

## Lessons learnt from the *Re-centring Tshwane Lab*

Nicholas Clarke, Marieke Kuipers and Johan Swart

### Introduction

Teaching architectural design is in itself a special pleasure. Presenting a masterclass on how to redesign an existing place rich in heritage value is even more exciting and all the more demanding. It requires of both students and teachers to reflect on the qualities of the human environment—in this case the historical centre of Tshwane—and its tolerance for change from both heritage *and* design perspectives. When coupled with resilience thinking, the theoretical basis for such investigations is partly supported by the Historic Urban Landscapes (HUL) approach of UNESCO. This approach is meant to serve as a universal tool to draft strategies for activating historic centres through the strengths of their historic qualities. Church Square and the wider city core are, indeed, a historic urban landscape that requires a ‘harmonious integration of contemporary interventions into the historic urban fabric’.<sup>1</sup>

Student investigations are mostly unfettered by the real-world requirements of client, economy and budget. As such, they provide an interesting vehicle for exploring the potentials of a place. They may respond to these through ambitious design interventions, in some cases by developing creative temporary solutions, and in others by fearlessly adding new architectural layers, thereby testing the tolerance for change in ways that might not be possible in real-world scenarios. In this sense, the Masterclass projects provide a valuable mechanism to test ideas and, eventually, distil options for future ‘integrated conservation’ strategies. This chapter presents the lessons learnt from the *Re-centring Tshwane Lab* as deduced by the authors who were themselves involved in directing the Lab.

*Left: The historic core of Tshwane with the investigated sites in yellow.  
(Adapted from a figure-ground diagram by Marike Franklin)*

<sup>1</sup> UNESCO, 2011.

## A need for recognition and reconnection

The focus of the Masterclass, or rather the Lab, was directed at three heritage sites within the historical core of the larger City of Tshwane. All three are narrowly related to the origins of Pretoria as the capital city of South Africa, and are also subjected to the dynamics of the 21st century: Church Square, the Old Government Printing Works and the Old Synagogue. The latter two historic buildings are now vacant, waiting for a new use. Church Square and its immediate environs are currently undergoing a physical transformation to accommodate the new infrastructure for the Tshwane Bus Rapid Transit system (TRT), but are also experiencing an intangible social transformation of meaning.

The Masterclass students (in the disciplines of Landscape Architecture, Architecture and Interior Architecture) were not the first to investigate the heritage values and urban development potentials in this multi-layered city centre. They had the benefit of previous studies in relation to possible larger-scale urban heritage strategies, as well as evaluations of aspects of heritage associated with the respective sites.<sup>2</sup> Their major assignment was to dig deeper into the tangible as well as intangible significances of the three sites and how they contribute to the public spatial memory of the inner city. The student investigations brought to light that many inhabitants recognized the places as landmark attributes of their city, but were generally not aware of the important roles they had played in the history of the city and South Africa.

This is the first lesson that can be drawn from the Lab: there is a great need to increase public awareness of heritage significances, even if some could be contested in South Africa's

current political climate. In addition, it is noted that all three sites are under various levels of threat, but that they all hold tremendous opportunity to be reconnected to the city centre, both physically and socio-economically. This depends on future functions, use patterns, and broader urban processes.

The second lesson relates to the broader urban and socio-economic context of the three particular sites. Their influence is in all cases greater than their physical extents in the significance they bear for a diversity of communities and the identity of the city. The need for recognition and reconnection poses contemporary macro-scale challenges that also ring true for the Capital in general. Given these challenges, students brought many responsive themes to the table that resonate strongly with the perspectives of an ideal inclusive Capital. Despite their distinctive individual differences of situation and significance, all three sites have the potential to play a stronger role in strengthening the—ideally collective—spatial memory of the inner city than they currently fulfil.

Cities are subject to continuous processes of transformation and self-regeneration. For the cultural historical sustainability of the inner city of Tshwane application of the UNESCO's HUL approach is vital. This aims at 'integrating the goals of urban heritage conservation and those of social and economic development'.<sup>3</sup> Accordingly, proposals for renewal and adaptation must 'take into account the existing built environment, intangible heritage, cultural diversity, socio-economic and environmental factors along with local community values'.<sup>4</sup> To advance a continued cultural resilience, attention has to be paid to urban functions and levels of public accessibility, as well as to the quality and sensitivity of the architectural interventions in or around the city centre.

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2 See Corten & Van Dun, 2010; Hanekom, Nadel & Stoltz, J. 2014; Le Roux & Botes, N. 1990, 1991 and 1993.

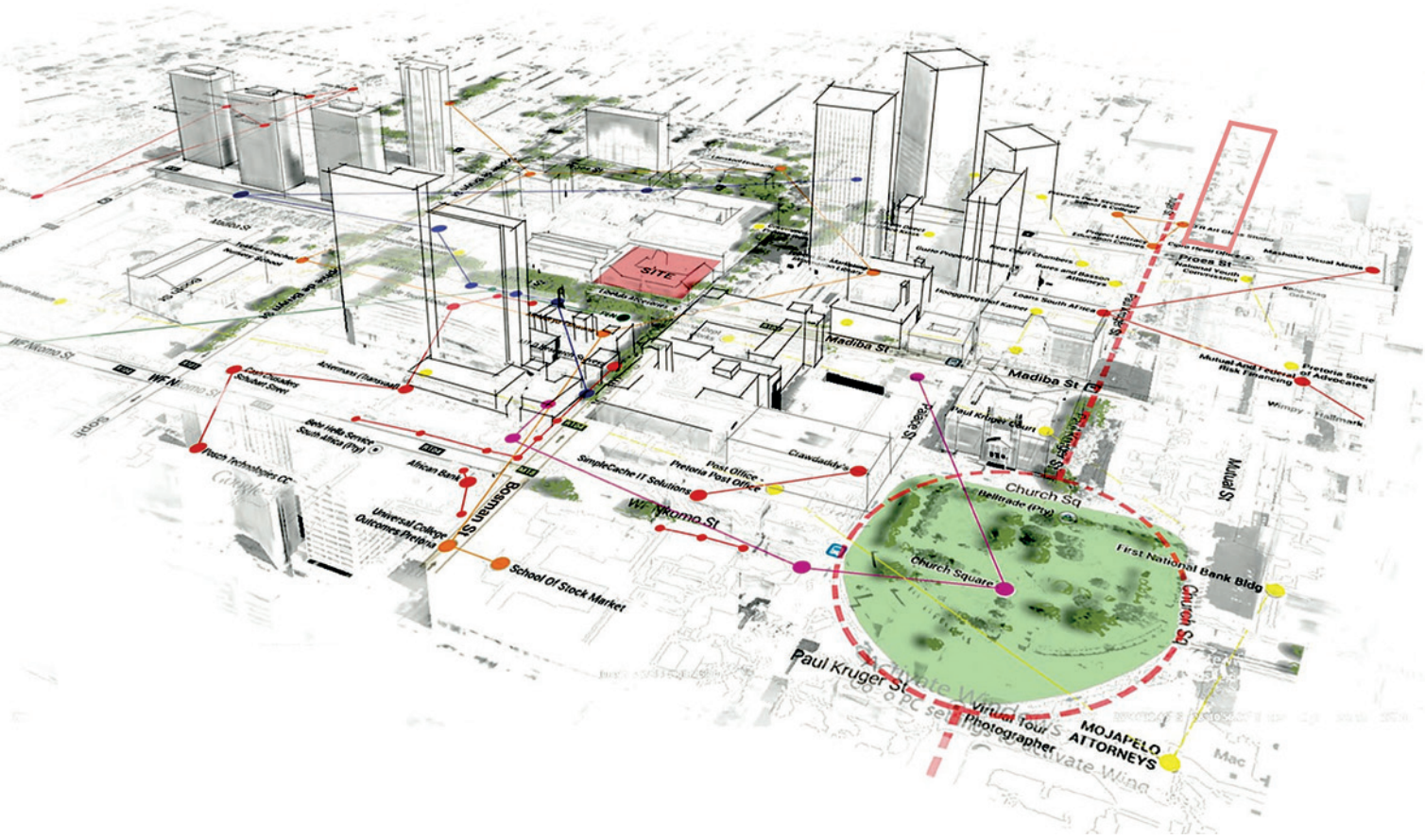
3 UNESCO, 2011.

4 UNESCO, 2011.

The three sites can each be interpreted differently as cornerstones of the urban fabric and streetscapes of the Capital, as will be discussed later. Their heritage values are not always immediately noticed, but one can sense a certain 'dignity of place' due to visible age, aesthetic quality, and cultural-historical associations. Consequently, the greatest challenge lies in addressing change while maintaining and augmenting the dignity of place, even if this mandates a partial removal of built fabric or architectural elements. A full understanding of the

place, its significance for the Capital, and its heritage value is a necessity for such culturally conscious interventions. Students therefore had to base their designs firstly on a 'statement of significance', and secondly on a critical analysis of the needs and potentials of the site.

Let us look at the outcomes of the students' design investigations per site concerning interpretations of significances and potentials:



Mapping the social and institutional structures in the urban fabric of the city centre. (Marc Degenaar)



## ■ Church Square

The central square of Tshwane, now more than 150 years old, remains the cradle of the Capital. It is today a well-used park in a dynamic metropolitan environment, enjoyed by tourists and members of the diverse communities of Tshwane alike. The site has a strong spatial structure defined by a combination of institutional buildings, public green space, and transport node. Church Square now requires a re-design due to changes in the demographic of its users and the implementation of the Tshwane Bus Rapid Transit system (TRT). In the Lab the re-design was based in a fresh appraisal of the Square's historical layers and its attached heritage values. These are listed below.

## Appraisal

- Church Square is the fountain from whence the city sprang and is the geographic heart of the Capital.
- Church Square is a multi-layered architectural collage spanning and representing the historic development of the city. It is a publicly accessible urban enclosure with strong character. As such it is one of the most important civic green spaces in the country and also one of the most monumental.
- The buildings surrounding Church Square create this harmonious space through their architectural dignity, styles, scale and the sense of enclosure they provide.





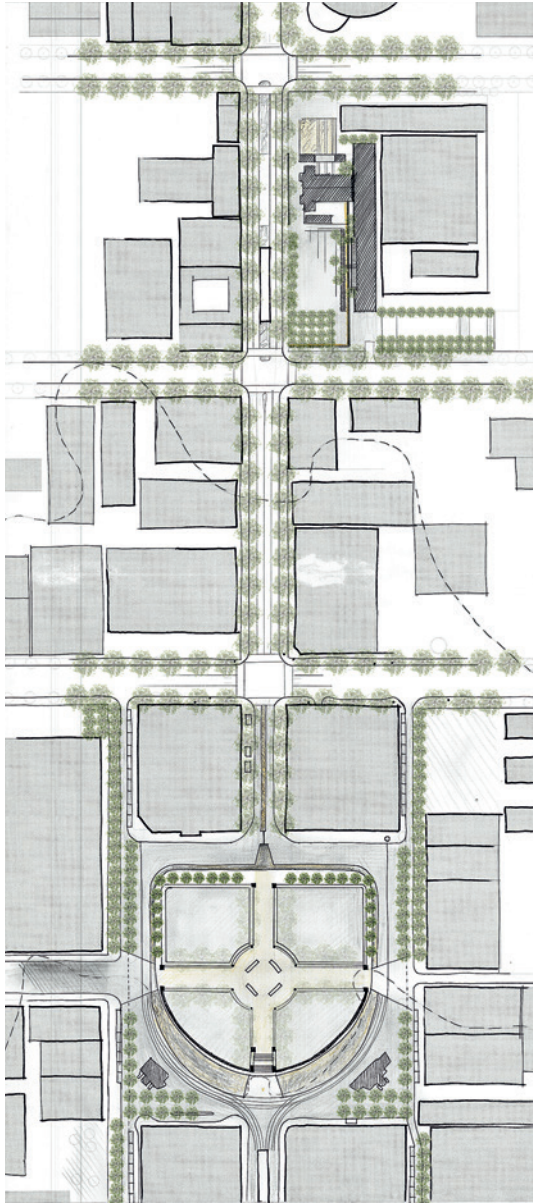
- The Kruger statue ensemble, granite balustrades, bus stops, street edges, and recently uncovered old tram rails contribute to the identity of the Square.
- Church Square is a unique place where one can touch history. Here the intertwining of tangible and intangible values converges through the vibrant resonance of the multitude of events that shaped the Capital.

## Recommendations

- The monumental character and beauty of Church Square are rare qualities that must be protected. The open nature of the heart of the Square is an asset that should be maintained. Care should be taken to ensure that interventions do not diminish these qualities.
- The north-south and east-west axes make the Square an important node in the city. This visual connection between the Square and its urban context must be maintained and opportunity exists for further enhancing this spatial structure.



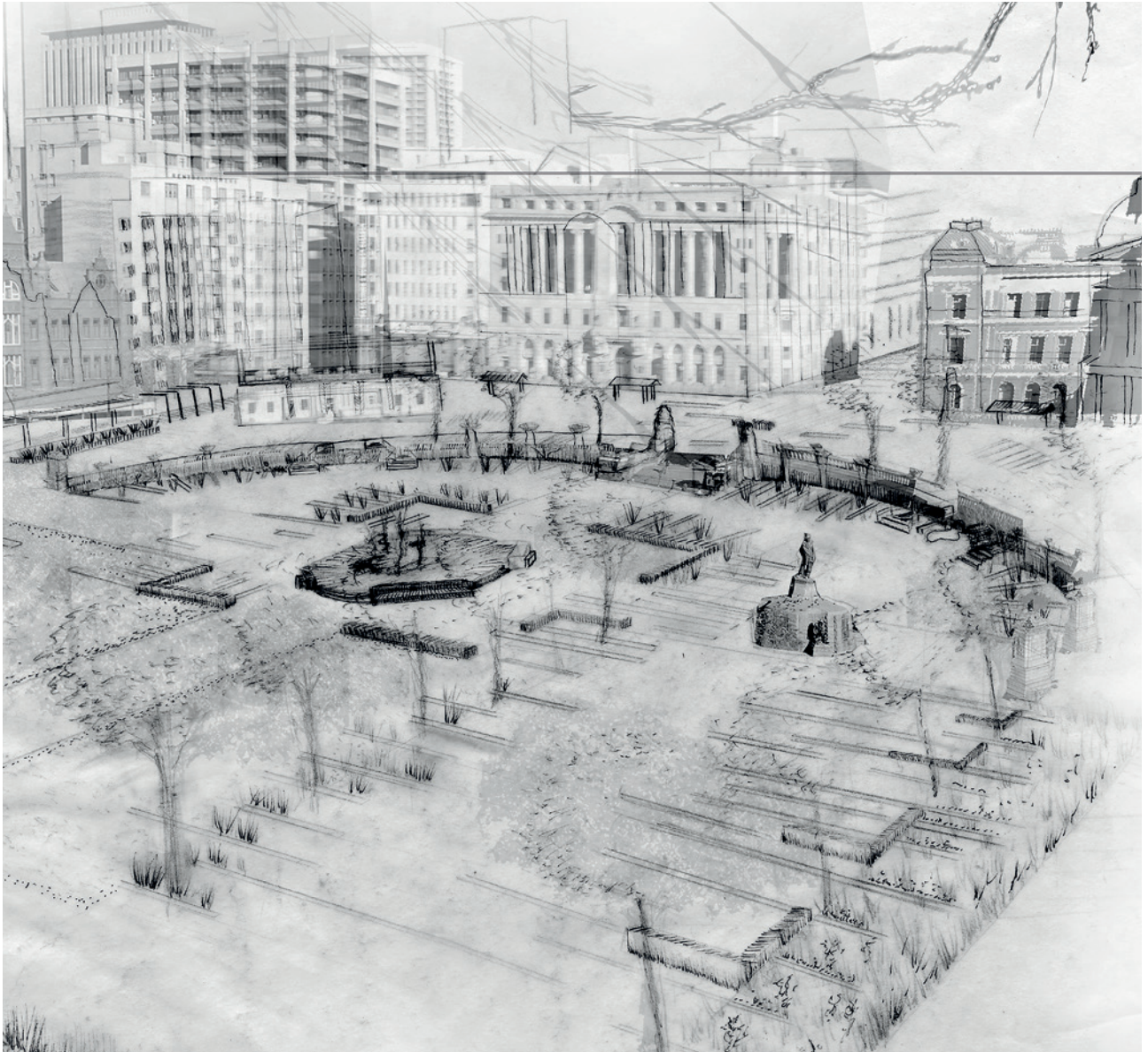
Church Square, 2014. TRT infrastructure under construction. (Marieke Kuipers)



- The relationship between the Old Raadsaal and the Palace of Justice is an important historical visual axis that should be retained.
- There is a need to open up the ground floors of the post-World War II buildings around the Square for public and commercial functions, thereby activating the edges of the Square. Such sensitive intervention will support the functioning of the Square as the meeting point for urban life in the Capital. This may require modulating the surface levels and finishes of the hard landscaping in front of the buildings concerned (the area between the building edges and the granite balustrade around the park).
- The semi-circular granite retaining wall and balustrade that encompasses the green space, including pillars and water features, add greatly to the beauty of the Square and should be retained.
- More green will mitigate the urban heat island effect. The lawn and flowerbeds can be re-designed as a responsive urban landscape to enhance the dignity of the Square. Such an intervention should include public seating and opportunities for play.
- In future, the planning of pedestrian movement should take precedence over vehicular movement around, to and from the Square.
- It is conceivable to de-code the central space by relocating the Kruger statue ensemble in order to allow for more greening and more extensive use of the Square for public activities. Should this intervention be undertaken, the statue must be repositioned in public at a place in the city significantly associated with Paul Kruger's life, and it is preferable that no new monument should take its place on the Square.
- Additional water elements could contribute to a more salubrious environment. A zero-depth water feature could, for instance, be located at the centre of the Square, allowing for multiple uses of the space.
- The north-eastern quadrant of the central lawned area has high tolerance for change. A suggestion to modulate the surface here by tilting it up to create an informal seating area deserves to be investigated further as an option for future redevelopment.

*Greening the city centre: a proposal for connecting the Synagogue Precinct with Church Square. (Marike Franklin)*





*A sketch design for a restructuring of Church Square to allow for more social use of the space. (Maryke van der Merwe)*







## ■ The Old Synagogue

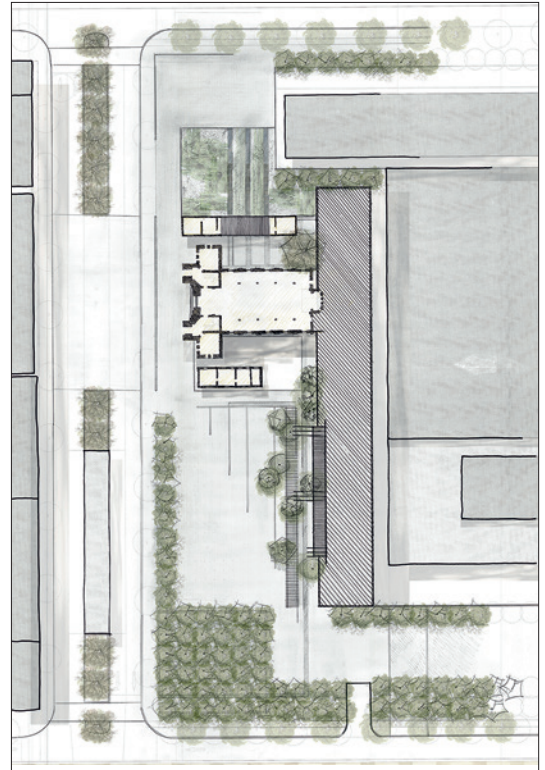
The Old Synagogue (1896), designed by Beardwood and Ibler, is the oldest of its kind in the city. Of the three sites investigated, it has the greatest national and international significance but is, paradoxically, also in the most desperate state of repair. The deterioration of the structure is not very evident from the outside as the custodian stabilized the roof structure some years ago. The interior of the building, including the floorboards, has been largely stripped despite security on site. The ongoing process of degradation is particularly distressing in view of the significance of the place.

The Synagogue desperately needs help to arrest its deterioration and to ensure its longevity through adaptive reuse.

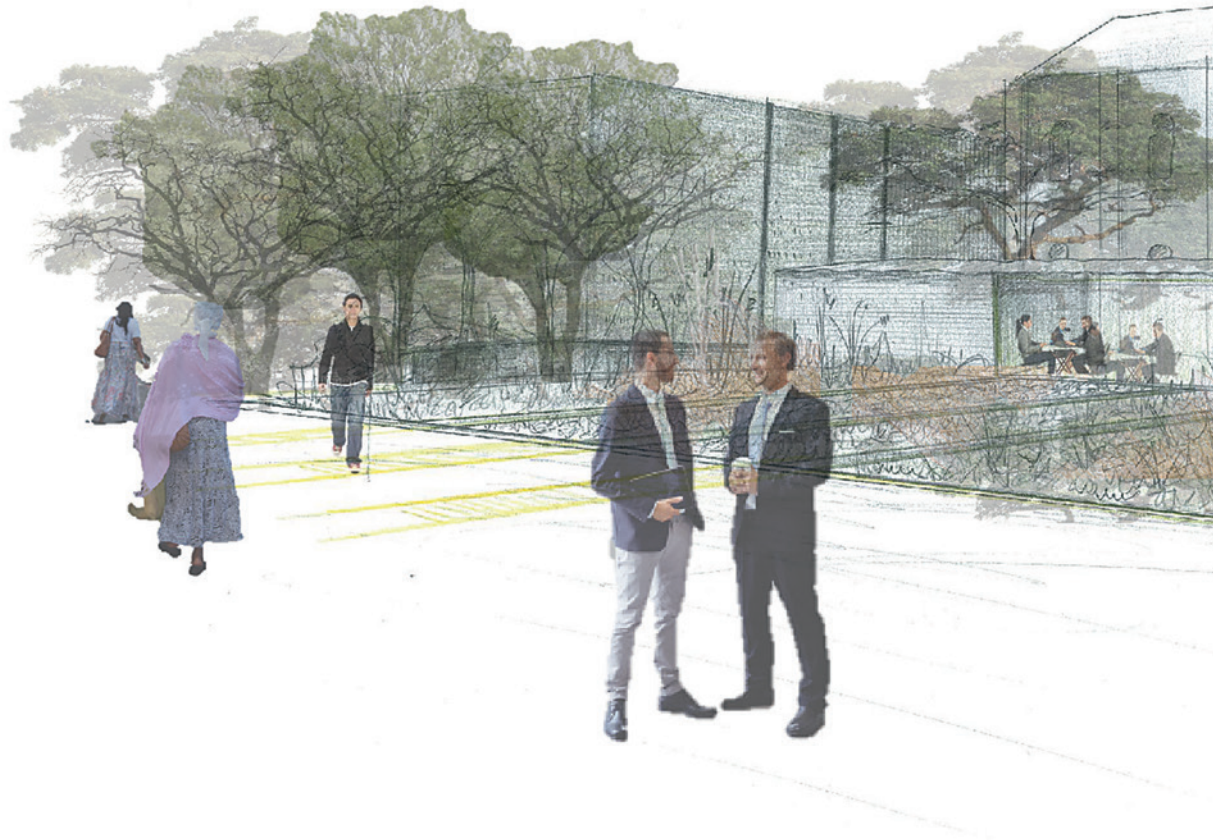
### Appraisal

- The Synagogue is a place of great historic importance; its—still abided—reuse is of (inter-)national relevance.
- The Synagogue is a unique example of the neo-Byzantine style and it could become a landmark of cultural diversity and multiculturalism in the Capital.
- The Synagogue contains a wealth of latent intangible significances. It not only represents the minority Jewish community, but it is also an important place in the history of the Struggle against Apartheid.
- The site of the Old Synagogue, including the rudimentary brick outbuildings, is associated with great South Africans, among them Nelson Mandela, Govan Mbeki and Walter Sisulu.
- The Synagogue is disconnected from its urban environment, standing forlorn on a vacant street edge and yet possessing a great dignity.
- The inspiring interior space has a strong, almost sacred, genius loci, and hence is extremely sensitive in its tolerance for change. It has a very impressive spatial integrity and contains a myriad of memories.

*Left: The Old Synagogue, a neglected site with great historic importance. (Nicholas Clarke)*



*Embedding the Old Synagogue in a public park and converting the area for use as a site for reconciliation. (Marike Franklin)*

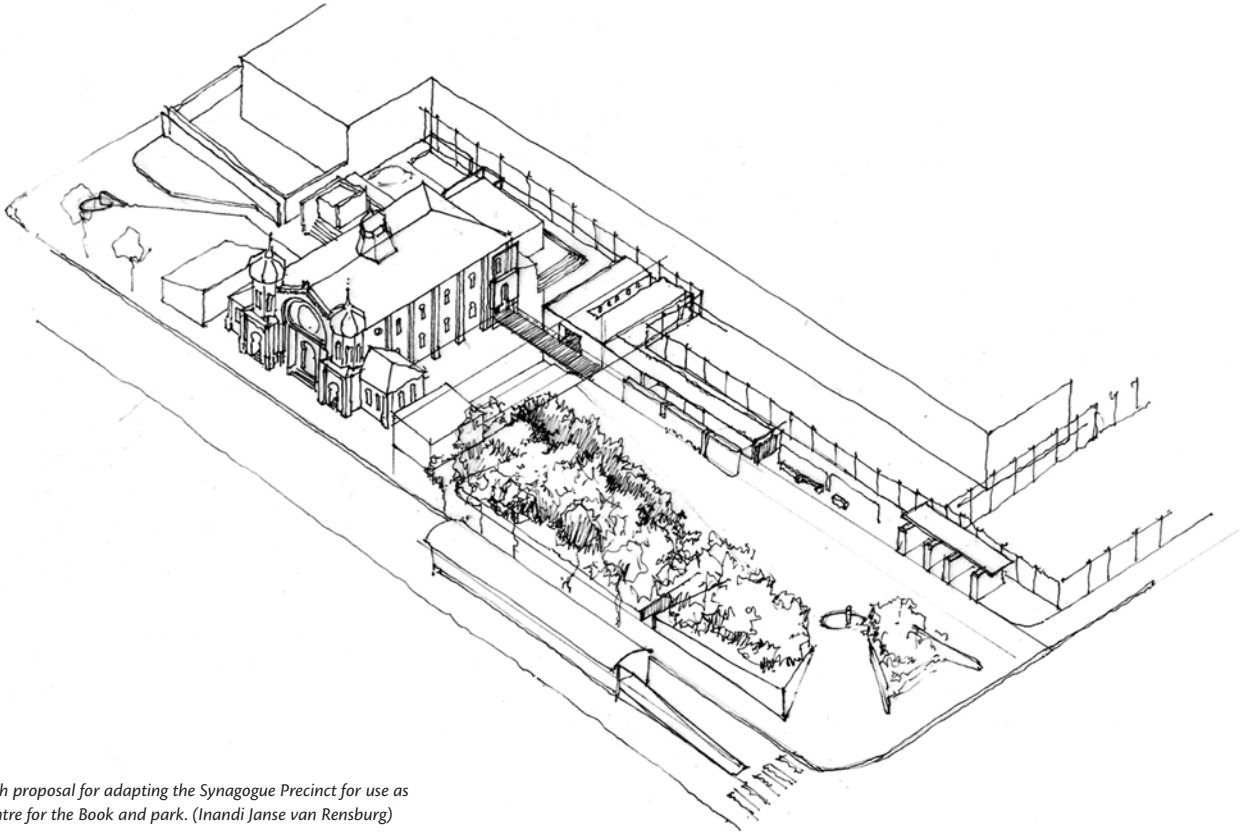


*Vision for a park to the north of the Old Synagogue. (Marika Franklin)*





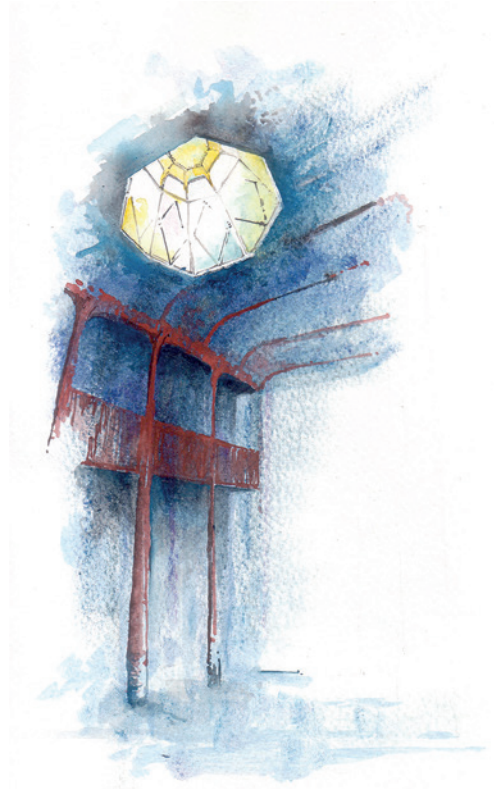
*Vision for a public park in relation to the reuse  
of the Synagogue as Centre for the Book.  
(This included a proposal for the  
relocation of the TRT station).  
(Inandi Janse van Rensburg)*



*Sketch proposal for adapting the Synagogue Precinct for use as  
a Centre for the Book and park. (Inandi Janse van Rensburg)*

## Recommendations

- The multi-faceted cultural history of the Synagogue site needs to be honoured in its re-use.
- The ensemble should be re-integrated with the surrounding city and its people through an engagement with tangible and intangible significances.
- The Synagogue has latent potential as a place for healing. This provides a great opportunity for re-programming the site for public-civic uses. The site is highly suited to uses that underscore the presentation of the struggle against oppression (interpretative; memory), the principles of democracy (active engagement through community; judicial or other activities) and reconciliation (dialogue, education, culture).
- The Old Synagogue is totally unsuitable for purely commercial activities due to its origin, history and significance.
- The manifestation of the surrounding streetscape should be designed from the Synagogue outwards, retaining the historical cast-iron gates in situ, and defining a new public nature for this distinct site.
- The portion of land to the south of the Synagogue presents a singular opportunity to connect the northern section of the city with Church Square. Creating a park here could bolster the significance of the larger site and at the same time extend the use of Church Square as a public green space. Limited construction of public amenities on the eastern boundary of this plot could help to define and service this proposed public green space.
- The original aesthetic qualities of the western façade are still extant but are partly obscured by later alterations. A restoration could be considered to reveal the original richness. This will be a delicate operation, which will require specialist research and highly skilled professionals and craftsmen to execute.
- The interior space has an exceptional light quality as a result of the octagonal lantern roof light and dominant axial arrangement of the space. These characteristics should be preserved, yet a full reconstruction of the original Synagogue interior is not desirable. Instead, the interior invites a re-use in service of contemplation and reflection.
- The brick outbuildings ought to be maintained and incorporated in an architecturally sympathetic manner in redevelopment strategies for the site. They could be adapted to house interpretative functions.



*View of the radiant skylight of the Old Synagogue. (Craig Mitchell)*





## ■ The Old Government Printing Works (GPW)

The GPW was constructed in 1895-1896 to the design of the ZAR *Departement Publieke Werken* under chief architect Sytze Wierda. It holds great potential to rekindle the fortunes of the north-western quadrant of the inner city. A public re-use of the site will generate massive spin-off energy for this seemingly forgotten precinct. The GPW has a relatively great tolerance for change (particularly inside), and holds the most potential for a mix of cultural, civic and commercial activities. Should it be retained as the 'gated' site it is now, it will continue to sever the north-western quadrant from the positive energy of Church Square and the city centre. It is therefore imperative that the site be transformed in a way that will not only activate the interior of the buildings but also engage the urban streetscape around it. The Lab has developed a great variety of options for intervention, hence the large number of recommendations listed below.

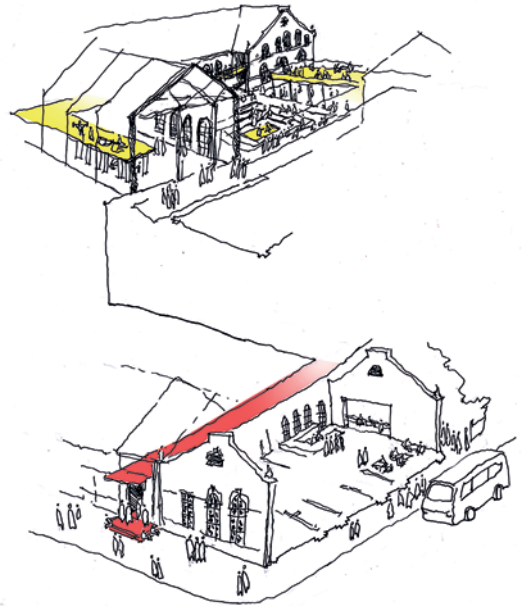
### Appraisal

- The GPW is a rare example of an early industrial heritage site in the centre of the Capital.
- The GPW makes an important contribution to the legibility of the north-western quadrant of the city through its typical Eclectic Wilhelmiens aesthetic. This architectural identity positions it within the unique collection of architectural structures that exemplify the emergence and early development of the Capital.
- The aesthetic of the delicate façade appeals through its picturesque appearance. The historical rooflines and ventilators contribute to the heritage value of the cityscape.
- The GPW's hybrid structure demonstrates the transition from traditional to modern construction methods.

*Left: The Old Government Printing Works. This site holds great potential for inner-city development. (Marieke Kuipers)*

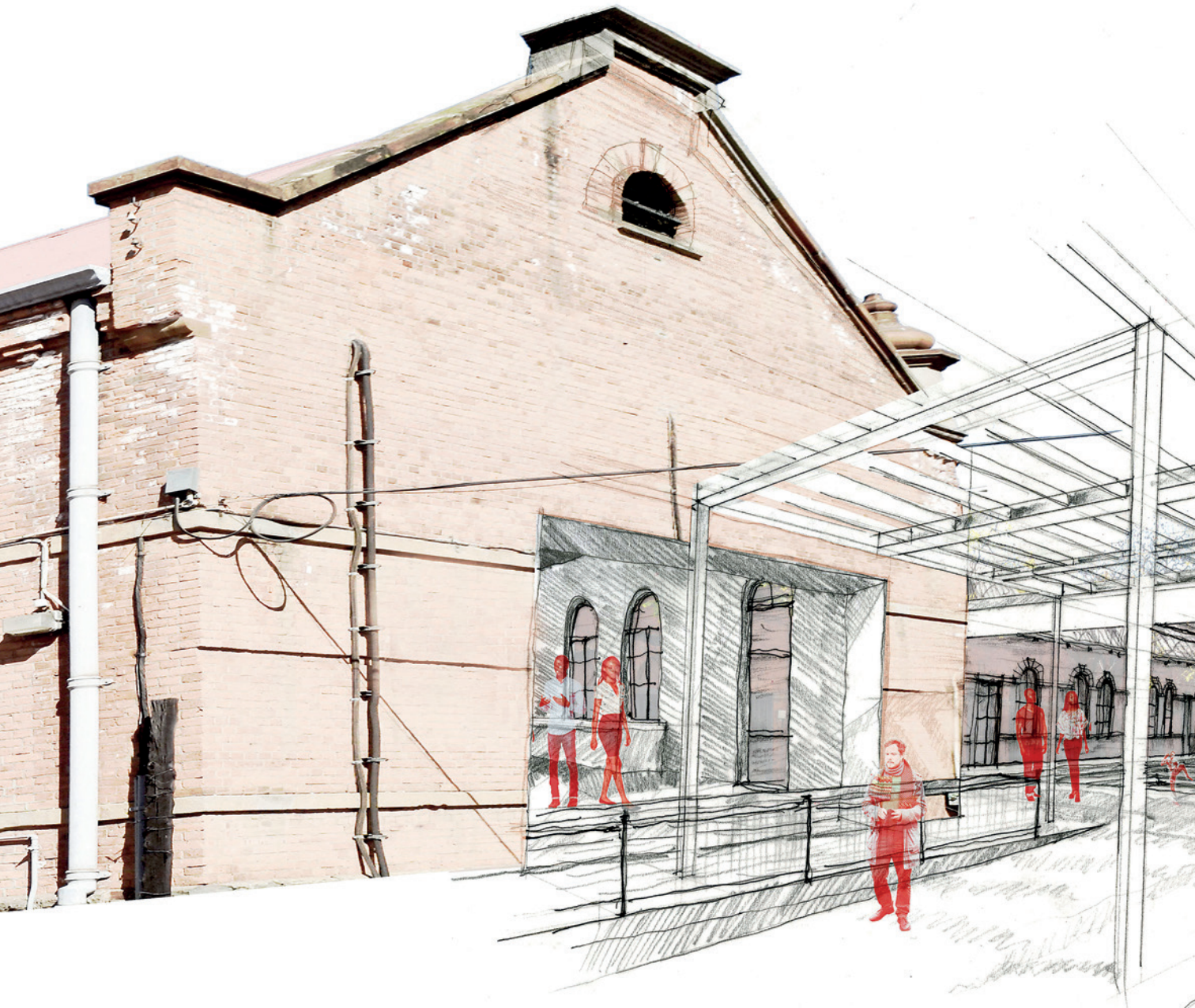
### Recommendations

- The GPW, by its very nature as an industrial heritage resource, allows for a high level of flexible programming and adaptation. Care should be taken to ensure that interventions support this essential characteristic.
- The GPW was a place of production and dissemination of information. These aspects could guide possible strategies for its future reuse.
- The buildings of the GPW are ideally suited to mixed-use (semi-)public programming. Ideally this should generate a new urban energy, which would spill out beyond the complex. The reprogramming can be developed over time through an emergent approach that initially programmes the buildings in a loose, temporary manner. During this phase different programmatic approaches could be tested.



*Conceptual sketch for reuse of the Old Government Printing Works as boxing academy, which requires opening up the southern façade to create a new public entrance. (Gillian van der Klashorst)*





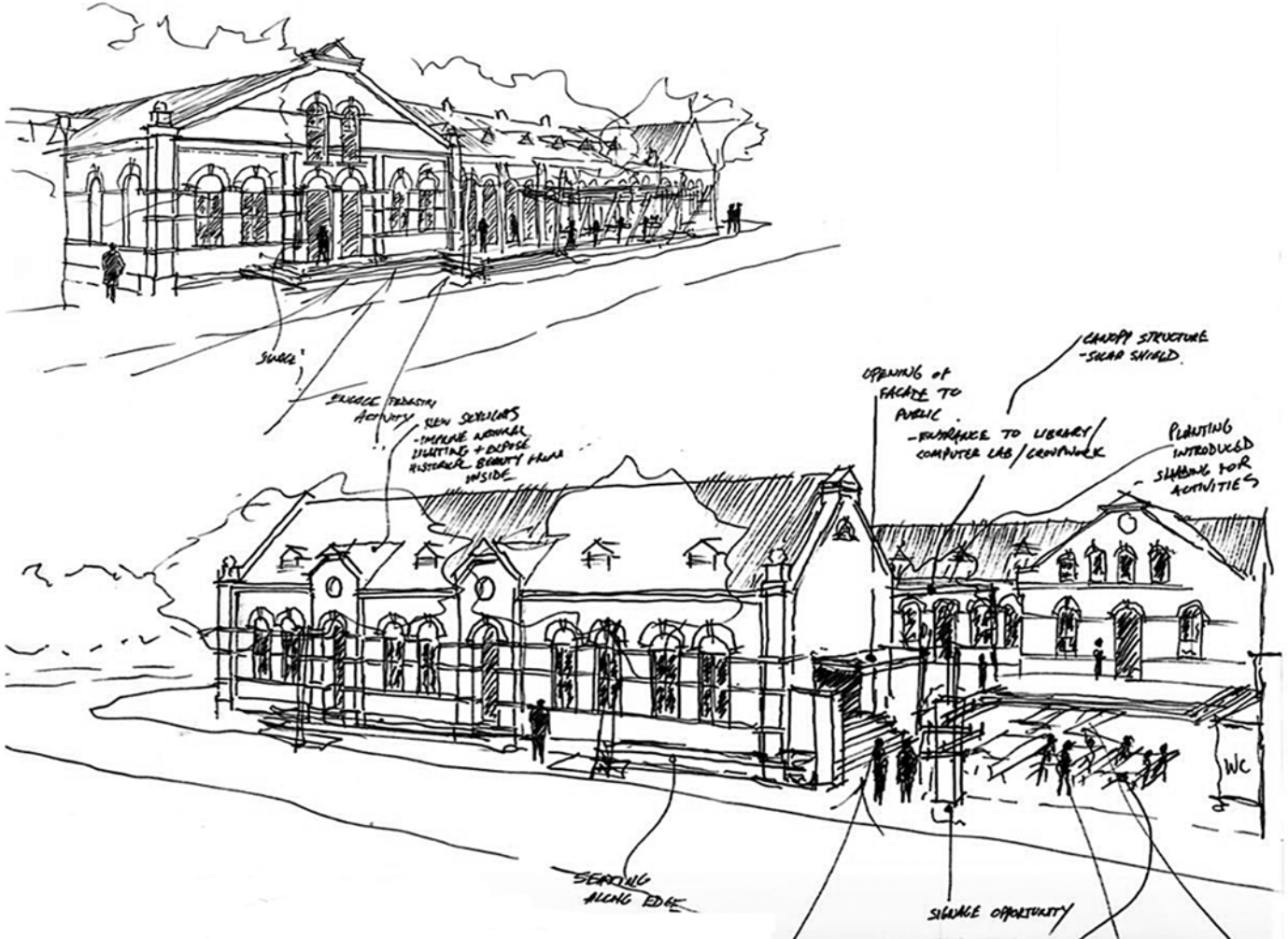


- The original 1890s ensemble consists of a series of connected pavilions. Each can accommodate its own function. Suitable uses for reprogramming the complex include culture and the arts, education, creative industries, community social facilities and ancillary public commerce such as market spaces.
- Opportunities exist for institutional functions where these are focussed on providing public interfaces such as service centres for government departments. A gradation of functions from public to private is possible across the site from south to north, with public uses located on the street. Circulation remains a challenge and could best be designed around the buildings rather than through them.

- The courtyard of the complex offers the most potential for unlocking the site for the city. The courtyard could be transformed into a pocket park, a green retreat in the bustling city. This may require the modulation of the courtyard-facing facades of the 1890s complex.
- The robust façade presents the greatest challenge to an adaptive use for the complex. Creating a public-private transition requires sympathetic architectural intervention.
- Restoring the soft brick façade will require specialist expertise. Incorrect approaches could permanently harm this valuable asset.

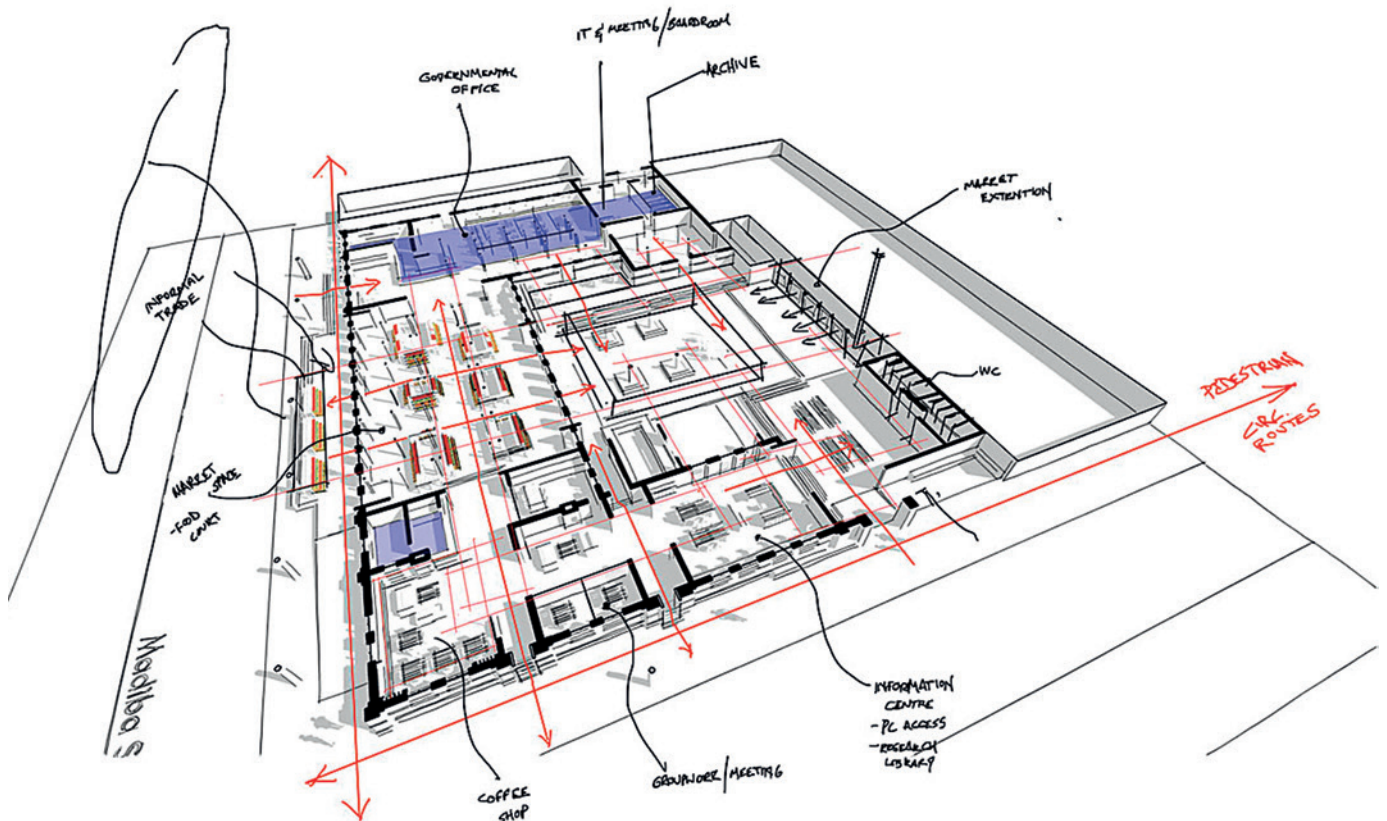


*Vision for the re-use of the Old Government Printing Works courtyard as part of a Boxing Academy. The courtyard is reimagined as pocket park. (Gillian van der Klashorst)*



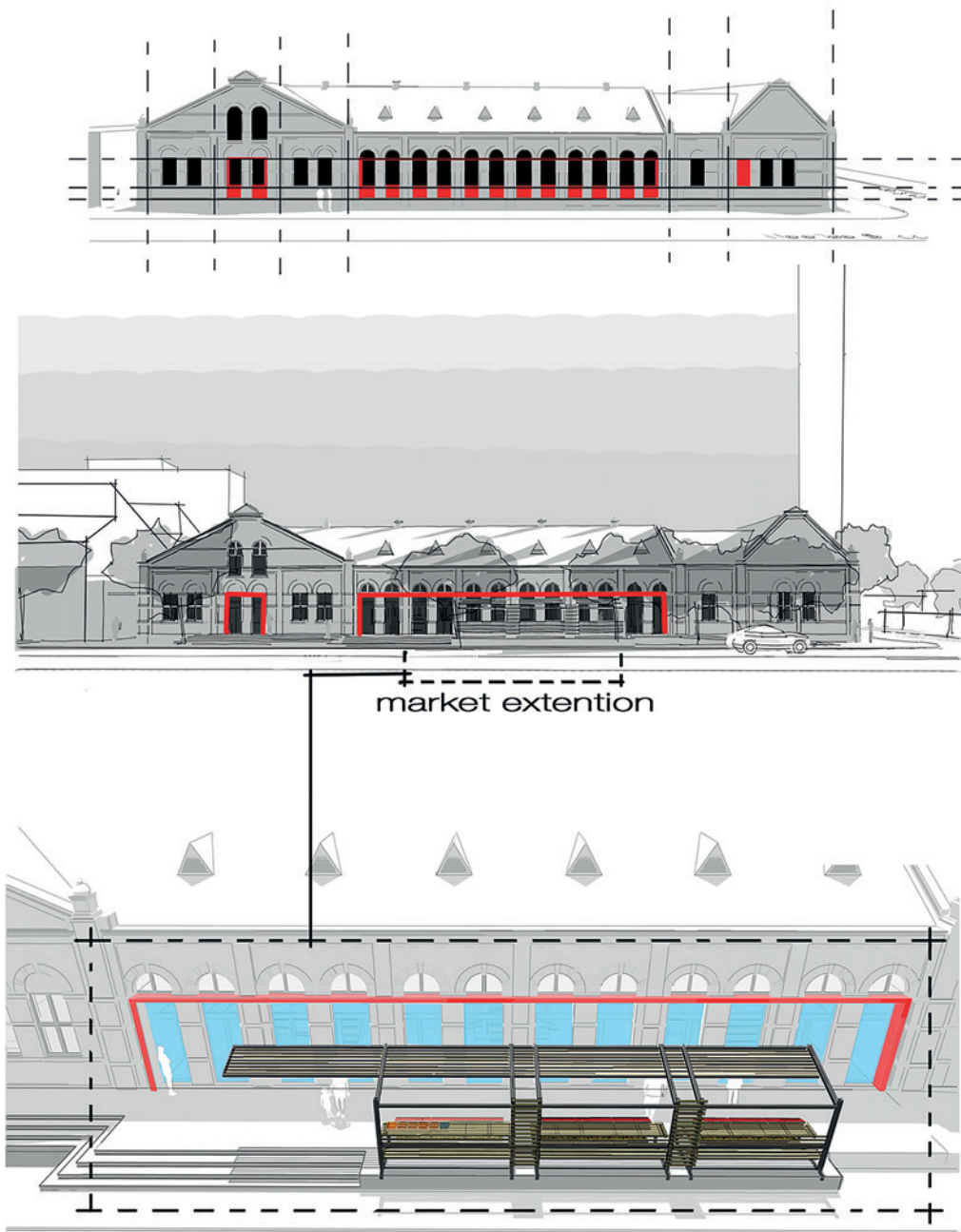
Analytical sketch for architectural adaptation options in the Old Government Printing Works to allow for the mixed commercial re-use of the site. (Marc Degenaar)

- The spacious interiors of the 1890s buildings appeal due to their early industrial character. These could accommodate industrial-inspired interventions on a grand scale. This commodious character deserves to be retained, also in the case of programme-driven compartmentalization.
- It is possible to add roof-lights to illuminate the interior spaces while retaining the important historical ventilation grilles and ceilings. The building incorporates a passive ventilation system. For contemporary energy strategies, it is preferable to augment rather than replace it.
- The original 1890s building contains the core values of the place. The two storeroom buildings located in the courtyard have less heritage significance and could therefore be partially sacrificed should this lead to a more vital future for the whole.

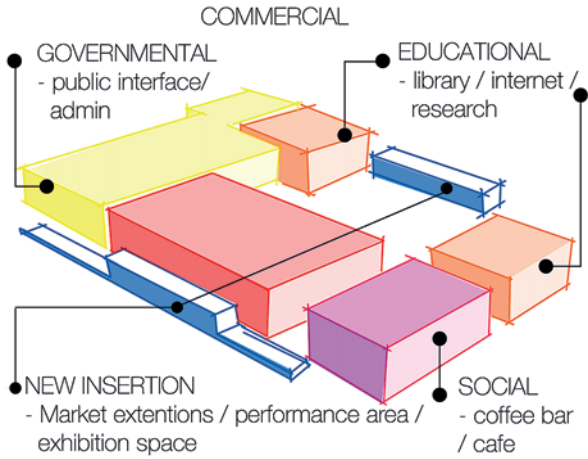


Spatial analysis for re-use options of the Old Government Printing Works as commercial market and local government public interface. (Marc Degenaar)

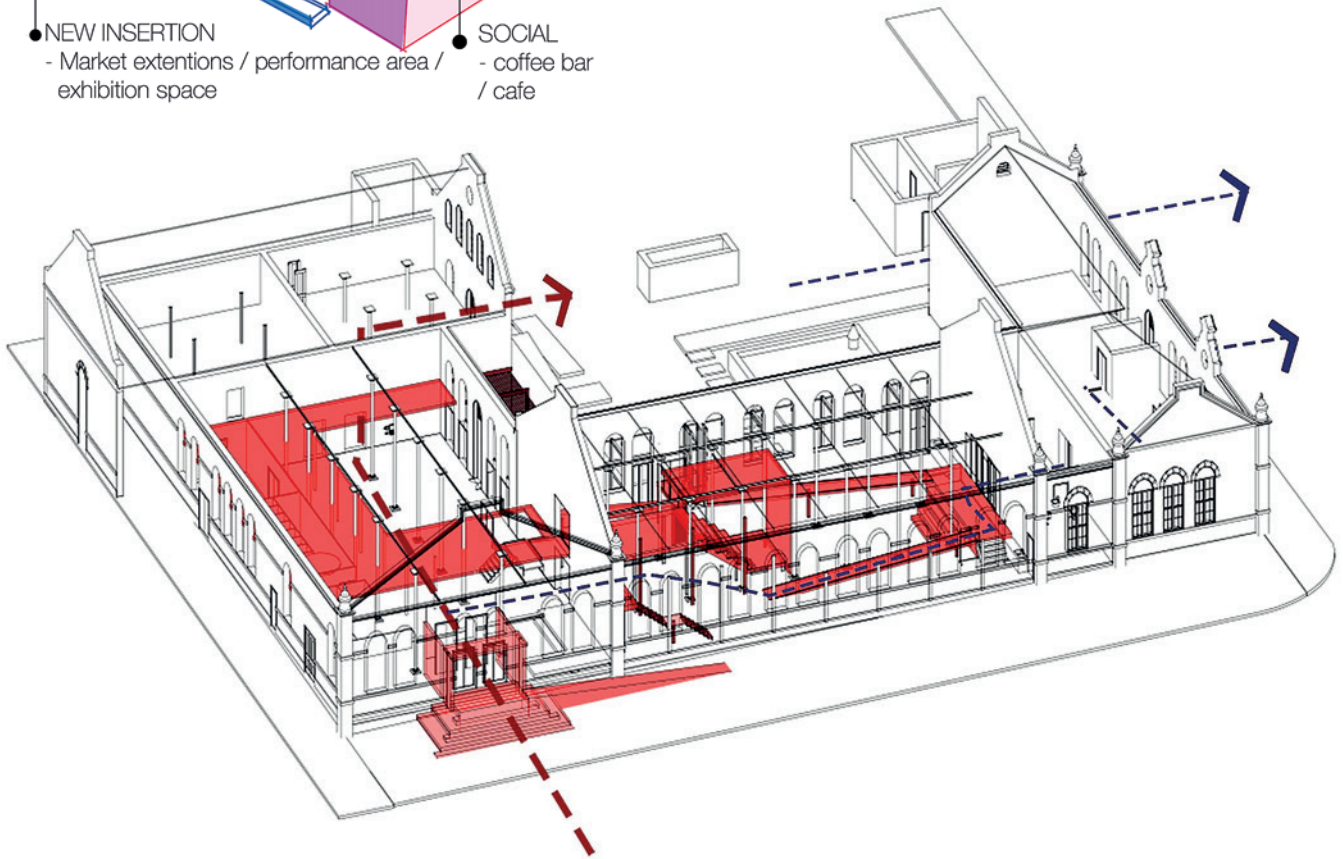




Diagrams illustrating the architectural tolerance for change in the southern façade of the Old Government Printing Works and a proposal for using the internal and external spaces as market. (Marc Degenaar)

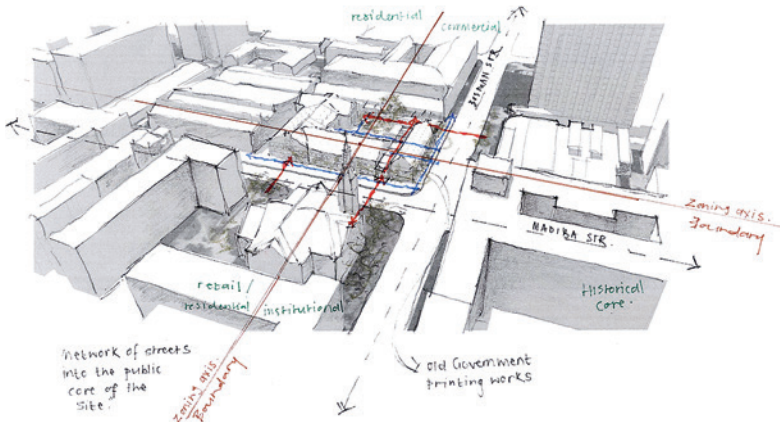


A proposal for reprogramming the Old Government Printing Works as multi-purpose facility in service of the city. (Marc Degenaar)

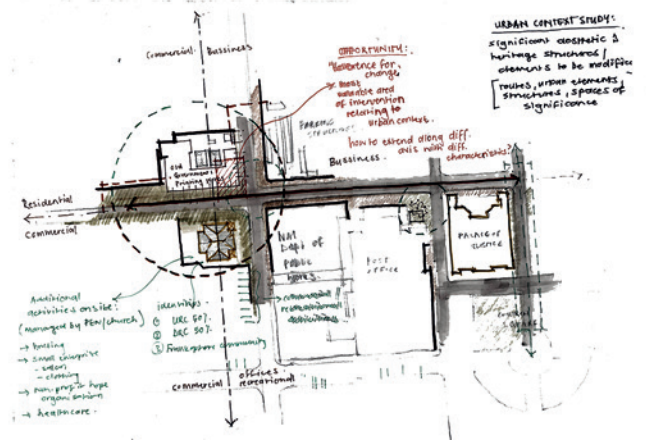


A City Youth and Media Centre proposal for the Old Government Printing Works: a new internal rout. (Willeen Gerrys)

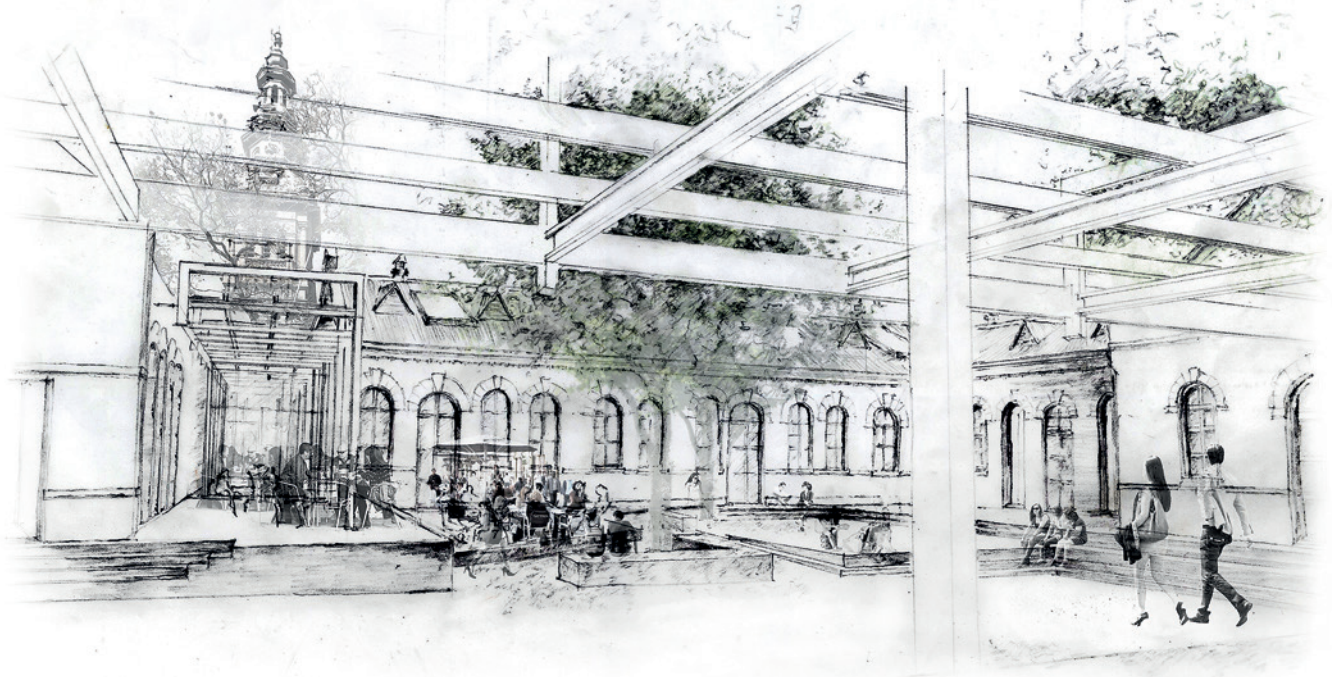




Diagrammatic summary of the contextual analysis: The Old Government Printing Works as portal between the historic core and the Western quadrant of the city. (Charne Nieuwoudt)



Old Government Printing Works: Urban Context Study of routes, urban elements, structures and spaces of significance. (Charne Nieuwoudt)



The Old GPW transformed into a dynamic public arts precinct. A proposal for a sculpture courtyard to activate the site as resource for the city. (Charne Nieuwoudt)

## Urban Heritage Challenges for the Capital

A major lesson derived from the *Re-centring Tshwane Lab* is that all three sites form essential parts of the urban environment of the inner city. They also require careful intervention in order to sustain their heritage qualities. This could be achieved through a public-driven redevelopment process that would animate the city in a way that makes civic platforms of heritage buildings. The student investigations showed that much is possible in terms of reprogramming and adaptation, as long as such architectural designs remain sympathetic to the age, aesthetic, intangible values and memory of the places.

The current challenge for the Capital is to develop and implement effective strategies that would advance adaptive reuse of the heritage resources in the historic inner city. Regenerative utilisation strategies should be based on an understanding of, and engagement with, extant energies.

The Lab has identified a number of macro-scale challenges that need to be addressed for the Capital in general through an investigation of broader urban and social contexts. The City of Tshwane's *Tshwane Vision 2055: Remaking South Africa's Capital City* could enable the development of relevant urban heritage strategies. According to this framework the ambition of the City of Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality is to complete the 'remaking' of the city concurrently with the centennial celebrations of the 1955 Freedom Charter and the bicentennial of the city, founded as capital of the Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek in 1855.<sup>5</sup> This vision predicts a *liveable, resilient and inclusive [city] whose citizens enjoy a high quality of life, have access to social, economic and enhanced political freedoms and where citizens are partners in the development of the African Capital City of excellence.*<sup>6</sup> The Lab

affirmed the applicability of the UNESCO *Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape*. This states that heritage-based strategies have an important role to play within this vision, given the potential that urban heritage holds in the fostering of economic development and social cohesion.<sup>7</sup> The greatest challenge for those entrusted with managing the heritage resources of the City lies in addressing change while maintaining and augmenting the dignity of place. Within the transformative *Vision 2055*, the heritage resources of the historic city core can be inclusive of all the citizens of the multi-cultural Capital of South Africa.

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<sup>5</sup> City of Tshwane, 2013: 23.

<sup>6</sup> City of Tshwane, 2013: 6.

<sup>7</sup> UNESCO, 2011.