



CULTURAL HIGH STREETS

CASE STUDY

MAY 2021



THE HYPHA STUDIOS MODEL

About Hypha Studios

Hypha Studios are a non-profit startup designed to match creative practitioners with empty spaces, regenerating high streets across the country through the formation of cultural hubs, unexpected artistic encounters, and projects to engage local communities.

About RCKa

RCKa is a pioneering practice that expands the traditional role of the architect, producing socially responsive architecture – beautifully crafted buildings that realise both social and economic value - to unlock development opportunities for clients and communities.

Our Approach

RCKa and Hypha Studios are coming together to present this creative solution for larger high street stores and department store buildings which have closed and sit empty.

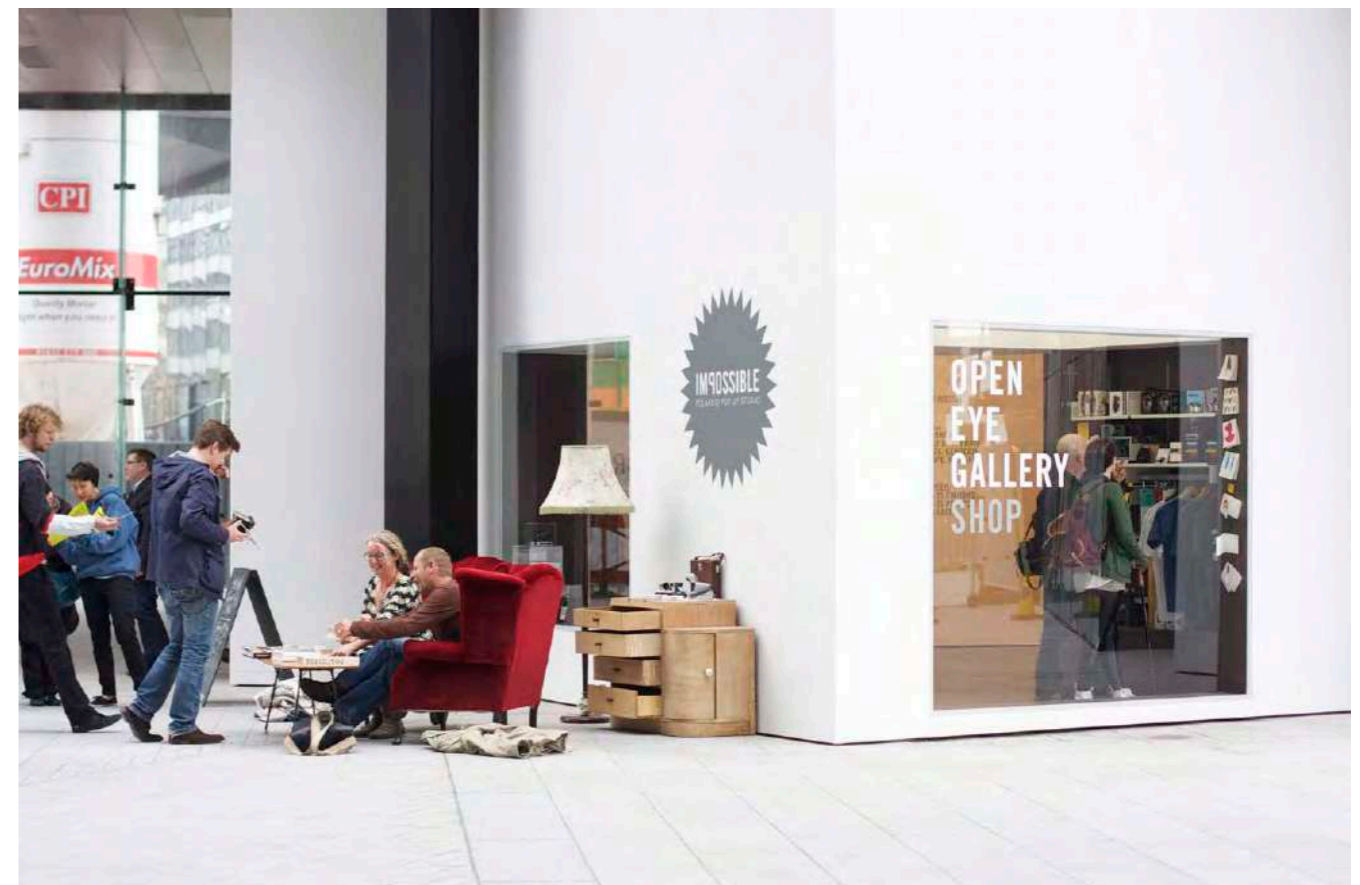
The basic business model is predicated on the strength of Hypha Studios' network and its ability to populate and programme the space with a compelling mix of tenants and operators in an environment that is permeable, public and explicitly visible.

A key strength of the business model is the combination of multiple income streams, some of which are independent of footfall. Together with operating overheads that are relatively low, this helps to mitigate risk and leaves opportunity to experiment, finesse and refine the mix over time and in line with expressed demand. Subject to securing good premises in strong locations for a term of 3-5 years, the concept does not require additional capital investment or any ongoing subsidy for staffing, operations or building maintenance. It is a self-sustaining model.

The model is well-suited to spaces in local authority ownership, where a host of socioeconomic and placemaking agendas can be advanced at low risk and no material cost to the Council, apart from the opportunity cost of foregone rent over a limited period. It would also appeal to private landlords through the mitigation of business rates on vacant premises, in the short term, and longer term uplift in value.

This Brochure

To illustrate our model, this brochure present Oxford Street as a case study for our innovative approach. An approach which can be adapted to meet the needs of communities and landlords across a diverse range of situations and locations.



CASE STUDY

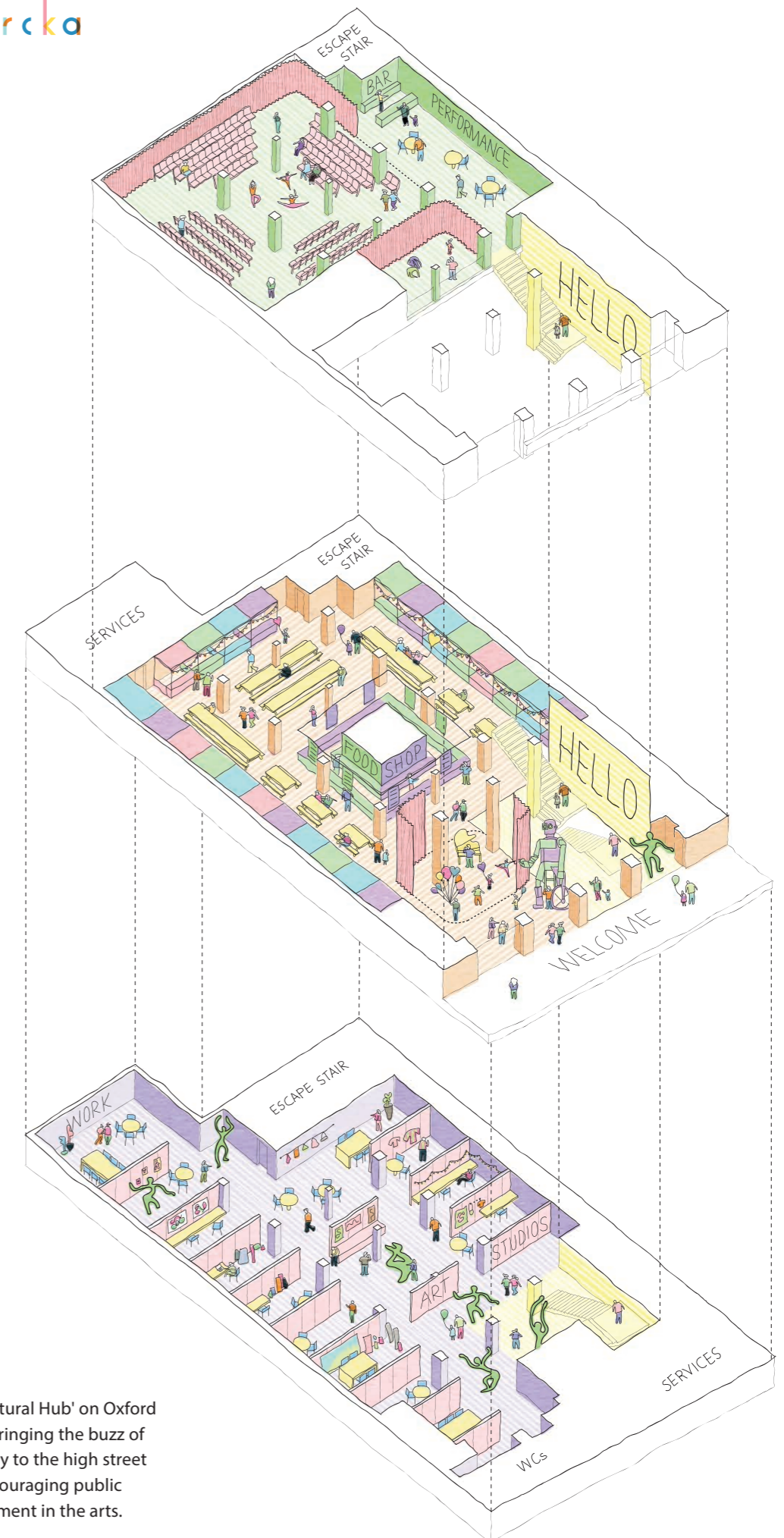
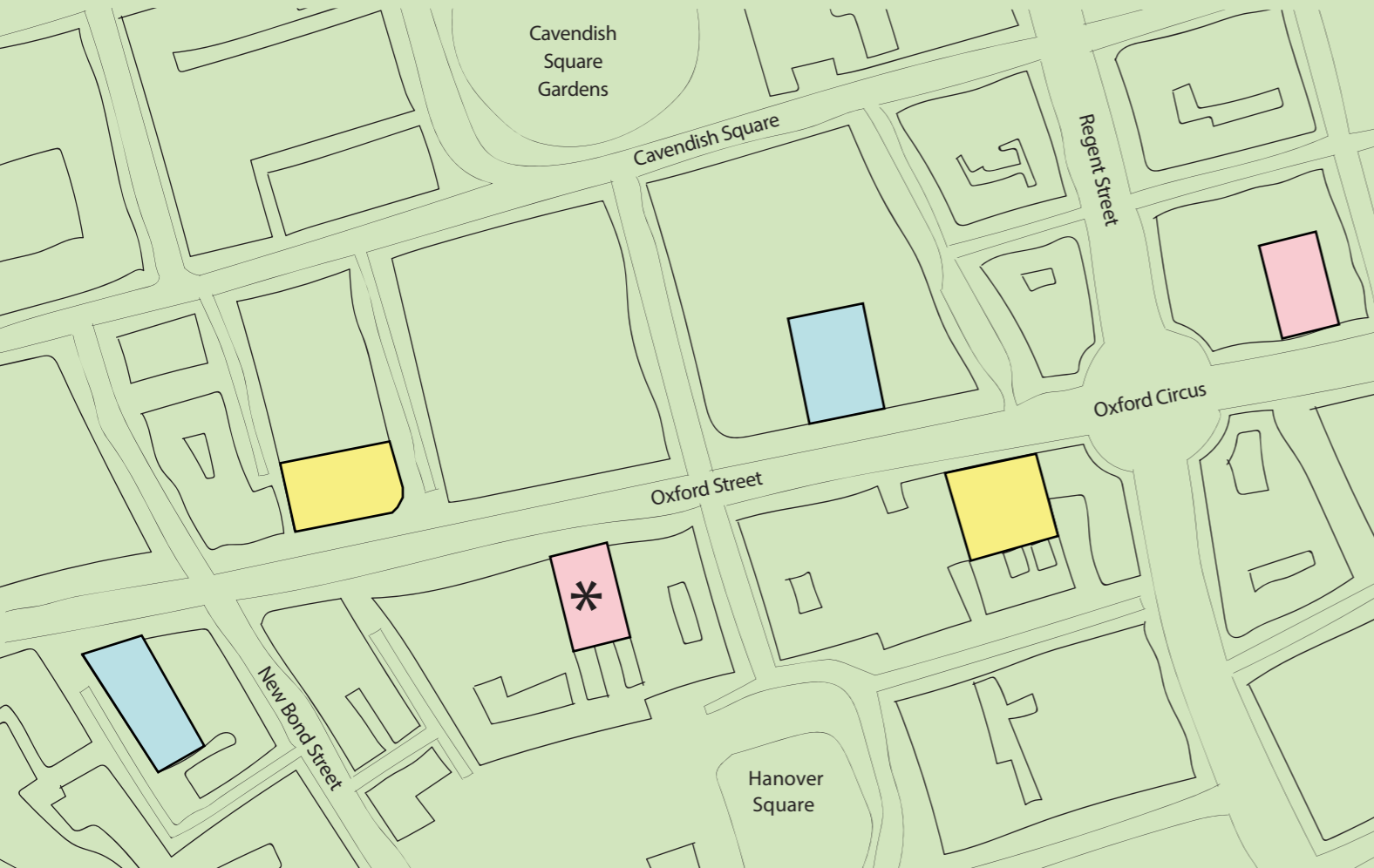
Oxford Street

Oxford Street faces many of the same challenges as high streets across the UK. The growing number of vacant units is a legacy of an increasingly obsolete single-use consumer driven experience.

In this pamphlet we've taken one building—a former River Island store—on Oxford Street as a case study to illustrate the potential and possibilities of a mixed-use leisure led high street, prioritising public engagement in the arts to produce cultural high streets of the future.

This 'Cultural Hub' approach has the potential to create department stores of the arts, offering spaces and platforms for emerging practitioners, bringing a public engagement with the breadth of arts, and creating a new destination on the high street, with associated buzz, footfall and placemaking benefits.

This is just a template, a starting point. It is adaptable to different spaces, contexts, demands and towns. We could, for example, have a string of units along one street, each supporting a different medium – music, visual arts, performance. But it's an exciting starting point, and one we hope can lead to exciting possibilities for high streets, cultural practitioners, and local communities.



* The 'Cultural Hub' on Oxford Street bringing the buzz of creativity to the high street and encouraging public engagement in the arts.

STEP 1: SIMPLIFY THE SPACE

Simplify the space to make the most of available opportunities.

Soft-Strip

Soft-strip the existing space to its bare essentials. Remove unnecessary partitions, dark corridors and awkward internal rooms - to create an open, welcoming and visually permeable space able to accommodate a variety of uses.

Retain, Reuse & Adapt

Avoid the costly replacement of existing infrastructure and services. As far as possible stick to the sustainable mantra - retain, reuse and adapt.

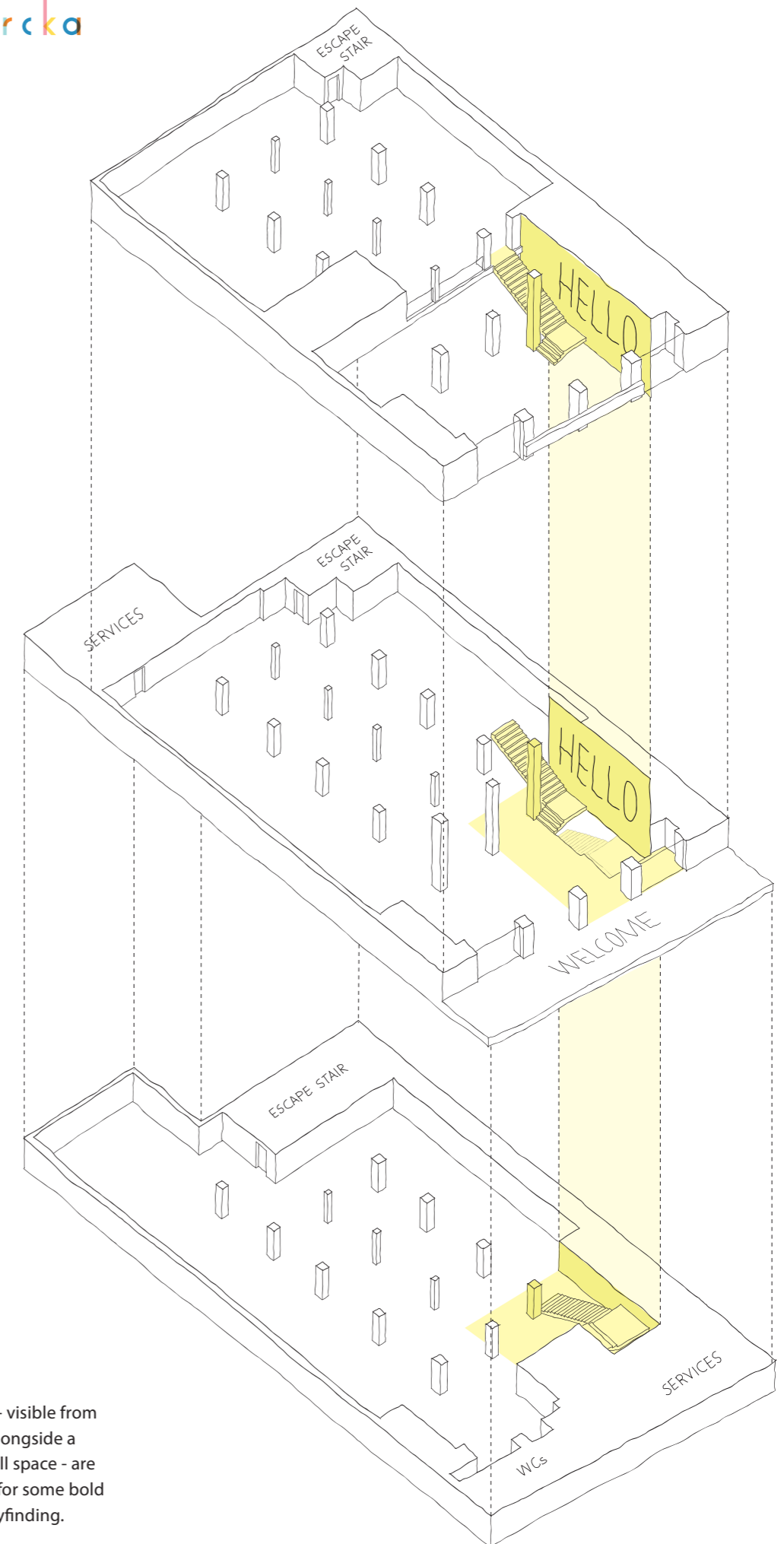
Consider user needs against the existing services provision including heating and cooling, mechanical ventilation, small power and digital infrastructure. However do consider replacing lighting, which can have a significant impact on the feel and quality of the space.

Be mindful too of costly elements of the building fabric such as the shopfront, stairs, lifts and flooring. It's far more cost effective to give old elements a fresh lick of paint as opposed to replacing.

Wayfinding

The core challenge of any high street unit or community space is to attract visitors through the door and encourage them to move freely through the space.

Consider low-cost and high-impact strategic design moves which can improve signposting, wayfinding and circulation through the space.



The open stairs - visible from the street and alongside a triple-height wall space - are an opportunity for some bold signage and wayfinding.

STEP 2: FLEXIBLE FIT-OUT

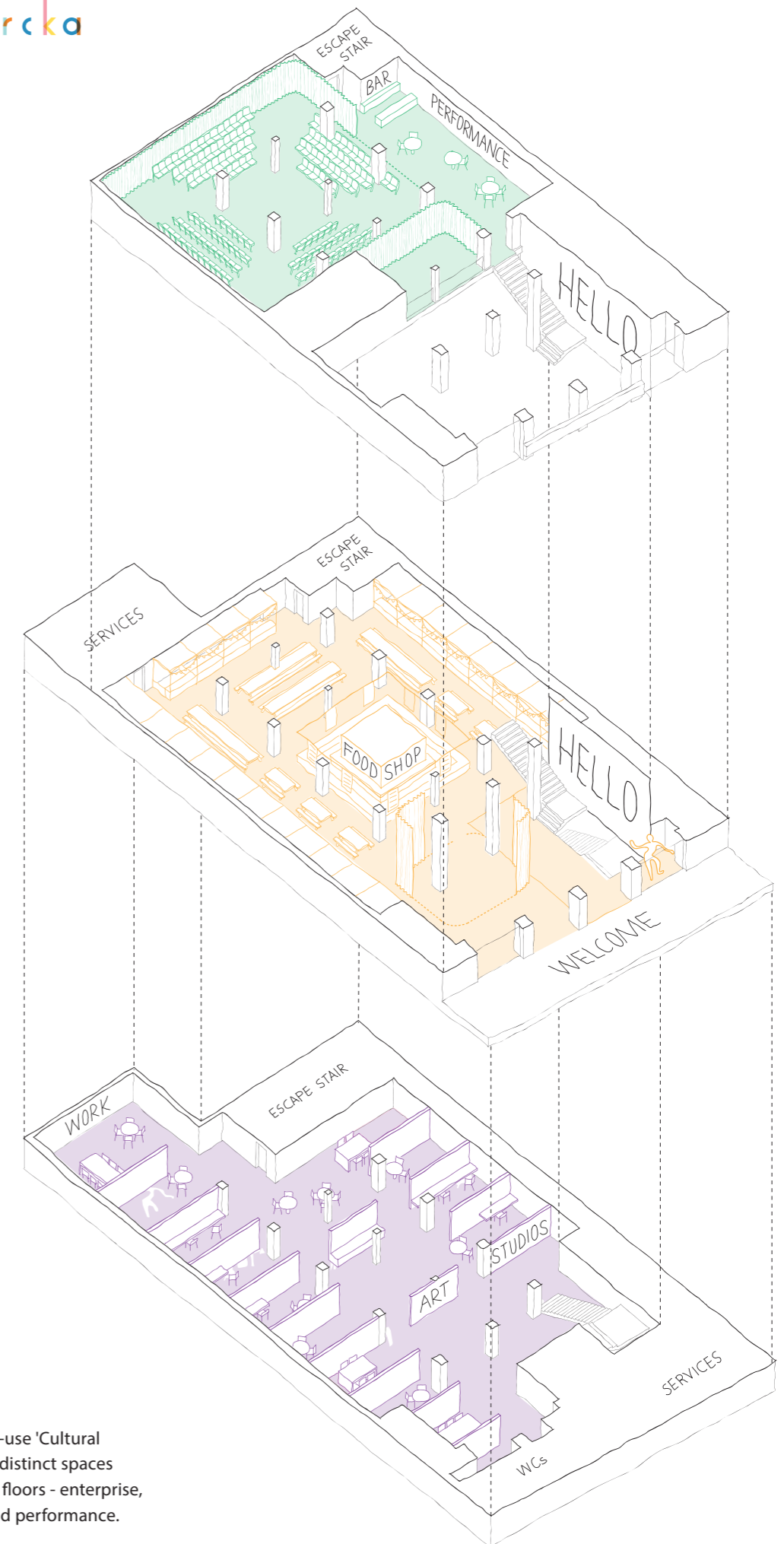
A low-cost high-impact fit-out to support a range of creative uses.

Creating Spaces of Various Scales

First, we consider the size and scale of an available space, and how suitable they are for different uses and users. Larger units can accommodate a mix of uses under one roof to create a vibrant 'Cultural Hub', while smaller more bespoke spaces may be better suited to a specific user group or artistic output. For the latter, we would consider how multiple smaller units along the high street can provide a diverse offer, creating a "string of pearls" effect whereby a series of spaces with cultural offer can support the length of a high street, bringing unexpected encounters along its length, where one unit may offer space for performances and video arts, one for studios spaces, and another for music. These could be adapted to suit local cultural excellence, partnering with existing organisations and networks.

Material Palette

Fit-out works would consist of low-cost versatile materials which can be easily assembled, dismantled and arranged. Materials with more than one use would be proposed. For example, wall panels which double as space dividers and acoustic buffers, inexpensive polycarbonate panels to transfer daylight to internal spaces, or dividing curtains that can be easily repositioned for changes of use. Eliminating 'wet trades' such as block-laying and plastering will save money, while 'loose elements' including furniture and signage are an opportunity to be creative and eye-catching. With climate breakdown in mind, where possible we would look to use re-usable and recycled materials, or those which have a latter use in the construction cycle elsewhere, contributing to a circular economy of materials and reducing our carbon footprint.



An active mixed-use 'Cultural Hub' with three distinct spaces across the three floors - enterprise, consumables and performance.

STEP 3: MOVING-IN

A variety of both public and private spaces provide a diverse offer to suite a range of creative and public needs.

Ground Floor - Consumables

A flexible 'busking' space, located immediately in the entrance area and visible from the street, acts as a lively 'village square' for the cultural hub, hosting a range of programmed events put on by the building's occupants. This could include musical performances or poetry slams, or be used as a space for exhibiting artworks or sculpture in pop-up exhibitions.

An open market / food hall across the rest of the ground floor accommodates 30-32 retailer stalls alongside open seating for approximately 110 covers. Stalls range in size from a basic 3 sqm sole-trader unit to a more sophisticated and serviced 5 sqm food and beverage kitchen. The food stalls could be let on a longer term basis, while there is potential for some of the smaller retailer stalls to be used for shorter windows of occupancy to reflect calendar events such as Frieze art fair week or LGBTQ month.

First Floor - Performance

A 150 seat performance space, set around a central stage, can be rearranged and orientated to accommodate all manner of shows and events.

A more intimate 18 seat studio space visible from the ground floor, can be used for smaller shows and experimentation - helping to animate the space and draw the public deeper into the building. Connecting both areas is a food, beverage and meeting zone.

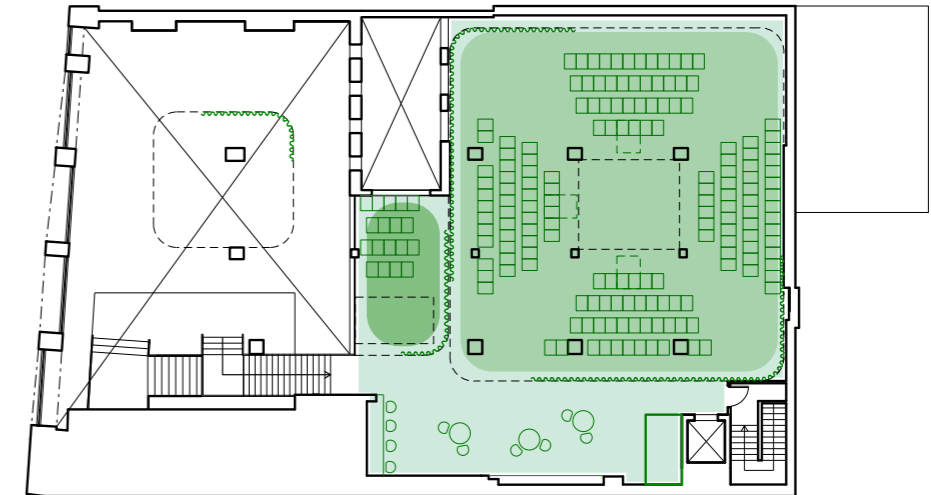
Lower Ground Floor - Enterprise

12-14 studio spaces are arranged around a central breakout and shared working space. This welcoming arrangement encourages visitors to freely explore the space and supports creative collaboration between occupants.

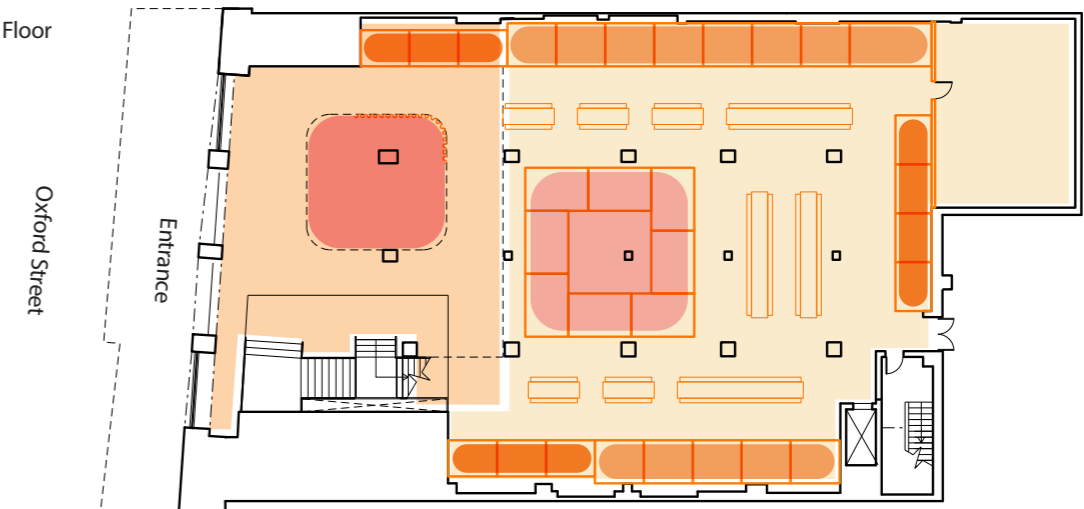
A range of studio sizes can accommodate different creative disciplines - with some studios suitable for more public-facing users and others providing a quieter more private offer.

In the spirit of the "department store of culture" idea, it would be welcome for the public to descend to visit this space where making spaces can sit alongside displace booths.

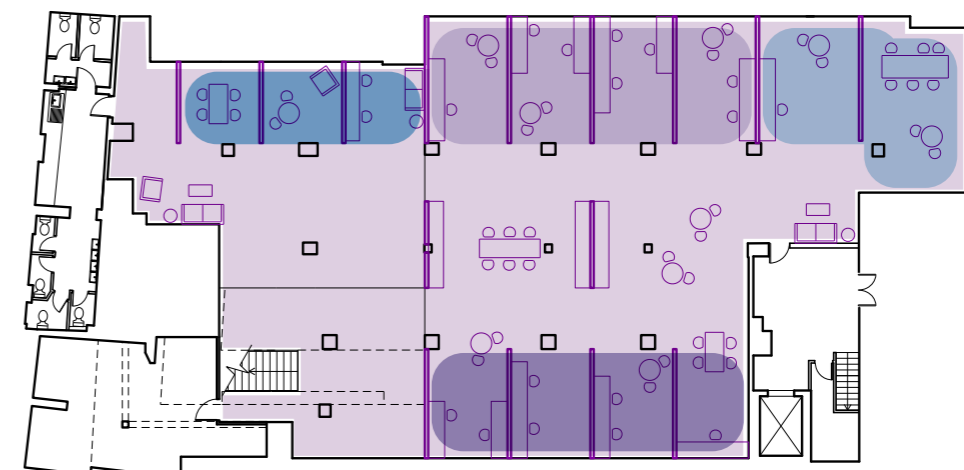
First Floor



Ground Floor



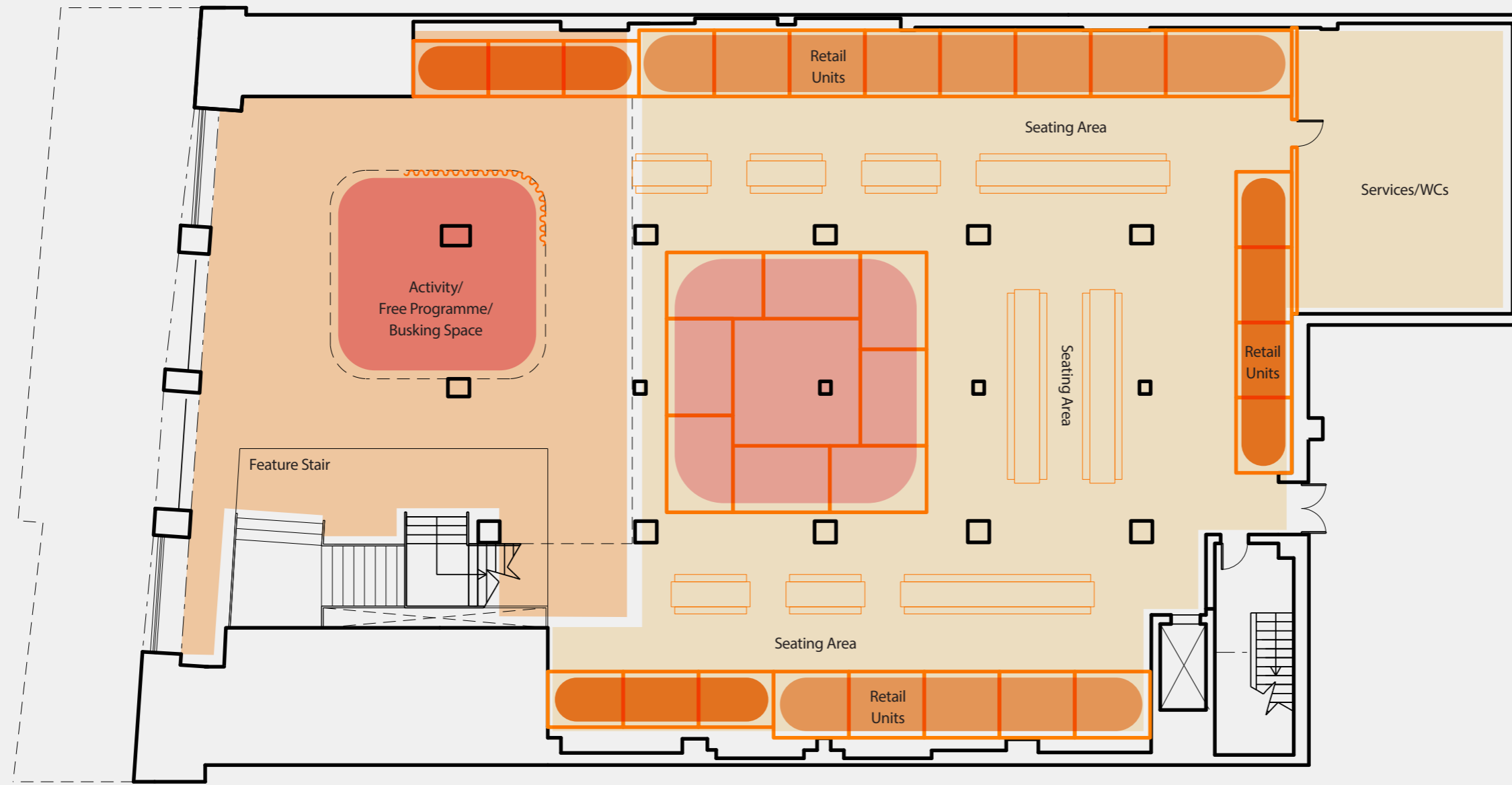
Lower Ground Floor



GROUND FLOOR - CONSUMABLES

Key

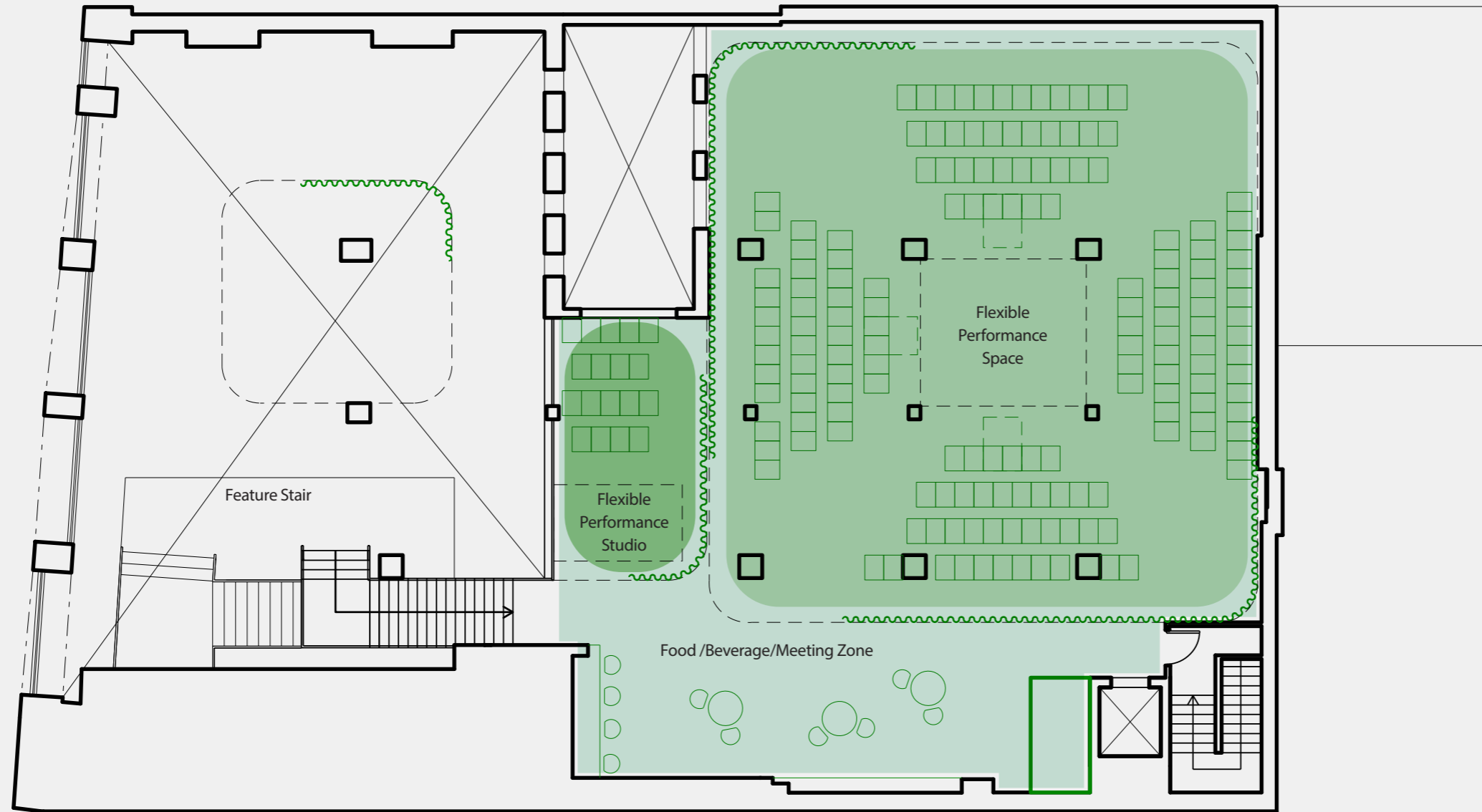
- Entrance Floor Area: 170 sqm
- Remaining Floor Area: 400 sqm
- Flexible Busking Space: 35 sqm
- Large Retail Units: 5 sqm
- Medium Retail Units: 4 sqm
- Small Retail Units: 3 sqm



FIRST FLOOR - PERFORMANCE

Key

- Total Floor Area: 315 sqm
- Large Performance Space: 230 sqm
- Small Performance Space: 30 sqm



LOWER GROUND FLOOR - ENTERPRISE

Key

- Total Floor Area: 515 sqm
- 12 sqm Studio Spaces
- 19 sqm Studio Spaces
- 16 sqm Studio Spaces
- Larger Studios as noted

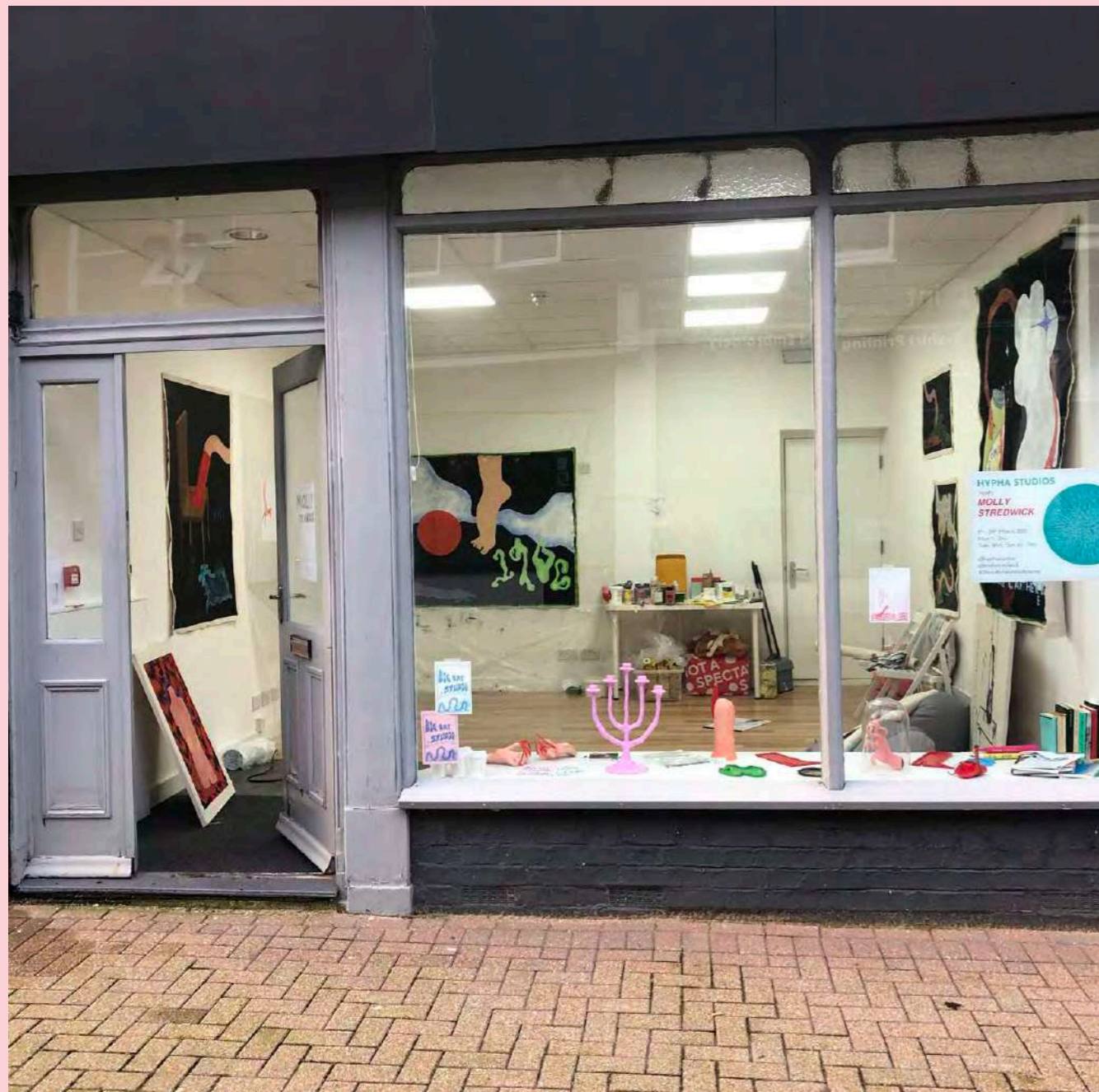


HYPHA CASE STUDIES

Molly Stredwick

Molly Stredwick was matched with an empty retail unit in Eastbourne. She was selected by Joe Hill, Director of the Towner Gallery and she used the space to create large paintings and sell work. Her practice is filled with symbolism about her life and experiences of navigating the world as a woman.

In the studio Molly created an exhibition of the works that she created "What's the Opposite of Floating?" in the space which she presented to the public and gave an artist talk about. Hypha also matched her with a contemporary art curator that gave her a one to one career development session to advance her career in the art world.



Rosa-Johan Uddoh

Rosa-Johan Uddoh is an interdisciplinary artist working towards radical self-love, inspired by black feminist practice and writing. She was matched with an empty unit in Islington by Catherine Wood, International Performance Curator from the Tate Modern. Through her performances, writing and multimedia installation, Rosa explores an infatuation with places, objects or celebrities in British popular culture, and their effects on self-formation. She will be using the site to prepare for her upcoming solo show 'Practice Makes Perfect' to take place at Focal Point Gallery in Southend on Sea, and gave a sneak preview of her upcoming solo show.



Clare Packham

Clare Packham is a performance artist, director and writer, specialising in experimental postdramatic theatre and new musical theatre. She was selected by Eddie Peake and she was matched with a vacant travel agent in the town centre of Horsham. She has lived in the area since she was born and has directed numerous theatrical performances in the town.

After discovering her late Grandfather had written down all his dreams, she has been interested in finding correlations in our dream worlds. She will engage the public by inviting them to share their dreams with her, which will be used to create an audio experience, or 'dream walk' of Horsham town centre.



RCKA CASE STUDIES

The Granville Workspace & Community Hub, Brent

The Granville is an ambitious example of community-led regeneration. Operated by the South Kilburn Trust, funded by the GLA, and housed in a historic Edwardian building owned by Brent Council - The Granville provides affordable workspace to local entrepreneurs, offers space for events and training, and incorporates existing uses including a children's centre and community kitchen.

The project demonstrates what happens when different parts of the community come together - to save a much-loved building and bring it back into full use, while developing local capacity, skills and know-how for the future.



Clitterhouse Farm, Barnet

RCKa have been working with local people in Barnet to develop proposals for an existing community farm, raising awareness of the services it provides and helping to create a vision for its future.

Together with Clitterhouse Farm, we have successfully secured capital funding through the GLA's Good Growth Fund along with support from developer Argent, who is delivering the Brent Cross regeneration project nearby.



Open Eye Gallery, Liverpool

RCKa was commissioned to design a new home for the Open Eye Gallery on Liverpool's historic dockfront which had outgrown its former home in the heart of the city

This presented a unique opportunity for the gallery to become the key cultural destination within the Mann Island development, with increased exposure and visibility bringing photographic arts to a wider audience.



The Nourish Community & Food Hub, Hammersmith & Fulham

RCKa has been commissioned by Hammersmith & Fulham Council to work with the local community to design a new mixed-use workspace and community food hub within the Edward Woods Estate. The Nourish Hub will replace a vacant post-office to provide new community facilities where learning about healthy eating and cooking food – as a common, social and community activity – can connect diverse cultures, teach meaningful skills and bring people together.

The project is funded by the GLA's Good Growth Fund.





CONTACT US TO FIND OUT MORE

Will Jennings, Hypha Studios
wj@hyphastudios.com

Camilla Cole, Hypha Studios
cc@hyphastudios.com

Anthony Staples, RCKa
anthony@rcka.co.uk

