

INTRODUCTION



Muni as Wesleyan Chapel & Municipal Buildings (early C20)



Muni as Wesleyan Chapel (early to mid C20)



Municipal Hall (c. mid-late C20)



Muni Arts Centre (2020)

Welcome

The Muni Arts Centre has been a much valued and well-loved focus for the arts and culture in Pontypridd for nearly 40 years since its conversion in the 1980s, and prior to that had served the community of Pontypridd as a Wesleyan Chapel since 1895. The Muni has not only been an important venue for professional arts in the town, but also for amateur and community performance over decades of use. Architecturally the Muni is a fine late C19 former Wesleyan Chapel in Gothic style, designed by local architect Arthur O Evans and is Grade II listed as being of architectural and historic significance to Pontypridd and its development as a town.

Since the Muni's closure in December 2018, and conscious of its vital importance as a cultural asset to the community and visitors to the region, the local authority, Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council (RCTCBC) have partnered with Awen Cultural Trust, an experienced third sector not-for-profit venue operating company who currently operate other significant cultural venues in Grade II listed buildings including Porthcawl Grand Pavilion and Maesteg Town Hall.

RCTCBC acknowledge the importance of making a significant investment into the Muni's future to give it a new lease of life and, importantly, to reflect the value and quality of the arts and culture in the town by future proofing the Muni to respond to changing cultural, environmental and technological opportunities.

As such, RCTCBC and Awen Cultural Trust have commissioned Purcell, a practice of Architects and Heritage Consultants who specialise in the conservation of heritage buildings and the provision of new design in the historic environment, to undertake the early stages of the design process to establish an ambitious, exciting and robust future for the Muni. Over the following sequence of boards we invite you to review our progress so far, to understand the history and current condition of the Muni and to view our emerging plans for the future vision.

We hope you will be interested to help - gathering the views of the community and stakeholders on our developing work is a fundamental part of our process, so please do refer to the details provided on the final board to make us aware of any feedback you have. This consultation will be live from the 07th December 2020 - 18th January 2021.

Thank you!

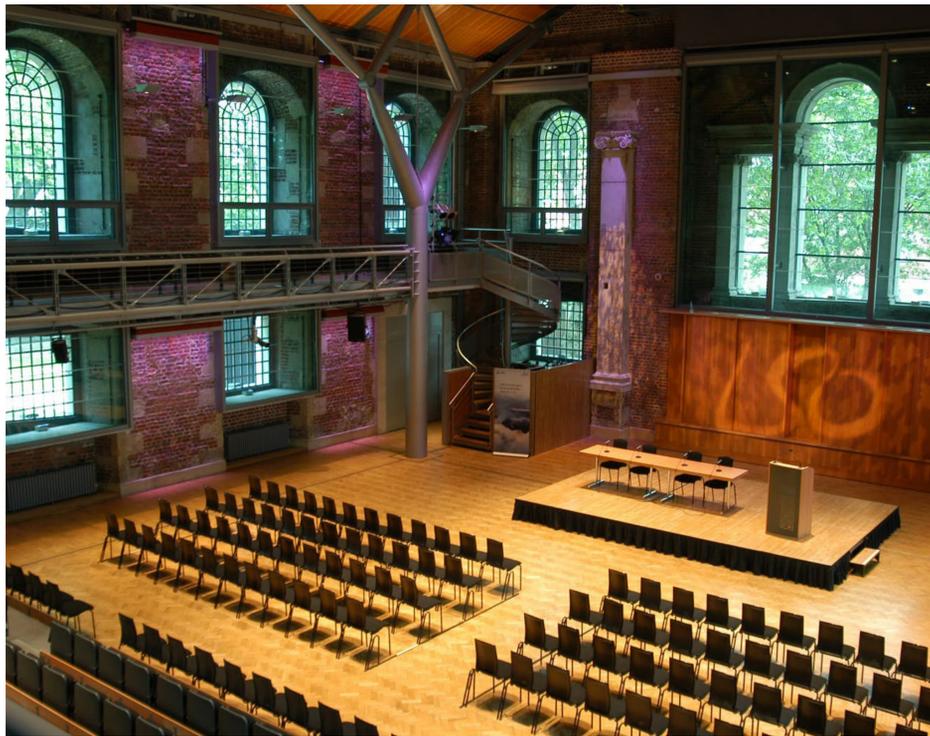
THE PROJECT BRIEF



The Unitarian Church, Nottingham



LSO St Luke's, Islington



LSO St Luke's, Islington



The Union Chapel, Islington

Our Brief & Objectives

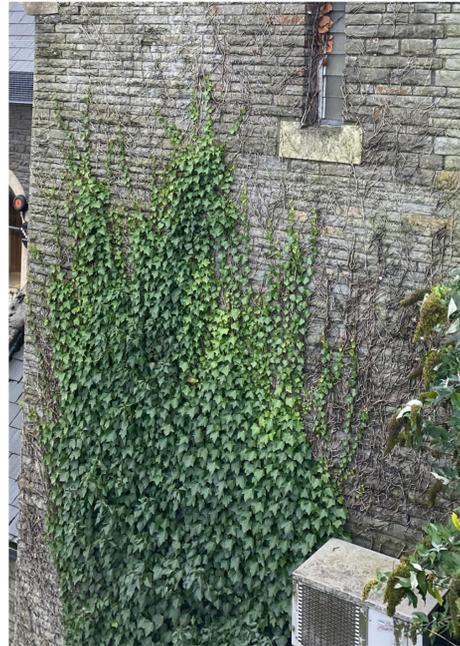
The brief and objectives for this study are in two parts, firstly we must ensure that the Muni is repaired, conserved and safeguarded as a significant heritage building in the first instance. Then, in addition to this, how can we explore, through remodelling and new design, ways of enhancing the existing building and offer to ensure the Muni is a sustainable venue in the 21st Century. To explore this, we have the following objectives:

- To establish, through thorough surveys of the existing building, the scope of repairs and conservation required to reduce the heritage deficit and ensure the Muni is easy to maintain moving forward.
- The ensure the Muni is a fully accessible building, providing access for all including both lift access to all floors and a dedicated, fully compliant Changing Place facility.
- Expose the Muni's impressive yet hidden Gothic architecture and heritage, creating a unique venue with a sense of place and identity rooted in its community.
- Explore ways of improving the Muni's environmental sustainability, exploring fabric-first methods of upgrading the existing building to achieve better thermal performance, and exploring the feasibility of renewable energy generation through Air Source Heat Pumps, PV panels and greywater harvesting.
- Retain and enhance the facilities which the community need.
- Develop a design option and vision which creates a financially viable and sustainable venue, ensuring the Muni is a key part of the Pontypridd economy and community now and in the future.
- Consider the Muni's role in Pontypridd's night time economy

HISTORY AND CONDITION



Failing Rainwater Goods



Algae & Vegetation Growth



Failing Flat Roofs



Poor Flashing & Leadwork Details



Vegetation Growth to Parapets & Mortar Joints



Historic Structural Movement



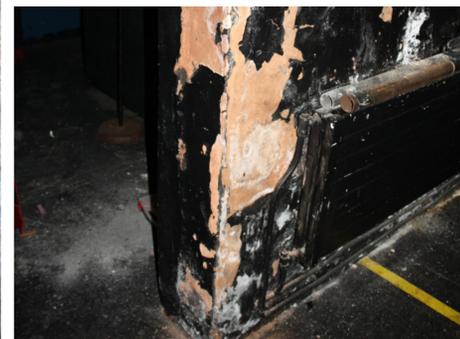
Neglected External Areas



Challenges with Tight External Retaining Wall



Rainwater Ingress



Rising Damp

A Physical & Heritage Assessment

Fabric Condition Survey

Purcell and their team of specialist consultants have undertaken a thorough assessment of the Muni's historic fabric. By surveying and categorising the building elements into items such as roof coverings, leadwork, rainwater goods, external masonry, internal finishes, structural elements and building services, we can establish the scope of repairs and upgrading required to ensure the Muni is safeguarded for future generations as a first priority.

Assessment of the Muni's Historic & Social Significance

We know that the Muni is rooted in the hearts and minds of the local community, with many residents still holding the memories of the building when it was used as a Wesleyan Chapel where it hosted weddings and religious events, and many residents who attended gigs, community events, exhibitions and various other cultural activities since its conversion to the Muni Arts Centre in the 1980s.

All of these memories are what makes the Muni so socially significant, and we are very interested in gathering as many of your memories and old photographs of the Muni to inform our understanding of the development of the building and its place in the town. If you have a memory or photographs of the Muni you would like to share, please click [here](#) to find out how.

We also know that the Muni is a fine example of late C19 Gothic architecture in the Valleys and many of its original architectural features remain. However, over the years the Muni has been extended, altered and redecorated with unsympathetic interventions which have served to conceal its original architectural features, particularly internally.

An important part of our study is to identify the Muni's original fabric from the more modern additions which are deemed detrimental to its aesthetic and historic value. Purcell's heritage consultants have produced a series of plans to unpick the original late C19 fabric which is of high-significance, from the low significance and more modern interventions. This information will be used to inform the future vision, ensuring we can remodel the Muni to meet future needs whilst maintaining its unique character and heritage.

EXPOSING HIDDEN HERITAGE



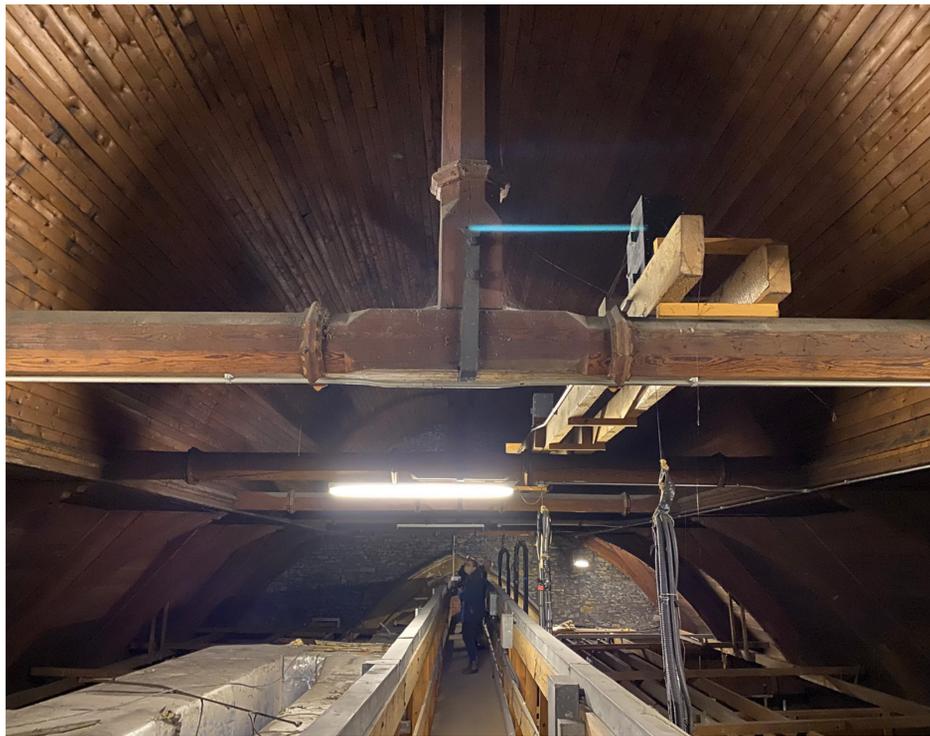
High-pointed arch above the former chapel chancel (above current stage)



High-pointed arches to former chapel aisles



Concealed tracery window to former chancel



Original arch-braced roof trusses concealed above suspended ceilings



Infilled original tracery window to nave

Creating a Sense of Identity

Some members of the community may still hold memories of the interior of the Muni when it was a Wesleyan Chapel, with intricate Gothic tracery windows, high-pointed arches and beautifully crafted arch-braced roof trusses. In its current condition however, all of these historic features are entirely concealed on the inside, where the Muni's impressive Gothic architecture is prevalent from the exterior, but the interior is a nondescript space with no sense of place or identity.

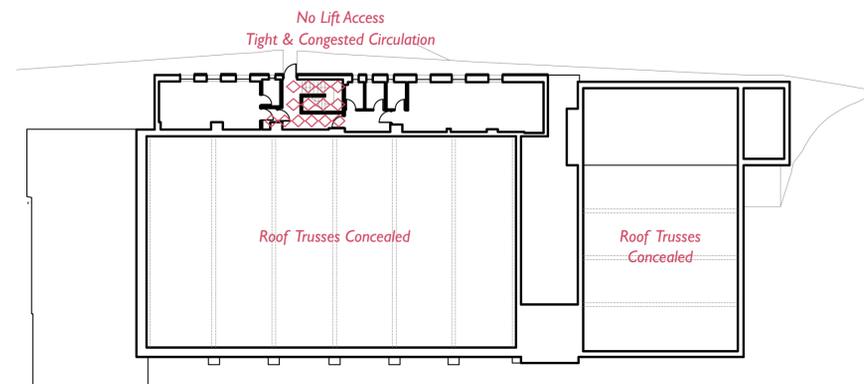
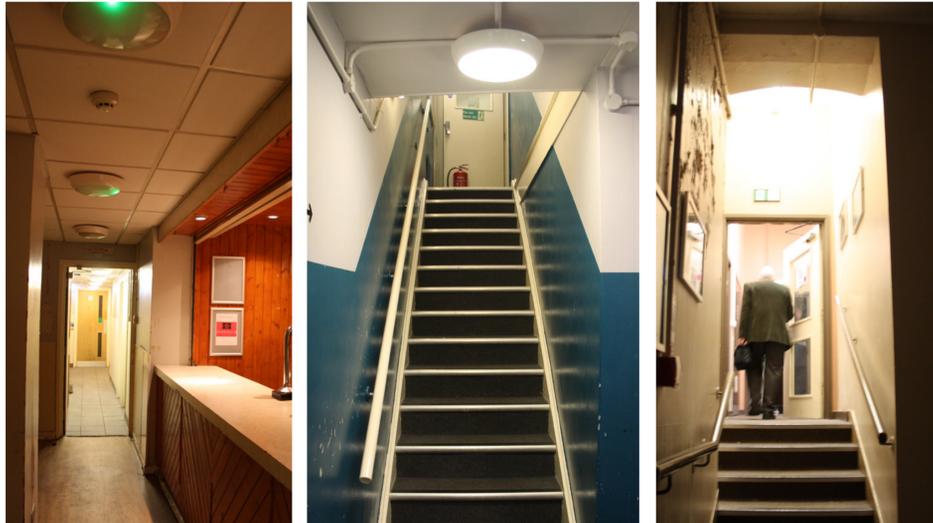
A key part of the brief for the Muni's future is to expose all of the buildings original features wherever possible, reinstating the original windows which will bring natural light and character back to the interior; cleaning and repairing the original pointed arches and making them visible to audiences and visitors, and lifting the 1980s suspended ceilings to unveil the Muni's impressive roof structure above.

The result of unveiling this hidden heritage will create a truly unique cultural venue which is rooted in its place and has a clear identity. The interior volumes will be significantly increased and the original features will form a characterful backdrop to any event which takes place in the building. Importantly, the craftsmanship of the local people who built the Muni over 120 years ago will be brought back to the fore and form part of the buildings exciting future.

EXISTING CONSTRAINTS

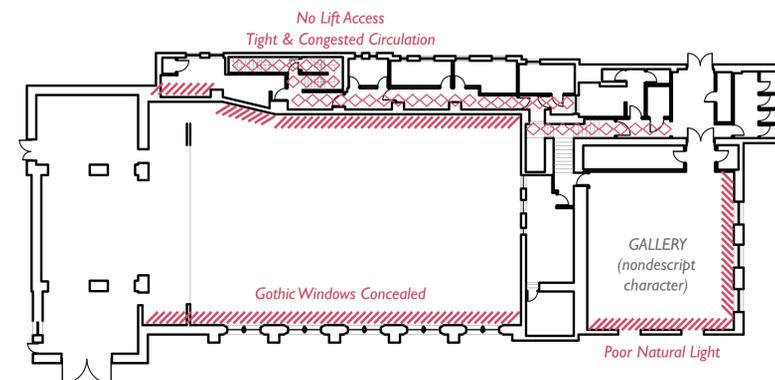
Internal Constraints

Second Floor



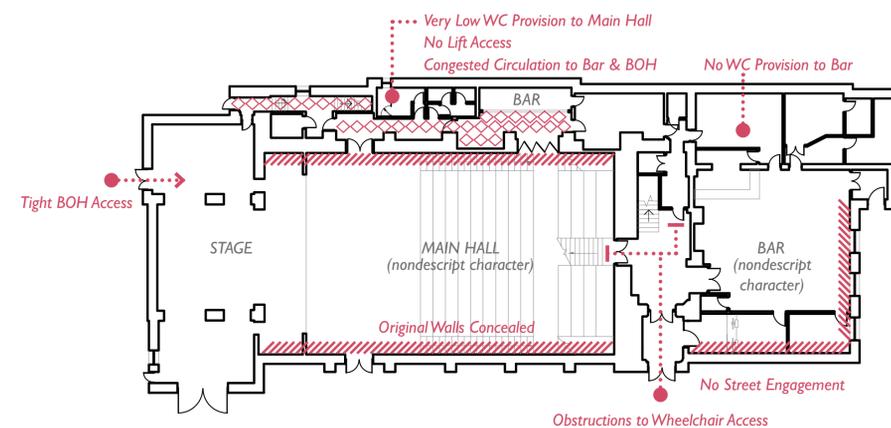
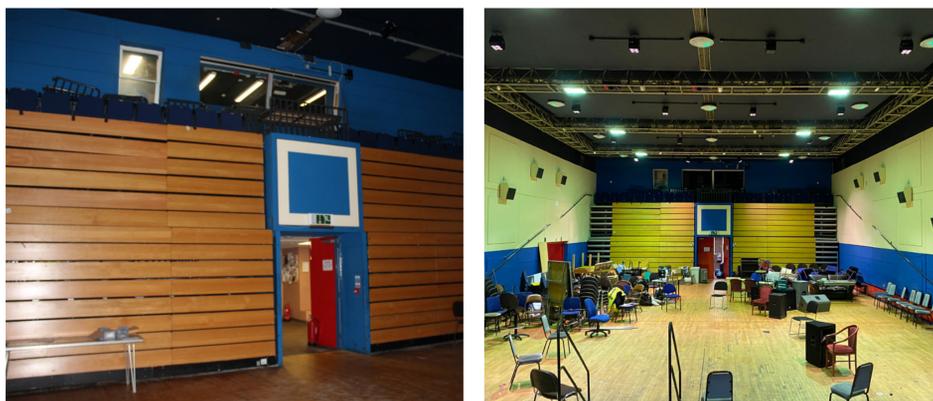
The second floor of the 1980s extension rises above the high retaining wall and allows level access to the car park to the west, which provides a unique opportunity for performers to park and access the building privately from the rear. The two second floor rooms either side of the stairwell once again suffer from a lack of natural light due to small window openings. There is no disabled accessibility to the second floor.

First Floor



Much like the ground floor, the first floor circulation is highly congested and characterised by narrow hallways and stairwells. Natural light to the series of small rooms within the 1980s extension is very limited, for its built tight up against the high retaining wall to the western site boundary. There is currently no lift access to the first or second floors.

Ground Floor



Key operational constraints on the ground floor include poor wheelchair accessibility, tight circulation spaces and a severe shortage of WCs, all of which must be addressed. The main hall and the former cafe bar are characterless, with all original Gothic features concealed behind modern linings. A key opportunity is the uncovering of these original Gothic features such as decorative stonework, tracery windows, pointed arches and arch-braced roof trusses reviving the Muni's unique identity.

THE FUTURE VISION - EMERGING DESIGN OPTION

- Bar(s) & Seating
- Back of House
- Performance
- WCs

Ground Floor

Foyer & Accessibility

The main foyer space is located centrally between the main hall and ground floor bar, accessed by the entrance door beneath the tower. All partitions and obstructions are to be stripped out, providing a greater circulation and milling space closer to the scale one would expect for a venue with the Muni's capacity. The foyer provides access either side to the bar or hall, and incorporates a central stair and passenger lift to provide full accessibility to all public spaces for audiences and visitors.

WC Provision

The WC provision in the existing building is grossly undersized, and therefore a generous bank of Male and Female WCs are positioned centrally and can be shared between the Hall and the Bar. Important to our objectives of achieving a fully accessible venue, a compliant Changing Places facility (i.e. a large, fully accessible disabled toilet fitted with equipment such as a hoist and shower for people who are not able to use the toilet independently) is positioned centrally and accessed easily off of the foyer.

New Bar Facilities

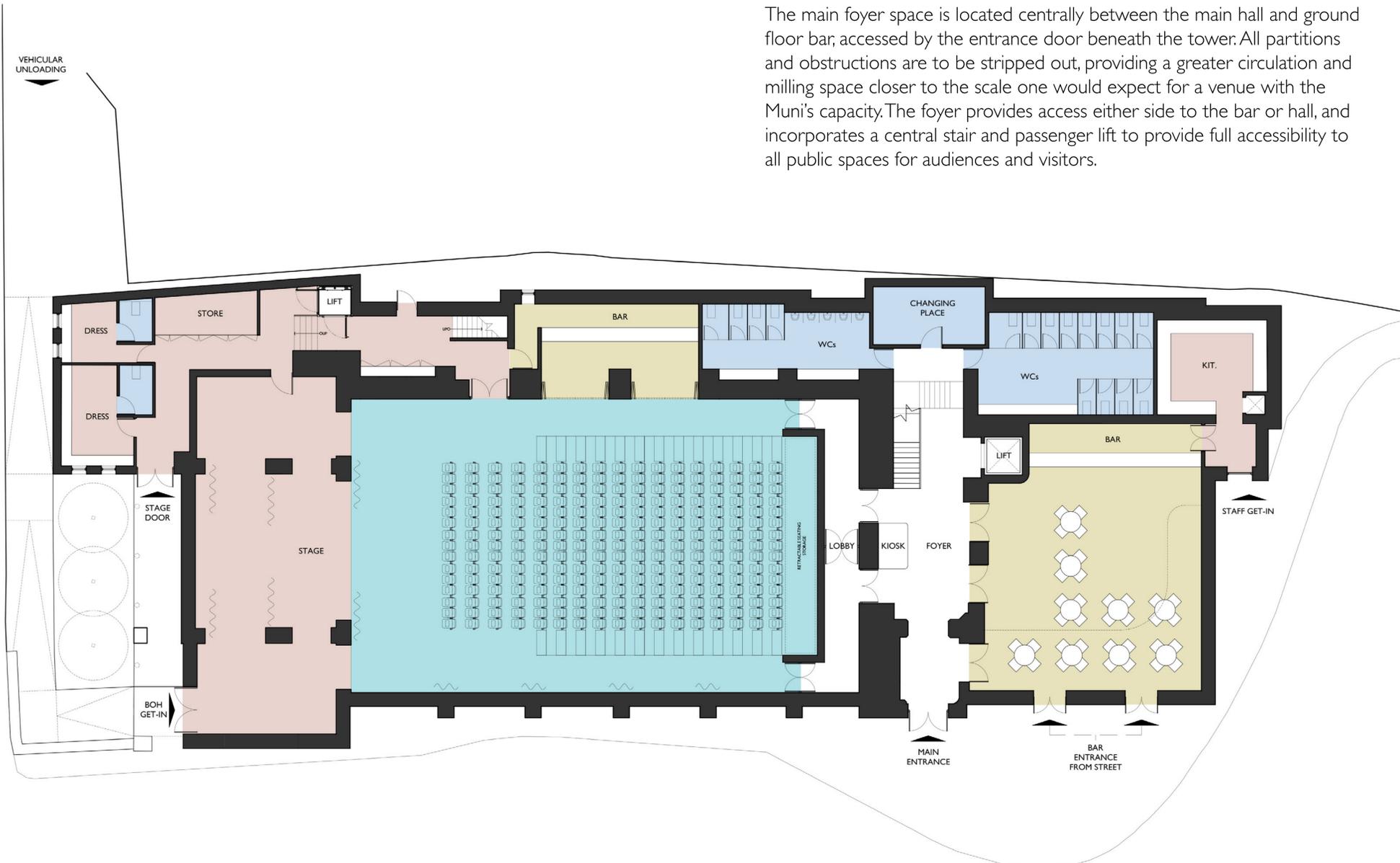
The existing cafe bar space in the former Sunday School is to be entirely overhauled, all modern linings removed to unveil original Gothic features behind. Original tracery windows and exposed roof trusses form the character of this space, including a triple height floor to ceiling volume. The plan indicates two new openings carefully created beneath the existing windows onto Gelliwastad road, providing the bar with a greater street presence and offer to Pontypridd's night time economy.

Main Hall

Access to the main hall is from the foyer and through a new lobby, created to allow wheelchair access either side of the retractable seating unit and as an acoustic and light buffer. The main hall has a seating capacity of circa. 340 and all modern linings to the walls and ceilings removed to uncover the Gothic heritage beneath. The space is characterised by tracery windows, exposed king-post trusses and Gothic arches framing the stage.

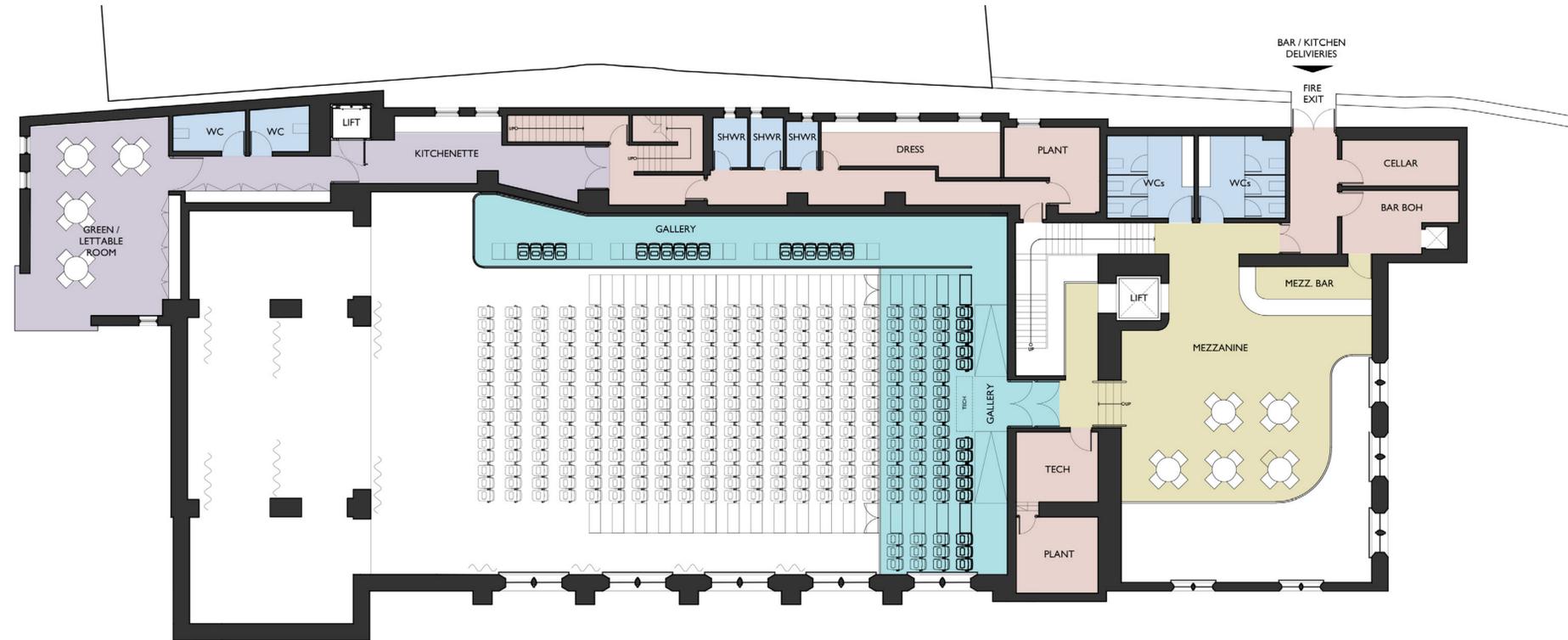
Back of House Access & Dressing Rooms

A new extension to the south-west corner of the Muni serves two functions at ground floor; 1. it provides much needed dressing room and storage facilities at the same level as the stage, including a dedicated 'stage door', and 2. it allows the installation of a new platform lift in a position which provides access to the stage for audience/cast members in a wheelchair, and full access to the first and second floors above.



THE FUTURE VISION - EMERGING DESIGN OPTION

- Bar(s) & Seating
- Performance
- WCs
- Back of House
- Self-Contained Green Room / Community Space



First Floor

Mezzanine Bar

Key spaces on the first floor include a new mezzanine bar and gallery seating in the main hall. The mezzanine floor is pulled back from the external walls to allow the original Gothic windows to be reinstated, providing a visual feature and natural light into the space. The mezzanine has its own dedicated bar and WC provision designed for maximum flexibility, where it can serve gallery audiences independently and be programmed for other community / flexible use.

Gallery

A new gallery is proposed above the ground floor lobby, providing an additional 83 fixed seats with the option of a side gallery which provides additional wheelchair spaces for use during a capacity standing performance. During a large event, gallery audiences can break-out to the mezzanine bar and WCs pre-show and during intervals.

Accessibility

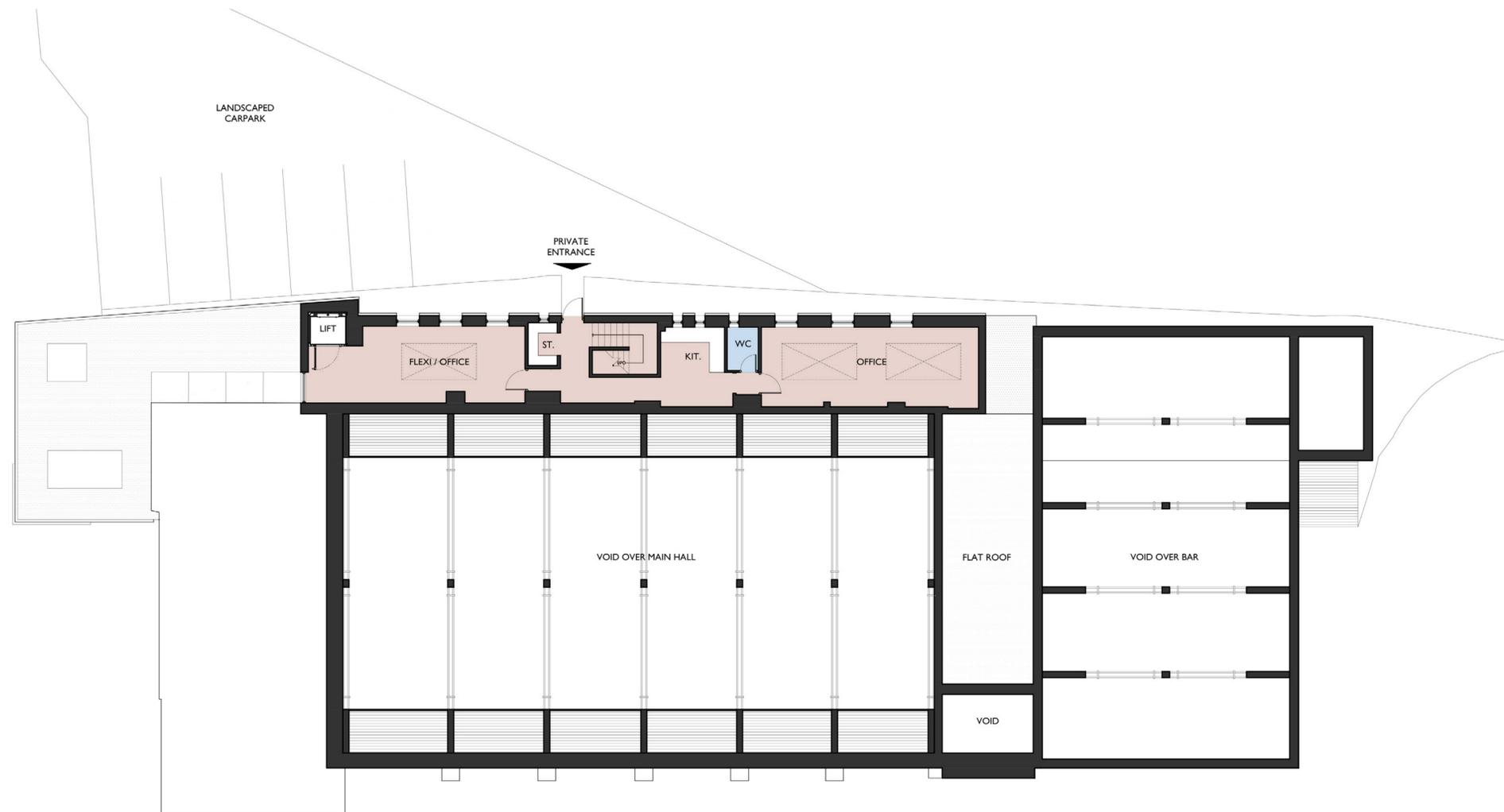
The central stair and passenger lift accessed from the central foyer space below provide full accessibility to a new mezzanine bar and gallery space. The passenger lift has two-sided opening, providing access to the mezzanine bar level and up another half-level to the new gallery in the main hall.

Green Room / Community Lettable Space

The new extension at first floor provides the opportunity for an entirely self-contained green room / community lettable space. By including its own dedicated kitchenette, storage, accessible WC provision and lift access, this space is designed to be as flexible as possible, where it can be used as a green room or overflow dressing room during large performances, and be hired to local community groups.

THE FUTURE VISION - EMERGING DESIGN OPTION

-  - WCs
-  - Back of House



Second Floor

Flexible Office Space

The second floor comprises of just the footprint to the 1980s extension, which will receive a light-tough refurbishment including the installation of roof lights to gain as much natural light as possible into the currently dark and oppressive rooms. The second floor use is predominantly dedicated to provision for the operating staff, with staff lockers, WC provision and kitchenette in support of the office. A second flexible office space provides a further option for community use or alternative programming.

Accessibility

As a performing arts venue, the Muni benefits enormously from a dedicated private car park to the west which provides level access into the second floor. This car park allows performers to park in a secure location and access the building directly into Back of House. The car park provides further benefit for wheelchair using performers or community members, who can enter via the rear and gain access to all floors below via the new platform lift.

WHAT NEXT?



Ymddiriedolaeth
Ddiwylliannol
Cultural Trust



Next Steps - How Can You Help?

We want to make sure that the ideas and proposals we are developing for the future of the Muni have the fullest support from the community. We want to give the Muni Arts Centre a new future that everyone supports and one that creates the maximum benefit to the community and the town of Pontypridd.

We would very much appreciate you spending some time to give us your views on our proposals in progress. We have set up an online questionnaire to gather the views of the community and our stakeholders which can be accessed below.

Above all, if there are opportunities you think we have missed, or you have feedback on the proposed programme and design, please note them on your questionnaire and make sure we know. This is a fundamental part of the process for us and we want to capture as many views as possible.

As our work progresses we will be collating all of your responses and feeding them into our developing design proposals. As work develops we will be regularly updating our website with information and images, so keep in touch to see how the Muni's future development plans are moving forward!

This consultation will be live from the 07th December 2020 - 18th January 2021. For links to our online survey, please click [here](#) or scan the QR code. Alternatively, please send your responses to:

Freepost RSBU-HJUK-LSSS
Research & Consultation
Public Relations & Strategy
The Pavilions
Cambrian Industrial Park
Clydach Vale
Tonypandy
CF40 2XX

or call our consultation telephone line at:
01443 425014



Thank you!