create retaining walls to support the existing building, as to the right of this the land drops sharply.

Programme implications – important in meeting the conditions of the grant funding agreement

- Whilst there have been delays to programme in order to develop the resubmitted design for the door in this location, we believe this can be delivered within the programme requirements stipulated in the Grant Funding Agreement.

Cost implications – important in achieving a solution that is viable

- The complexity of the structural work required to create an opening in this bay, and the widening of the terrace needed to facilitate access both increase costs.



Option 3 – One to the left of river

Heritage / conservation impact – important in respecting the historic building

- In addition to the impact highlighted in option 2, the need to configure level access to a door in this position would create a significant exposed face in front of the facade where the walkway would remain at internal floor level while the rest of the land slopes away – concealing more of the existing façade and causing a greater impact on the historic building.
- However, the LPA have advised that if this option were feasible they would find this acceptable.

Business planning impact – important in delivering a viable offer, and meeting grant requirements

- It is vital for the business plan that we achieve a flexible seating arrangement that targets the 150 person capacity needed to make the business plan work. Extensive work has been taking place with retractable seating specialists to coordinate this, which has had to include measures such as removing the armrests between seats to allow as much seating as possible. The gap between the bleacher seating and the outside wall is unfortunately not wide enough to create an appropriate escape to this potential alternative position, and the design of bleacher seating systems mean the whole audience would need to reduce in width. If we created a wider gap we would lose 11 seats which would significantly impact the business plan, and impact the proportions and experience of the auditorium.

Structural impacts – important in making sure a solution is structurally viable

- Greater level of structural intervention needed to create a level walkway from this location as the ground drops towards the river, and increased costs and impact on the historic building fabric as a result. To create an exit from ground floor here would require raising external levels, and therefore increasing the load on the existing river wall. It is likely that the wall cannot accommodate these load increases and therefore likely that a new piled retaining wall will be needed to facilitate this.

Programme implications – important in meeting the conditions of the grant funding agreement

- The additional structural works needed to make this option viable would have some impact on programme, although not to the extent of option 4. However, the tight timescale defined by the Grant Funding Agreement means this would still push the project beyond the required completion date.

Cost implications – important in achieving a solution that is viable

- The additional structural works required for this option compared to option 2 would represent a significant cost risk to the project, and could threaten its viability.

For the business planning, structural, programme and cost reasons highlighted, this option is not viable.



Option 4 – Next to the river

The team understands how the bay to the far right hand side would be the least visible position for the escape door, however this is unfortunately not possible due to the business planning, structural engineering, programme and cost reasons highlighted:

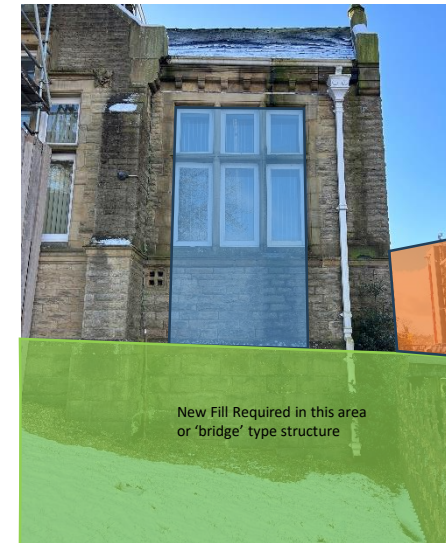
Heritage / conservation impact – important in respecting the historic building

- The LPA have advised they would be happy with a door in this location due to the reduced viability.
- However, the professional team are keen to highlight that this would require the highest level of intervention in the historic fabric of both the building and the river wall, and the works to raise the land to configure access to this door, over the required fire exit from the basement, would represent the highest visual impact of any of the options.

Business planning impact – important in delivering a viable offer, and meeting grant requirements

- It is vital for the business plan that we achieve a flexible seating arrangement that targets the 150 person capacity needed to make the business plan work. Extensive work has been taking place with retractable seating specialists to coordinate this, which has had to include measures such as removing the armrests between seats to allow as much seating as possible. The gap between the bleacher seating and the outside wall is unfortunately not wide enough to create an appropriate escape to this potential alternative position. If we created a wider gap we would lose 11 seats which would significantly impact the business plan, and impact the proportions and experience of the auditorium.

Continued on next page



New Fill Required in this area
or 'bridge' type structure

Extension to
railing required

Extension and
reinforcement
to retaining wall
required

Option 4 – Next to the river (cont.)

Programme implications – important in meeting the conditions of the grant funding agreement

- Creating an escape in this location and the substantial structural works to the building, walkway, and river wall that would be required to facilitate this, would require lengthy surveys, negotiations with the Environment Agency, and a complicated and intrusive build that would likely extend the programme by at least 6 months. This would break the terms of the grant funding agreement and risk the viability of the project.

Cost implications – important in achieving a solution that is viable

- The high levels of risk involved in conducting substantial works to the river wall mean and supporting a new walkway above the basement fire escape represent an estimated £200k risk to the project, again affecting the viability of the project.

Structural implications – important in making sure a solution is structurally viable

- The window detailing to this bay is the same as to the far left hand bay (the previously selected location), however the formation of a door opening in this location is not comparable to the selected location. This is due to the fact that the elevation terminates on the river wall and as noted in the accompanying SE response from Sutcliffe, the existing top of river wall datum level is approx. 122.20m AOD whereas the ground level of the building is 124.00m AOD. Due to this difference in levels of 1.8m creating an escape in this location either requires very significant engineering works to the river wall or the creation of a cantilevered structure with the aim to mitigate works to the river wall.
- From both an engineering and a heritage perspective there are a large number of significant unknowns regarding proposing a solution that would require works to the river wall. The existing construction is very unlikely to have been designed to a standard that will comply with current standards and required calculations. This is not currently known and not possible to determine without undertaking intrusive investigation works to the river wall. However based on experience of working with Victorian infrastructure of this nature the team anticipate that any works to increase the height of the river wall would not be possible without significant remedial engineering proposals such as significant rebuilding / strengthening and / or underpinning. The unknowns pose too high a risk to the project for this to be recommended as an option to proceed with.
- The alternative of providing a cantilevered structure also holds significant concerns in relation to the potential additional physical impact that the provision of the necessary support would require (over and above the creation of the door opening). This is detailed in the accompanying SE response.

For the business planning, structural, programme and cost reasons highlighted, this option is not viable.

Planning Comment response

Emergency egress from performance area

It has been suggested that the proposed fire escape door from the eastern elevation is relocated from the bay closest to The Esplanade to the bay closest to the River Roch, in order to minimise its visual impact.

There are a number of reasons why we have concerns with this proposal:

- 1.1. The existing top of river wall level is approximately 122.20m AOD. The existing ground floor level of the building is 124.00m AOD. This would require a new structure being installed to provide a platform to allow pedestrians to exit the building.
- 1.2. To facilitate this, we would need to raise the levels in this area which would substantially increase the loading on the existing river wall.
- 1.3. The river wall itself would also need to be raised, with a new sufficiently strong balustrade at ground floor level.
- 1.4. We are not able to ascertain the construction of this wall without intrusive works. It is very unlikely that we will be able to justify the load and height increase, and therefore the wall would require strengthening works. It is quite possible that we would need to pile behind the existing wall to create a sufficiently strong retaining wall.
- 1.5. This work would be in conjunction with the new basement exit point directly below, further complicating the geometry and available zone for any new structure, particularly if a piled wall is required.
- 1.6. An alternative would be to create a cantilevered structure from the building to provide this exit platform. We would also have concerns with this as a solution, as the structure would require considerable intervention within the existing library ground floor. It would likely not be possible without removing a portion of original the masonry arch and steel beam floor construction, which are retaining throughout in our current proposals.
- 1.7. The scope of structural works required in and around the listed building and river wall would be significantly increased if the ground floor door were to be relocated to this position, and our recommendation would be to avoid these intrusive works by locating the fire escape door closer to The Esplanade.

SE note from Sutcliffe referred to

Option 5 – Within the front facade

This option has been considered as an alternative to repurposing any of the existing windows in the performance space. Whilst it is in the front façade of the building, the key objection to the location proposed in the application was due to its visibility from the Town Hall, and this position is less prominent from these views as is seen from an oblique angle.

Heritage / conservation impact – important in respecting the historic building

- As this is a new opening in an existing area of solid wall then the physical impact is arguably the least of all the options with the fabric removal limited to the size of the door opening and limiting the existing features affected.
- Whilst it is to the main elevation the visual impact is also arguably the least as it is not altering the existing fenestration and the door size can therefore be minimised – albeit that the size and design would preferably be in keeping with the scale and proportions of the existing doors.
- However, the conservation officer has advised this would not be acceptable due to its position on the front façade.

Business planning impact – important in delivering a viable offer, and meeting grant requirements

- This option allows the required capacity of 150 people seated in the bleacher seating unit to be achieved, although does mean a clear route would have to be maintained to the back of the stage for escape, impacting performances. This would have some impact on programming, and therefore some impact on business planning.

Structural implications – important in making sure a solution is structurally viable

- The structural engineer has assessed that a new door in this location would be structurally viable.

Programme implications – important in meeting the conditions of the grant funding agreement

- The team believe a new opening could be achieved in this location without significant impact on programme.

Cost implications – important in achieving a solution that is viable

- The costs for this option would not be substantially different from the original option, so this is viable.

This option has not been deemed viable by the planning and conservation officers.



Door Design

The door proposed in the only viable opening is shown opposite.

The team have been asked to explore whether this can be glazed.

Unfortunately, due a high level of security is needed due to the works contained within the building. This concern has also been exacerbated by a recent uplift in break-ins within Rochdale Town Centre, including at the recently completed Richard Street artist studios, and the Fireground Café, both of which have utilised glazed doors to break in and gain entry.

The two main entrances to Touchstones benefit from security lobbies, which allow the alarm to be raised before an intruder would be able to roam inside the building.

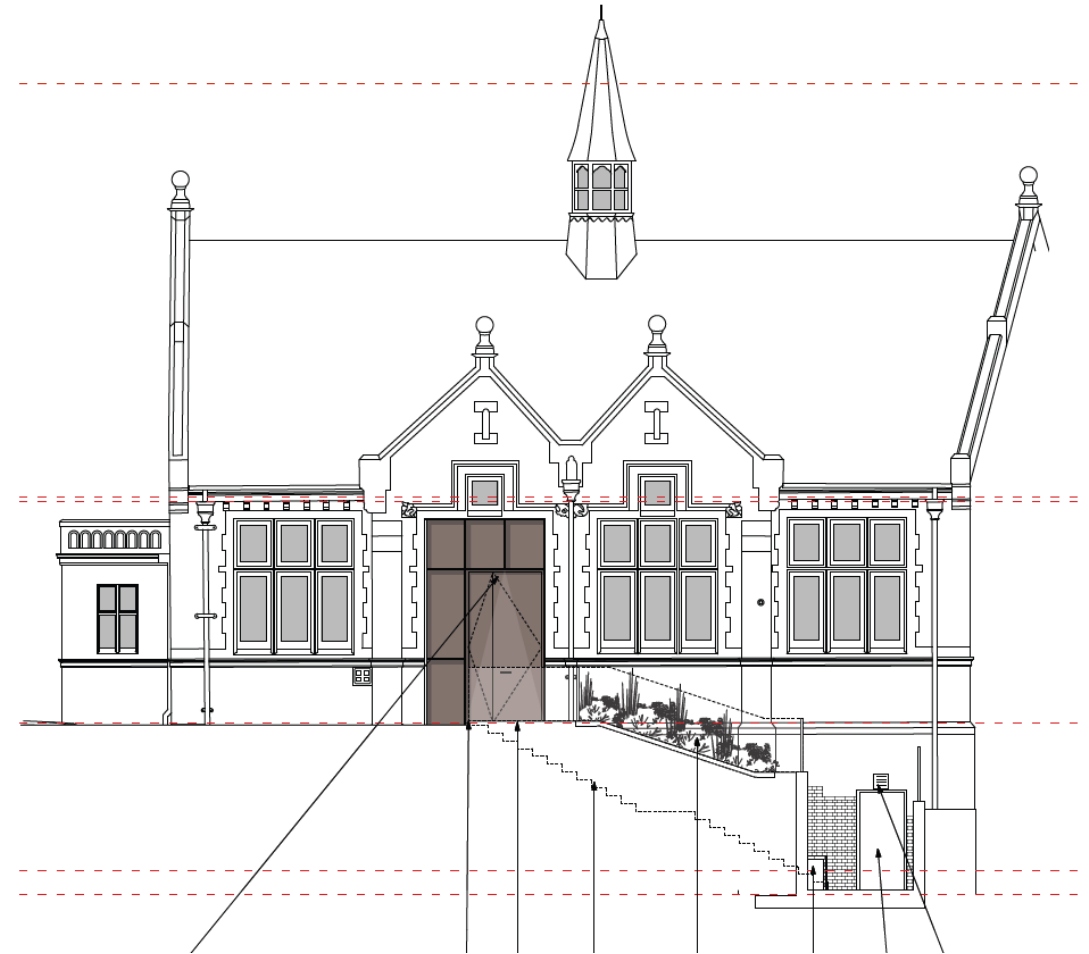
Unfortunately neither the basement or ground floor doors are able to accommodate a security lobby without severely impacting on the spaces within, and in the case of the fire escape from the performance space, significantly:

- Reducing the capacity of the space, with business planning implications as highlighted previously.
- Impacting the experience of the space, including detracting from the heritage inside by having to build a large lobby adjoining this new opening.

We have therefore concluded this is not viable.

It is also important to not that from an aesthetics perspective it is not possible to replicate the exact proportions of the original window within the doors themselves as one of the door leafs must be sized appropriately to allow a wheelchair through it. Therefore this option whereby the door is solid is also the best approach. As the door is solid the surrounding area should also be solid, otherwise the windows would look odd and the door would stand out more than is necessary.

The proposal therefore utilises a high quality bronze coloured metal door which references the proportions of the existing mullions and the materials used in the original building, whilst achieving these security requirements.



2. Quiet Space - Justification

The Education Space - Function

The redeveloped space in Touchstones needs to change from being able to accommodate a single class to two classes. This is in order to support Touchstones in expanding their education offer which from a key part of their Arts Council England 'National Portfolio Organisation' delivery requirements, as well as forming a key part of their business plan.

In addition to accommodating school groups, the education spaces will also continue to host Pinc College, who have been based in the building until the recent decant to facilitate the redevelopment, and will move back in once this is complete.

Pinc College is a Specialist College for creative education in the UK, focusing on creative study programme pathways for 16-25 year olds. Their mission is defined as:

Include - neuro diverse young people in creative learning opportunities within their local Arts and Heritage places.

Engage - in Art, Design and Craft education to support attendance, attainment and wellbeing.

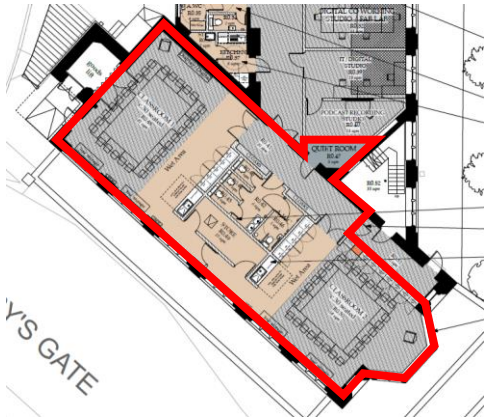
Create - opportunities for all young people to explore their creativity, build skills and create pathways to being work ready.

The design of the education space has been based on the following key considerations, in addition to regulatory and conservation matters:

- **Creation of 2 classrooms** – to meet the requirements highlighted
- **Child safeguarding** – making sure that all spaces where children or staff might need to go within a session are within a secure line, separated from all other building users. This includes, a quiet space, a sufficient quantum of storage, WC's, and coat storage.
- **Removal of the poor quality storage** – which currently covering 6 of the 7 stained glass windows. We're keen to expose these to celebrate the heritage of the space, and bring in natural light to support the wellbeing of all occupants.
- **Creation of new storage** – within the safeguarding line to allow the existing storage which covers the windows and used during classes to be removed. The space needs to be accessible from both classrooms.
- **Creation of a quiet space** – as is needed to support the education offer for all students, and especially the neurodivergent children who Pinc College work with. The space needs to be accessible from both classrooms (more info provided on next page).
- **Creation of dedicated WC's** – to allow children to go to the toilets during classes within the safeguarding line, again – accessible from both classrooms.

Questioning the need and location of the quiet space

The submitted design, and design included in the resubmitted drawings (shown below) – meets each of these requirements highlighted, and represents a significant net-benefit to the experience and preservation of the historic building fabric. The required facilities highlighted are all accommodated within the secure line required for child protection – highlighted in red below.



The subdivision of this area retains the historic joinery which is then located within the podcast recording studio with the location of the partition carefully located to avoid any conflict. As part of previous alteration works this door no longer provides access to the small ancillary room (which now houses a fire escape). An additional door opening required in the masonry wall to access the quiet room provides the necessary access and is a reversible alteration with minimal loss of historic fabric.

Following submission of the planning application 08/06/2023 – the conservation and planning officers have asked the client, user and professional team to question the necessity of the quiet space, due to concerns about the creation of the new entrance into this space, and the partition needed to separate this from the podcast space next door. The extensive interrogation of the need and location of this space is summarised below:

The need for the space – Pinc college have advised:

'A breakout space is an absolute must for us at Pinc. We can't deliver for our students without them having a space to use for this purpose. Without this in the building I feel this will be a considerable barrier to marginalised members of the local community. A high number of museums, galleries & community hubs are now installing these within their sites.'

We have a number of students with sensory processing disorder & a high number of students who can become dysregulated due to their autism, ADHD, mental health. Of course, it is not just neurodivergent people who will benefit from the use of such a space. There is a huge number of people who will be neurodivergent but have never had an assessment or received a diagnosis and as a neurodiverse society surely a cultural hub such as Touchstones needs to be accessible to all & limit barriers as much as possible.

For Pinc College the use of a break out space gives students & team members the space, time & privacy to process their current need. Whether that is to gather their thoughts & have some quiet time away from others or a space where they can stim or have sensory input in order to process, help regulate & avoid crisis.'

The location for the space

As highlighted on the previous page, there are a number of facilities that need to be accommodated within the 'secure zone' needed for child safeguarding, including WCs and storage to replace the large quantum lost in order to remove the shelving that currently covers 6 of the 7 stained glass windows. The user team have interrogated the necessity for each space within the secure zone and advised that there are none that can be removed in order to allow the quiet space to be relocated. The space proposed for the quiet space in the application maintains the position of the quiet space in the 'secure zone', but has the added benefit of being outside outside of the classroom box and therefore giving more physical and acoustic isolation from the classrooms. Whilst its not visibly noticeable from the plans, the location proposed has a much greater headroom than the only alternative (the box containing the WC's and store). Both of these considerations will improve the experience of this space for those needing it.

For these reasons, and the very limited impact of this preference on this historic building fabric, the team have concluded the quiet space needs to remain in the location proposed in the application. The team also conclude that when viewed in the full context of the other proposed changes to the education space, which include uncovering all the boarded up windows and removal of poor quality insertions, the proposal represents a significant net improvement in how the heritage of the space is experienced and preserved. The localised impact is a relatively minor and unnoticeable, yet will significantly improve the experience for neurodivergent children needing to use the space and therefore deliver significant community benefit.

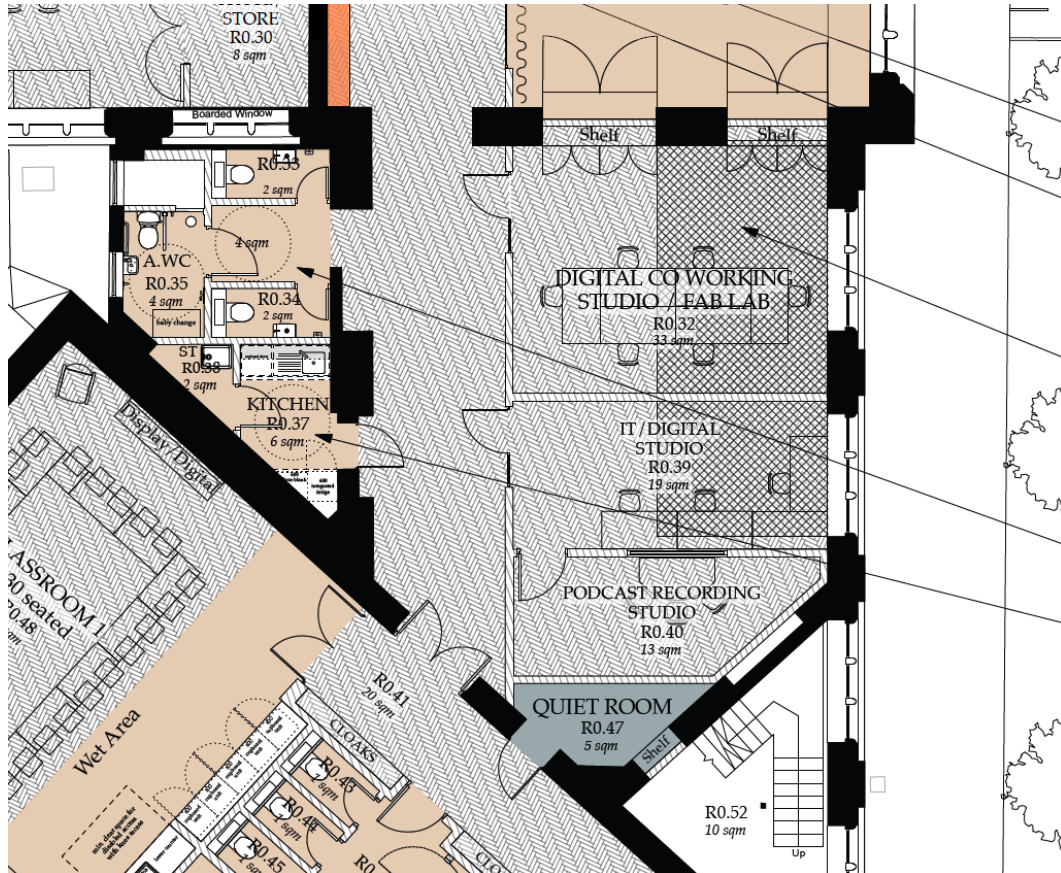
3. Internal Partitions - Changes

Partition Positions

Conservation concerns were raised about the position of the new partitions in the creative workspaces, and their relationship with the historic cornicing and beams.

Following interrogation of the design and assessment by the fire engineer and building control, there is confirmation that these partitions need to form fire separation lines, which require intervention in the soffit to achieve the required fire separation. To mediate this requirement, and the need to coordinate these with the beam layouts the partitions position have been tweaked to:

- Align with, but sit slightly to the side of the beams and cornicing, allowing the fire separation to be achieved with minimal impact on the historic details
- Keep the proportions of the digital co-working space and IT/digital studio symmetrical to the window, emphasising this important historic feature.



As part of this analysis, the need for these partitions has also been revisited. The substantial user, stakeholder, and community engagement conducted as part of the design development highlighted that to deliver the required impact of these spaces (both in terms of generating revenue and helping support the creative economy), it is essential they provide specialist equipment and resources needed by the creative sector. The key uses highlighted include:

- Somewhere for messy work, including clay – this is accommodated in the messy studio
- Somewhere for groups to gather, temporary exhibitions and functions – the clean studio
- A fab lab and digital space – with 3D printers and other noisy equipment
- A podcast studio – with a window between the studio and a control room where producers sit
- A digital studio lab – with high end computers for video, audio and graphic production

The only two of these than can be combined are the podcast studio control room and the digital design. The team are therefore confident that the brief requirements have been accommodated with the minimum number of partitions.

As noted previously, the subdivision of this area retains the historic joinery which is then located within the podcast recording studio with the location of the partition carefully located to avoid any conflict. As part of previous alteration works this door no longer provides access to the small ancillary room (which now houses a fire escape). An additional door opening required in the masonry wall to access the quiet room provides the necessary access and is a reversible alteration with minimal loss of historic fabric.