

WHITBY HALL TRANSFORMATION



Cheshire West
and Chester



Cheshire and Warrington
Local Enterprise Partnership

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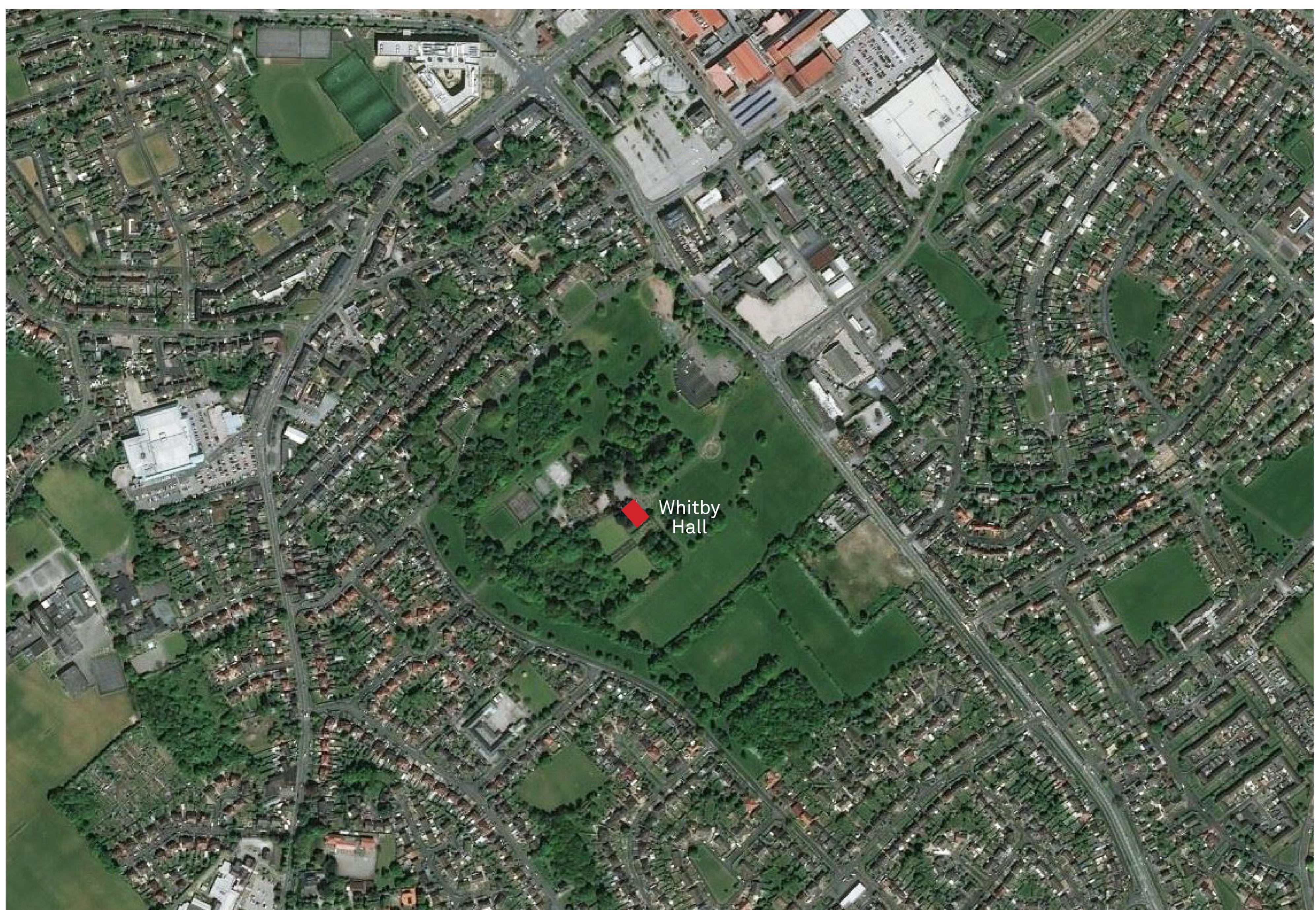
1 Welcome to the Whitby Hall Transformation

Action Transport Theatre are preparing to carry out an ambitious project which will see the transformation of locally listed Whitby Hall into a world class centre, specialising in high quality arts and culture for children, young people and their families.

The project will transform Whitby Hall from a tired, run-down building into a welcoming, accessible and inspiring arts and cultural centre, which will create a sustainable operating model for Action Transport Theatre; broadening, strengthening and consolidating their position as one of the North of England's key cultural assets.

An award-winning team which includes architects Bennetts Associates and main contractor Engie are appointed to design and construct the project. An exciting, modern scheme has been developed to accommodate the future aspirations of Action Transport Theatre.

You are invited to view the designs and proposals for the building and provide us with feedback through the online questionnaire.



Whitby Hall sits in the middle of the Green Flag-awarded Whitby Park.

2 About the Whitby Hall Transformation Project

In response to the recent growth and success of Action Transport Theatre and in the context of Ellesmere Port's wider regeneration, a scheme has been developed to transform Whitby Hall into a world class centre specialising in high quality arts and culture for children, young people and their families.

Action Transport Theatre is a professional, specialist young people's theatre in Cheshire; it has a national reputation for creating high quality touring work for children and family audiences, and engages local young people who would otherwise have little or no access to artistic or cultural activities.

The improved arts and cultural centre will support the expansion of Action Transport Theatres programme of activities and allow the theatre to engage with partner organisations to bring a rich range of arts and community activities into the building, including yoga, photography, dance, visual arts and music. Additionally, the project will address the current costly maintenance issues of Whitby Hall; the proposed flexible-use workshop spaces will help to generate further revenue.

The transformation directly supports Cheshire West and Chester's cultural strategy for the region. More locally, Whitby Hall and Action Transport Theatre will work strategically with local organisations in Ellesmere Port to support a broad programme of activities across the town, providing opportunities for cultural engagement to all.



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3 Whitby Hall History

Action Transport Theatre has been based at Whitby Hall in Ellesmere Port since the late 1990s.

Whitby Hall was originally built in the 1860's on the rural estate of local entrepreneur and politician John Grace. The Hall was home to the Grace family until 1931, when it was acquired by Ellesmere Port Council and converted into offices. The estate was re-planned by Thomas Hayton Mawson as a public park, which formed the centrepiece of Ellesmere Port's expanding residential suburbs. The Council vacated the property in the 1990's and the building was converted to theatre use.

There have been a number of changes made to the original building over time, each with different levels of success. The planned new additions to Whitby Hall will be underpinned by a sustainable design approach to the historic building, preserving and enhancing its character.



Top: Historic photo of Whitby Hall when it was still in use as a Manor House
Bottom Left and Right: Present day Whitby Hall

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4 The Current Issues

The current venue supports neither the world class aspirations of Action Transport Theatre or the community. The Hall is in a poor condition, failing in parts, and this investment will help the building last for another 100 years. More specifically, there are a number of key issues facing Whitby Hall, illustrated below, which the transformation will address.



Main Auditorium

The existing space is disadvantaged by a very low ceiling and intrusive structure, which limits the ambition of productions. Also, the lack of both a lobby to cut out light and sound into the performance space and any dedicated backstage route for performers creates further inconveniences.



Cafe

The kitchen provided in the 2000 refurbishment project is remote, cramped and uninviting, and doesn't allow visitors to engage with Action Transport Theatre.



Entrance

The current entrance is very unwelcoming, its heavy reinforced door suggesting fortification, rather than accessibility. The brick access ramp provides further visual barriers to the entry, rather than making the building appear more accessible.



Historic Building

The Hall is in poor condition, suffering from damp and general disrepair. Work will be carried out to restore the Hall, undertaking the necessary repairs to ensure a sustainable future for the whole centre.

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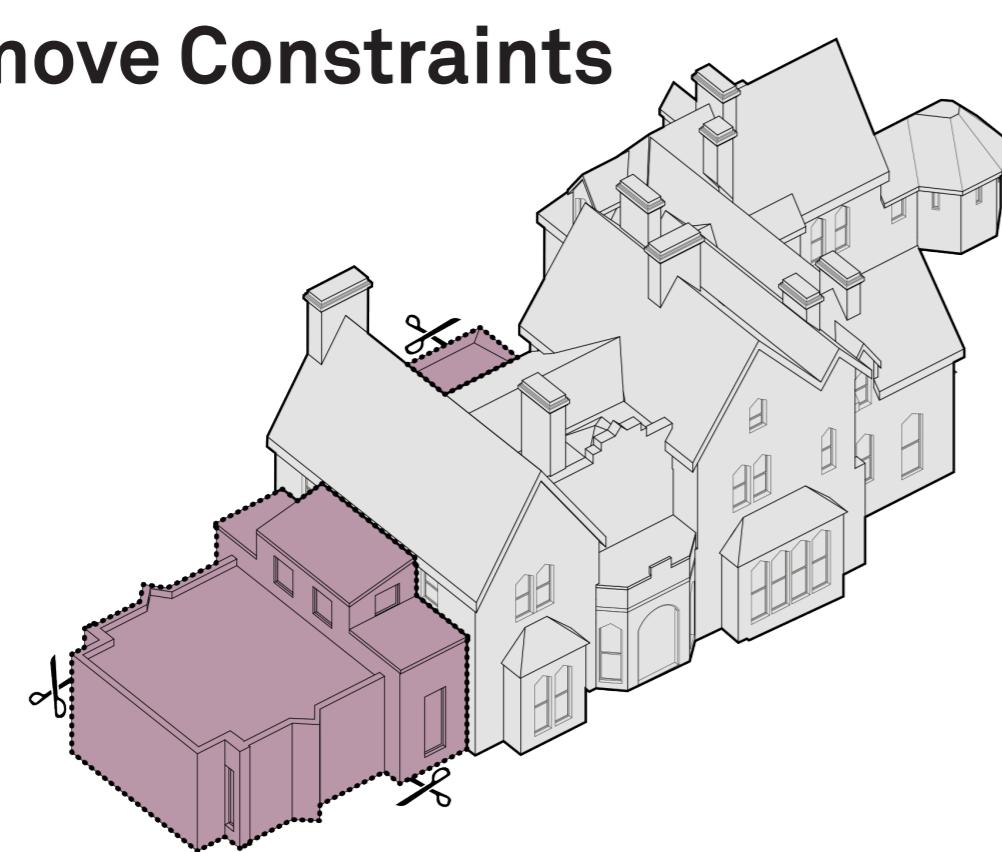


5 The Project Vision

The project will transform Whitby Hall from a tired, run-down building into a welcoming, accessible and inspiring arts and cultural centre.

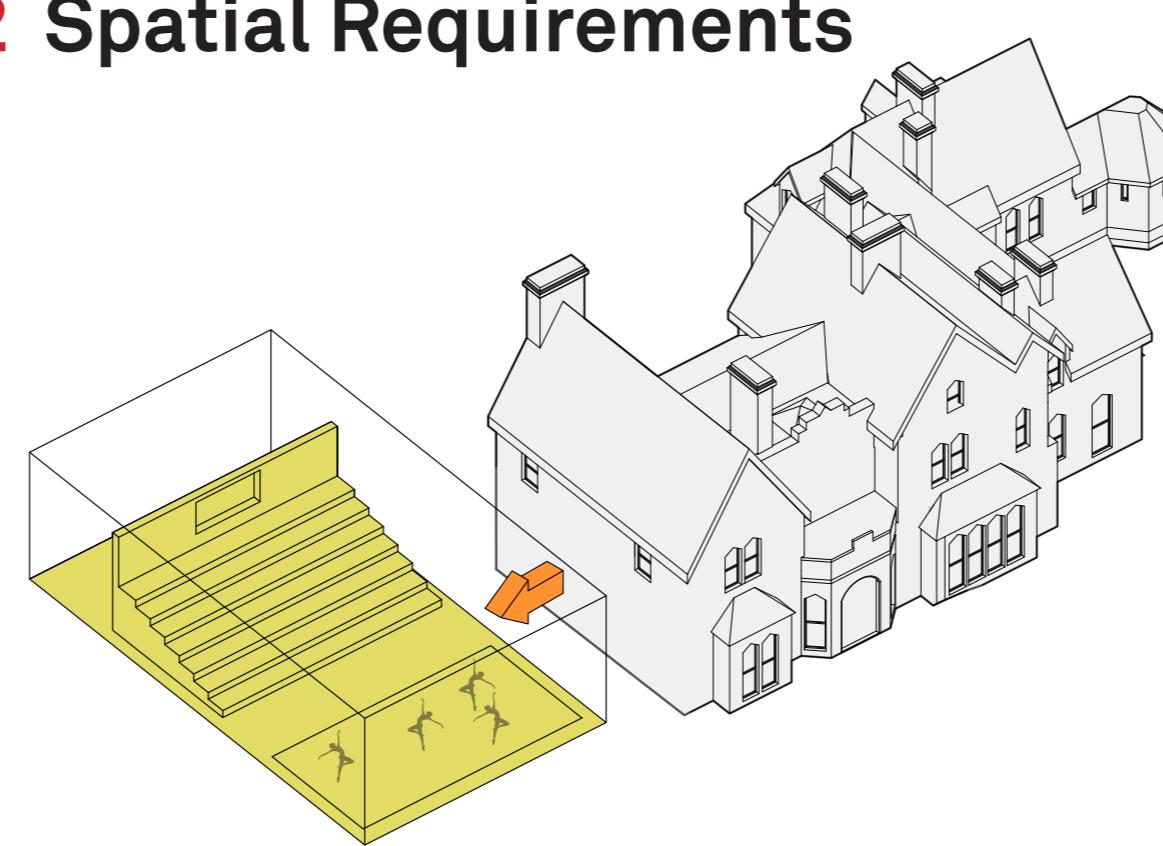
The diagrams illustrate the fundamental principles of the scheme. This includes the provision of a new main auditorium, the relocation of the community cafe into the centre of the building, improved WC provision for both visitors and park users, and a welcoming and accessible entrance.

1 Remove Constraints



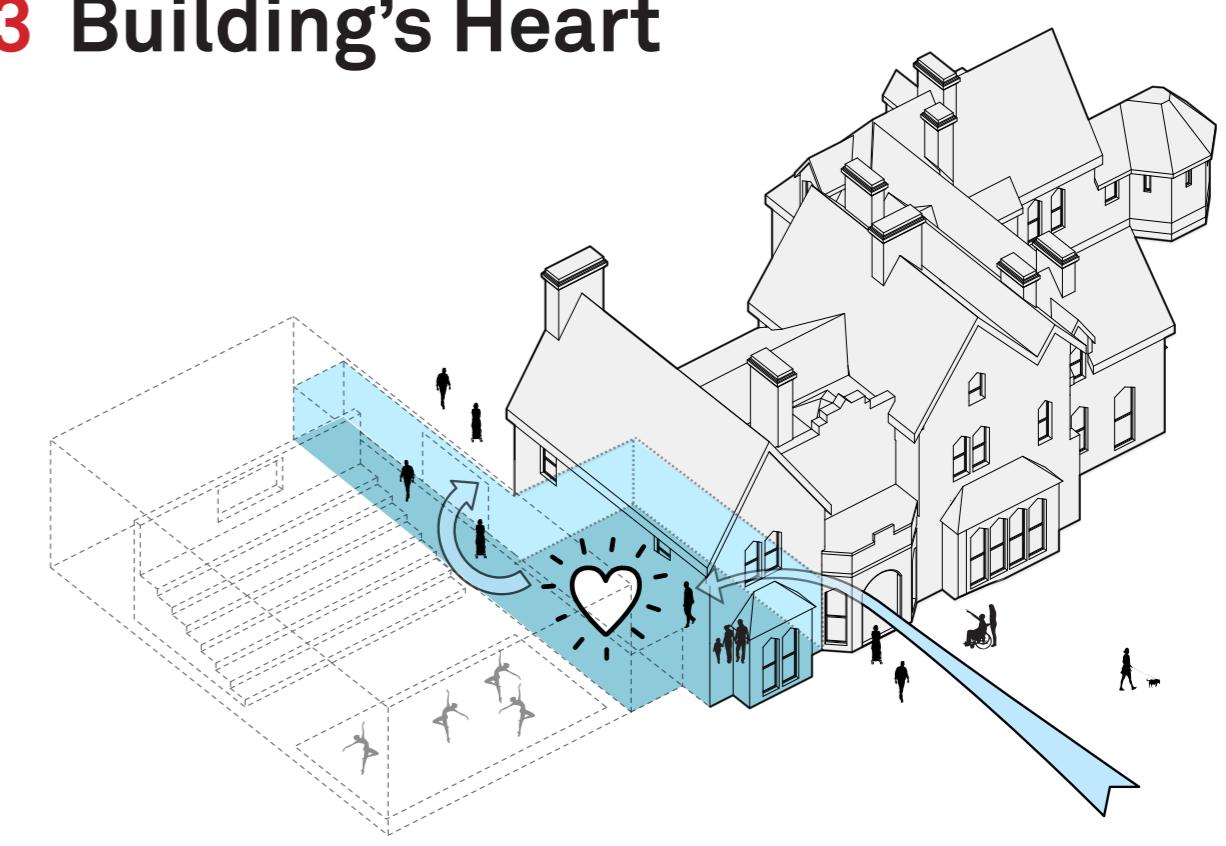
The existing building appears uninviting and doesn't indicate the interesting activities occurring inside. The scale and technical capability of the later extensions currently limit the ambition of Action Transport Theatre ; these will be removed to make way for new spaces.

2 Spatial Requirements



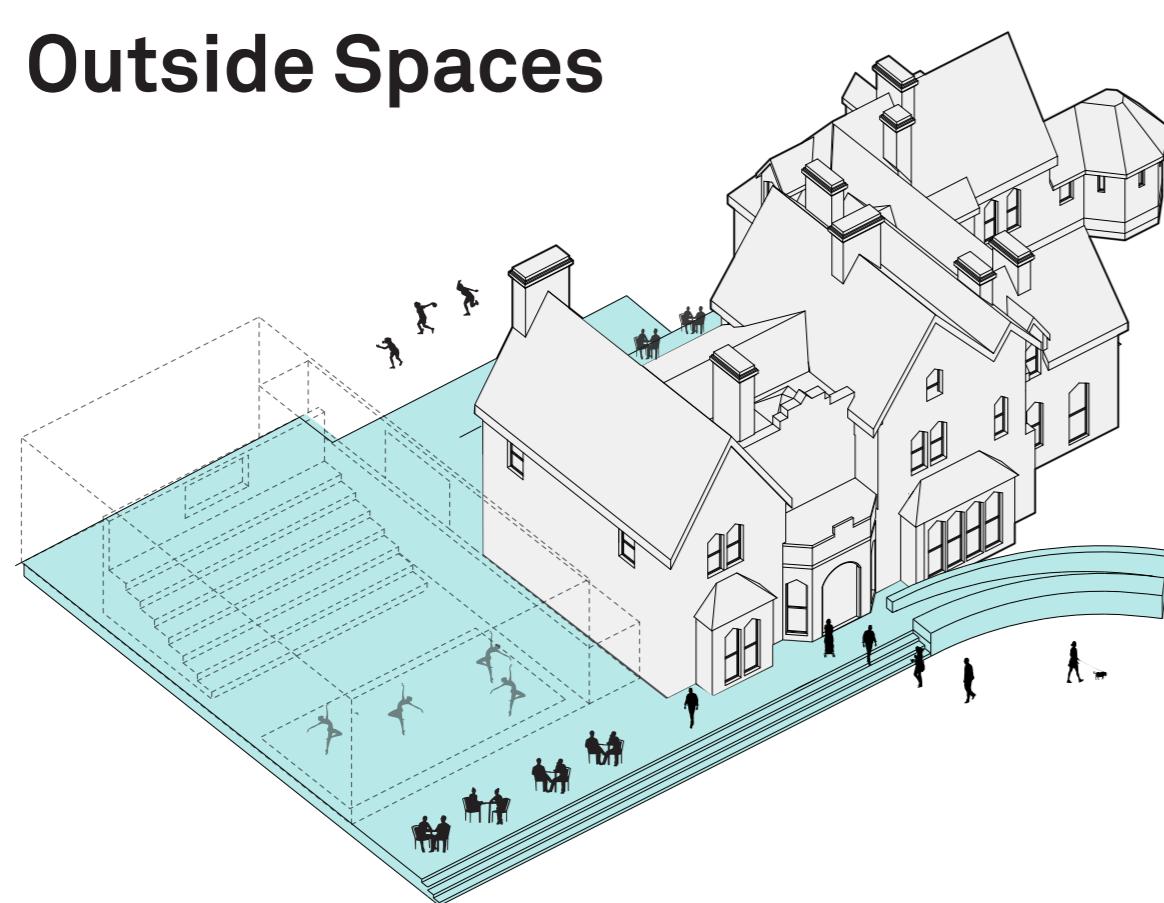
The brief calls for a flexible 145 seat theatre which dictates the volume of the new extension. The front facade is pushed back from the front of the building, acknowledging the historic hall.

3 Building's Heart



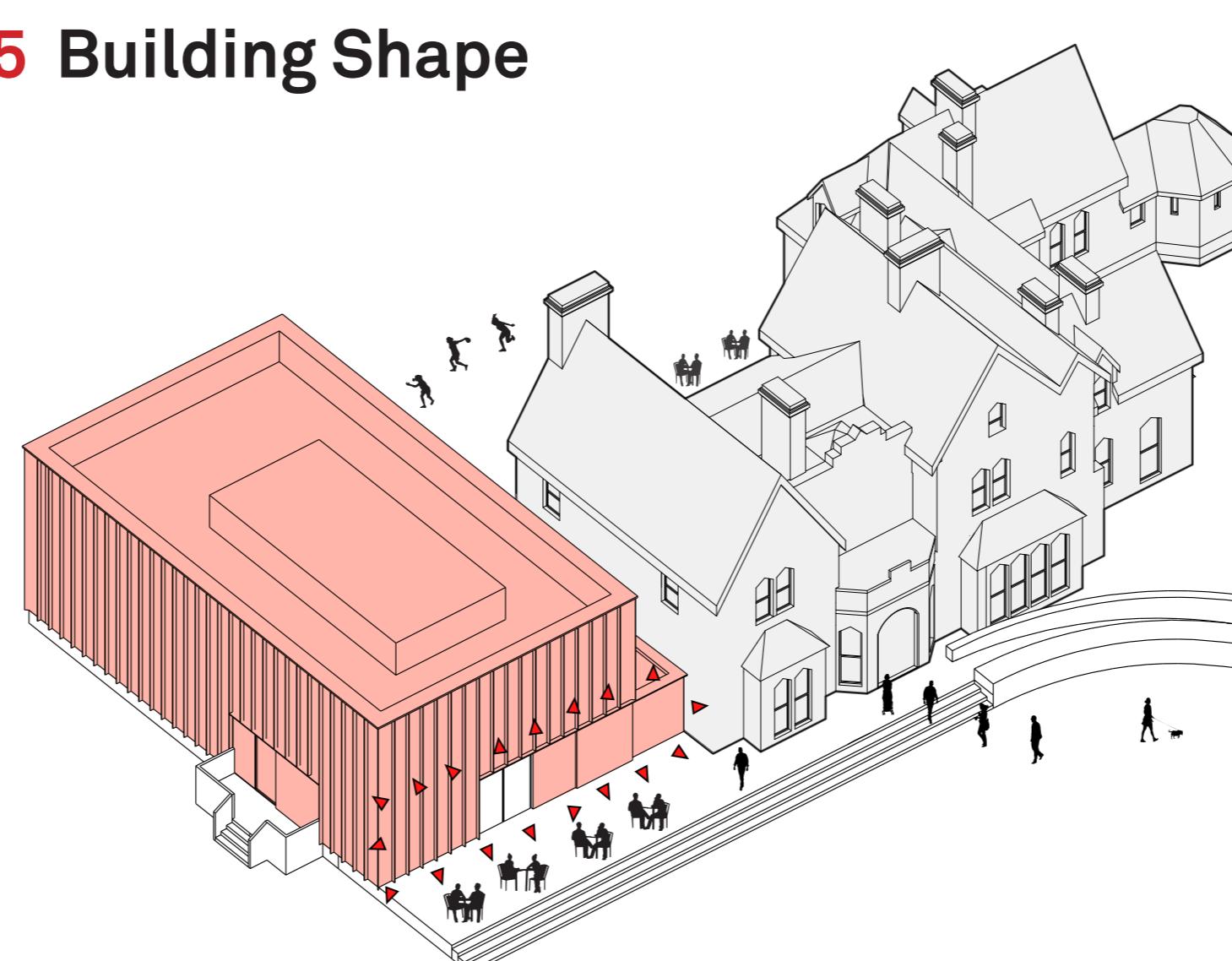
Visitors enter through the Hall's main entrance, before being led into the community cafe/theatre foyer. The cafe's relocation places it in the heart of the building, forming an energised link between the original hall and new extension.

4 Outside Spaces



The building sits on a plinth that helps tie it into the surrounding parkland. It provides an inviting arrival space and outside space for the cafe looking over the bowling greens.

5 Building Shape



The new auditorium features openings which allow activities to move in and out of the building. The exciting appearance is carefully considered to both enhance the existing building and act as a public face for Action Transport Theatre

School Engagement

Action Transport Theatre have engaged with local schools who have provided exciting thoughts and ideas for the building, helping to shape the vision for the project.

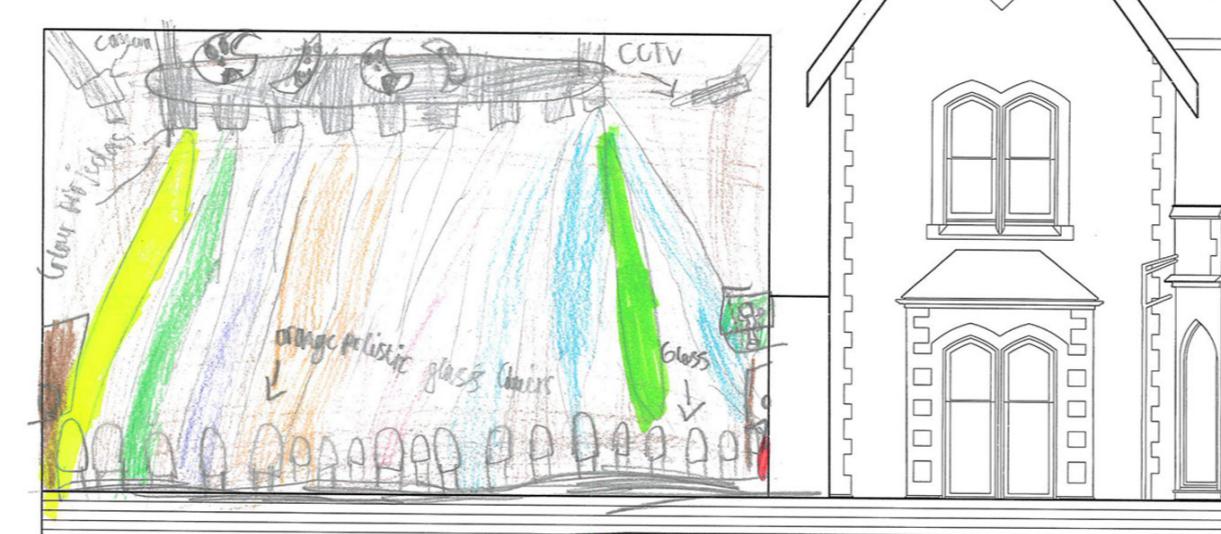
make it stand out more
and to make more people come to it.

Incredible



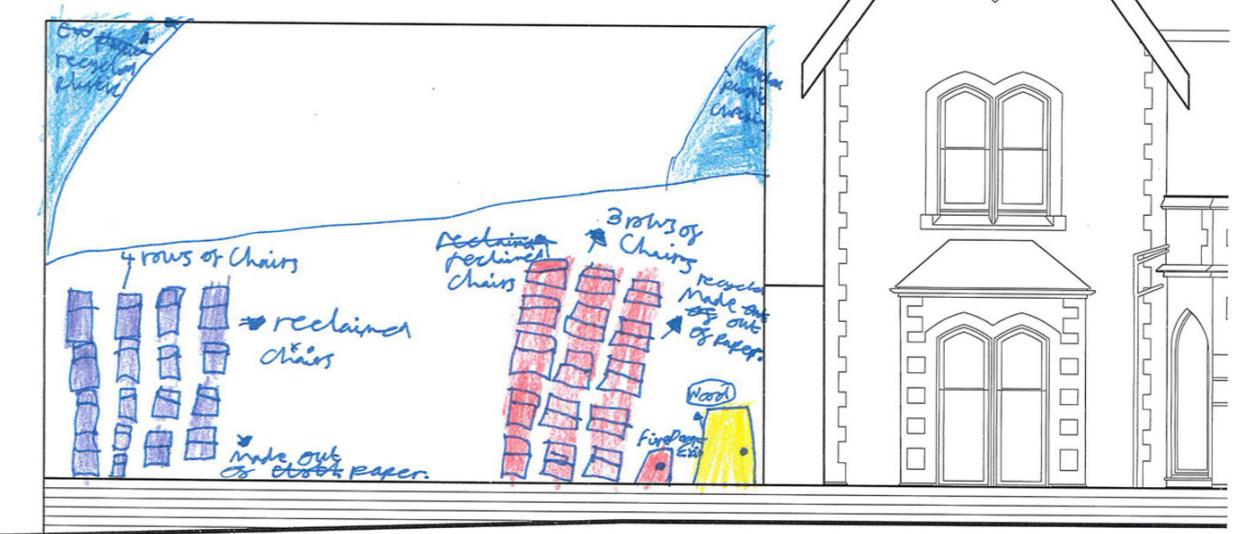
Grand it helps us notice our abilities

unique



Creative

Needs to become more modern



Here is a small selection of ideas from children at St Bernard's RC Primary School in Ellesmere Port and selected feedback from local young people who attend Whitby Hall

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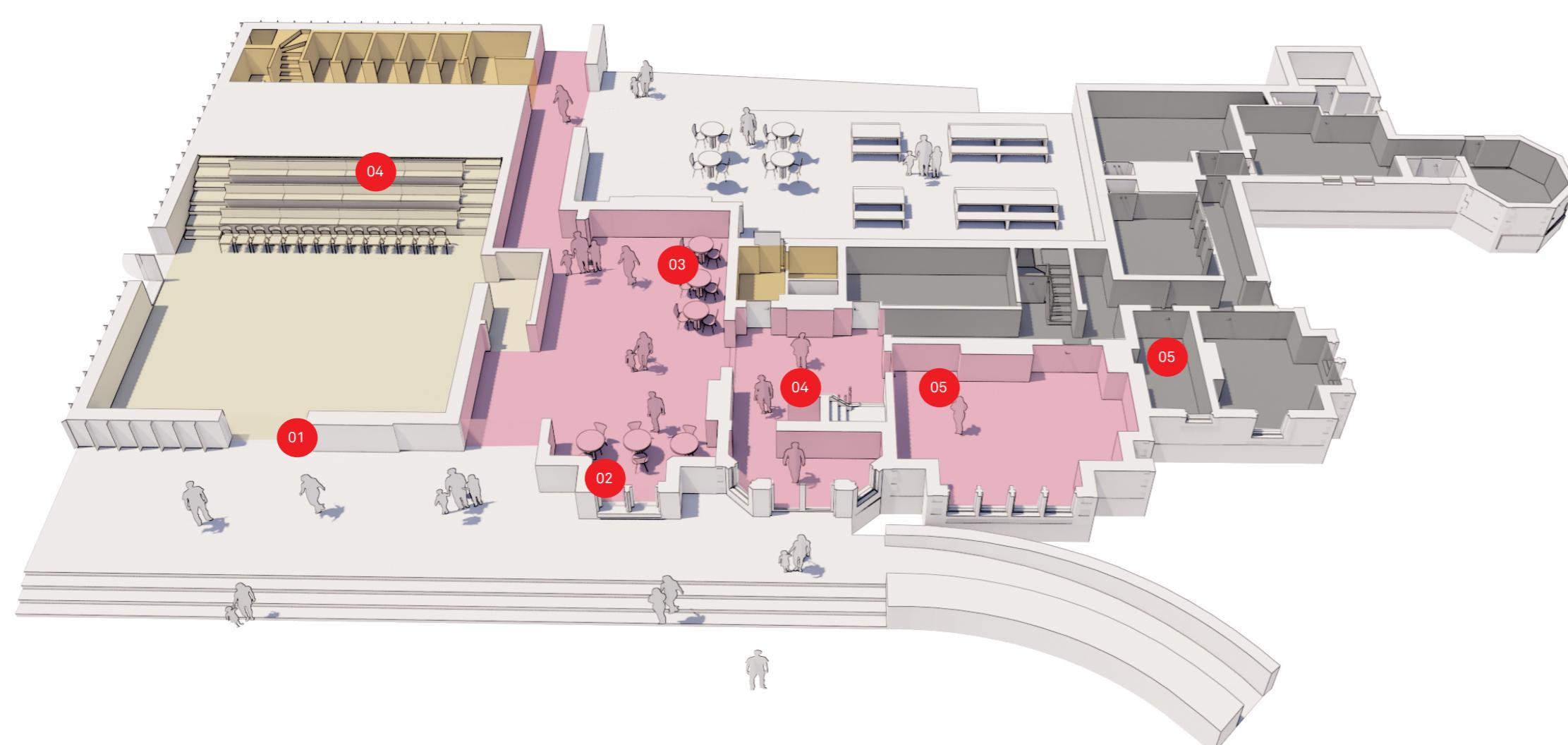
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6 The Project Proposals

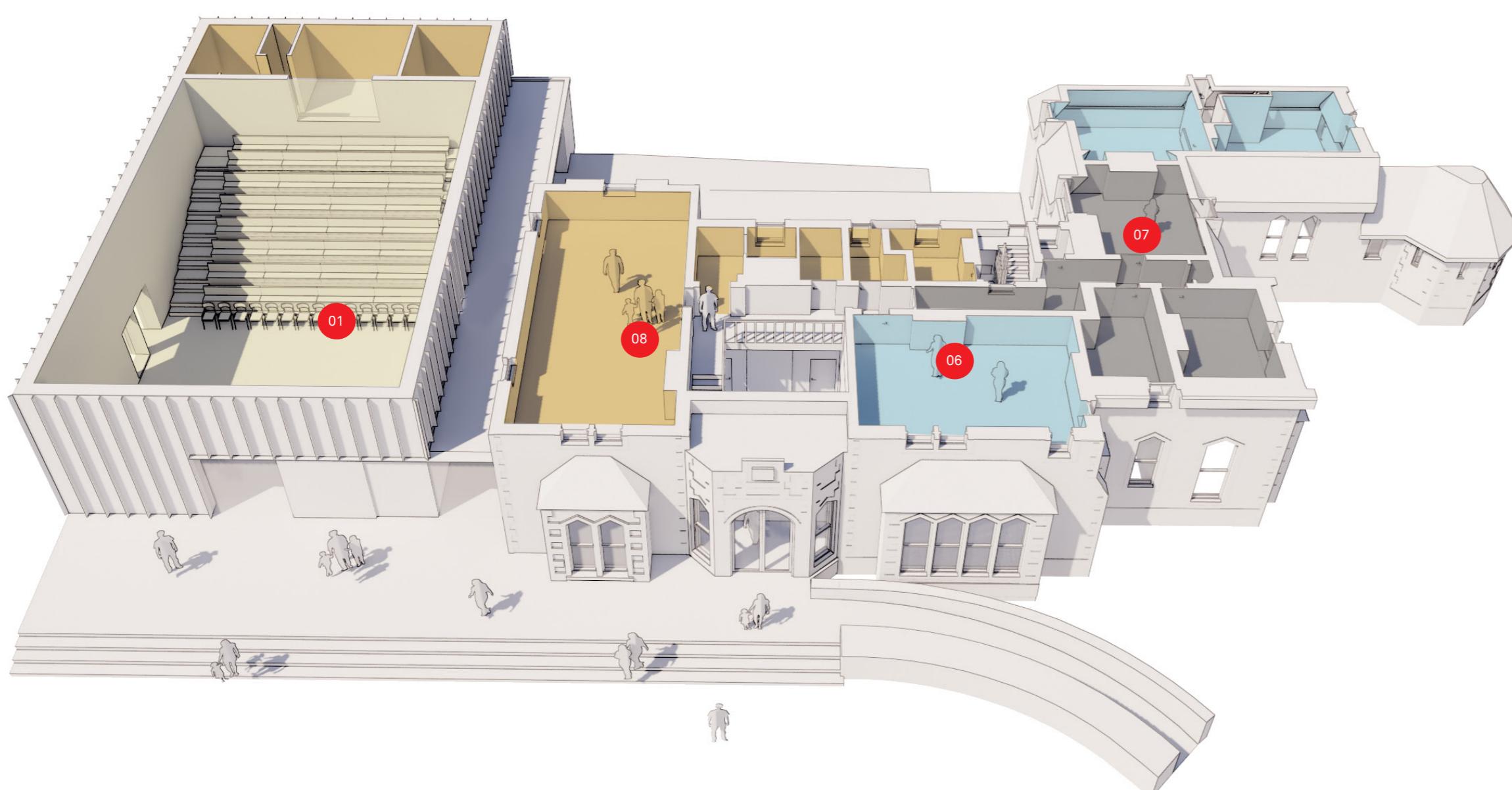
Currently, Action Transport Theatre has only limited space, used for performances, rehearsal and community work. The scheme will accommodate new studio space: and refurbishment of existing spaces.

The centrally placed cafe overlooking the park (front and rear) sits at the heart of the scheme for the local community to enjoy. Combined with a more welcoming foyer and entrance, Whitby Hall will appear more open on a daily basis and accessible to the community. An extension to the rear will accommodate improved accessible toilet facilities for all park users and visitors.



Ground Floor Arrangement

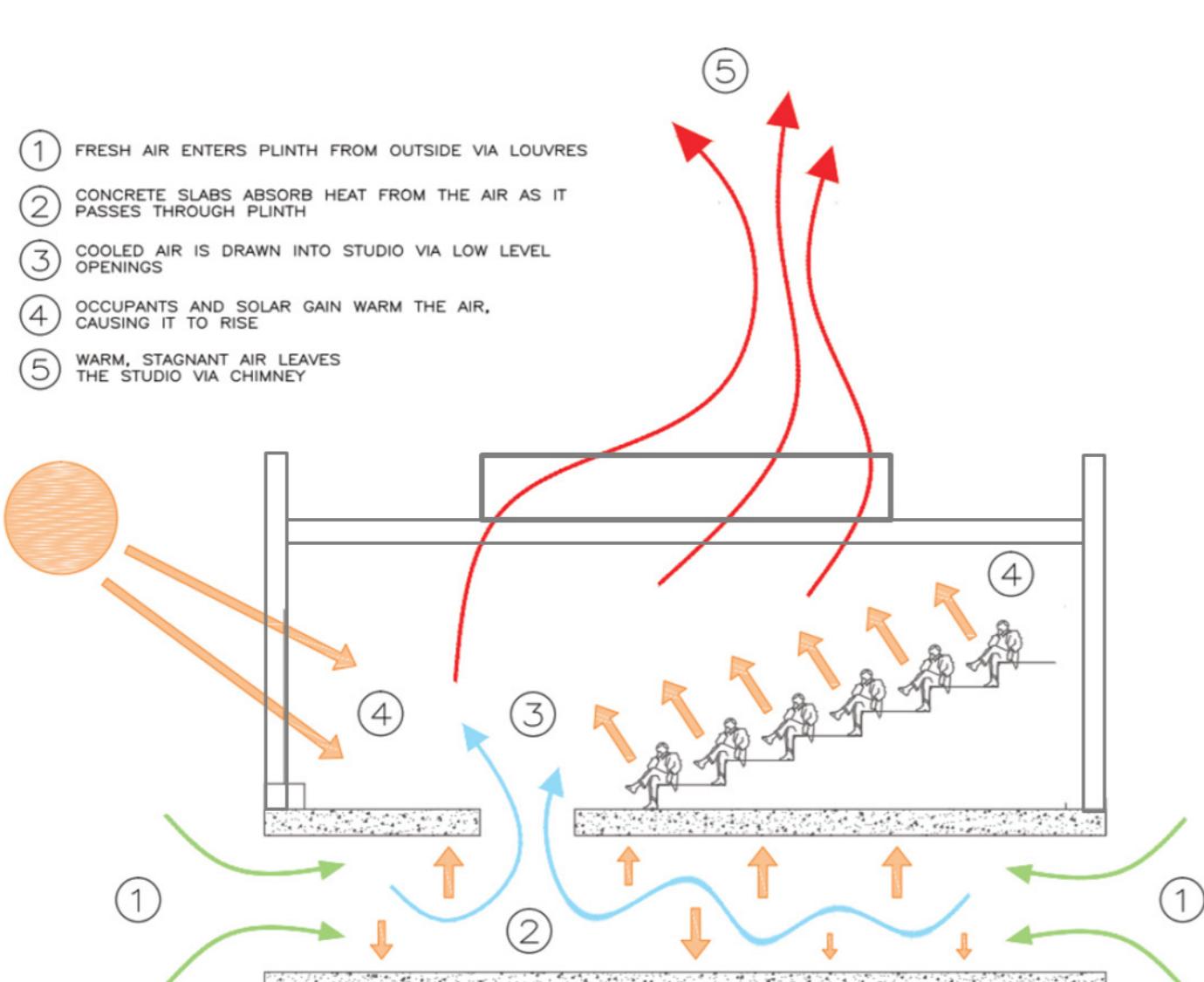
- 1 Main Auditorium** - The new performance space features a retractable seating bank allowing the room to adapt to a multitude of uses including performances, workshops, functions and events.
- 2 Cafe / Theatre Foyer** - The cafe has been relocated into the heart of the building. It will also act as the theatre foyer, during performance times. All park and building users will be able to make use of the improved facilities.
- 3 Rear Terrace** - Provides a south facing terrace overlooking the bowling greens and garden. It connects directly into the cafe for use throughout the year.
- 4 Improved Facilities** - An increase in WCs will support the increased theatre capacity as well as the other building and park users.
- 5 Improved Back-of-House** - This series of spaces will be rearranged and refurbished to better serve the performers and staff including relocation of the office space.



First Floor Arrangement

- 6 Rehearsal Space** - Refurbishment of the current office space will provide a much need rehearsal space to support productions and activities in the new auditorium.
- 7 Workshops** - A mix of spaces to serve and support the diverse programme of activities in the building.
- 8 Ancillary Support Spaces** - Refurbished rooms to provide necessary support facilities to the theatre and building.

Theatre spaces
 Support spaces
 Front-of-House
 Back-of-House
 Workshops



Environmental Strategy

Low carbon has been an important consideration of the design with features including natural ventilation and a timber structure. The new auditorium space has been designed to be naturally ventilated. The roof shape is designed so that as air passes over the top of the building, it creates low pressure which drags air through the main space from a low level inlet. Whitby Hall's unique location in the park allows for this since surrounding noise levels are so low.

As far as possible, the extension and renovation of the Hall will be undertaken using materials with low carbon content that perform effectively through their life cycle. This will ensure Whitby Hall continues to be an energy efficient building into the future with the project aiming to achieve net zero carbon.

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7 External Appearance

The aspiration is for the auditorium to compliment the existing hall as a subservient, contemporary pavilion in the park. This bold form is united with the historic Hall through a shared, accessible plinth and glazed linking element, allowing active and visual connections to be made between inside and out.



8 Summary and Next Steps

The transformation of Whitby Hall into a world class centre, specialising in high quality arts and culture for children, young people and their families, will improve levels of aspiration and general health and wellbeing by providing a new, wide-ranging and inspirational programme for all.

- The dramatic improvement of Action Transport Theatre's spaces with a new auditorium and refurbished areas will allow the company to expand their programme of activities and further engage with external and partner companies.
- The new auditorium aims to be the perfect partner to the historic Whitby Hall, preserving and enhancing its character for future generations to enjoy.
- The building will connect with the park and create iconic, contemporary spaces which will engage, broaden and inspire audiences and participants.
- The new cafe-bar will connect all aspects of the building's operation together and provide meeting spaces for all users. It will also provide valuable secondary income streams to support core and new activity.
- The centre will provide opportunities for young people who would have little or no access to artistic or cultural activities, working collaboratively to create 'world class' theatre work.
- Capital developments will create training and employment opportunities for local young people and others.
- The project will allow Action Transport Theatre to work with local, regional, national and international partners to support the development of an ambitious programme of activities to raise levels of cultural engagement and aspirations across the town and beyond.

The proposed development will cost in the region of **£2.5 million** which has been secured through funding from Cheshire West and Chester Council and Arts Council England. Over the coming weeks, the design work will be completed up to RIBA Stage 3 and the scheme will be submitted for planning.

The project is important for Ellesmere Port and the wider region, and has cross party political support. It has had backing from the Cheshire West and Chester Council, Arts Council England, Local Enterprise Partnership, Ellesmere Port Development Board and other key community stakeholders which has elevated the profile of the project locally and nationally. Action Transport Theatre continue to engage with the local community including local schools and groups who currently make use of the building.

If you would like to share your thoughts or leave any feedback about the ambitions of the project, please help show your support by **completing our feedback questionnaire** by scanning the QR code or visiting: tinyurl.com/tu9nky6

And to sign up to the ATT newsletter please visit: www.actiontransporttheatre.org

