

Inis Cealtra Visitor Centre, Mountshannon, Co. Clare

LANDSCAPE DESIGN REPORT

December 2024

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Development Description

DEVELOPMENT DESCRIPTION

Inis Cealtra - Visitor Centre - Visitor Parking

The landscape design project is divided in to three distinct parts; Inis Cealtra itself, the proposed Visitor Centre on the former Rectory site at the harbour in Mountshannon and the proposed parking area off the main street in the village. There are related areas of intervention, at the main street, an upgraded pathway and new connection to the Rectory site in Aistear Park, and at the harbour.

Inis Cealtra - Holy Island



Introduction and Design aim

Inis Cealtra

Inis Cealtra - Holy Island - is, as the name suggests, an island rich in ecclesiastical as well as cultural and natural heritage. It is located on Lough Derg, which is part of the Shannon river system, which is a Special Protection Area. The monastic built heritage of the island is owned by the Department of Housing Local Government and Heritage, and managed by the Office of Public Works. Clare County Council own and manage the island. As a national monument in state ownership, the island is afforded the highest statutory protection in Ireland. It is located approximately 2km to the south west of the town of Mountshannon in Co Clare, and some 300m from Knockaphort slip to the northwest. The 20 hectare island has a peaceful and ethereal ambience, separated as it is from the mainland.

The design aim is provide a new mooring point and access paths for the visitors of the island, as well as a visitor shelter pod, WC pod, and staff pod and OPW facilities. This report deals with the paths design and layout. The individual pods are further detailed in the architect's report.

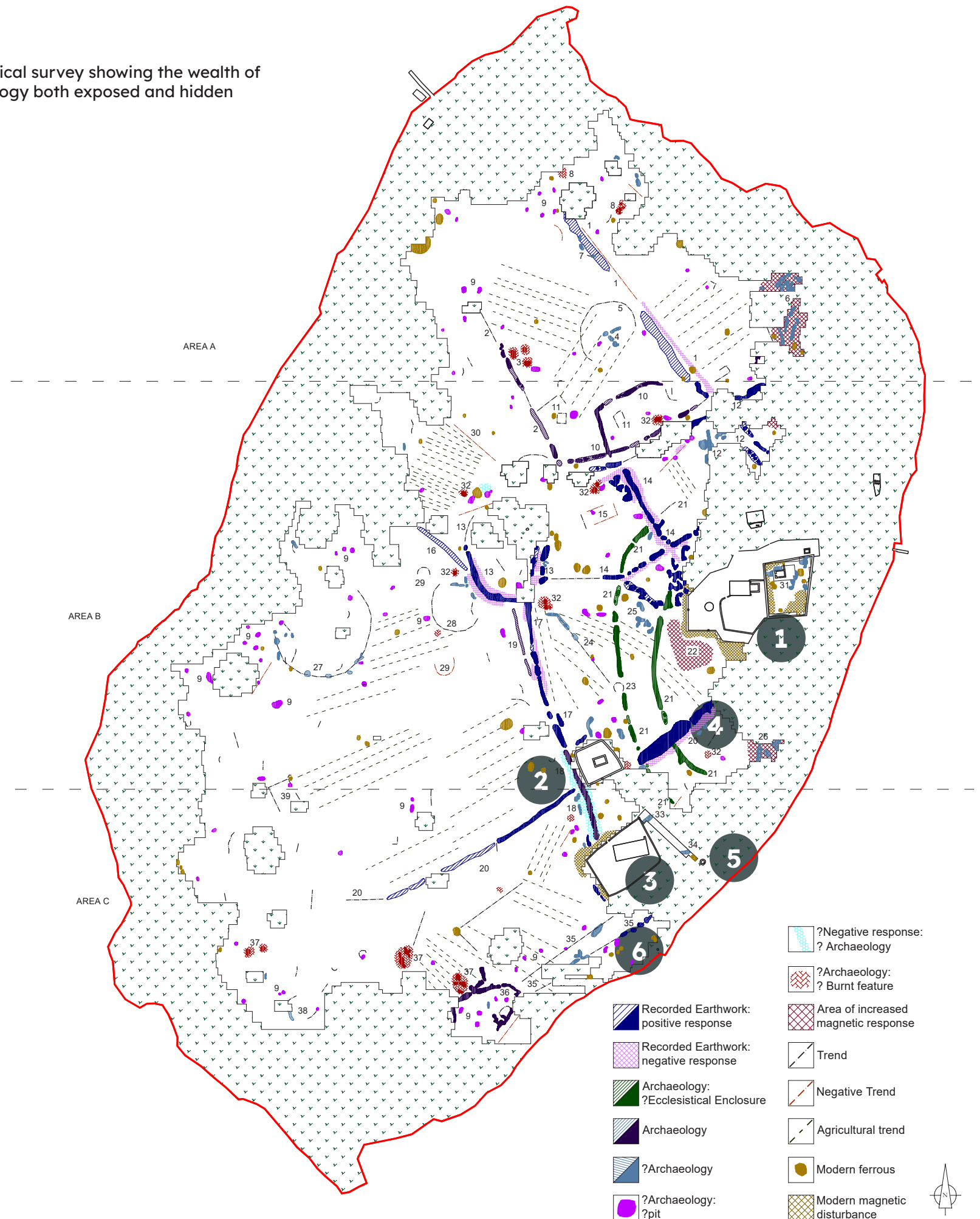
A Conservation and Management Plan is also prepared and is to be read together with the Landscape Design Report.

Key cultural heritage that the design aims to provide access to:

1. St Caimins church, round tower and graveyard
2. St Bridgids church
3. St Marys Church
4. Bullaun stones
5. Lady well
6. Bargaining stone

The proposed landscape design - essentially the mown grass paths - takes into account the principles of minimal intervention to archaeological heritage, both visible and hidden in the ground, as well as natural heritage and seeks to find balance between accessibility, wayfinding, readability of the landscape and protection of archaeology and nature protection.

Geophysical survey showing the wealth of archaeology both exposed and hidden



Landscape Concept

Inis Cealtra

A new mooring point is proposed at the existing location together with a visitor shelter pod, WC pod, and staff pod. These are located near the mooring point where boats will arrive to and depart from for convenience, while being located within the scrub zone to minimise visual impact on the island.

A series of 2m wide mown grass paths are proposed to explore the island and its archaeological and natural beauty.

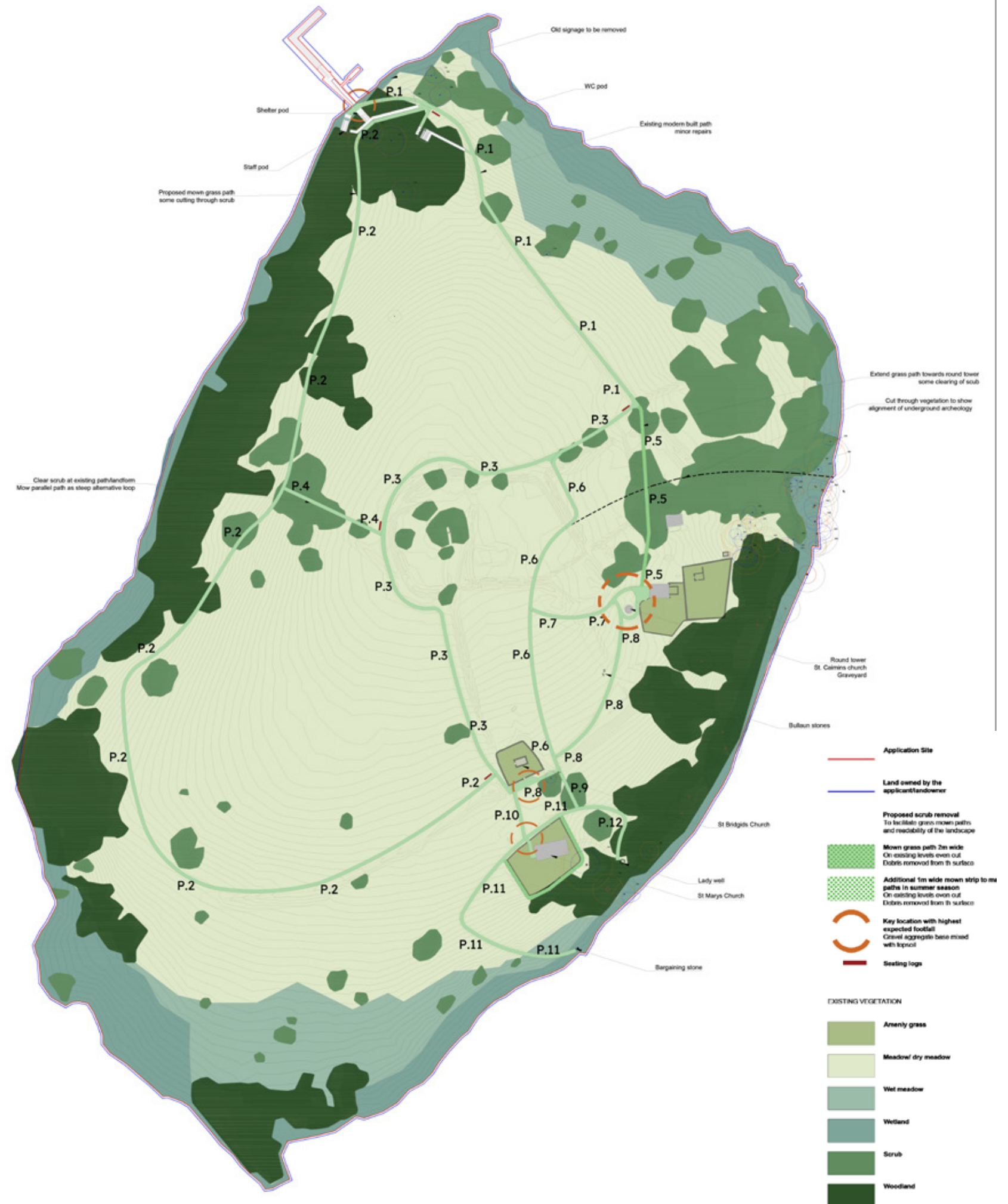
The paths layout and location is defined by the following:

- Existing paths location and access to main monument (Path 1, Path 8)
- Accessibility and location of monuments - paths 11 and 12 are proposed to take visitors to Lady well and the Bargaining stone in a less direct but gentler sloping route
- A series of additional paths are proposed to be able to make a looped walk around the island with the option of a smaller loop (Path 3) or bigger loop walk around the whole island to enjoy the natural beauty of the island as well as its cultural heritage, leading through grasslands and woodlands and back to the mooring point (Path 2). Adding a short connection between the two options (Path 4) allows for a bigger variety of loop options.
- An optional path (Path 6) is proposed alongside the ecclesiastical enclosure as a way to experience the now hidden history of the site (the enclosure is not visible above the ground).

The path of least intervention has been chosen for the proposal - the paths are all proposed as mown paths to existing ground levels for minimum visual impact and to avoid impact on the archaeology underground.

In order to avoid erosion, several measures are proposed:

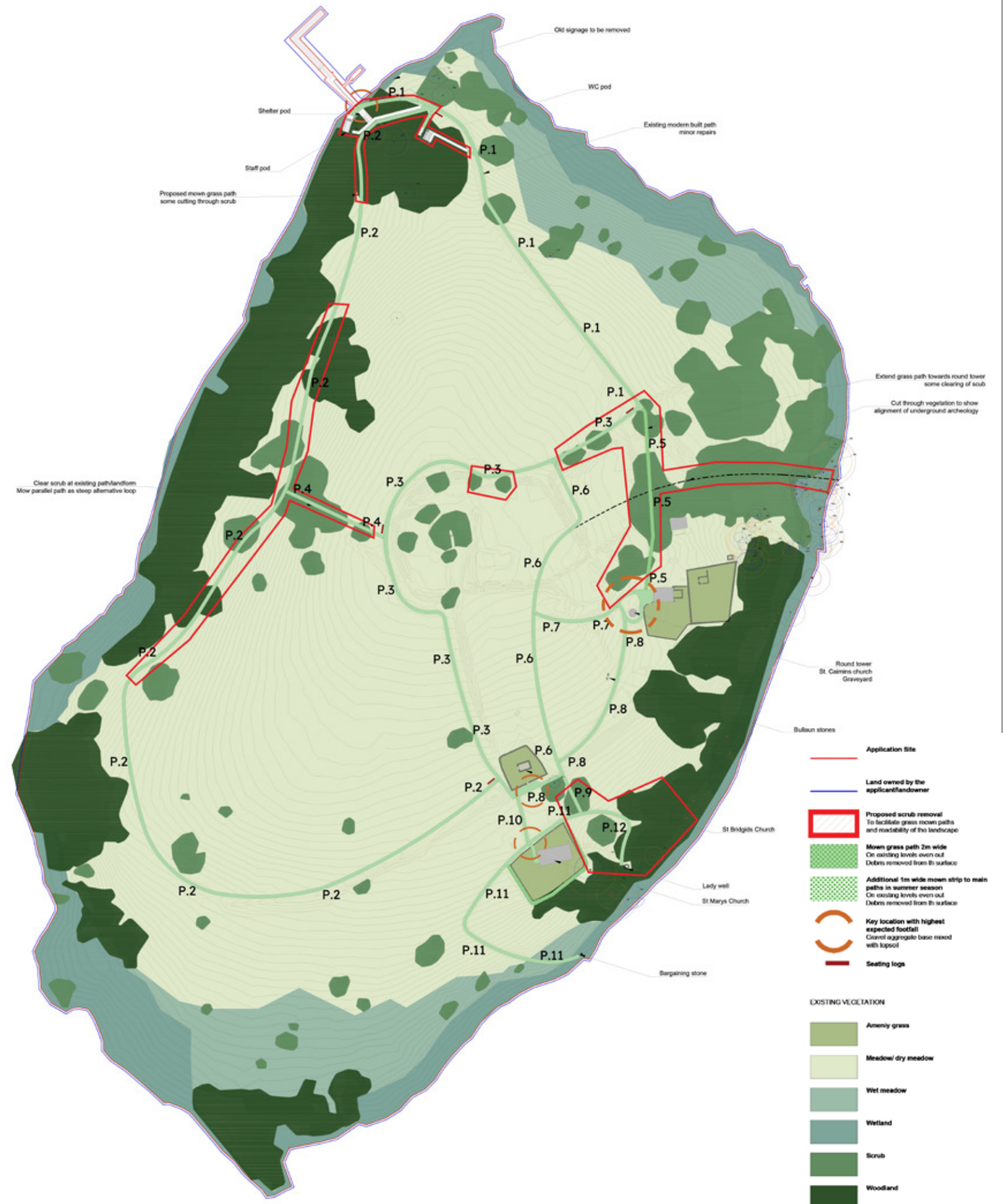
- Several path options are proposed to spread the footfall. These may be phased in different seasons as intensity of use is observed.
- The existing stone base to path 1 is proposed to be repaired where necessary. Path 1 is expected to be the most heavily used as it is leading from the mooring point directly to the Round tower.
- Where heavy footfall is expected (orange dashed circled), a layer of crushed aggregate is proposed with topsoil spread on top to allow for grass to develop. This will allow for sufficient air and moisture for grass to develop even with heavier footfall and only expose the aggregate in extreme situation rather than eroded topsoil. No plastics, geotextile or edging is being proposed.
- Where the footfall is expected to be the heaviest, 1 meter on either side of the path is proposed to be mown in addition to the 2m width in the main season to allow visitors to spread over a wider width of the path. A 6 week mowing regime is proposed in the summer for the additional strips.



Scrub removal

Inis Cealtra

Areas of scrub are proposed for removal in order to assist the interpretation of the landscape, such as scrub removal along the alignment of the ecclesiastic enclosures and space around the Lady Well on the eastern side of the island; and to allow space for the mown grass path and access into different areas of the island, such as the woodland edge on the Western side.



Woodland regeneration

Inis Cealtra

A review of archaeological analysis of charcoal from the excavations points to the species that have had a presence on the island. Of these, oak, ash, elm and hazel are predominant. As indigenous elm have generally succumbed to Dutch Elm Disease (*Ophiostoma novo-ulmi*), and there is a moratorium on the propagation of ash, it suggests that regenerating woodland should be directed towards an oak woodland with hazel understorey, as well as other associated native species such as birch, holly and cherry and apple.

The proximity to native woodland in the locality means that a seedbank of local provenance can be sourced for replenishing the islands tree species.



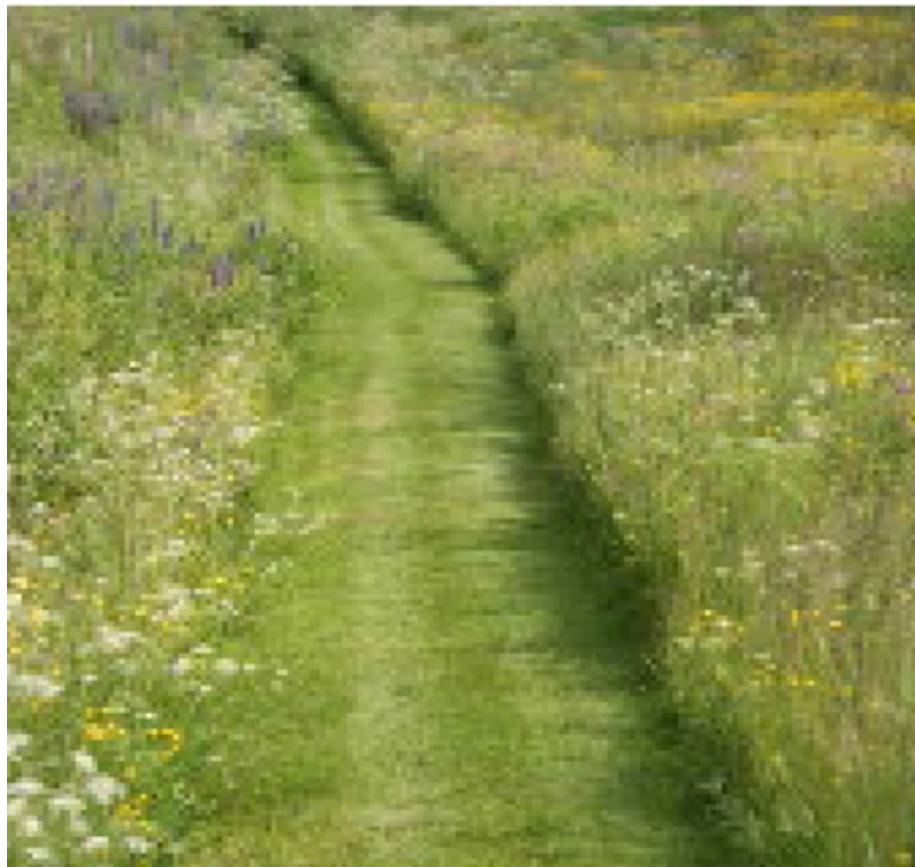
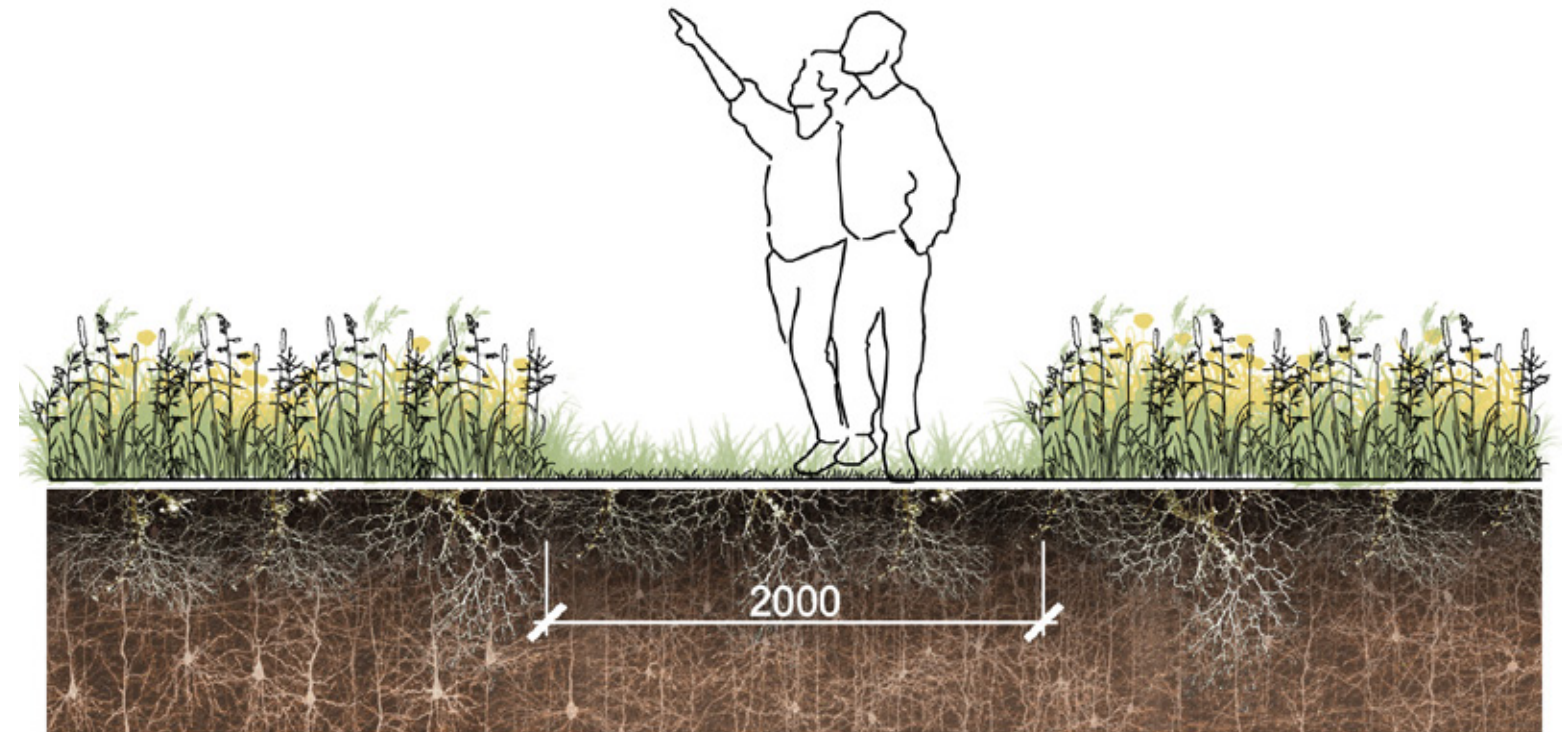
Materials and maintenance

Inis Cealtra

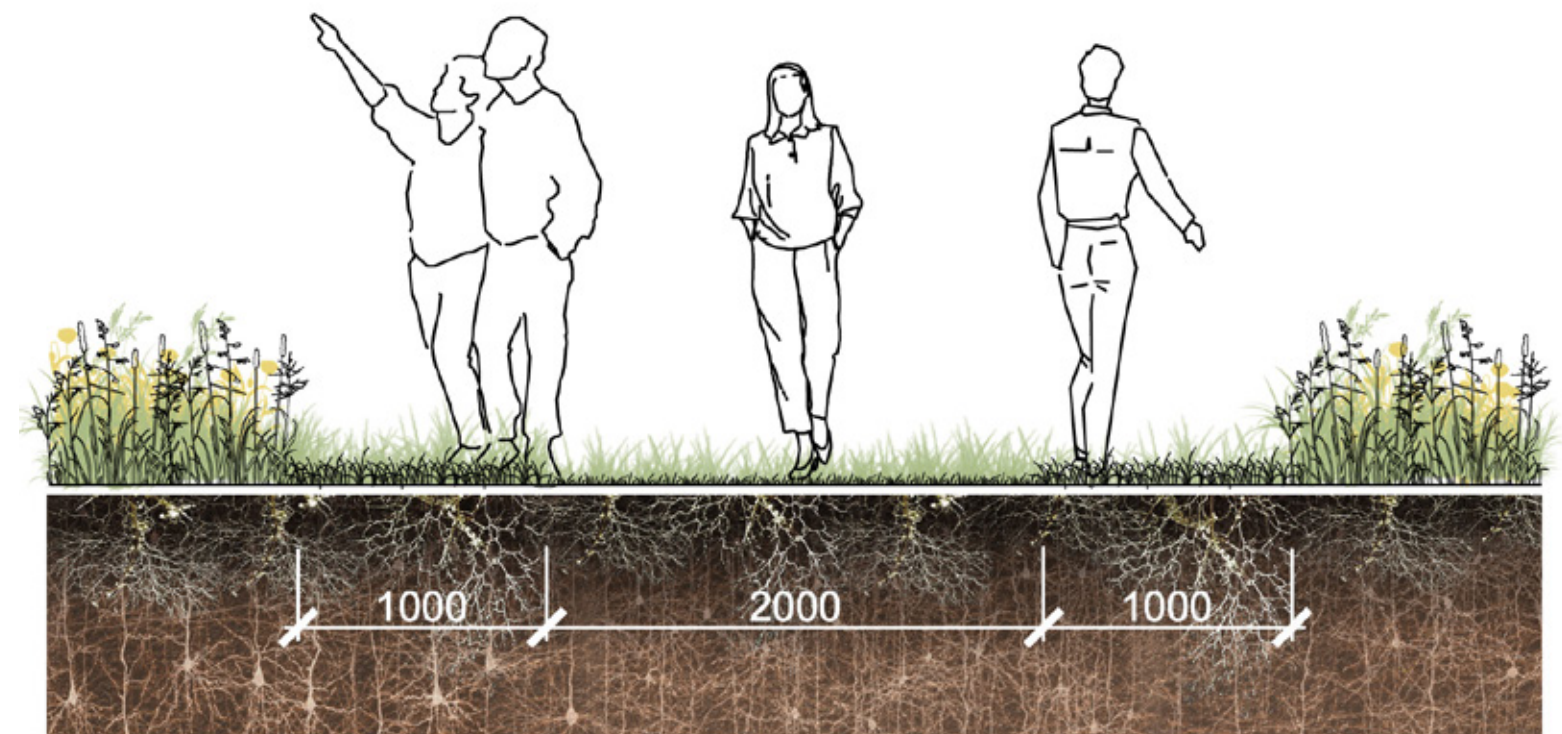
All island paths are proposed as 2m wide grass mown paths following existing ground levels and contours for minimum visual impact and to avoid impact on the archaeology underground.

On paths that are expected to be more intensively used (paths 1, 3, 5, 8, 10, 11, and 12), 1 meter on either side of the path is proposed to be mown in addition to the 2m width in the main season to allow visitors to spread over a wider width of the path. A 6week mowing regime is proposed in the summer for the additional strips.

2m mown paths



2m mown paths with additional 1m mown strip in 6week mowing regime for intensively used paths in summer season



Mown grass paths

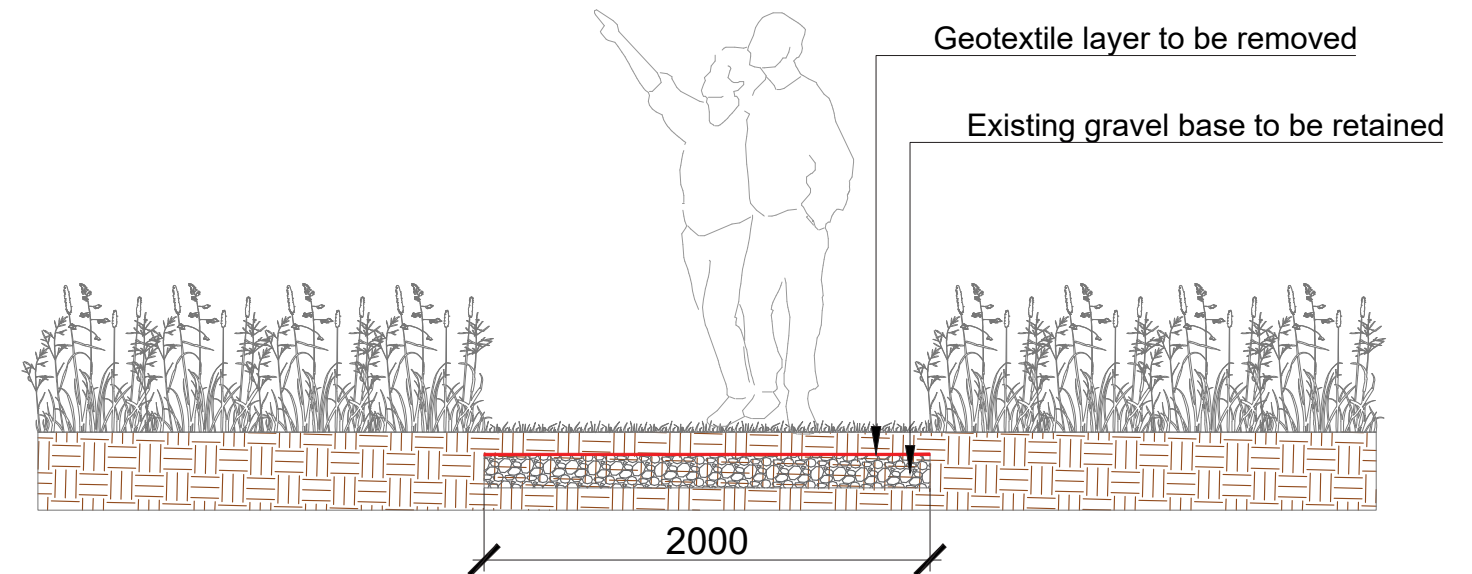
Materials and maintenance

Inis Cealtra

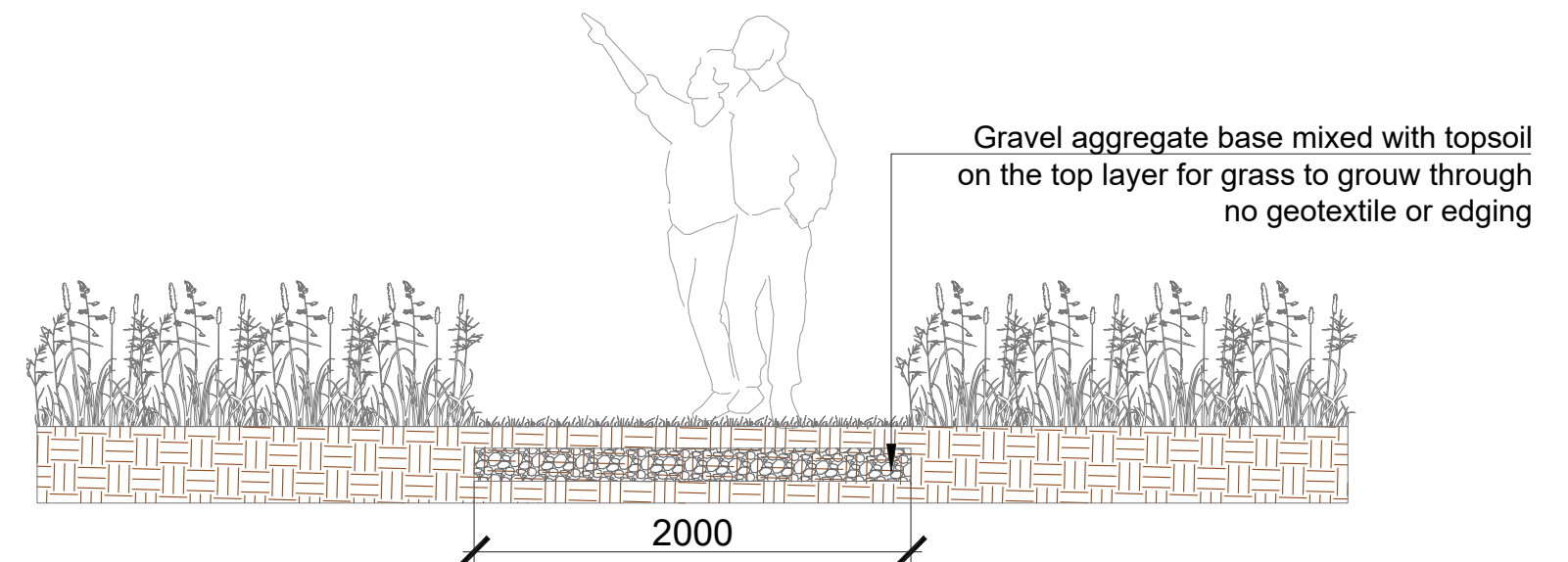
Path 1 is proposed as the existing grass path with stone base aggregate base (to be repaired where necessary).

Similarly, Where heavy footfall is expected (orange dashed circles on the landscape plan), a layer of crushed limestone aggregate is proposed with existing topsoil spread on top to allow for grass to develop. This will allow for sufficient air and moisture for grass to develop even with heavier footfall and only expose the aggregate in extreme situation rather than eroded topsoil. No plastic materials, geotextile or edging is being proposed.

Path 1



Key location where the most intensive use is expected



Path 1 - existing grass path with stone aggregate base. Similar approach to be used at the highest intensity key points as marked on the landscape plan - at the mooring point, at St Caimin's church and round tower (outside the enclosure), at St Bridgid's church (outside the enclosure) and St Mary's church (outside the enclosure). These areas have been excavated in the past and therefore no archaeology is intended to be disturbed. All works on the island will be subject to monitoring.

Mown grass paths

Visitor Centre

Landscape Concept

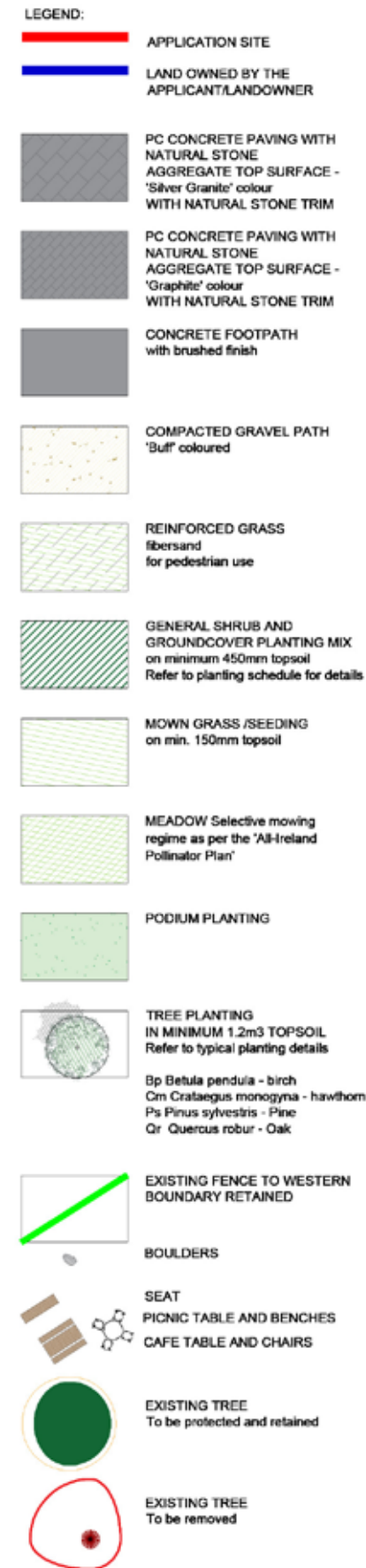
Visitor Centre

A new visitor centre is proposed for Inis Cealtra at the harbour in Mountshannon and in front on the old Rectory building that is to serve as a visitor centre in the meantime.

The building is proposed in a semi-circular shape, facing the Holy Island over the water. A semicircular arrival plaza in front of the building completes the circle in plan and spans over the road, with a shared space in front of the building, creating a welcoming space for the visitors. Two mounded large planted areas are proposed to the plaza to maintain part of the existing trees on the sides, while trees right in front of the centre of building are removed to allow for a generous access as well as open the view towards the island.

The roof terrace of the visitor centre is accessible both from the centre itself as well as from the rectory by a winding gently sloping compacted gravel path. A visual access is proposed between the Rectory building and the new visitor centre with a wide mown reinforced grass strip for pedestrian use and step connecting the rectory formal garden with the gently sloping grass mown terrace and grass steps connecting the grass terrace to the little compacted gravel arrival plaza to the visitor centre roof terrace. This axes is further framed by both existing as well as proposed tree planting.

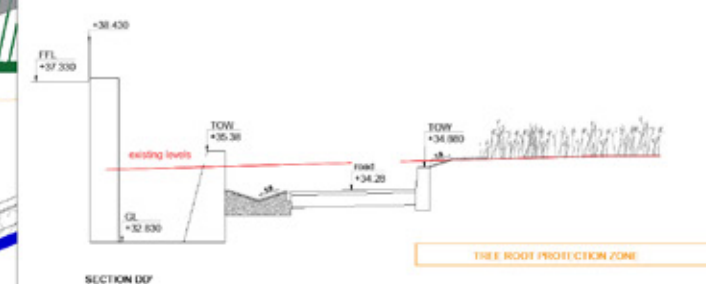
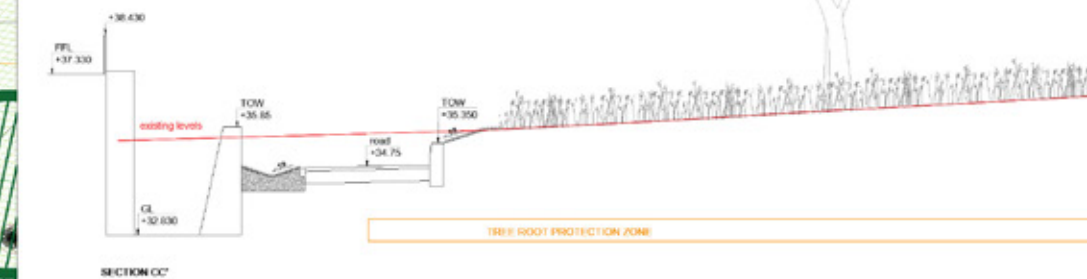
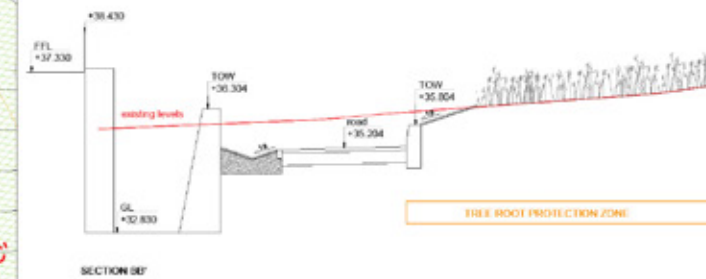
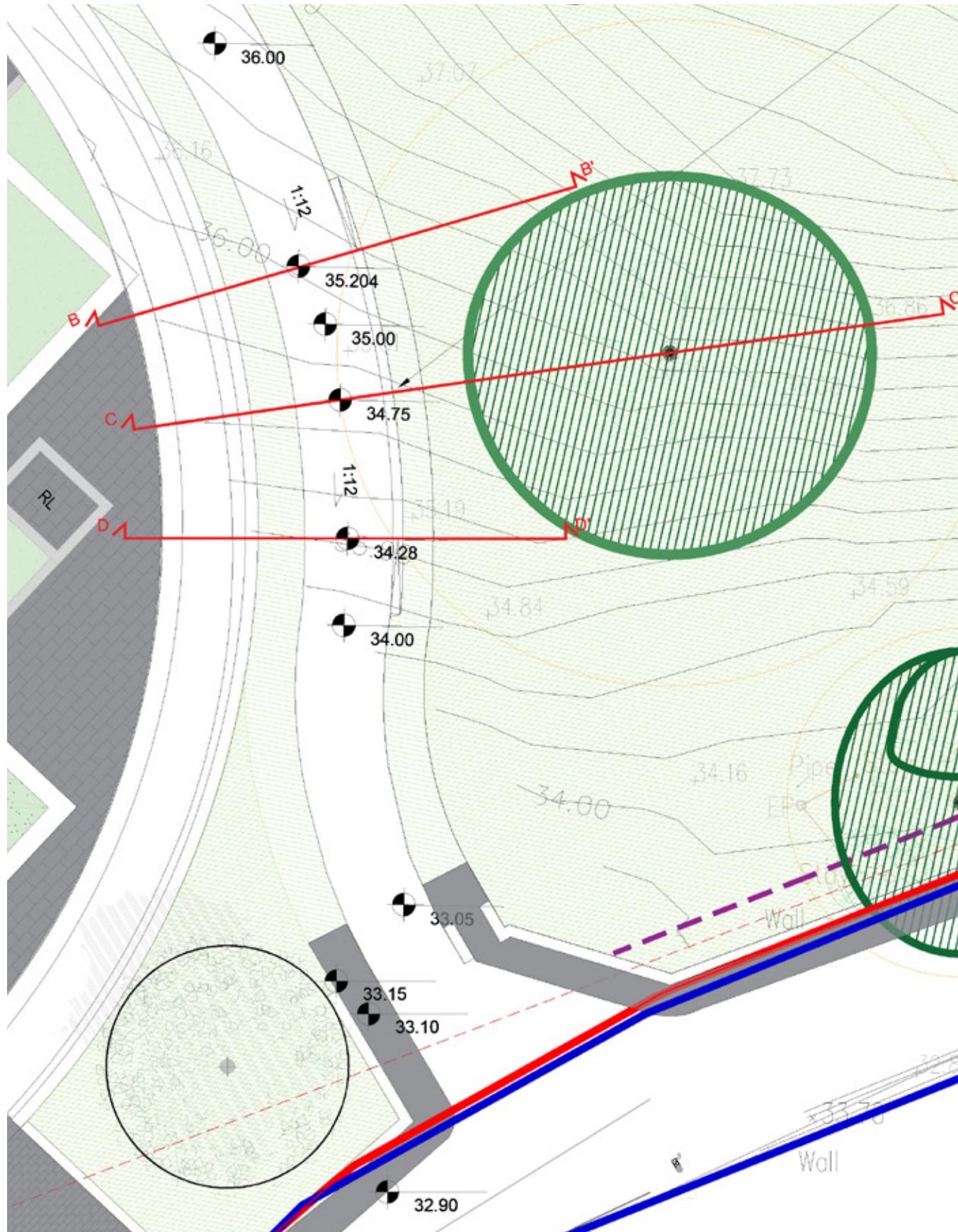
The harbour itself is proposed to be renovated with rearranged car parking spaces and a substantial planted area in the centre.



Tree retention - retaining wall

Visitor Centre

A 600mm high retaining wall is proposed locally to the eastern edge of the road leading up to the Rectory in order to maintain existing levels around the existing oak tree.



Materials

Visitor Centre



PC concrete paving with granite surface finish



Reinforced grass (fibersand) and reinforced grass steps with stone trim



Compacted gravel path for gently sloping path to the rectory



Sheffield type bike parking

Planting

Visitor Centre

Planting and management of the landscape areas shall be undertaken in accordance with pollinator friendly management objectives as outlined in the “All Ireland Pollinator Plan 2021-2025 (Councils: Actions to Help Pollinators)”

The planting scheme prioritises native species, while flowering species and evergreen groundcover and shrub plants are added to extend the flowering season for pollinators, and to provide winter cover for invertebrates, contributing to the biodiversity of the site as well as its seasonal interest.

Native tree planting is proposed to the visitor centre, including:

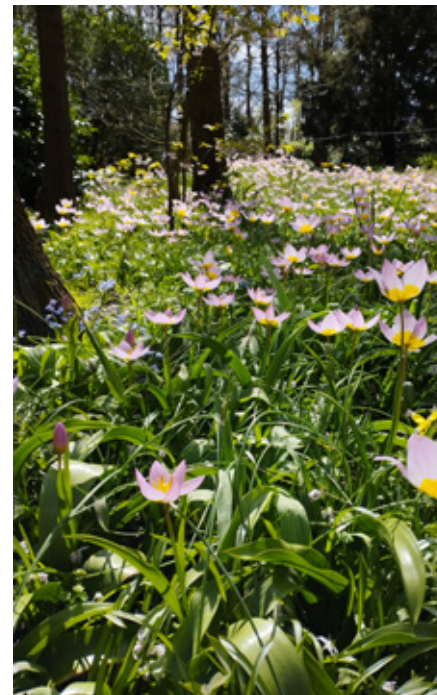
Oak trees (*Quercus robur*)
Pine trees (*Pinus sylvestris*)
Hawthorns (*Crataegus monogyna*)
and birches (*Betula pendula*)

The visitor centre is set in the native wildflower meadow slope of the rectory site, which motive is repeated in the car parking of the harbour.

Groundcover planting with seasonal interests of flowering species, including bulbs, is proposed to the Visitor Centre entrance plaza and includes:

Bluebell (*Hyacinthoides non-scripta*)
Common polypody (*Polypodium vulgare*)
Cranesbill (*Geranium ‘Rozanne’*)
Dwarf sweet box (*Sarcococca humilis*)
Great wood rush (*Luzula sylvatica*)
Hard fern (*Bechnum spicant*)
Hellebore (*Helleborus niger*)
Ivy (*hedera hibernica*)
Japanese anemone (*Anemone ‘Honorine Jobert’*)
Primerose (*Primula veris*)
Snowdrop (*Galanthus nivalis*)
Snowflake (*Leucojum vernalis*)
Tulip clusian (*Tulipa clusiana*)
Tulip woodland (*Tulipa sylvestris*)

A series of pollinator friendly green roof are proposed for the Visitor Centre with extensive planting including Sedum species and drought tolerant herbs.



Native groundcover planting with added spring and summer bulbs



Native wildflower meadow (image is illustrative)

Visitor Parking



Landscape Concept

Visitor Parking

The visitor parking area is proposed on an existing grass field framed with hedgerows, in Mountshannon, accessible from the main road, north of the R352.

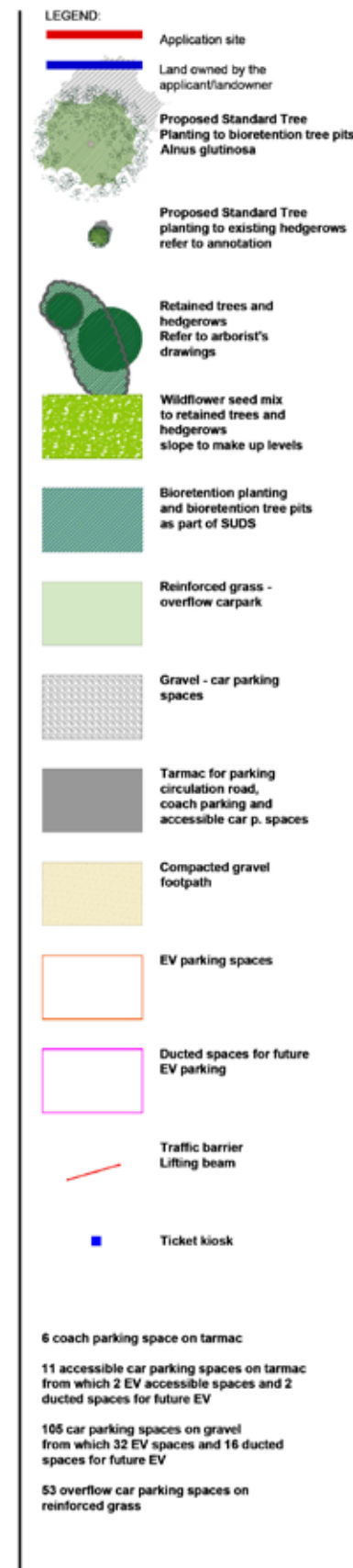
It is proposed to conserve the existing hedgerows, retaining existing levels along the hedgerows and leaving a strip of native meadow along the edges.

The parking itself is proposed as a tarmac surface for the carriageway and bus parking with compacted gravel parking spaces. An overflow car park at the rear of the site is proposed in reinforced grass surfacing for use in high peak periods - normally in the summer months. In total 6 coach parking spaces are proposed, 11 accessible car parking spaces (initially proposed as 4 accessible spaces and 10 regular spaces - on tarmac), 105 car parking spaces on gravel and 53 overflow car parking spaces on reinforced grass.

Cycle parking is also provided.

A pedestrian path runs through the centre of the scheme to the exit on to the street, and an additional footpath is proposed along the eastern hedgerow in the narrow southern end of the parking.

Nature based SUDS are central to the scheme with bioretention tree pits and rain gardens between car parking bays and in the centre of the car parking along the footpath.



Materials

Visitors Car Parking



Reinforced grass overflow car parking area with pockets of wildflower meadow and wildflower meadow edge to existing hedgerows.



Limestone compacted gravel to footpath



Tarmac carriageway and gravel car parking spaces.
Precedent: Lough Boora Visitor Centre



Sheffield type bike parking

Planting and SUDS measures

Visitors Car Parking

Planting and management of the landscape areas shall be undertaken in accordance with pollinator friendly management objectives as outlined in the “All Ireland Pollinator Plan 2021-2025 (Councils: Actions to Help Pollinators)”

The planting scheme prioritises native species, while flowering species and evergreen groundcover and shrub plants are added to extend the flowering season for pollinators, and to provide winter cover for invertebrates, contributing to the biodiversity of the site as well as its seasonal interest.

Besides alder tree planting proposed to bioretention tree pits, additional native tree planting is proposed to the existing retained hedgerows in the form of feathered trees, including Native tree planting is proposed to the visitor centre, including common holly (*Ilex aquifolium*), hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*), willow (*Salix caprea*), rowan (*Sorbus aucuparia*), wild cherry (*Prunus avium*), and oak (*Quercus robur*).

A native wildflower meadow edge is proposed to the edge of the hedgerow with pockets of wildflower meadow in the grassed overflow car park.

Native groundcover planting is proposed to bioretention beds and includes the following native species:

Creeping Jenny (*Lysimachia nummularia*)
 Cuckoo flower (*Cardamine pratensis*)
 Devil's bit scabious (*Succisa pratensis*)
 Flowering rush (*Butomus umbellatus*)
 Greater pond sedge (*Carex riparia*)
 Hemp agrimony (*Eupatorium cannabinum*)
 Large sedge (*Carex pendula*)
 Marsh marigold (*Caltha palustris*)
 Meadowsweet (*Filipendula ulmaria*)
 Oxeye Daisy (*Leucanthemum vulgare*)
 Purple loosestrife (*Lythrum salicaria*)
 Ragged robin (*Silene flos-cuculi*)
 Red campion (*Silene dioica*)
 Reed sweet grass (*Glyceria maxima*)
 Sneezewort (*Achillea ptarmica*)
 Soft rush (*Juncus effusus*)
 Square-stalked St John's wort (*Hypericum tetrapterum*)
 Tufted hair grass (*Deschampsia caespitosa*)
 Water avens (*Geum rivale*)
 Water mint (*Mentha aquatica*)
 Yellow iris (*Iris pseudacorus*)



Pockets of wildflower meadow and wildflower meadow edge to existing hedgerows.

Bioretention planting to car parking. Native grasses, ferns and wildflowers to be selected.



Unit 5, Woodpark
The Rise
Glasnevin
Dublin 9
D09 NA02

www.mitchell.ie

+ 353 1 454 5066