



CAMBUSLANG
Community Council

Cambuslang Libraries Action Group

OPTIONS FOR THE FUTURE OF CAMBUSLANG LIBRARY

version 6 May 2024

This paper from the Cambuslang Library Action Group reviews options for the future of public library provision in Cambuslang as a basis for discussion with South Lanarkshire Council and South Lanarkshire Leisure & Culture.

1. Starting point

The position of the Cambuslang Library Group is that Cambuslang, now the third largest town in South Lanarkshire, must continue to have a public library that ‘provides a comprehensive and efficient library service for all persons’ who live, work and study in Cambuslang.

It is important to understand that the origins of Cambuslang Library go back over 140 years when a group of working men “of serious mind” created a small lending library for “social betterment” and self-improvement, then called the Cambuslang Social Union. With the creation of the Cambuslang Institute building in 1892, purpose-built premises allowed the library to expand to 4000 volumes, with 150 volumes added annually. It was relocated to a separate building, built in classical style on Glasgow Road, in the early 1930s – and was a much-loved library building for generations of the Cambuslang community. However, in 2007 South Lanarkshire Council took the decision for the library building to be demolished and the land sold to developers for housing (now Sir Thomas Lipton Gardens and Library Gardens), with the library being relocated to its current premises in Cambuslang Gate – a step that is still rightly regarded as a mistake by many local residents today.

This history is relevant to the current debate. Any suggestion that Cambuslang might not have a public library for the first time in 140 years would be an unforgivable betrayal of the community. As recent consultations by SLLC have shown, local people value libraries as critical for themselves, their families, the local community and community wellbeing. They matter for supporting literacy, learning, digital inclusion and socialization. This has become progressively more important as Cambuslang has expanded over the past two decades; thousands of new houses have been built, with many young families moving into the area, but without commensurate investment in public services.

In this context, the Cambuslang community do not accept the loss of a public library in the town centre and reject any version of ‘reprovisioning’ that would lose this vital public service in favour of some kind of library that would not be classed as a ‘public library’. In other words, while the community is willing to engage with SLC/SLLC and work constructively in collaboration on agreed options, any solution must demonstrate how SLC will continue to discharge its responsibilities for providing a public library service to all residents with some level of staffing and participation in SPYDUS to enable effective library management, have access to new material, online content etc.

2. Options

In discussions with SLC and SLLC, the focus on the future of Cambuslang Library has been on the following two options.¹

- a) **Retention of the Library in Cambuslang Gate.** This would be one of the preferred options for the Cambuslang Library Group as it would involve the least disruption. The location is well known to the community, and it is well-used by community and other groups. SLC/SLLC have a long lease on the space which they will need to continue funding unless they break the lease which they have said they do not intend to do. The community could provide voluntary support for the running of the Library to reduce the running cost, but it would need to retain its status as a public library with a qualified librarian.

There are of course some disadvantages: the first-floor location is a disincentive for less mobile residents who, despite the lift, are worried about getting out of the building in an emergency; and the opening hours of the Cambuslang Gate restrict the opening hours of the Library.

- b) **Relocation of some form of library to Cambuslang Institute.** This could be seen as having advantages. It is a well-known building that, in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, housed the Cambuslang Library. SLC have a long lease (to 2032) and SLLC already manage the building. However, the building is not universally accessible because of the lack of a lift. On-site parking is limited. The need to walk uphill from the Main Street is a disincentive for less mobile members of the community. Only one room on the ground floor (other than the main hall) could house some books as well as providing meeting space - but this would be a much-diminished 'library'.

The major concern of the Cambuslang Library Action Group is that this option would be little more than a 'book store' that would no longer qualify as a public library, reliant on community volunteers and without access to the current public library management software.

3. A third option: Cambuslang Community Hub

The Cambuslang Library Group proposes consideration of a third option: the relocation of the current library to a new community hub at 152 Main Street ensuring a continued public library for the town. This address is currently a vacant unit, the deepest and most spacious unit on the south side of Cambuslang Main Street, which has been unoccupied for many years. The unit has 4,000 sq ft on the ground floor and 1,500 sq ft on the first floor. It opens onto the centre of the Main Street, is across the road from the Allison Drive car park, and has service/loading access and staff parking to the rear. The landlord is open to a long-lease (preferred) or sale of the unit.

Cambuslang Community Council (CCC) has previously undertaken some exploratory work to assess its suitability as a community hub as a way of bringing more footfall onto the Main Street. The plans drawn up envisaged a combination of meeting space, community café, a

¹ From media reports, we learn that SLC/SLLC are also considering an option of a room at Eastfield Lifestyles. This has not been discussed with us. Our view is that this would not be suitable.

children's arts & crafts shop, surgery space for elected members/police and others and pop-up shop space. A proposal was submitted to the Regeneration Capital Grant Fund in 2020 (see application in Annex 1) which was positively appraised at Stage 1 with a recommendation to resubmit once CCC had title to the property.

CCC have recently viewed the property and have videos of the current internal state of both floors.

CCC proposes that a CCC/SLC working group be established quickly to assess the feasibility of an option to acquire the unit at 152 Main Street to create a community hub housing the Library. CCC have recently been in touch with the landlord and have viewed the property; video can be provided.

Cambuslang Library Action Group, 5.4.24

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This project will deliver the transformation of a vacant and derelict building into a Community Hub in the heart of Cambuslang Main Street, contributing to major regeneration of the town centre. Cambuslang is one of the most deprived towns in South Lanarkshire with 6 datazones in the bottom 15% of the SIMD 2020. Its town centre has been badly hit by the decline of Main St. retailing and by unsympathetic, car-focused redevelopment schemes. This project is part of a wider set of community-led initiatives to reinvent the Main St. with sustainable, accessible, varied and affordable local services.

The project involves the acquisition of the building, refurbishment of two floors, and the fitting-out of 510 m² for private, public and voluntary sector uses, including a community café, a children-focused social enterprise, community cinema and community learning services. Space will be provided for flexible pop-up activities such as surgeries for the community police team, elected members and bank services. The project includes renewal of the deteriorating façade of the outdated, central section of the Main St housing the Hub (known as Cambuslang Square), including updated shopfronts and wall murals.

The project will create new economic activity and employment in the Hub and stimulate investment to bring neighbouring vacant units into productive use. The Hub will provide a focal point for community events (e.g. street markets) on Cambuslang Square, exploiting the renewed Main St. streetscape being delivered under a 2019 Town Centre Fund grant.

The strategic justification is the long-term market failure affecting the town centre. The local community and business sector have been closely involved in identifying development needs and opportunities to revive the Main St. Consultations include the Cambuslang Community Survey (2015), Cambuslang Business Survey (2017), and a Your Town Audit (2018) conducted by STP and EKOS. These were used by South Lanarkshire Council (SLC), together with Cambuslang Community Council, to develop the Cambuslang Town Centre Regeneration Strategy, approved by SLC in 2019. The Strategy identified the need for “projects aimed at building a sense of community in the town centre and give families, young people and the older generation more reason to use their town centre” contributing to the objective of “an attractive, commercially successful, community- focused, welcoming town centre which generates a sense of civic pride in its citizens”.

Main objectives

- to restore a long-vacant town centre property to catalyse regeneration of the Main St.
- to provide new facilities for interconnected commercial and community uses
- to provide a focal point for indoor and outdoor community exhibitions and events
- to improve the physical appearance of the central area of Cambuslang Main St and make it more attractive for private investment and the creation of new jobs
- to attract more people to the Main St. to increase footfall and spend.

Anticipated outcomes

- 1 vacant and deteriorating building refurbished and brought back into use
- 510 m² of building space refurbished for private, public and third sector use
- upgrades to 350 m² of facade and 7 shopfronts
- new murals on gable ends

- a 2m-wide, 60m-long canopy to facilitate outdoor seating/activity for 7 businesses
- 3-5 construction jobs supported
- 10-15 jobs created
- upgraded energy performance of 510 m² of building space from its current G rating.

Community Support

The project has been developed by Cambuslang Future, a group of residents and business owners established in 2017 by Cambuslang Community Council in response to local concern with the decline of the town centre. Drawing on community surveys and regular business engagement, Cambuslang Future has met monthly with SLC over the 2018-20 period to develop the regeneration strategy for the town. Other project partners are Cambuslang Baptist Church (contributing match-funding), Healthy n Happy CDT, the LEAP (elderly action) Project, and Universal Connections Youth, Adult & Community Services, all of which would be active users of the Hub.

The importance of the project as a focal point for community life and catalyst for economic activity is evident from the 2017 Cambuslang Business Survey, which found the Main St. retail sector to be supporting c.350 jobs and an estimated turnover of £8-11 million. The survey revealed the concerning facts that a sizeable proportion of retailers (40%) had experienced declining business performance over the previous three years. A quarter assessed their performance as poor, and 20% had considered closing down or moving out of Cambuslang. More recent consultations show that footfall is down around 70% on 2017 following closures of all three banks, and a third of the 350 jobs (270 FTE) are under threat.

Less measurable, though also important, is the effect of decline on civic pride. Community dissatisfaction is evident in the responses to the 2015 Community Survey (at the time, the largest community survey in Scotland) and from the 2017 'Save Cambuslang' petition on change.org, signed by 6,128 people and presented to SLC Leader Cllr John Ross in January 2018, which registered major local frustration about the state of Cambuslang Main St.

Wider regeneration outcomes – physical

The basis for the Town Centre Strategy is transformational change to the physical environment of Cambuslang town centre. There is significant potential to capture much more local disposable income if the Main St can be made more attractive. Community and business consultation has demonstrated that the layout and quality of the streetscape are not considered fit for purpose, being neither coherent nor supportive of commercial viability. A plan for a redesigned Main Street was provided by a 'Smarter Choices, Smarter Places' study coordinated by Healthy n Happy CDT (a key stakeholder for this project) and undertaken by Systra via design workshops with the community and business sector.

Using the Systra study and other community engagement, the Town Centre Strategy has prioritised investment in a coherent, visually attractive streetscape, through a 2019 Town Centre Fund grant (£620,000) to renew a major part of the Main St with more attractive paving, distinctive street furniture, and creation of a civic space (Cambuslang Square).

This project builds on the first-phase investment by addressing the appearance and use of key buildings. The Your Town Audit (YTA) found that the place and quality impressions of Cambuslang present an "unkempt feel", and that the town falls "substantially below the YTA average" in the quality of building fronts. The project will improve the outdated and

worn appearance of the central section of the Main Street (dating from the 1960s) with a new façade that ties the appearance of the buildings in with the Victorian red-sandstone architecture of the other sections of the Main St, gable-end mural images reflecting the history of the town, and a distinctive canopy running the length of the central section.

Wider regeneration outcomes – economic

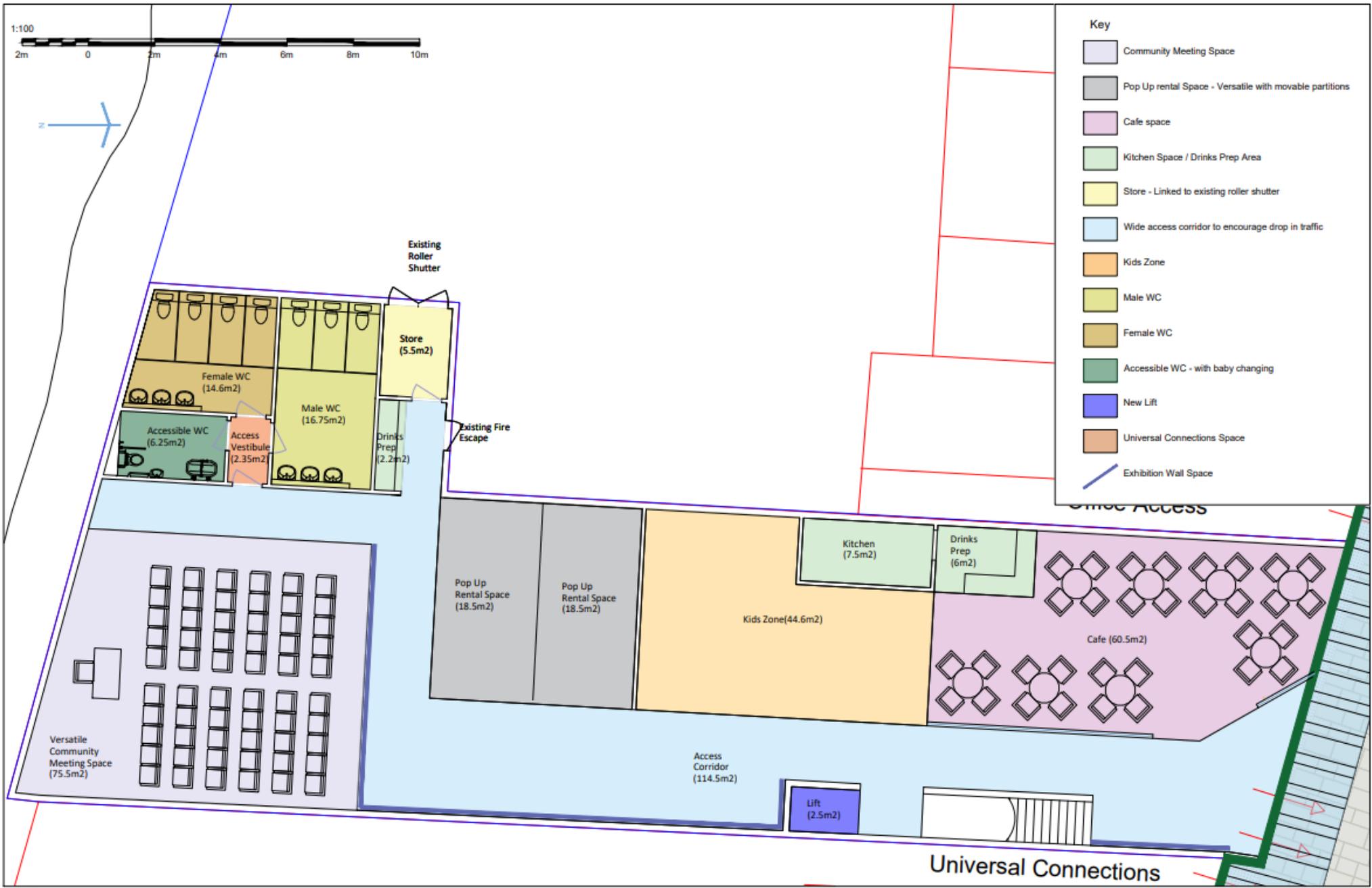
The YTA found that 11.4% of retail units in the town centre were vacant. In the central part of the Main Street, addressed by the project, this rises periodically (as in 2020, pre-Covid) to half of the sales area being vacant. The YTA attributed vacancy levels to properties being “particularly unattractive to occupiers and do not meet the needs of modern business” as well as appearing “unloved and unwelcoming to consumers”. The above physical improvements are intended directly to address these obstacles to investment. The creation of the Hub will bring one of the largest units in the central section of the Main St. back into productive use, with a community café and children-focused social enterprise providing soft play for infants, arts and crafts for children, support activities for young parents, and recycled children’s clothes and toys. The Hub will also have flexible pop-up space for commercial, public and third-sector uses. The large scale of the Hub will allow it to adapt to the post-Covid economic landscape and social distancing requirements.

Together with space for meetings, church and learning services (see below), and service provision (water, power) for outdoor events on Cambuslang Square, the project will draw significantly increased footfall to the central area of the Main St. Improving the façade and providing a canopy will also the central section more attractive for other businesses, especially restaurants and other commercial activity benefiting from outdoor seating.

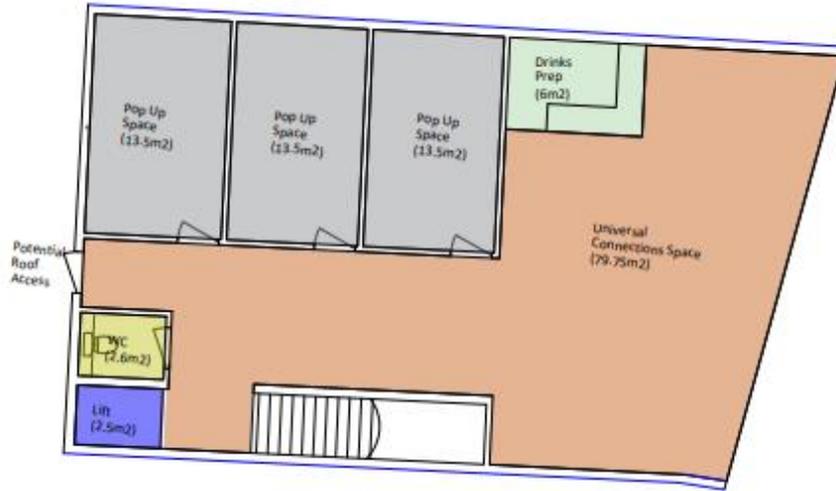
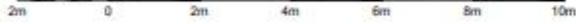
Wider regeneration outcomes – social

The project will create a focal point for community life in the heart of Cambuslang town centre. The lack of such an intergenerational ‘civic space’ is highlighted in the extensive community and business consultations. The most recent (2019) consultation on the draft Town Centre Strategy (which attracted over 1000 responses) identified the need for: “indoor and outdoor locations to meet friends and make social connections in a nice environment”.... family friendly spaces for “parents/carers and younger children where they can play and have food”.... “more recreational facilities, activities and events for children from infants to late teens”... and ... “facilities that bring the community together”. The project responds to these needs. In addition to the community café and children-focused social enterprise noted above, the ground floor would have 76 m² of flexibly configured meeting space, with capacity for up to 60 people for community meetings, a community cinema (focused particularly on young and elderly audiences) and local church services. The first floor would provide space for increased youth, adult and community learning services, to increase skills and employability for the Cambuslang datazones in the bottom deciles for employment, education and skills. The project would, therefore, contribute to the aim of the Town Centre Strategy of creating a new identity of a prosperous Cambuslang that is socially inclusive as well as economically viable.

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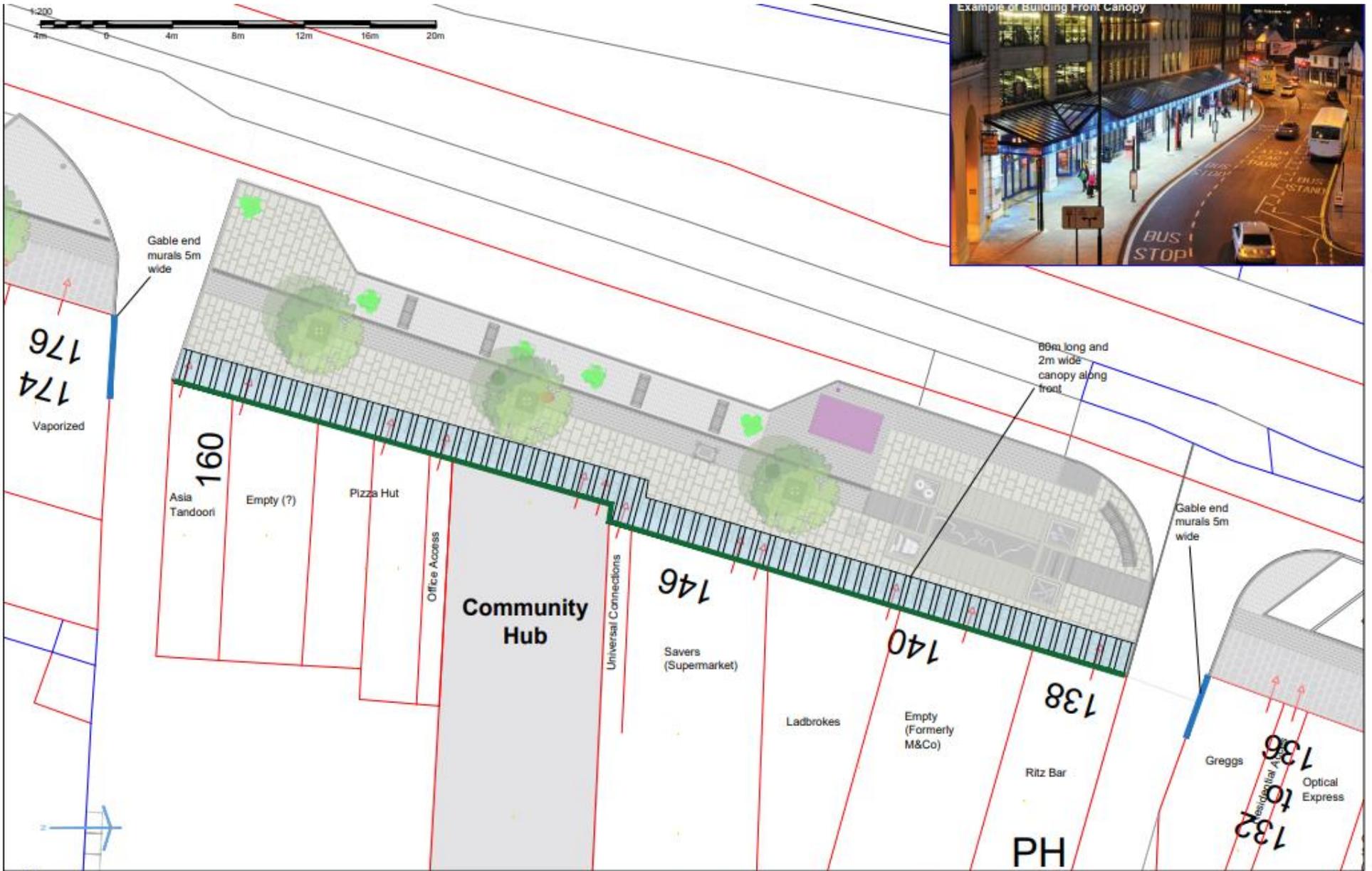
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- Community Meeting Space
- Pop Up rental Space - Versatile with movable partitions
- Cafe space
- Kitchen Space / Drinks Prep Area
- Store - Linked to existing roller shutter
- Wide access corridor to encourage drop in traffic
- Kids Zone
- Male WC
- Female WC
- Accessible WC - with baby changing
- New Lift
- Universal Connections Space
- Exhibition Wall Space



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