

The Collection - Deconstruction of the Envelope

Unlocking the APO640 Story

The story of the US Army's influence on Sutton Coldfield is currently a hidden narrative that should be opened out to the wider Sutton Coldfield population. In order to reach the maximum audience a historical interpretation centre is to be included in the design of the new Royal Mail Delivery Office.

'The Collection' will have a dual function of exhibiting information relating to the APO640 movements within the site and within the wider Midlands Region. The secondary function is a 'callers office' where the general public will go to collect parcels and letters that were undeliverable.

Design Overview

The Sutton Depot Site has had a long association with postal sorting and delivery, from the arrival of the US Army Post Office APO640 in 1942, to the foreign postal sorting office through to the present day Royal Mail Delivery Operations.

A constant item that links all of these phases of postal history is the 'envelope'. The envelope is an item in which to store information. Items such as personal letters to soldiers on the front line were transported into the European theatre of war during the APO640 use of the site. The information inside the envelope is unique and personal.

The exterior of the envelope contains all of the information required to transport the enclosed information thousands of miles. The stamps and post marks allow the for the identification of the source of the mail, cancellation marks denote its transfer from air mail to surface mail. The first day covers represent significant events in history. These external marks are unique to APO640 and resonate with the history of the site.

The envelope is the starting point for the design of 'the collection,' it can be folded and manipulated to form an enclosure to 'the collection'.



Photograph of APO640 during WWII operations in Sutton Coldfield

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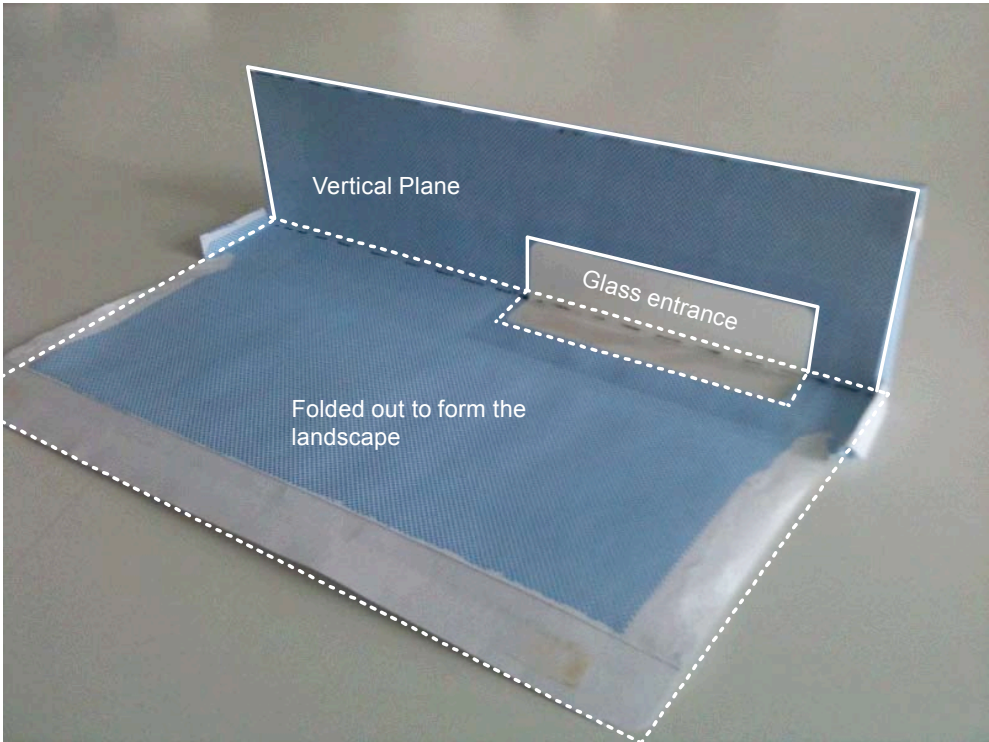
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Folding the Envelope

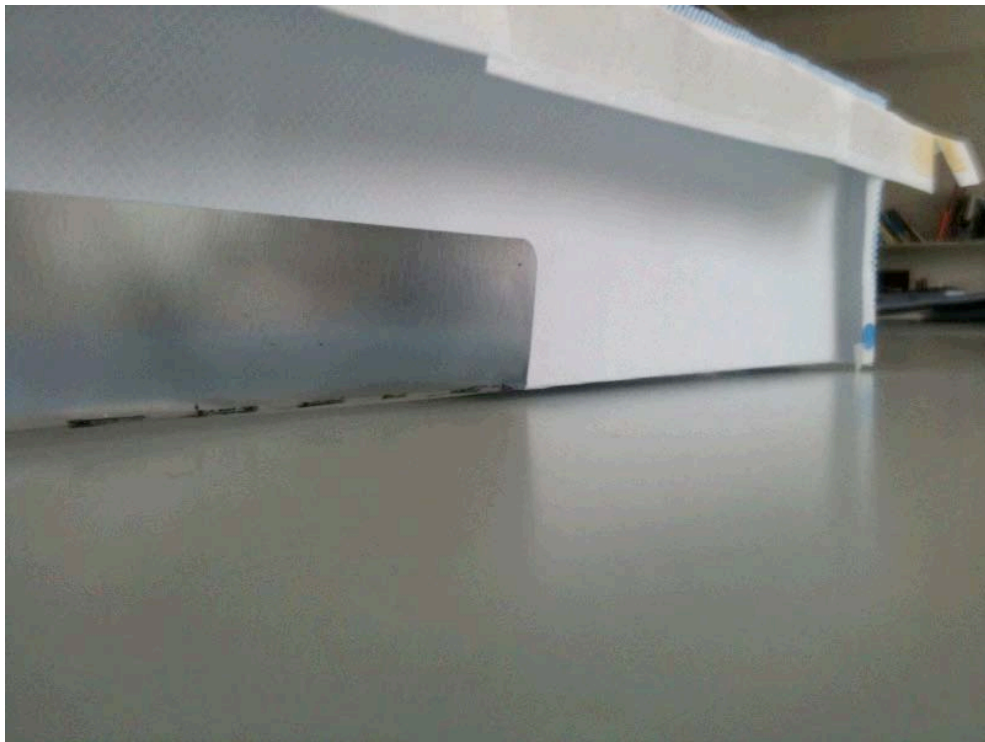
The envelope can be folded to form vertical and horizontal planes. The vertical plane presents a threshold into the building, whilst the horizontal plane imbeds the building into the landscape and creates a 'plaza' space in front of the building.

The window of the envelope presents a 'shop window' in which the enclosed contents can be seen by the passing public.

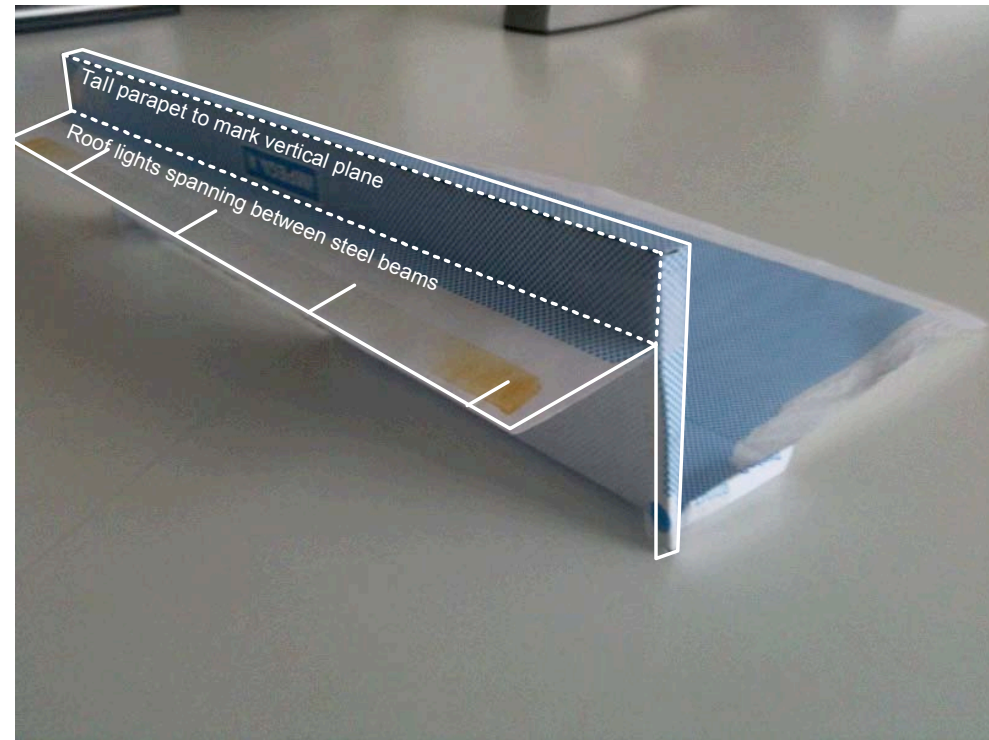
01 Envelope is deconstructed and inverted to form the vertical and ground plane.



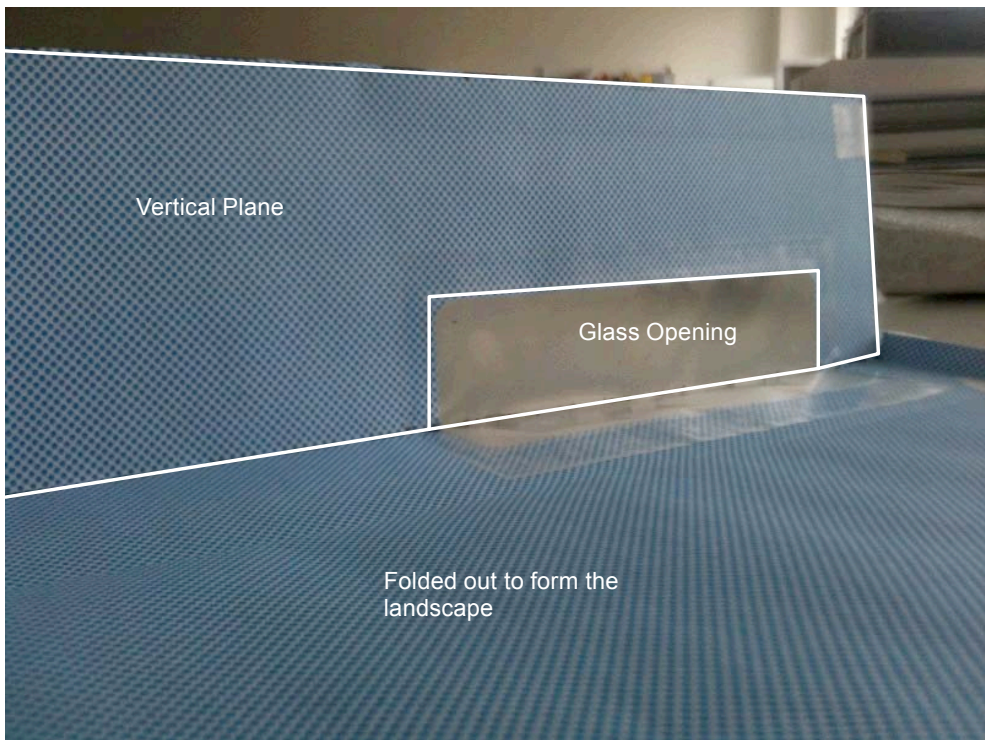
03 The inverted envelope presents a 'white' face to the interior where the collection material can be displayed, much like the how the postal information is arranged on the face of the envelope



02 The top of the envelope is folded to form a tall parapet along the vertical plane. The envelopes sides are folded around to form the thickness of the wall. The top tab (with precut slits) forms the roof lights that separate the vertical plane from the rest of the structure



04 The external envelope presents the 'textured' side of the envelope which could be represented by the textured brick plane that folds out into the landscape. The window of the envelope becomes the entrance.

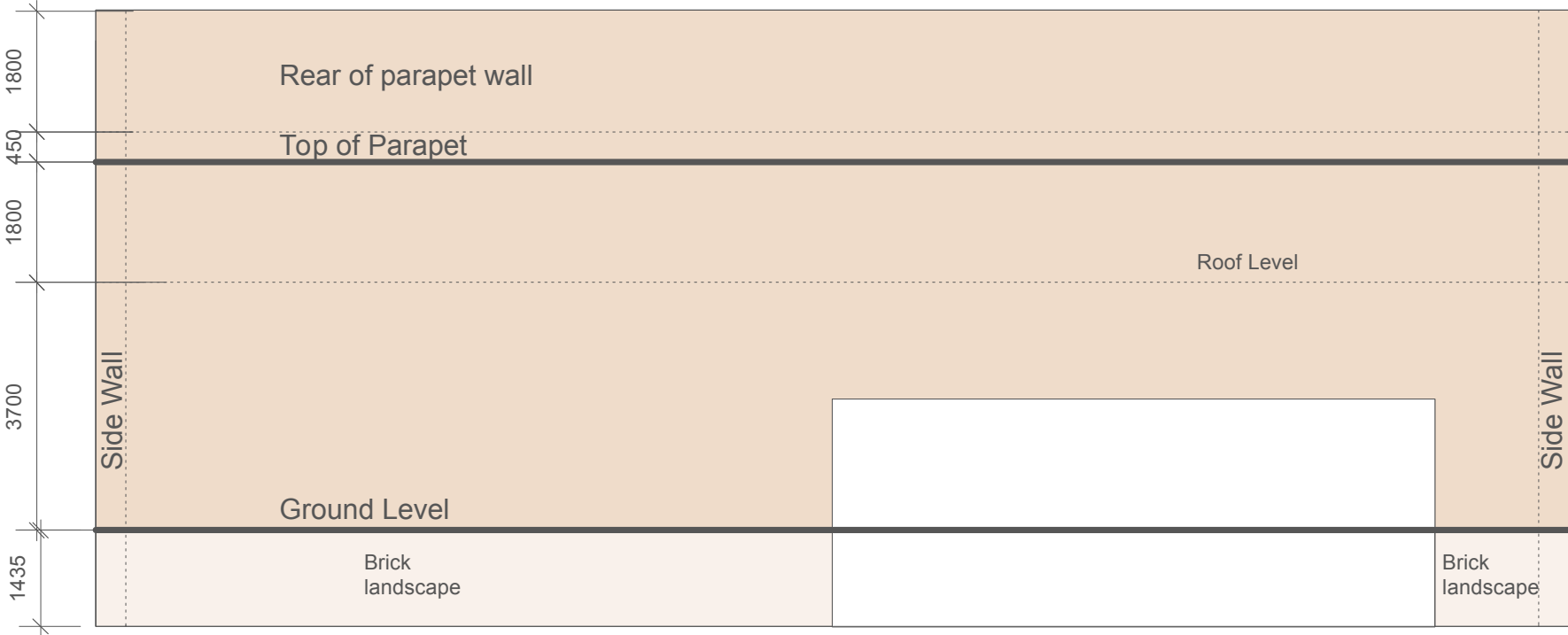


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01 Standard window envelope elevation



02 Fold lines on standard window envelope elevation



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## The envelope

The envelope manifests itself as a 450mm thick blue brick wall with a glass slot inset into the smaller volume behind. The blue brick is highly textured and reflects the railway heritage as well as the APO640, as the majority of the railway infrastructure utilises blue brick. The second advantage of using a blue brick is the ability to continue the material into the landscape.

Adjacent to the 'envelope' is a timber screen that could form part of a 'landscape of memory' and art installation that explains the movements of APO640 on the site and in the wider region.



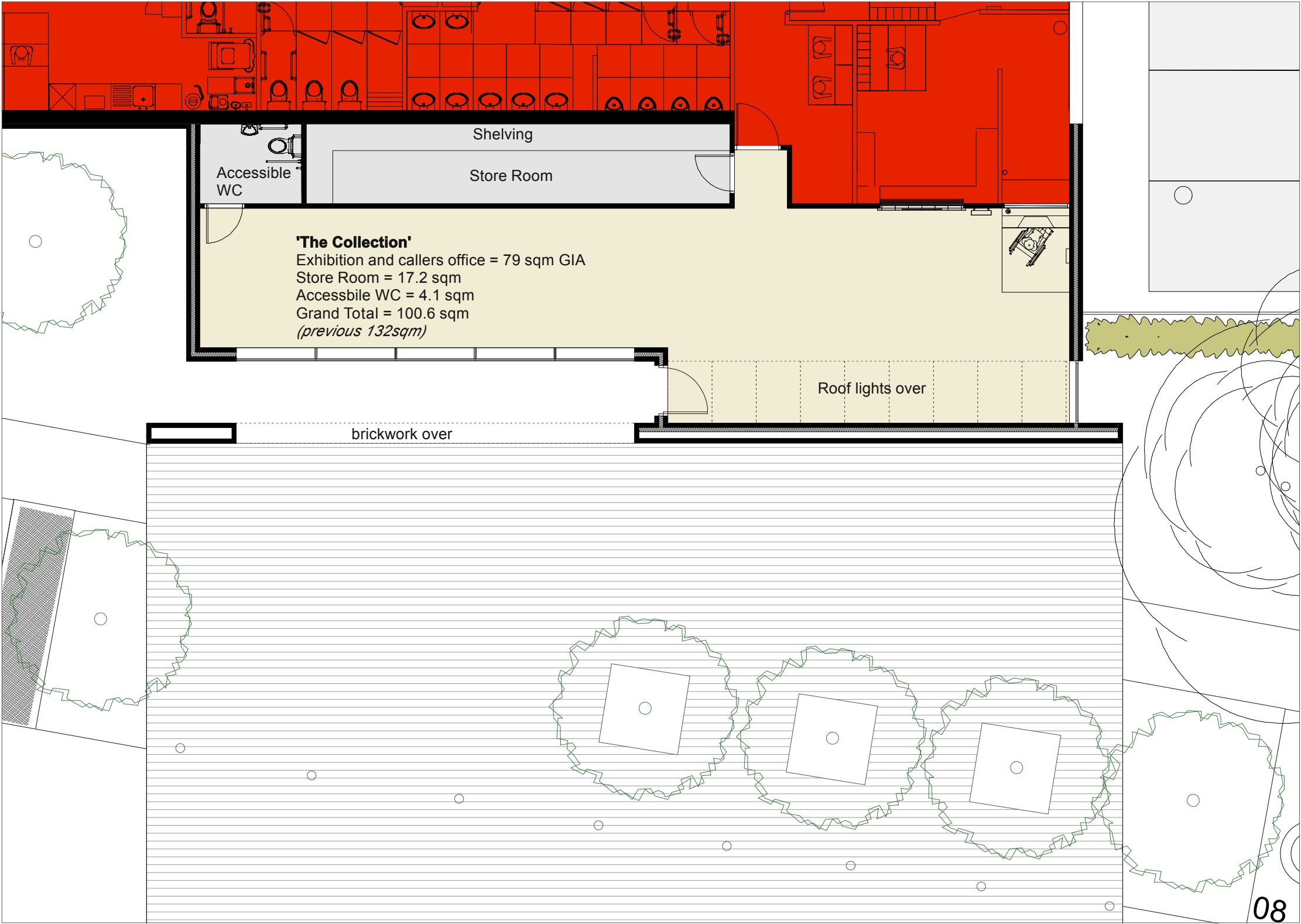
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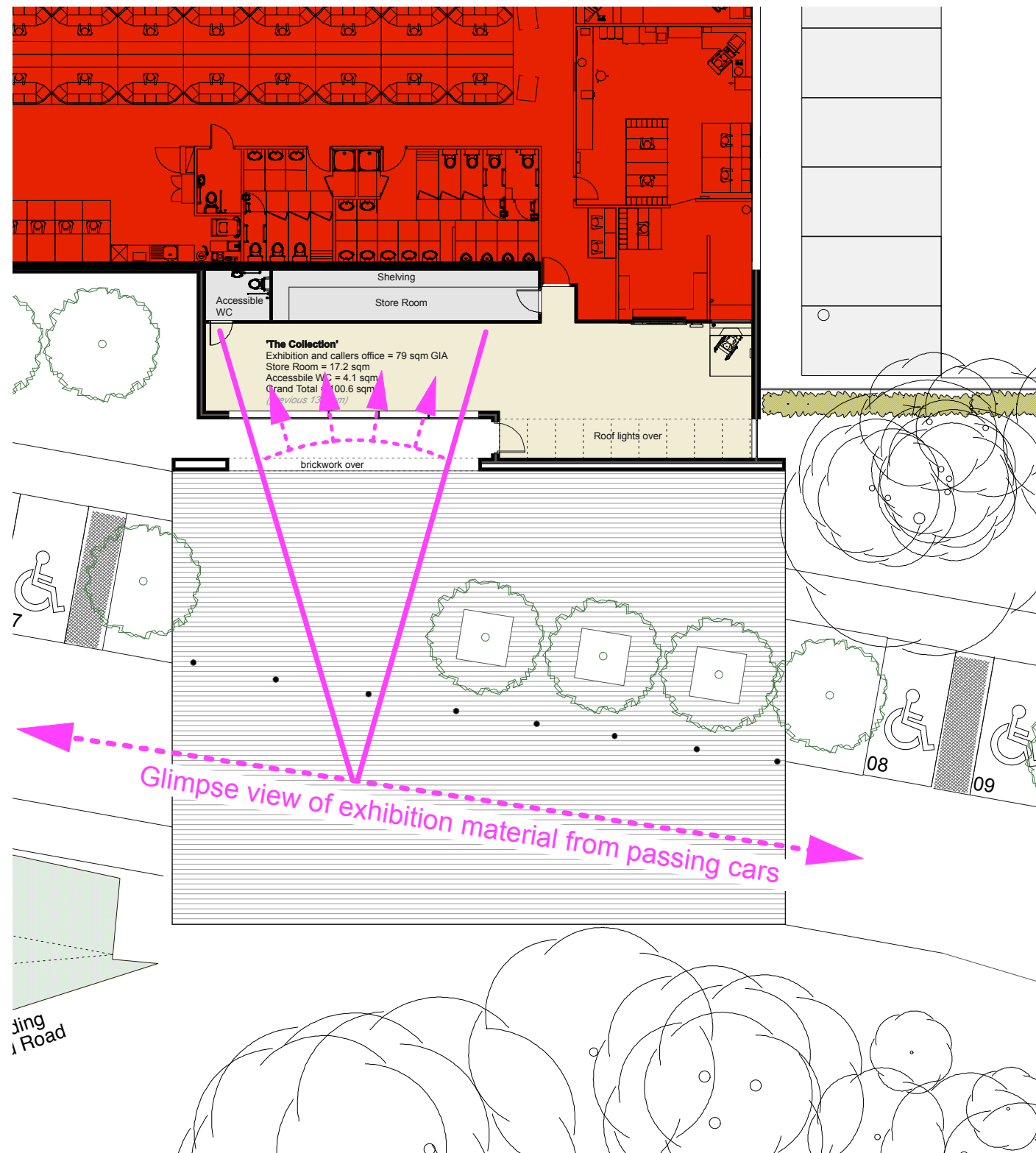
## The Collection

The collection is arranged to have a dual function of an exhibition space and a 'callers office'.

The entrance door is positioned the side to enable a clear view into the exhibition area, whilst providing an immediate visual connection with the 'callers office' so that visitors are able to easily navigate the space.

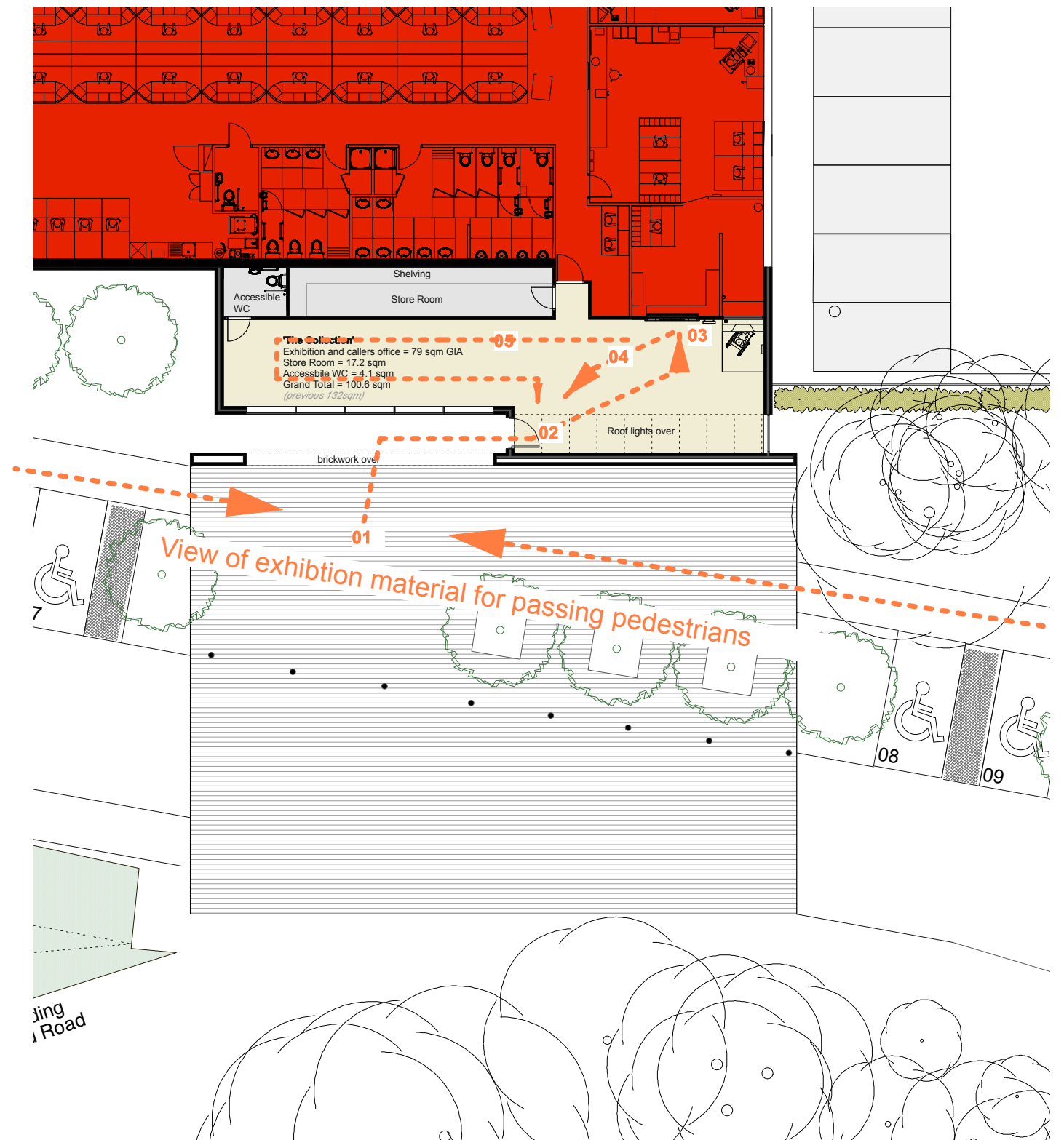
The collection contains a store room to enable exhibits to be stored and refreshed to maintain a level of interest. Along side the store room is a discrete accessible WC, that is to remain locked with the key held by the callers office.





### The Shop Window - Reaching out to a wider Audience

- The large window presents the opportunity for a 'shop window display' of larger scale material that can be seen by passing cars. The ability to see what is inside will open up the display to a wider audience and may tempt people to stop and explore the exhibition further



### Fulfilling the Function - Seamless integration of operation and exhibition

- The opening in the brick plane clearly locates the entrance. By locating the door to the side it creates an immediate visual connection with the display material, whilst also creating a visual link to the callers office, providing re-assurance that this is the place to collect mail.

01 - views into the exhibition through the 'shop window'.

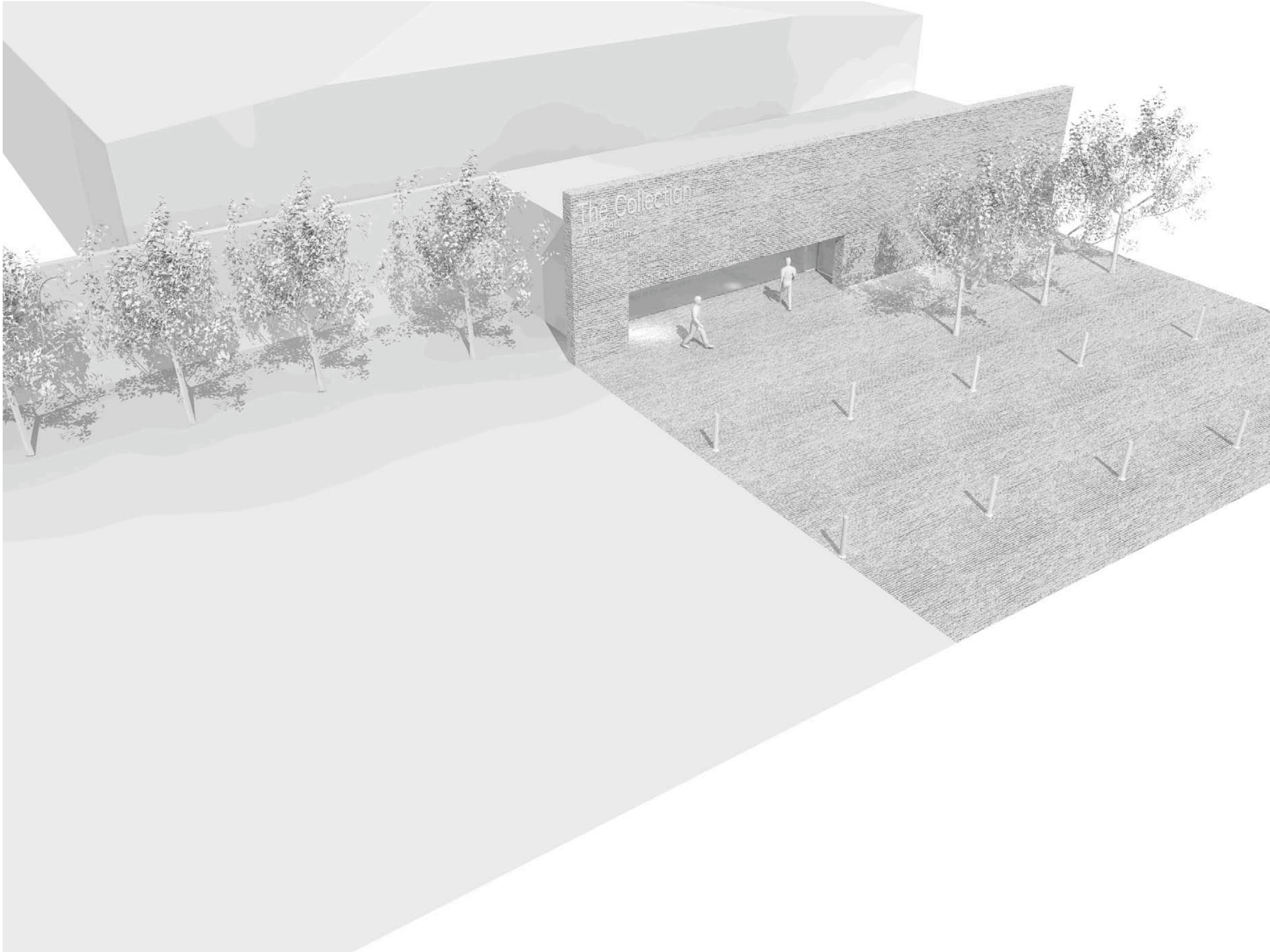
02 - Immediate visual connection to callers office, with smaller scale material along the southern wall, with RMG information contained to the eastern wall by the callers office.

03 - Collection of mail at hatch

04 - Returning to the exit, display material on southern wall becomes more evident.

05 - Option to explore the main exhibition area before leaving the building.

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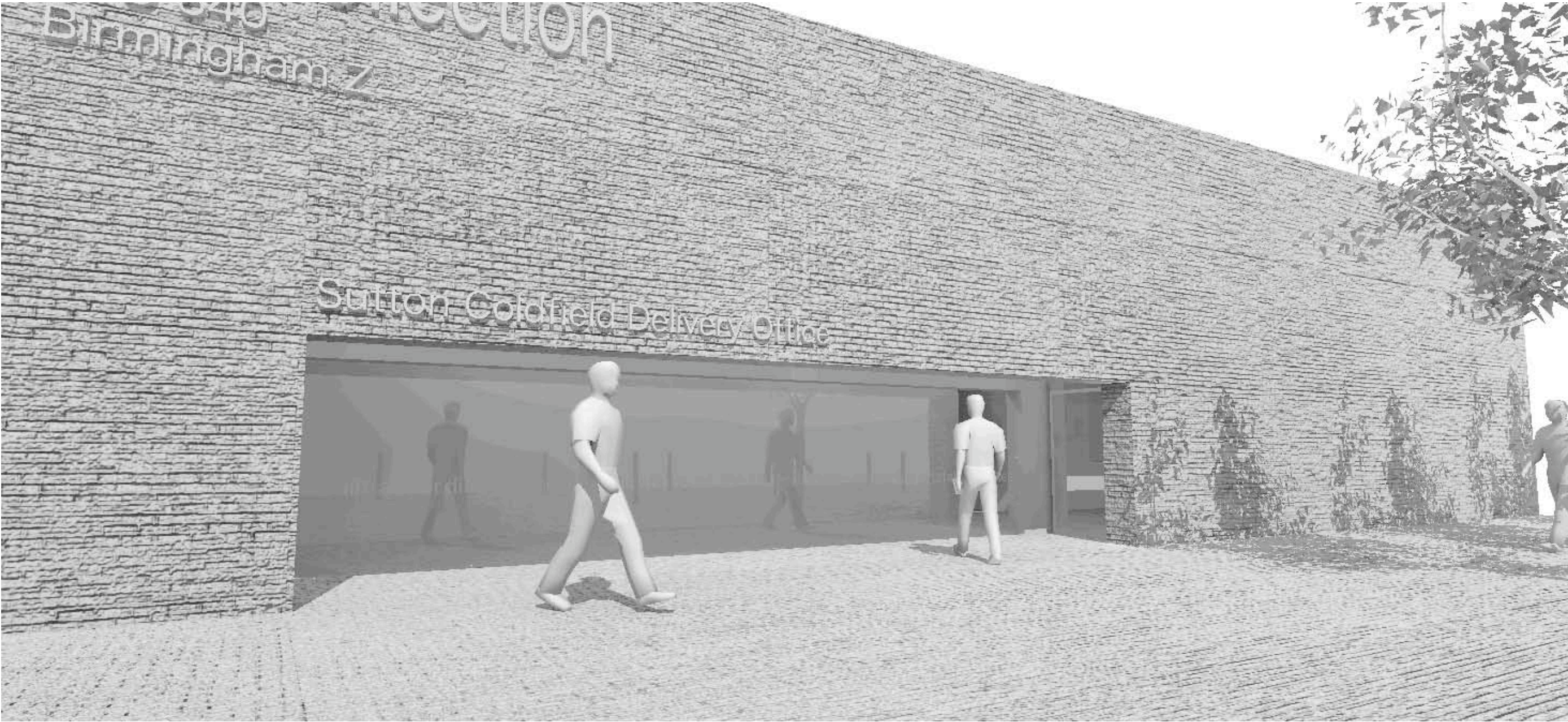
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The Collection - Precedent - Brick Planes



01 Dominikus Centre - Munich - Andreas Meck



02 Museum of Architecture - Hombroich, Germany  
- Alvaro Siza & Rudolf Finsterwalder