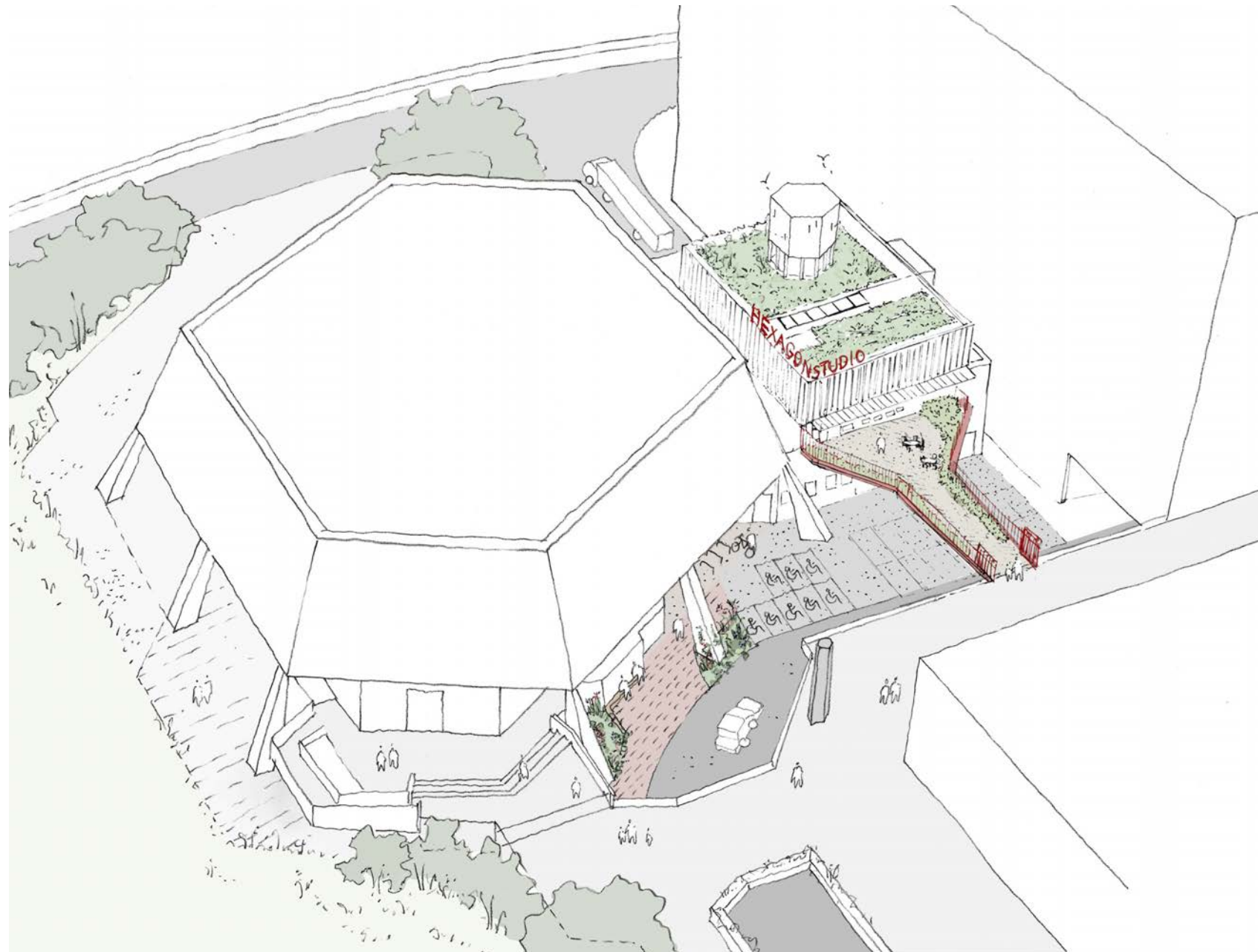


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Hexagon Studio Theatre

Landscape Statement

HX201-JCLA-RP-L-6002

Project: Hexagon Studio Theatre
Project number: HX201
Date: 18.10.2024

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Landscape Scope

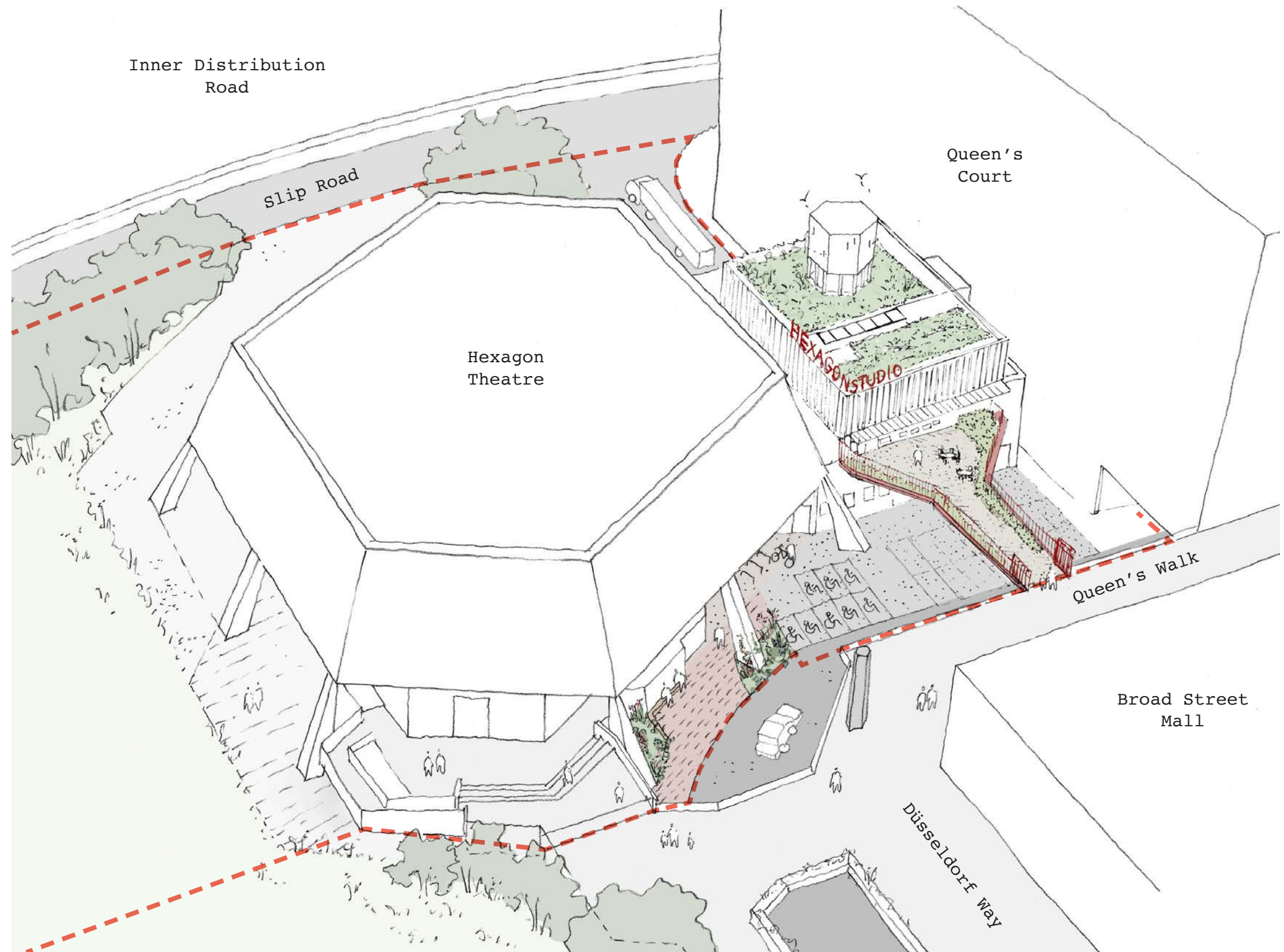
Hexagon and Immediate Surroundings

Located in Reading City Centre, the Hexagon is a multi-purpose theatre and arts venue. At the time of its opening in the 1970s, The Hexagon formed one of four interlinked civic buildings on the site, connected via the still existent raised podium. Hexagon's future landscape setting is yet to emerge as the wider site undergoes urban transformation.

The boundaries of the site all have very distinctive characters. To the south of The Hexagon is the derelict landscape of the now demolished Civic Centre. To the east, which is the main frontage of the Hexagon, is the extensive raised concrete podium, providing pedestrian access to the Hexagon and its adjacent buildings, whilst vehicular traffic, service routes and public parking are located below. The western edge of the site is then delineated by the high-traffic Inner Distribution Road (IDR).

The new Studio Theatre project is seen as the catalyst project for the new Minster Quarter. As well as signalling a new destination in Reading's cultural campus, the new theatre will physically re-link the Hexagon to its context, and will reactivate its presence on Queens Walk and Düsseldorf Way, which have become increasingly neglected since the demolition of the Civic Centre.

The landscape proposals associated with new Studio Theatre project are limited to the spaces directly adjacent to the new and existing theatre buildings, addressing the brief to create welcoming visitor entrance areas, review parking facilities for staff and visitors and accommodate the relocation of the main get-in. As the Minster Quarter development plans become more defined over time, the ambition is to knit-in these cultural buildings into the reimagined landscape, contributing to the creation of an active, greener and more welcoming public realm.



Landscape Context

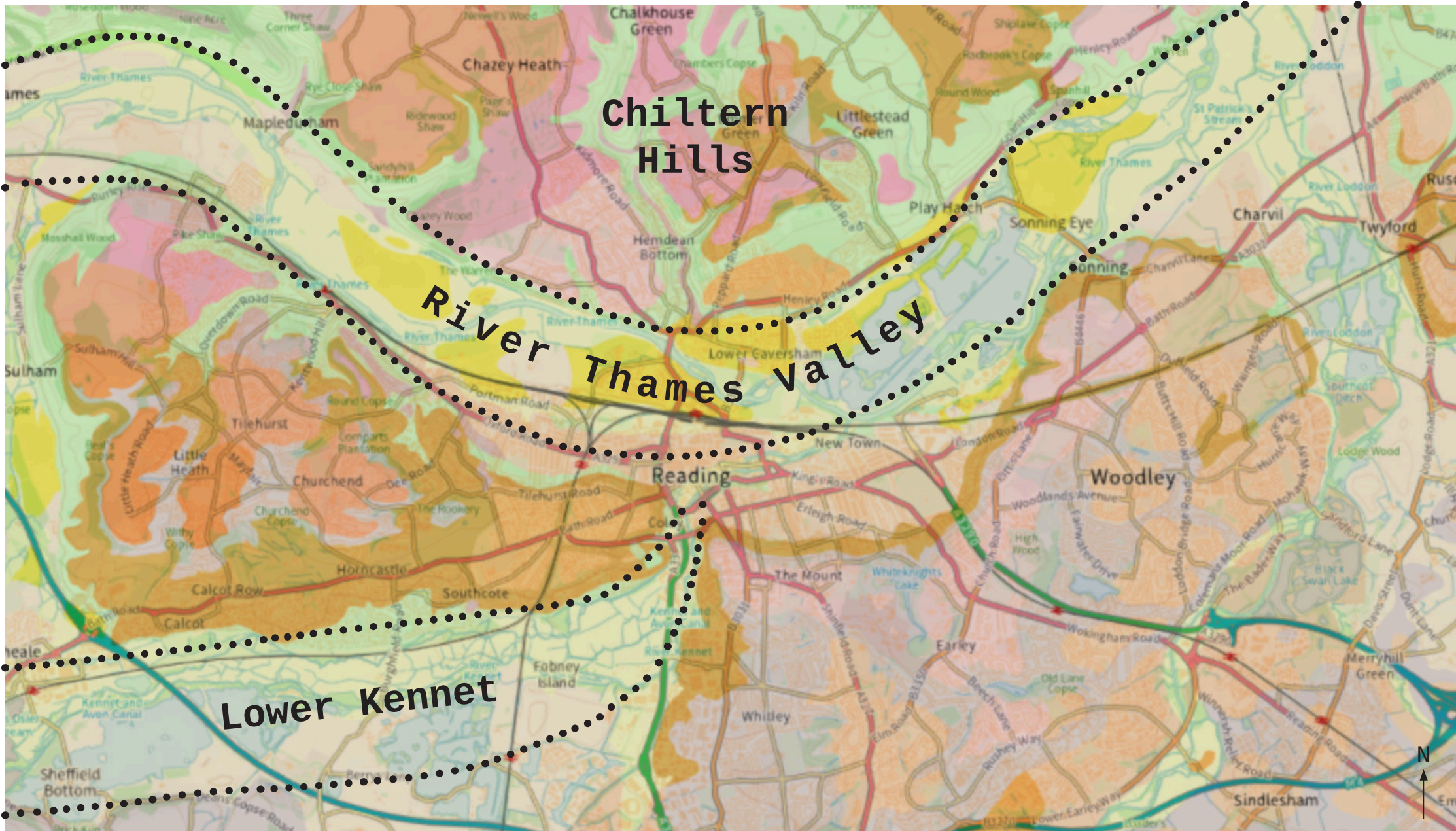
Wider Landscape Character

Reading is located in the Thames Valley at the confluence of the rivers Thames and Kennet. Today the inner Reading town area is largely built-up, with a lot of its historic landscape elements lost or hidden from view. Many brooks and rivers have been culverted and canalised during the years of rapid urban expansion.

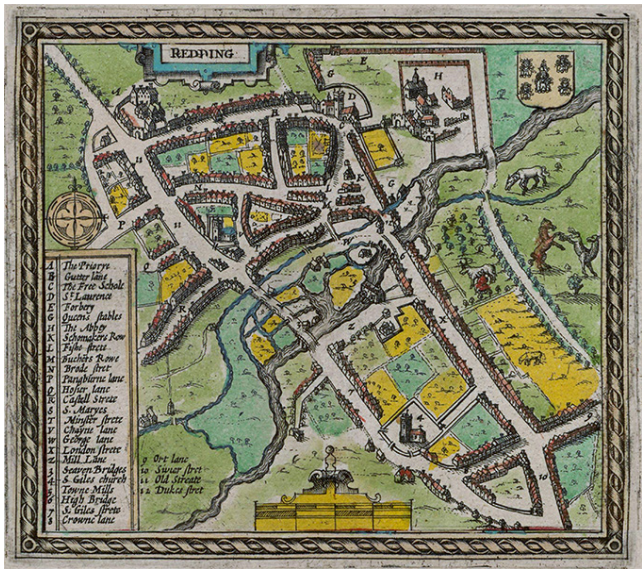
Historically the local rivers fed a total of six mills including one owned by the Reading Abbey. Its mill stream became known as the ‘Holy Brook’ because it was so important in making money for the monks. Today the rivers and water bodies to the South of Reading give rise to a number of water meadows supporting rich wetland habitats.

To the north of the river Thames the geology of the area changes to chalk forming the Chiltern Hills.

The regional topographic and water relationships are reflected in the multi-layered nature of the site.



Geology and Landform around Reading



The earliest map of Reading, published in 1611



The Holy Brook beneath the old arch of the Abbey mill

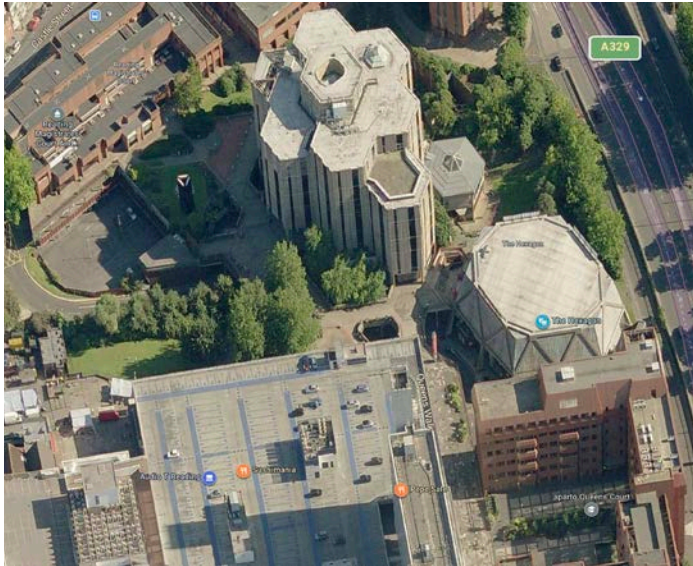


Coley Water Meadows nestled in between river Kennet and Holy Brook south of Reading centre

Landscape Context

Past, Present & Future

The development of the site around the Hexagon and the new studio theatre is shaped by the legacy of the original landscape design including an extensive podium area. The site is currently in a ‘temporary’ situation, the civic centre having been demolished in 2016.



1977-2016



2018-2024



2024+

Construction of the Hexagon Theatre took place in the 1970’s with the theatre opening to the public in 1977. The original landscape design utilised a pedestrian podium providing access to the Hexagon Theatre, Civic Centre and other buildings, with vehicular traffic limited to the ground street level – extensive parking was included on site.

The original landscape design included many trees, open grass and shrub planting areas, and integrated planters within chunky concrete balustrades. Some of the original trees remain as mature specimens today at street level to the south of the remaining podium, and along the buffer to the Inner Distribution Road.

The Civic Centre was demolished in 2016, leaving behind a partial and hard to use landscape with little active offers for people to enjoy.

From 2018-2023, Lavender Place community gardens occupied the site next to the Hexagon. Taking reference from previous small holdings in the area suggested by place names such as ‘Lavender Place, Cherry Court and Grape Passage’ herbs and edibles were cultivated on the site by food4families in partnership with local people, schools and community networks. Its legacy would be inspiring to reference in future landscape proposals.

There is a sense of vegetation taking over the site, which will increase its ecological value but results in an unkempt appearance. Significant noise is heard from the adjacent IDR.



The Hexagon seen from across the former Lavender place meanwhile use.

Significant development plans for the area are part of the Minster Quarter Area Framework.

Hexagon Quarter is intended to be an attractive destination within the town centre, with a significant new residential provision with a car-free podium level.

Redevelopment of the Civic Centre site to the south of the project area with very tall new buildings will affect the daylight/sunlight and wind modelling of the area around the Hexagon and new studio theatre. Any landscape proposals will therefore need to take into account wind & micro climate factors.

There is an aspiration for a future bridge link over the IDR, connecting the new quarter with existing residential neighbourhoods to the east.

There is an opportunity for the landscape design around the new studio theatre to set the scene for what is to come, enhancing the activation and ecological qualities of the area within this planning application.

Existing landscape
Site Analysis Street Level



① Existing terraces need maintenance and are unclear how to access

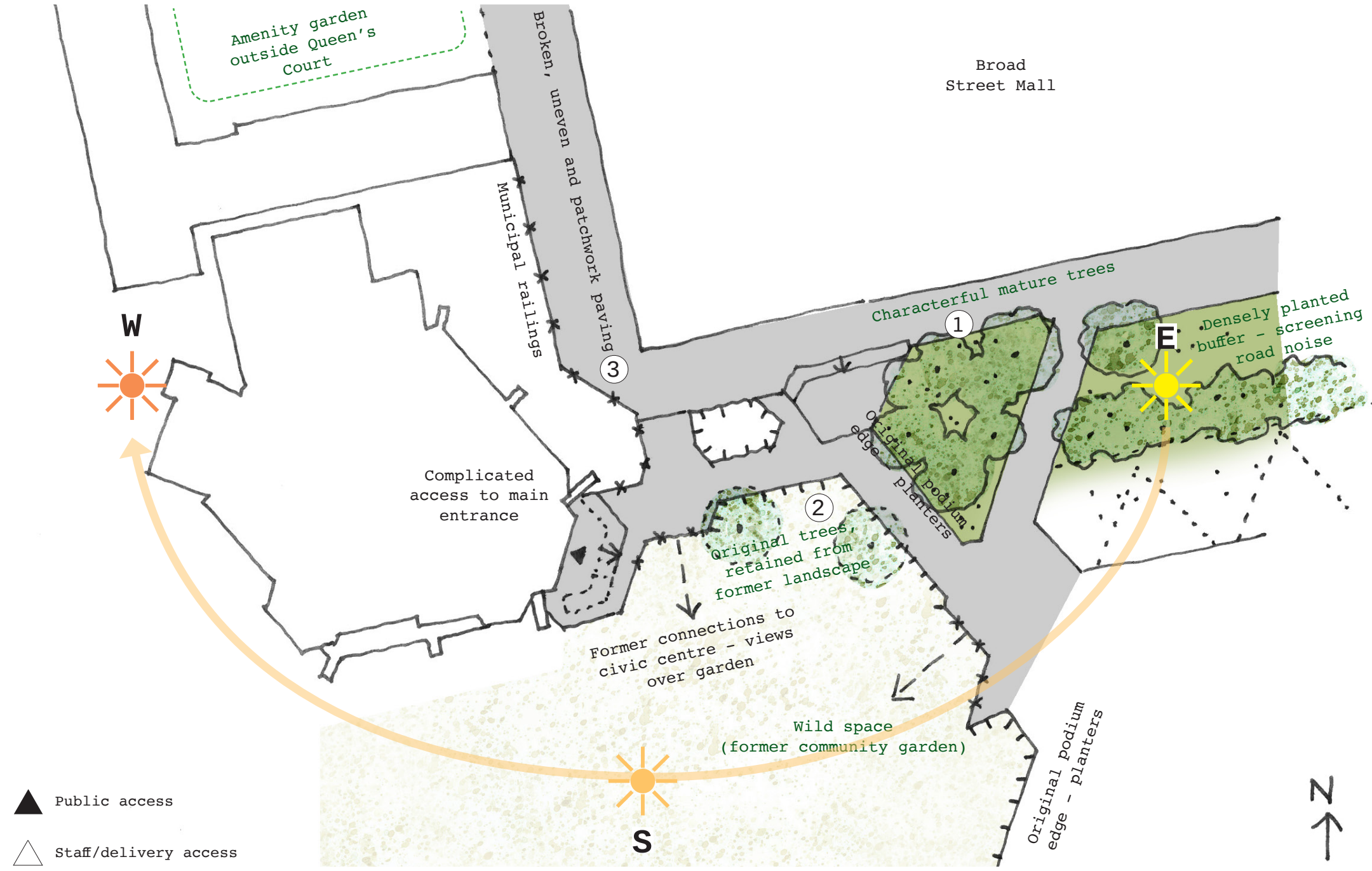


② Unclear routes/zoning and access, with potential to vastly improve planted edge



③ Street level entrances are generally unclear, unwelcoming and prioritise cars

Existing landscape
Site Analysis Podium Level



① Characterful mature trees (Planes) vital for shade, shelter and greening of the area



② Remnants of original design intent (mature trees, podium edge planters)

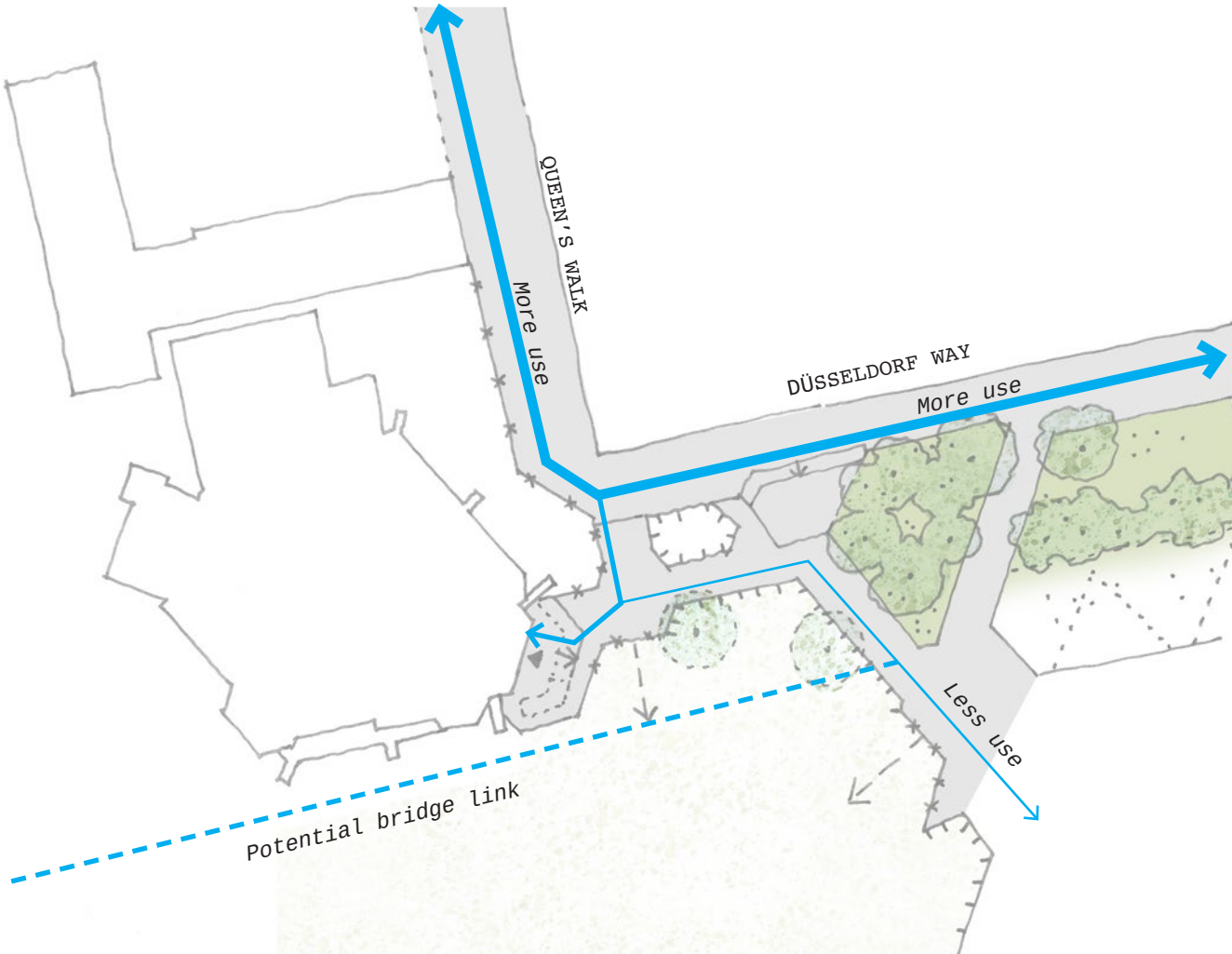


③ Existing surface materials and boundaries along Queens Walk

Existing landscape

Access & Movement

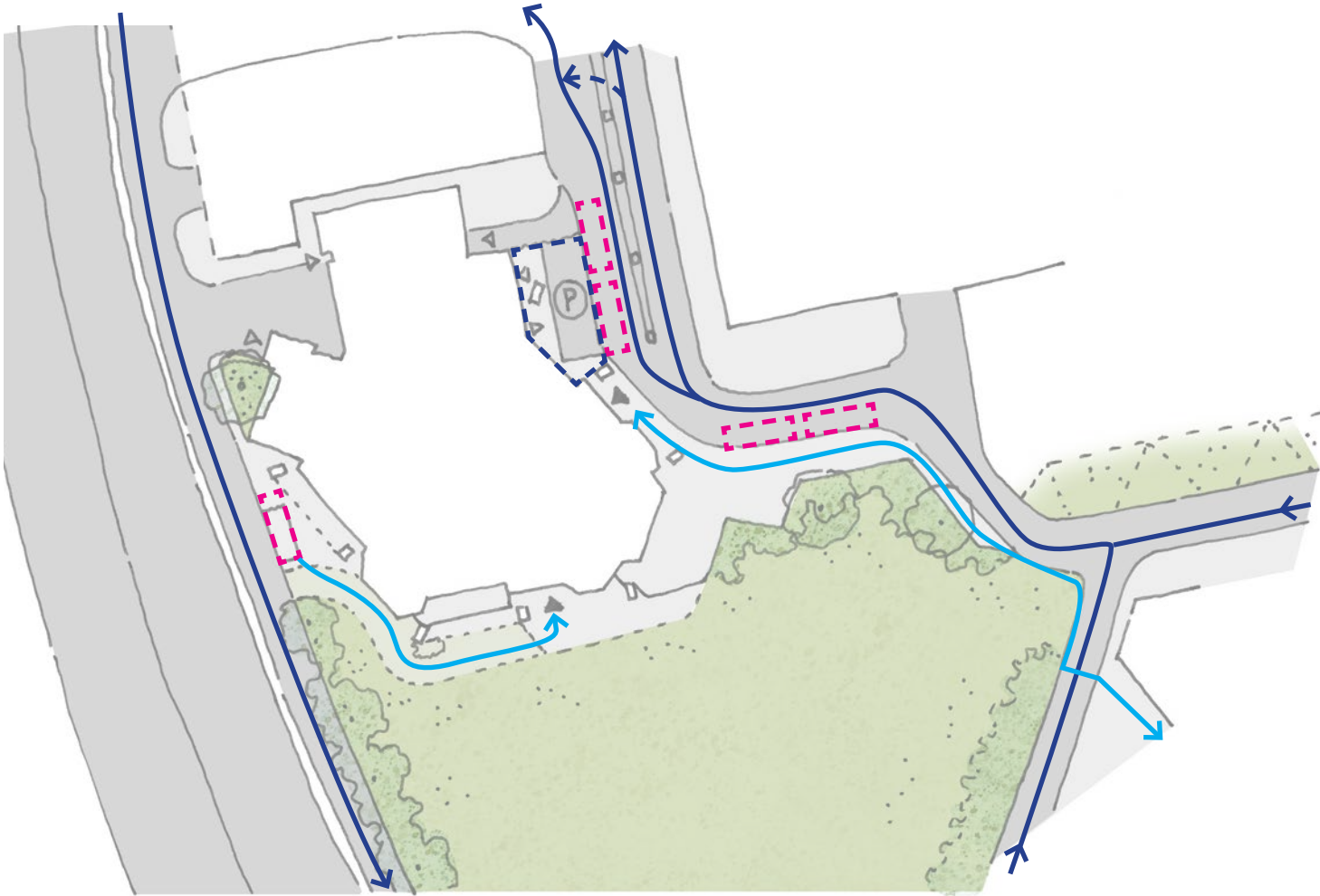
Access and movement across the podium level is limited to pedestrians only. The main traffic is from Queen's Walk - Düsseldorf Way, with limited foot traffic towards the Police Station, and to the Hexagon entrance for events.



Podium Level

- Existing pedestrian routes
- Potential future pedestrian routes - to be developed as part of MQ area plan

At street level, priority is given to vehicles which leaves the pedestrian experience poor and disjointed. Congestion is an issue in the area to the east of the new studio theatre/ Hexagon, with coach waiting, servicing, accessible and staff parking. Coaches may also drop off on the western side, with visitors accessing the Hexagon via the garden doors.



Street Level

- Existing pedestrian routes
- Existing vehicular routes - Cars / coaches / service vehicles
- Accessible parking / staff parking - Note: Approx. 6 staff spaces, double loaded - 8 accessible spaces, double loaded & space not compliant with regulations
- Coach drop-off/pick-up points - Note: At times of pantomime / local / educational events

Existing landscape

Trees & Vegetation

Although trees and vegetation on the site itself are limited, there are a number of neighbouring trees and vegetated areas that should be considered in the landscape proposals.



Existing London Plane (T1 in Tree Survey) on the west side of the Hexagon, regularly pollarded

One category B tree (T1 – London Plane) falls within the extents of proposed landscape works. This tree will be retained, and its setting enhanced as part of the Studio Theatre development proposals. Adjustments to the hard surface and kerb lines will be required to facilitate the new get-in configuration, as outlined in the ‘Transport Statement’. Works will be planned to minimise disturbance to the root protection area of the existing tree. For further details refer to pages 14 and 15 of this document, and the ‘Arboricultural Impact Assessment’.



Podium Level

- ① Large mature trees, part of the original landscaping scheme for the area lend character, maturity and presence to the street scape. They are invaluable in giving shade & shelter, and also provide high biodiversity value.
- ② The original design for the podium balustrades incorporated planters built into the concrete structures. Most of these have no planting remaining, and what is there appears to receive little or no maintenance.
- ③ There is a significant lack of greening to the majority of the podium, especially the area along Queen’s Walk. A successful planting area outside the entrance to Queen’s Court would make this pocket feel much more welcoming.



Street Level

- ④ A number of mature trees at street level should be retained and protected in the proposals as per the Tree Survey. Any new proposals should be designed to protect the longevity of the trees using no-dig construction where necessary. Filtered views/glimpses of green are important in the undercroft.
- ⑤ The existing tree and hedge planting provides a physical buffer and screening from the adjacent road noise.
- ⑥ The derelict landscape adjacent to the south terrace of the Hexagon Theatre is defined by wild grassland / brownfield – unkept and self-willed in nature.

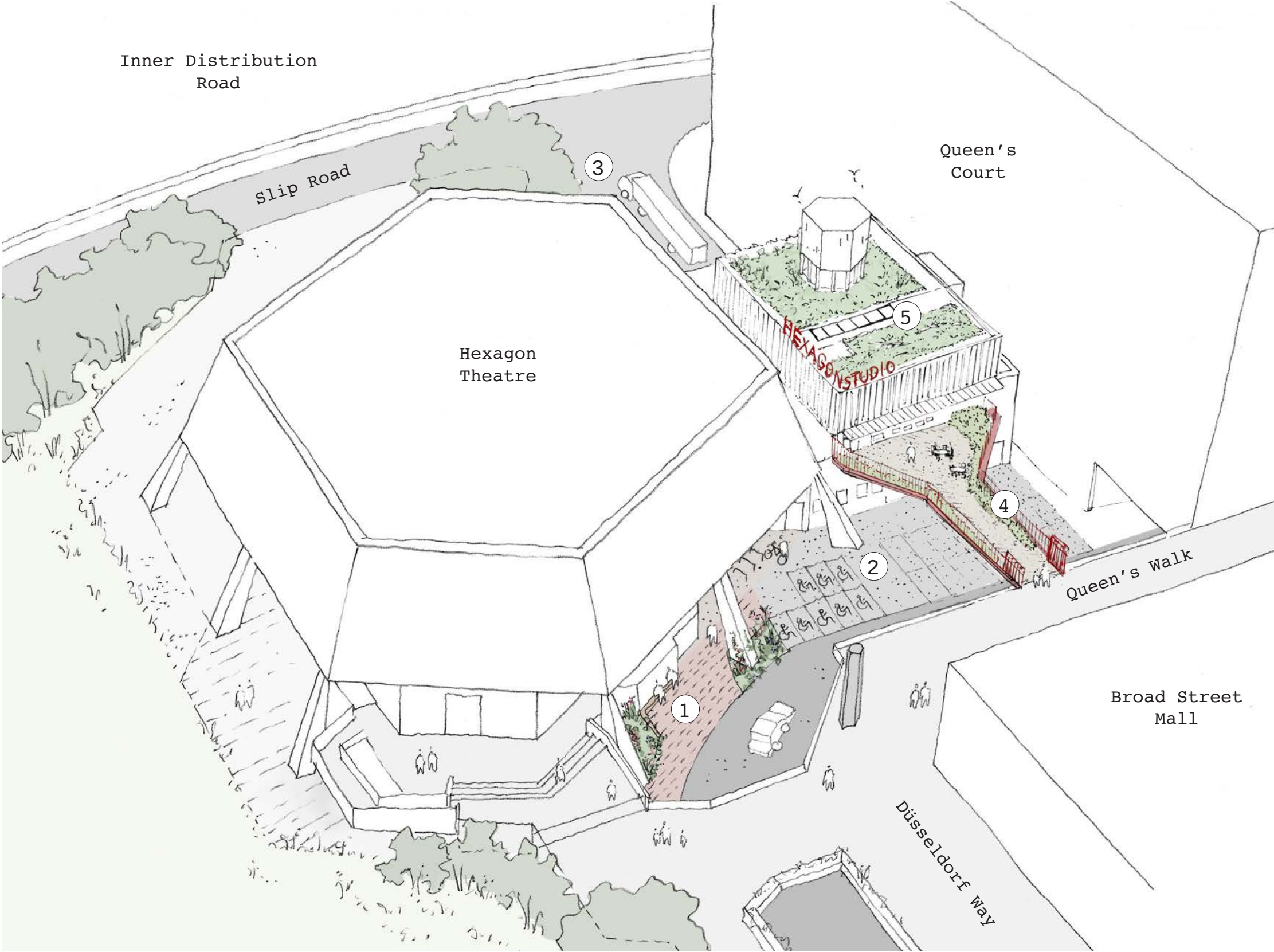


Proposed landscape

Overview

The landscaping proposals to be implemented as part of the new Studio Theatre project look to create welcoming public spaces with moments of greenery bringing seasonal interest and biodiversity to an otherwise predominantly urban hard landscape. A summary of the key landscape interventions is shown on this page.

- 1 Improvements to front of house landscaping include distinctive surfacing to the public entrance, new seating and areas of planting.
- 2 Parking arrangement reviewed to maximise provision for theatre staff and performers. Existing managed visitor Blue Badge parking bays retained.
- 3 Back of house area re-landscaped to new get-in configuration with adjustments to existing kerb lines to accommodate large delivery vehicles.
- 4 Distinctive light weight decking to the entrance bridge of the new Studio Theatre building, including linear planting along the edges and feature planting at the studio theatre side.
- 5 Biodiverse green roofs with varied flora including native wildflowers, habitat areas and provision of bird nesting boxes.



Proposed landscape

Street Level

Street Level landscape proposals overview:

- ① Improvements to Front of House landscaping to include distinctive surfacing to the existing theatre entrance, new seating and areas of planting.
- ② Existing parking arrangement reviewed to maximise parking provision for theatre staff. Existing visitor Blue Badge parking bays retained. Parking area resurfaced using permeable paving.
- ③ The bridge requires minor changes to the existing traffic island and road road layout. See architect's and traffic planner's information.
- ④ Existing Back of House area to be re-landscaped to create a suitable get-in configuration. Adjustments to existing kerb lines will be needed to accommodate large delivery vehicles, which will be done with care to minimise disturbance of the adjacent tree's Root Protection Area.
- ⑤ Small alterations to existing hard landscape configuration to allow for temporary accommodation get-in (outside of core project works scope).

Project red line boundary

Existing tree Root Protection Area



Key landscape areas

Street Level FOH Entrance Area

The landscape proposals at the street level entrance area to the existing theatre building are aimed at creating a more welcoming external space for theatre visitor arrival and spill out at performance intervals. The existing disjointed surfacing will be replaced with red clay paving to reference the original podium level landscape design.

A bench will be provided near the visitor drop-off location to provide an opportunity to rest. Planting areas have been proposed at suitable locations to add greenery and soften the concrete elements that dominate this space. A tap is integrated within the building face to allow for manual watering during dry spells.



Clay pavers to reference the original podium level landscape design



Concrete and timber bench to match the architectural character of the Hexagon



Generous large foliage planting at the base of the existing columns to complement and soften the 'brutalist' concrete



Street level theatre entrance area plan

- ① Large concrete planter with shade tolerant planting and climbers

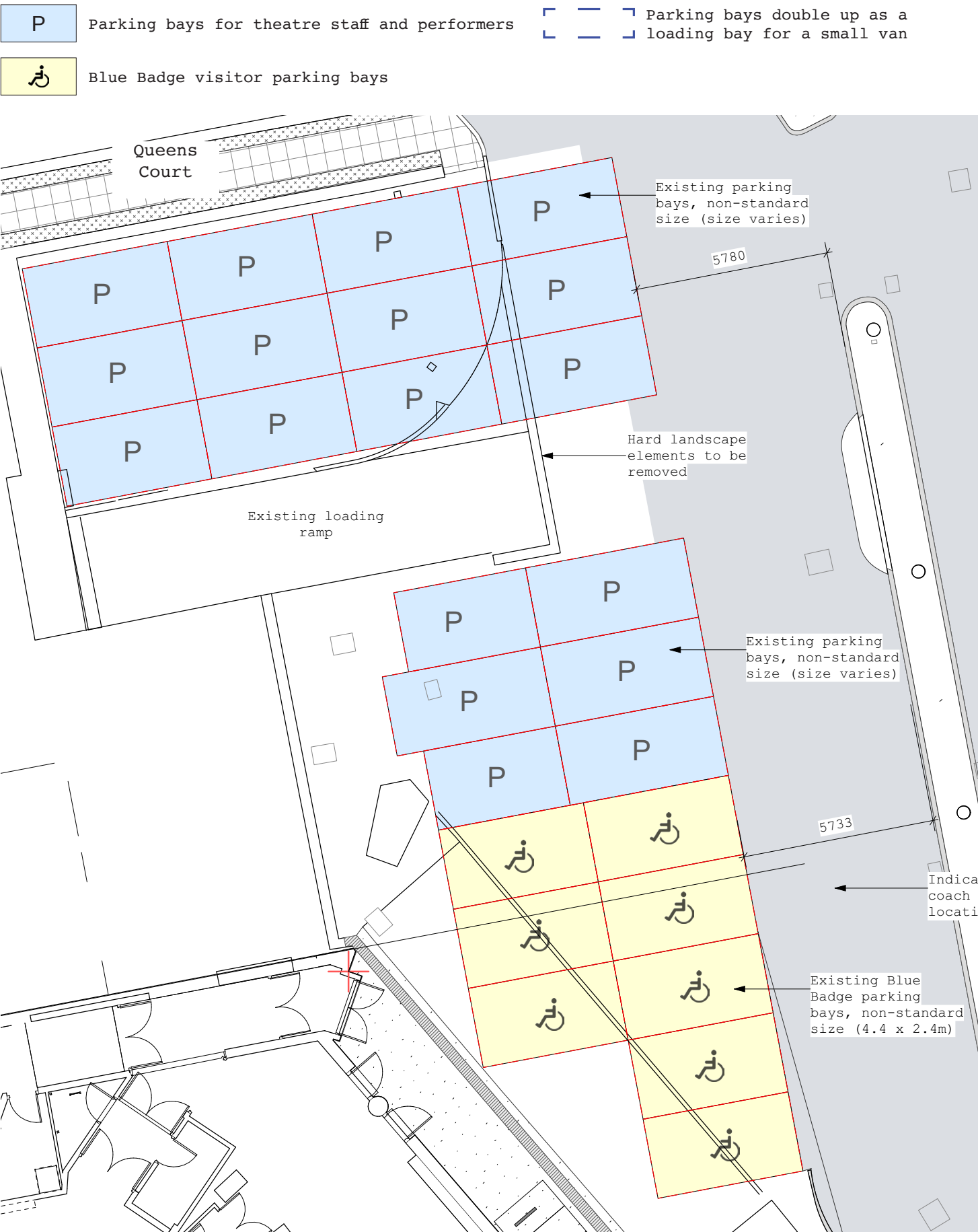
② Planting pits around existing columns (feasibility to be confirmed)

③ Permeable red clay paving to reference original podium landscaping
- ④ Concrete and timber bench to match the existing architectural character

⑤ Dropped kerb extended to improve access for visitors being dropped-off

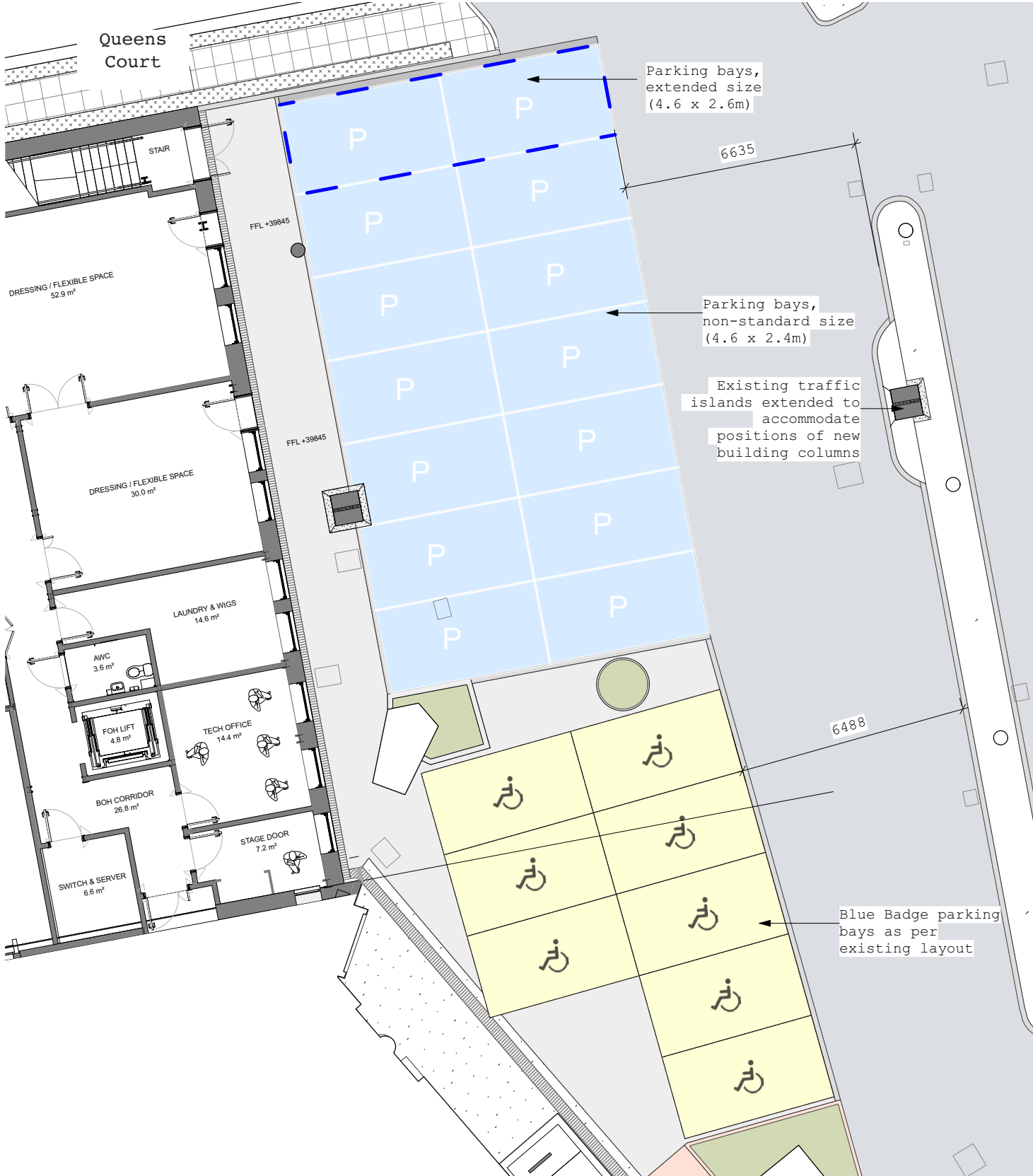
Key landscape areas

Street Level FOH Parking



Existing plan showing parking arrangement

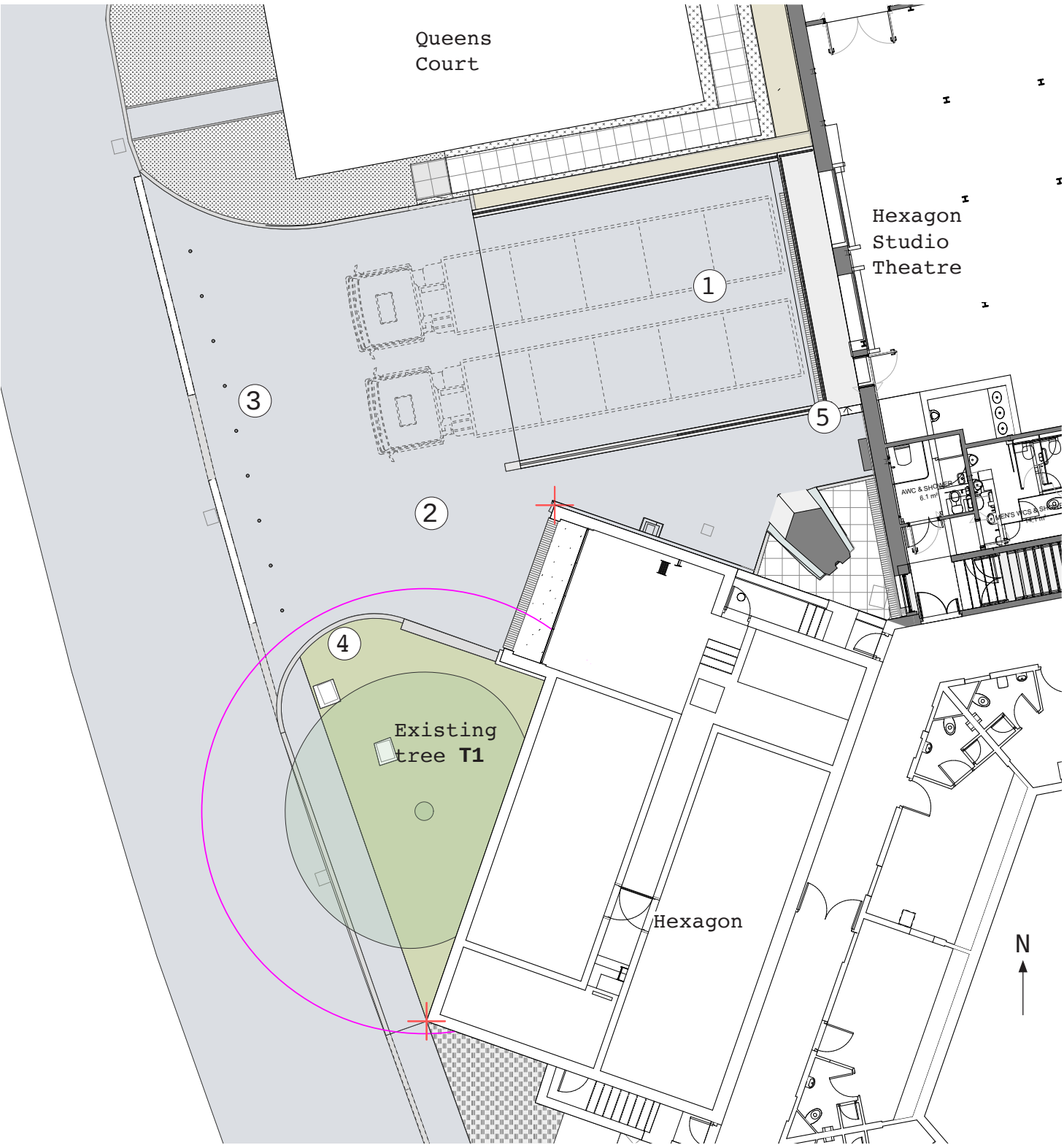
As part of the street level landscape design process a review of the current parking arrangement was undertaken. The proposed parking arrangement for theatre staff and performers takes into account the positions of new columns needed to support the bridge element of the new building. All of the 8 No. existing Blue Badge parking bays will be retained as per the current layout. The entire parking area will be resurfaced with permeable paving as part of the sustainable drainage strategy, refer to drain for further details.



Proposed plan showing adjusted parking arrangement

Key landscape areas

Street Level BOH Loading Bay



- ① Ramped hard standing loading dock with retaining walls and guardrails

② Entire area resurfaced with new asphalt surfacing

③ Removable bollards installed to prevent illegal parking
- ④ Kerb adjusted and existing planting area replanted with woodland flora

⑤ Steps to allow an alternative fire escape route within site boundary



The existing landscape arrangement around tree T1 (Plane tree)



Woodland understorey planting to the base of the existing tree - robust low maintenance species

One of the strategic project proposals is relocation of the main loading dock to the west of the site to create a new dual get-in serving both venues. Proposed landscape works in this area include formation of a ramped hard standing area to allow efficient loading. The entire area will be resurfaced with new asphalt surfacing and removable bollards installed to prevent unwelcome car parking.

Existing kerb lines will require realignment to allow for large vehicle turning circles resulting in a small incursion into the Root Protection Area of the existing tree T1 which is to be retained. Further detail of the proposed works around the tree can be found on the next page of this report.

A mix of woodland species will be planted under the existing tree to rejuvenate the existing planting area.

Key landscape areas

Works Around Existing Tree

The below plans show the extent of proposed landscape works around the existing tree T1 that are required in order to facilitate large vehicle turning circles for the new get-in configuration. A small incursion into the RPA will be needed to allow for kerb line realignment, the design of which has been considered with the project Arboriculturist.

Proposals in this area also include some de-paving of existing hard landscaping and replanting of the understorey with diverse woodland flora that include native species. Refer also to the 'Arboricultural Impact Assessment'.

