WHO OWNS THE CITY

A RESPONSE TO PRIVATISED PUBLIC SPACE

Keywords / *public space, POPS, privately owned public space, gentrification, ownership, commons, Thatcherism*

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The Estate, L.S. Lowry 1887-1976

The changing nature of public space

Throughout history the notion of ‘public space’ has always been evolving, although it is still often misunderstood as being constant.

Avermaete, T. et al.
Architectural Positions: Architecture, Modernity and the Public Sphere
(2009)

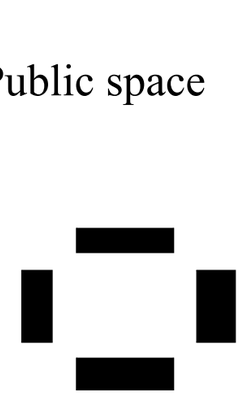
Public space / ***Privately owned public space*** \ Privatised space

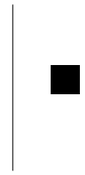
Spaces which are publicly accessible but are provided and maintained by private developers, offices or residential building owners. These spaces often have restrictions regarding when or how to use them, the possibility to take photographs or even protest.

Public space

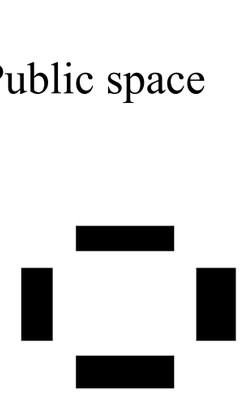
Privately owned public space

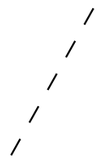
Privatised space





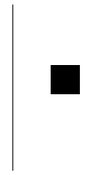
Public space





Privately owned public space

Privatised space



Grey area

Therefore, defining public space is difficult. Because a lot of public spaces are not even truly public or never have been. Actually many public spaces are regulated by the government or private investors in order to move the responsibility of maintenance, or for example to prevent criminality.

Minton, A.
The Privatisation of Public Space
(2006)

Ownership

An inevitable part of public space: especially the tension it can create between who ‘owns’ the space legally, and the ‘sense of ownership’ which is to be created for the public.

Greater London Authority
Expanding London’s Public Realm: Design Guide. (2020)

Men vote to ostracize a fellow citizen in the Athenian Agora, colour lithograph, H.M. Herbert, 1885-1950

Don Mitchell related public space to the **Greek agora** and showed the importance of public space within democratic cities. The agora or marketplace was the heart of the *polis* and had **a social, political and commercial character.** It was described here as a **place of gathering, socializing, trade and politics: a representation of democracy.**

Mitchell, D.
The End of Public Space? People's Park, Definitions of the Public, and Democracy (1995)

‘Commons’
In England, from the 5th to 15th century kings and lords controlled all land in exchange for services, while peasants had rights to live on it and use it: this idea was called ‘the commons’.

99% Invisible
Katie Mingle’s Right to Roam
(2021)

Warning sign referencing right to roam on land, Hugh Venables

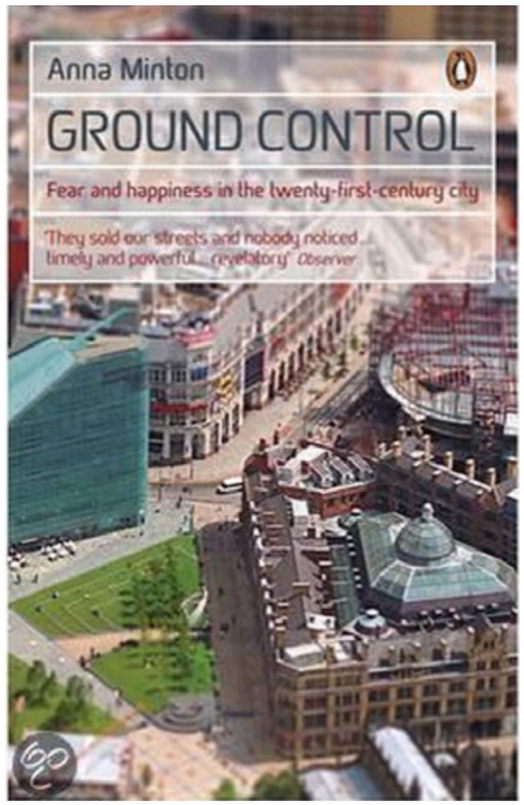
But one thing is to roam,
another is to **own**...

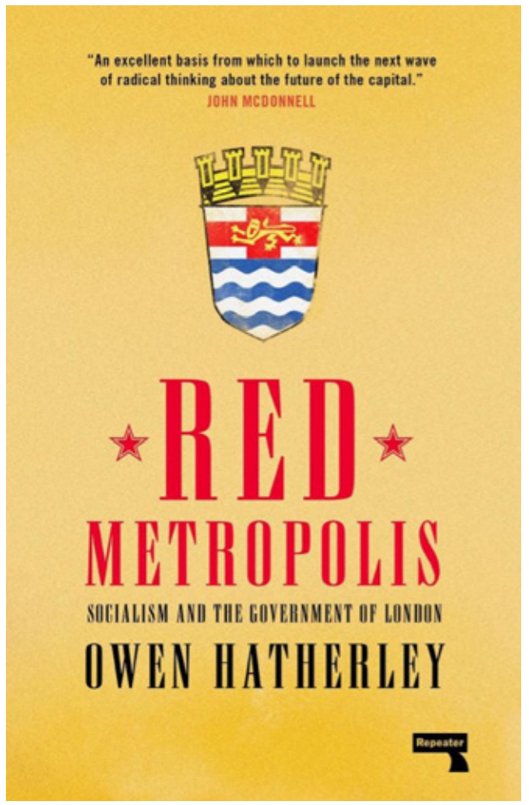
Warning sign referencing right to roam on land, Hugh Venables

And while the agora in Ancient Greek times initially seemed to have a democratic character, inclusion has always been a problem: women, slaves and foreigners were at that time not even allowed to participate in the political activities in these public spaces.

Mitchell, D.
The End of Public Space? People's Park, Definitions of the Public, and Democracy (1995)

Apparently *ownership*, the *democratic* character of public space and *accessibility* for all are important aspects of these spaces, but this is not always as black and white as we think.





Understanding the **social, political and economical** layers of influences

"Our Bedrooms Were Turned Into Offices": How the Olympics Gentrified a Cultural Hub in London.

“Our Bedrooms Were Turned Into Offices”: How the Olympics Gentrified a Cultural Hub in London.

Pancras Square by Townshend Landscape Architects, London

Understanding the changing nature of public space and layers of influence

Political

Social

Economical

Architecture

The aim of this research is to discuss the complexity of the grey area between privately owned public space and public space, not necessarily to reflect on morality. The nature of public space shifts, and it is important to know why these changes occur and if these changes are still relevant in current times.

To what extend could architecture contribute to a more symbiotic relationship - and mediate - between the public and private interests, as a response to privatisation of public spaces in the City of London?

- */ What is the nature of public space and how is it different from privately owned public space?*
- */ How did the nature of public space change through history and what layers of influence caused these changes?*
- */ Which elements define public space?*
- */ Which elements define privately owned 'public' space?*
- */ If architecture can mediate: is there one architecture, or are there many minor forms of architectural practice that make the (im)balance between private and public visible? What are the characteristics and through which mechanisms do these architectural practices challenge and overturn these (un)balanced, (un)equal relations?*

The Great Fire of London 1666,
Jan Griffier (1652 - 1718), Museum of London

The Blitz (1940), Encyclopædia Britannica

The Big Bang: the introduction of electronic trading (1986), Getty Images

"...the architecture of extreme capitalism, which produces a divided landscape of privately owned, disconnected, high security, gated enclaves side by side with enclaves of poverty which remain untouched by the wealth around them. The stark segregation and highly visible differences create a climate of fear and growing mistrust between people, which together with the undemocratic nature of these new private places, erodes civil society."

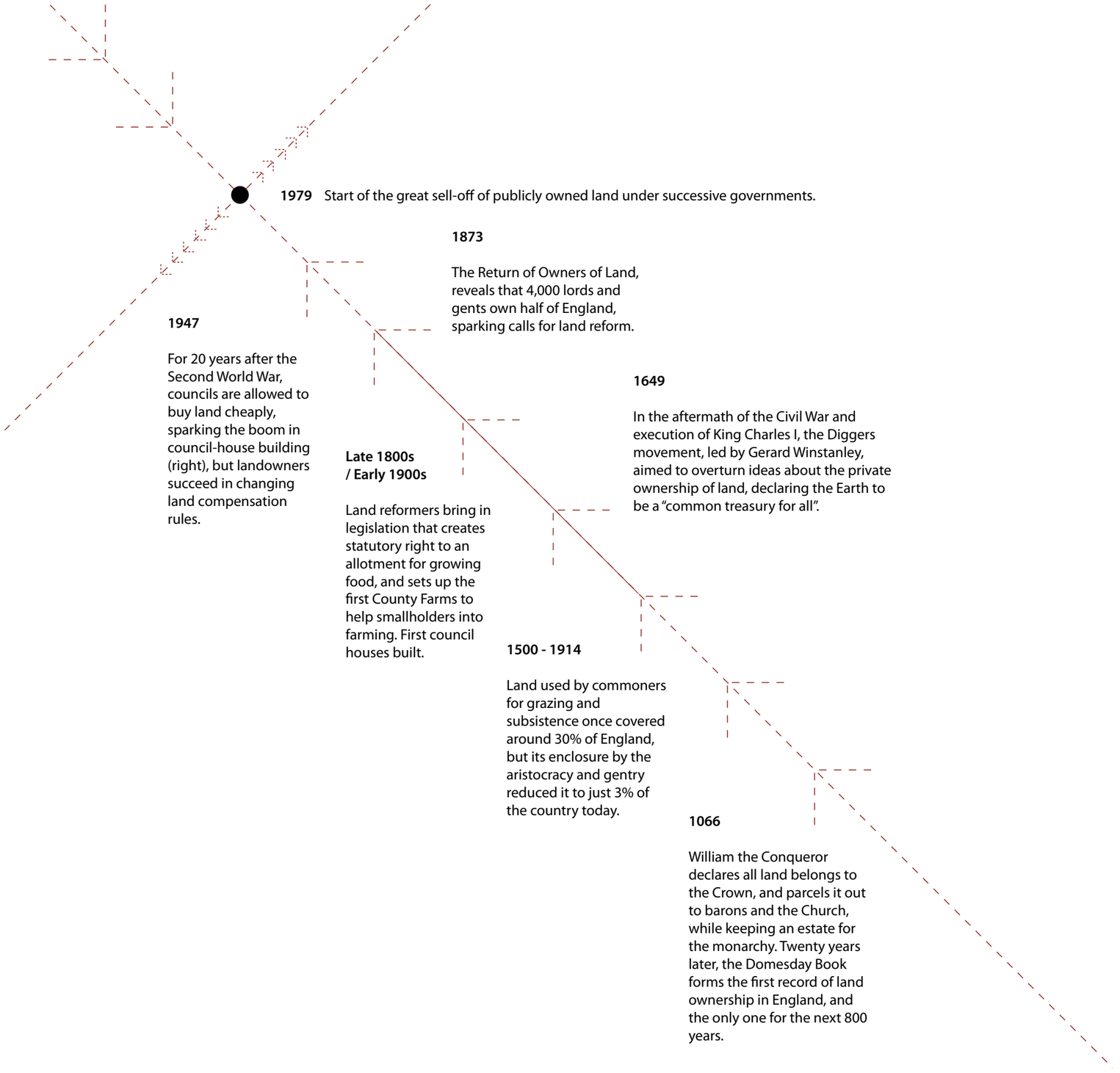
- Anna Minton

Who Owns England
"Who Owns England?", accessed October 7, 2021.

Countryfile
"Who owns England? History of England's land ownership and how much is privately owned today", accessed October 8, 2021.

En-topia
"The London Evolution Animation", published on May 7, 2014, Youtube video, 7:22.

London Datastore
"Privately Owned Public Spaces", accessed September 20, 2021.



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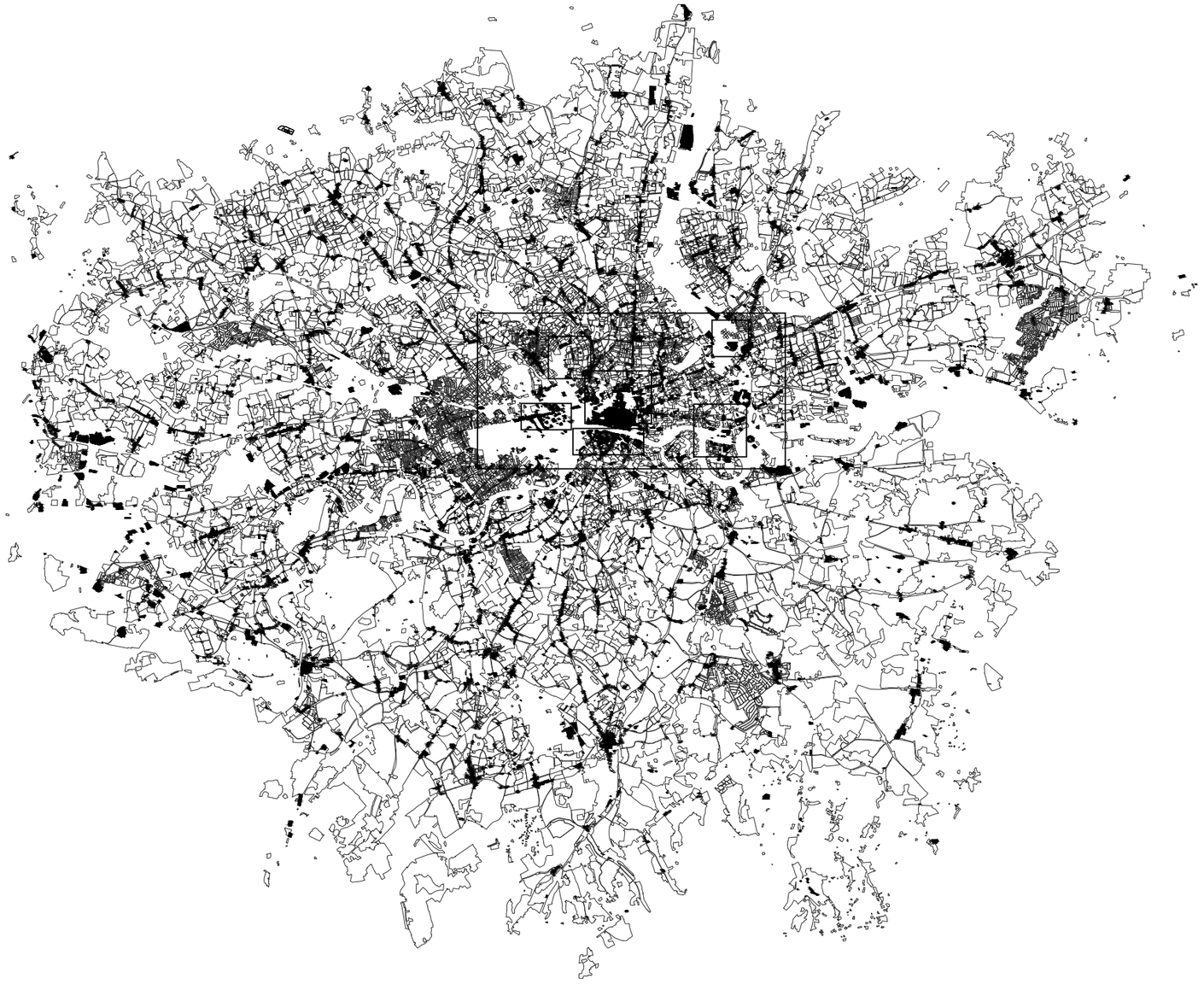
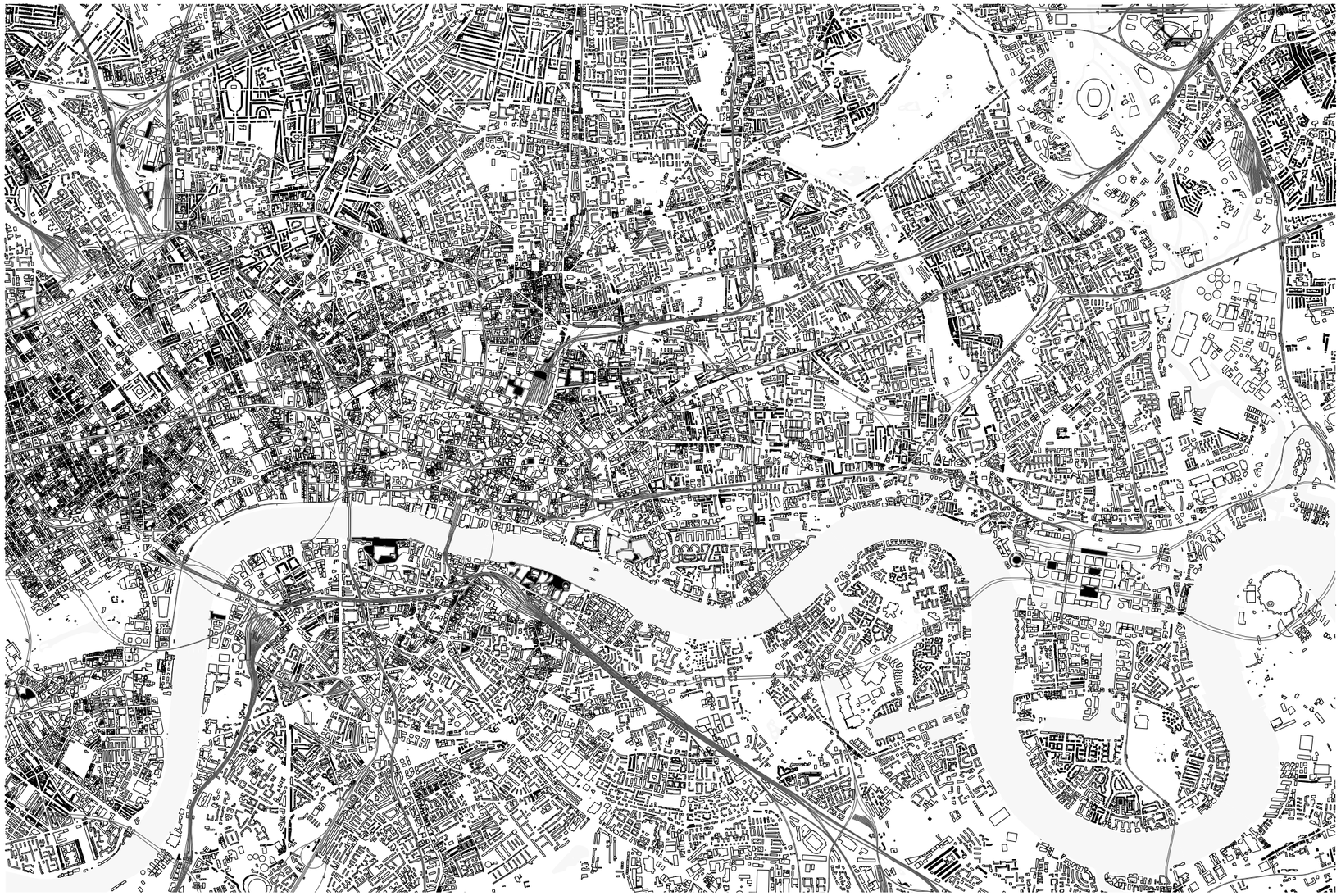
Research area: City of London



Commercial (black), residential (grey) and POPS zones

Research area: City of London



Inventory of POPS London 2021, scale 1:40.000

1.	Granary Square (Camden)	0,45	King’s Cross Central: a partnership between Argent Kings Cross and Australian Super
2.	Wharf Road Gardens (Camden)	0,23	King’s Cross Central: a partnership between Argent Kings Cross and Australian Super
3.	Lewis Cubitt Park (Camden)	0,15	King’s Cross Central: a partnership between Argent Kings Cross and Australian Super
4.	Gasholder Park (Camden)	0,44	King’s Cross Central: a partnership between Argent Kings Cross and Australian Super
5.	Pancras Square (Camden)	0,44	King’s Cross Central: a partnership between Argent Kings Cross and Australian Super
6.	Regents Place (Camden)	1,78	British Land
7.	Central St Giles (Camden)	0,12	Central Saint Giles Ltd Partnership - a venture between Legal & General and Mitsubishi Estate Company
8.	Exchange Square (City of London)	0,71	British Land and GIC
9.	New Street Square (City of London)	0,25	Land Securities
10.	Paternoster Square (City of London)	0,43	Mitsubishi Estate London
11.	Open space at Leadenhall Building (City of London)	0,22	CC Land: a Hong Kong-listed company run by Chinese billionaire Cheung Chung-kiu
12.	New River Head (Islington)	0,36	Manhattan Loft Corp
13.	Angel-on-the-Green (Islington)	0,04	Groveworld
14.	Arsenal Podium (Islington)	2,70	Arsenal Ltd
15.	City Road Basin (Islington)	0,54	Miller Group, Groveworld and British Waterways
16.	Pear Tree Street (Islington)	0,11	Silvertown Properties
17.	The London Eye (Lambeth)	0,48	Owned by a subsidiary of Merlin Entertainments
18.	Merton Mansions Gardens (Merton)	0,35	Private
19.	Victory Park and Portlands (East Village) (Newham)	2,38	Get Living London (owned by Qatari Diar)
20.	Mirabelle Gardens (East Village) (Newham)	0,32	Get Living London (owned by Qatari Diar)
21.	Water Glades (East Village) (Newham)	2,11	Get Living London (owned by Qatari Diar)
22.	Westfield Stratfield City (Newham)	1,01	Westfield Corporation
23.	Excel Centre (Newham)	2,59	ADNEC (Abu Dhabi National Exhibitions Company)
24.	Bankside (Southwark)	3,73	Private
25.	Tabard Square (Southwark)	0,40	Private
26.	More London (Southwark)	4,35	St Martins Property Group (controlled by the Kuwaiti state)
27.	Cabot Square (Tower Hamlets)	0,47	Canary Wharf Group
28.	Canada Square Park (Tower Hamlets)	0,49	Canary Wharf Group
29.	Jubilee Park (Tower Hamlets)	1,13	Canary Wharf Group
30.	Westferry Circus (Tower Hamlets)	0,31	Canary Wharf Group
31.	West India Quays (Tower Hamlets)	0,49	Canary Wharf Group
32.	Crossrail Place Roof Garden (Tower Hamlets)	0,77	Canary Wharf Group
33.	Reuters Plaza (Tower Hamlets)	0,08	Canary Wharf Group
34.	Bishops Square, Spitalfields (Tower Hamlets)	1,23	JP Morgan
35.	St Katherine Dock’s Surrounds (Tower Hamlets)	0,85	Private
36.	Channel Four Community Garden (Westminster)	0,18	Channel Four
37.	Brown Hart Gardens (Westminster)	0,12	Grosvenor Group
38.	Paddington Central (Westminster)	0,57	British Land
39.	Cardinal Place (Westminster)	0,91	Land Securities
40.	Broadgate Plaza (City of London)	0,30	British Land and GIC
41.	St Martin’s Courtyard (Westminster)	0,09	Longmartin Properties and Shaftesbury
42.	Merchant Square (Westminster)	1,29	European Land & Property
43.	NEO Bankside (Southwark)	0,23	Native and Grosvenor
44.	Broadgate Circle and Finsbury Avenue Square (City of London)	1,15	British Land and GIC

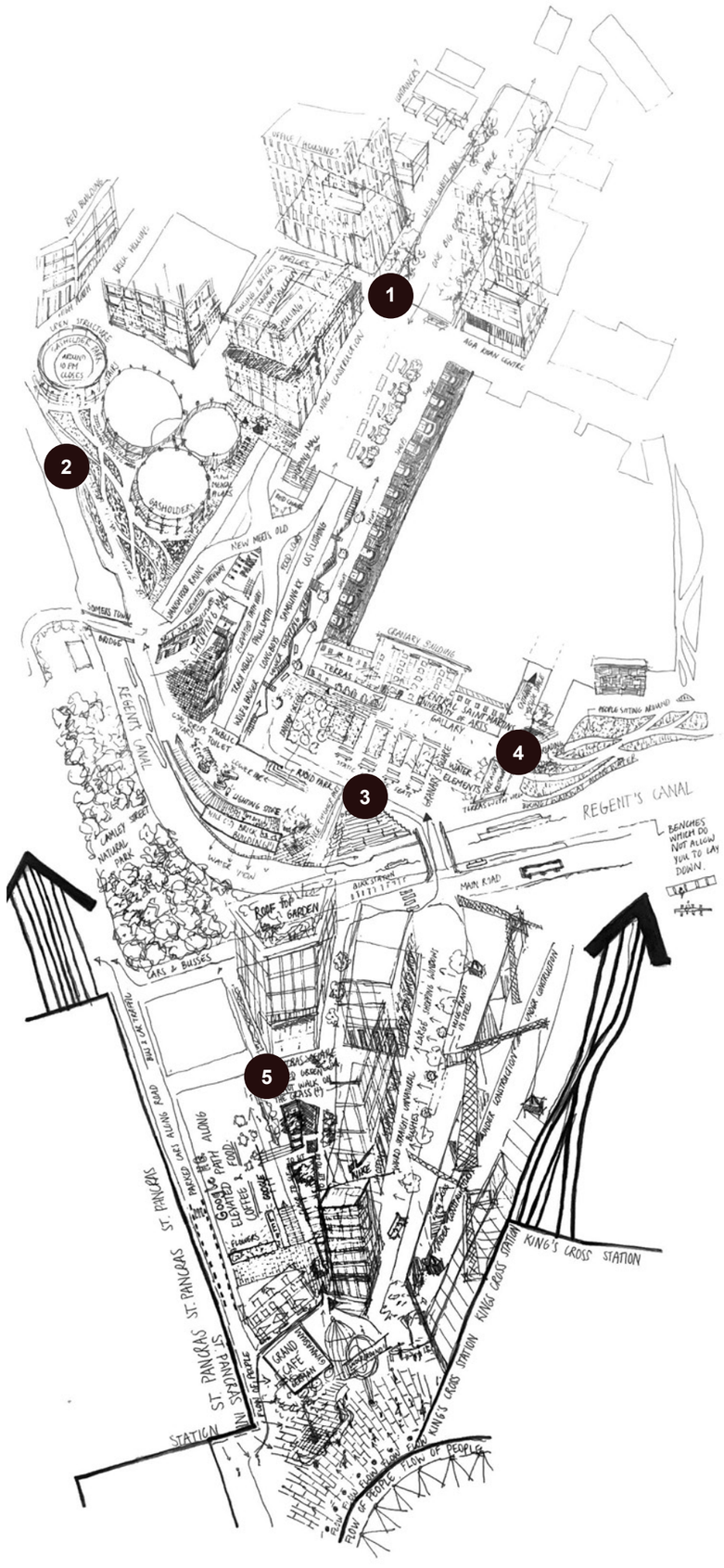
The Guardian
“Pseudo-public space: explore the map and tell us what we’re missing”, accessed October 7, 2021.

London Datastore
“Privately Owned Public Spaces”, accessed September 20, 2021.

Connection to railway system

Inventory railway system and stations / Power of Landassembly, scale 1:40.000

Connection to railway system: King's Cross area, Broadgate area, Canary Wharf



1 *Lewis Cubitt Park*

2 *Gasholder Park*

3 *Granary Square*

4 *Wharf Road Gardens*

5 *Pancras Square*

RESEARCH & DESIGN BOOKLET

WHO OWNS THE CITY?
A RESPONSE TO PRIVATISED PUBLIC SPACES

15 POPS

SITE RESEARCH

USAGE
KING'S CROSS, CANARY WHARF, BROADGATE AREA

1

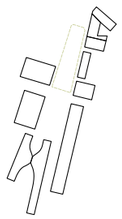
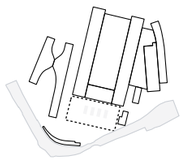
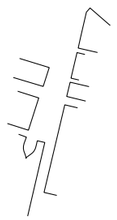
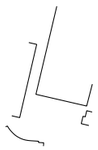
ELEMENTS
KING'S CROSS, CANARY WHARF, BROADGATE AREA

2

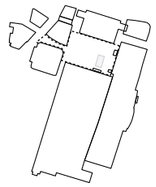
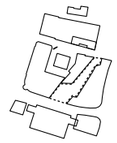
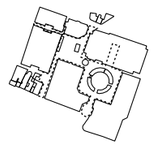
MATERIALS
KING'S CROSS, CANARY WHARF, BROADGATE AREA

3

KING'S CROSS

	Pancras Square	*Lewis Cubitt Park*	*Gasholder Park*	*Granary Square*	*Wharf Road Garden*
Pops and direct concext					
Pops					
Buildings involved					

BROADGATE

	Exchange Square	*Broadgate Plaza*	*Broadgate Circle*	*Finsbury Square*
Pops and direct concext				
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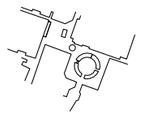
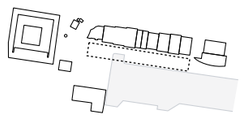
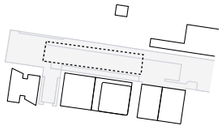
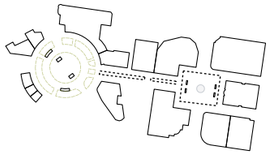
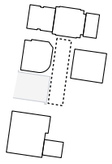
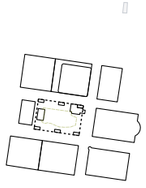
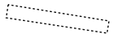
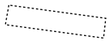
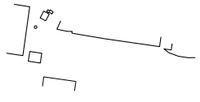
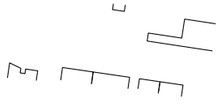
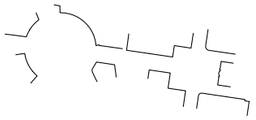
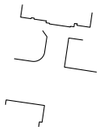
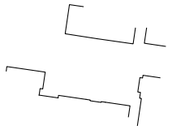
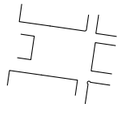
Buildings involved				

CANARY WHARF

	West India Quays	*Crossrail Place Roof Garden*	*Cabot Square*	*Reuters Plaza*	*Jubilee Park*	*Canada Square Park*
Pops and direct concext						
Pops						
Buildings involved						

*'Usage' visualises **how** these spaces are used, as well as **who** actually use the space. But sometimes more importantly: **who is not** using the space. What do people wear, where are they going or are they staying, how do they interact with other people or the architectural objects they come across?*

Pancras Square
Working people, passengers, tourists
Places of pausing and traffic, guided along the sides of static division elements

Along Pancras Square, towards Granary Square
Passengers
Place of traffic inbetween elements

Along Pancras Square, towards Granary Square
Passengers, tourists, shoppers
Place of pausing, traffic guided along elements promoting to 'SHOP, EAT, DRINK, DISCOVER'

Along Pancras Square, towards Granary Square
Passengers, tourists, working people
Place of pausing and traffic

People going to work *at Pancras Square, King's Cross area (November 2022)*

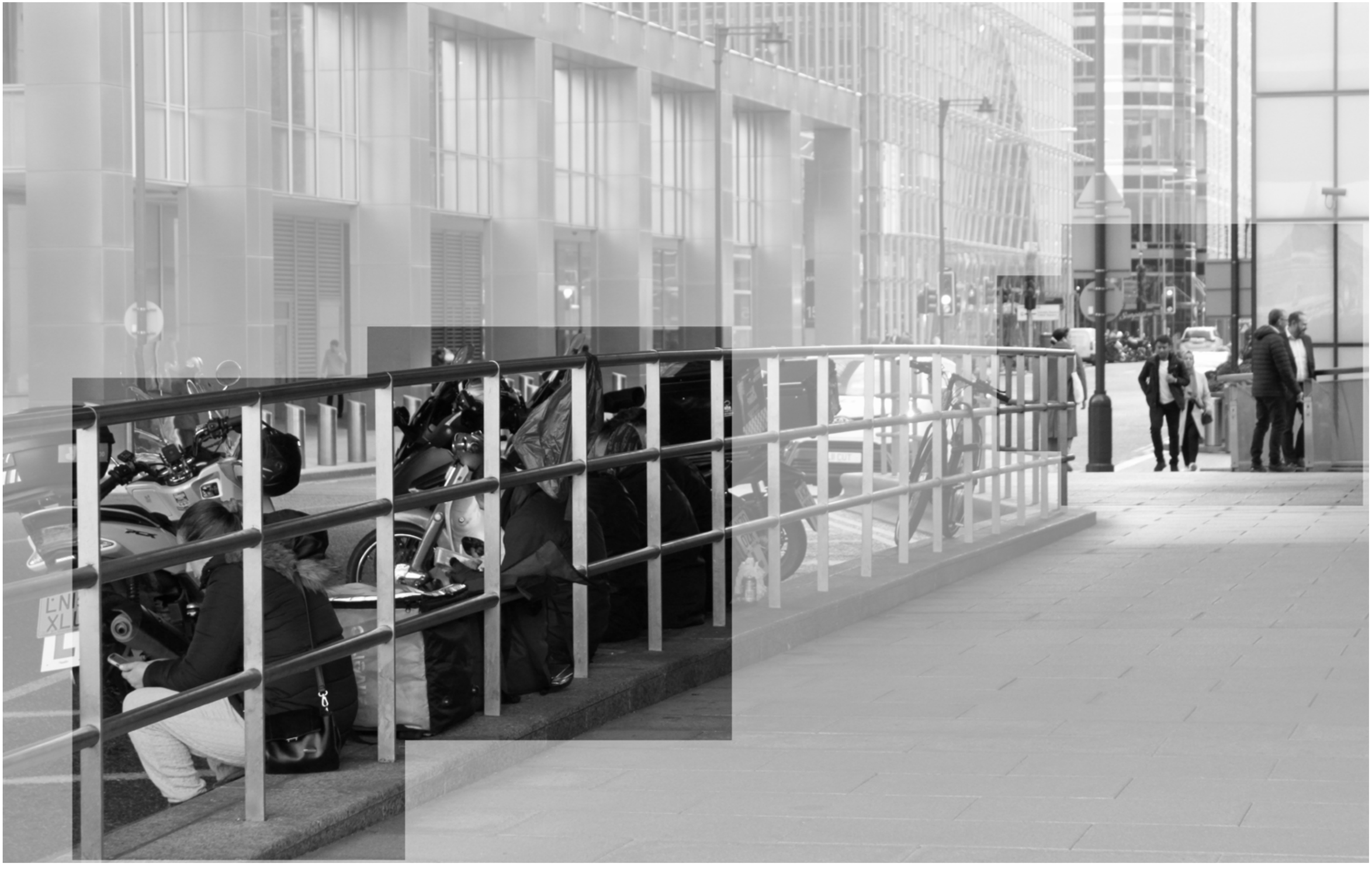
***Tourists** at Pancras Square, King's Cross area (November 2022)*

***Maintenance** at Pancras Square, King's Cross area (November 2022)*

***Security** guard keeping an eye on random man at Broadgate Circle, Broadgate area (November 2022)*

USAGE

'Shop, eat, drink' *at Granary Square, King's Cross area (November 2022)*



Uber Eats drivers having lunch *at Canary Wharf traffic entrance, Canary Wharf (November 2022)*

Usage, King's Cross area (2021)

Adding 5 dots, boosts the whole area
People play a vital role in consumerism,
without: these zones almost remain un-used

*'Elements' shows **what role architectural elements or objects play in these spaces**. What do these elements **initiate**, are they used as division tool or do they frame these spaces, are they **static or changeable**, is there a specific function bound to this or not? Elements, large or small scale, can determine how people use space and are therefore extremely important to pay attention to when designing.*

Pancras Square
Large urban green / water structure, providing places to pause or walk along
Division element

Pancras Square
Places to sit
Pausing element

Pancras Square
Large urban green / water structure providing places to pause or walk along and an elevated walkway along retail
Division and transition elements

Pancras Square
Large urban green / water structure providing places to pause or walk along
Division and transition element

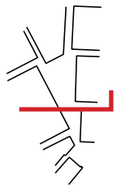
ELEMENTS

Cut

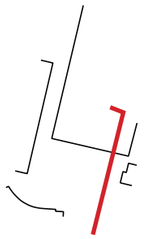
Section

Elements as division tool

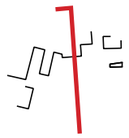
Pancras Square



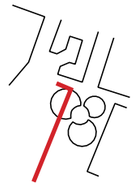
Granary Square



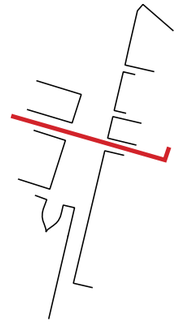
Wharf Road Garden

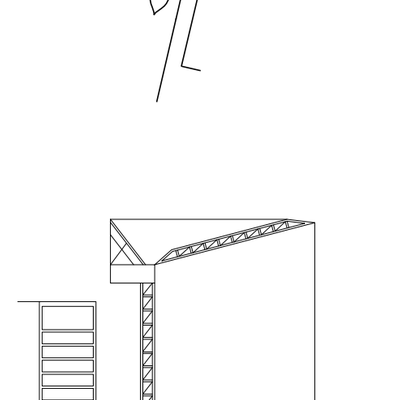


Gasholder Park



Lewis Cubitt Park





Static elements as division and guiding *at Pancras Square, King's Cross area (November 2022)*

Static elements as division and guidance along retail *at Pancras Square, King's Cross area (November 2022)*

Signs - what not to do - and single-use elements *at Finsbury Square, Broadgate area (November 2022)*

Repetitive elements as guidance to other POPS *around Pancras Square, King's Cross area (November 2022)*

Static elements not promoting social encounter *in between Granary Square and Lewis Cubitt Park, King's Cross area (November 2022)*

*'Materials' can be an **indication of borders**, **thresholds or function** and can make privatisation visible. Just by looking at one patchwork of materials, it not only shows something about **transitioning**, as well it can give an **impression of the physical state** of a certain object or even a part of the city.*

The fact that it is carefully chosen and the repetition of certain materials might even expose ownership. Repetition of materials and color-use can create homogeneous places, especially in relation to one another.

Grey natural stone
No disruptions, clean and orderly

Beige natural stone
No disruptions, clean and orderly

Grey natural stone
No disruptions, clean and orderly

Material transitions
Clean and orderly, clear boundaries

Material transitions
Clean and orderly, clear boundaries

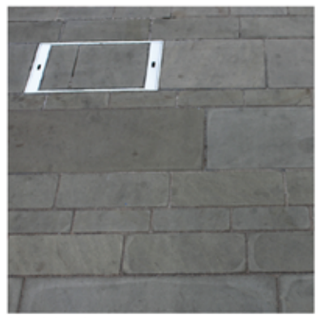
Material transitions
Clean and orderly, clear boundaries, textures

Grey wood and pavement
No disruptions, clean and orderly

Material transitions
No disruptions, clean and orderly

Material transitions
Steel details and light elements

Material transitions
Same material, different configurations



Metal details
Clean and orderly, refined details

Material transitions
Clean and orderly, clear boundaries

Food For All: initiative giving free produce to the vulnerable, backside King's Cross Station

Proposed site in relation to analysed research areas and POPS

Belgrove House (right), currently in use by Access Self-storage

Proposed site

Belgrove House, currently in use by Access Self-storage

Proposed site

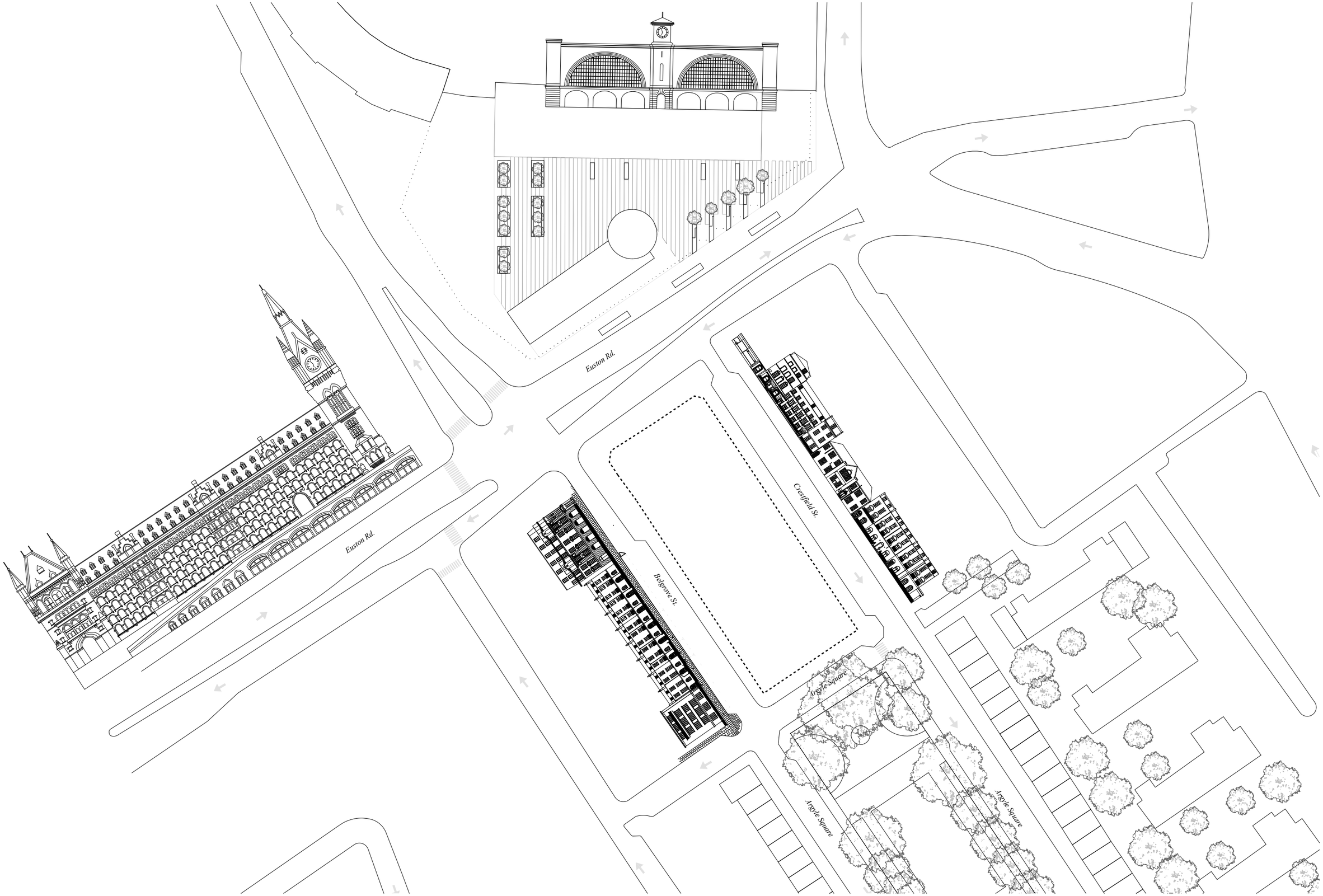
Belgrove House, currently in use by Access Self-storage

Interior Belgrove House, currently in use by Access Self-storage

Save Bloomsbury
"Camden make Significant Error in Belgrove House Assessment", accessed November 29, 2021.

King's Cross coach station (built c. 1930), now known as Belgrove House since 1950

Belgrove House Life-sciences research center, a redevelopment proposal by Alford Hall Monaghan Morris



Belgrove House: situated in one of the oldest conservation areas in London

Churches
Mosks & Islamic Cultural Center
Hotels
Residential
Food / restaurants / bars
Central Library
Elementary school
Argyle Garden / basketbal field
Youth Club
Borough Center
Tutor group
Scala Music Theater

Appropriation of the streets at Hyde Park, London (November 2022)

The Hall

By definition the room or space right behind the door. In my project it represents the *grey area* between public and private and functions as an urban threshold. It should be meaningful to the community, but might turn out to be of greater importance to the city.

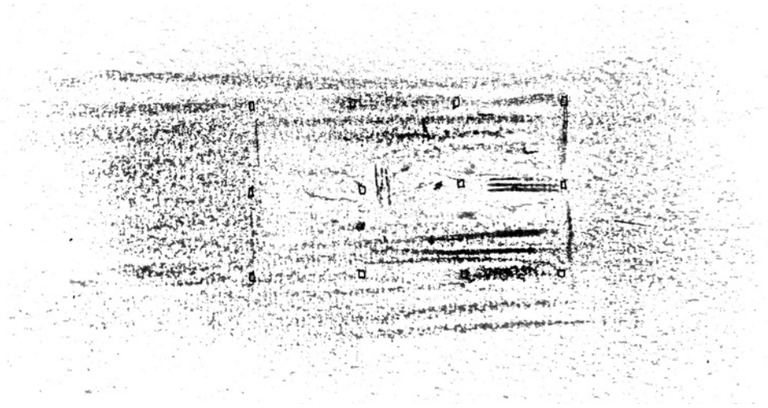
Based on the ideas of *Jacobs*, *Hertzberger* and *Sola-de-Morales* the hall facilitates multiple functions for a larger public, finds opportunities or possibilities in the grey area between public and private and establishes a relationship with the historical context by transforming the former King's Cross Coach Station.

Representation of the public hall within context

An open podium

The building intents to act as a small open podium for (local) upcoming artists. Something is asked from the public, as well as it gives back to the public: an open podium at a central location surrounded by hotels and tourism. Participation is free for everyone: music, dance, theater, street artists, writers, poets or cabaret.

A part of the building contains studios which can be rented to talents, but can also be used by small companies or as study places. This way it becomes beneficial for the public, as well as it is profitable for private investors. At the corners there is room for a public market, the existing postal office and a laundry store.



Representation of the open podium

*CREATING **REPRESENTATIONS** OF SPACE, BY CREATING **REPRESENTATIONAL** SPACE (Levebre)*

*CREATING **PLACES** INSTEAD OF **NON-PLACES** (Augé)*

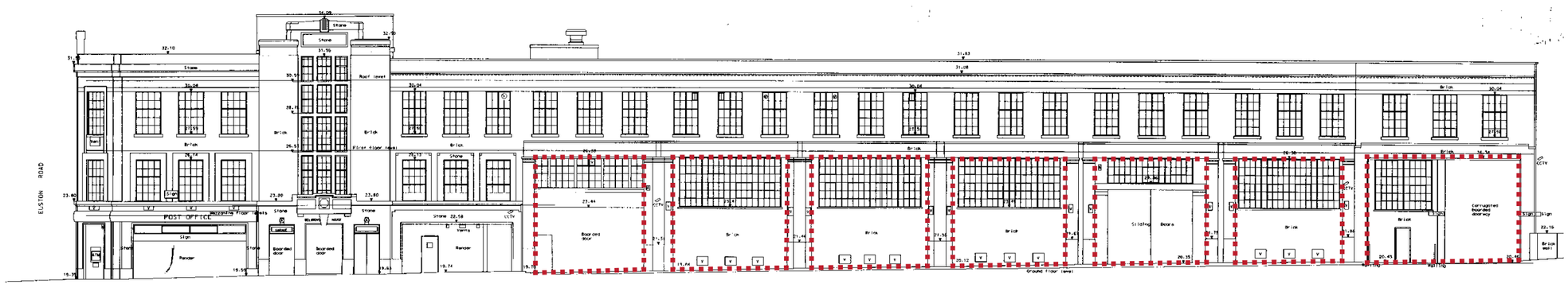
*USING THE **MEMORY OF SITE, SPACE, ELEMENTS AND MATERIALS** TO TRIGGER A BROADER PUBLIC*

***AFFORDANCES & APPROPRIATION**: A NEED FOR AN OPEN ARCHITECTURE*

*EXPLORATION OF THE **GREY AREA** BETWEEN PUBLIC AND PRIVATE*

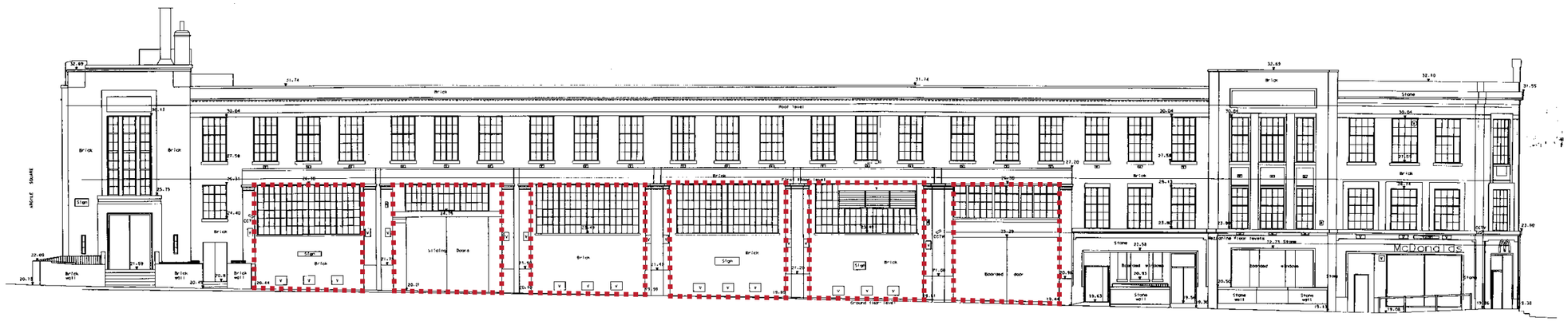
Belgrove House and how it was closed off when it became a warehouse

Generating the grey area between public and private



Different character, expectation it used to be closed off

Open structure for previous coach station

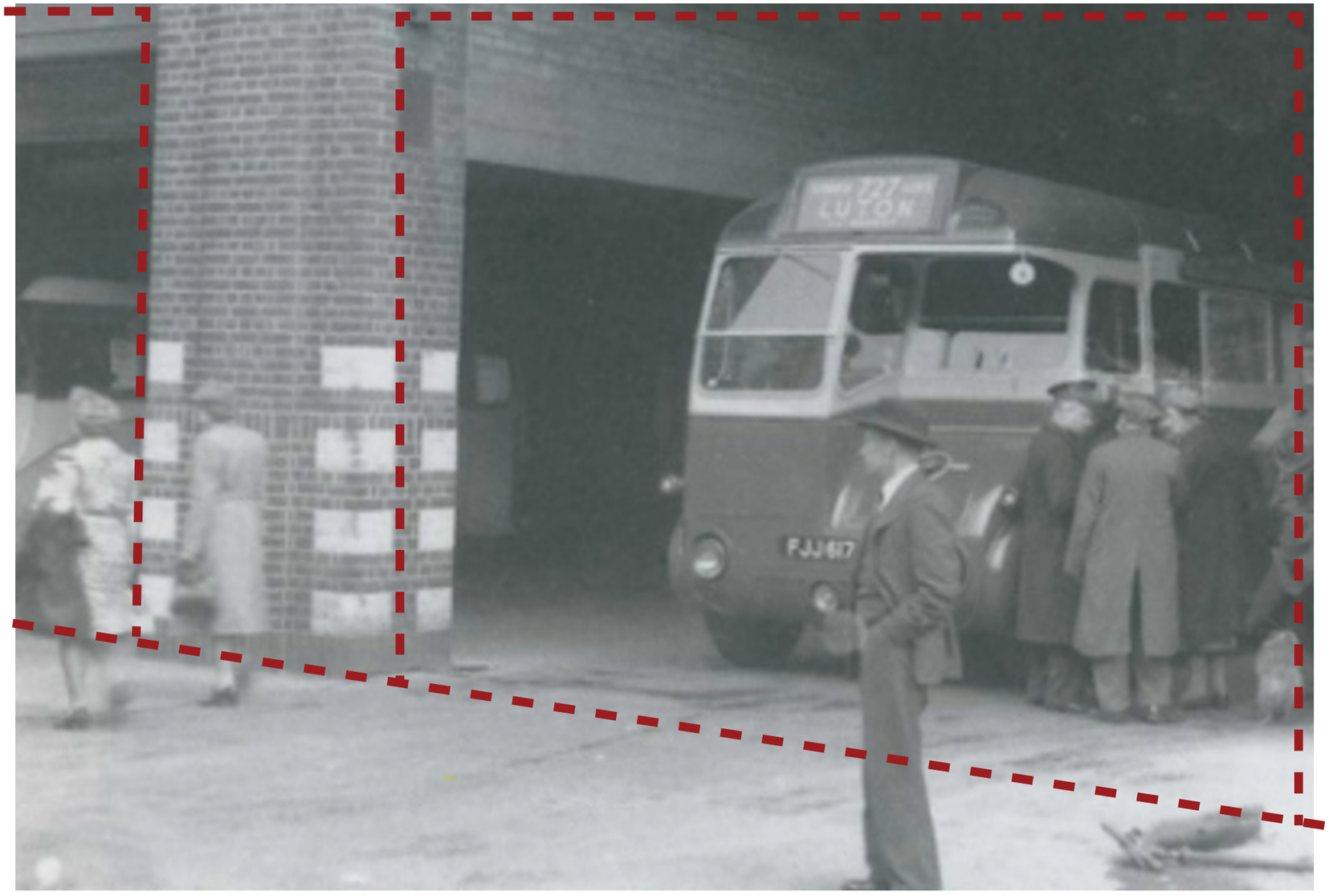


Slope towards basement

Open structure for previous coach station

Different character, expectation it used to be closed off

Expectations of what it used to be



King's Cross coach station (built c. 1930), now known as Belgrove House since 1950

Generating the grey area between public and private

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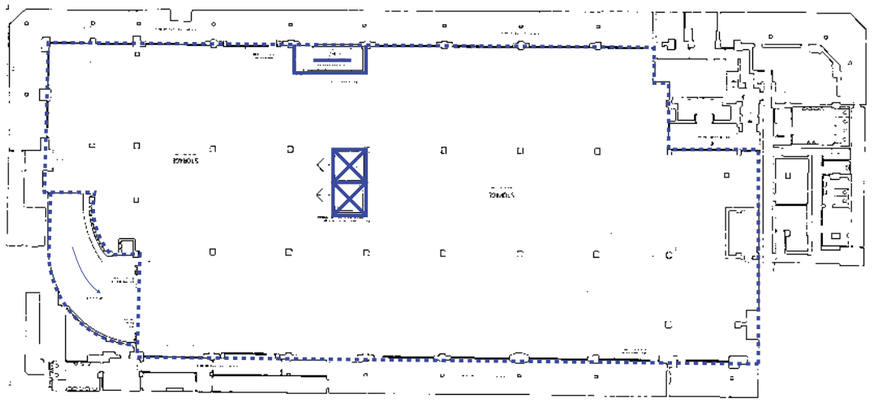

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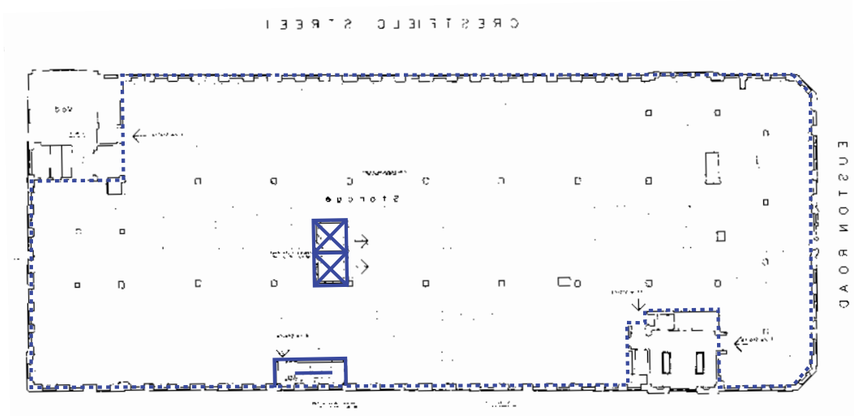

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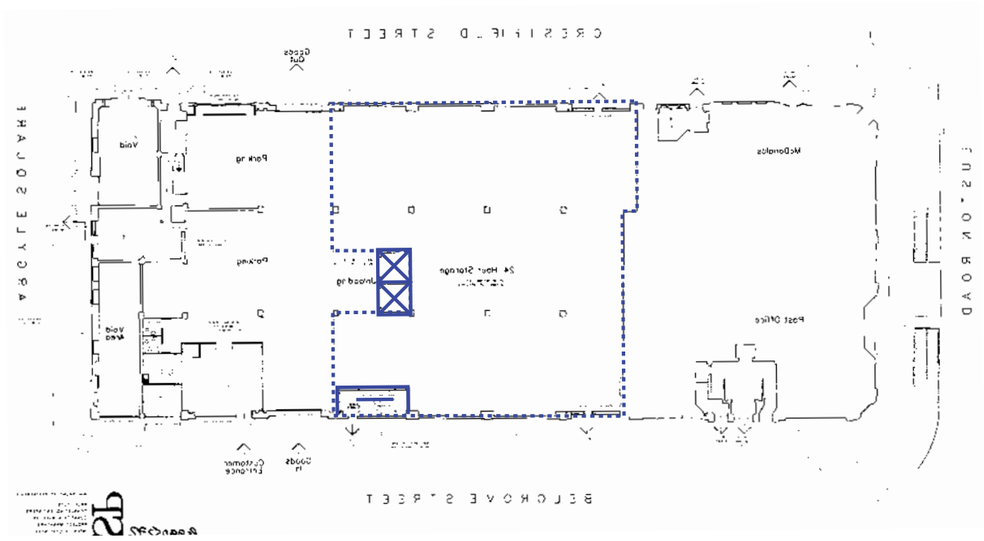

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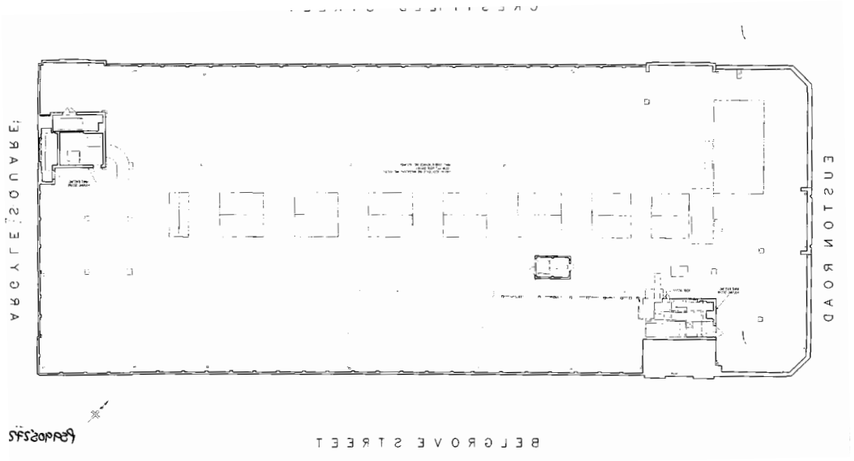

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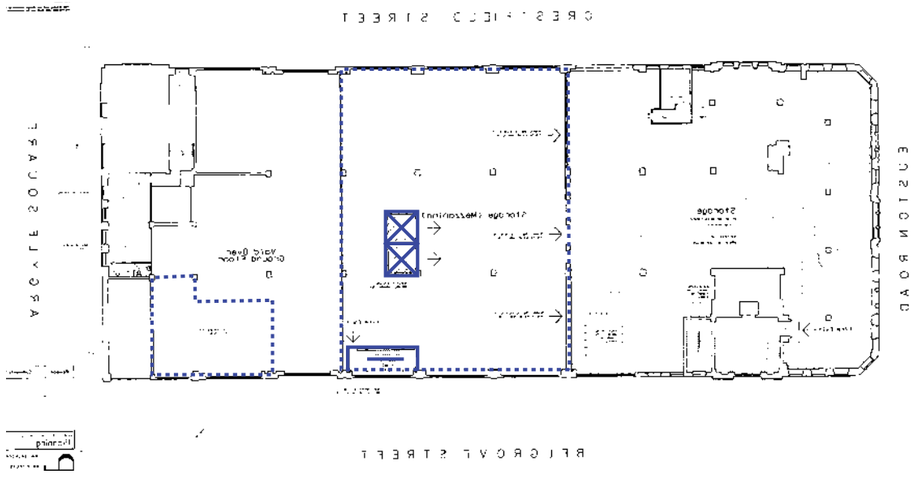
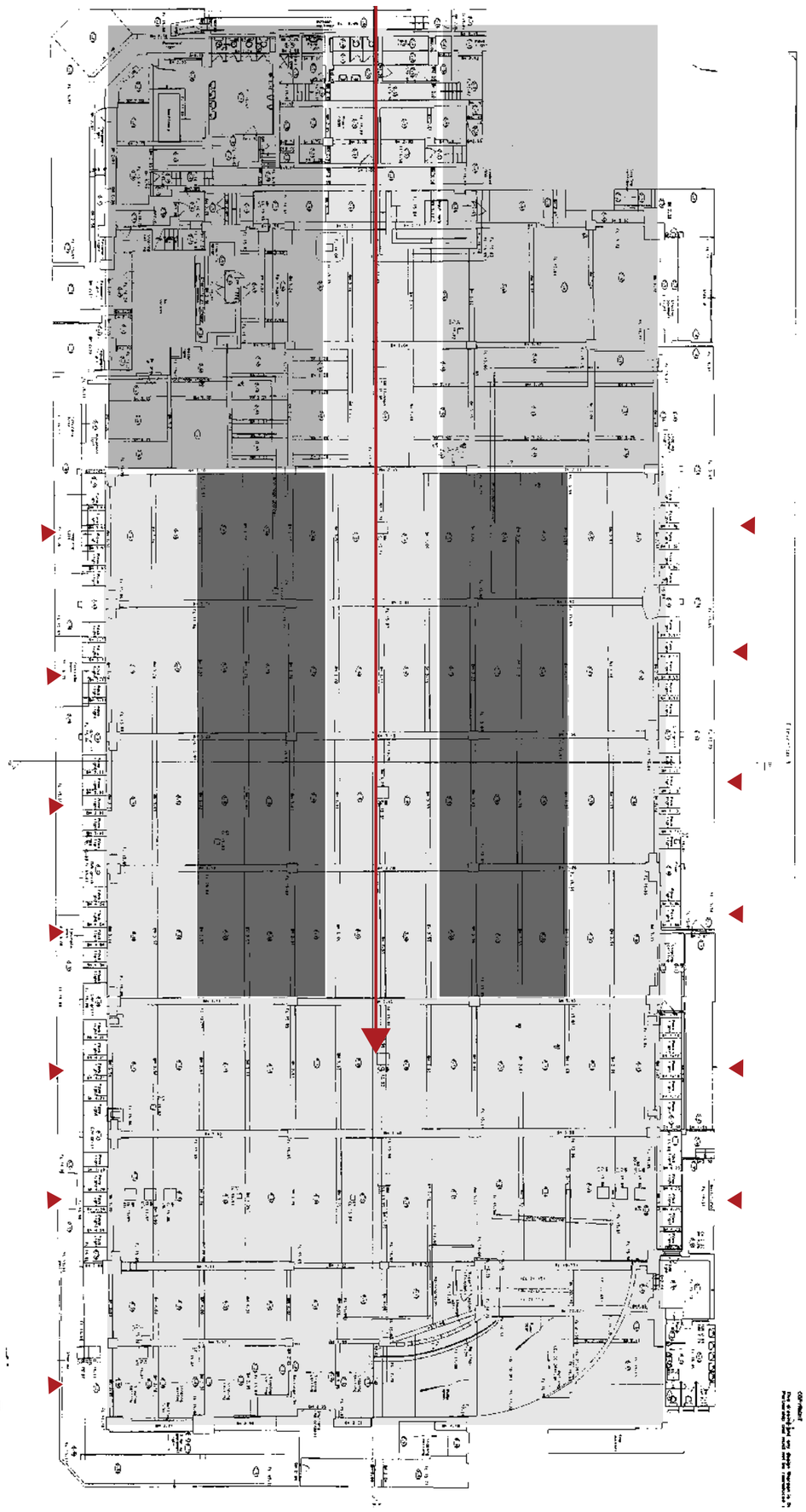


Euston Rd. (King's Cross)



Belgrove St.

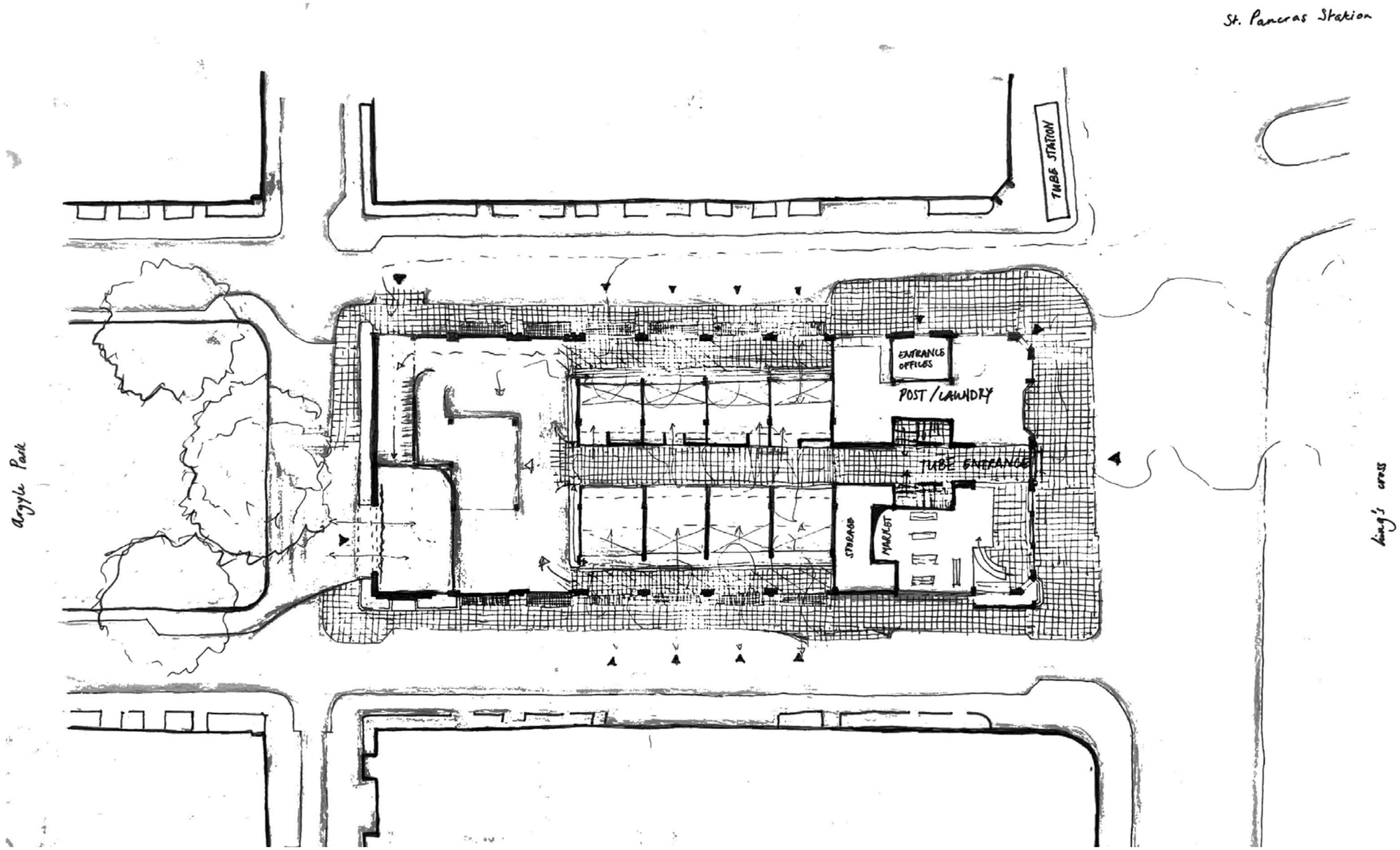
Crestfield St.

Argyle Square

Generating the grey area between public and private

Opening up the closed facades giving back it's previous public identity

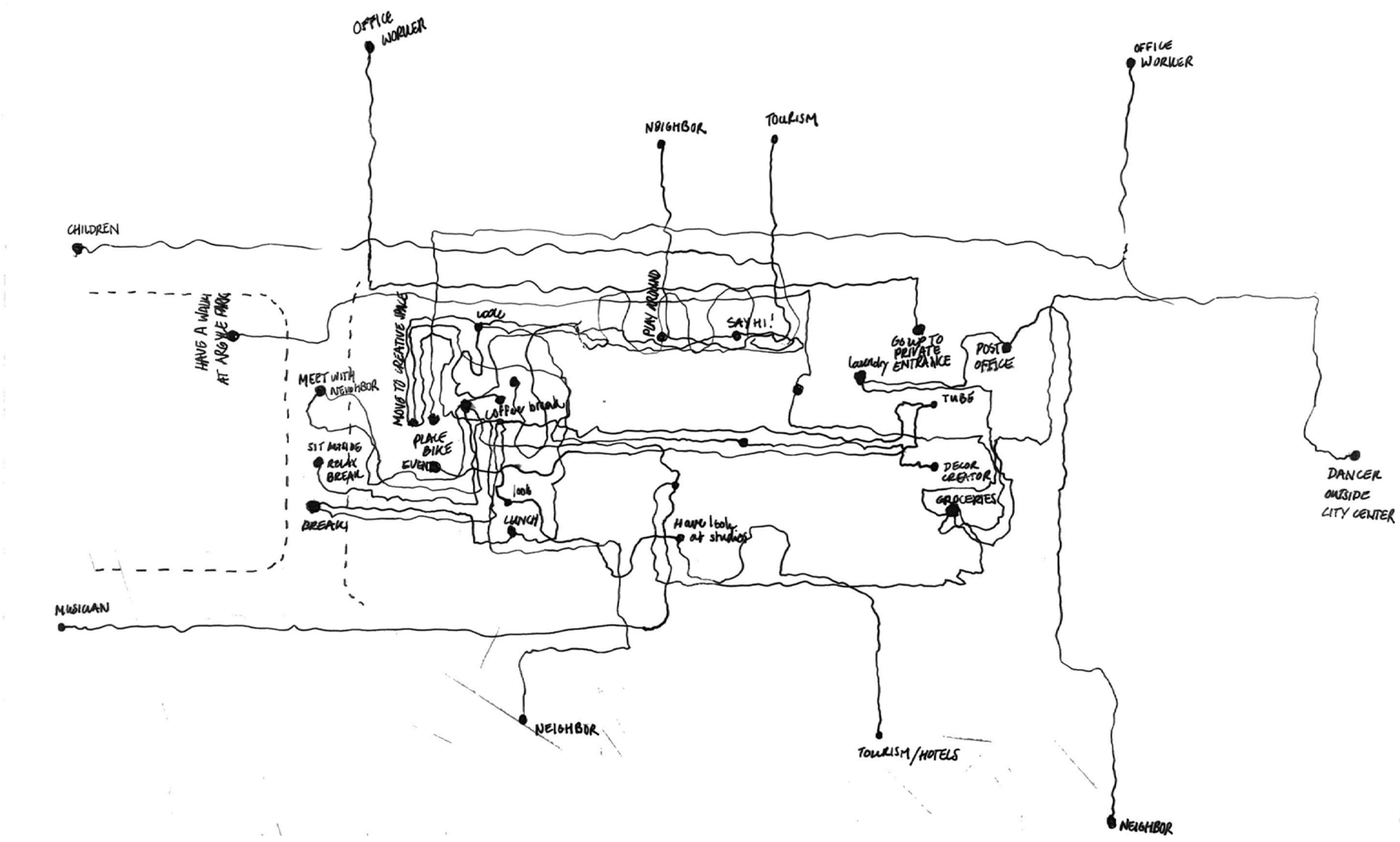
Generating the grey area between public and private



Opening up the closed facades giving back it's previous public identity

Generating the grey area between public and private

Opening up the closed facades giving back it's previous public identity


OFFICE WORKER
NEIGHBOR
TOURISM
OFFICE WORKER
CHILDREN
HANG A WALK AT ARGYLE PARK
MEET WITH NEIGHBOR
MOVE TO CREATIVE SPACE
LOOK
PLAY AROUND
SAY HI!
GO UP TO PRIVATE ENTRANCE
laundry
POST OFFICE
TUBS
COFFEE BREAK
PLACE BIKE
EVENT
SIT AND DO RELAX BREAK
DECOR CREATOR
GROCERIES
DANCER OUTSIDE CITY CENTER
BREAK
LUNCH
Have look at studios
MUSICIAN
NEIGHBOR
TOURISM/HOTELS
NEIGHBOR

Public Hall: An open podium for upcoming talent

How could *affordances* improve privately owned public spaces to facilitate multi functionality?

How can people *appropriate* the building in order to feel more involved with the building? By adding to it or changing it during the day?

How can studios be designed in a multi functional way?

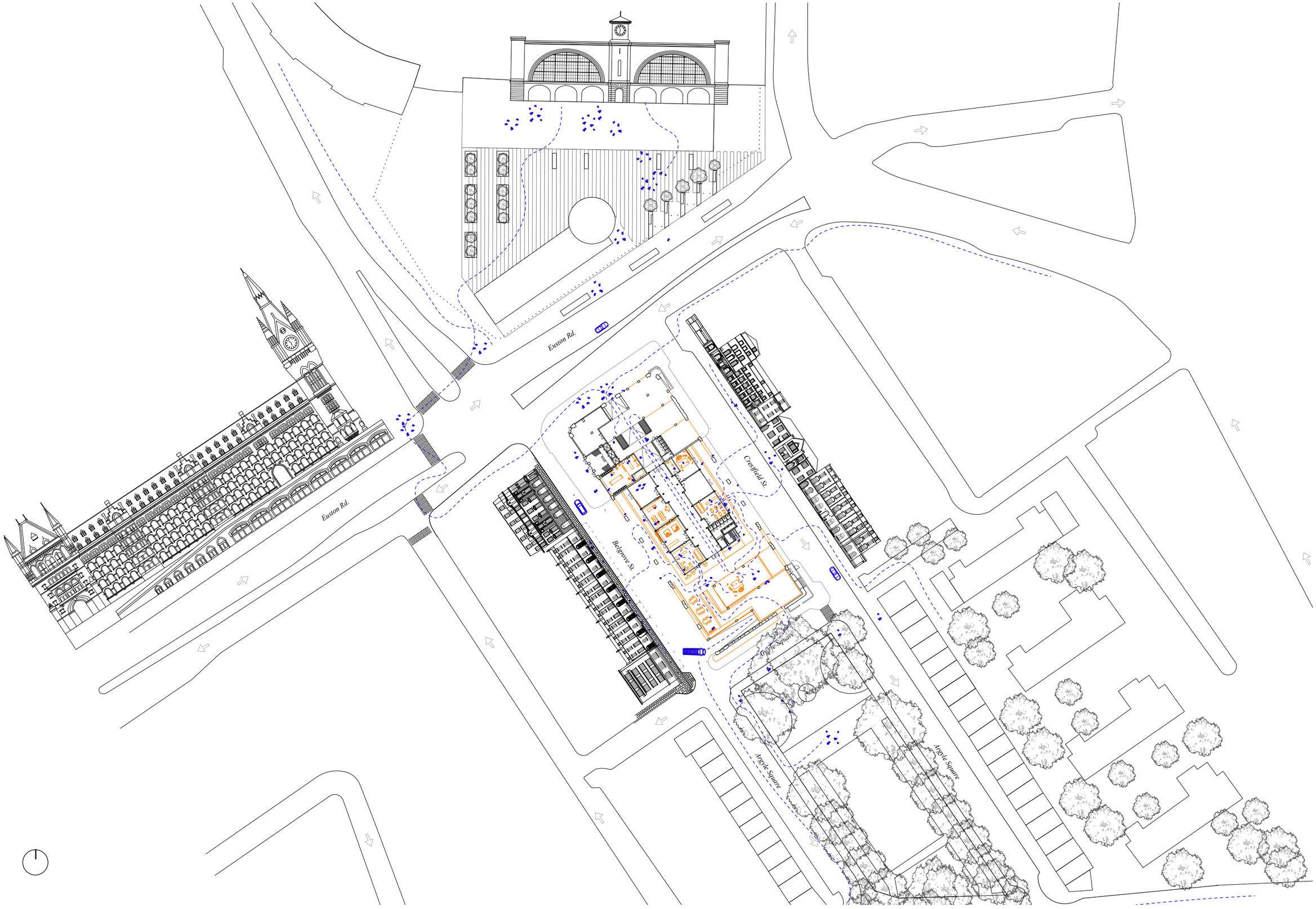
How can the open podium act as an open podium, as well as a public square which allows different things to happen?

How can the building and its elements promote *social encounter* between people?

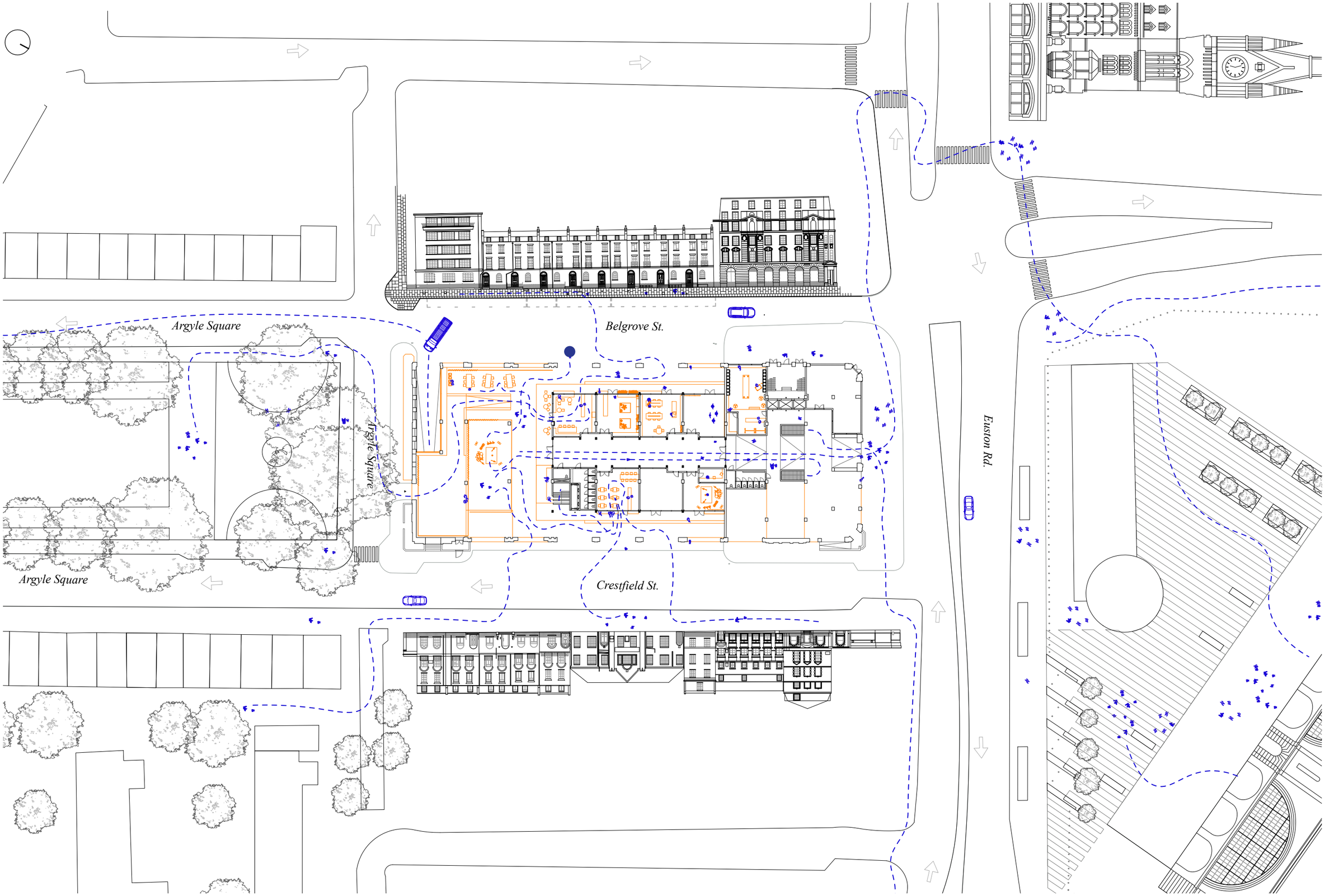
How can the old structure of the Belgrove House facilitate this new function?

What can we learn from the *materialisation* of existing privately owned public spaces in order to visualise the grey area between public and private?

Generating the grey area between public and private



Generating the grey area between public and private



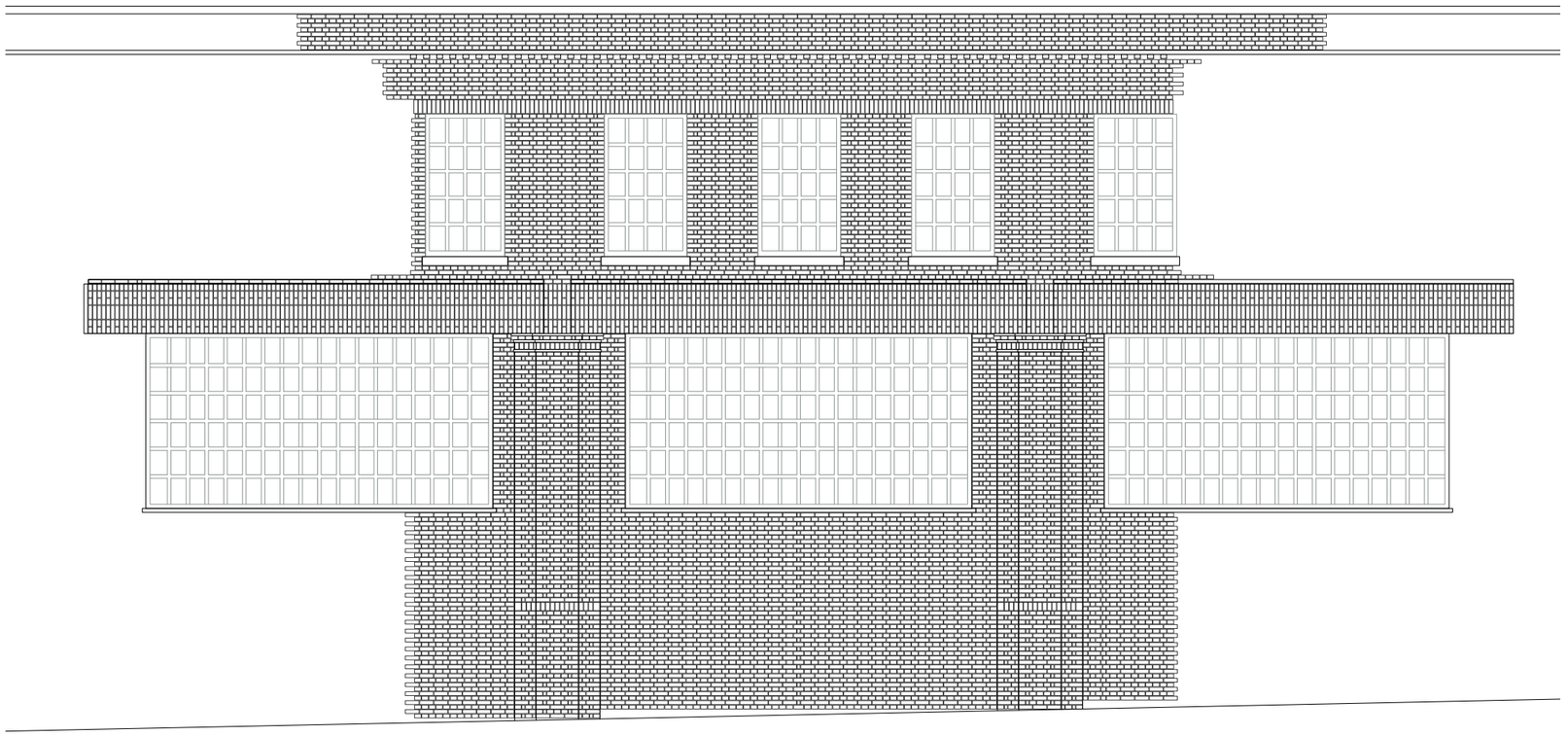
Generating the grey area between public and private

Belgrove St.

Public (down)

Public & goods

Generating the grey area between public and private

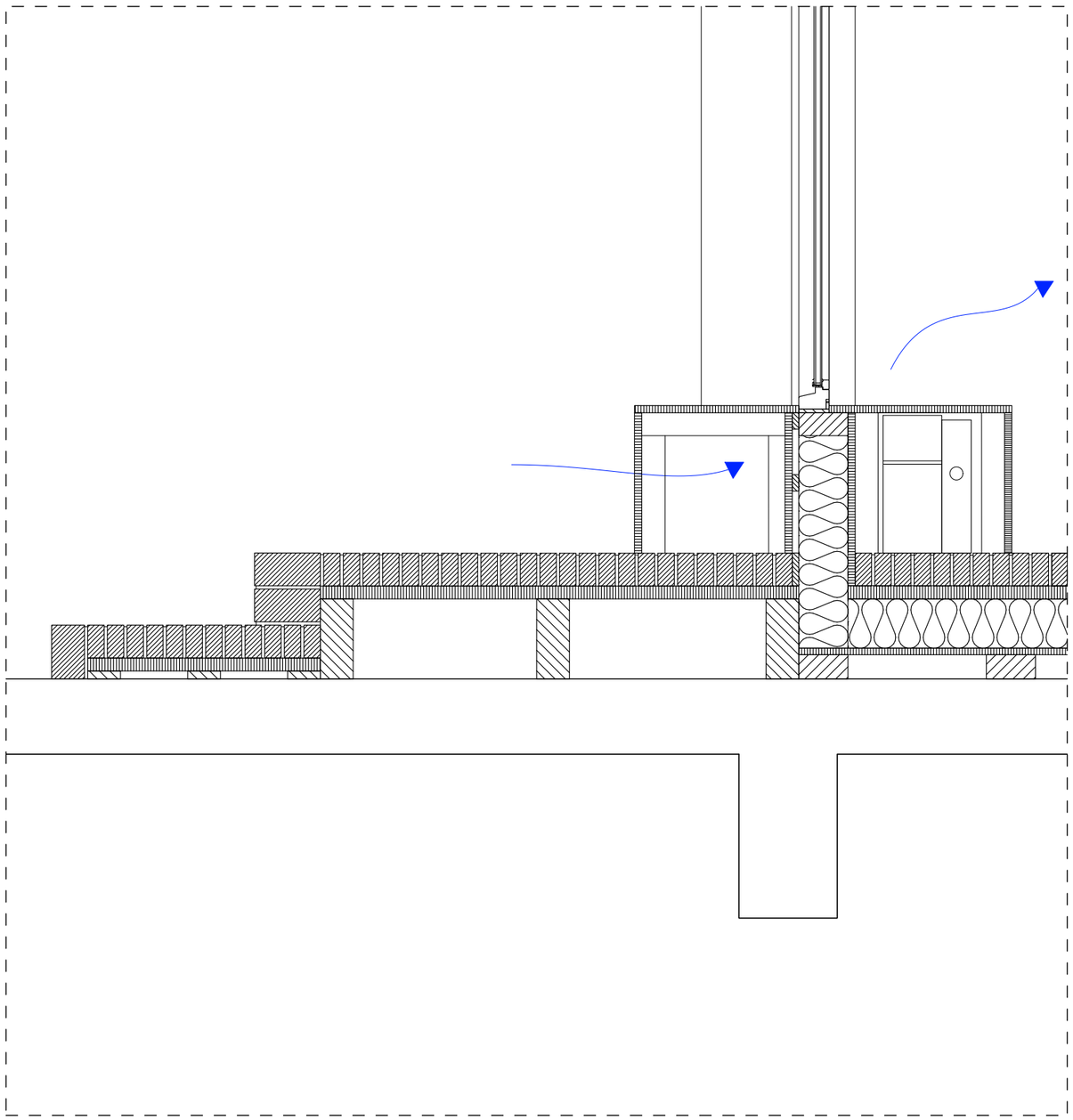


Generating the grey area between public and private

Set back facade: creating semi-outside spaces

Set back facade: creating semi-outside spaces

Set back facade: creating semi-outside spaces

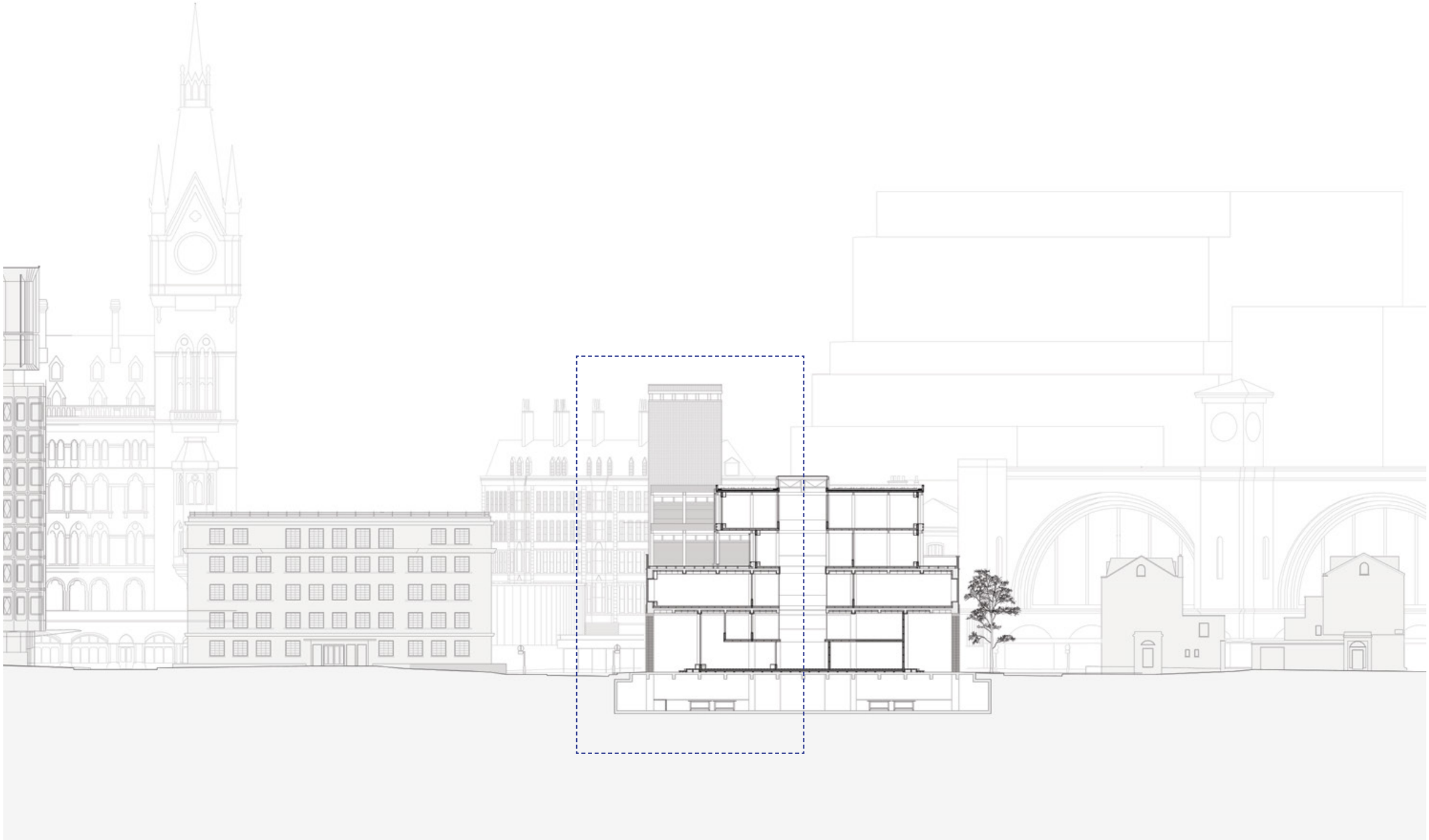


Elevated ground floor

1. Existing concrete slope 200 mm
Lowering from Argyle Square towards King's Cross Station.
2. Inclined steps towards public square
3. 'Klinkers' 230 x 100 x 65 mm
4. Wooden board 40 mm
5. Wooden beams treated for weathering 100 x 245 mm
4. Horizontal: EPS insulation 150 mm
5. Vertical: Wood fibre 150 mm
6. ClimaRad integrated in seating

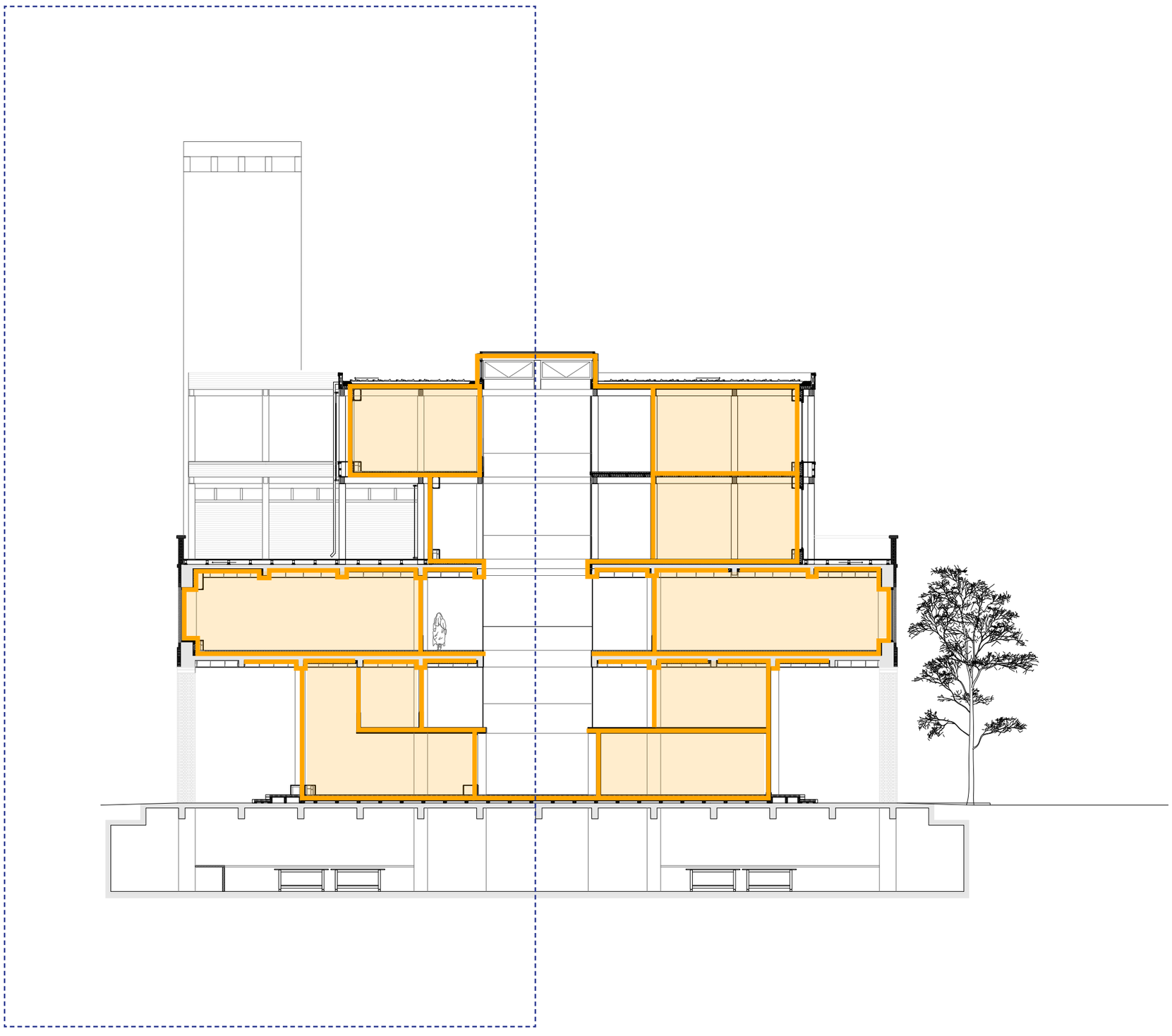
Detail inclined steps 1:10
Soft borders and transitions creating grey area between outside and inside

Generating the grey area between public and private



Set back facade: creating semi-outside spaces

Generating the grey area between public and private



Set back facade:insulation diagram

Generating the grey area between public and private

Belgrove St. elevation

Belgrove St.

Generating the grey area between public and private

Public (down)

Public & goods

Ground floor: Set back facade, creating semi-outside spaces

Visualisation coffee corner, next to the square

Belgrove St.

Generating the grey area between public and private

Public (down)

Public & goods

Ground floor: The public square

Generating the grey area between public and private

An empty public square

Belgrove St.

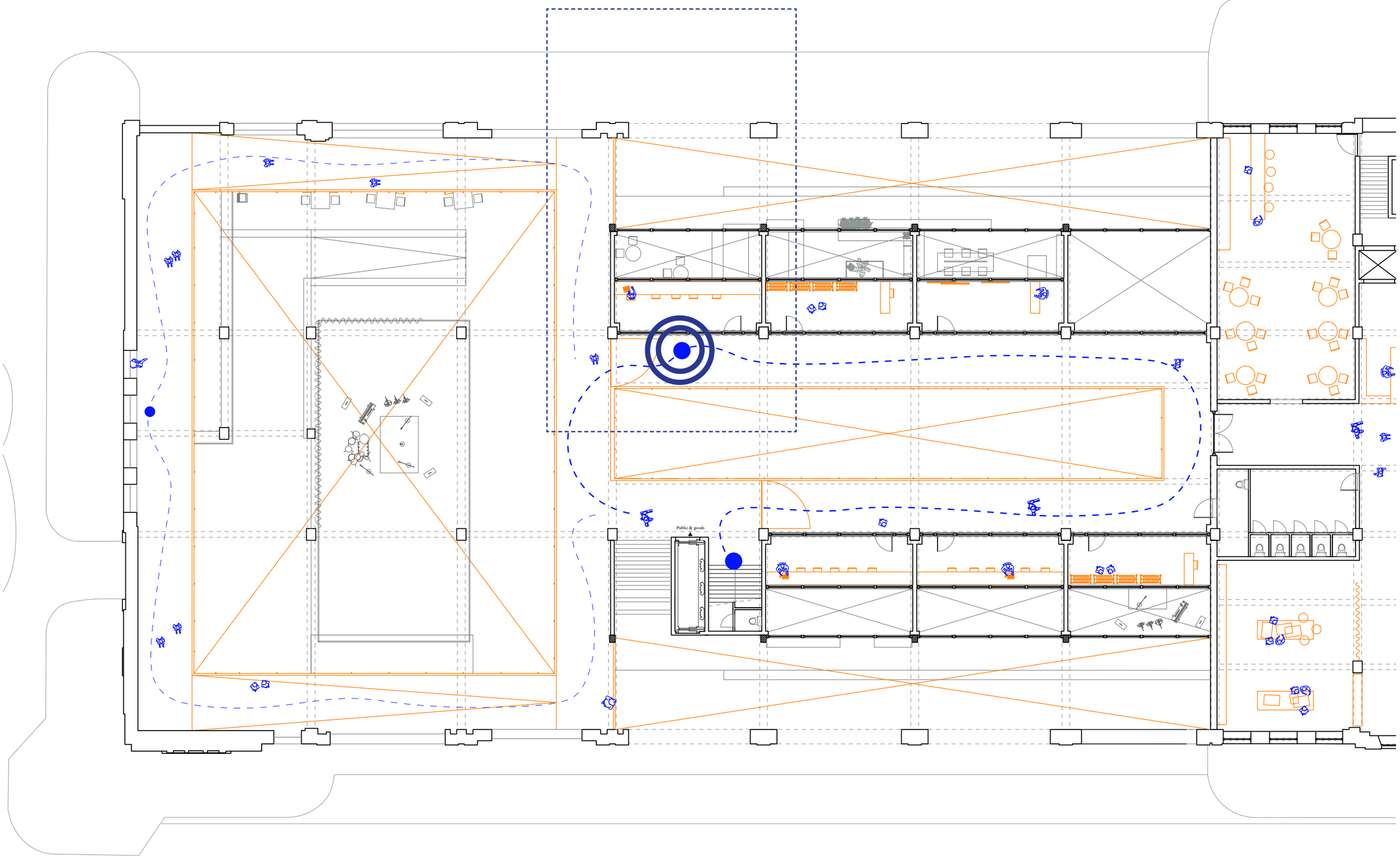
Generating the grey area between public and private

Public (down)

Public & goods

Belgrove St.

Generating the grey area between public and private

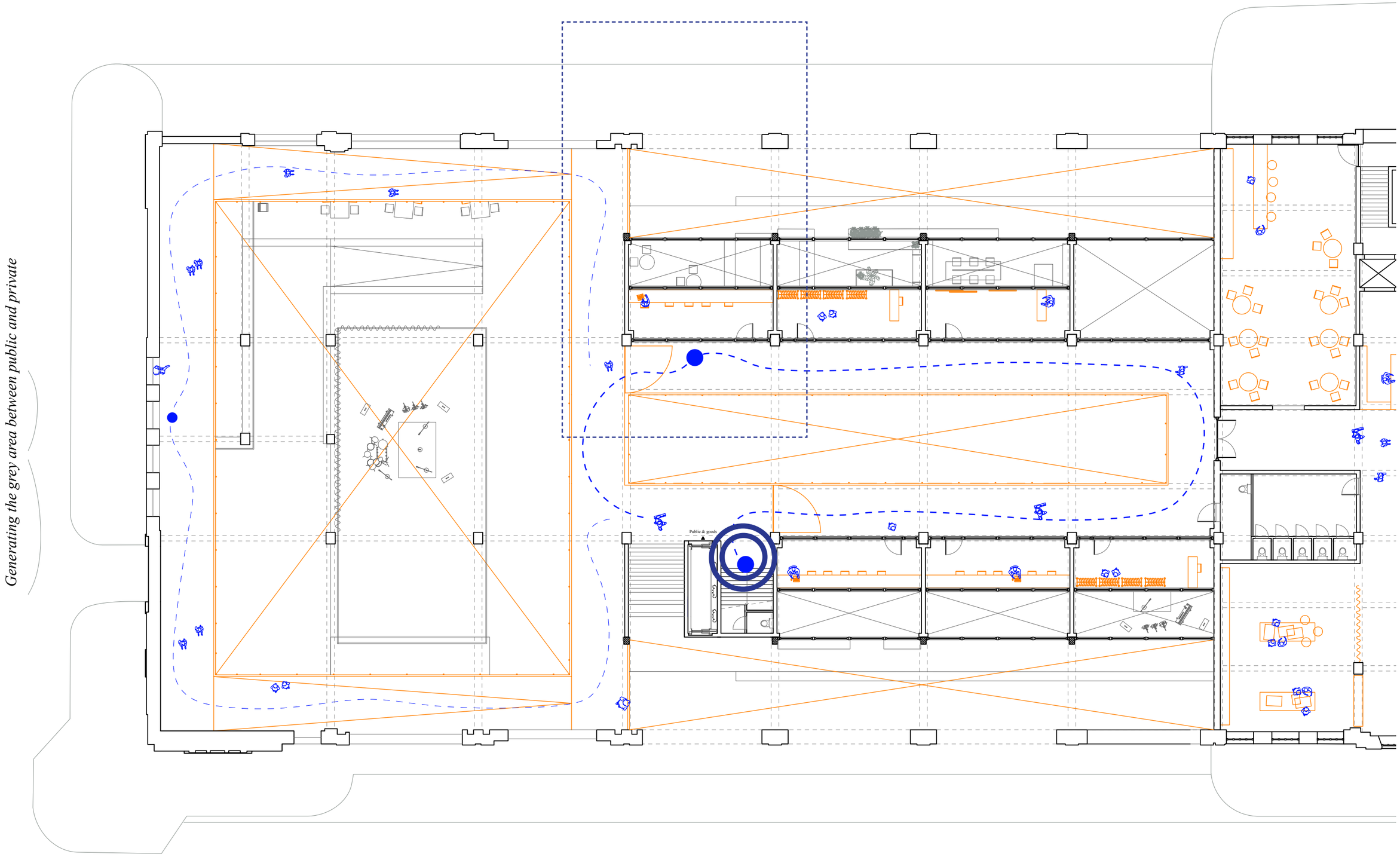


First floor: Small focus and retail studios

Study places

Belgrove St.

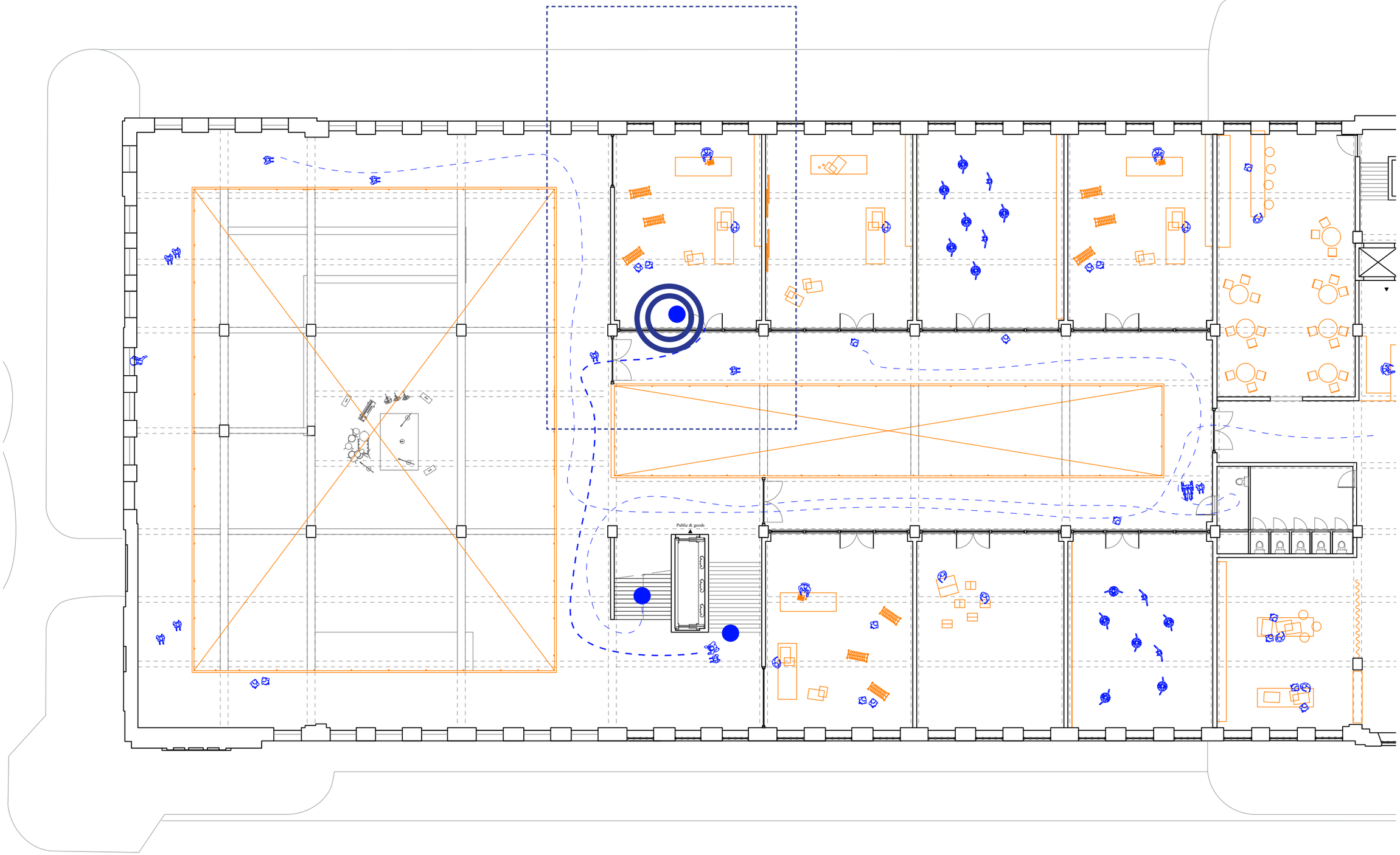
Generating the grey area between public and private



First floor: Moving up

Belgrove St.

Generating the grey area between public and private



Second floor: larger workshops, studios and retail

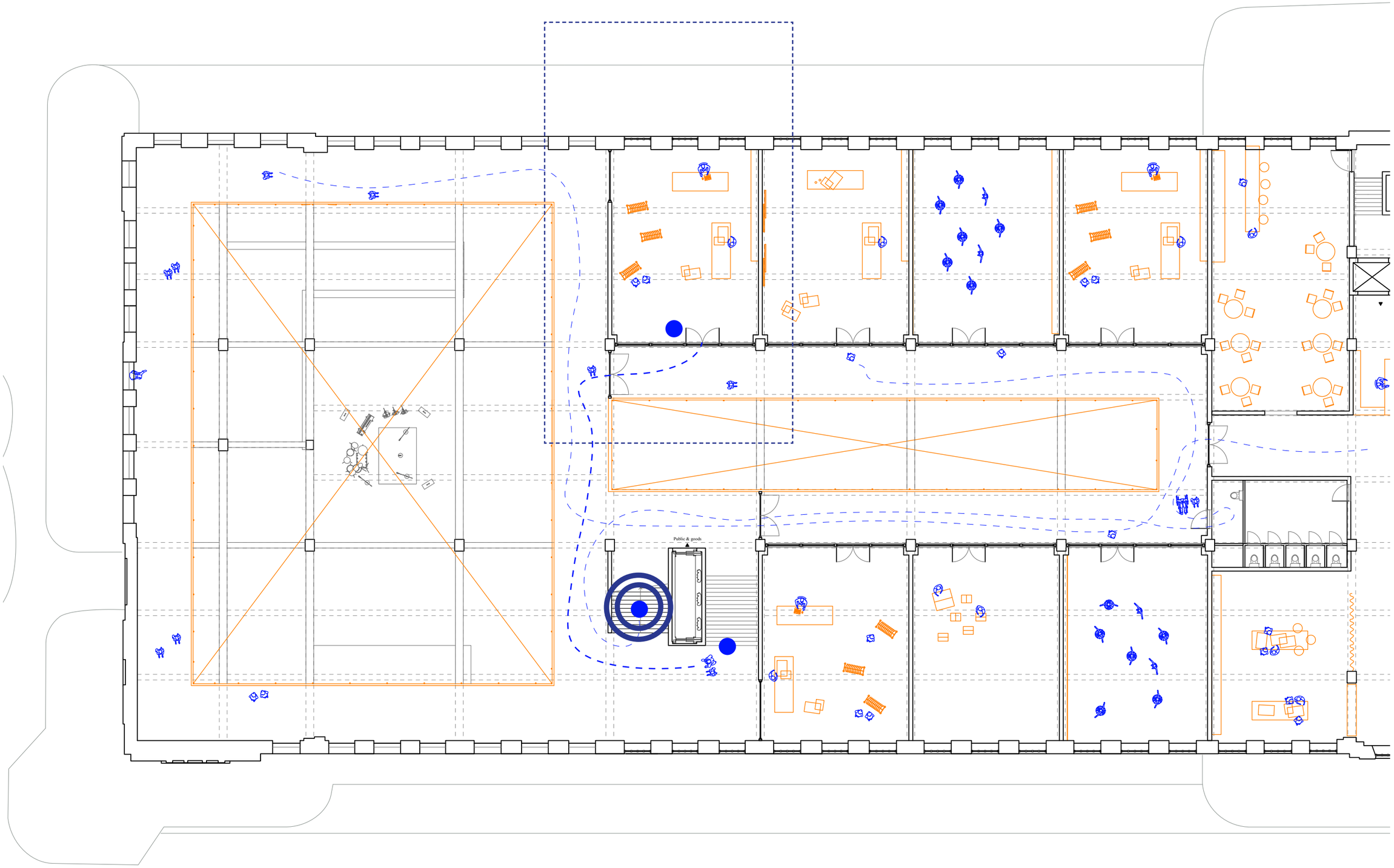
Artist studio and workshop

Design studio

Design studio

Belgrove St.

Generating the grey area between public and private



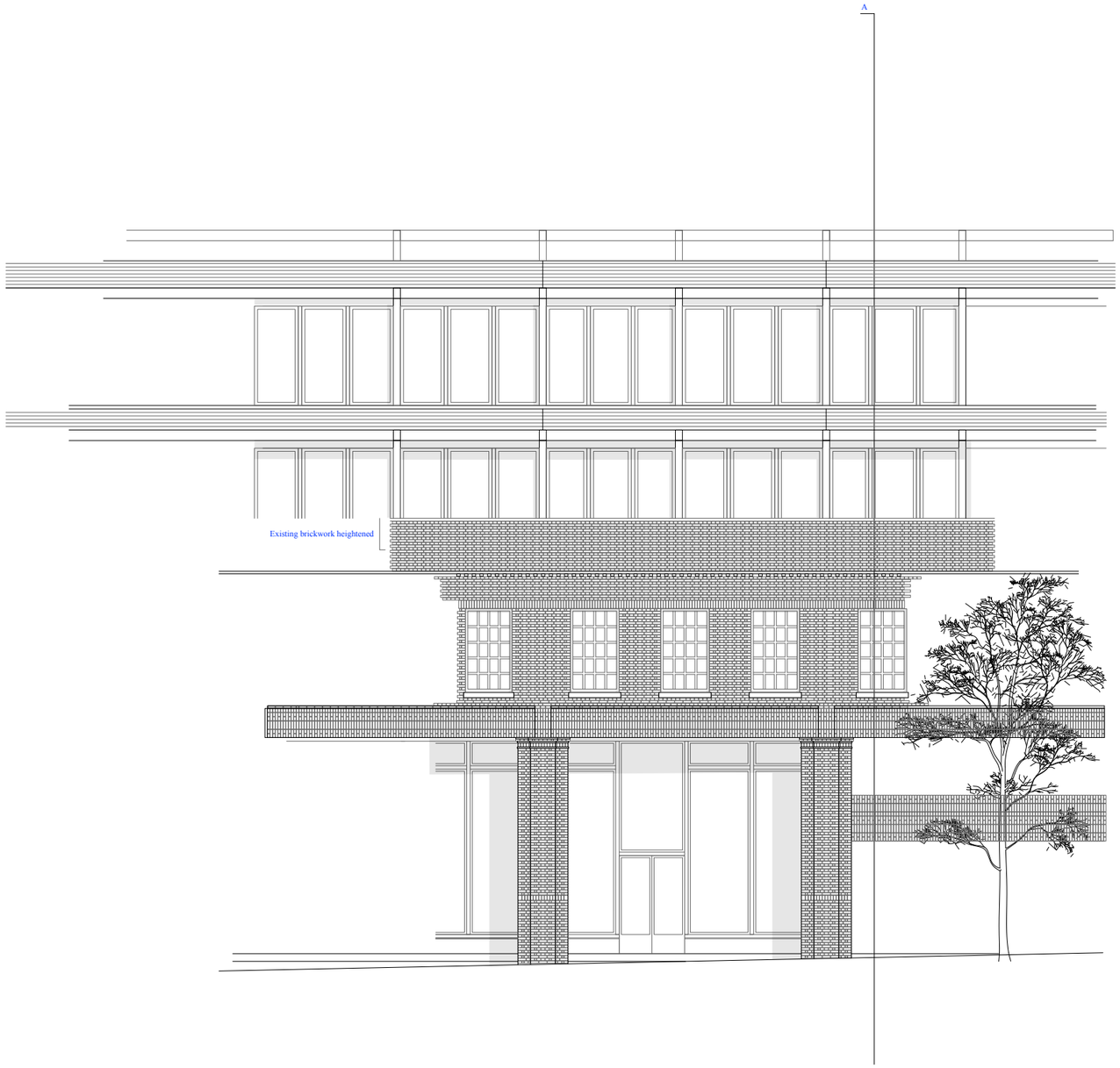
Second floor: Moving up

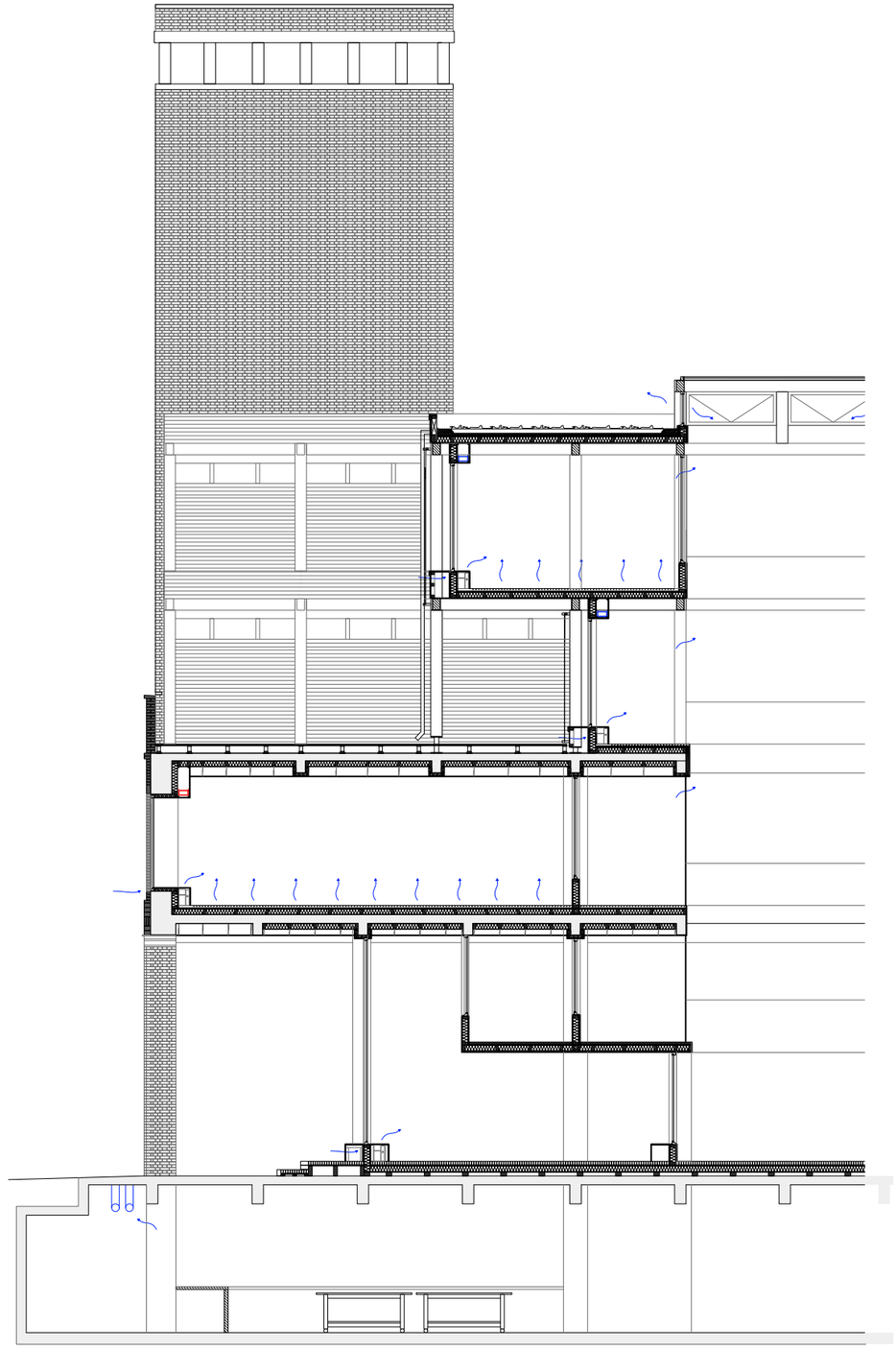
Belgrove St.

Generating the grey area between public and private

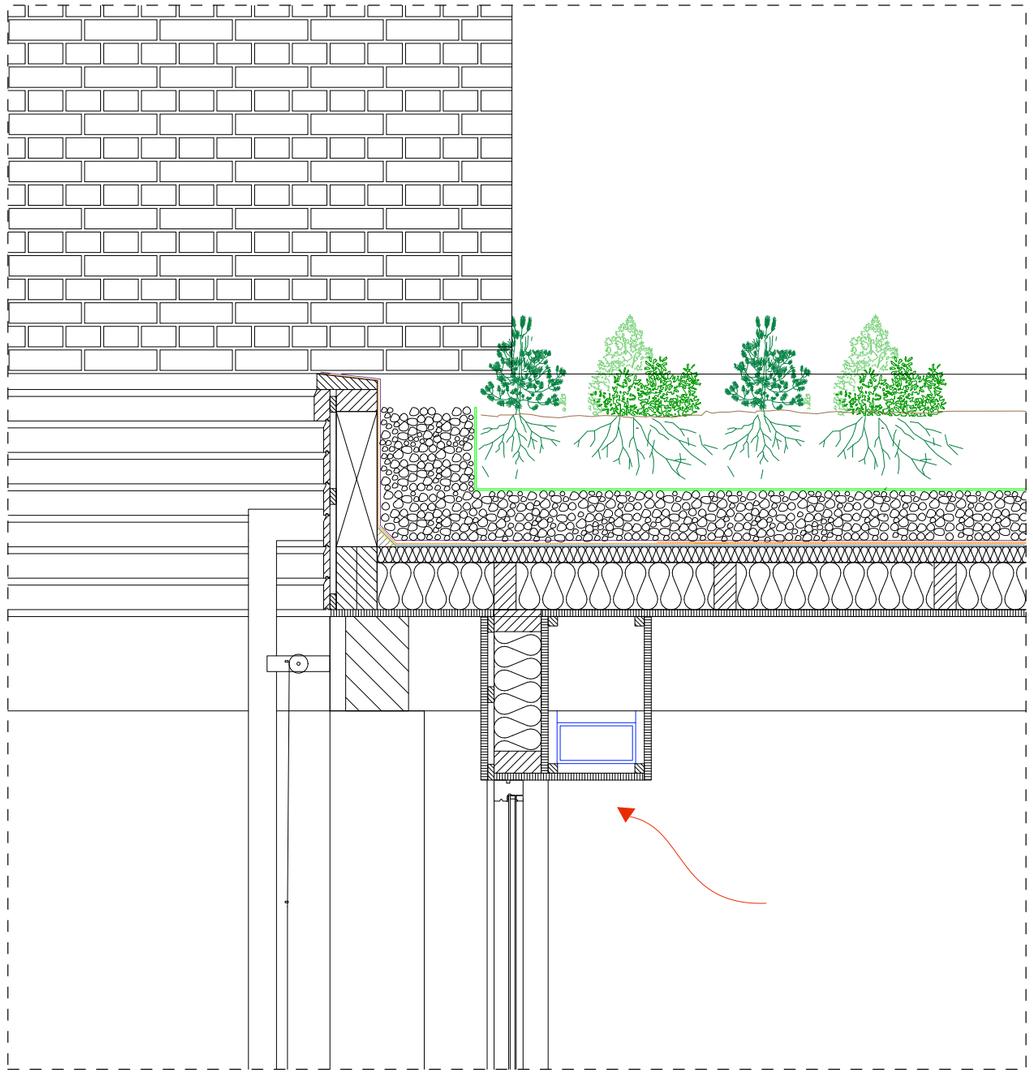
Third floor: rooftop extension and restaurant

Generating the grey area between public and private





Generating the grey area between public and private



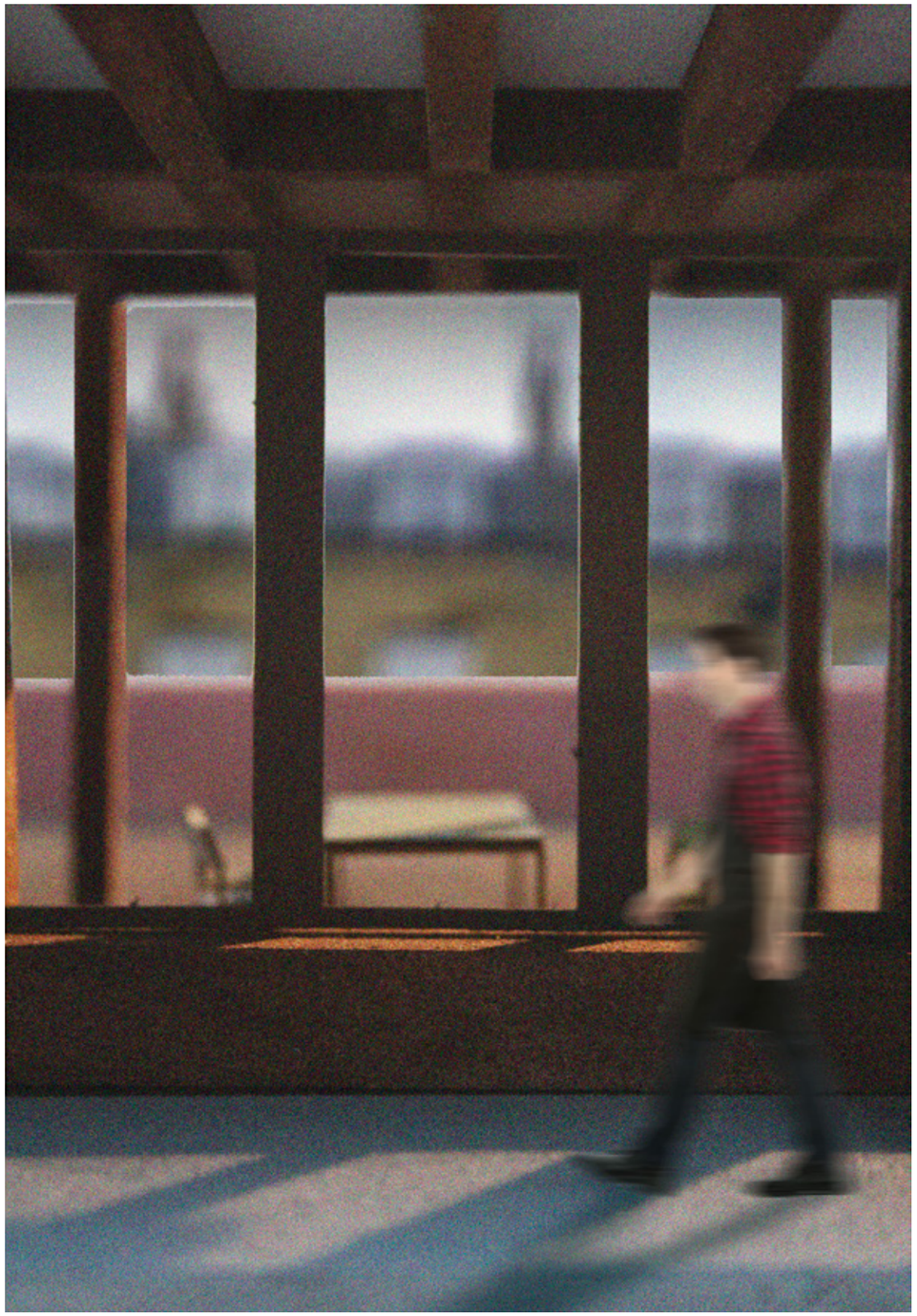
Vegetation roof

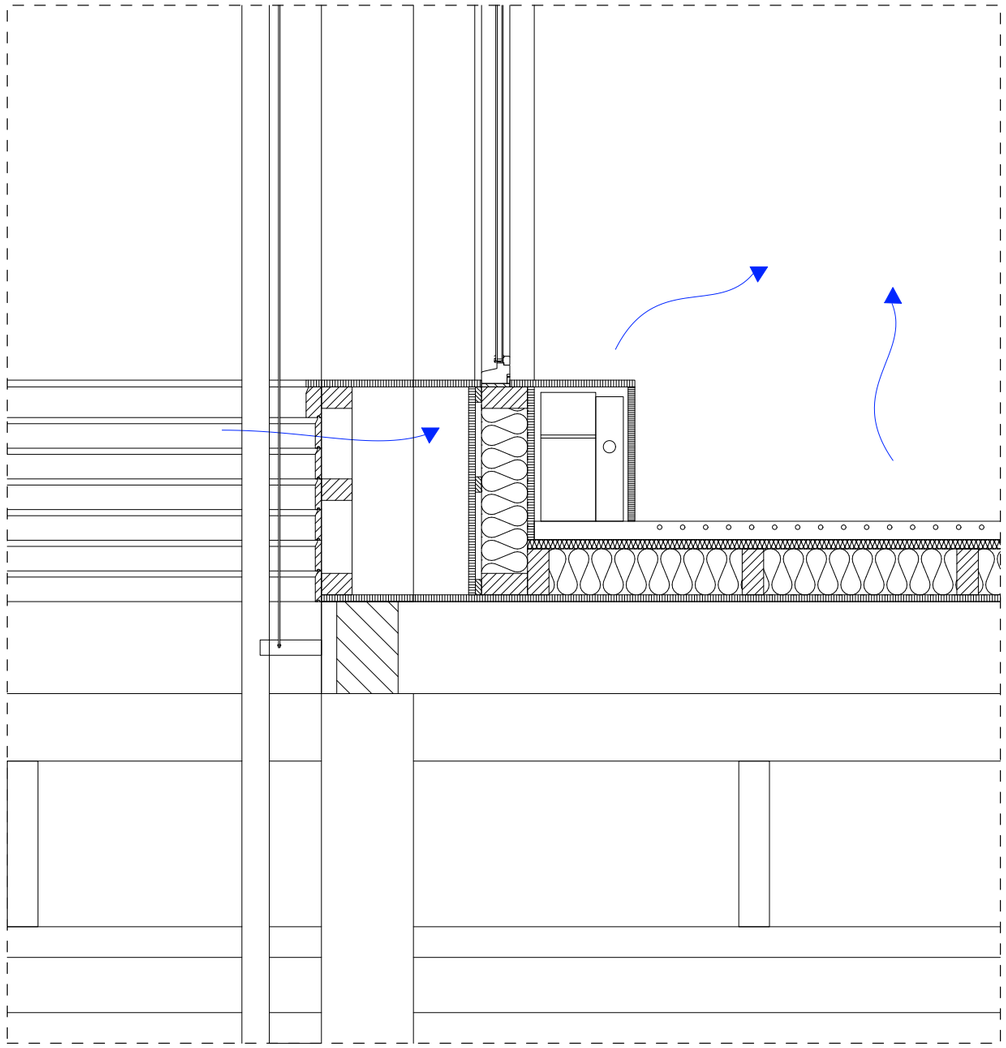
1. Gypsum board 22 mm (stuc)
2. Vapor layer
3. Wooden framework 150 x 70 mm
4. EPS roof insulation 150 mm
5. Sloping insulation 70 mm (2%)
6. Roofing system 10 mm
7. Protection layer 10 mm
8. Drainage layer 10 mm
9. Vegetation free zone 300 mm
10. Substrate layer 150 mm
11. Vegetation

Roof trim

1. Wooden roof trim
Sloping - water drainage
2. Wooden beam 130 x 70 mm
In order to heighten roof trim
3. Wooden framework 50 x 20 mm
4. European dark hard wood cladding
100 x 20 mm
5. Sunshading between metal and steel
thread - attached to loadbearing structure

Generating the grey area between public and private

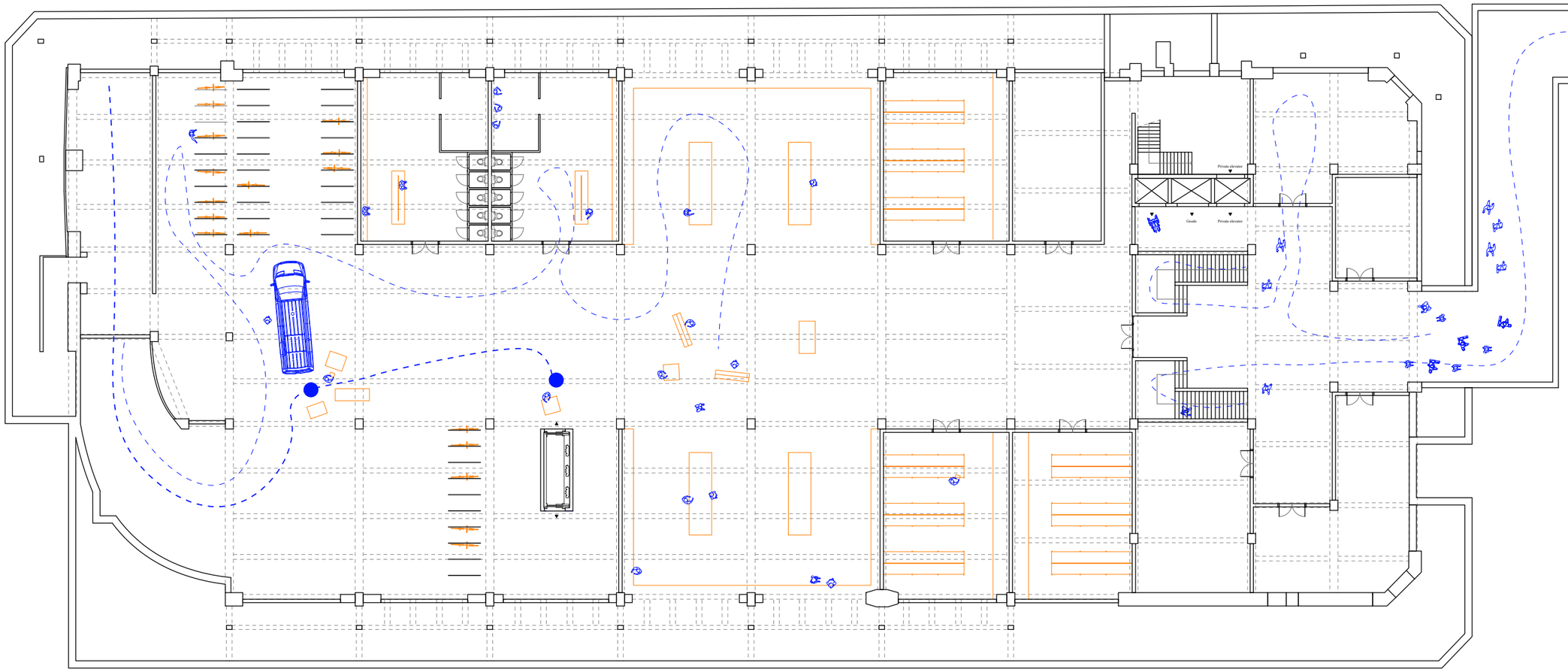




Wooden extension facade

1. Sunshading with metal and steel thread
attatched to loadbearing structure
2. European dark hard wood cladding 100 x 20 mm
3. Wooden framework (100 x 70 mm)
4. Load bearing wooden structure
European dark hard wood 200 x 300 mm)
5. Ventilation cavity (ClimaRad)
6. Gypsum board 20 mm
7. Wooden framework 20 x 50 mm
8. Wood fibre insulation 150 mm
9. Window frames, iroko wood HR+++

Generating the grey area between public and private



Basement: loading and unloading, creative workshop and tube station

Generating the grey area between public and private

Public square and open podium: used as a platform for young talent

Generating the grey area between public and private

Public square and open podium: used as exhibition space

Generating the grey area between public and private