

Section 7

**Open Space Assessment and
Landscape Design**

Section 7 - Open Space Assessment

Open Space Assessment

The Arcadian Thames is one of the most special places to visit in London. The river corridor is the largest connected open space in the capital and contains more protected sites than in any other UK location, such as palaces, historic gardens and former royal hunting parks as well as common areas, wetlands and a series of towpaths providing riverside walks, leisure and recreation space along this stretch of the River.

Once dominated by royal or aristocratic patronage, today it is open, for the most part, for everyone to enjoy. Within it lie two of the country's top visitor attractions - Hampton Court and the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew.

Historical Landscape

Up to the Tudor period, the Thames landscape between Hampton and Kew consisted largely of riverside villages, orchards and market gardens supplying the capital with food. Following the construction of Richmond and Hampton Court Palaces, the landscape began to evolve as successive royal and aristocratic families moved to the area. Up and down the river a series of great palaces, grand houses, magnificent gardens and hunting parks were constructed, linked to one another by grand avenues of trees.

During the eighteenth century, this concentration of wealth and power together with the area's stunning beauty attracted the most influential thinkers, poets, artists and landscape designers of the day, with this section of the Thames becoming the focus of culture, inspiration and design, ultimately becoming the birthplace of the English Landscape Movement, inspiring such greats as J.W.M Turner and Capability Brown.

With the end of the very formal and structured Tudor and Stuart gardens in favour of a much more romantic landscape where the boundaries between nature, art, poetry and gardening were merged, the idea of the pastoral paradise was born.

During the nineteenth century the delights of the Arcadian Thames were opened up for the enjoyment of the public, and by the late Victorian period, the once privately owned landscape, had become London's 'Promenade' where Londoners came to walk, relax and enjoy the river.

However, with the creep of suburbia, and the relentless pressure to develop land along the Thames, the need to protect the river's diverse ecology and range of green spaces, led to the development of a series of policies and frameworks, as a means to retaining and reinstating lost stretches of this once idyllic landscape.

Thames Policy

The Thames Landscape Strategy was established in 1994 to understand these events of the past in order to take them full circle to conserve, enhance and promote the watery landscape for the next 100 years, and in connection with this strategy both the Metropolitan Open Land and The All London Green Grid (ALGG) policies were developed.

ALGG

The ALGG framework to promote the design and delivery of 'green infrastructure' across London, helping to deliver a network of green spaces, designed and managed to provide a range of benefits, including: recreation and amenity, healthy living, reducing flooding, improving air quality, cooling the urban environment, encouraging walking and cycling, and enhancing biodiversity and ecological resilience.

The policy framework comprises London Plan policies on green infrastructure and urban greening - and those relating to open spaces, biodiversity, trees & woodland, and river corridors - plus the All London Green Grid Supplementary Planning Guidance and a series of ALGG Area Frameworks.

The ALGG aims to:

- adapt to climate change and promote urban greening
- increase access to open space
- increase access to nature, and to conserve and enhance biodiversity
- improve sustainable travel connections
- promote healthy living
- conserve and enhance heritage features and landscape character
- enhance distinctive destinations and boost the visitor economy
- promote sustainable design, management and maintenance



Thames Policy Area - Hampton to Wandsworth

- enhance green space and green infrastructure sector skills
- promote sustainable food production
- improve air quality and soundscapes
- improve the quality of and access to the Greenbelt and the urban fringe
- conserve and enhance the Thames and its tributaries riverside spaces

Metropolitan Open Land

“Metropolitan Open Land” or “MOL” is a term or designation used only within London, and is land identified and designated to protect areas of landscape, recreation, nature conservation and scientific interest which are strategically important. MOL is afforded the same level of protection as the Metropolitan Green Belt, and as such, and development within MOL requires consultation with the GLA, Mayor and adjoining authorities.

Land designated as MOL should satisfy at least one of the following criteria:

- Land that contributes to the physical structure of London by being clearly distinguishable from the built-up area
- Land that includes open air facilities, especially for leisure, recreation, sport, arts and cultural activities and tourism which serve the whole or significant parts of London
- Land that contains features or landscapes of historic, recreational, nature conservation or habitat interest, of value at a metropolitan or national level
- Land that forms part of a Green Chain and meets one of the above criteria

Thames Policy Area

Within the London Plan, the River Thames is identified as a ‘strategically important and iconic feature of London,’ and that this role should be protected and promoted. Development proposals within the Thames Policy Area should therefore be consistent with the published Thames Strategy for the particular stretch of river concerned.

Section 7 - Open Space Assessment

Open Space Assessment

The stretch of river running from the TFL overland/underground bridge, adjacent Oliver’s Island, to Chiswick Bridge, has steadily changed over a long period of time, with significant developments such as the National Archives building, Kew Riverside Park, Kew Riverside and the Crematorium to the south, having been finished over last few decades. Historically, the former Biothane site is the only site along this stretch of the Thames, still remaining as it’s original use - a water treatment works.

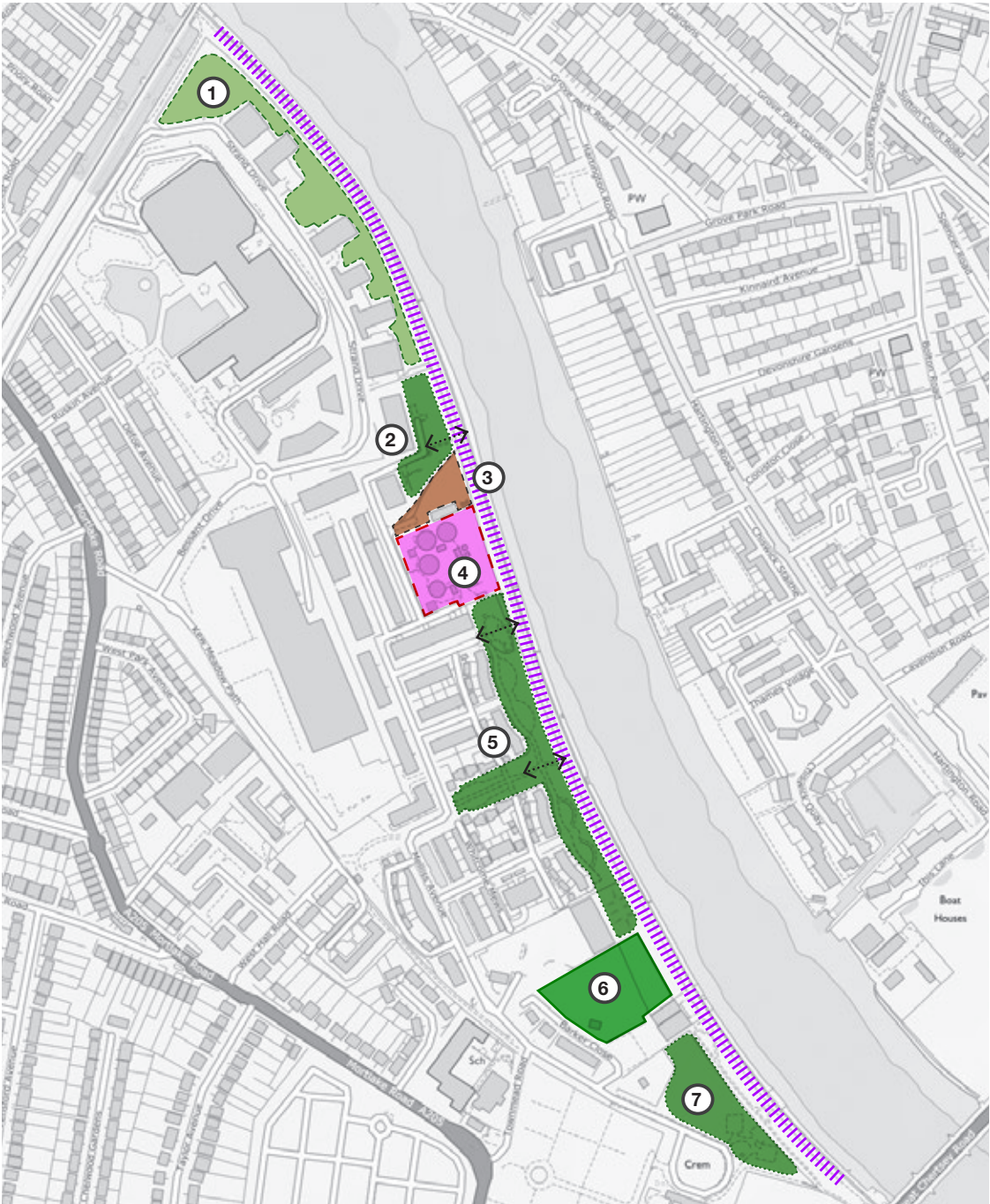
In connection with these developments, are a series of open spaces, sat behind the towpath line, in both public and private ownership; the towpath tying them together within the framework of the various London green space policy frameworks.

Noticeably, all these spaces sit within the MOL boundary, and the existing Thames Water site and former Biothane works site, remaining the only two sites within the MOL remaining to be (re)developed.

Both sites are fully secured by a 2.4m high metal security fence, and are not accessible by the public. Further to this, both sites have a very high level of hard landscaping contained within their confines, with the limited soft landscaping being predominantly grasses, weeds and shrubs.

1. Kew Riverside Park	Private Gardens	No Public Access
2. Kew Riverside (North)	Privately Owned Gardens	Publicly Accessible
3. Thames Water Site	Privately Owned Industrial	No Public Access
4. Biothane Site	Privately Owned Industrial	No Public Access
5. Kew Riverside (South)	Privately Owned Gardens	Publicly Accessible
6. Sports Fields	Privately Owned Gardens	Publicly Accessible
7. Mortlake Crematorium	Publicly Owned	Publicly Accessible

←.....→ Towpath publicly accessible





View of the River Thames from Richmond Hill

Section 7 - Landscape Design Response

Existing Habitat

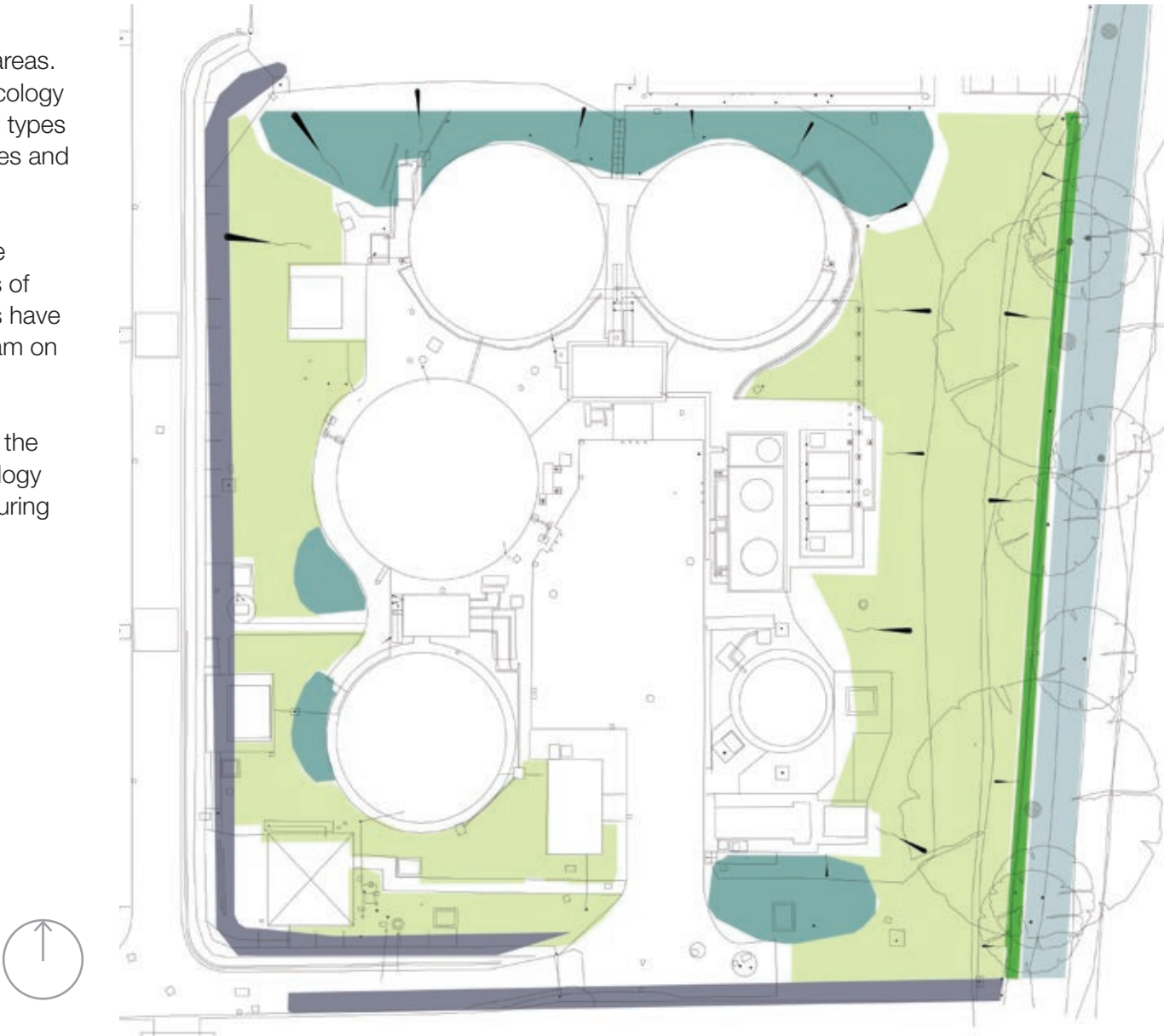
The diagram opposite is an assessment of the existing site ecology and habitat areas. The proposed landscape seeks to incorporate where possible the existing site ecology as well as introducing new habitats that increase the site biodiversity. The habitat types that occur on the site are representative of those that spring up on brownfield sites and consist of scrub vegetation, neutral grassland, tall ruderal herb and trees.

All of the large and established native trees, including the two large oak trees, are located off site and will not be affected by the development proposals. The areas of neutral grassland are of relatively low ecological value and species rich meadows have been proposed in order to improve the site biodiversity. Please refer to the diagram on page 167 that illustrates the proposed habitat zones

This analysis also provides the opportunity to make a clear comparison between the existing and the proposed habitats, enabling the team to determine areas of ecology that need to be removed and subsequently compensated by, as a means of ensuring lost habitat is replaced as a minimum.

Key

- Continuous Scrub
132.77m2
- Neutral Grassland/Semi-Improved
2366.53m2
- Tall Herb Ruderal
670.14m2
- Broadleaved Parkland/Scattered Tree
440m2
- Broadleaved Woodland/Semi Natural
668m2



Introduction

Garden Living / Garden Therapy

There is an exciting opportunity at Melliss Avenue to create a garden of both character and purpose, that brings new life to an area of the Thames riverside which for too long has been left to fend for itself.

The intent is to introduce 21st century landscape design and systems to the tradition of creating beautiful gardens. Themes such as sustainable drainage systems, adaptation for climate change, urban food production, learning through landscape and landscape for health and well-being are to be used. This approach will both complement the historical location of the site and help sustain the new landscape as a whole; ensuring its long term use and benefits for generations to come.

Central to this project is the idea of people living, socialising, visiting, exercising or working in an inspiring garden. There is the opportunity to develop a narrative based on a garden where there is a strong relationship between the inside and outside world, where pockets of outdoor space are attached to specific rooms or activities.

Rather than trying to make each piece of the public landscape all things to all people the garden at Melliss Avenue will aspire to provide a hierarchy of spaces and uses across the site. In this way, a walk through the site takes in a sequence of quite different spaces, characters and functions. This approach will encourage greater use and enjoyment by residents, visitors and workers.

Bridging Inside and Out

A key aspect of the design is to create an environment where activities and associated risks are appropriate to those using the gardens and their level of independence. The cafe terrace seeks to break down the barriers between inside and outside and lighting and external heaters may be used to prolong the use of this intermediate space throughout the year. From the terrace the residents will be able to view the communal garden and play area, engaging with the activity.

Thresholds and Boundaries

The key aspect of the gardens is to create a series of engaging, welcoming yet safe spaces for the residents, visitors and staff to enjoy.

The Wildflower Meadow adjacent the towpath will be freely accessible to all residents. This garden will therefore be designed to be eliminate as much risk as possible. Views from the internal spaces over the garden will ensure that staff will be able to appropriately monitor the residents. The other garden spaces will have a small level of risk associated with them such as gardening tools, level changes, water, etc. residents will be encouraged to engage with these spaces either independently or with the assistance of staff or family members. These have been designed to encourage independence among dementia residents.

Creating Homes

The gardens and open spaces will provide the context for the specialist extra care units and communal spaces. It is therefore essential to create a welcoming, familiar and safe environment for residents, families and staff to enjoy.

The proposed scheme shall create a strong framework of public, communal and private gardens and courtyards. These spaces vary in scale and detail across the site to provide a wide variety of outdoor experiences and uses for residents and visitors.

There will be a formal public space and an active street frontage to Melliss Avenue to signal the front door. Beyond this, inside the site, there will be public gardens and courtyards, play spaces, wildlife corridors, sensory gardens and private thresholds.

The relationship between spaces and their associated hierarchy has been carefully considered to encourage natural passive surveillance, and where required, a natural sense of ownership.

Together these gardens and spaces will create a rich variety of experiences; busy spaces, quiet spaces, shady nooks and spaces open to the sky.

Section 7 - Landscape Design Response

Landscape Design Approach

Design Approach

The landscape design approach for the Melliss Avenue scheme is to provide a courtyard space that acts as an extension to the Metropolitan Open Land (MOL) but is contained within the curtilage of the two arms of the proposed building. The scheme offers an opportunity to open up the existing site in order to provide an extension to the green corridor that runs along the western side of the River Thames.

The amenity of the development will also be improved by borrowing views onto the riverside corridor and through access to the riverside walkway that runs the length of the Thames corridor.

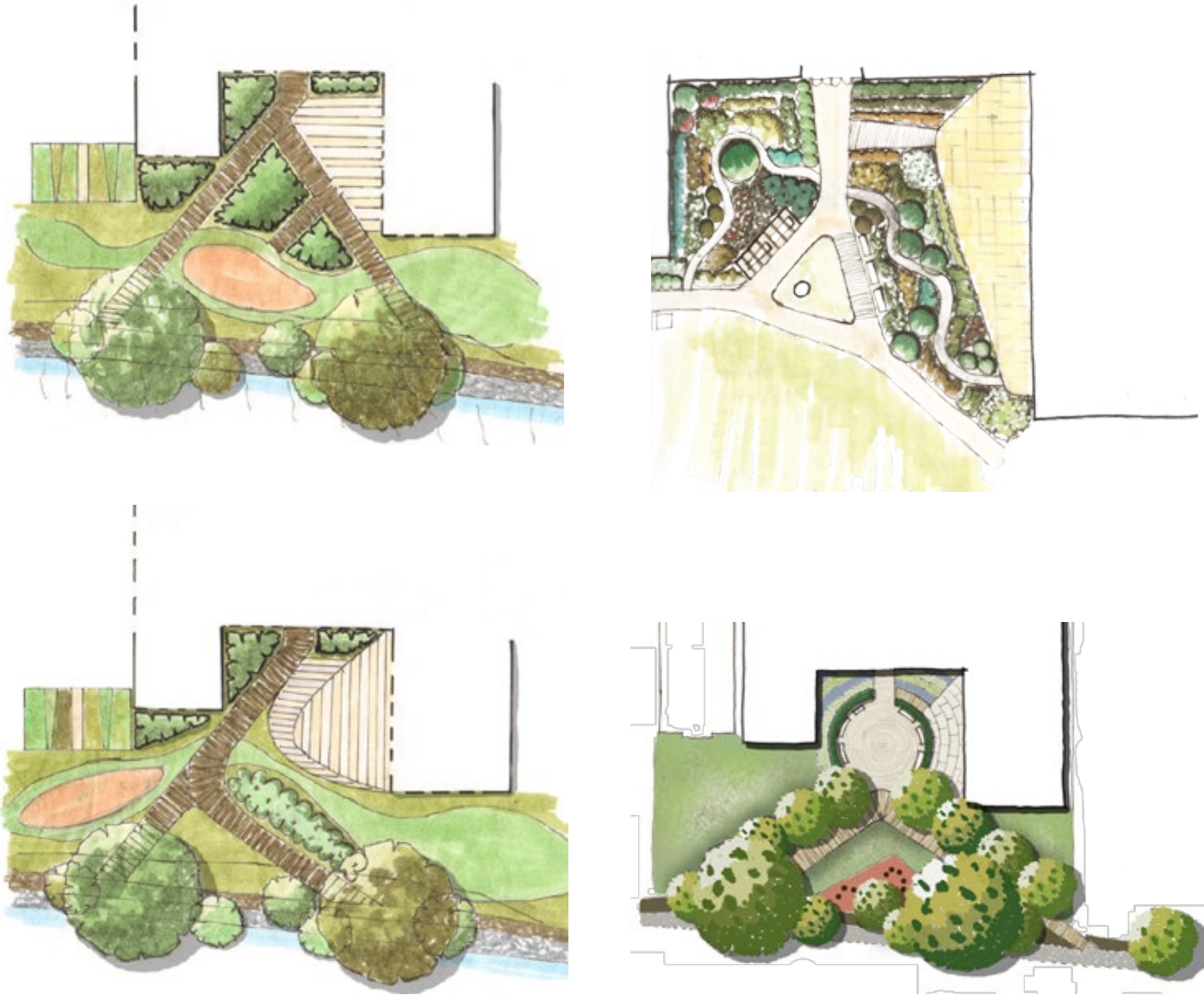
Part of the landscape design objective is to provide access for all across an existing bund which forms part of the site containment for the former water works. The bund also offers some screening of the development from the riverside walk and opportunities for increased biodiversity planting on the site.

Initial Design Response

The initial design response was to provide a maximum length of pathway from the central courtyard to the riverside walkway in order to facilitate inclines of 1:21 or less. The preliminary concepts also aim to create a central hub that can act as a communal space as an extension of a proposed cafe for both residents and the wider community.

The scheme proposes various scenarios for the integration of a small play space within the MOL. Whilst the initial concepts provide a central courtyard and connectivity to the riverside, it was felt that they extended too far into the MOL. Further options were explored in greater detail with an aim to provide the same level of amenity but with a more compact and contained central hub.

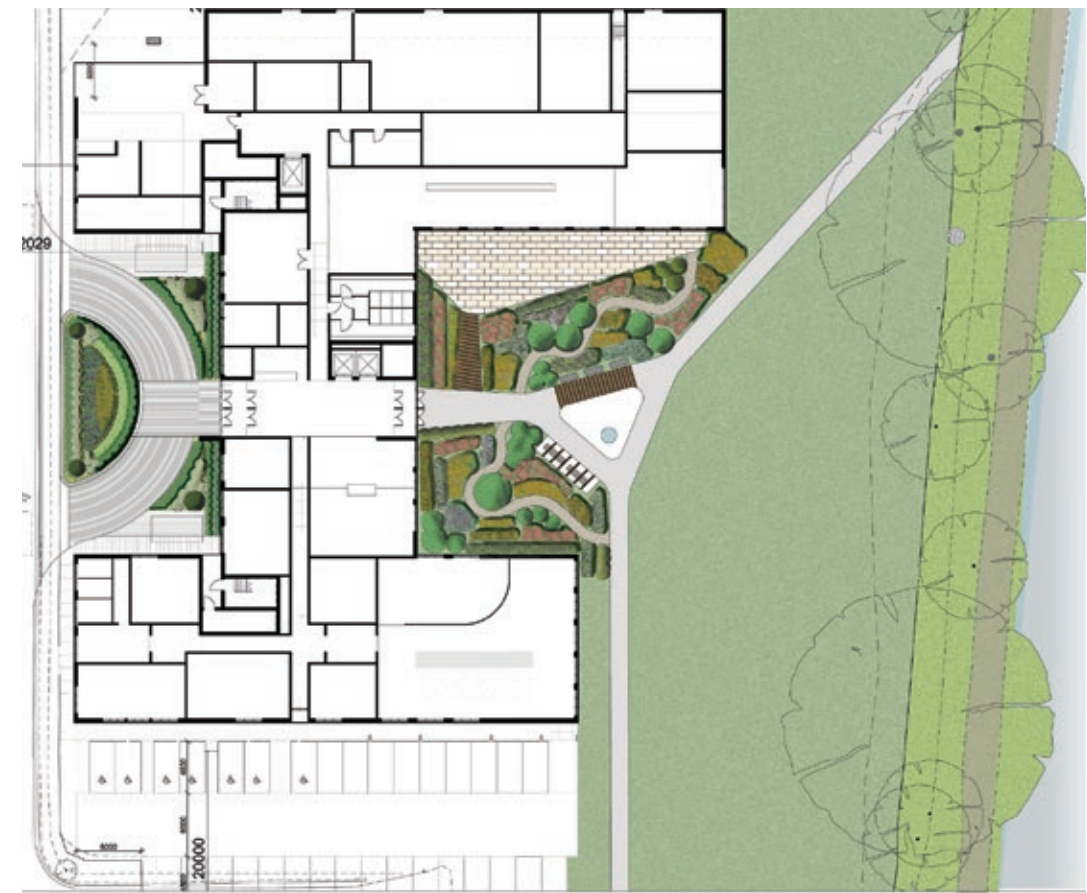
The evolution of the central courtyard design focussed on an aspiration to provide views through the building to the courtyard from the arrival point and a focal point at the heart of the landscape space. The developed concepts explored further options for providing a self-contained central hub screened by vegetation. The evolved scheme sought to pull the landscape closer to the building and by reducing the size of the café terrace, provide a central amenity space that was open to the MOL and the views to the riverside.



Sketch Concepts



Concept with central play space
planting wrapping around a
large cafe terrace



Concept with courtyard moved
into building curtilage and a
reduced cafe terrace

Developed Concepts

Section 7 - Landscape Design Response

Proposed Matserplan

The evolved landscape design establishes a focal point within the central hub around which the various spaces are organised. The café terrace to the north of the courtyard has been reduced, enabling a more generous and green space framing the central hub.

A curved pergola establishes a soft transition between formal lawns within the central hub and proposed meadows on the embankment.

The proposed playground has been located along the southern arm connecting the central hub to the riverside walkway. This ensures that it benefits from good footfall and passive surveillance but slightly removed from the courtyard area.

The central spine through the building creates a journey from the formality of the entrance to the more natural landscape along the riverside corridor.

The biodiversity within the site is reflected in a transition from formal to informal planting, including lawn, meadow and ornamental planting.

Sections through the landscape illustrate the relationship between the central hub and the riverside corridor and how the existing bund has been incorporated into the proposed levels. The arms which extend out from the central hub ensure that the incline through the embankment remains less than 1:21 and can be easily traversed by wheel chair or motorised scooter.

Existing trees on the riverside would be complemented by new tree planting and the open MOL corridor would be managed as a wildflower or pictorial meadow.

The play space on the south east corner of the site would be integrated into the mound to create an interesting use of level changes for more natural and engaging play.

