



Revised Landscaping Proposals

Groveside School
(Former Hamilton Academy)
40 Christchurch Road
Reading
RG2 7AY

Design and Access Statement

February 2026

Our ref: 23-062



Chartered Practice

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01 | INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

In July 2023 MH Architects and Acorn Education and Care Ltd submitted a full planning application for alterations to the former Phoenix School on Christchurch Road. Application No. 231025 included changes to rear school extensions and a comprehensive landscaping scheme. This application was approved by Reading Borough Council in November of 2023. The building works were completed in the summer of 2024 and the school opened two months later in September.

Acorn Education provide education for children and young people with special educational needs. The behaviours and additional needs for all children are extremely varied. A decision was made not to implement the landscape design until the cohort of young people were in place, and the school were in a stronger position to understand their abilities and behaviours.

An enforcement notice was served in August of 2025, and discussions have been ongoing following a meeting on site with Planning Enforcement Officer Ray Wheeler, Natural Environment Officer Sarah Hanson, Head Teacher Mary Rome and Head of Group Property Development John Seaber. We acknowledge we are strictly in breach of the planning conditions and are committed to rectifying the position.

On the advice of Planning Enforcement, a pre-application was submitted in November 2025. Comments and advice were received under reference PL/25/1650. This included the new fence, with electronic vehicle access gates, on Christchurch Road, which was installed without the appropriate planning approvals.

This planning application presents the revised landscape scheme, including the additional fence and gate access. We have maintained the original planting areas as closely as possible, and hope that we have responded to the comments raised in the Pre-App.

APPLICANT AND DESIGN TEAM

Applicant



Groveside School is part of Acorn Education, part of Outcomes First Group, a leading education provider for children and young people with special educational needs.

The school opened in September 2024.

Architect



MH Architects Ltd are a multi award winning practice based in Chichester, with projects ranging across the south and east of England.

The Practice incorporates architectural and masterplanning skills and can draw upon specialist planning advice which provides a robustness and breadth to our design approach.

Our portfolio of work is diverse, encompassing housing, educational, cultural, industrial, commercial, sports and retail projects within local and regional areas.

Landscape Architect



Bright Plan Civils provides integrated civil engineering services to support development and infrastructure projects across the UK.

Bright Plan Civils combines transport planning, flood risk and drainage, landscape design and infrastructure design disciplines in order to meet the increased need for projects to provide an integrated approach to planning, design and engineering from the outset.

02 | DESIGN ADDITIONS

EXTERNAL STRUCTURES

As part of this planning application process, Groveside School would like to highlight temporary structures that they are looking to install in the near future.

There will be no intrusive foundations for any of the structures, as they are all within the root protection zones of TPO trees. In the Pre-App response, the Natural Environment Officer highlighted that discussion with the Natural Environment Team is required to ensure the suitability of structures within these zones. The shed will be placed on the shingle filled BodPave 40 surface, with no ground alteration; and the yurt will be pegged into the ground with no sub-base. The external pod will require future discussion, if it is installed, but we want to highlight them as part of the overall scheme so that we are able to continue the discussions post planning. We would be seeking to include a conditional approval for the pod, with the proviso that details of any sub-base are approved by the Natural Environment Team.

01-02 A new 7 x 11 foot metal shed adjacent to the car park.

03-06 A small external 'pod' in the rear garden to allow staff to monitor outside play or hold external group lessons.

07-08 A Yurt structure in the rear garden. This will serve as a base for the outdoor learning with a 'forest school' element. The images presented are from another Acorn Education school, The Greater Horseshoe School, in Newton Abbot, Devon.



01



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BOUNDARY FENCE & ACCESS GATES

A new electric controlled gate was installed at the front of the school, along Christchurch Road. This was not included within the original application, and installed by the school later without realising that planning permission would be required.

It is essential for the school that access is strictly controlled. It is not uncommon for pupils to attempt unauthorised exit from the site and the gates significantly minimise the risk of children running into the main road.

We would like to seek retrospective approval for the fence and gates. The revised scheme will include planting on the exterior of the fence to soften the school's presence with a positive contribution to the street.

When the site was operational as Phoenix School, a pair of manual swing gates were in place in similar locations to the replacement gates. Google street view shows that these were in place as far back as 2009, and likely earlier.

The school will operate an 'open gate' procedure during drop off and collection times. Both gates will remain open to allow vehicles to safely pull off the road and not block the footpath. Pupils will be dropped off / collected under the supervision of staff. During school hours the gates will remain closed but they are set back far enough from the road to allow deliveries / visitors to pull off the highway and minimise obstruction. The entrance gate is set back further than the previous manual gate, which provides more room off the highway.

The replacement gates are remotely operated electronic sliding gates, which allows staff to provide access quickly during school hours. Previously school staff would have to manually provide access. The new gates significantly reduce the time delivery vehicles or visitors are likely to block the footpath and/or Christchurch Road.

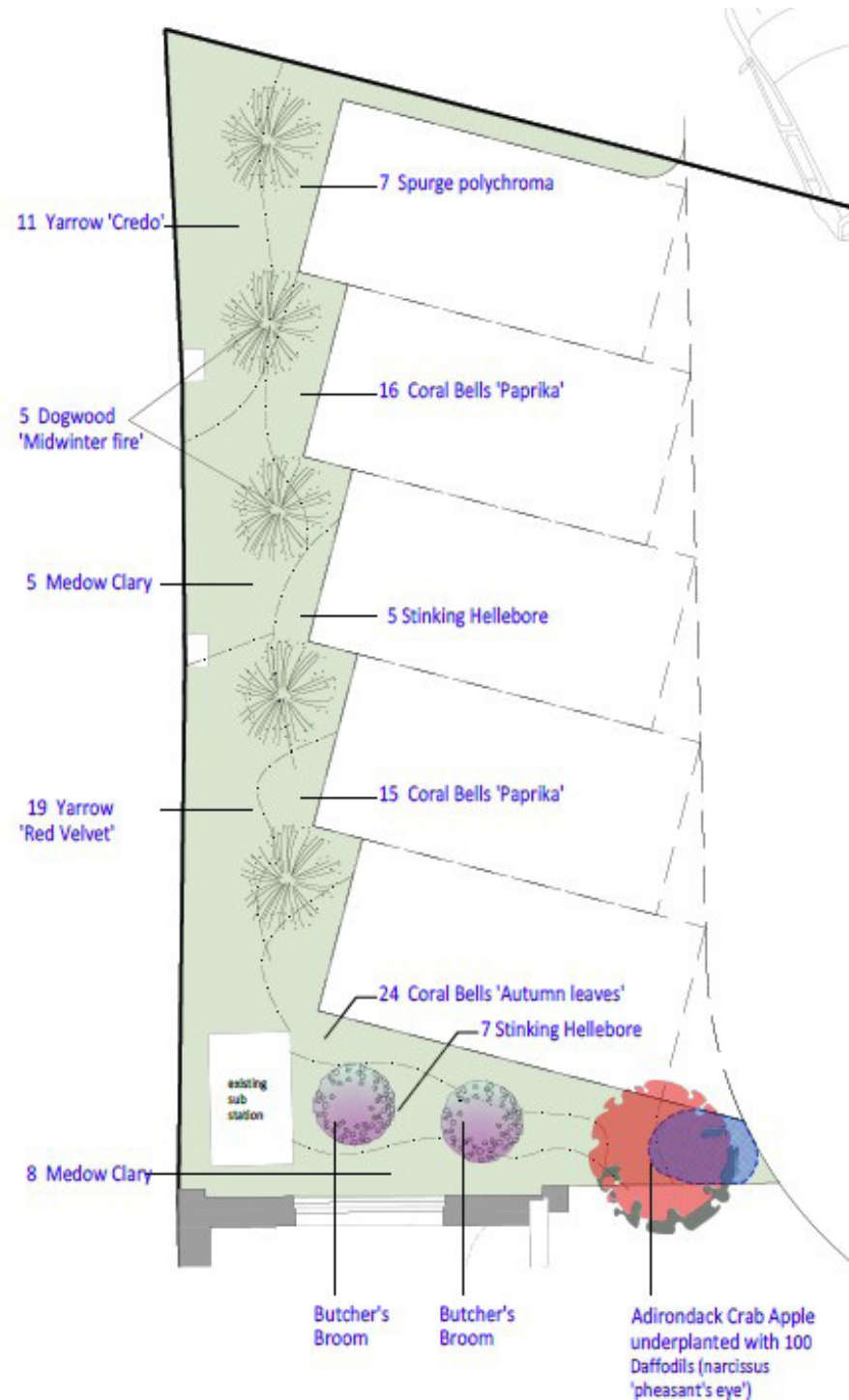


Existing Gate Entrances

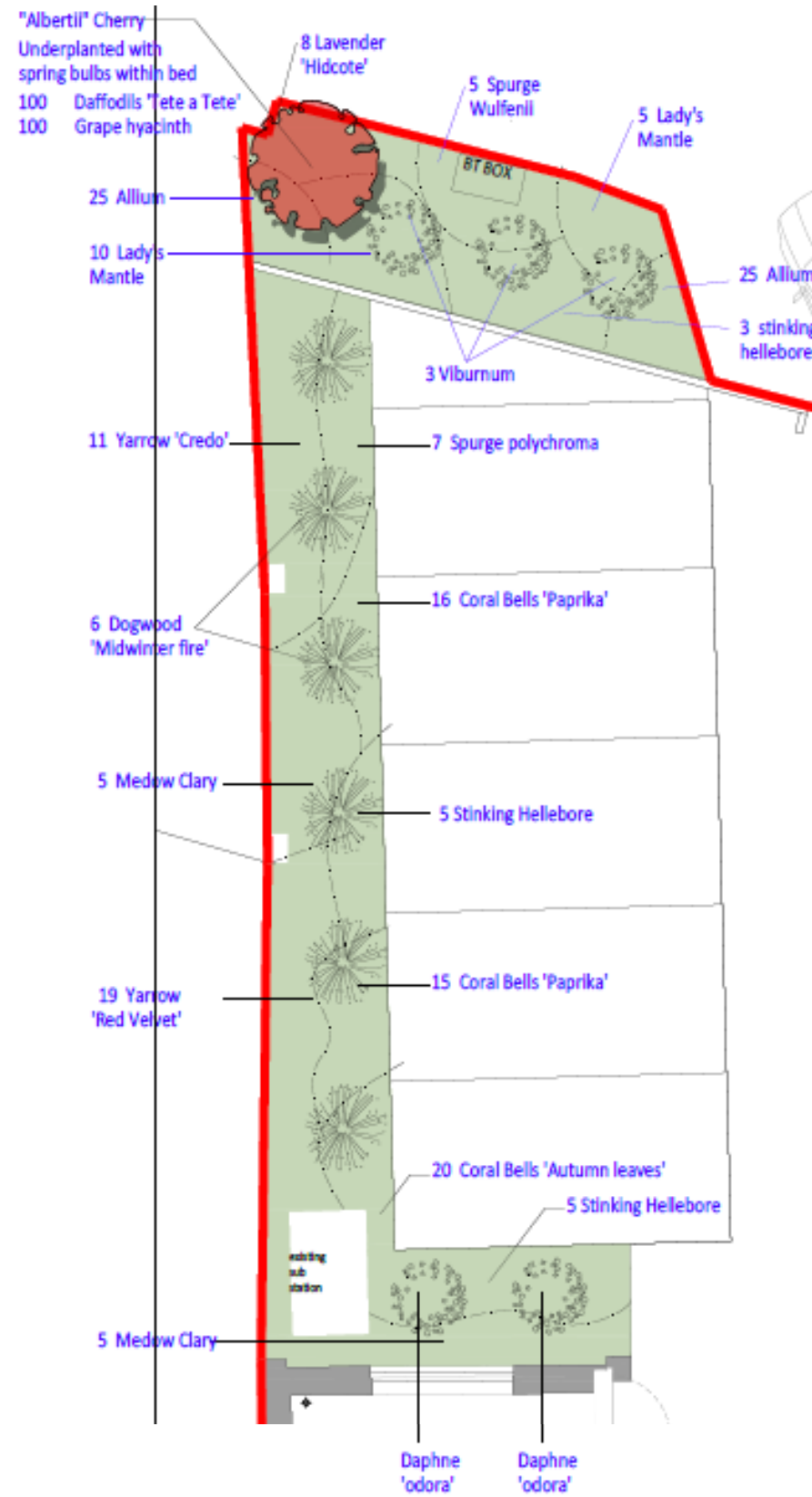


Proposed Gate Entrances

03 | LAYOUT COMPARISON



Planning Submission



Proposed Landscape

The subsequent pages detail the changes between the original planning submission and amended landscape proposal. The Natural Environment Officer provided a helpful and detailed response as part of the Pre-App. The Landscape Designer has responded to as many recommendations as possible.

Overall, the amount of new planting across the site is approximately the same as the previously approved application. The number of trees has increased from 13 to 15.

North-West Boundary

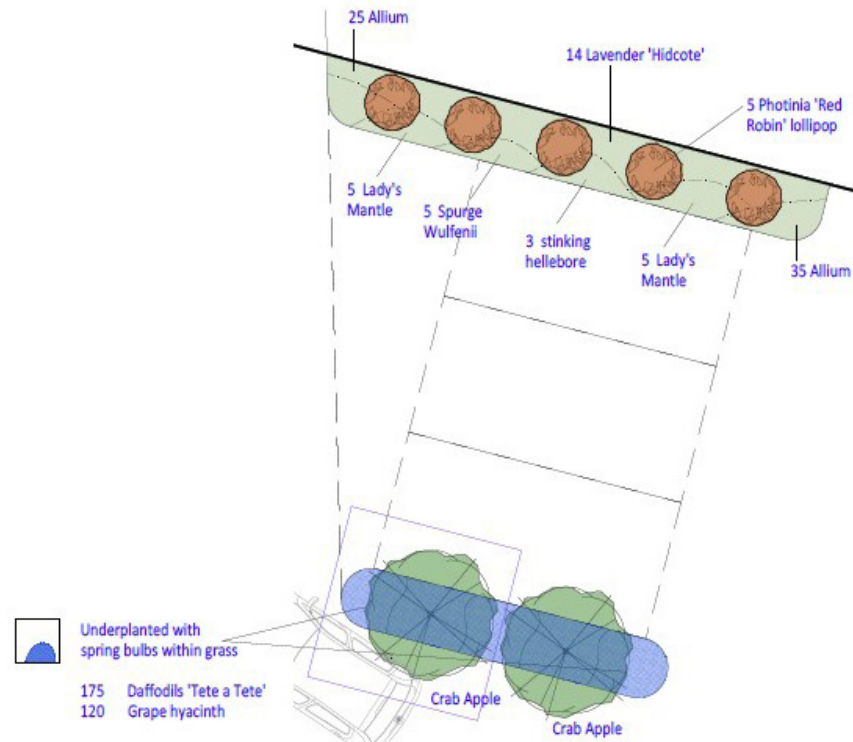
Species proposed remain unchanged.

Crab Apple removed due to restriction of planting area.

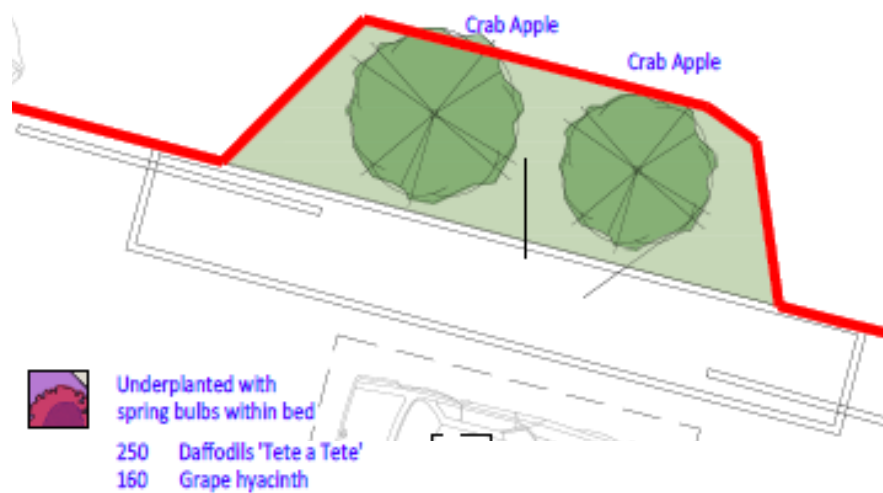
Site Boundary extended, area outside of gates, adjacent to footpath, to receive planting to soften the appearance from the street. Three Viburnum are proposed in response to pre-app advice suggesting that Red Robin would not suitably contribute to the schemes wildlife value. In addition, one Bird Cherry Tree has been proposed to counteract the loss of trees elsewhere.

The only service clash is with the BT box, which has led to the removal of one tree that was shown in the Pre-App

Northern Boundary

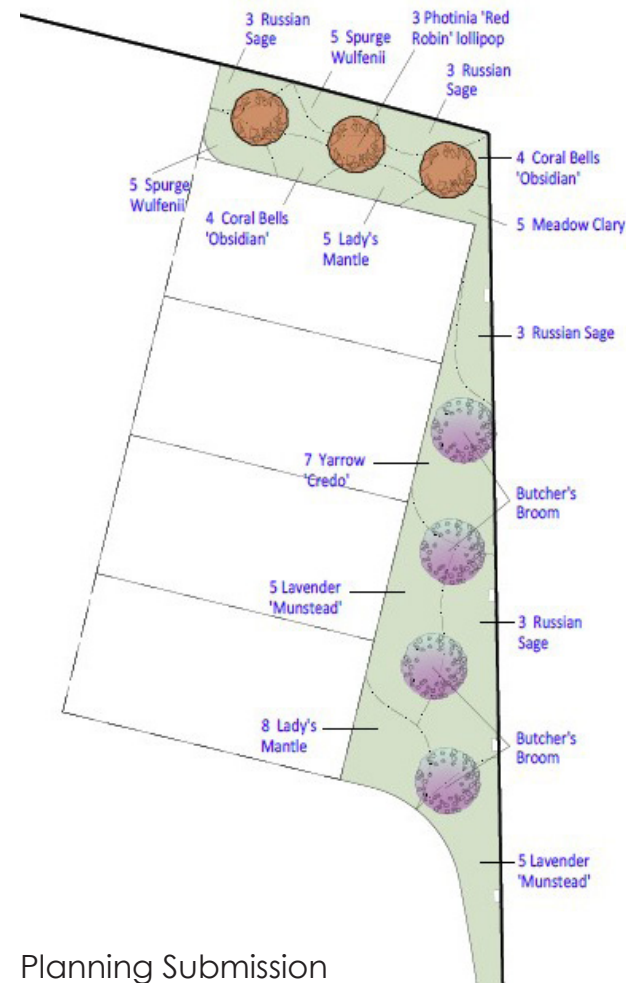


Planning Submission

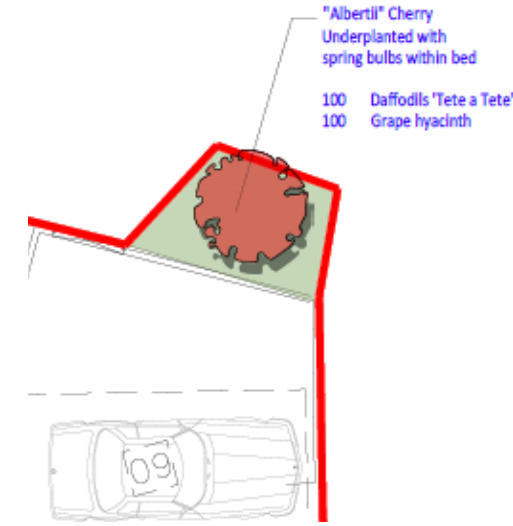


Proposed Landscape

North-East Boundary



Planning Submission



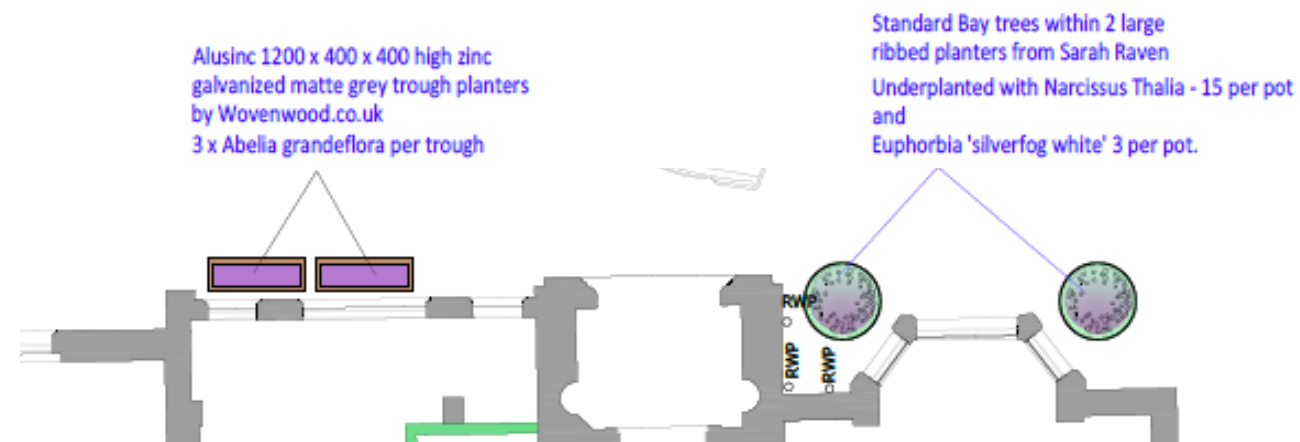
Proposed Landscape

Crab apples and planting moved to outside the boundary gates due to risk of clash with cars and to soften the appearance from the street.

Additional planting added to the eastern side of the vehicle access.

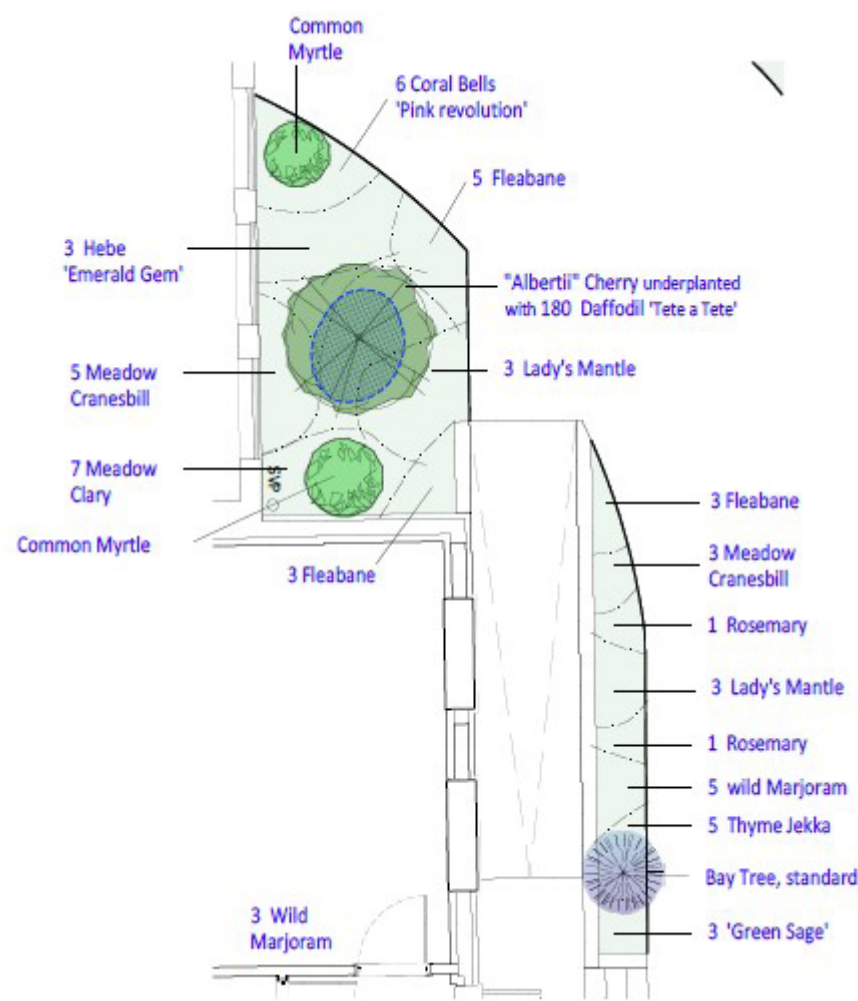
Bay trees and planters added to the front of school to help mitigate the loss of planting from adjacent to the fence lines to the north and east. The planters for these bays will be sized in accordance with the designers requirements to ensure reasonably sized trees are accommodated in this area.

There are no service clashes indicated in either area at the front, however, further investigation will be required during the excavation.



Proposed Landscape

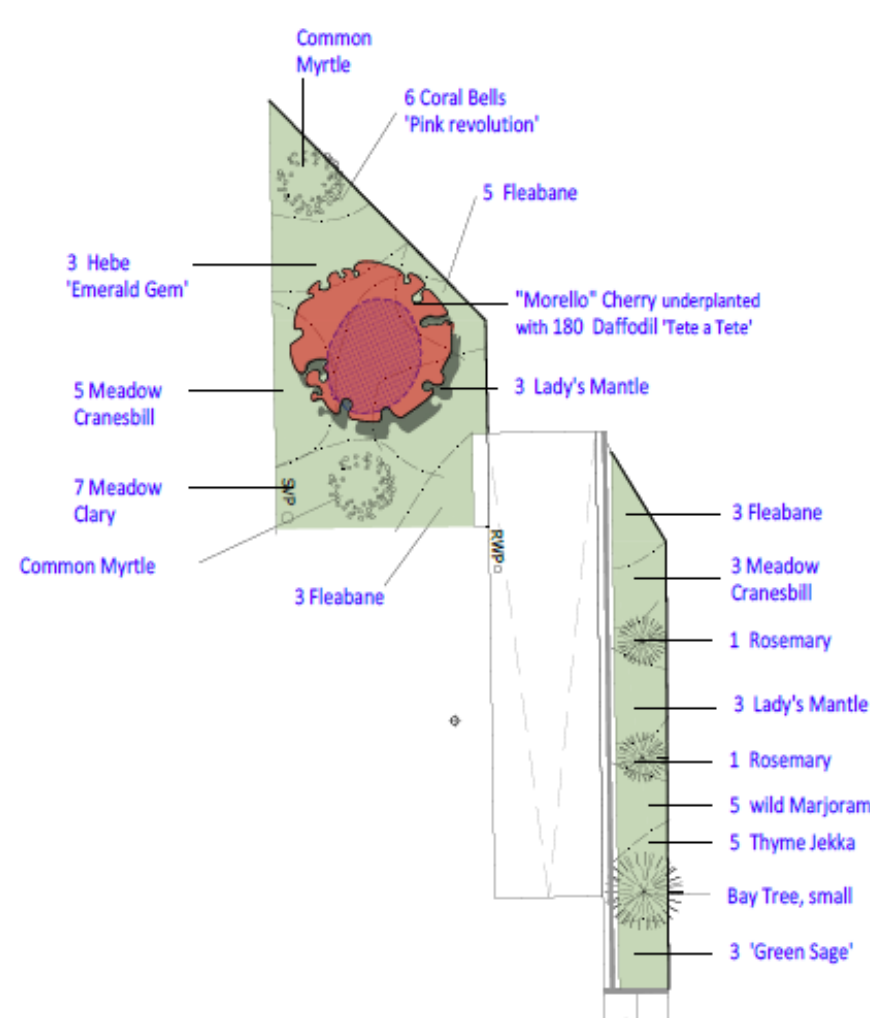
Adjacent to Pavilion Ramp



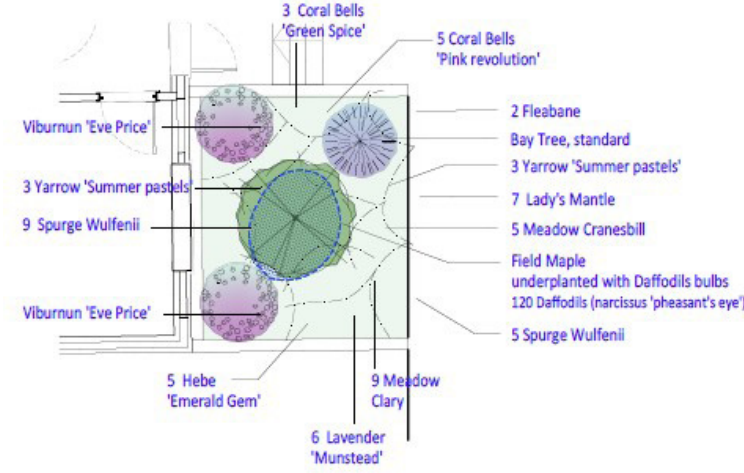
Planning Submission

The areas at the top and end of the pavilion area are as proposed within the planning submission, with one viburnum removed from the end to prevent overcrowding.

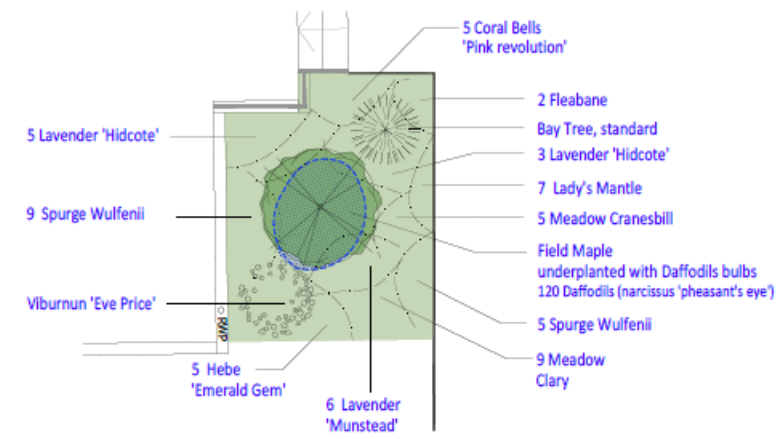
Proposed Landscape



Adjacent to Pavilion End

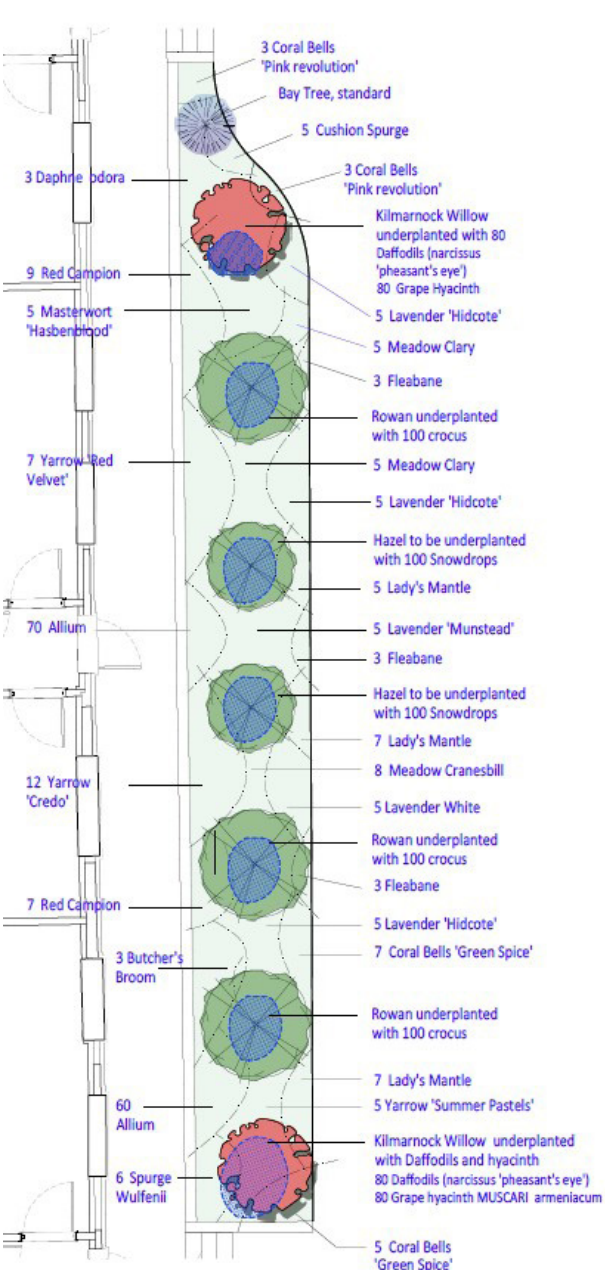


Planning Submission

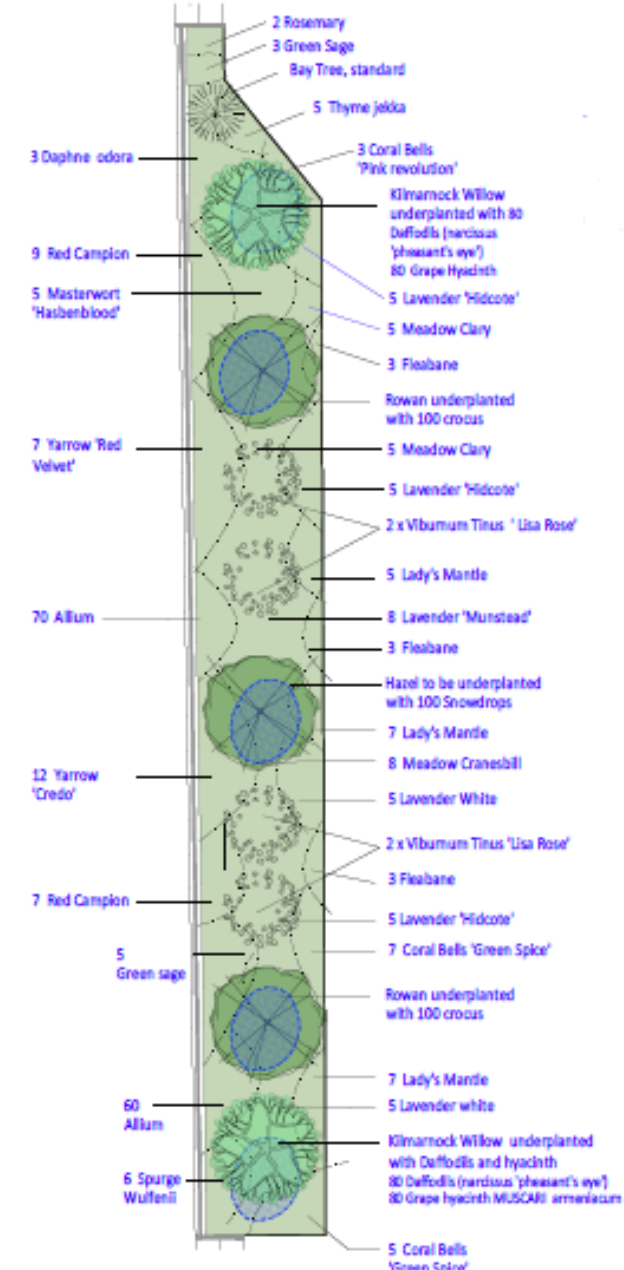


Proposed Landscape

Main Pavilion Section

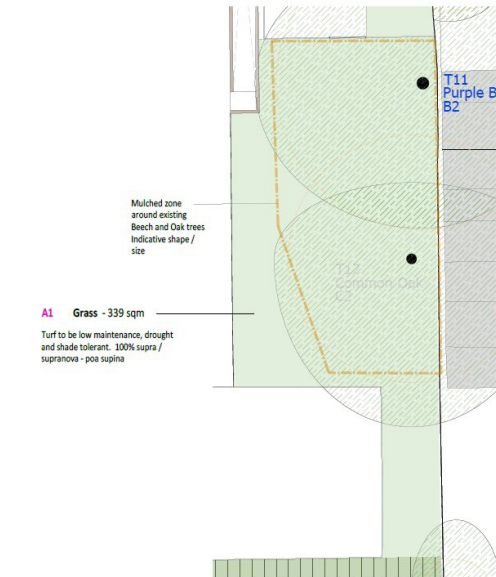


Planning Submission

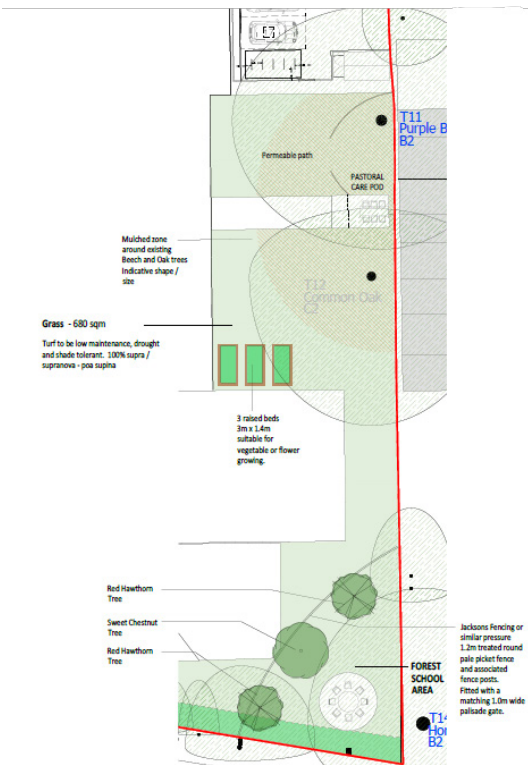


Proposed Landscape

South-West Boundary



Planning Submission



Proposed Landscape

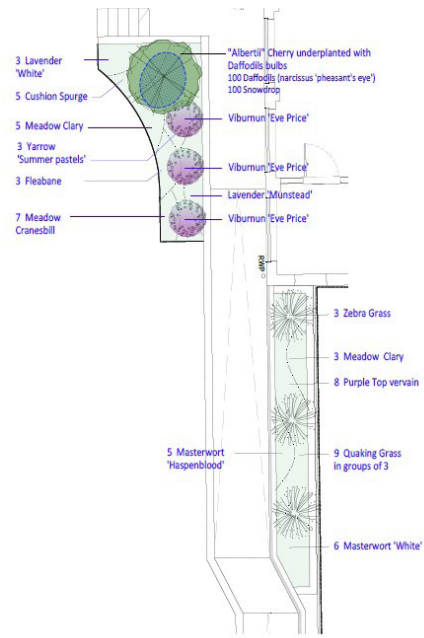
The main pavilion section retains the same area and majority of planting. One Hazel and one Rowan removed to prevent overcrowding. Additional trees are present elsewhere in the scheme to mitigate this reduction.

Adjacent to the altered ramp, there are no proposed changes. The altered shape of the ramp has allowed for a large section of lavender to be added.

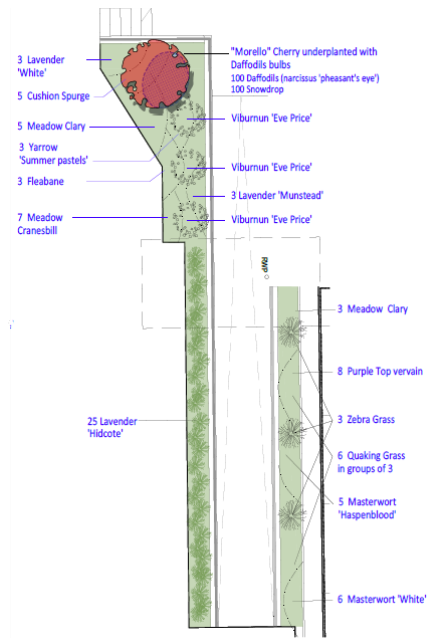
At the rear of the site we are proposing additional planting in the form of the Chestnut and Red Hawthorn trees as well as planters for vegetable or flowers. This area is planned as a 'Forest School' area, where the children can learn in the outside. The Chestnut will be maintained at a relatively small size so as not to dominate the first school area.

A query was raised by the Natural Environment Team regarding the planting adjacent to the ramp. We believe the photo provided indicates an area to the south of what is proposed and a slight misunderstanding. The area remains the same.

Ramp Adjacent



Planning Submission



Proposed Landscape

04 | SUMMARY

The school now has a strong cohort of young people, and we better understand their abilities and behaviours. This knowledge has informed the adaptations to the approved planting scheme. We have looked at the resilience of species and connections to the wider curriculum including, for example, how the children can take ownership of parts including designated horticulture and forest school areas.

The addition of a new fence and electronic access gates, present a different appearance at the front of the school. However, this is essential to ensuring safe access for the pupils. We are committed to softening the appearance with planting outside the fence line, in the areas that are within the school's lease. An appropriate management plan has been put in place to minimise the impact on Christchurch Road and its users. We believe that the new gates are an improvement on what was previously installed.

We trust this demonstrates our intent to resolve the situation with a considered scheme acceptable to the Council that also meets the needs of the school.

We hope that the additional Pre-App feedback has now been addressed satisfactorily.



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