

1647283

NATALIA GNOINSKA

SUSTAINABLE BUILDING CONSERVATION

1ST YEAR (FULL TIME)

ART504 part 2

Case Studies and Regional Work

Whitchurch Hospital



(Coflein 2007)

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1. Introduction

Whitchurch Hospital is an example of monumental Victorian mental asylums erected on the turn of the XIXth and XXth century. It is following the pavilion arrangement (separate blocks as in modern hospitals; disposition of connecting corridors decides the layout of blocks relative to each other, e.g. linear; broad; arrow; H-plan; crescent), with buildings being organised radially with the Water tower in the centre of the plan (Taylor, 1991 p51). The hospital was opened in 1908, followed by a grand opening ceremony, and it remained opened throughout both World Wars, as well as many structural changes to the operational of the hospital. It was finally closed, deemed not fit for its purpose in 2016. (County Asylums, 2019).

Furthermore, it is one of the few remaining examples of original designs by a collaboration of XIXth century architects from Bath; George Herbert Oatley and Willie Skinner (Curland, et. al, 2015). Seeing as two other of their complete designs of asylums were either demolished entirely or partially (County Asylums, 2019), causing a loss of original fabric and material evidence of architectural development in the field of mental asylums design.

Whitchurch Hospital is situated within Cardiff municipality in the area of Whitchurch. Initially, the hospital was a great drive for the development of the area, and to this day, remains firmly embedded in the mentality of the local community. However, still controversial due to its history, it brings both positive and negative reactions in people. A great statement of the hospital's history is a book 'Behind Many Doors: Writing from Whitchurch Psychiatric Hospital' (Carradice, et. al). It is a collection of patients and staff memories put together as the memento before the hospital closed its doors in 2016.

It can be said that the most significant aspect of the heritage value of the site is its communal value, seeing how the history of the hospital reflects on the growth of Cardiff as the capital city and general the development of the area. Therefore it could be concluded that the intangible value of the site contained in the tangible structure of Whitchurch Hospital should be prioritised in any future regeneration or conservation plans. (Hughes and Gnoinska, 2020)

Therefore, the further suggested proposal's aim will focus on; opening Whitchurch Hospital grounds to the community again, directing the local community to take ownership of the site as

one of the means of preventing any further incidents of vandalism, and encouraging the regeneration of the site by taking a step by step approach, which will be elaborated on further in the text.

2. Context: community and demographics

According to the Welsh government, the population of Wales is one of the fastest ageing ones in the UK which in future years might lead to over 25% of its population being over 65. (Cardiff Council, 2018) Focusing further on the demographic analysis provided by the Welsh Government and other independent sources, the future tendencies show not only the increase in the retirement age group but also children and young adults in age under 20. (Fig. 1)

According to the analysis provided for the area of Cardiff, the trend seems to draw more people in the working-age closer to the centre, where areas further away from the city centre such as Whitchurch tend to attract more families (Cardiff Council, 2018). However, despite overall life satisfaction among the elderly in Wales and the Cardiff area, surveys show that people over the age of 65, especially women, are more prone to depression compared to any other age group (Mental Health Foundation, 2016). It was indicated that approximately two-thirds of that elderly suffering from depression receive no help from the NHS. (Mental Health Foundation, 2016)

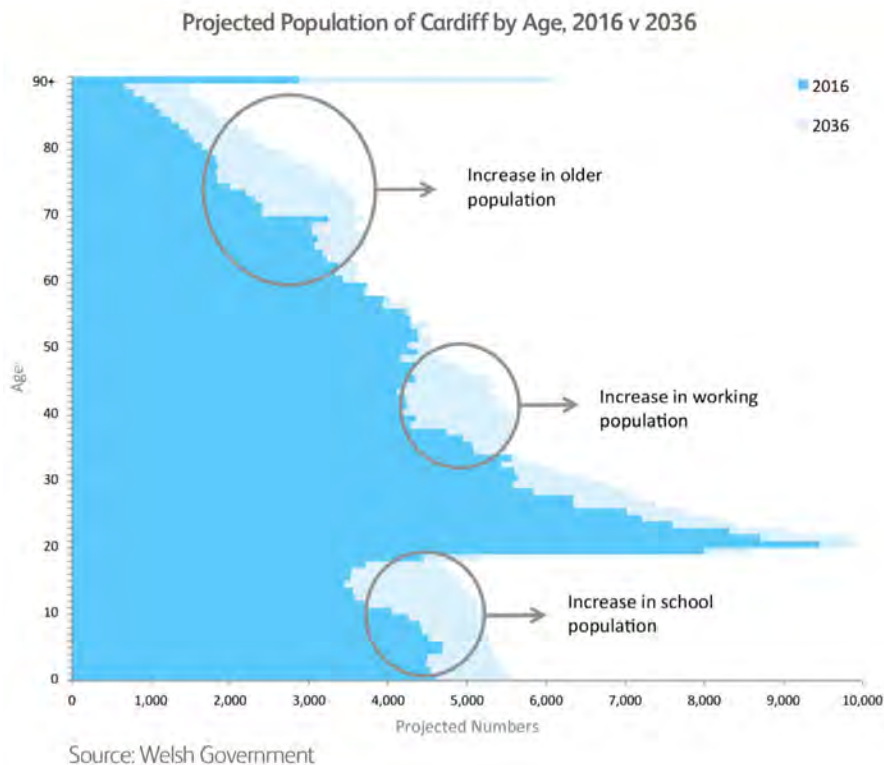
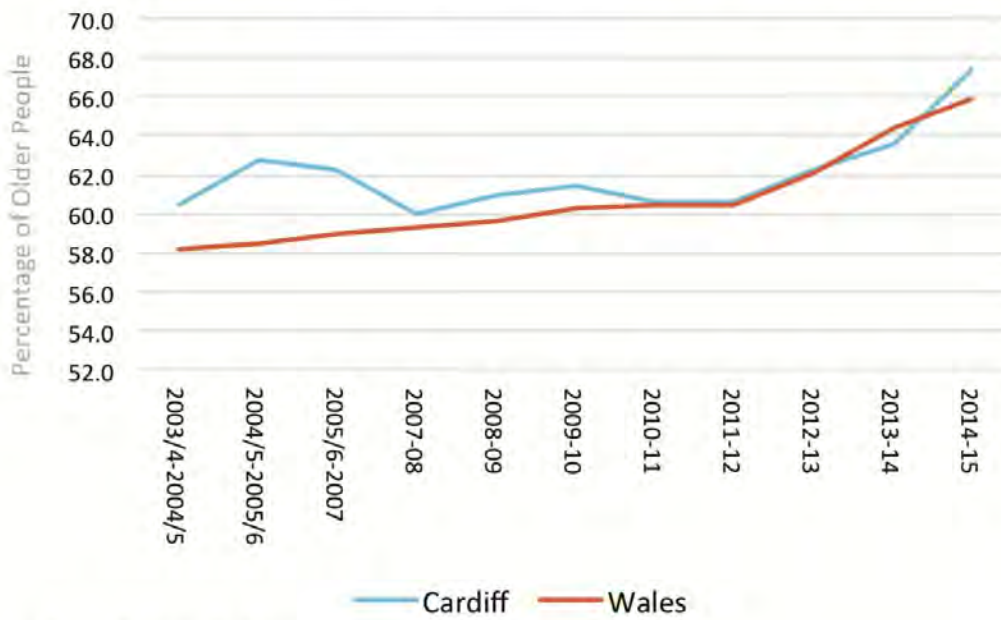


Fig. 1 Projected population of Cardiff by age 2016 v 2036 (Cardiff Council, 2018)
at: <https://www.cardiffpartnership.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/Cardiff-in-2018-Final-English.pdf>
[Accessed on: 20.04.2020]

Fig. 2 Percentage of Older People (aged 65+) who consider themselves in "good" health 2003 - 2015 (Cardiff Council, 2018)
 at: <https://www.cardiffpartnership.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/Cardiff-in-2018-Final-English.pdf> [Accessed on: 20.04.2020]



Source: Public Health Wales

It also cannot escape attention that in the Cardiff area, and the area of Whitchurch, there are multiple (nearly 15) nursing homes which can indicate the local demand for such facilities, which according to the demographic analysis would increase in the future (Cardiff Council, 2018) . A similar pattern can be observed with the presence of multiple nursery schools and day-cares in the area.

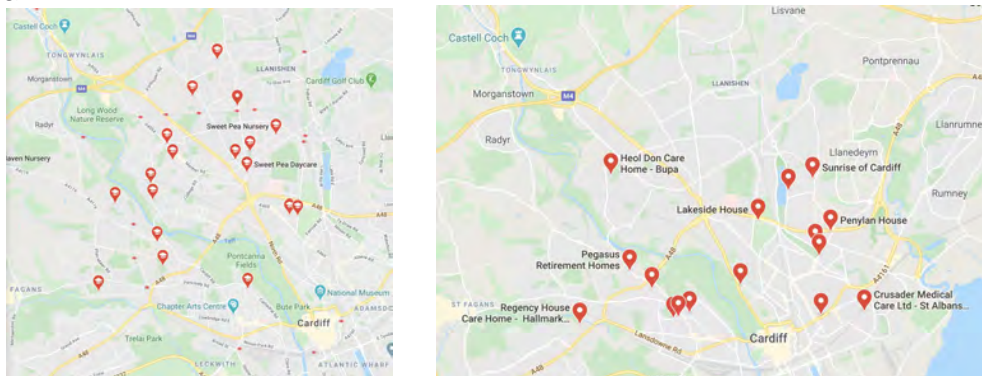


Fig. 3 Google Map view of the Cardiff area on the left daycares, on the right nursing homes (Google, 2020)
 at: <https://www.google.co.uk/maps/place/Cardiff/@51.5023268,-3.2750897,12z/data=!3m1!4b1!4m5!3m4!1s0x486e02d434ec53f5:0x143406db6586670e!8m2!3d51.481581!4d-3.17909> [Accessed on: 29.01.2020]

For an ageing population, loneliness and depression are significant issues, that also applies to the UK as well as Wales in general, and Cardiff as well. The suicide rate amongst the elderly has been increasing in the past years and is especially alarming for age group above 85 (Mental Health Foundation, 2016)

Different governments and independent organisations take upon themselves to find a solution to that situation, one common point in different approaches suggested so far focus on integrating the elderly with the community (National Council Canada, 2020, Age UK, 2020) . Some lunch campaigns

focusing on creating opportunities for leisure and hobby activities like dancing, gardening, knitting. Others focus on creating a more diverse environment at home. (Age UK, 2020, and National Council Canada, 2020) In the UK, there is an initiative encouraging and facilitating elderly renting rooms in their houses to students for a lower price in exchange for their companionship and help. (Ahn, Tusinski and Treger, 2018)

3. Intergenerational day-care

In 1976 in Japan, an experiment was conducted, its aim was bringing together nursery school children and residents of a retirement home (Apolitical, 2019). The results were auspicious; the research has deemed a success and started spreading to other countries such as USA, Canada, and Norway. Research has shown that twice as many children participating in the experiment who were a part of the intergenerational day-care show empathy, understanding and positive approach towards both the elderly but also aging and becoming old (Femia et al., 2008. Compared to the group attending a regular nursery, which did not show much understanding in those matters. Studies have proven that children attending intergenerational day-care show better social acceptance and empathy and benefits for the elderly reflect in the increased life satisfaction and lower social isolation and loneliness (Middlecamp and Gross, 2002 and Femia et al., 2008) .

In the UK this concept has not gained much popularity yet. One example can be found so far in South London, and since its opening in 2017, it has been showing excellent effects such as bringing together the community, building relationships granting some children ‘foster grandparents’, and enabling the exchange of knowledge and enthusiasm between generations (Applesandhoneynightingale.com, 2020 and Jones, 2017). Bringing joy to the life of pensioners and allowing children to create new bonds and learn from the experience of the elderly. It also seems to have a positive effect on children living away from their extended families and the local community. (Tapper, 2020 and Jones, 2017)

Following the above findings and focusing on the beneficial outcome of the approach I would like to suggest, in this project, considering introducing it to the Whitchurch area by creating an intergenerational day-care within the walls of the Whitchurch Hospital, as a part and the first step in the future regeneration of the site.

The proposal would initially focus on adapting the space of the administration building into a nursery which would, in the beginning, regularly accommodate the intergenerational day-care activities to then eventually incorporate a part of Whitchurch Hospital for the permanent nursing

home and combine the two institutions. The project would also encourage locally living elderly to visit and volunteer in the nursery as an encouragement to pass their leisure time actively as an active part of a community. It could also bring the local community closer, creating bonds between different families and generations, enriching, through generational diversity, the education of the younger generation. Furthermore, the setting of the site in relation to the institutions which could be involved (nurseries and nursing homes) is quite favourable, providing good access and proximity to many, as well as excellent communication links for those willing to commute. (Zhang, n.d.)

4. Step by step approach and suggested phases of development

Because of the scale of the building, it would be sensible first to build the community sense of ownership of the Whitchurch Hospital which would ensure that any further actions would be taken with the best intentions for the site and its heritage and securing needed funding to ensure steady development and regeneration of Whitchurch Hospital. Moreover, gathering funding for such a large site could be difficult. However, gathering funding for the regeneration on step by step basis while the building is in use could be a more comfortable option, bringing people and money as well as future perspective to Whitchurch.

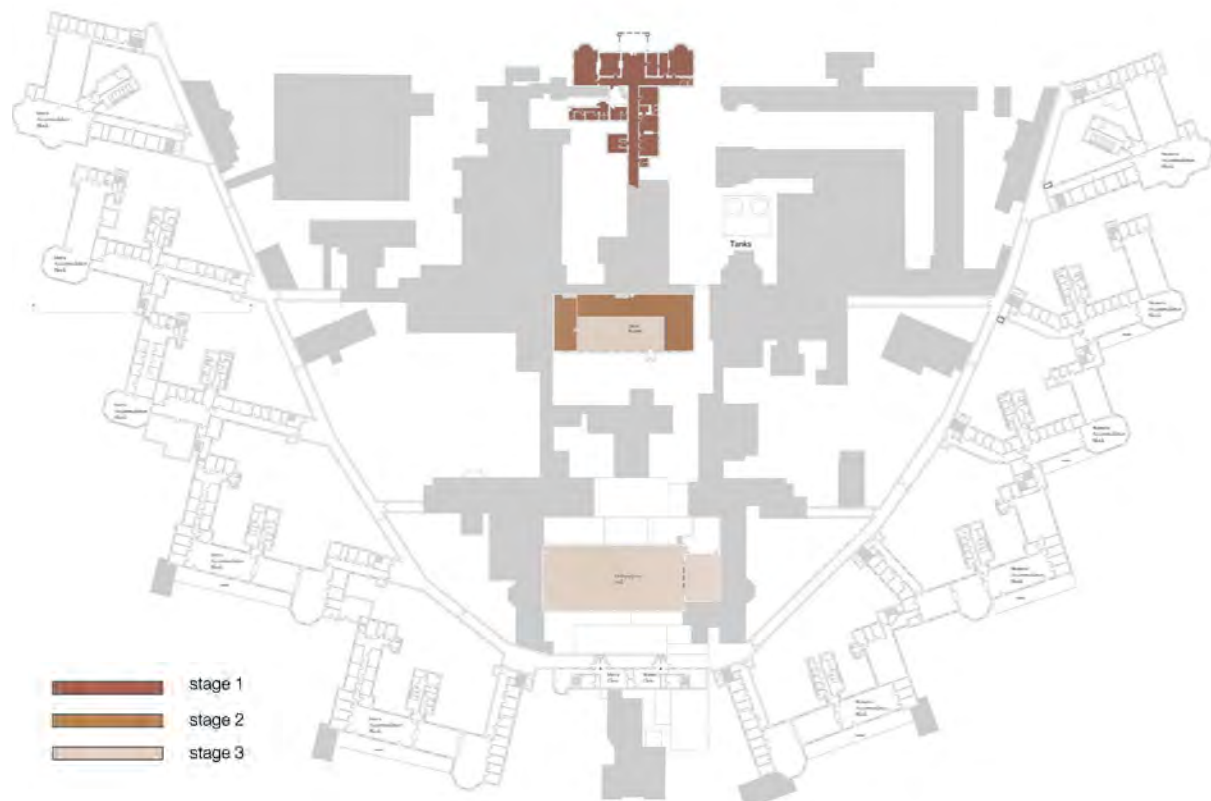


Fig. 4 Diagram, step by step approach, Whitchurch Hospital, first 3 stages

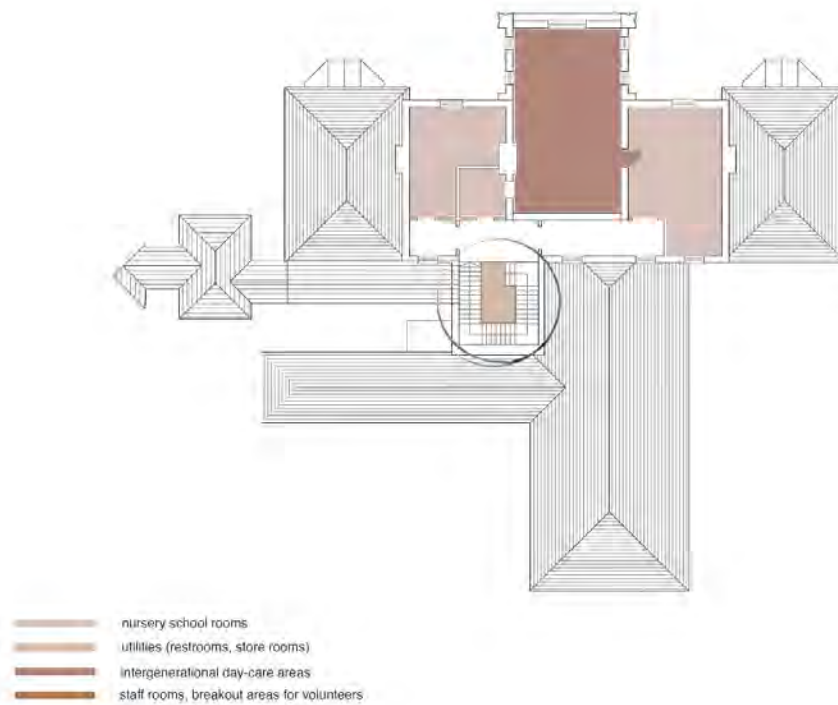
It should be, however, considered that repurposing of the building gradually might lead to some discomfort on the side of its users. Occupying a space while parts of it are still in some state of ruin may create a sense of neglect leading to reluctance in using provided facilities. A possible solution though expensive may be to consider putting up scaffolding and securing the inside of the building from any further penetration of the elements. It could slow down the currently occurring process of decay of the building fabric of the Whitchurch Hospital. This however would cause covering the elevation, and therefore taking away from the aesthetic value of the site. On the other hand, in the past, especially during the Victorian period, ruined buildings covered in vegetation were considered picturesque and attracted many people as a destination of walks or a source of inspiration for artists. It could also be possible to undertake initial conservation work to secure and stabilise the site, and this way ensure the safety of the visitors during the process of regeneration of Whitchurch. Nonetheless, it is an aspect of the proposal that remains risky and may lead to either outcome.

In the future, as following steps for the full regeneration of the site, the central spine of Whitchurch should be taken care of as a priority. It provides a series of multifunctional open spaces which could be easily arranged and adapted following the needs of the local community. Regarding the further steps in the regeneration plan for the site, following actions could be considered:



Fig. 5 Whitchurch Hospital, Ground Floor, Plan of the areas, colour marked depending on the purpose. In a circle is indicated the staircase connecting the ground and second floor of the administration building.

Fig. 6 Whitchurch Hospital, First Floor, Plan of the areas, colour marked depending on the purpose. In a circle is indicated the staircase connecting the ground and second floor of the administration building.



- ❖ using the main storage room as a cafe and creative shared community space which could also be used for exhibition purposes,
- ❖ refurbishing the recreation hall into a adaptable cinema and community entertainment and performance space,
- ❖ farmers market which could be depending on the weather held either on the lawn in front of the administration building, or the in the corridor between the administration building and main storeroom and recreation hall,
- ❖ along other works adapting courtyards as communal green as potential gardening and recreational spaces could be carried out.

As the first stage, the administration building situated at the front entrance should be addressed by adapting it into previously mentioned intergenerational day-care. This step would allow the local community to engage with the building and the site. By placing the facility at the very front of the building refurbishments would not need to be excessive, and the facility would be easily accessible without the need to explore the building further. By being at the front of the building, it would also with time become the face of the community engagement and beneficial use of the building.

As the second stage, the area of the main storage room could be addressed along with the corridor, joining it with the administration building. This way, new uses and refurbishments



Fig. 7 Front lawn of the Whitchurch Hospital as a potential seasonal marketplace.

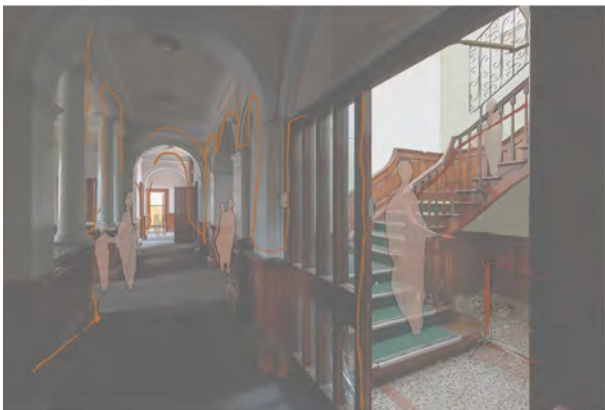


Fig. 8 View from the corridor towards the main entrance of the administration building.



Fig. 9 Main store room

could be introduced further into the building. By having a café and exhibition space which could be potentially located in that area, the meeting point and community hub could be created as well as a breakout space for the workers of the intergenerational day-care and any other future facilities of the site. Whatsmore, the storage room which previously served as an archive could be a memento of the building heritage and due to its convenient location in the heart of the site provide a home for a permanent exhibition with the site's history.

The third stage would stretch along the spine of the building to the recreation hall, which could be adapted as a cinema and performance space due to the stage as well as its size it could become a great space for the use of the local community, schools and businesses.

Before the start of the refurbishment itself it is important to plan strategically. Remembering and forgetting the site's history is often vital in cases such as Whitchurch Hospital. One simple factor can deem a refurbished and

repurposed heritage site to be wanted, popular and successful, or hunted, repulsing, and unwelcoming. This can be observed in examples such as:

- ❖ Palazzo della Civiltà Italiana in Rome, which has been adapted by a fashion brand Fendi (Morby, 2015) as its headquarters. It is a sculptural piece of architecture that attracts attention and is now associated with a degree with the brand. However, the origins of

the design (commissioned by Mussolini) and the purpose of the building remain. Despite its new purpose, the public is sometimes reminded of its heritage.

- ❖ Edinburgh Royal Infirmary now the Quartermile Development, a luxurious housing estate designed by Foster + Partners (Hartley, n.d.).

It can also increase the potential of the site and increase its appeal for future funding possibilities. This is why the name such site is bestowed with, can be a first step in directing and shaping the future regeneration of certain sites.

In case of the potential new name of Whitchurch Hospital, it seem natural to keep the unofficial name of “the Old Whitchurch” as it is not directly associated with the mental health aspect of the site however it indicates the history of the place and its heritage. It would be a solution providing a compromise of not denying the history and heritage of the place but allowing people to remember or forget its chosen aspects naturally, at their own pace and conditions and claim the site anew. With the potential of social media though an opinion poll could be conducted among the community, to check if this traditional name of the site has positive connotations.

5. Proposal: staircase in the administration building



Fig. 10 Behind Closed Doors (2018) Whitchurch Hospital at: <https://www.bcd-urbex.com/whitchurch-hospital-cardiff/> [Accessed on: 1.05.2020]

In many historic buildings, staircases were in itself an elaborate piece of design work. (Historic England, 2020) As such they are advised, by Historic England, to be treated carefully and respectfully. The staircase in the administration building in Whitchurch Hospital due to its design and finish has its own historical and aesthetic value as a part of Oatley and Skinner still complete design. Therefore, it should not be adapted more than necessary, and any changes should be minimal and done with respect to the original structure.

The requirements for the general access stairs, according to the Approved Document part K are as follow:

- ❖ rise: 150 - 170mm
- ❖ going: 250 - 400mm
- ❖ landings should be of an unobstructed length a minimum of 1200mm on each landing

Also, according to the guidelines of the Approved Document Part K railings should be installed approximately 1000mm above the floor or ground level. In the case of platforms, however, the distance changes to approximately 600mm.

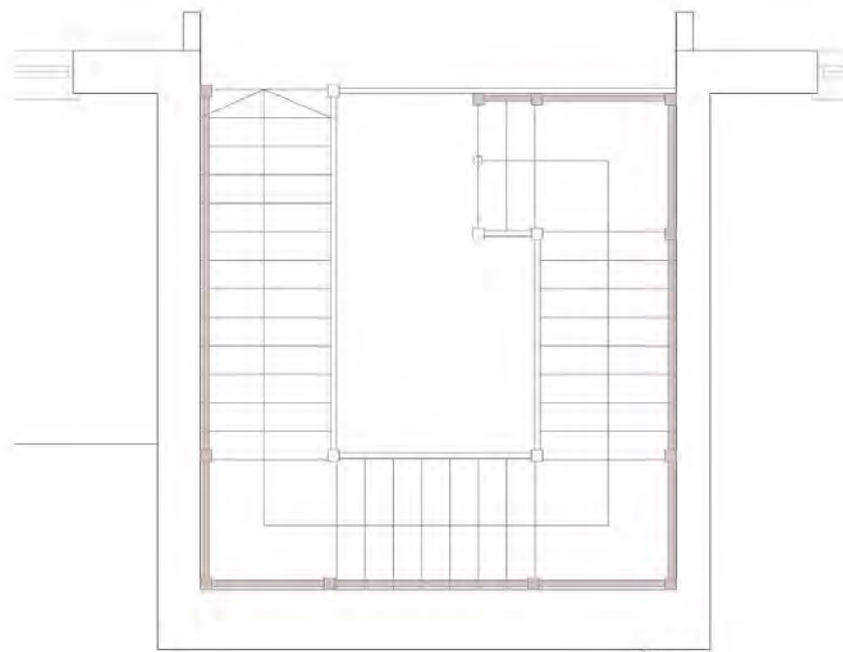
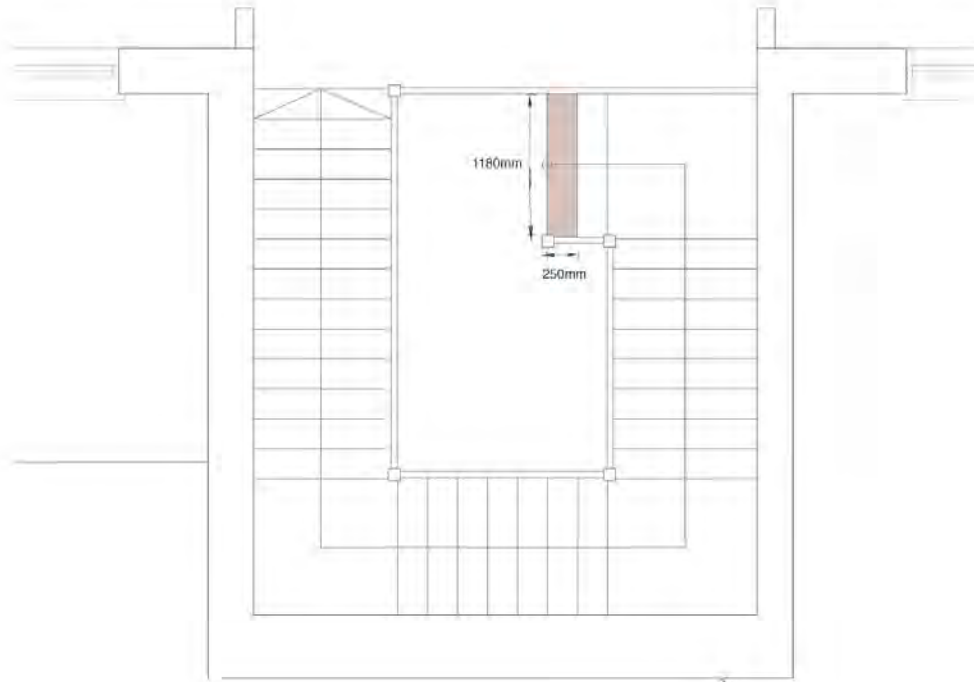


Fig. 11 and 12 Additional railing added alongside the wall (secondary railing running under the existing and new one).

Due to the specific of the new purpose of the administration building guidelines for nurseries and schools should be taken into consideration. This is why despite being an addition to the

original structure, the secondary railing should be installed, to ensure support for children and people of smaller stature. (SSLD, 2008) As much as the steps are similar in their measurements to the building requirements the landings seem to be more of an issue. Also, depending on the size of the facility, number of children, elderly, staff and volunteers, there might be a need of adding an additional staircase as an additional fire escape. Preferably on the east side of the administration building from where the fire escape route is the longest.

Because of the character of the facility, it should be advised to secure all the doorsteps and thresholds. This is for the benefit and security of both for children and the elderly.

Also, regarding vertical communication, to facilitate access to those with walking difficulties, and allow wheelchair access to the first floor of the building, a platform or lift could be considered as an option. It might require removing parts of the first floor balustrade to install the door to the platform.

The issue with introducing either of the mentioned solutions is the restricted space, as well as the question of reversibility. Possibility of removing or improving the done work is advised in any conservation work as a way to respect the original tissue of the building. However, according to Historic England; when a building is being repurposed, some leeway is allowed to accommodate the required adjustments. (Historic England, 2020) In case of the staircase in the administration building, a vertical platform lift could be a good option due to its compact measurements. This solution would provide secure, individual access for wheelchairs to the first floor without a need for extensive construction works.

6. Funding opportunities

The mixed-used development is highly encouraged by the Welsh government; housing, new employment opportunities, education, recreation, cultural opportunities. The following potential funding opportunities may be available for Whitchurch that could apply to the suggested scheme of community focused mixed-use development.

- ❖ As community-focused and a non-profit initiative, the project could be eligible for the National Lottery Heritage Fund. The requirements being as follows; bringing heritage site to excellent condition, inspiring people to value heritage, ensuring heritage is inclusive, demonstrating how heritage can help with the development of an area and the contribution of heritage to the UK economy.

- ❖ Potentially the source of funding could also come from the Architectural Heritage Fund. However, it covers only 50% of the costs. In the case of Whitchurch Hospital, an investor or community involvement and fundraising would be needed (could be in the form of Community Lottery Fund). It also prioritises heritage at risk, which could play in favour of Whitchurch Hospital. (Adams, n.d.)

7. Conclusion

As a grade 2 listed building and a site of significant communal value for the area Whitchurch Hospital requires attention and care, which would allow passing it and its heritage along to the future generations. Following arguments presented in this text, the future regeneration proposal should focus on the communal value and the aspect of bringing the site to the attention and use of the local community and beyond. Furthermore this solution addresses a timely issue of the ageing population and issues of social isolation, loneliness, depression and suicide that occur in that particular age group. Connected with the parallelly growing number of children the site presents an opportunity for creating intergenerational day-care, which overtime would be followed by other functions would be systematically introduced to the building with necessary refurbishment works.

Beginning with the intergenerational day-care and followed with the next phases of regeneration, the aim is to present Whitchurch to the local community and allow it to become the heart of it. To make certain that this process is a success it is important to decrease the stigma of the mental facility history. This can be achieved by altering its name to the "Old Whitchurch" This could be beneficial for potential development and investors as well as visitors from outside of the local community.

This case study proves that, as a heritage of great value on many levels: historical, communal and aesthetic, Whitchurch Hospital is a site with great potential for future regeneration. It does not require extensive demolition or alteration to the original building tissue, which also confirms the sustainable aspect of such a project. Furthermore, the site presents a great potential in its green spaces which can become the next stage of the revitalisation of the site.

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