

# GRENSEN (NO)



## THE GATEHOUSE: THE OPEN BORDER

### *PORTHuset: DEN AAPNE GRENSEN*

*The Gatehouse* provides an opportunity to rethink the University's relationship with the broader community. The location of Grensen, at the 'border', metaphorically and physically speaks to ideas of transition, integration, and a larger sense of coming together. For these reasons, our proposal seeks to look at the site as a community hub that not only serves the students but also the residents, enlivening the area and contributing to a melting pot of activities. By creating the space to inhabit 'the border', we replace the perception of the institution as something distinct from its context, with a 'village' where human encounter encourages the dissemination of knowledge.

By creating a living lab that brings together and fosters new artistic and educational practices, we aim to design a new activity heart that fuses the university campus with the local surroundings and extends a network into the greater urban environment.

While promoting more programming on the site, the proposal acts as a flagship model for future development to centralized NTNU on the hill of Gløshaugen. This considers the existing buildings and what they can offer to create more efficiency and future-proof flexibility for space allocation. As an underlying principle, we aim to keep the exterior of existing buildings as they are, allowing heritage to inform progress. This is not only for sustainability purposes but also to preserve the idea of a neighborhood on the site that uses each building as a node in the overall network of activity.

The Gatehouse, therefore, proposes to create an activity spine that links the existing buildings and produces a natural flow of people through the site while maintaining Grensen's character in a format that creates a dialogue between old and new. The project adds to the existing program by implementing spaces for co-working, meeting rooms, exhibition areas, an auditorium, a café, a sports rental shop, sports and hang-out areas, bike storage, student club offices, and event spaces, a fabrication lab, and additional researcher housing. The design transitions from more publicly accessible areas to those that are more university-focused, producing a logic that draws people to the site and to hosting communal spaces for shared activities. This is all done through a process of sustainable restructuring, through the concept of 're-use first', where buildings are given a second life with energy-efficient standards.

The following text will describe the aspirations of the project and the design decisions that have been made to promote a space for all, one that cares for the local community, the university population, and the character of place. The proposal works with ideas of merging old and new, merging local and student bodies, and merging technology and tradition to produce spaces that can foster innovation and excellence.

### **The Design Proposal:**

The concept of the gatehouse emerges from the proposal of a distinct 'L-corridor,' that bridges the city and Nidarosdomen with NTNU Hovedbygget, while maintaining the site's existing facades and uniting their interior into a coherent public space. Occupiable, flexible space areas are created on the ground floor, in the fashion of an 'inhabitable landscape', while the second floor has smaller, more private spaces dedicated to offices and meetings. The back row (13-15) is considered semi-private, with the existing buildings being used for smaller university club offices, linked by the courtyard and a new corridor that doubles as a study and event space. Residential spaces are inserted into Building 12 and the relocated Building 6 (which can both be extended depending on need), while building 4 and 2 remain untouched. To ensure a variety of spaces, the surrounding green space is largely preserved, creating a natural yet flexible landscaped area.

*Buildings 7-10:* The Gatehouse proposes turning buildings 7-10 into public spaces and meeting rooms, becoming an activity heart that can be used by students and local residents. This space then becomes an attractor to the site and the university events, as well as a natural thoroughfare between the top and bottom of the hill. The proposal encloses this space in a double-height atrium that connects all buildings on both sides of the alley while maintaining some of the original facades of these



buildings on the interior. The exterior facing facades are maintained, reinsulated, and proposed to be restored with original paint colors to blend into the existing historic fabric of the local neighborhood.

Given the level difference between buildings, the atrium steps and accessible ramps bring people up into the space and through the site, creating an 'inhabitable landscape'. The occupiable thoroughfare links into communal spaces on the ground floor such as the exhibition space, the café, co-working spaces, the sports equipment rental, and an auditorium. On the upper floors, there is denser, more private programming: meeting rooms and classrooms overlook the activity below. In the basement, there is a bike storage space and facilities that link into the public park space of the triangular lot adjacent to buildings 9-10B. The cycle storage is meant to encourage cycling.

In the construction process, we promote material restoration and reuse. Facade components will be reused in the construction of the atrium spaces and any excess materials can be stored in and used at the new fabrication lab workshop proposed adjacent to buildings 13-15. The new construction uses a combination of timber (Glulam and CLT), new insulation materials and energy efficient glass to promote sustainable methods of construction while also bringing in ample light to support the event/meeting spaces. The roof form positions photovoltaic panels for energy collection and introduces an additional gutter for water collection. A new-build circulation module adjacent to the south side of 9B creates further accessibility to the buildings with an elevator and stairway and a bridge walkway that connects upper floors on both sides of the atrium. An exterior courtyard provides additional spaces for gathering that connect to the atrium, public park, and residential areas.

Ultimately, the design of the atrium serves as a spine for the project that forms an 'L' on the site connecting the main public spaces to more student and university-oriented spaces. This networked approach creates a variety of public and private functions that activate different areas of the site.

*Buildings 13-15:* The atrium space crosses over the road linking buildings 7-10 with buildings 13-15. This shorter portion of the 'L' acts as both an occupiable corridor as well as breakout space for club offices that have been allocated to 13-15. The addition further encloses the back of 13-15, creating occupiable courtyards for events or meetings, while the outhouses will return to their intended use as small kitchenette spaces that can be used by the student organizations for events. Adjacent to building 15, The Gatehouse proposes the construction of a new fabrication lab built in a similar wood-frame construction method as the existing buildings, using some of the materials from the deconstructed zones of 7-10, and with two large garage doors that allow for overflow of workshop and fabrication areas.

*Buildings 12 and 6:* Much of the proposed new program functions as public areas that will unite the university faculty and students with the local community. However, we believe that a healthy and active urban intervention also relies on an immediate residential adjacency. For this reason, the triangular lot becomes a space that can host more residential programs. We propose to move building 6 parallel to building 12, flanking a pedestrian access path between them that will connect the lower part of the site with the upper part. This reorientation produces an inviting entry point to the overall site that mirrors classical courtyard spaces while promoting local Norwegian building styles. Currently, the proposal considers most of the triangular lot as public park programming. However, if there is an additional need for more residential



densification, the existing structure of 12 and 6 can easily be extended while maintaining the core concept.

*Buildings 2 and 4:* The proposal acknowledges the recent renovation of building 4 and therefore will not be doing any further renovation to the structure but instead proposes some changes to the landscape that lines the thoroughway between 7-10 and 2&4. These landscape decisions are intended to better direct the public into one of the main entrances of the new proposal that links into building 9A and creates spaces for people to meet. As buildings 2&4 are residential, the new programs and their positioning would also serve the residents of these buildings while maintaining their privacy.

*Landscape:* To promote many outdoor activities in addition to the new indoor programs, The Gatehouse supports minimal interventions on the triangular lot instead proposing a landscape that will foster local flora and fauna and provide flexible spaces for sports and well-being. Diverse planting and man-made bird nests and feeders encourage biodiversity on the site. A basketball halfcourt can also double as a hard surface for other sports and outdoor equipment will activate the park, being an attraction for both the local community and students. Paved spaces are kept to a minimum in favor of planted areas and gravel pathways. A new bike path through the site promotes sustainable commuting that is also supported by the bike storage in the basement of 9B and 10B that connects directly to the park. This ethos is continued on the upper parts of the site, next to the fabrication lab and buildings 2&4, where student pavilions will be on display across each season.

## **Conclusion:**

The Gatehouse proposes a new community and university activity hub that integrates principles of urban connection and unification, historical and ecological sensitivity, and sustainability. On an urban scale, it recentralizes the university, bringing people into and through the site. Recognizing the beauty of the heritage construction, and its value to the community, we integrate new thinking behind the existing walls, reusing these and upgrading the buildings to meet sustainability standards with new insulation and energy efficient glazing. This approach values the local character while also adopting sustainable design methods with the use of mass timber (Glulam and CLT), low embodied carbon materials, the addition of PV panels, and drainage water attenuation tanks. The design decisions are bold yet balanced with minimal overall new construction on the site and the integration of new build within the existing built areas. The main design intervention inserts itself to provide a new artery for the campus that supplies activity and circulation to the overall site and branches out to connect the surrounding urban environment with the university campus.