

BALLINAHOWN

2030



*a Vision
for
Ballinahown Village
2020 to 2030
On behalf of
Ballinahown Community Development Co. Ltd.*

Ballinahown Community Development Company Ltd has been supported by Westmeath Local Community Development Committee and the Department of Rural and Community Development under the Rural Development (LEADER) Programme 2014–2020.



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A Vision for Ballinahown: 2030

01 INTRODUCTION

(i) Study Context

Ballinahown Community Development Co. Ltd., (BCD) are the representative local voluntary body tasked with the responsibility of protecting and developing the community facilities of the village of Ballinahown, (*Baile na hAbhann*). This over the years has involved activities across a variety of 'action areas' including promotion, protection and development of community projects, facilities and the environment. The village has prospered as a result, despite the challenge and adjacency of a very busy public road, (the Regional Route N 62), through the centre of the village.

Despite this challenge the village has managed to create and maintain an environment conducive to craft, art and community engagement and this vision document '**Ballinahown 2030**' is intended as a support to these endeavors. Local community actions are critical to the cultural and social well-being of not just that community, but also the nation as a whole, and they are therefore deserving of both active support from exchequer funds and participatory promotion and encouragement from centralized national agencies. This document would be the context in which these supports might be requested and be forthcoming, safe in the knowledge that a cohesion vision of activities, exists within the village.

BCD, currently, are well progressed through a range of projects. These reflect detailed works carried out in the past 12 months which have given rise to a central re-organized carpark and market area; the opportunity for an extended recreation area to the rear of the local St Colmcille's National School has also been recognized and pursued. This document represents an ideal opportunity for a community such as Ballinahown to review its operations, it's strengths and weaknesses, optimize its actions to the benefit of the community, control through design its public spaces and establish thereby a village where '*the whole is greater than the sum of the parts*'.

The village in particular is a wonderful location and destination for the developed art and craft traditions which exist there; the central market area serves locals and passers-by alike, sharing itself with the wider rural community and has become a significant and vibrant social centre for them.

(ii) Study Priorities.

The clients have noted in their briefing document their desire to:-

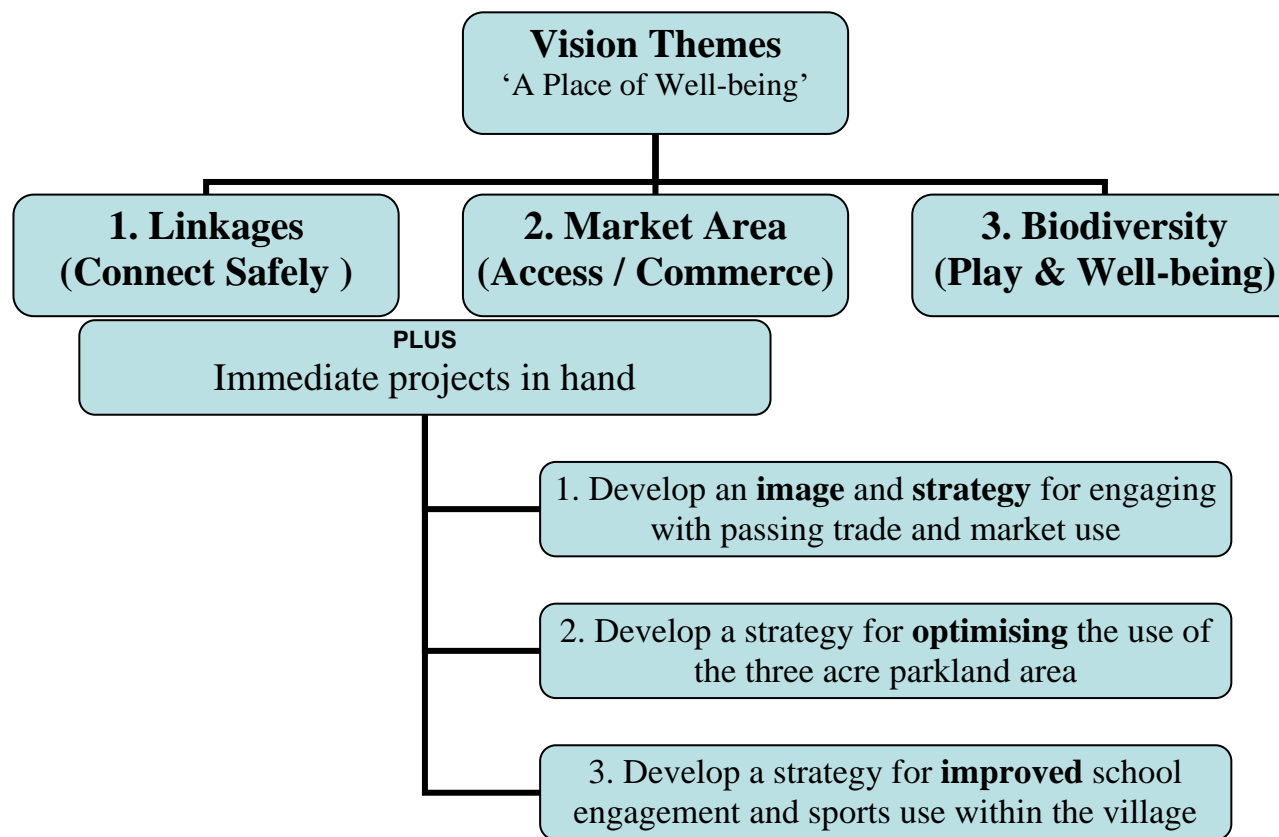
Prepare a detailed strategic plan for Ballinahown village, a 2030 vision - with all elements of design considered, to include the following:-

- 1) To develop a vision for the 3 acre wilderness area behind the playground which is leased to the community by Westmeath Co. Co., to include proposed future uses for this wilderness area taking into account the biodiversity impact of all elements.*
- 2) Develop a plan for how to integrate the river into the wilderness area.*
- 3) Review village layout in the context of best planning practices and integrate this review into how the community can achieve this vision in consultation with relevant bodies.*
- 5) Create a vision template for the community, based on the village design plan highlighting where their strengths lie into the future and how these might integrate with the local village plans in terms of tourism potential and local market needs.*
- 6 Detailed drawings on three key projects brought forward from above.*

This presents a number of challenges for the community both in regard to 'keeping their eye on the ball' while also ensuring that the village reflects in its operation, an optimization of its layout and networks.

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The vision document therefore sets out three main themes of development:-



The themes are easily understood and future plan activities and works could be set and evaluated relative to their attainment. The vision seeks to both reflect the immediate needs of the community and to convey the contingencies and possibilities of the village across a range of timescales and intervention scales, such as: (i) **Immediate short** term works/initiatives, (ii) **Medium** term interventions, (2 to 4 year increments) and (iii) **Long** term strategic interventions over a development period of anything from 4 years, to 10 years, to 2030.

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02 VISION THEMES:

In strategic use terms and for the purposes of analysis, this vision document encompasses, three distinct elements or themes, as noted; together they have the potential to create a village environment supportive of community well-being. First among these is the protection and reinforcement of the linkages which unite the community :-

(1) Linkages

The protection and reinforcement of the linkages, through the village, will allow for ongoing safety and vitality in use, and reinforces the mental image and map of the spaces among their users. The theme of linkage is to ensure that these connections are maintained and strengthened both in regards to physical expression, infrastructural supports and use.

The theme as expressed through the strategy drawings, supports the following interventions:-

- (a) **The Road Crossings** allow for the use of 'structural' or 'visually prominent' crossings which would emphasise the movement of community over the passing traffic; would reinforce the circulation patterns of the village; would add an additional layer of 'art' within the village; and would allow safer use for both young and older members of the community. It is proposed to engage with the National Roads Authority (NRA) through the Local Statutory Authority (WCC) to investigate and test different road finishes acceptable for use on the regional route going through the village.
- (b) The **School/Carpark Route** has been identified for the purposes of this vision as '**Slí na hAbhainn**', linking together conceptually the key 'nature' of this path through the village, and the old Irish name for the village, 'Baile na hAbhainn'. The route is central and key to the movement patterns of the village from church to carpark, to Community Centre, to school, to sports areas, to playground, to ecological parkland. The route currently lacks good signage, public lighting, landscape finishes, (to render it user friendly), seating and tables, and a hierarchy of width and design reflective of the many uses existing and potential along its length. Among these would be the potential for shared allotments for community use and educational benefits. The ability of these spaces to work in unison with the community centre would also need exportation and a design statement.
- (c) The **Signage** for the village has been notable heretofore, for being design and craft based. It is proposed within this vision statement that the signage through the village be templated from a consistent design theme and the chosen theme is 'cor-ten' steel, a visually robust finish which would complement the scale and texture of the village setting. The steel finish is self-finished and requires no maintenance, but does need careful design to control run off from the steel surfaces. Three main signs are required at the entrances into the village and also an array of internal signage within the village is required for direction and naming. The Market Area in particular could host two to three main signs particularly within the tight wedge of landscaping facing toward the Birr/Offaly border. It is noted that this material cor-ten steel has been used throughout the 'Atlantic Way' and so may also offer other benefits through this tourism association.



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(2) Market Area, (Access & Commerce)

One of the immediate needs of the BCD has been to develop the layout of the established central parking area to render it more amenable to Market and Community use. The area is currently in good condition but is heavily used by cars, heavy trucks, (some regrettably for overnight parking), and local large agricultural vehicles. As a result it lacks a beneficial structure or layout, and a coherent framework to optimise the variety of additional uses envisaged. A series of meetings, (four in total), with the community, gave rise to the following interventions, which are proposed:-



➤ (a) The **Carpark Area**, is to be redesigned into a 'Market Space' allowing for formal parking but with additional integrated raised pathways and sculptures to create an environment suited for casual trading on a regular basis, and particularly during the tourism season. The use of a 'bull sculpture' echoes the history of the early settlement being on a significant trading route through which herds of cattle would have been brought on a regular basis. The sculpture echoes the existing sculpture of the ornamental pond which has been re-captured back into the new parking layout and integrated into the market-use. Additionally disabled parking has been set out for use by the community and adjacent hall.

➤ (b) The **Community Hall** is in need of a variety of works to protect it's fabric and ensure it's ongoing use. In the short term the hall would benefit from internal upgrades to toilets, kitchen and studio spaces. Disabled access to the front could be upgraded to integrate with the new disabled parking spaces within the market area/carpark. Significant expenditure in the medium and long term could look at accommodating additional studio facilities, a further integration of the hall facilities out into the rear external spaces and the potential (modern) extension of the hall space itself to the side to both broaden its potential use and to provide an inviting physical engagement with the external Market Space.



➤ (c) A **Totem**, for the village, within the market space, has been identified as a potential feature to 'ground' and 'found' the centre of the village, symbolically and physically. In support of the whole concept of linkages and pathways, vertical features of visual dominance help to compliment the 'map' of the village. The purpose of such a feature, not unlike the church spire, is to dialogue with the larger community, the surrounding hinterland and the passing trade of the N62. The location proposed for such a feature is the current seating area adjacent to the bus stop. In design terms it is proposed that the totem could encompass both 'bog oak' as a reflection of the surrounding bogs, (and the culture therein), and the 'cor-ten' steel which the signage through the village would be templated from. To balance the totem physically and design wise, it is proposed to frame a larger horizontal sign to the front of the wedge-shaped landscaped space adjacent to the N62, which would also capture traffic approaching from the south of the village and announce the open nature of the Market Space.



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(3) *Biodiversity, (Play & Well-being).*

The village has the benefit of access to three acres of public pasture lands, located immediately adjacent to the sports and play areas within the village, and close also to parking facilities and the village centre. The opportunities that this presents for the community are immense in regards to leisure, exercise and well-being. Our design perception of such parklands today is significantly different to the older Victorian parks of our towns and cities, or the manicured landscapes of office parks. Biodiversity is now recognised as a significant and important contributor to well-being for both us and the environment as a whole. It is potentially also a significant tourism offering and a key element in providing for the well-being of the village as a sustainable community. It would also serve as an educational support to the National School. The vision for the pasture land is intended to be deliberately diverse. The vision of Biodiversity is as expressed through the strategy drawings and supports the following interventions:-



➤ (a) The **Apiary** area is proposed to the rear of the parkland; bee keeping and the planting of extensive wild flower pollinating species would create an area of great interest, sustainability and diversity. Consideration was given to the provision of some 'allotments' also, however the lack of vehicular access is regarded as an impediment to these activities. (These are now proposed along the Slí na hAbhainn). Like all of the spaces within the parkland, this area has significant educational potential both for adults and children alike, promoting in particular, an understanding and tolerance for bee keeping as a pastime beneficial to the environment.

➤ (b) The **Aquaculture** area within the centre of the parkland has been identified as an area capable of creating a significant connection between the village community and the local stream which founds its name. The excavation of a managed and active pond would allow for the creation of an entire area devoted to aquaculture and the flowers and fauna that support same. It is sufficiently far from the local road to support some wild life and the pond could also act in part as an attenuation area for some of the adjoining hard standing. It is envisaged that the excavated materials would be used to create raised feature lawn areas, set within wild meadows, which would accommodate sculptures, picnics and recreational 'classes', derived from the environment created. Safety would obviously be paramount, and the customization of such a water feature has the added advantage of it being capable of being designed, to be extremely family friendly.



➤ (c) The **Ecological Space** proposed, adjacent to the playground, is to be developed with wild flowers, fruit trees, bushes and scrubs. This area would be designed to include also the existing stone faced mound around which would be created a stage area, with a planted back drop and opposite which, would be created a gentle graded surface 'in the round' to allow casual theatre events, story-telling for the community and the school. The fruit trees would provide sun screening and the orientation of the space would lend itself to summer evening use. In the longer term the space would be augmented by canopies and tiered seating to create a more formal educational space, with public lighting, to also allow winter use, such as at festival times like Halloween or Christmas.

Overall, these three extremely diverse bio-zones located within this existing parkland setting, being adjacent to the playground, to the school, to the sports area and served by existing walking trails, with future site development achievable in a phased manner, creates undoubtably a space whose 'whole is most certainly greater than the sum of it's parts'.

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(4) Conclusions.

(i) Study Outcomes.

BCD have noted in their briefing document, a wish to create an 'achievable' vision for the village, capable of being implemented over the next ten years.

The proposals enclosed reflect a variety of different scales of intervention from small, modest proposals (fruit trees), capable of being done over a weekend, without significant encumbrances, to mid-sized proposals (totem and signage) which would require both design preparation, buy-in from the community as a whole, sourcing of tenders, funding, and legislative permissions and subsequent implementation. Beyond this scale again would be the larger construction projects such as alterations to the Community Hall or construction of the enlarged sports facilities, all of which would demand a very structured and coordinated approach. All works require an overview of implementation:-



(ii) Implementational Steps.

All interventions ought to contribute to a 'whole greater than the sum of it's parts'. All Works therefore within the village ought to be gauged and calibrated according to their contribution to progressing the strategy and vision of the village as a whole. It is also important to keep the dynamism and renewal of the village 'live' in the minds of the community by ensuring that at all times projects are in hand and are being brought to realization. This in itself keeps the community together. The optimum sequence for development would be a decision for the community, however the following scenario would not be without merit :-

	Ballinahown: Maintaining the Dynamic :-									
	YR 1	YR 2	YR 3	YR 4	YR 5	YR 6	YR 7	YR 8	YR 9	YR 10
1.Linkages	Slí Abhainn	Village Signage & Linkages across roadways				Parking to Sports area				
2. Market Area		Develop additional covered areas		Develop Totem Minor upgrades to Community Hall			Add Market Signage	Extend Community Hall		
3.Biodiversity	Wild Meadow	Fruit Trees	Pond Feature		Apiary		Public lighting		Theatre area	

- (a) **Short Term:** Completion of the Market Area; Improve Signage; Create linkages across Roadways; Plant meadows and trees.
- (b) **Medium Term:** Landscaping to 'Slí na hAbhainn'; Development of Water Feature within Biodiversity Area.
- (c) **Long Term ('Blue Sky'):** Re-imagining of the Community Hall; Additional structures to the Market Place and Ecological Areas.

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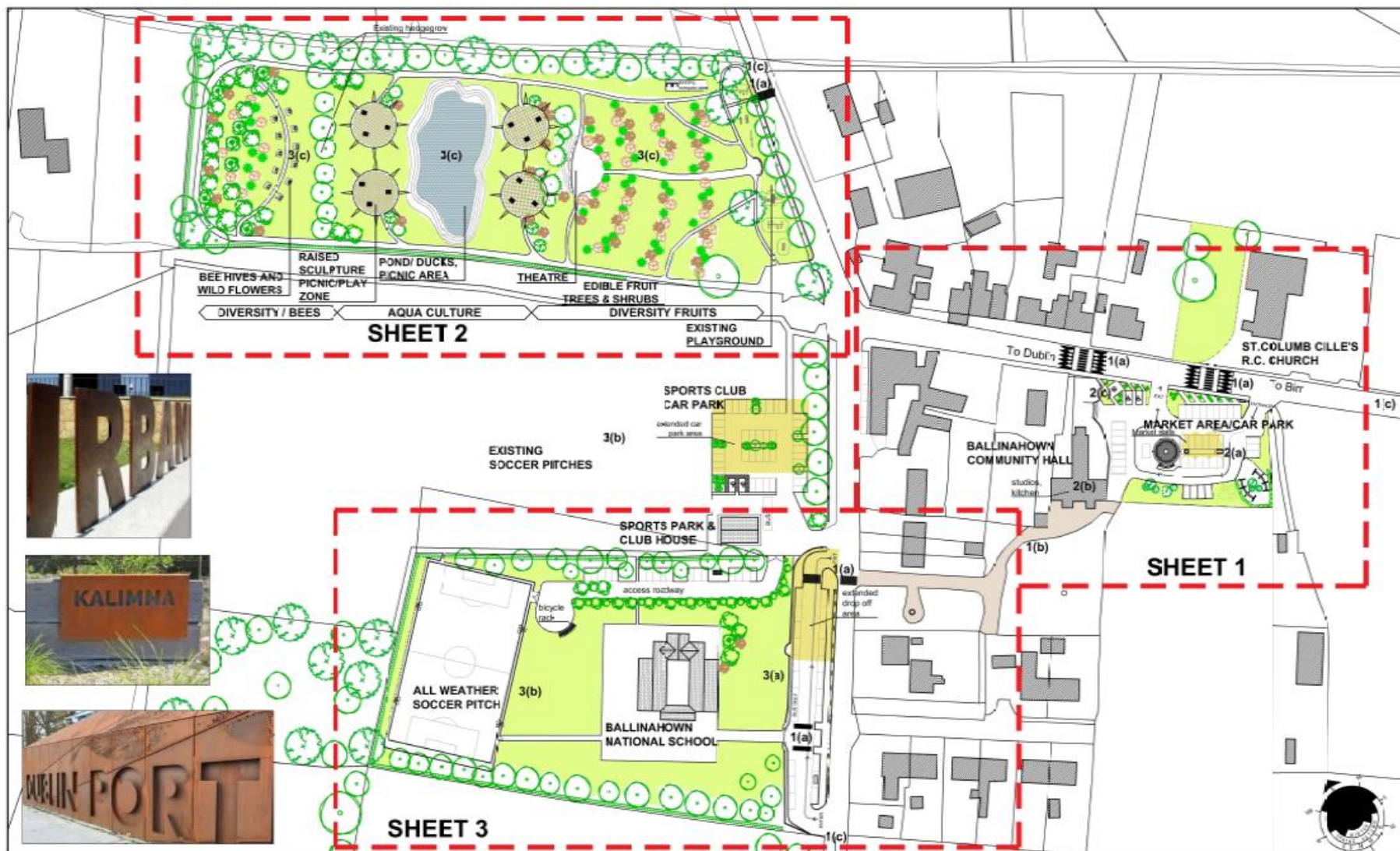
Vision Drawings.

Mood Board.

Preliminary Design Drawings.



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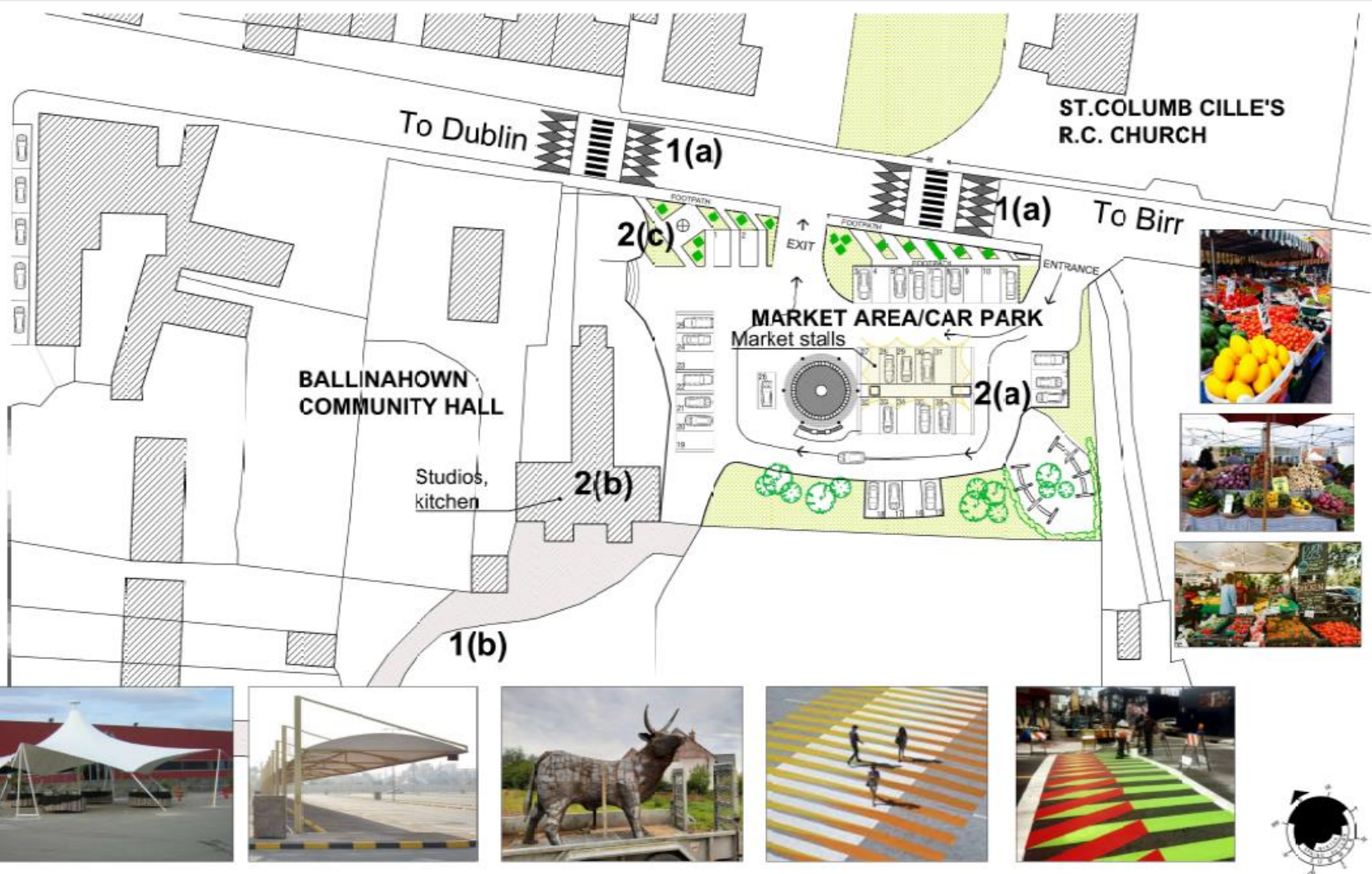
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**Client: Ballinahown Community Development Co.Ltd
July 2019**





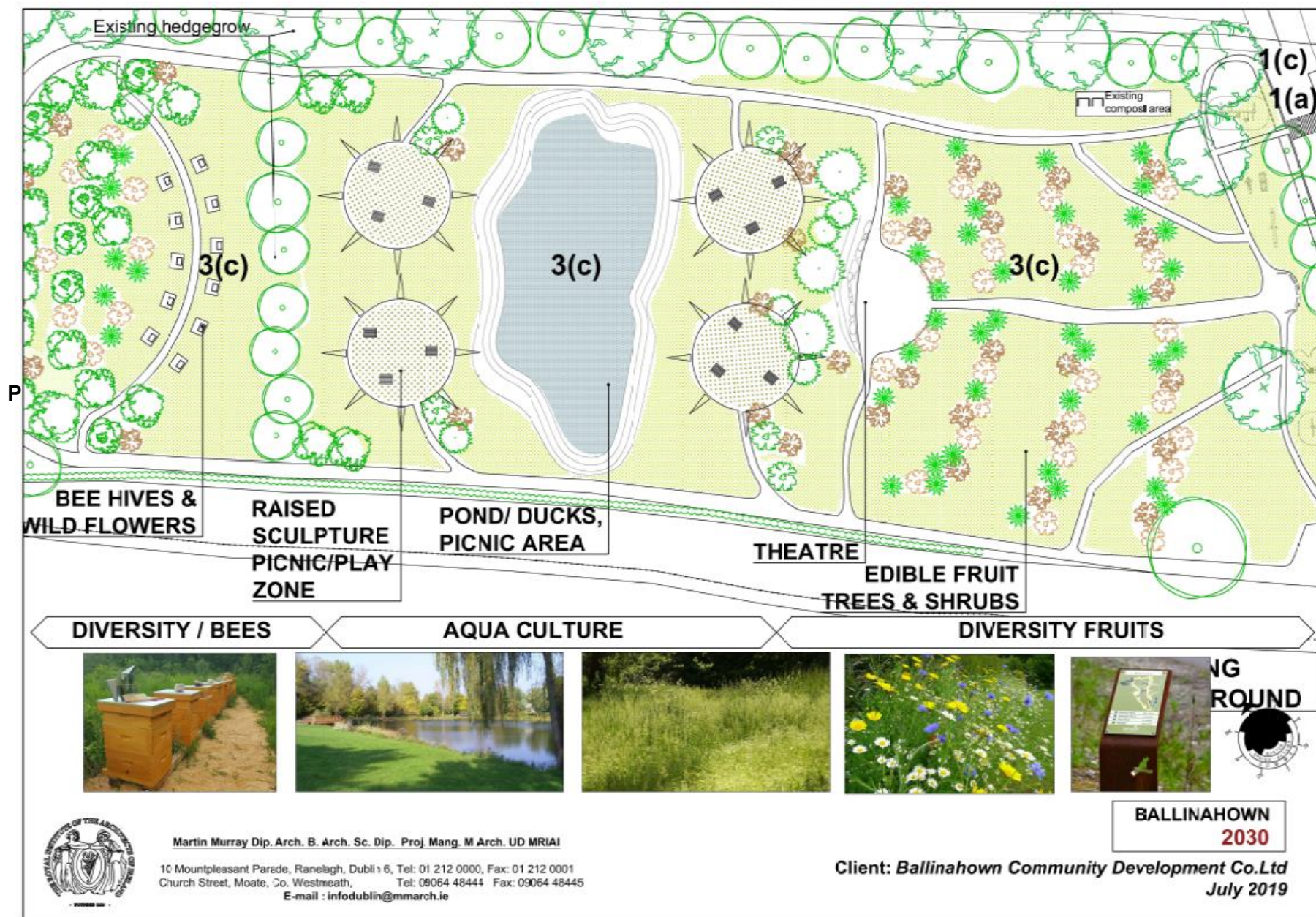
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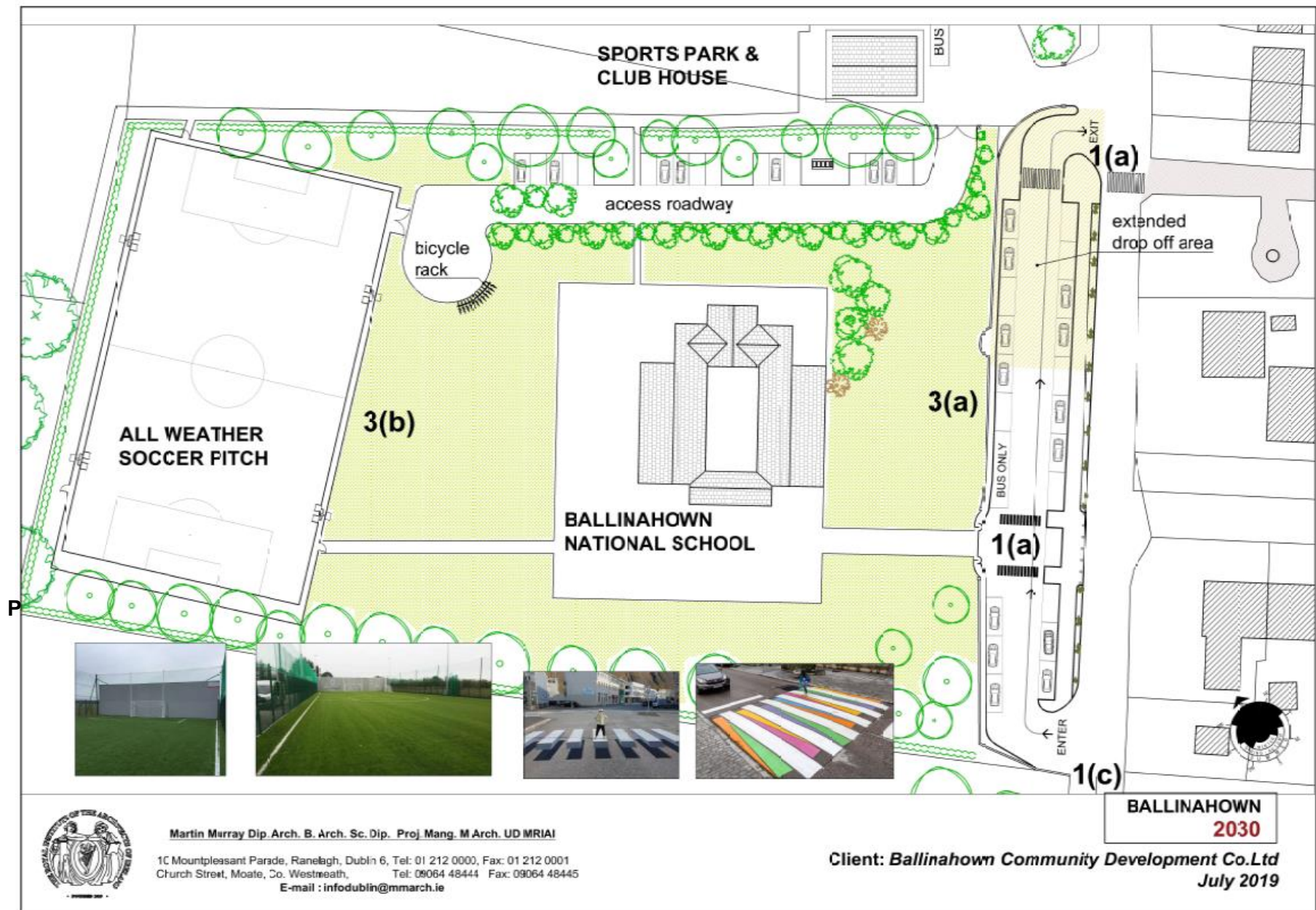
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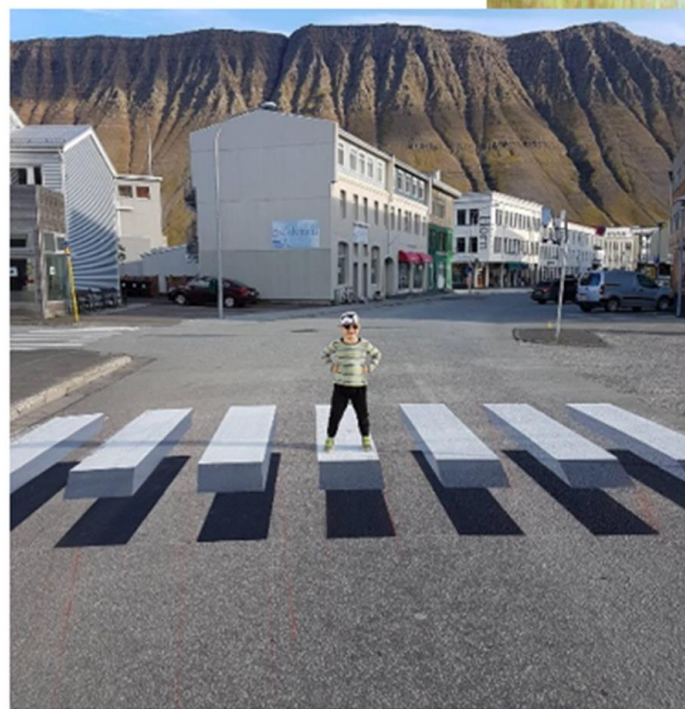
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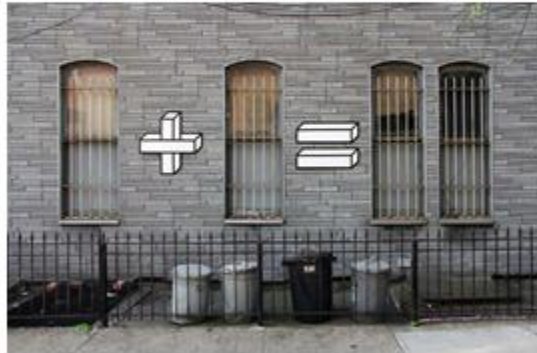






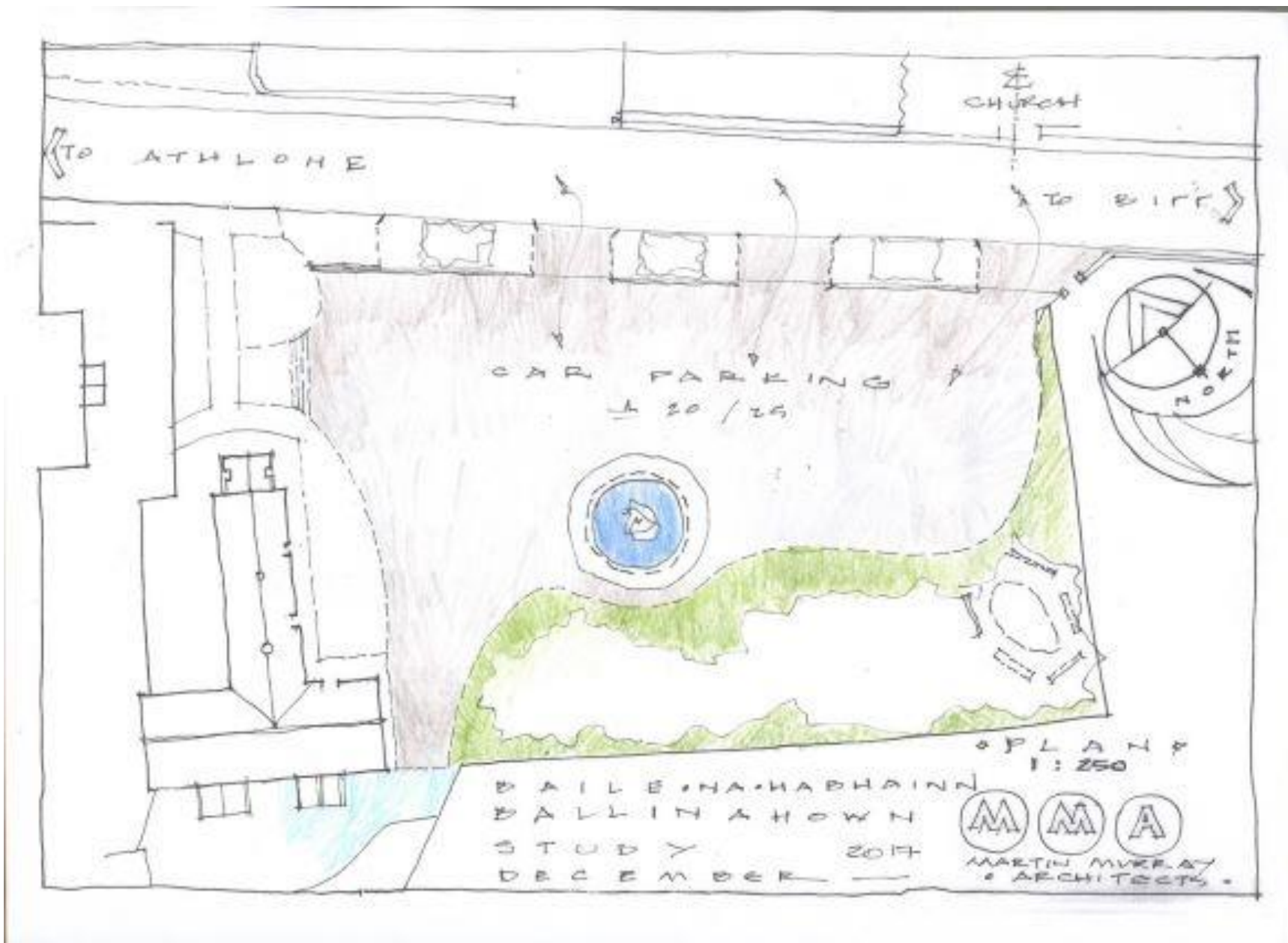


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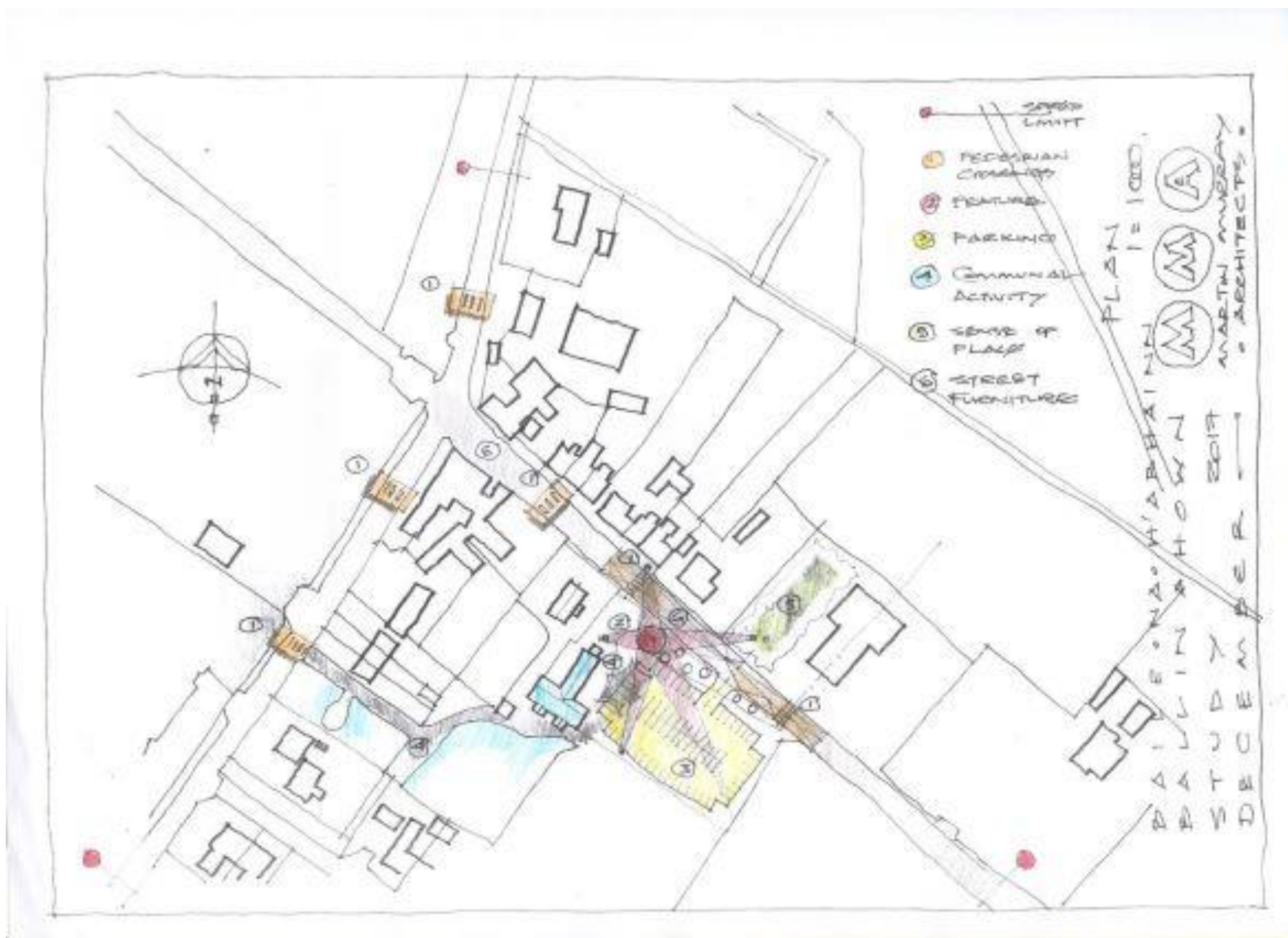


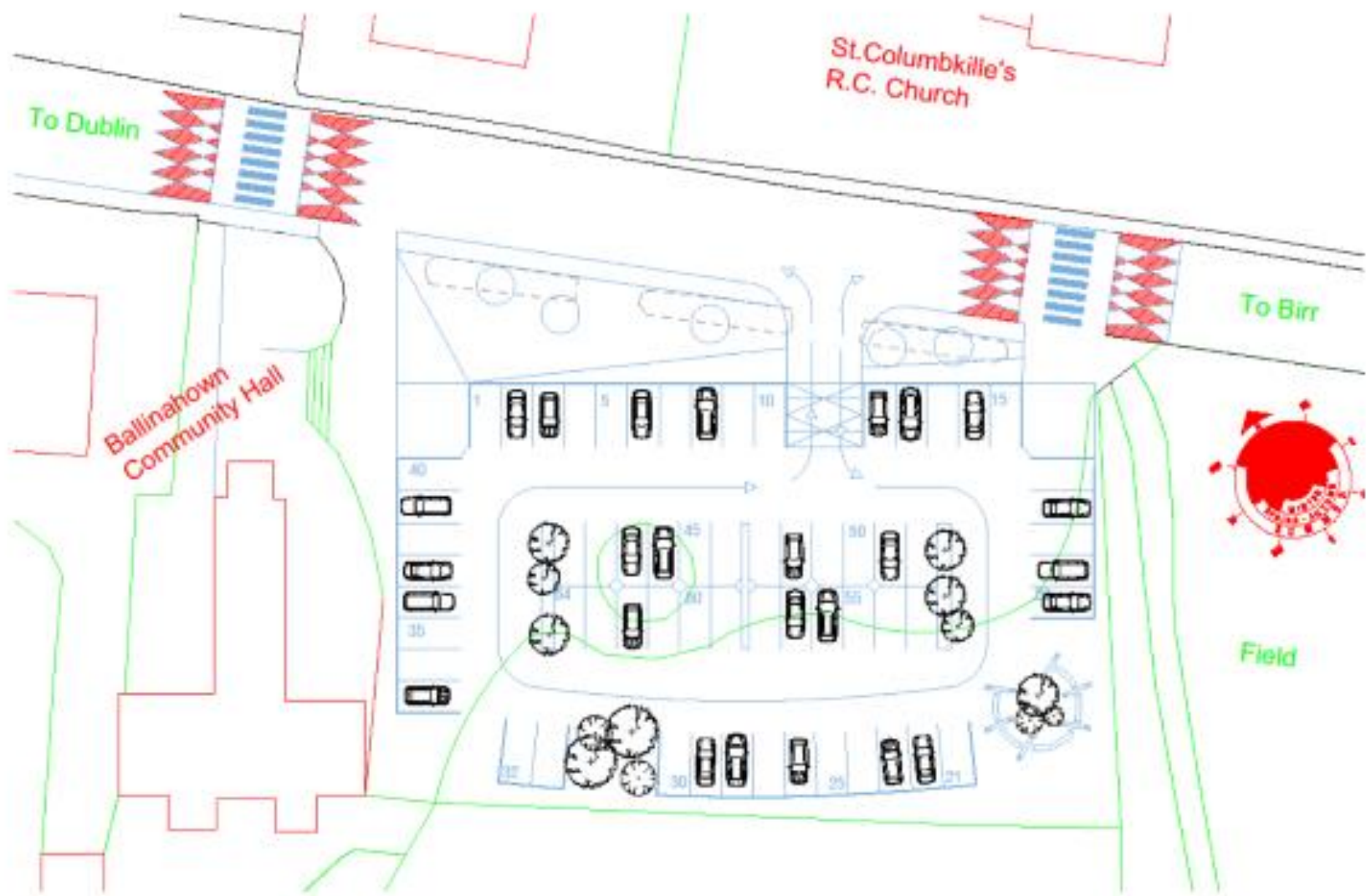




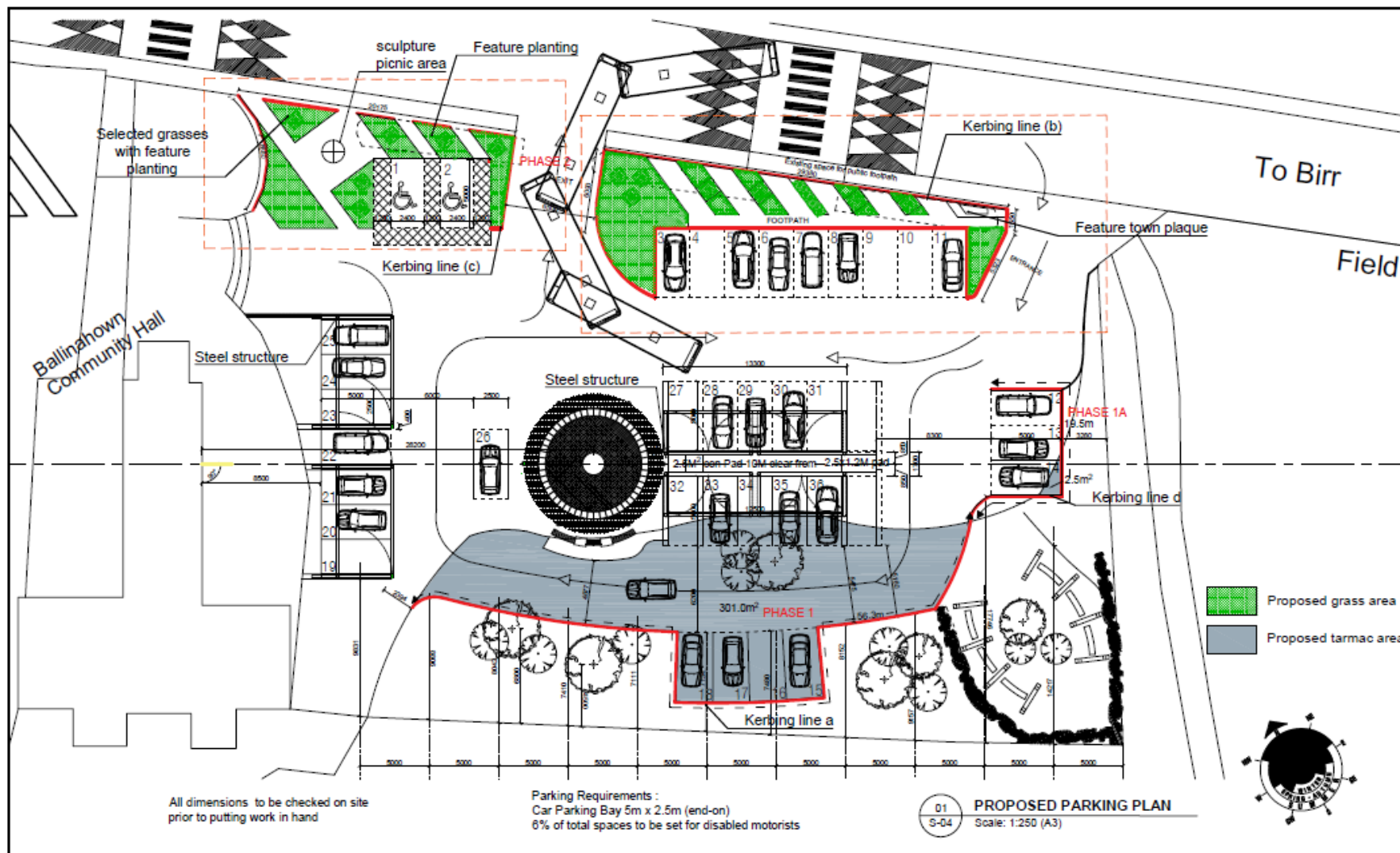





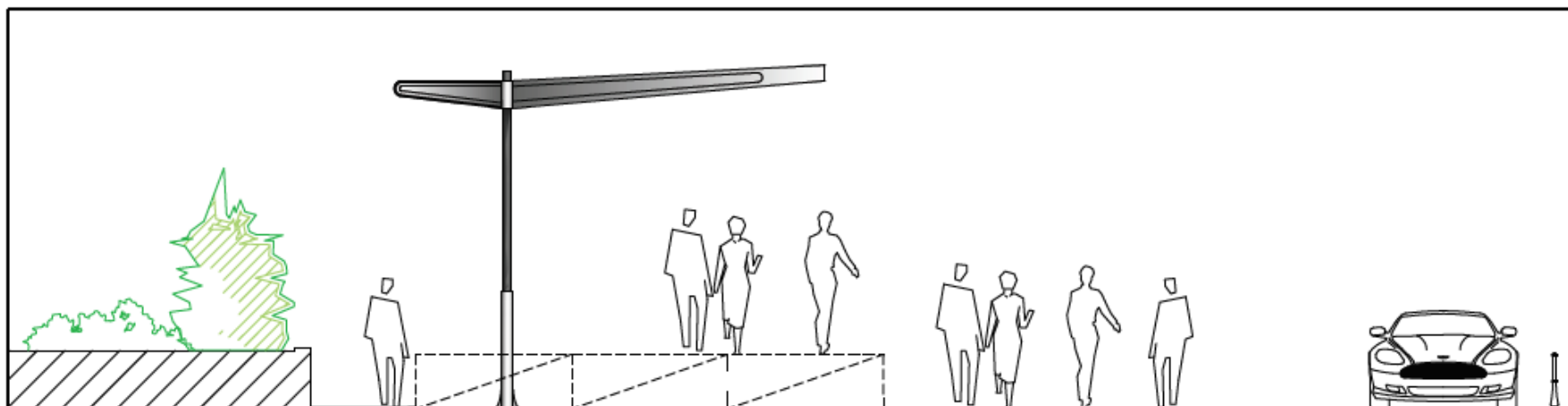




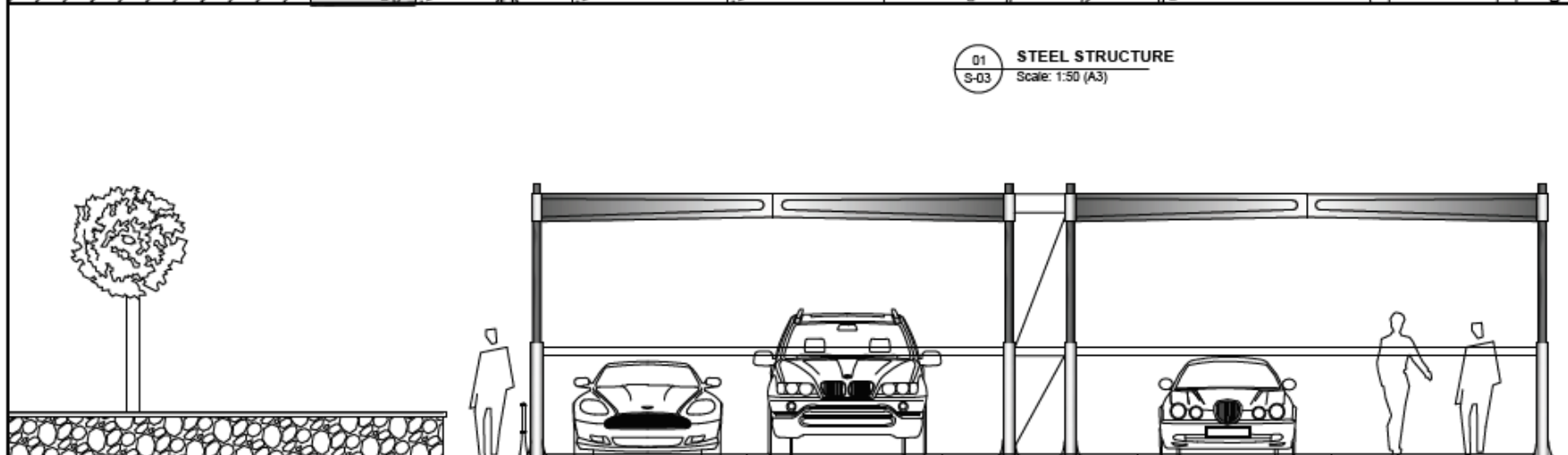
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01 STEEL STRUCTURE
S-03 Scale: 1:50 (A3)



02 STEEL STRUCTURE
S-03 Scale: 1:50 (A3)

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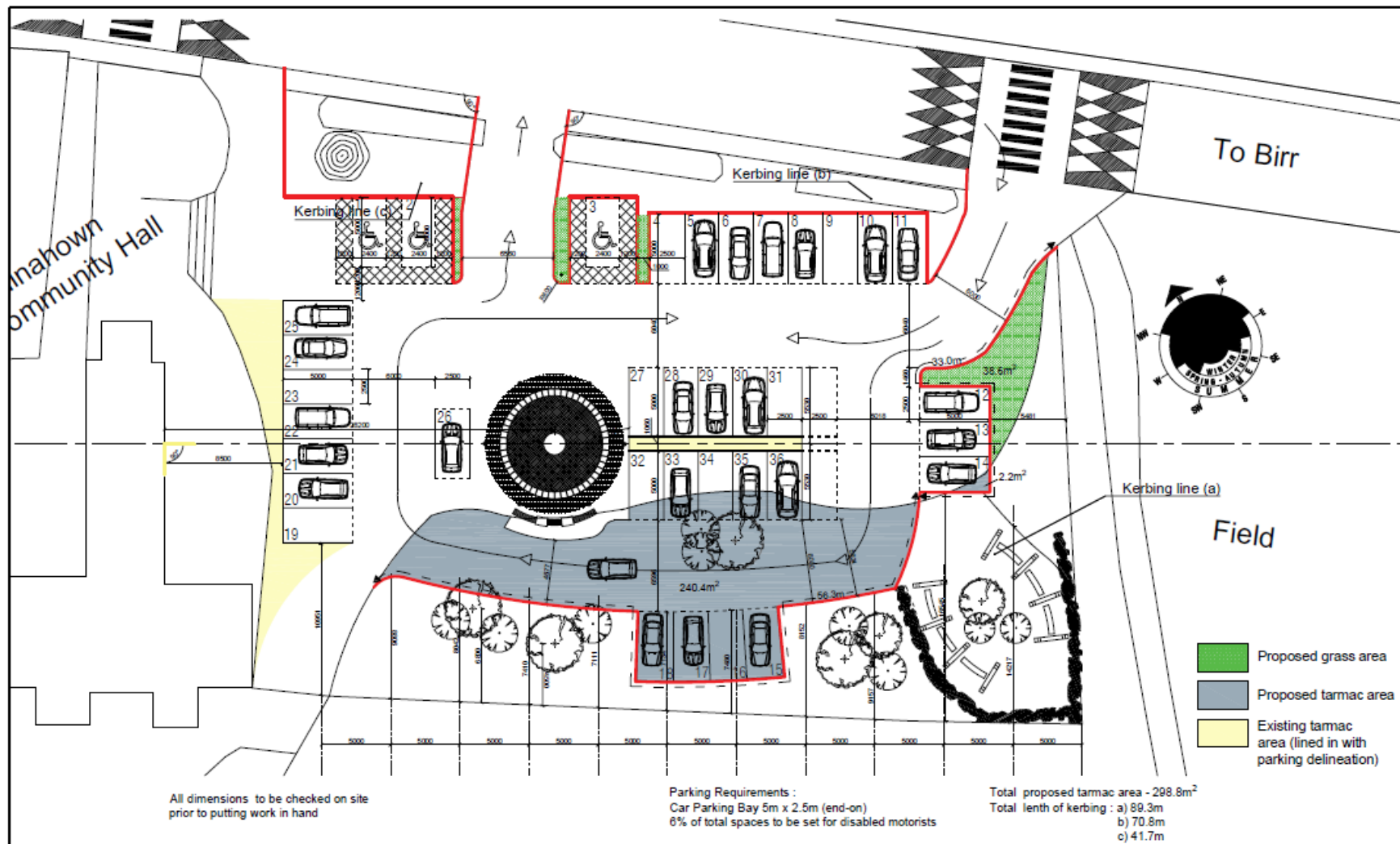



Job Title:
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