



Radcliffe House Hitchin Priory

Metric + Maker

**Landscape Design
Statement**

April 2026

HTA Design



Client	Metric + Maker
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Site context

1.1 Site Context

Overview

Hitchin Priory Estate

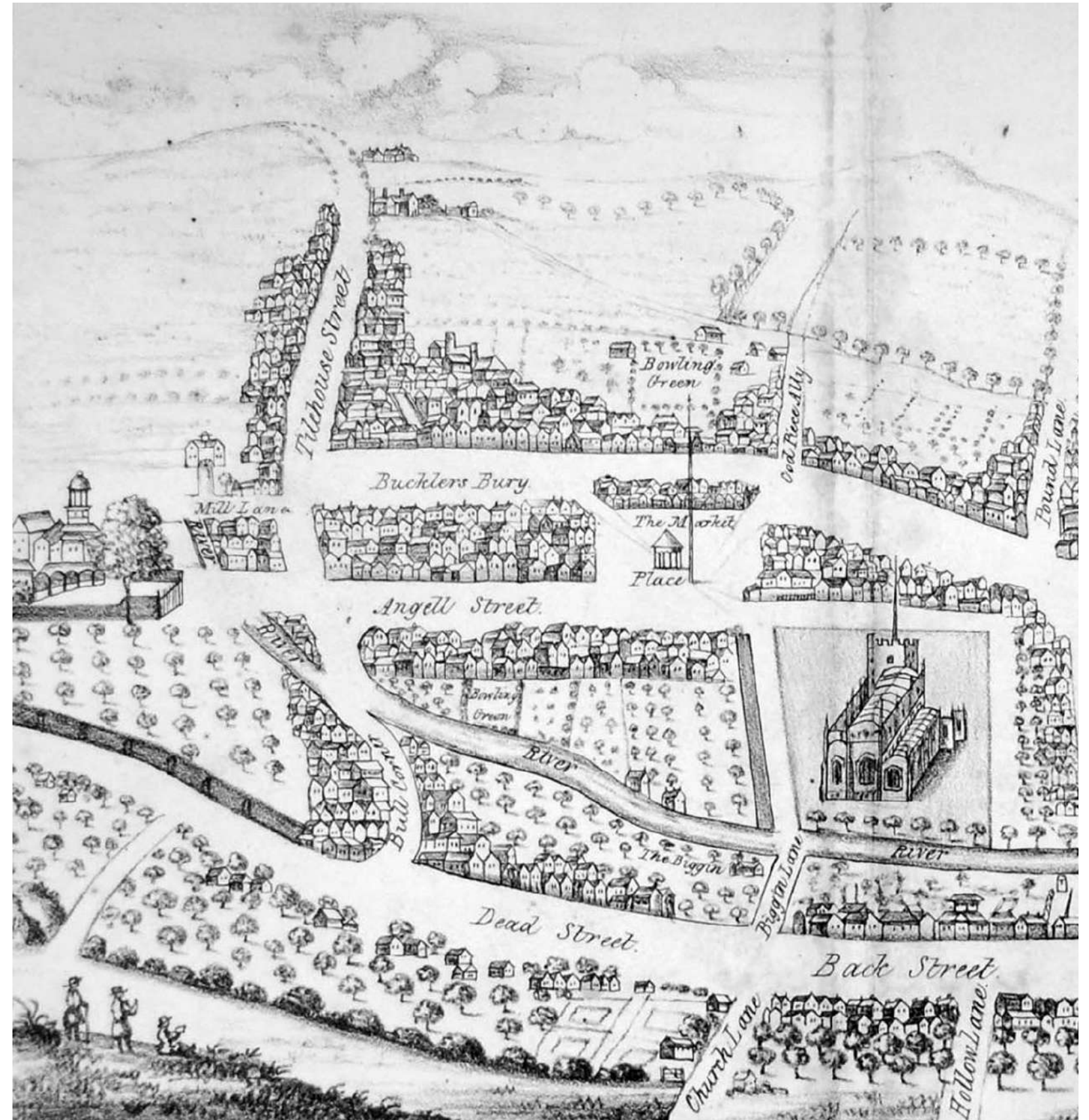
Hitchin Priory is a historic estate with roots dating back to the medieval period. Originally founded around 1317 as a Carmelite friary, with grounds extending over the area known today as Priory Park, the friary was disbanded following the Dissolution of the Monasteries in the 1530s and the estate granted to Sir Richard Radcliffe for use as a private residence.

Over the centuries, the building evolved architecturally, blending its medieval origins with later Tudor and Victorian additions. Its structure reflects changing tastes and uses, shifting from a monastic complex to a country house. In the 20th century, the Priory was repurposed for institutional and hospitality uses, including functioning as a school and later as a hotel and event venue.

Today, Hitchin Priory stands as a symbol of England's layered history, illustrating the transition from religious to secular land ownership. Its preserved architecture and landscaped grounds provide insight into centuries of social, political, and cultural change, making it an important heritage site in Hertfordshire.



OS Map of Hitchin, 1851 showing the historical layout and relationship between Hitchin Priory [1], the Kitchen Gardens [2], and the wider Priory Park grounds [3]



Plan of Hitchin c. 1700, showing St Mary's Church (centre right) and Hitchin Priory (far left) Hertfordshire, by Sir Henry Chauncy

1.2 Landscape Characters

Historic Landscape References



Overall Landscape Characters Diagram

Landscape Characters

- Picturesque Treed Gateway:
Based on the original tree belt between Hitchin Priory and the Kitchen Garden area - Refer to the Historic Landscape References Diagram.
- Garden Forecourt:
Based on the original open landscape character directly adjacent the Kitchen Garden - Refer to the Historic Landscape References Diagram.
- Open Riverfront:
Based on the original open landscape character of the River Hiz waterfront - Refer to the Historic Landscape References Diagram.
- Italian Terraces - Based on the lost Italian Garden designed by Walter Sarel - Refer to the Historic Landscape References Diagram.
- Woodland Fringe - Based on the existing modern landscape character.



Historic Landscape References Diagram

1.3 Existing Condition

Opportunities and Constraints

Radcliffe House

Built in 1987 by National Mutual Life as intended offices, Radcliffe House is one of three blocks situated within part of the original Kitchen Garden footprint. At the time of construction, some original trees were retained and new planting introduced to create an attractive park-like garden character between the offices and the river.

Existing Condition

While the park-like character around Radcliffe House remains and can still be interpreted, the overall landscape setting is lacking in habitat value and colour / seasonal interest. The current experience of the landscape is utilitarian and relatively sterile.

Opportunities

- Enhance garden character setting of the main building and ancillary buildings through new ornamental planting to complement existing features.
- Existing mature trees and climbing planting anchors new planting improvements with an established landscape structure.
- Diversify existing habitats to improve biodiversity and increase ecosystem resilience.
- Improve experience of the River Hiz and waterfront areas.

Constraints

- Built structures.
- Existing mature trees and root protection areas.
- Ecology.
- Existing topography.
- Location relative to watercourse.
- Heritage and Conservation Area setting.

Existing Condition



Approach to Radcliffe House from Garden Bridge, Hitchin Priory



Existing mature trees



Existing car park to rear of Radcliffe House



View towards the River Hiz and Hitchin Priory beyond



2

Landscape Design Proposals

2.1 Design Proposal

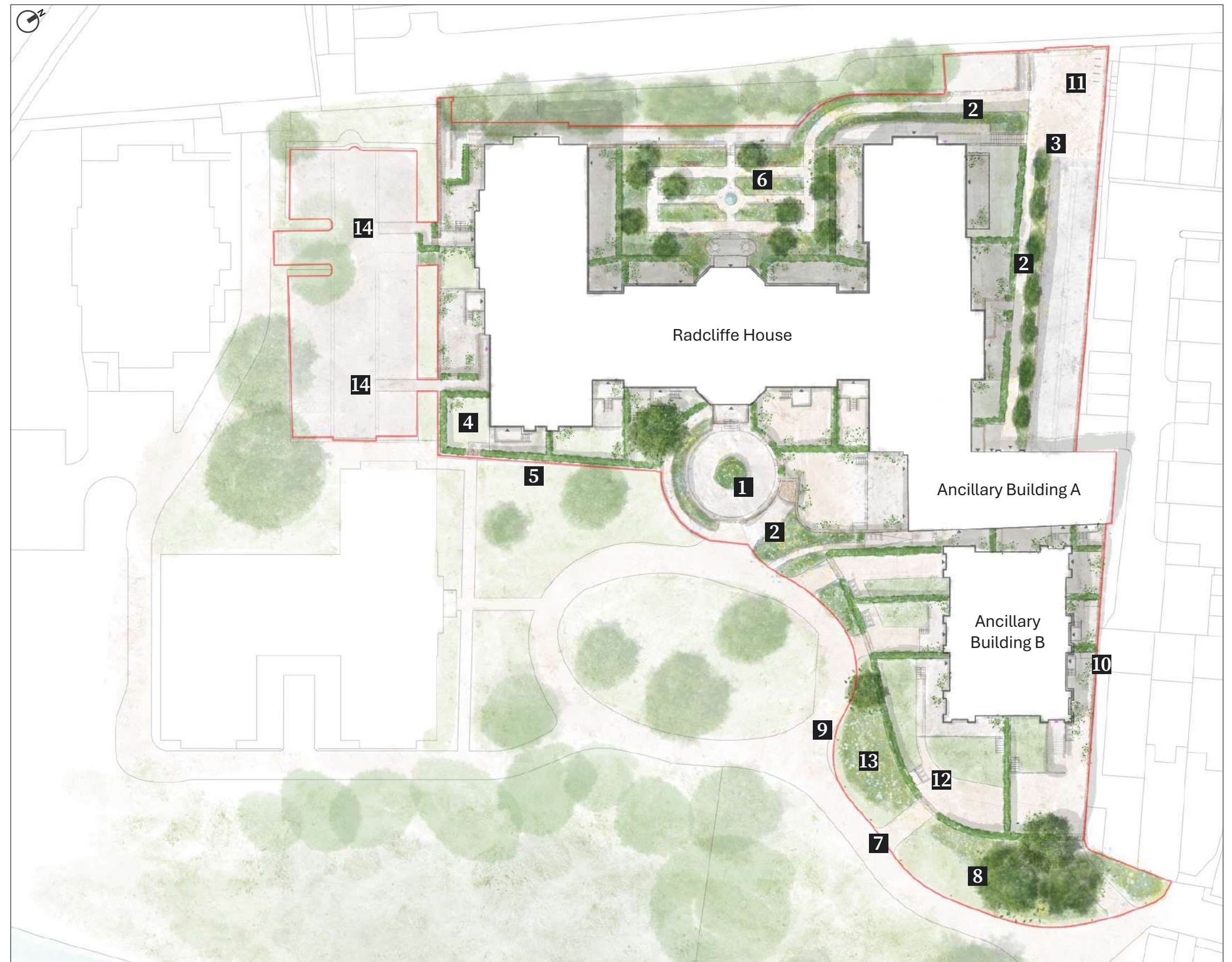
Landscape Masterplan

Overview

The landscape proposals will build upon the existing garden character of the site, enhancing the arrival experience with new ornamental planting, flowering meadows and trees. Landscape structure is maintained through existing mature trees, complemented with a new backdrop of hedges to frame private gardens. To the rear of Radcliffe House, a new shared garden draws inspiration from the lost Italian Gardens designed by Walter Sarel.

Proposed Improvements

- 1** Improved main entrance with feature central planting bed
- 2** Proposed planting to frame pedestrian routes
- 3** Proposed trees to screen entrance to basement
- 4** Private gardens / terraces with varied hard and soft landscape treatments
- 5** Hedge boundaries to private amenity areas
- 6** New garden to rear of building with planting, trees, seating and central focal feature
- 7** Driveway entrances into private gardens
- 8** Existing trees retained
- 9** Proposed lighting
- 10** Cycle storage (private)
- 11** Cycle parking (visitor)
- 12** Refuse storage (private)
- 13** Wildflower meadows framing sweeping lawns
- 14** Reconfigured entrances into car park



Landscape General Arrangement Plan

2.2 Design Proposal

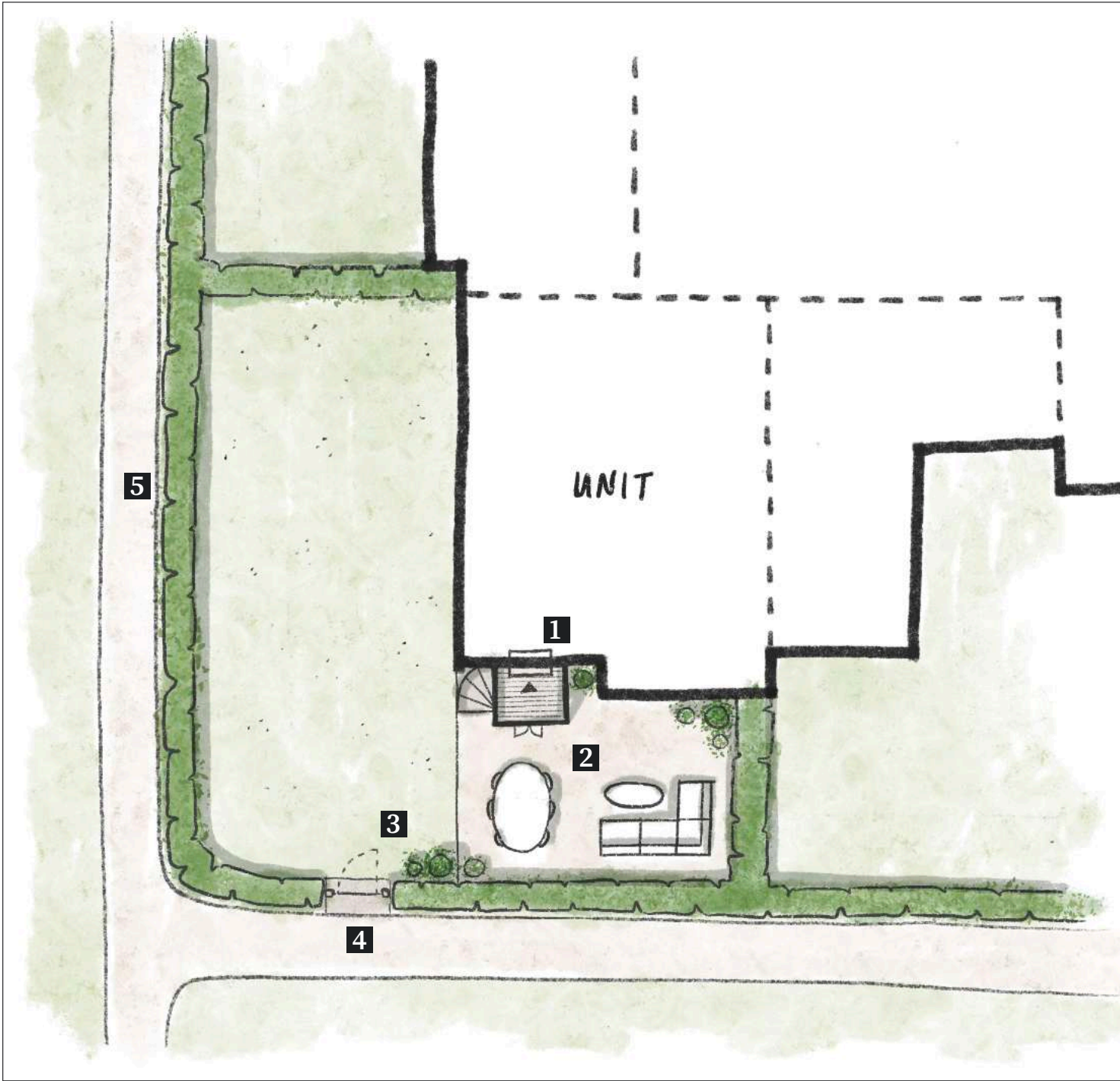
Individual Garden Spaces - Design Study

Individual Garden Spaces

Areas for private amenity will be created with a variety of hard and soft landscaping as required to suit existing constraints.

The designs concentrate on generosity of space, privacy / screening, and accessibility through introducing informal pathways and direct access to public-facing areas where possible.

Creating a consistent language of hedge boundaries across the estate strengthens the garden character of the site overall, and plays a key role in shaping its new identity.



Individual Garden Spaces - Design Study

Precedent Images



1 Raised landing accessed directly from building



2 Permeable hard surface to patios



3 Informal access within gardens



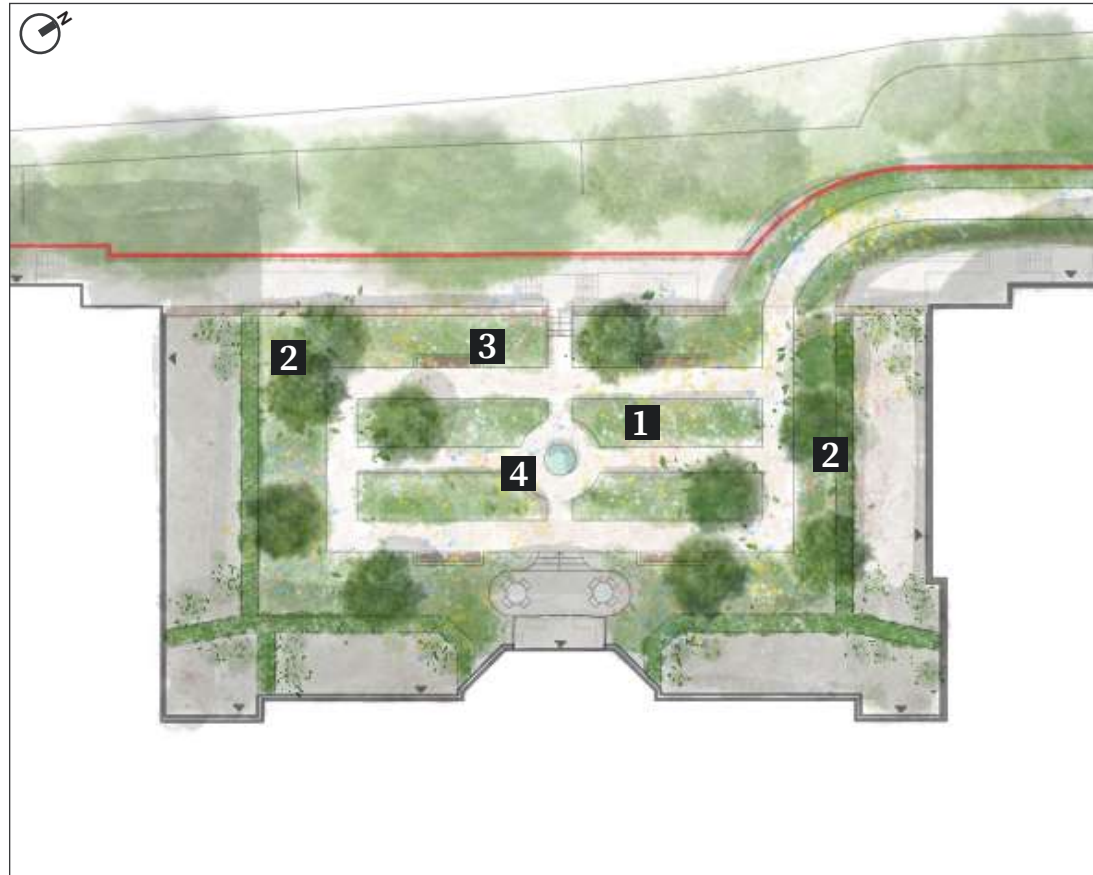
4 Proposed access as needed



5 Hedge boundaries to provide screening

2.3 Design Proposal

Italian Terraces



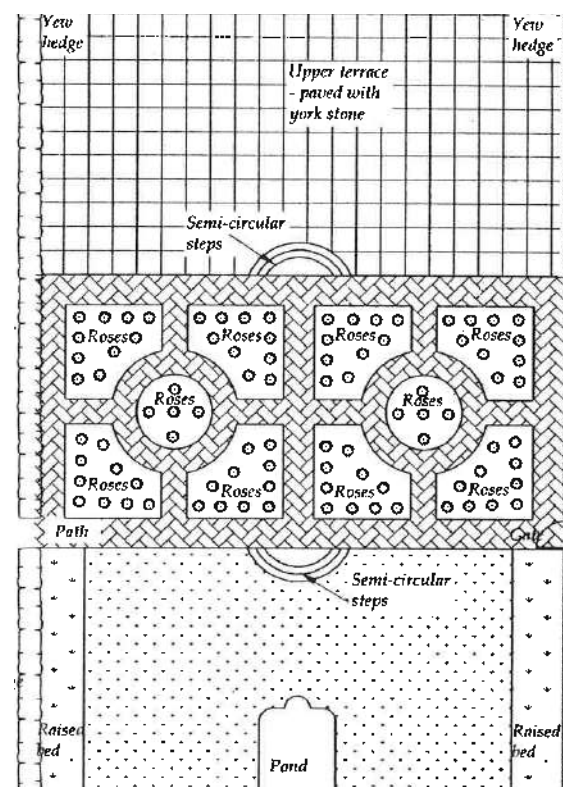
Italian Terraces Detail Plan

Italian Terraces

The proposed garden draws inspiration from the lost Italian Garden, situated to the south-west of Radcliffe House and currently car parking.

The planting designs for the garden had likely been provided by Gertrude Jekyll, a highly influential British horticulturalist who revolutionised garden design in the late 19th / early 20th centuries.

Taking key motifs from the original garden, such as semi-circular steps and a focal garden feature which shapes the geometry of the central planting beds, a piece of the history of the estate is made visible once more.



Original Italian Garden design, Walter Sarel

Precedent Images



1 Proposed ornamental planting

2 Proposed ornamental trees



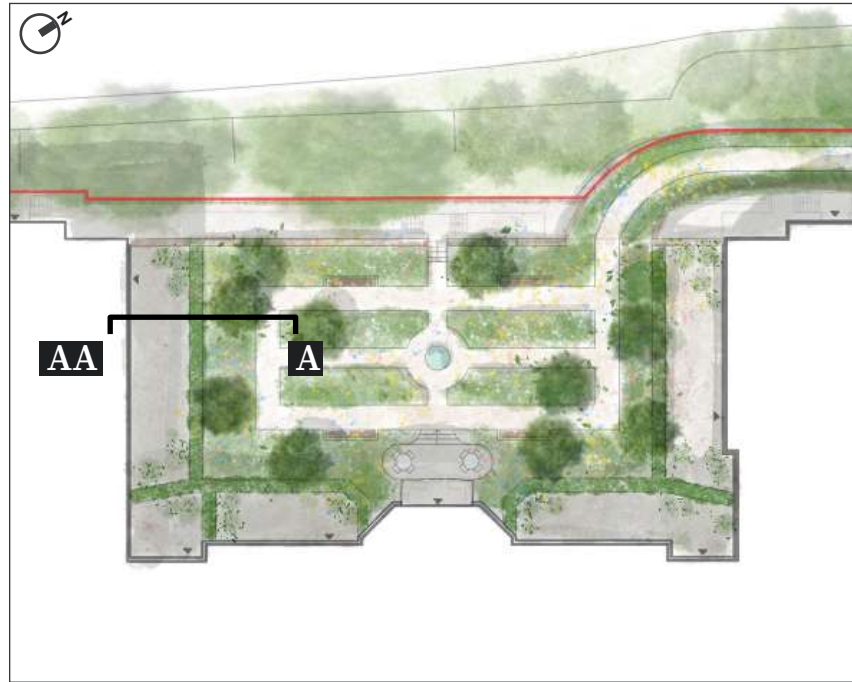
3 Proposed seating areas within planting



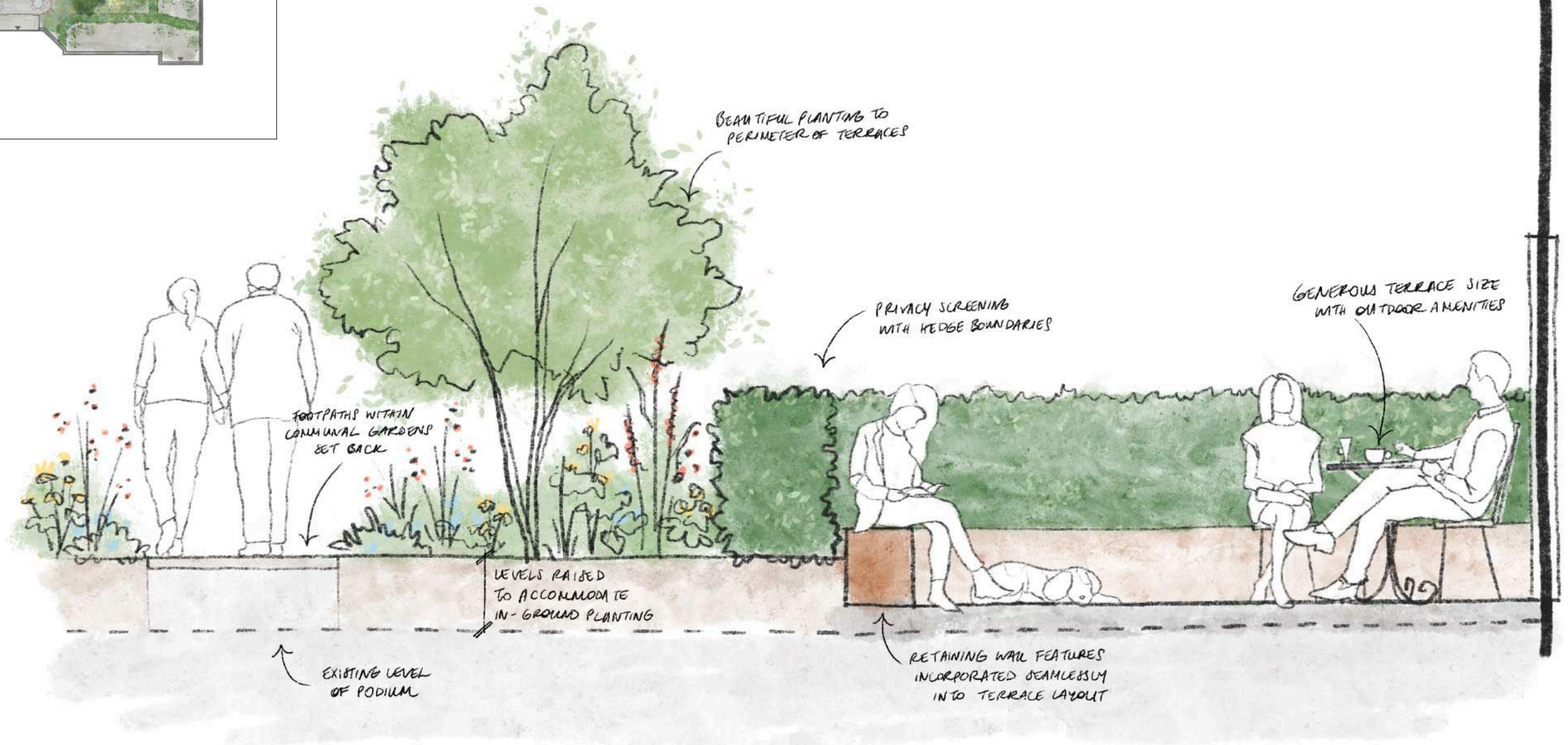
4 Example of central focal garden feature

2.4 Design Proposal

Italian Terraces - Private Terraces



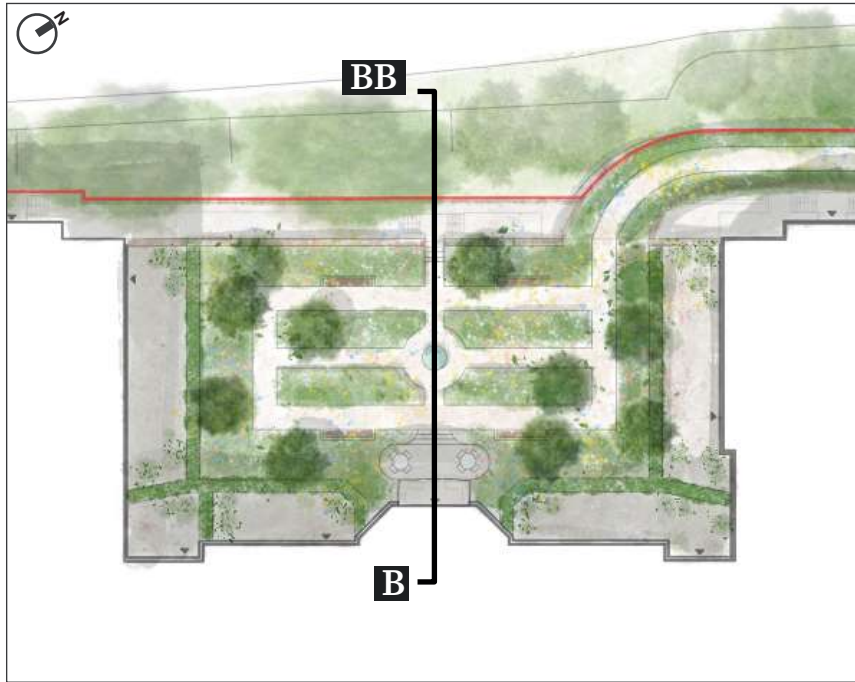
Key Plan



Illustrative Sketch Section A-AA

2.5 Design Proposal

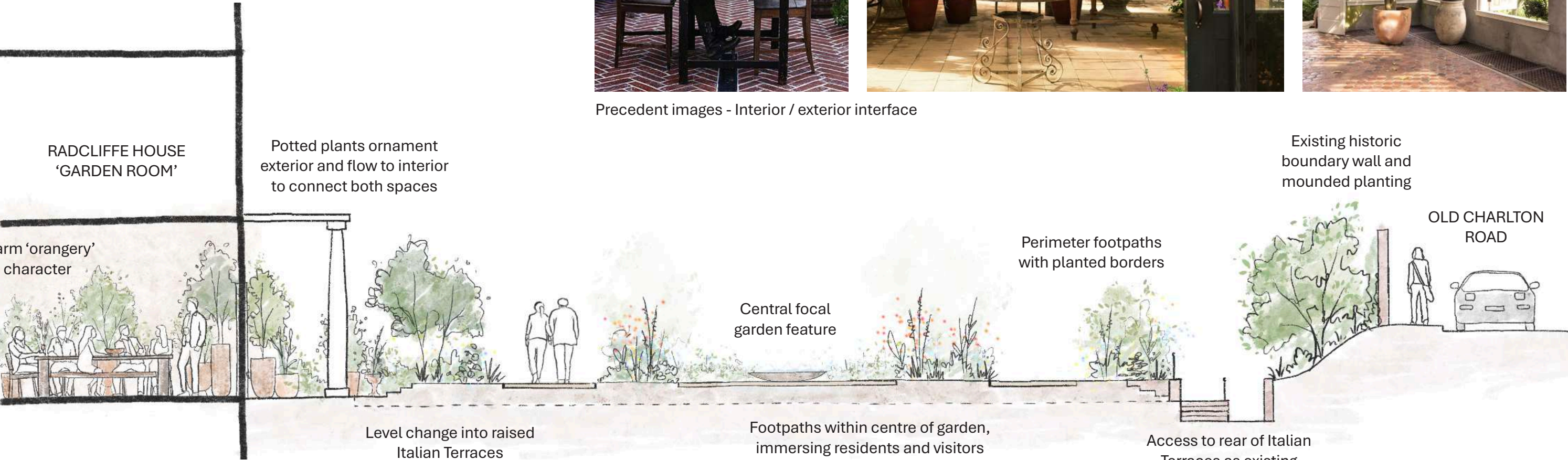
Italian Terraces - Garden Room



Key Plan



Precedent images - Interior / exterior interface



Illustrative Sketch Section B-BB



3

Landscape Strategies

3.1 Landscape Strategies

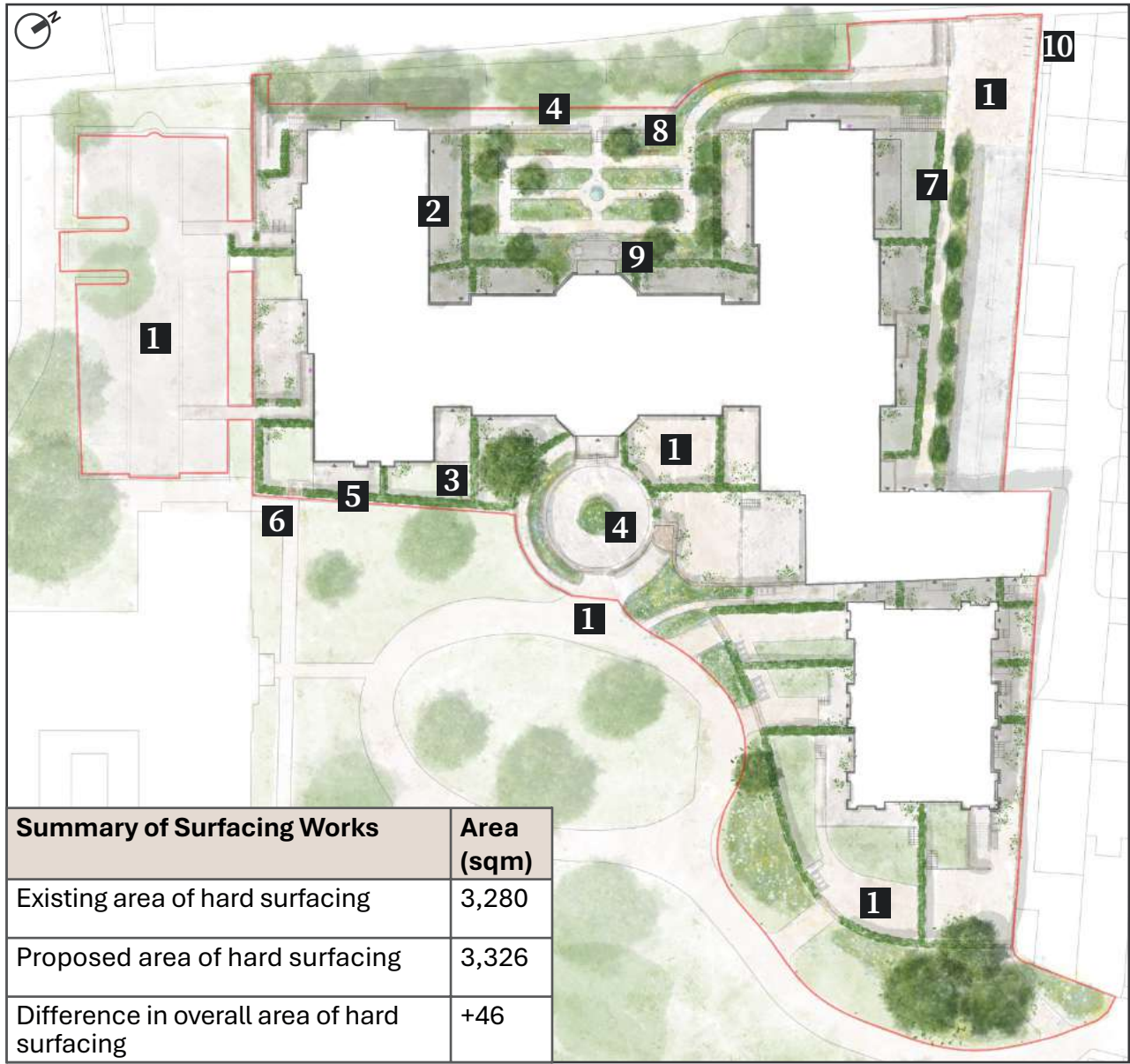
Hard Landscape - Surfaces, Boundaries & Furniture

Surfaces, Boundaries & Furniture

The proposed hard landscape palette is guided by four key objectives:

- To be simple and coherent, retaining existing materials in good condition where feasible
- To promote accessibility for all
- To support connectivity through clear legibility
- To be robust and fit for purpose

The selection of materials—including their type, colour, and texture—will play a crucial role in tying into the site’s character and identity, while ensuring a cohesive response to the existing architectural language.



Hard Landscape Diagram

Precedent Images



1 Gravel surface dressing



4 Existing surfaces in good condition retained and upgraded as needed



8 Proposed garden benches



2 Permeable hard surface to patios



5 Existing boundary treatments retained and upgraded as needed



9 Proposed flexible furniture



6 Proposed access to private gardens as needed



3 Informal access within gardens



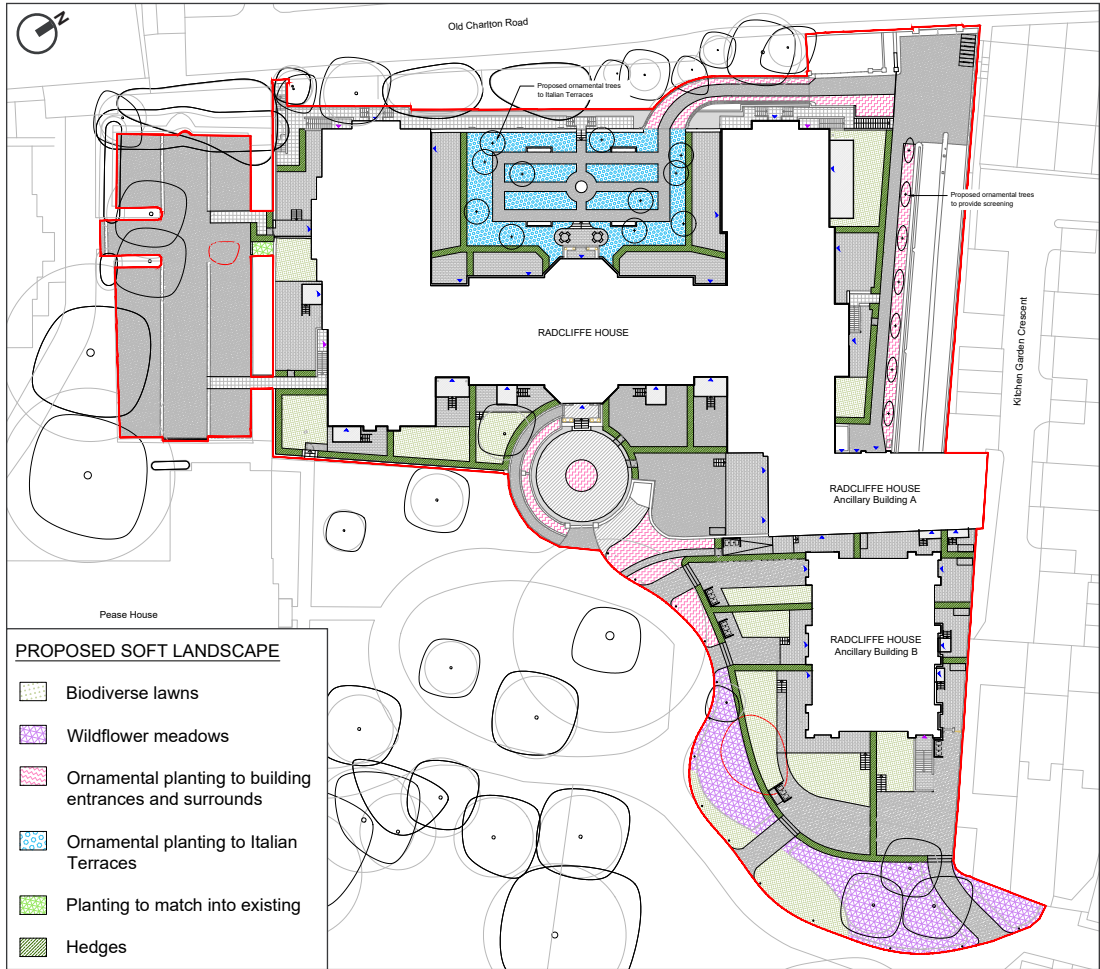
7 Proposed boundary treatments to private gardens as needed



10 Proposed cycle parking

3.2 Landscape Strategies

Soft Landscape and Biodiversity Net Gain



Soft Landscape Typologies Diagram

Overview

The soft landscape strategy promotes climate-resilient and biodiverse planting, carefully tailored to the site’s varied microclimates.

The approach is designed to provide seasonal interest, ecological value, and long-term adaptability in response to changing environmental conditions.

The proposals achieve a Biodiversity Net Gain of 43.86% (Habitat units) and 538.50% (Hedgerow units). Refer to BNG Report prepared by the project Ecologist:

[Biodiversity Net Gain Plan - Radcliffe House, The Priory, Hitchin]

Planting Typology	Area (sqm)
Biodiverse lawns	484
Wildflower meadows	317
Ornamental planting to building entrances and surrounds	214
Ornamental planting to Italian Terraces	255
Planting to match into existing	5
Hedges	274

Precedent Images



Sweeping lawns to estate entrance



Hedge boundaries to private gardens



Wildflower meadow planting



Ornamental planting to building entrances



Example of climbing planting to soften buildings

3.3 Landscape Strategies

Biodiversity Enhancements

Overview

Following the issue of the National Planning Policy Framework, all planning decisions should aim to maintain and enhance, restore or add to biodiversity and geological conservation interests.

Ecological enhancements should aim to deliver biodiversity gains for the proposed development site.

There are opportunities for biodiversity enhancements to be made across the site in the form of the following:

- Planting of native British species where possible
- Enhancement of existing habitats e.g. lawns
- Provision of deadwood features for invertebrates and reptiles
- Bird and bat boxes
- Hedgehog holes

For detailed overview of recommendations for biodiversity enhancements - refer to Preliminary Ecological Appraisal prepared by the project Ecologist:

[MKA Ecology Ltd - 262012 - Radcliffe House, The Priory, Hitchin - PEA 2.0]

Precedent Images



Example of insect hotel within wildflower meadow



Example of tree-mounted bird box



Example of hedgehog hole within boundary treatment



Example of deadwood ecological feature

3.4 Landscape Strategies

Soft Landscape - Trees

Overview

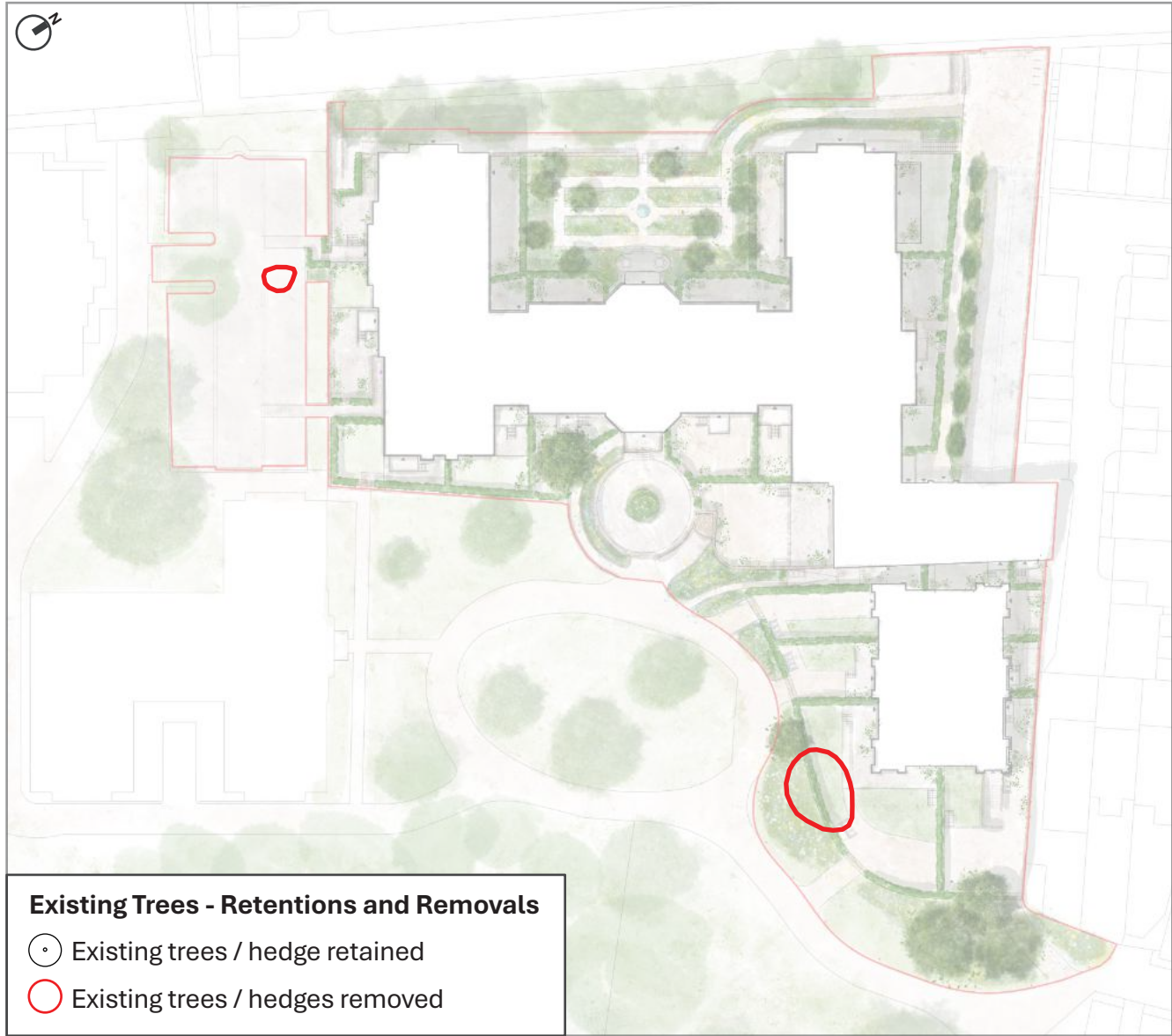
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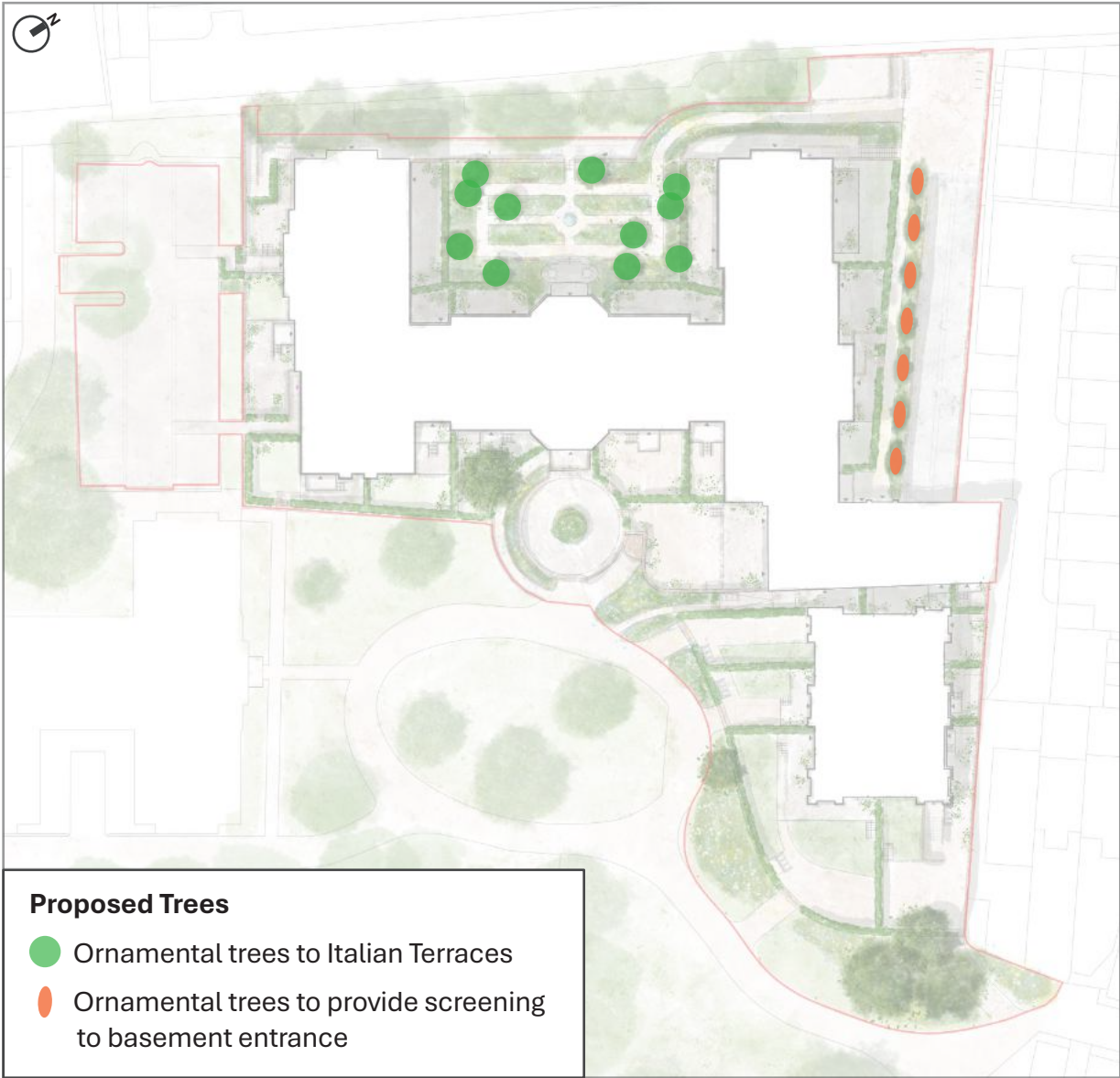
Refer to Arboricultural Impact Assessment & Method Statement prepared by the project Arboriculturalist:

[BHA_7394B_AIAAMS Radcliffe House, Hitchin_IM_April2026]

Summary of Tree Works	
Number of trees within site boundary	6
Number of trees adjacent to site boundary	15
Number of trees to be retained	5
Number of trees to be removed (group)	1
Number of hedges to be removed	1
Number of new trees to be planted	18



Tree Retentions and Removals Diagram



Proposed Trees Diagram



3.5 Landscape Strategies

Flood Mitigation and Drainage

Flood Mitigation

The proposed landscaping of the site is not at risk of river flooding from the River Hiz.

The site is shown to potentially be at risk of catchment surface water flooding. However, the Environment Agency mapping does not accurately represent this risk. The surface water flood risk mapping was generated without considering the existing protection provided by the brick walls along the Old Charlton Road and wider business part boundaries, which would limit catchment surface water from entering the site off Old Charlton Road.

Two potential routes for surface water to flood the site were identified, including a gated pedestrian archway, for which a passive flood mitigation work was approved for a previous application. Surface water flooding of the car park to the southwest of Radcliffe House is expected, via the off-site driveway access to the car park off Old Charlton Road.

Passive flood mitigation measures are proposed to reduce the risk of surface water flooding Radcliffe House from the car park via a new access included in the landscape proposals.

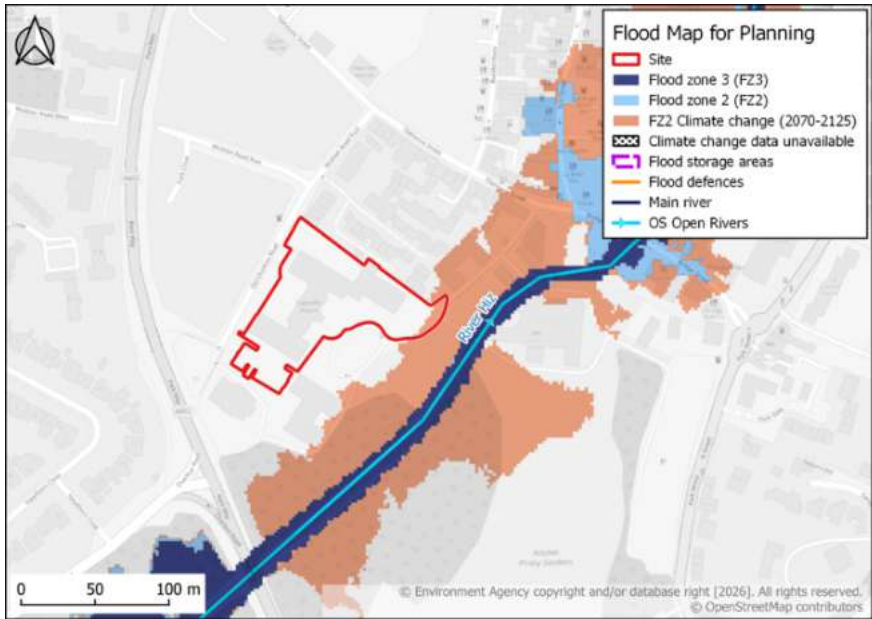
The proposed landscaping will not increase the flood risk to Radcliffe House or surrounding properties, and safe access and egress from Radcliffe House will remain unchanged by the proposals.

Drainage

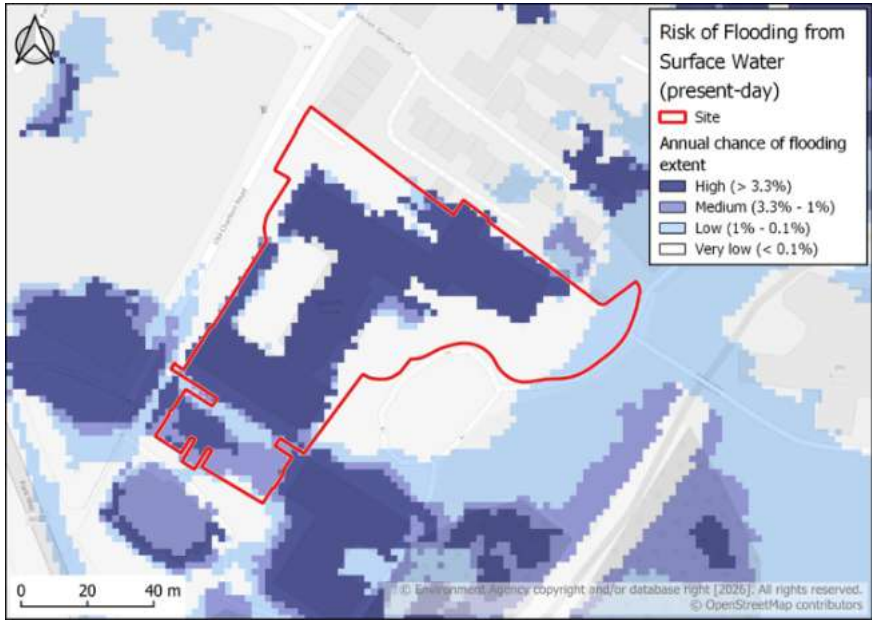
A sustainable surface water drainage strategy will need to be prepared to support the proposed development, to mitigate the proposed increase in drainage surfaces across the site. The surface water drainage of the proposed new hardstanding surfaces will likely connect to the existing drainage of the site. As such, the drainage strategy may need to make changes to the existing drainage.



Diagram - Proposed location of new access to Radcliffe House from adjacent car park



Flood Map for Planning



Risk of Flooding from Surface Water (present-day)

Refer to full Flood Risk Assessment:

[24075-FRA-TN-02 P01 (FRA Landscape)]

3.6 Landscape Strategies

Lighting

Proposed Lighting

The lighting strategy is designed to enhance key landscape spaces, creating a human-scale, pedestrian-friendly environment that encourages safe and comfortable use of outdoor spaces throughout the year. All fittings will be durable and easy to maintain, and a sensitive lighting control approach will help to minimise impacts on wildlife (the detailed lighting design will receive input from the project ecologist).



Proposed Lighting Diagram

Precedent Images



Low-level lighting to entrance drive



Uplighters to proposed trees



Lighting to highlight building entrances



Examples of evening activation



4

Summary

4.1 Summary

Summary

The landscape proposals for Radcliffe House at Hitchin Priory aim to transform a currently functional and visually limited setting into a high-quality, biodiverse, and historically responsive environment.

The design builds on the site's existing parkland character, retaining mature trees while introducing enhanced ornamental planting, wildflower meadows, and biodiverse lawns to improve seasonal interest and ecological value.

Key features include a central shared garden at the rear, drawing inspiration from the historic Italian terraces and planting by Gertrude Jekyll to reintroduce formal geometry, seating areas, and a focal feature to reconnect the site with its heritage.

Private gardens and terraces are introduced with a mix of hard and soft landscaping, defined by consistent hedge boundaries to create privacy and a cohesive identity.

The proposals also incorporate new trees, informal pathways, lighting, and cycle and refuse storage. A simple and sensitive hard landscaping palette is introduced, with a focus on accessibility while maintaining durability and coherence with the existing architecture. Environmental strategies include significant biodiversity net gain, climate-resilient planting, and sustainable drainage principles.

Overall, the improvements will create a more attractive, usable, and ecologically rich landscape that enhances resident experience, strengthens historical character, and increases environmental value.



Illustrative sketch visual - View of the Italian Terraces

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