

Engaged:

A toilet on every high street

Royal College of Art
**THE HELEN HAMLYN
CENTRE FOR DESIGN**

PiM.studio
Architects



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Introduction:

People are the heart of the high street, but they need public toilets to spend more time participating in their community and the local economy. For older people, disabled people and those with young families, toilet access can decide which high street to visit, or whether to visit at all. Yet despite public support, public toilets in England and Wales have reduced by 35% since 2000*.



*Hansard, 2021, H.L. Vol 811:426

Introduction:

Partners and Stakeholders

The **Engaged** project is run by the **Public Toilets Research Unit (PTRU)** based at **The Helen Hamlyn Centre for Design (HHCD)** at the **Royal College of Art (RCA)**, in partnership with **PiM studio Architects**.

Engaged is one of 20 innovation projects in the **Mayor of London's Designing London's Recovery** programme, in response to the 'High Streets of All' Mission.

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Project Partners:



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Introduction:

Engaged Brief

Engaged investigates how to reuse empty premises as public toilets, sharing space with start-ups, small businesses, incubator space or community initiatives, to provide this overlooked element of public health infrastructure that supports high street regeneration.

With expertise in inclusive design, urban design and architecture, **PTRU** and **PiM.studio Architects** will develop toilet facilities that meet the needs of those who are often excluded, for and with the local community, through co-design methods.



Pre-Feasibility:

Aims of the Study

We are engaging with experts in local authorities, business improvement districts, urban design, retail and other local community stakeholders to understand:

- What value they see in a project like **Engaged**?
- How realistic would **Engaged** be to achieve?
- What are the barriers?
- What funding routes may realise **Engaged**?

This informs how we develop and pilot Engaged as a sustainable proposition that can bring value to the high street.



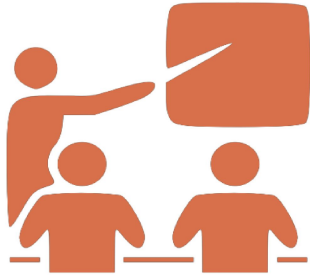
Research:

Overview of Methods

Engaged has already working closely with local and national stakeholders to understand the current barriers and issues surrounding public toilet facilities. This information has been captured in the form of workshops, site visits and interviews.

Activities so far

- 1** Workshop
- 13** Workshop participants
- 10** Expert interviews
- 2** Location-based Site Visits



Research:

Evidence - Regeneration Workshop

A workshop was held on the **17th May 2022** via Zoom for London regeneration officers who were engaged in active projects with their local communities, and borough policy-making. 13 officers from seven London councils participated in the session. Over three hours, the workshop hosted two surveys and six individual and small-group activities involving discussion, mapping and ideation.

The activities aimed to:

- Gather place-based public toilet needs.
- Introduce the **Engaged** model, and explore how **Engaged** could be part of their vision for high street regeneration.
- Identify barriers to implementation of **Engaged** and public toilet provision.
- Explore potential versions of Engaged in different boroughs, addressing unique local barriers.
- Enable peer support and shared learning between officers in relation to toilet provision (barriers, challenges, successes).



Research:

Overview of Regeneration Workshop

The workshop highlighted that participating local authority regeneration officers were keenly aware of the need for public toilets as a crucial element of public health provision, and in enabling general access to public spaces and the high street. They also recognised public toilets as being a lifeline for those with additional needs or vulnerabilities.

Access to public spaces was a priority reason for providing toilets on high streets specifically, with inclusive access and the need to 'dwell longer' on high streets. Toilets on high streets enable increased footfall and supports local regeneration broadly (beyond retail alone).

The next two pages compile the feedback and learnings from the workshop focused on the public toilet and the potential vacant unit.



Research:

Evidence - Site Visit - Hackney, London

Following the workshop, we were invited by a London Borough of Hackney Regeneration Officer to visit potential sites of interest around Hackney Central. This highlighted positive case studies as well as areas for opportunity.

This multicultural borough celebrates its diversity. The unique makeup of each borough also brings its own challenges.

There is respect and responsibility for all communities within Hackney, which makes this a great site to potentially pilot **Engaged**.

We will continue to learn about site needs and opportunities within Hackney to pilot and scale the impact of **Engaged**.



Research:

Evidence - Site Visit - Heart of Hathersage, UK

We were invited by the **Heart of Hathersage** to visit their hugely successful village toilet block and outdoor community space project, in the Peak District. A committed and determined local residents group planned and managed the demolition of the existing public toilet block, and the building of new direct-access toilets. Regular donations from local toilet users and visitors to the Peak District contribute to upkeep. Since its opening, it has experienced almost no vandalism or 'extra-curricular' use. The whole project took 15 years to complete.

Core barriers and challenges were: managing four land owners; meeting multiple councils' planning criteria; – and crucially – their inclusion of public toilets making the project ineligible for many funds and grants.

Enablers included: sheer local drive to raise awareness for local toilet need; learning how to present the project to others; having a good business mentor and advocate; taking a loan; and establishing strategies to manage deficits.



Research:

Evidence - Interviews - Overview

Engaged conducted **10 expert interviews** as part of its research into the national need for public toilets.

Two interviews were undertaken within each of the following five categories:

- Crime
- Business & Commerce
- Retail Management
- Urban Design
- Government & Regeneration.

The interviews aimed to:

- Elicit experts' perspectives on the key barriers to implementing public toilets on high streets.
- Explore how these barriers might be addressed or overcome.
- Gather experts' critique on the **Engaged** idea and how this might be improved and successfully implemented.



Research:

Evidence - Interview Findings

Potential barriers for Engaged

Experts flagged a range of physical, financial, bureaucratic, crime-related, and perception-related barriers that Engaged will need to anticipate and plan for, including:

- low availability of appropriate vacant units,
- ensuring sustainability of the project so the benefits of Engaged are supported long-term,
- potential conflicting needs between Engaged activity and Engaged toilet or neighbouring businesses,
- managing legal and other bureaucratic issues potentially restricting adaptations to buildings or types of Engaged activities,
- financing the set-up and maintenance of an Engaged toilet,
- negative perceptions around public toilets, toileting or continence needs, discouraging involvement of stakeholders,
- managing ongoing crime issues relating to public toilets, that may still apply to an Engaged toilet,
- future proofing for uncertainties including: changes to funding, law, policies, standards, the environment or expectations.

Research:

Evidence - Interview Findings

Potential enablers for Engaged

Experts reported what they felt might enable both set-up and sustainability of Engaged, including:

- good understanding of: local funding opportunities; planning policies & agendas; key clientele; footfall; local area needs & issues; existing local support for public toilets; local BID agendas,
- ensuring that business-enabling requirements are in place such as infrastructure, parking or storage,
- establishing a model for financial sustainability – and for incentivising Engaged space activities,
- design features that: enable ease of cleaning & maintenance; mitigate crime and safety issues; encourage use of the Engaged toilet within the unit,
- identifying Engaged activities and businesses that align well with and encourage use of the Engaged toilet,
- establishing clear responsibilities for all stakeholders and partners,
- shifting perceptions around public toilets, establishing their potential as: ‘enabler’ not ‘burden’,
- establishing standards and expectations around what Engaged is and provides, to enable investment, involvement and use,
- further evidence-gathering of local and UK need.

Research:

Evidence - Interview Findings

Value of Engaged

All interviewees responded positively to Engaged on the basis that it held potential to:

- support regeneration, local businesses, tourism;
- generate revenue;
- make use of vacant units and the existing facilities within them;
- make toilet provision more accessible & inclusive;
- mitigate crime issues & reduce public soiling;
- establish a successful model that others can build on.



Research:

Precedents (UK)

Listed are some examples of public toilets as well as their innovative set up or complementary function.

WCityStop.info | **Wolverhampton**



Public toilet in retail unit + public information

- Public toilet opened in 2006, in shopping centre unit.
- Managed by Wolverhampton City Council, it includes council info (both paper-based and digital kiosk).
- Includes: accessible & standard toilets, feeding room, shower.
- Trialed as base for health services (eg New Years Eve) to support partygoers and night-time economy.

• status: open

Brooksby's Walk Public Toilets | **Clapton**



Public toilet + community cafe

- Clapton Improvement Society (CIS) fought to save the closed toilets, to support Chatsworth Road's regeneration projects, including a market.
 - CIS reopened the toilets (2011) with a peppercorn lease from London Borough of Hackney.
 - CIS and NANA community cafe restored the building as a cafe space (2013), with a public toilet.
 - 'Brooksby's Walk' bar + restaurant (2015), keeping unisex toilet access to support the market.
- status: closed (empty hospitality unit with public toilet)

Westbourne Grove Public Toilet | **Notting Hill**



Public toilet + flower shop

- Free-standing award-winning public toilet building with retail space.
- Designed in 1994 by architects CZWG, who added the retail unit at residents' request.
- Income from the unit - run as a flower shop - offsets the cost of running the attended facility.

• status: open

Research:

Precedents (Worldwide)

Additional examples of public toilets with an innovative design helping making them more visible, respected and safely used.

Wembley WCs | **Wembley, London**



Public toilet block

- Design: Gort Scott
- Standing over five metres tall and with a gold perforated metal facade, the public toilet stands at the centre of a newly landscaped and pedestrianised area.
- The base of the building is made of concrete making it durable and robust. Above head-height the structure becomes a filigree metal screen, allowing for light and ventilation without letting views in.
- The perforated water-cut screen further creates the effect of a glowing lantern during the evening.
- status: open

Tokyo Toilets Project | **Tokyo, Japan**



See-through public toilet

- Design: Shigeru Ban
- The toilet is part of the Nippon Foundation's Tokyo Toilet project, which has seen toilets created by leading Japanese architects
- The toilets feature transparent glass walls that become opaque when they are occupied.
- This see-through walls reassure users that the facilities are safe and clean before they enter the toilet block.
- status: open

Gdansk Public Toilet | **Gdansk, Poland**



Public toilet + cycle parking

- Design: Schleifer & Milczanowski Architekci
- Designed as part of the drive to make Gdansk match-fit to host the EURO 2012 football tournament, these public toilets are practical as well as stylish.
- The toilet's cylindrical form bulges at the base, in shape reminiscent of a raindrop, while the vertical steel ribs of the exterior double as a bike rack.
- status: open

Research:

Findings and Analysis: Literature Review

Listed are the themes that appeared in our Literature Review, to consider when introducing public toilets to the high street:

1. **Support:** how landlords and businesses could be supported in joining the Engaged program
2. **Impact:** the impact of toilets on the community, high streets and city centres. The need for a public toilet strategy to measure the impact and make evidence based decisions.
3. **Implementation:** Looking at similar schemes to see how landlords and businesses could join and run a public toilet as part of the Engaged program.
4. **Standards/Design:** The requirements for toilets, accessible toilets and changing places toilets to meet British Standards and Building Regulations
5. **Communication:** How people know where to find the toilets and what facilities are available.
6. **Inclusivity:** Equitable toilet provision, inclusive of profound disabilities and all genders.
7. **Schemes:** A run through of number of schemes, some directly related to toilets or public toilets, and others to government regeneration schemes.

Research: Schedule of Accommodation (Toilet)

The minimum and ideal features of the toilet, based on research

	Public Toilets		
	Minimum	Ideal	Current (Pre-existing)
Services/Products/Design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Functioning bathroom basics (toilet, basin, method of drying hands, sanitary waste bin) - Accessibility (physical and neurodivergent needs) - Wayfinding/sign posting - Facilities to hang jacket, bag, clothes. Changing room facilities - Surface space to hold any makeup, coffee or small items - Space for a pram inside the PT. - Wellbeing aesthetics (e.g. sound; art) - Secure by Design design features + strategies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Small shower unit as bidet - Drinking water fountain station - Providing safe drug spaces (sharps bins) - Themed to local area - Sanitary goods or children's nappies (donated?) - Safe space to sit, a quiet room (for breastfeeding) - Natural lighting - Calm sounds or music - Well ventilated - Public art toilets - Nature (plants, green architecture, plants outside) 	
Location/Spatial Configuration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - On ground level, to allow disability access more easily (could be assisted with a ramp) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Configured away from the business/activity space - Offset the access to the toilet from the main building/unit entrance - Place near green spaces to support more engagement with nature - Near other public facilities (bike hire, bus stop, transport links etc) - Location requirements (e.g. 100m from tube) 	- Piloting public access toilets around parks
Servicing/Maintenance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Managed: always the necessary resources - Initial regular monitoring of the site. Potential for feedback of facilities (toilet trip advisor, live) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A need for standardisation of the maintenance of space. 	
Time-based	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Toilet to be available for use during business hours 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Providing access at night - 24 hour access sites 	
Method/Community Engagement		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Co-design with community/group/council to enable ownership and promotion - Making it part of a local network - Co-designed for local needs 	
Policy		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Building the engaged model into new building schemes - "Engaged" politician sparks people to promote further developments 	- Built into new schemes
Finance/funding/business	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Free for users! - Sustainable financial strategy 		

Research: Schedule of Accommodation (Unit)

The minimum and ideal features of the unit, based on research

	Unit (Engaged Vacant Unit)		
	Minimum	Ideal	Current (Pre-existing)
Services/Products/ Design		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To provide culture, local support or education - Supporting vulnerable/homeless - To use the toilet as a conversation starter, to then teach and learn through conversations around them (toilet roll or water consumptions impact on the planet) - Using recycled water systems 	
Location/Spatial Configuration		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Toilet space and business unit space to be separated by levels (upstairs & ground floor) - Near a tube station 	
Servicing/Maintenance	- Maintaining the facilities ensuring they are clean and stocked with consumables (toilet paper and soap)	- Robotic cleaning and self maintaining system	
Timebased		- Providing access outside of business hours	- Open all hours business (hotels) providing all hours access to toilets
Method/Community Engagement	- Engaged concept dissemination routes / strategy (using the site to promote further locations)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Accreditation schemes for "Engaged" toilets - Micro business/start-ups to be given access to the units - Fixed term contracts 	- Working with developers to bring in "Engaged" scheme
Policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Physical space & infrastructure prerequisites - Community engagement prerequisites (research, co-design, active community group steering, direct ownership) 		
Finance/funding/business	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Non-financial incentives / rewards / benefits for maintainer - Benefits to the space for a business (cheap rent, gaining extra funding support to maintain the facilities etc) - Responsibilities for maintainer (day-to-day running strategy provided) - financial and non-financial? (cost of good consumed) - Establish owner/maintenance partnerships & responsibilities, and to secure owner/maintenance funding - Strategy for set-up, repairs, overseeing - financial and non-financial? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Financial incentives / rewards / benefits for maintainer - For the unit to gain council/tax/rent based benefits to support the running of the toilet space 	

Design Principles:

The design principles for the Engaged Model have been informed by the research and have led to multiple necessities being highlighted. This has been approached from two perspectives: the **Engaged Unit** space which could be commercial or council-owned; and the **Engaged Toilet Facilities**. With these two elements as the focus, we are able to build on the surrounding context to embed the system into the community and high streets.

Gender-based principles

To ensure that everyone is provided with respectful and inclusive facilities

Space for other uses

Handwashing, infant-feeding, respite/wellbeing

Easy to maintain/clean

Facilities, materials and equipment to be selected based for ease of maintenance

Wayfinding/ Branding Requirements

Lines on Floor, signposting, display stickers

Viewpoint

A clear view to the toilet entrance

Soft-walls/barriers

To create a pathway to the toilet, separate from the unit's visitors/customers

Accessibility features

Providing for both physical and neurodiverse needs

Safety

By including 'design against crime' elements

Sustainability

Advocating the use of sustainable materials and methods. E.g. Natural roofs, wood, water reduction and reuse

Design Principles:

Typologies

The research within this project has highlighted a range of potential opportunities for the Engaged model within high streets. The sizes of these vary. Based on this, we have developed schemes for three different sized units based on the design principles raised by Engaged.

The intention of these is to create replicable designs and guidance for as wide a range of sites as possible. The core principles remain the same, however the features and scope can be adjusted based on the size of the unit.

Challenges around ownership and maintenance are site-specific, requiring adjustments in the business models.

Small Unit

E.g. High street independent shop (small space available)

Medium Unit

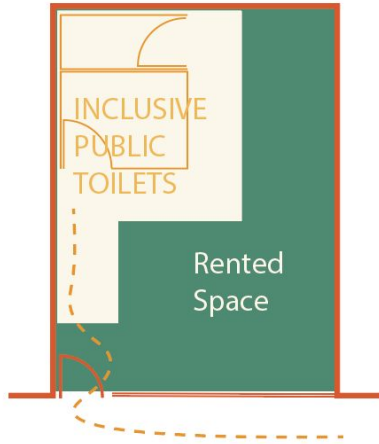
E.g. Larger retail or council property with higher footfall

Add-On

To add a structure to an existing toilet block based on the **Engaged Model**

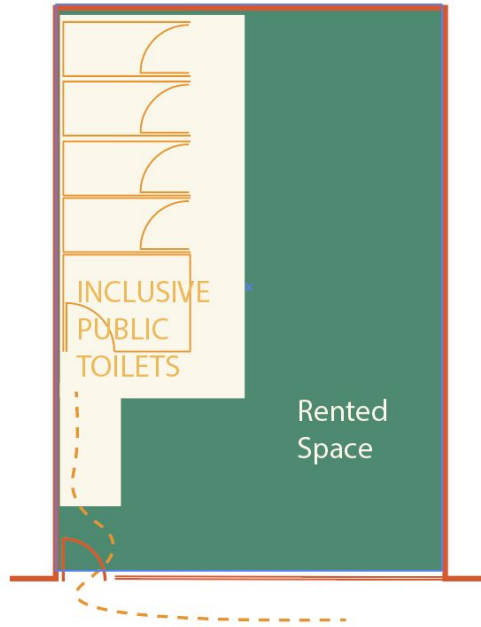
Design Principles:

Typologies



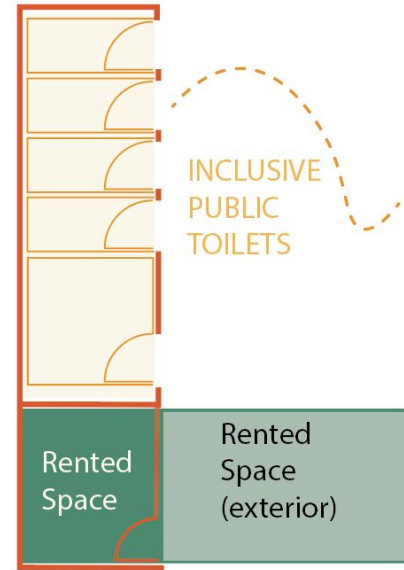
Small

E.g. Highstreet independent shop (small space available)



Medium

E.g. Larger retail or council property with higher footfall



Add-On

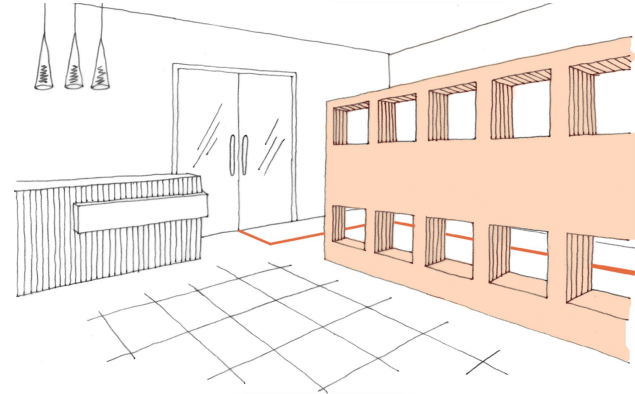
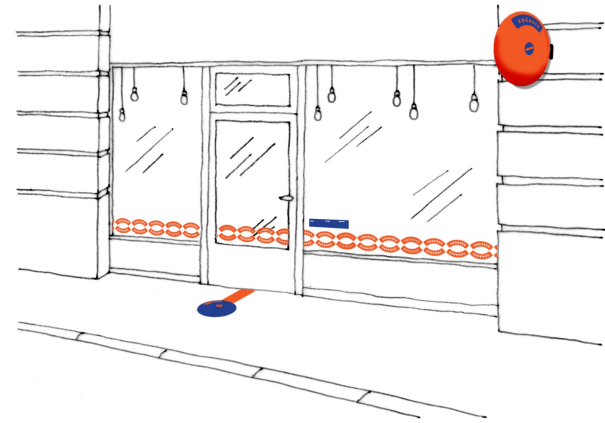
To add a structure to an existing toilet block based on the **Engaged** Model

Design Principles:

Typologies

There are several stages of engagement, with different spaces encountered, when accessing the public toilets: the high street itself, the shop/unit entrance, the shop/unit interior, the toilet entrance.

These user journey stages have been considered within the Engage model to encourage and provide confidence in use of these facilities.



Access Times: _____ Disabled Toilets: _____ Overall Toilets: _____

Additional Features: _____

ENGAGED UNIT: 000022

Example of Timescales and facilities information presented at the front of the Unit.

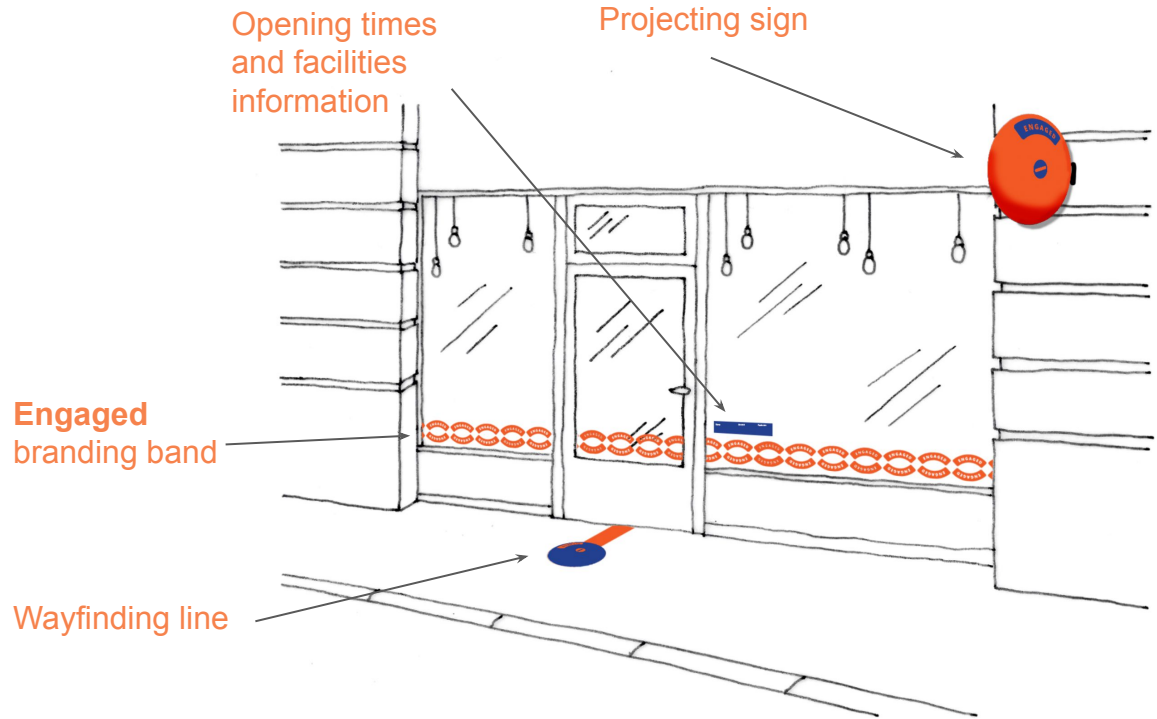
Design Principles:

Facade/Shop Front

The exterior of an **Engaged** unit will clearly advertise its facilities and that they are following the **Engaged** model in providing safe, clean and accessible toilet facilities. This will be done through:

- **Engaged**-approval vinyl band on the front of the shop window.
- **Engaged** projecting sign.
- Window sticker with opening times and facilities information.

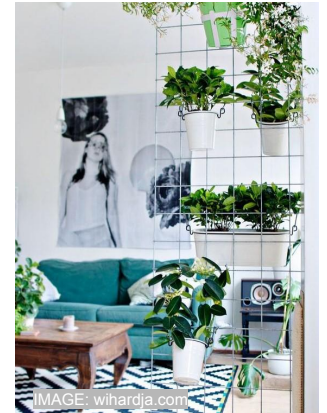
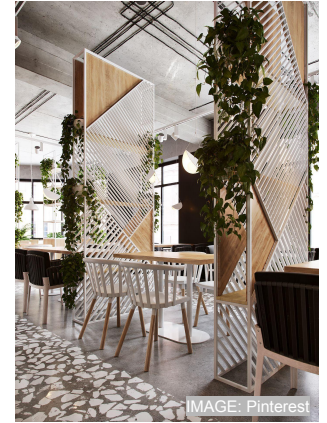
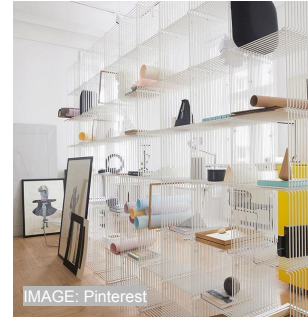
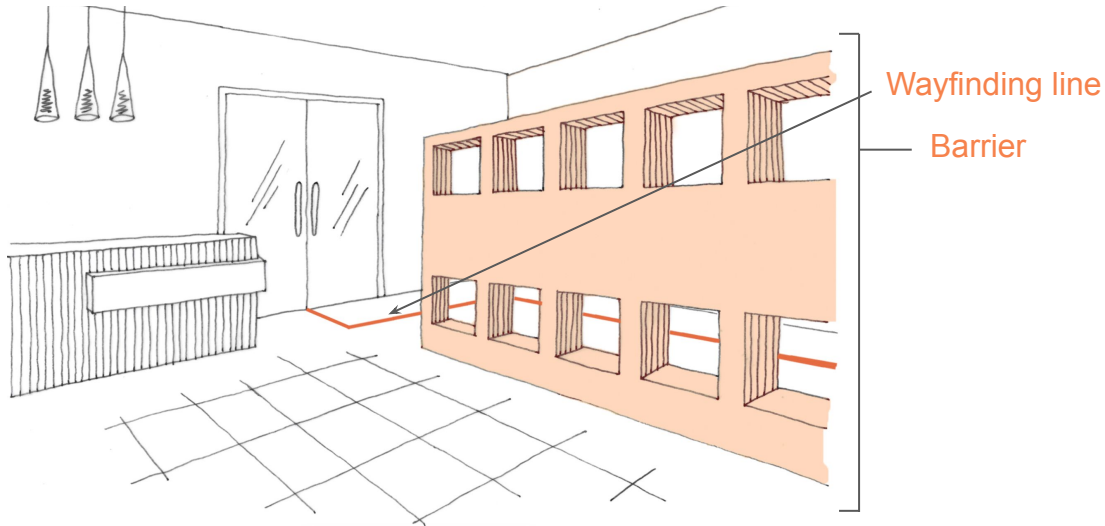
The unit will need step-free access from the street to the interior. It will also need a wheelchair accessible door so that the unit access matches that of the facilities provided (eg Accessible toilet, Changing Places toilet)



Design Principles:

Unit requirements

Two key requirements of the unit would be the **wayfinding line** from the entrance to toilet, and the use of **space dividers** to provide a corridor to the toilet. This allows a business to have minimal disruption from additional footfall, and for non-customers to feel legitimate access to the toilets. It could provide further storage or functional display space as the examples show.



Design Principles:

Toilet requirements

The **Engaged** model will aim to respond to local needs, and provide inclusive facilities that support people whose needs are not currently met. For high streets where no toilets exist, this will be everyone.

To know the local needs, an Engaged facility must be designed with or by people who currently or wish to visit the high street, and those who live, work or study in the area.

It is important to seek participation from people in the community who might be excluded from current toilet design. Depending on the community, this might include: trans and non/binary people, people who need support from a carer, people with non-western toileting practices, young children, rough-sleepers / the voluntarily homeless, people with physical disabilities and neurodiverse people such as those with autism or dementia.

Elements to consider are:

- Gender-neutral cubicles as standard, with a women-only cubicle if required.
- Ambulant cubicles as standard - these are wider and have grab rails to support people with reduced strength/mobility.
- Two accessible (disabled) toilets, for left-hand and right-hand transfer.
- Baby-changing both within and outside of a toilet cubicle.
- Sinks and shelves within the cubicle, for washing, menstruation and continence management.
- Accessible or sensor taps, flushes and locks, for children and adults with reduced hand strength.

For more information, see [Publicly accessible toilets after COVID-19 \[pdf\]](#) for the PTRU's latest inclusive design guidance.

Design Principles:

Bathroom Interior



Use of natural materials such as timber contribute to create a welcoming space



Create a sense of privacy while maintaining door visibility and safety



Greenery and sunlight create a comfortable space



A comfortable parent & baby room provides a safe and quiet space



Design for All: lower basin for children help making the toilet functional and friendlier to all



Signage can help create a sense of inclusivity

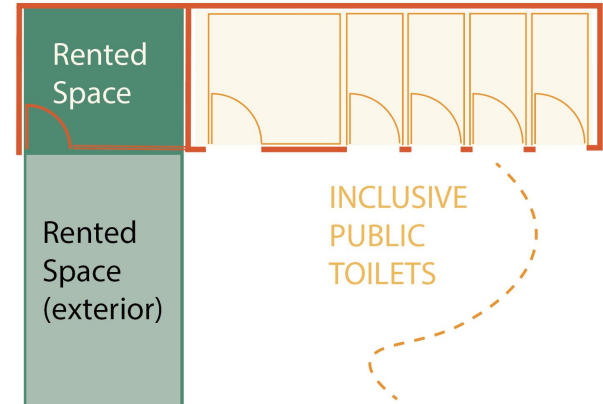
Design Principles:

Add-On Typology

The Add-On Typology is based on supporting a current toilet block by bringing it into the Engaged model.

This involves creating a rentable internal space, with possible exterior space as well. This will sit alongside the toilet block to provide a new business opportunity that can also monitor the toilets.

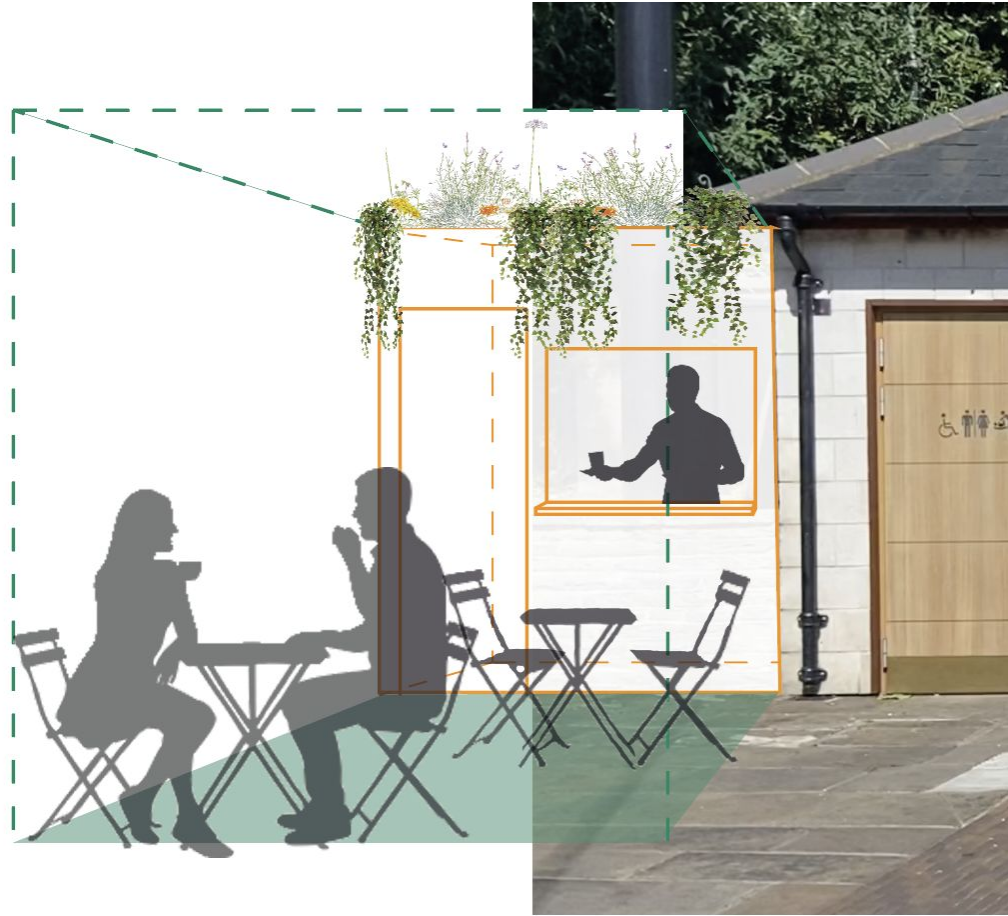
These Add-On structures would be a location-specific design but would include plumbing, electricity and storage, suiting a variety of businesses, for example a cafe or coffee shop.



Design Principles:

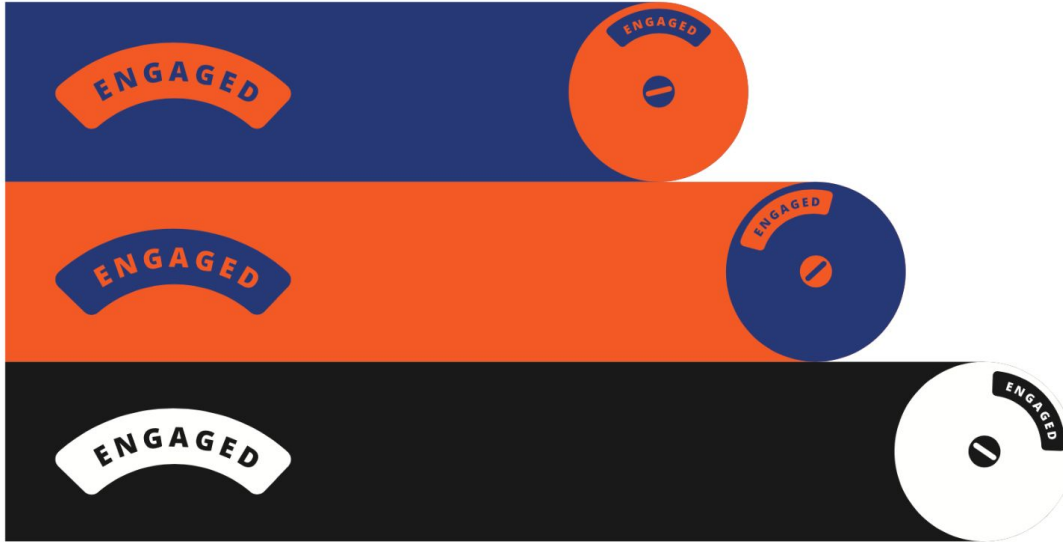
Add-On Typology

- **Window service:** ensuring serving space to place goods and keeping customers outside the unit
- **Exterior seating space**
- **Attached to the toilet block** for access to electrics and plumbing
- **Opportunity for “Green Roof”** to incorporate nature into the design



Design Principles:

Graphic Identity



Next Steps:

Hackney Central

The Engaged team will now work in Hackney Central to co-design a facility with people who live, work, study in or visit the Hackney Central area.

The aim is to identify gaps in local public toilet provision, how an inclusive toilet can meet these needs to increase time spent locally, and how local people can drive these ideas forward to create a facility that supports and reflect the local community within future regeneration.

Alongside this, we will conduct local stakeholder engagement within property management, urban design, community groups, business & community safety. This will help reveal local challenges for the commercial or community use of the unit, and possible financial drivers and mechanisms to support the ongoing maintenance / cleaning / management of the public toilet facility.

This work will conclude August 2022, and will be shared in a Co-design Plan and Project Report.

Royal College of Art & PiM.studio Architects

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June 2022

