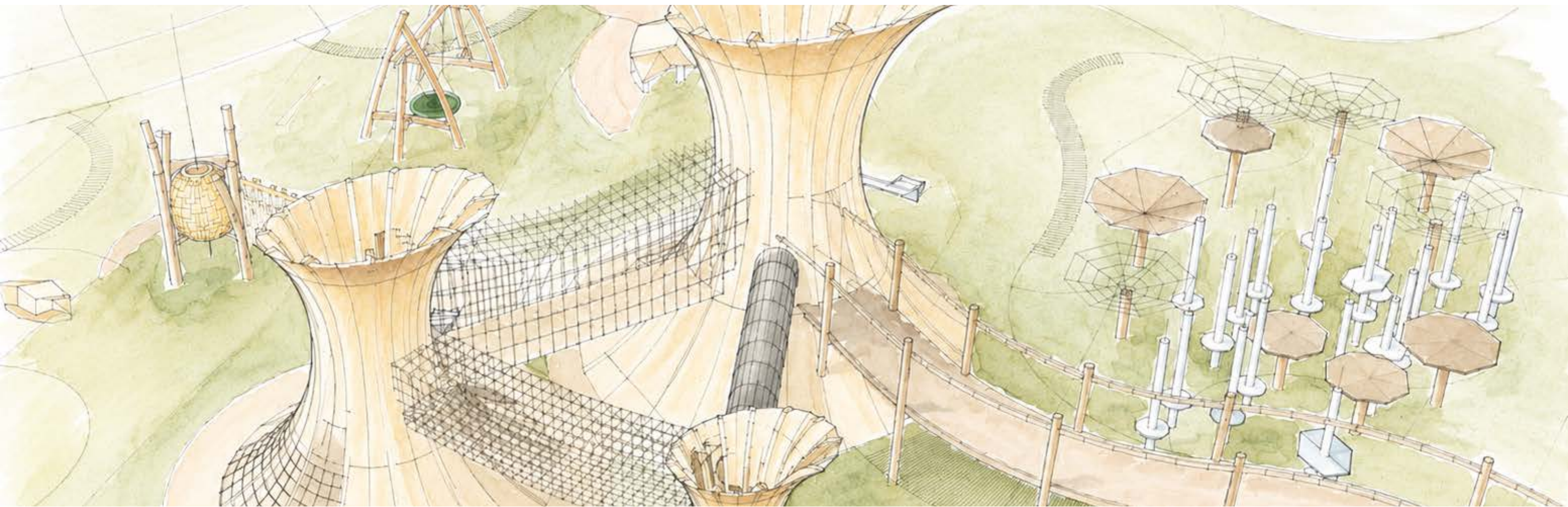

Wakehurst Wild Play



Design and Access Statement
Prepared by Southern Green and Studio Hardie
Date 17.07.26

SouthernGreen |

STUDIO HARDIE

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Introduction

This Design and Access Statement has been prepared in support of a planning application for the proposed Wild Play development at Wakehurst.

The proposals have been developed collaboratively by Studio Hardie and Southern Green to create a landscape-led play environment that is embedded within the existing landscape and reflects the unique character of Wakehurst. Rather than introducing a conventional playground, the ambition has been to create a series of natural play experiences that emerge from the landscape through carefully considered landform, planting, natural materials and bespoke play structures.

The Design and Access Statement explains how the proposals have evolved in response to the site's historic setting, mature trees, existing topography, woodland character and internationally significant botanical collections, whilst delivering an inclusive and accessible visitor experience appropriate to the significance of the Grade II* Registered Park and Garden.

The application seeks planning permission for the creation of a new Wild Play landscape including natural play structures, accessible paths, landscape works, planting, seating, informal gathering spaces and associated visitor infrastructure.

Section 1

Site and Surroundings

Wakehurst Place

Wakehurst is a nationally significant historic landscape, Grade II* Registered Park and Garden and home to the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew's wild botanic garden.

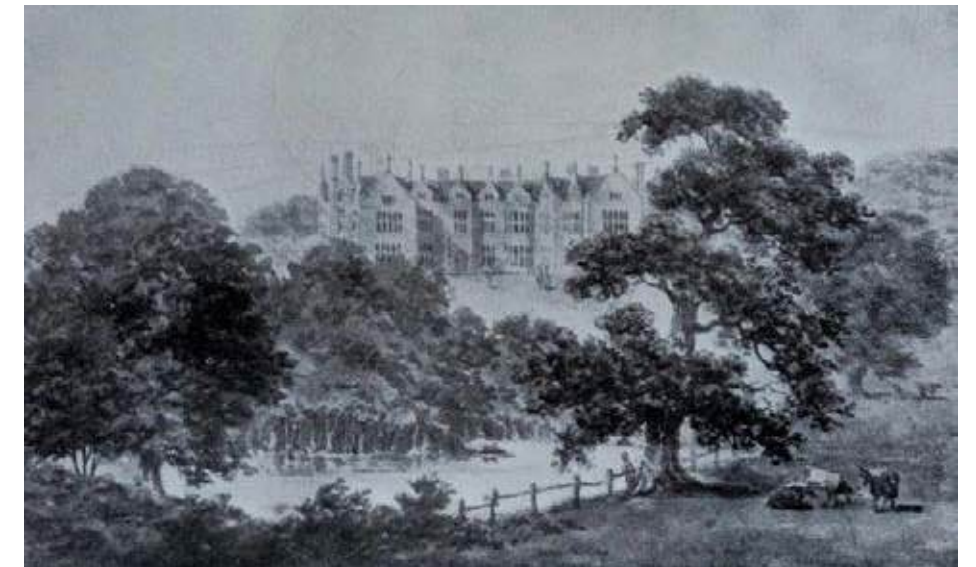
The estate has evolved over several centuries through successive phases of estate management, woodland planting and horticultural development to become one of the world's leading botanic gardens. Today it continues to evolve as a living landscape, balancing conservation, scientific research, education and public enjoyment.

The Wild Play proposals have been developed within this context, seeking to create a contemporary intervention that reinforces the landscape character of Wakehurst whilst respecting its historic significance.

Wakehurst has evolved over several centuries through successive phases of estate management, landscape design and botanical development. Today it is managed by the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, and represents one of the world's leading botanic gardens, balancing scientific research, conservation, education and public enjoyment. The proposals have been developed to respond positively to this historic landscape whilst reinforcing its distinctive botanical and woodland character.

Wakehurst Place, 1708

Source: Kew Gardens <https://www.kew.org/read-and-watch/history-of-wakehurst-mansion>



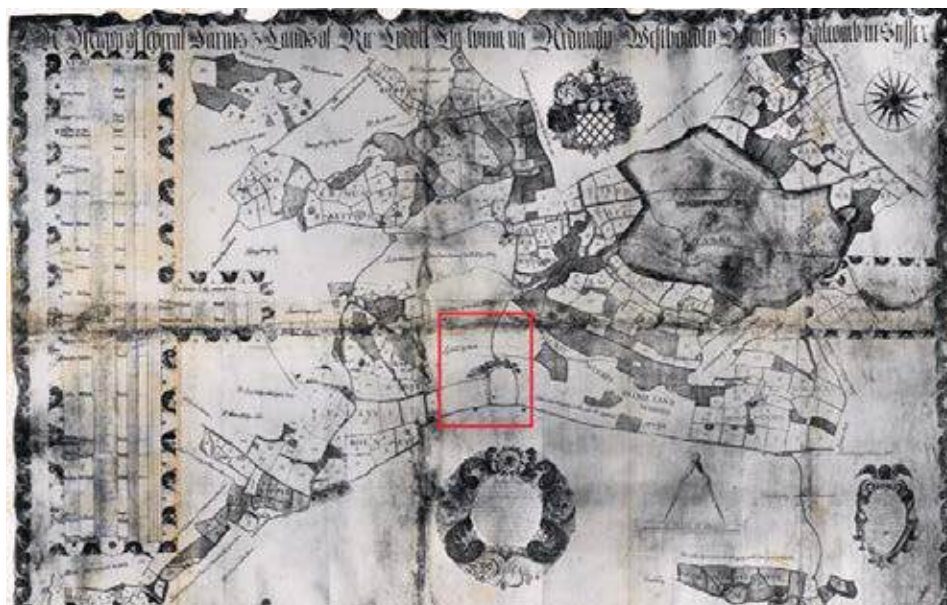
Wakehurst Place, 1805

Source: Kew Gardens <https://www.kew.org/read-and-watch/history-of-wakehurst-mansion>



Wakehurst Place, 1907

Source: Kew Gardens <https://www.kew.org/read-and-watch/history-of-wakehurst-mansion>



① The Wakehurst estate in 1727

Source: Wakehurst Place, Sussex | Conservation Management Plan | June 2024, p54 | RGA 481B

Historic Maps

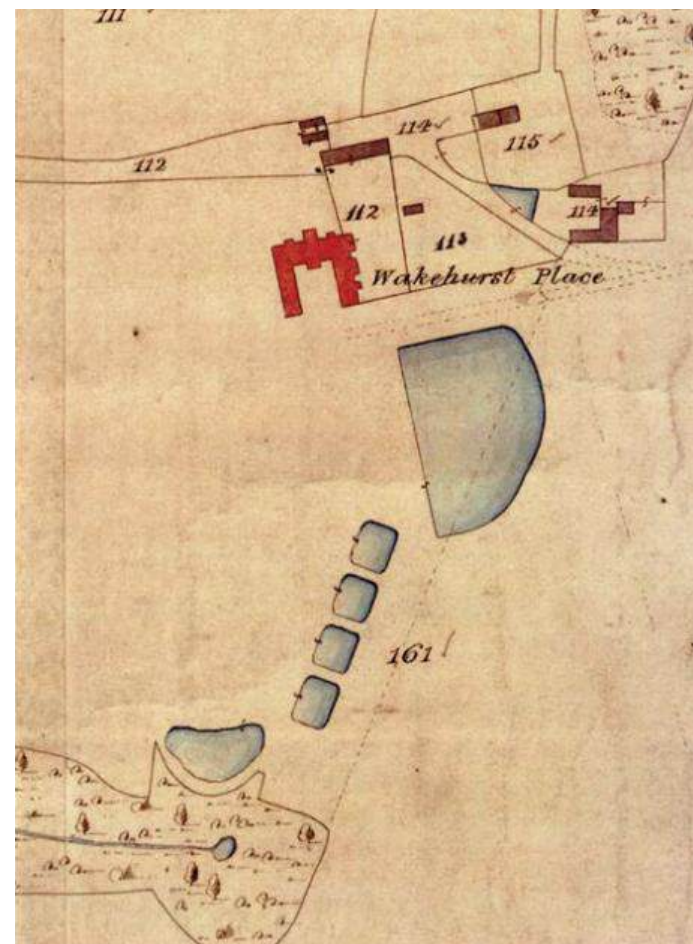
1. The Wakehurst estate in 1727
2. Ordnance survey map 1808
3. Extract of Tithe map
4. Ordnance Survey Map 1871
5. Estate plan 1907

Historic mapping demonstrates that the application site has consistently formed part of the wider Wakehurst estate and has remained as an informal landscape setting. This continuity has informed the landscape-led approach to the proposals, which seek to work with the existing character of the site rather than fundamentally alter it.



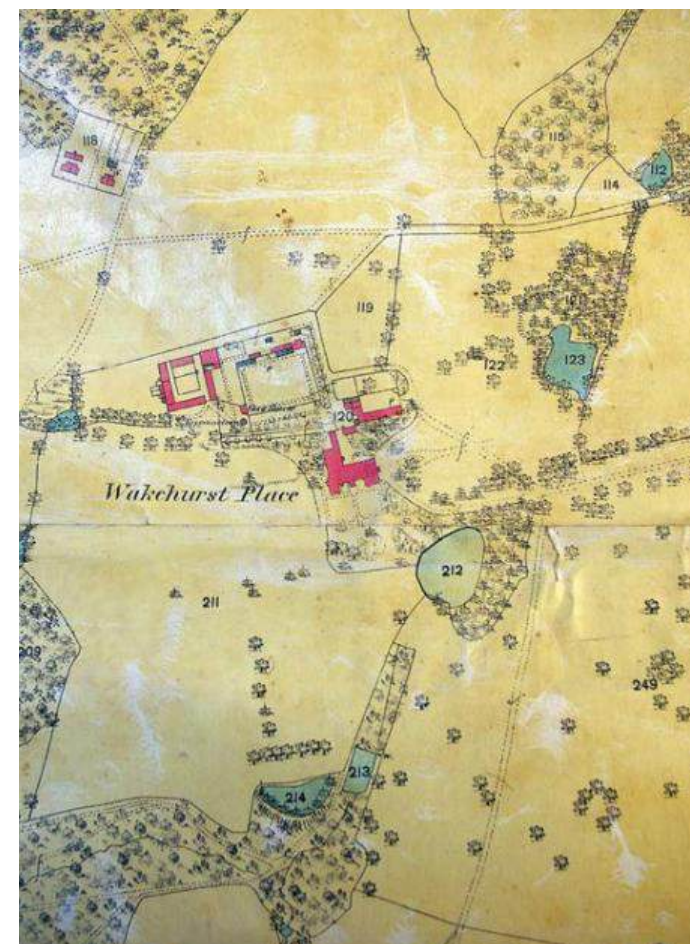
② Ordnance survey map 1808

Source: Wakehurst Place, Sussex | Conservation Management Plan| June 2024



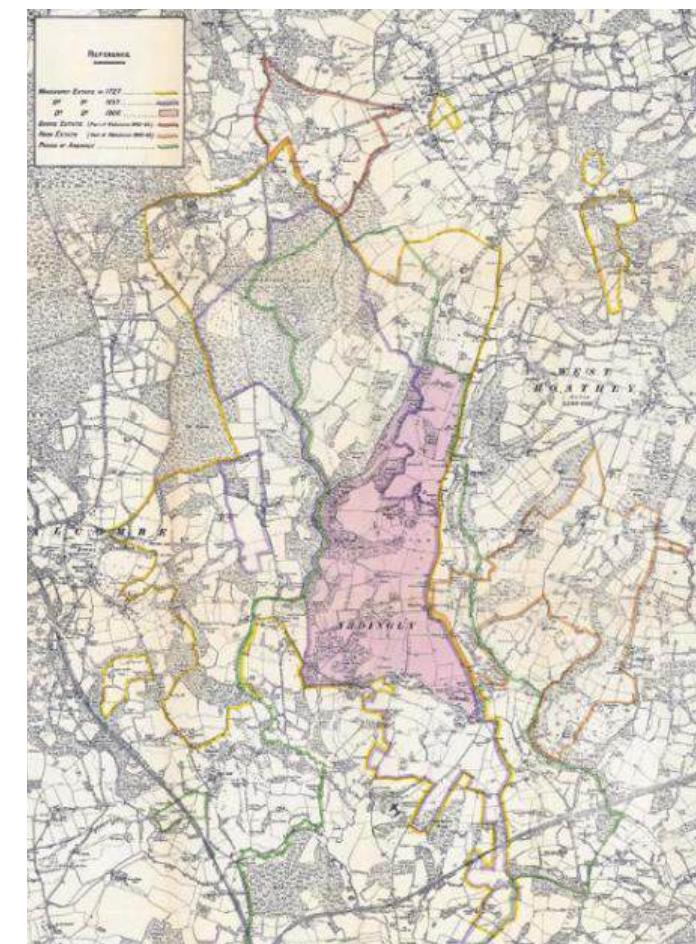
③ Extract of Tithe map

Source: Wakehurst Place, Sussex | Conservation Management Plan| June 2024 | RGA 481B



④ Ordnance Survey Map 1871

Source: Wakehurst Place, Sussex | Conservation Management Plan | June 2024 RGA 481B



⑤ Estate plan 1907

Source: Wakehurst Place, Sussex | Conservation Management Plan | June 2024 | RGA 481B

Site Context and Landscape Character

Site Context

The application site occupies an important transitional landscape between Meadow Terrace, the Southern Hemisphere Garden, surrounding woodland and the wider High Weald landscape.

The site forms an interface between the more managed botanical collections and the surrounding woodland and meadow landscape. Existing mature trees, woodland edge planting, species-rich meadow, subtle changes in topography and informal visitor routes establish a strong landscape framework which has informed the proposals from the outset.

Immediately to the north, Kew is delivering the Lansdown Conservation Research Nursery, a major new facility for botanical research, conservation and public engagement. The application site therefore forms part of a wider area of investment at Wakehurst, with the proposals developed to complement this emerging destination whilst reinforcing opportunities for nature-based play, learning and exploration.

The proposals seek to strengthen these existing relationships rather than introduce a separate destination, allowing the play environment to become part of the wider landscape experience.

Landscape Character

Existing mature trees, woodland edge planting, surveyed habitats, subtle changes in topography and established visitor routes establish a strong landscape framework which has informed the proposals from the outset. The layout has subsequently been refined through detailed arboricultural, ecological survey work.

Rather than introducing formal boundaries, the proposals reinforce this existing sequence of landscape character, allowing the play landscape to emerge naturally from the surrounding environment.

Existing mature trees, woodland edge planting, surveyed habitats, subtle changes in topography and established visitor routes establish a strong landscape framework which has informed the proposals from the outset. The layout has subsequently been refined through detailed arboricultural, ecological and topographical investigations.

Section 2

Heritage Context

The site lies within the Grade II* Registered Park and Garden at Wakehurst and forms part of a nationally important designed landscape.

The proposals have therefore been developed to preserve the significance of the historic landscape through a restrained approach to landform, planting and materials, ensuring the development complements rather than competes with the wider estate.

The planning application is supported by separate Heritage, Arboricultural, Ecological and Archaeological reports, which consider the relevant planning designations and technical constraints in detail. This Design and Access Statement focuses on how those considerations have informed the design.

Design Considerations

The proposals have been informed by:

- Grade II* Registered Park and Garden.
- Arboricultural Survey and Root Protection Areas.
- Ecological Impact Assessment.
- Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment.
- Existing topography.
- Existing visitor movement.
- Existing utilities and drainage infrastructure.
- Relationship with the adjacent nursery development.

The proposed Wild Play Area is located within the northern boundary of the Grade II Registered Park and Garden at Wakehurst Place. A comprehensive Heritage Impact Statement (HIS) has been prepared by Martin Ashley Architects to assess the development's impact on the registered landscape and nearby listed structures, including the Grade I listed Wakehurst Mansion, Grade II* listed Stables, and Grade II listed South Lodge.*

The Wakehurst estate has its origins in the medieval period. The manor is first recorded in the early 13th century and the Wakehurst family held the estate until 1454, when it passed by marriage to the Culpeper family, in whose hands it remained for the next two centuries through eight successive generations.

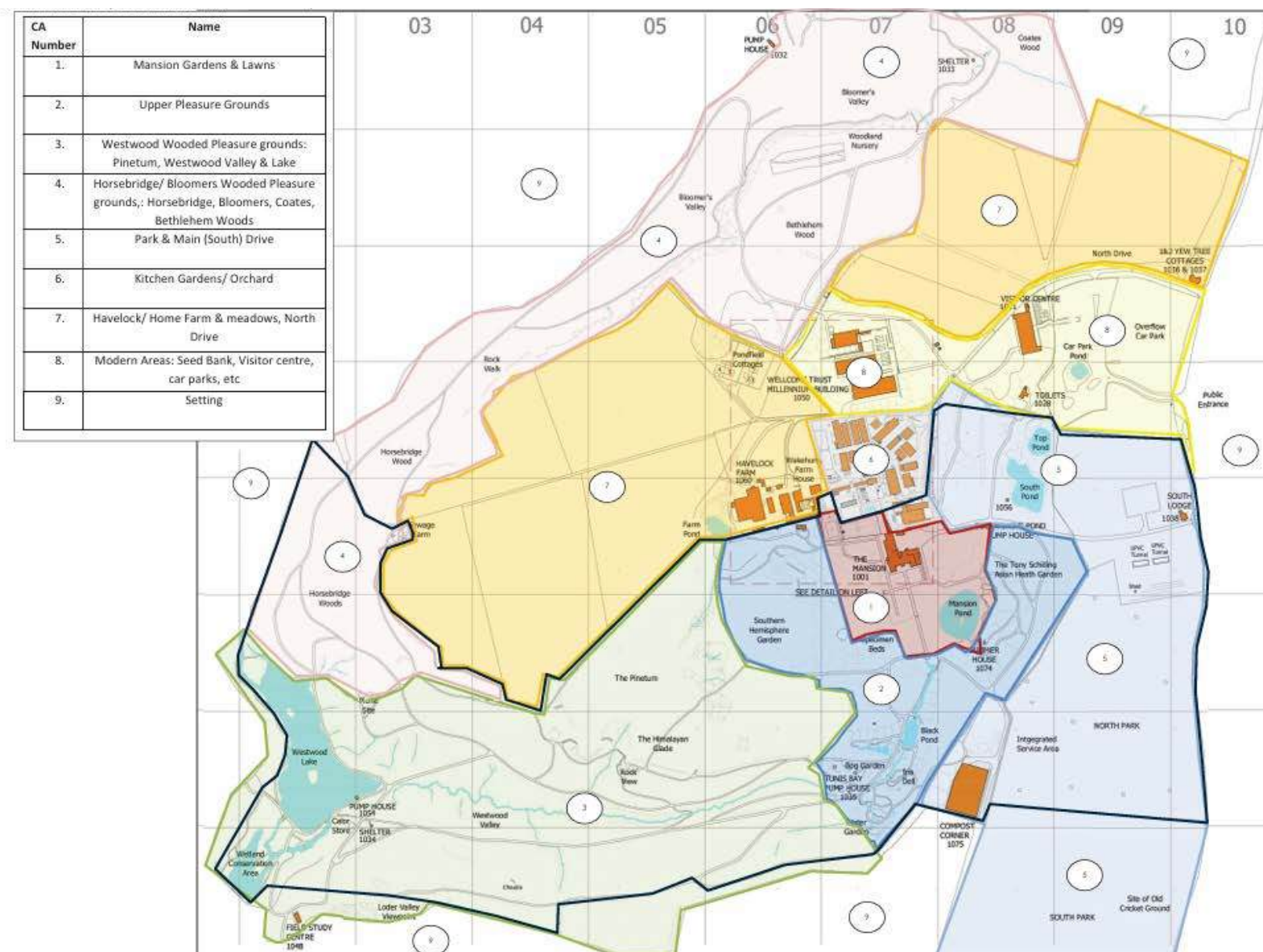
The present Mansion was built between 1571 and 1590 by Sir Edward Culpeper. The house was originally of courtyard plan and underwent numerous structural alterations over the following three centuries. From the outset, the estate was organised around a clear hierarchy of spaces: ornamental gardens to the west of the Mansion, service yards and kitchen gardens to the east, and the wider agricultural and woodland landscape beyond.

The estate passed from the Culpepers to the Lydall family in 1694, then by inheritance to the Clarkes, and in 1776 to Admiral Peyton. Between 1816 and 1869 the Peytons let Wakehurst to tenants and sold off portions of the estate. In 1869 it was sold to the Dowager Marchioness of Downshire, who carried out extensive additions and alterations to the Mansion and gardens. Sir William Boord purchased the estate in 1890, followed in 1903 by Gerald Loder (later Lord Wakehurst), who spent the next 33 years transforming Wakehurst into one of the great woodland gardens of the High Weald, establishing outstanding plant collections particularly from Eastern Asia and the southern hemisphere.

On Loder's death in 1936, the estate was bought by Sir Henry Price, who continued to develop the gardens and bequeathed the estate to the National Trust in 1963. In 1965 the National Trust leased Wakehurst to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, with management passing to the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew (RBGK). The Millennium Seed Bank opened on the estate in 2000 and the Lansdown Conservation and Research Nursery has been established more recently, reinforcing Wakehurst's role as a centre of international horticultural science alongside its designed landscape. The Richard Grittahs Architects Conservation Management Plan (2024) states that Wakehurst should not be understood as a static survival of one date, but as a layered estate and building complex shaped by successive owners, uses and interventions.

The archaeological and cartographic evidence establishes that the application site, known as the Old Wood Yard, has never been a principal designed space. The Compass Archaeology DBA confirms there is no evidence the site has ever been formally developed beyond existing paths and a modern concrete platform for a semi-permanent tent structure. The 1727 estate map shows the area as open agricultural land within the estate; the 1841 Tithe Map and 1874 Ordnance Survey confirm it remained undeveloped open land. By the time of the 1909 and 1963 OS revisions, the area had been enclosed by Loder's Pinetum planting to the west and north, giving the site its present character as a screened, back-of-house working enclosure. The site has served practical estate functions, including timber storage, milling and, more recently, use as a gathering space for school groups.

Martin Ashley Architects



Character Area Plan from Wakehurst Place Landscape Conservation Statement



Registered Parks and Gardens (Historic England)



Site Constraints

The design has been informed by detailed arboricultural, ecological, archaeological and topographical investigations undertaken in support of the planning application. These assessments have enabled the proposals to minimise impacts on important trees, habitats and heritage assets whilst retaining the landscape-led design approach.

These include:

- Existing mature trees and Root Protection Areas.
- Existing woodland structure.
- Existing meadow habitat.
- Existing topography.
- Existing visitor movement.
- Existing utilities.
- Existing pond and culverted ghyll.
- Heritage setting.

Rather than overcoming these constraints, the proposals have sought to work positively with them, allowing the existing landscape to guide the arrangement of routes, planting and play spaces.

The site is classified as Wood pasture and Parkland BAP Priority Habitat with patches of Deciduous Woodland BAP Priority Habitat. The Landscape Character Area's (HW1) ecology notes for the wider site area identify:

- Diverse natural history.
- Species-rich gill and semi-natural woodlands.
- Geologically important rock exposures.
- Nationally-rare sandrock plant communities in gills.
- Remnant and dormant wet and dry acid heathland.
- Species-rich meadows and hedgerows.
- Reservoirs, hammerponds, field, fish and ornamental ponds.

Habitats and biodiversity

Within the site there appeared to be scope for establishing an ecologically (and narratively) integrated sequence of micro-habitats that can enrich biodiversity.

Key Ecological Considerations for the Wild Wakehurst Site

Drawing on the completed Arboricultural Report, Ecological Impact Assessment and associated technical surveys, the treatment of existing vegetation and habitats has informed the evolution of the landscape proposals.

Existing mature trees form the principal landscape structure for the proposals and have informed the layout from the outset.

The southern boundary contains a belt of predominantly non-native evergreen planting which currently provides enclosure and visual screening. Whilst a number of specimens are to be retained, opportunities have been identified to diversify this edge through selective management and supplementary planting, responding to the wider landscape character and long-term management objectives for the site

The proposals include selective management of the existing evergreen belt, retaining valuable specimens whilst introducing a more diverse woodland-edge planting strategy in accordance with the wider landscape objectives for Wakehurst.

Any transition will be undertaken progressively to maintain appropriate screening whilst allowing replacement planting to establish and mature over time.



View outside of proposed site boundary onto site’s southern boundary with non-native evergreen trees

Section 3

Design Development

Project Objectives

From the outset, the ambition has been to create a landscape before a playground.

The proposals seek to create a play environment that appears to have grown naturally from the existing landscape rather than being inserted into it. The design has therefore been guided by the character of Wakehurst, existing landform, mature trees and surrounding botanical collections.

The principal objectives have been to:

- Create a distinctive landscape-led play experience unique to Wakehurst;
- Integrate play seamlessly within the surrounding landscape;
- Retain mature trees and minimise intervention within Root Protection Areas;
- Work sympathetically with existing topography;
- Strengthen biodiversity and habitat connectivity;
- Reinforce Wakehurst's botanical identity;
- Provide inclusive and accessible play opportunities;
- Use robust natural materials appropriate to the woodland setting.

Soft Landscaping to Support and Screen Play Zones

Integrating soft landscaping elements such as native hedging, hazel and birch copses, and living screens were explored to help create distinct play zones while providing natural screening, privacy, and a more immersive environment for children.

These elements would also help to define boundaries between different play areas and support the overall ecological and aesthetic design of the play space.

- Native Hedging (Hawthorn, Dogwood, Hazel) – Provides privacy and defines boundaries around gardens, play zones, and pathways.
- Living Willow Tunnels – Adds interactive play and privacy with dynamic, tactile experiences.
- Birch and Hazel Copses – Act as natural screens while providing shade and aesthetic beauty around water features.
- Native Grasses and Shrubs – Offer soft visual separation and blend into the woodland landscape.
- Small Trees and Larger Shrubs – Frame spaces and create a sense of enclosure and separation without closing off the natural environment.



Alternative Options Considered

A number of landscape concepts were explored during the early stages of the project. Initial studies investigated a series of accessible meadow terraces creating playful movement across the site. These concepts evolved into a lighter touch landscape inspired by naturally occurring ripples within the landform, reducing earthworks whilst retaining the original ambition of creating a sequence of interconnected outdoor rooms.

The design also explored different approaches to landscape character, planting structure and visitor movement before arriving at the preferred transitional landscape strategy, allowing botanical planting to blend gradually into native woodland and meadow.

Concept Design Ideas

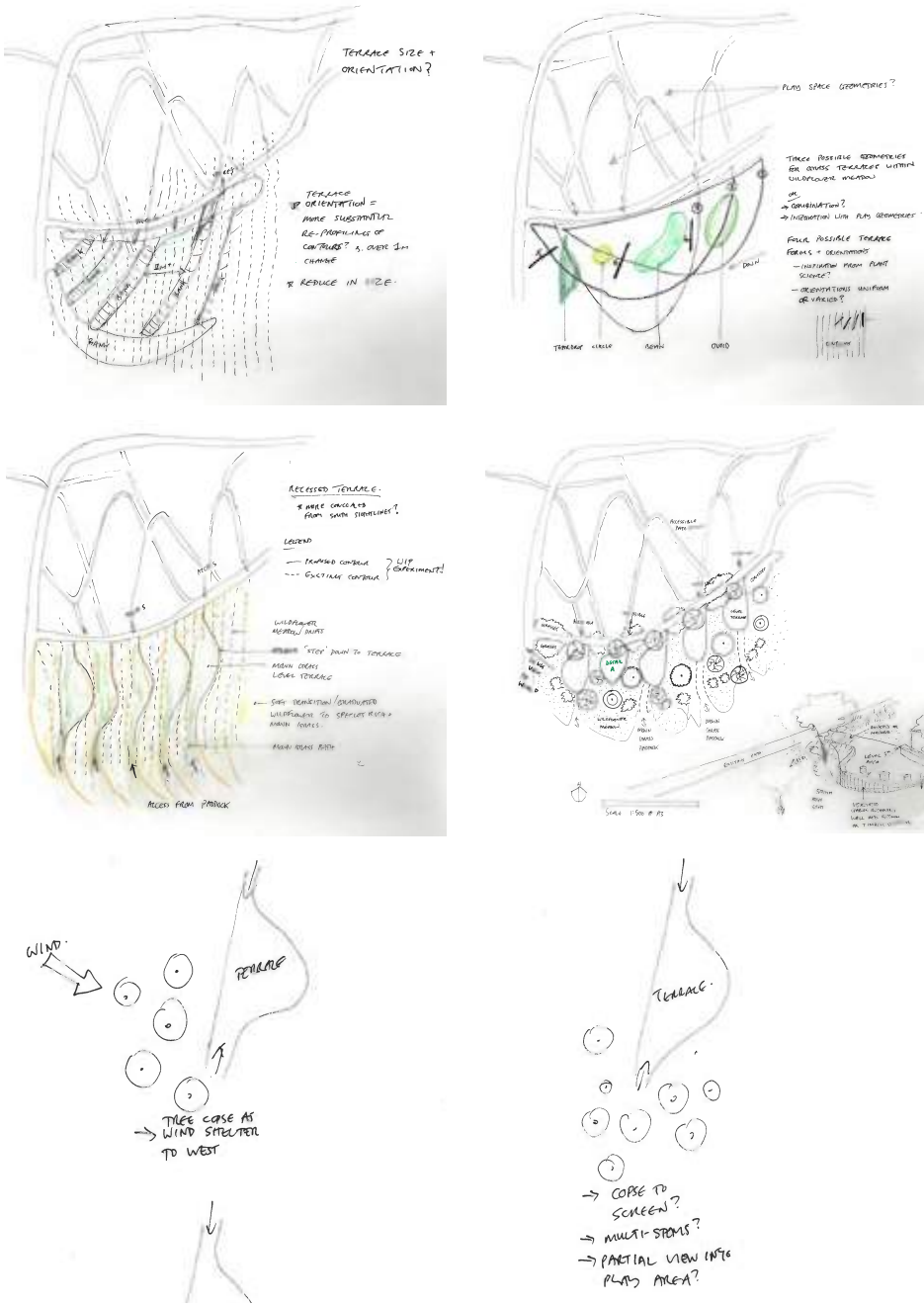
Accessible Meadow Terrace

Previous sketch iterations exploring a spectrum of options and ideas for a series of accessible ‘meadow terraces’.

Early concept work explored a series of accessible meadow terraces as a means of integrating movement, planting and play. Through subsequent design development, consultation and technical review, this evolved into the lighter touch ripple concept and transitional planting strategy illustrated on the following pages.



The Wilderness Garden, Linjiang Hilla



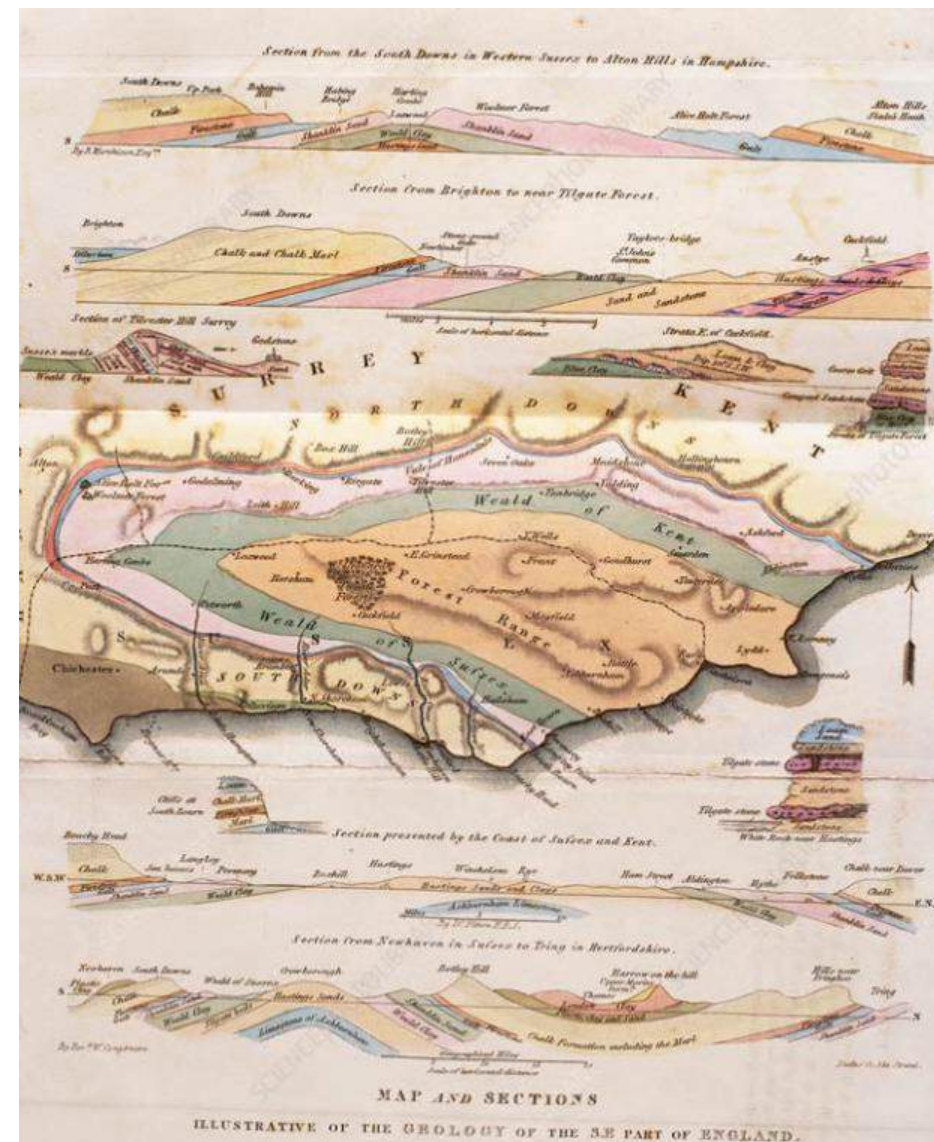
Initial sketch design iterations

Meadow terrace ripple: *shape and scale of intervention*

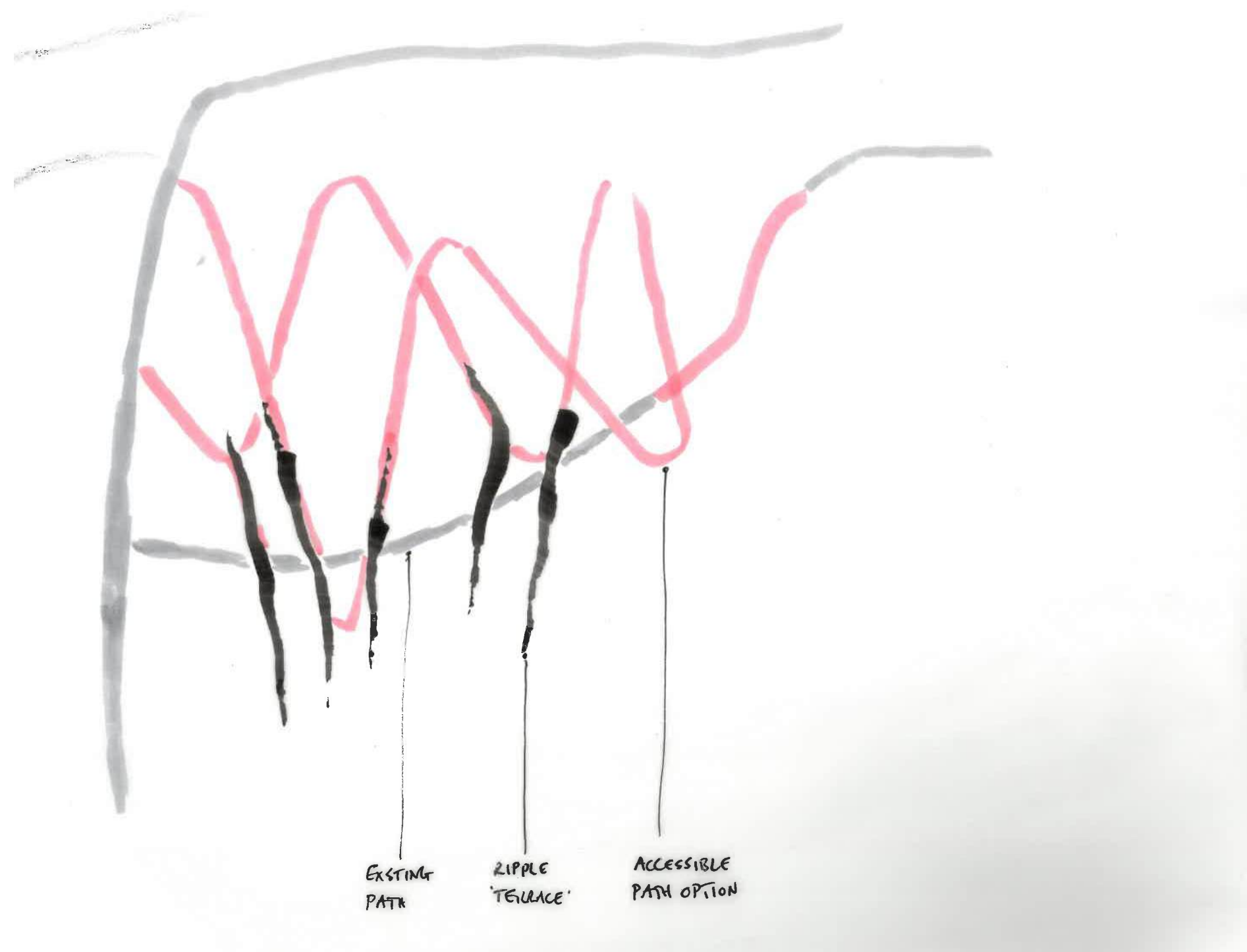
Through design development the original meadow terrace concept evolved into a more subtle landform strategy inspired by naturally occurring ripples and geological formations characteristic of the High Weald. This approach reduced earthworks, responded more sensitively to the existing topography and mature tree framework, and established the landscape language that informed the final proposals.



Rock Walk, Wakehurst



The Age of the Weald, geological map and cross-section, DK Images / Science Photo Library



Ripple abstractions mapped illustratively as meadow terrace areas, connecting with existing paths and accessible path options

Conceptual ripple studies illustrating how subtle changes in landform, movement and planting informed the final landscape framework. These diagrams are illustrative of the design process rather than the final layout.

Landscape Typologies – Evolution of the Meadow Terrace Concept

Design Evolution

Early design work explored how a series of landscape typologies could create a varied sequence of play experiences whilst responding to Wakehurst's distinctive landscape setting. Rather than developing a conventional playground, the ambition was to establish a series of connected landscape rooms, each with its own character, planting palette and opportunities for play, exploration and learning.

As the design evolved through consultation, site investigation and technical assessment, these individual typologies became less formally defined. Instead, their key principles were incorporated within a more integrated landscape framework that responds directly to the site's existing topography, mature tree structure and botanical setting.

The submitted proposals therefore retain the original aspirations of the Meadow Terrace concept, whilst expressing them through a lighter touch landscape intervention that sits more naturally within the surrounding landscape.

Meadow terrace: ecological and narrative typologies

A series of planting typologies was developed to understand how the soft landscape design could be developed in relation to the complex landscape character of the immediate site context of Wakehurst's botanical heritage, and the wider High Weald landscape composed of native planting.

Options for the meadow terrace were therefore organised around four broad typologies that describe how the Wild Play area could be ecologically positioned, structured, and integrated.

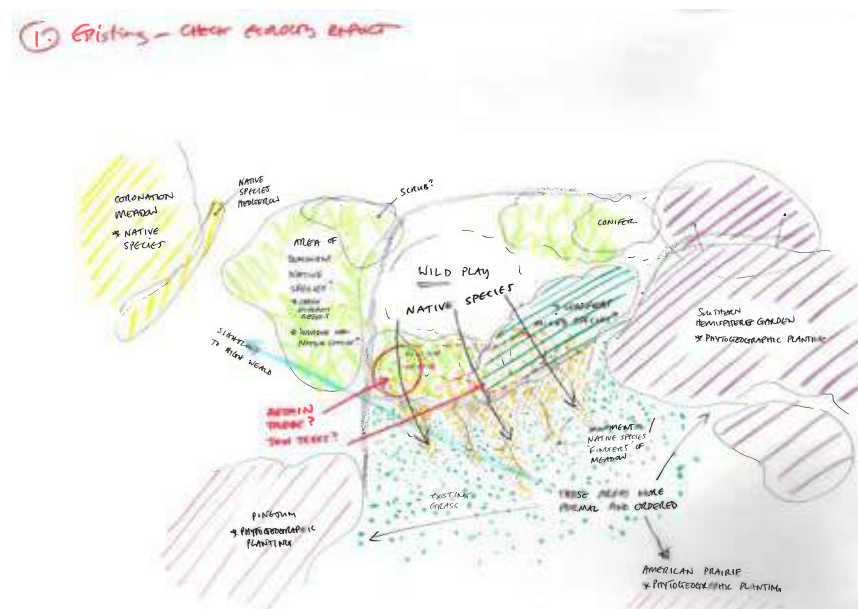
The four 'types' are:

1. HIGH WEALD
2. BOTANIC
3. INTERMINGLED
4. TRANSITIONAL BOUNDARIES

Each type or model reflects a design workshop preference to direct activity westwards and downhill along the southern boundary path. This approach responds to the presence of retained conifer trees near the eastern entrance and highlights the unique character of the Southern Hemisphere Garden. The typologies also allow for potential tree thinning, subject to findings from the arboricultural survey.

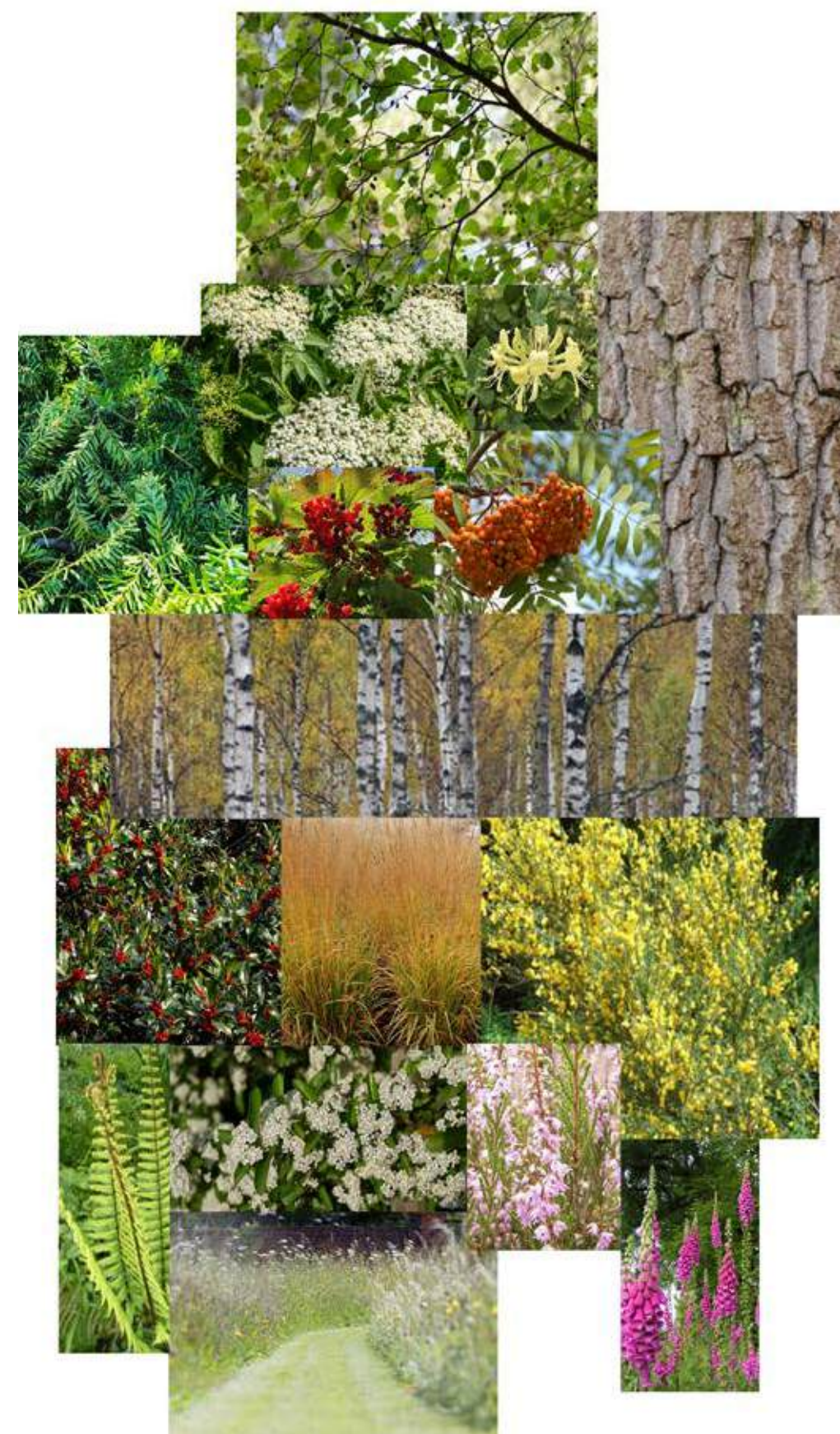
The typology explores three main considerations:

- The use of native and/or botanical planting palettes, focusing on how the meadow terraces connect with the Play area and align—both ecologically and narratively—with Wakehurst’s phytogeographic planting approach.
- How the meadow terraces interact with key views to and from the High Weald.
- Tree planting strategies, including options like scattered, clustered, or linear buffer planting—each offering different ecological and visual outcomes.

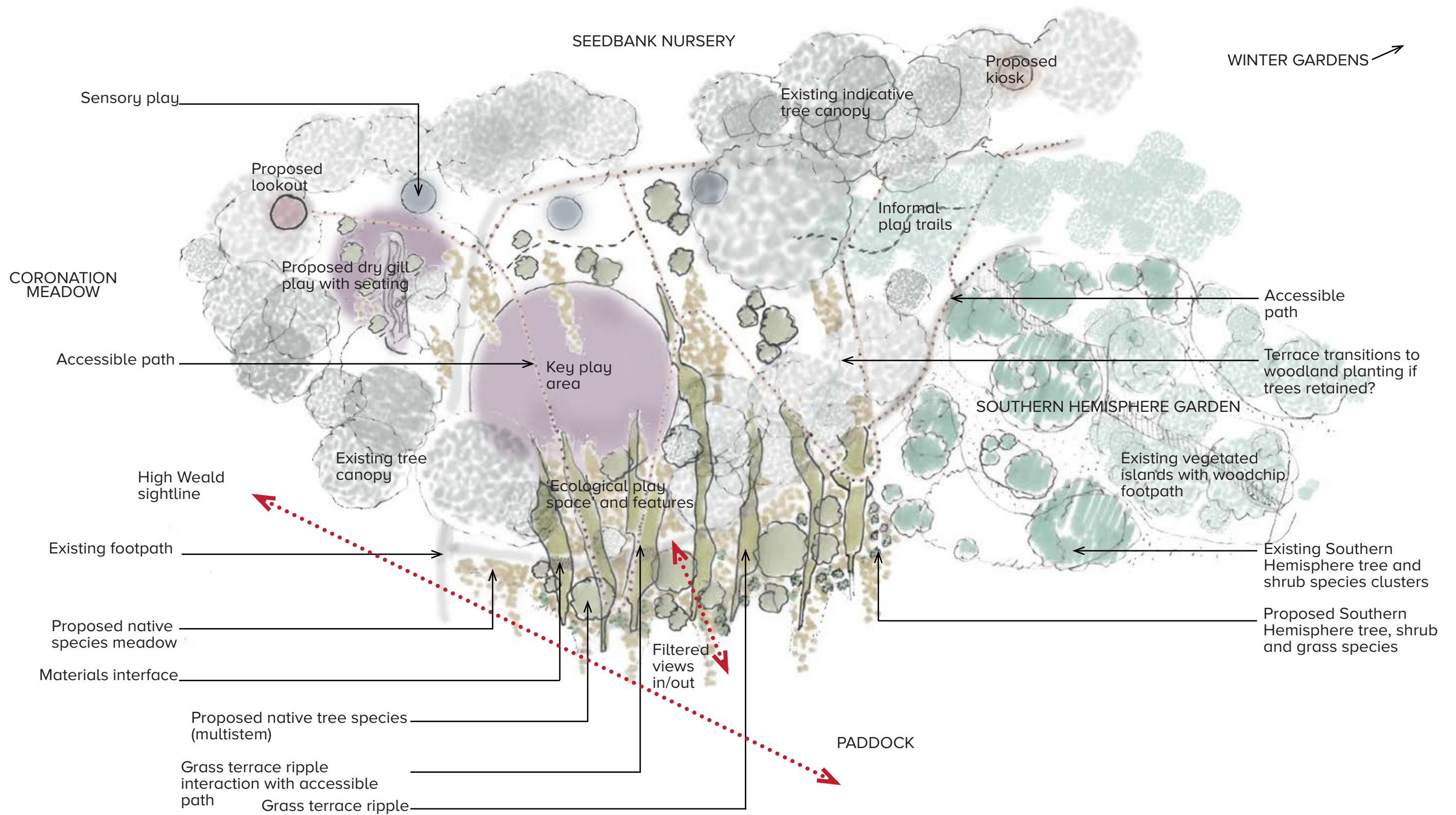




Botanic planting palette



Native planting palette



Meadow terrace: transitional boundary concept with scattered and clustered tree structure

Precedents for path material interactions



Timber, grass and sward height



Brick and timber



Site won recycled materials (urban industrial materials shown here only to illustrate concept)



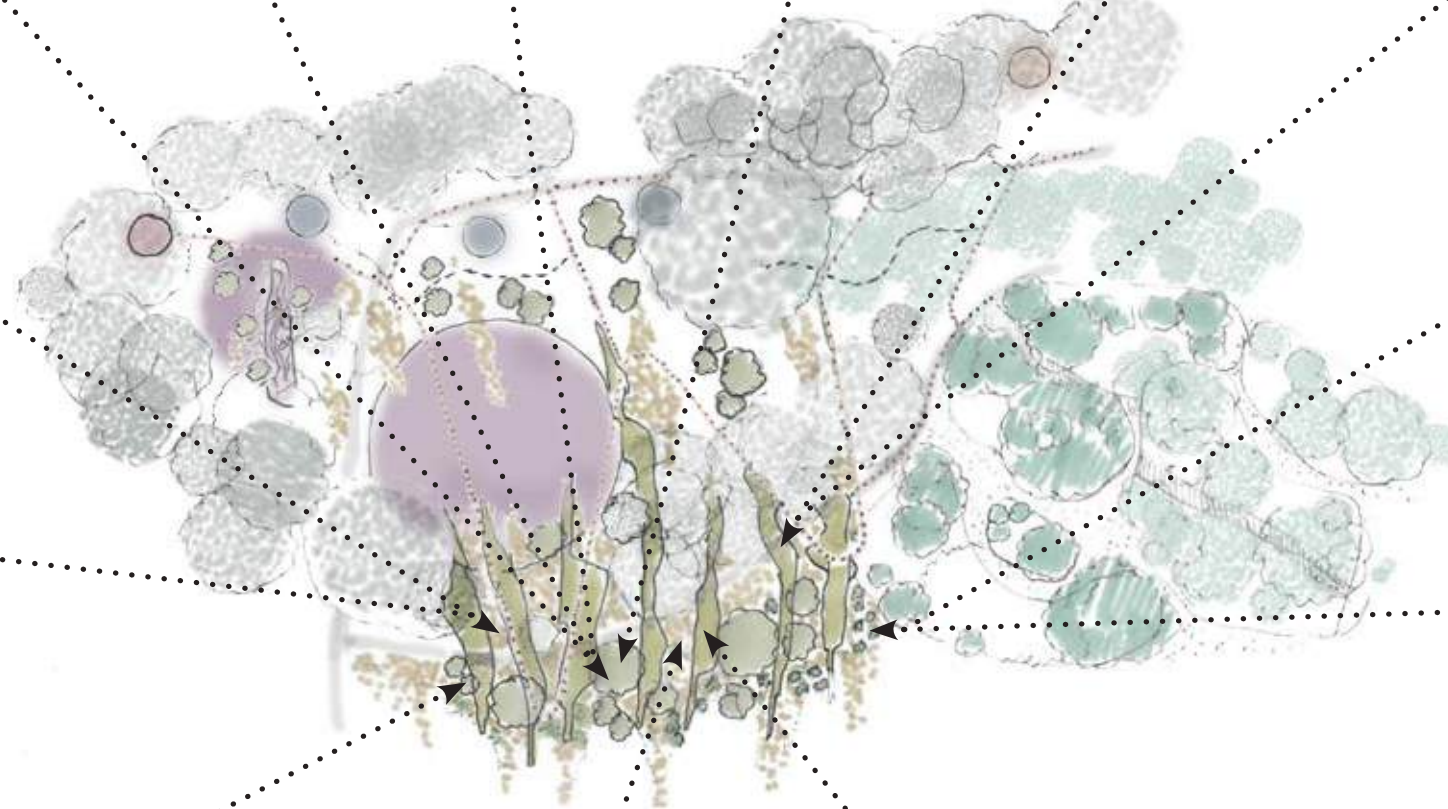
Gravel



Paths emerging from landscape



Stone cobbles with vegetation as spatial connector



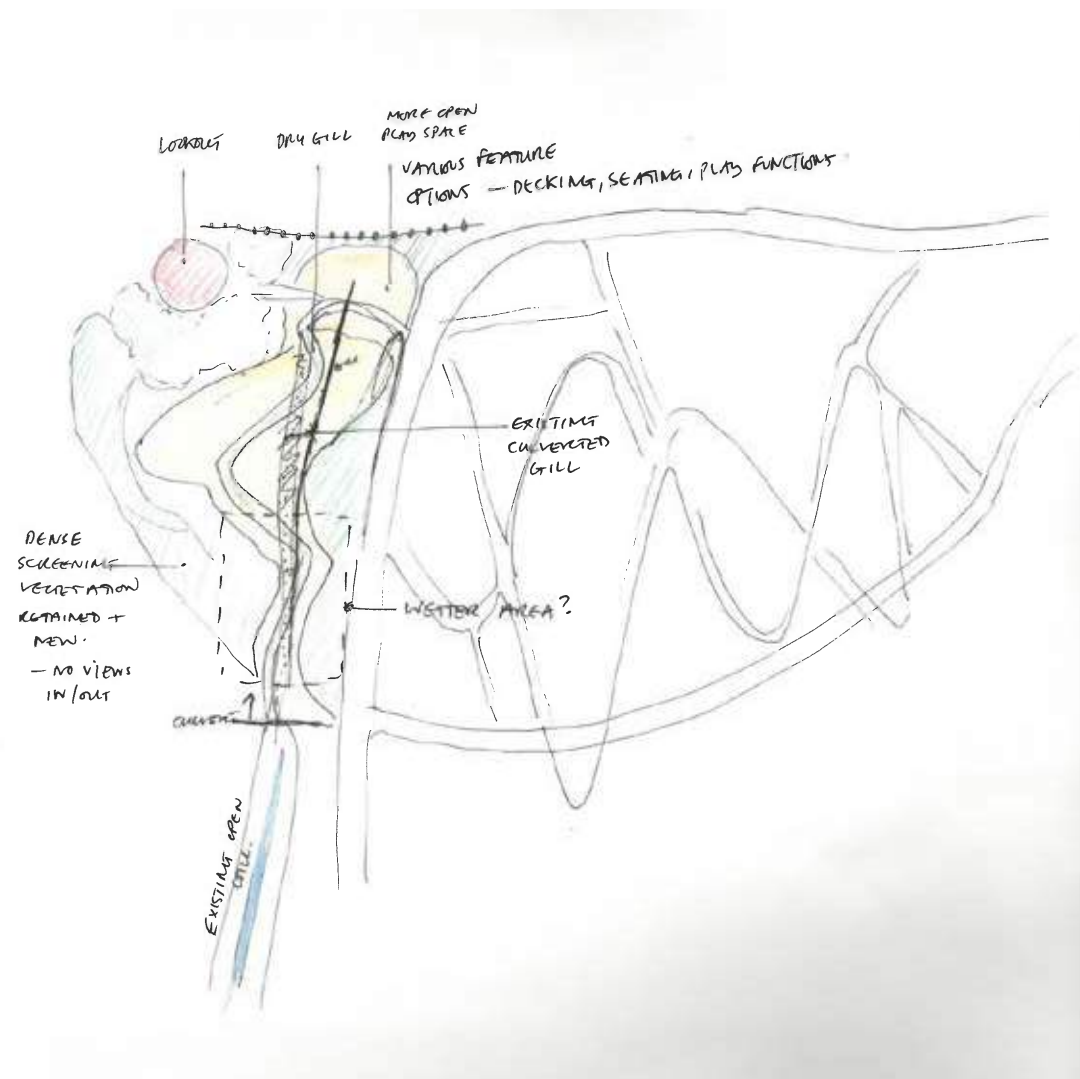
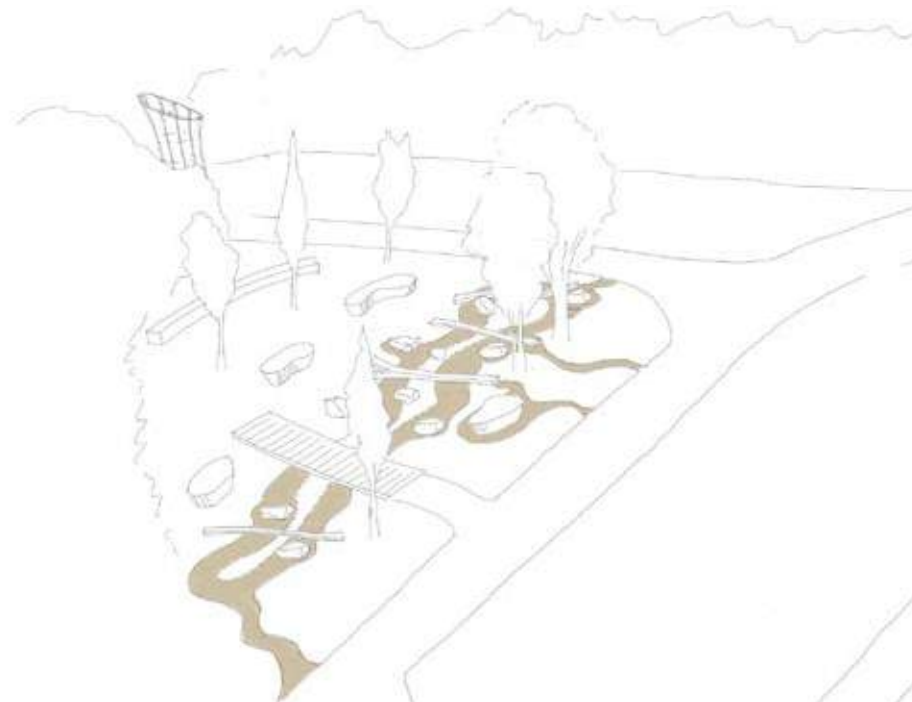
Concept Design Ideas

Dry Gill Concept

The dry gill has been developed as a subtle landscape feature inspired by the natural landform and drainage characteristics of the High Weald. Rather than creating a formal play element, it introduces opportunities for informal exploration, sensory play and seasonal interaction within the landscape.

Working with the site's existing topography, the feature follows natural changes in level and has been carefully integrated around retained trees and Root Protection Areas, minimising earthworks whilst reinforcing the landscape-led approach to the design. Timber, boulders and naturalistic planting define the space, creating opportunities for balance, discovery and imaginative play without relying on conventional play equipment.

The dry gill forms part of a wider sequence of landscape experiences, linking the woodland edge, play spaces and proposed lookout whilst reinforcing the transition between the managed gardens and the surrounding woodland landscape. It is intended to evolve naturally over time, with seasonal change becoming an integral part of the visitor experience.





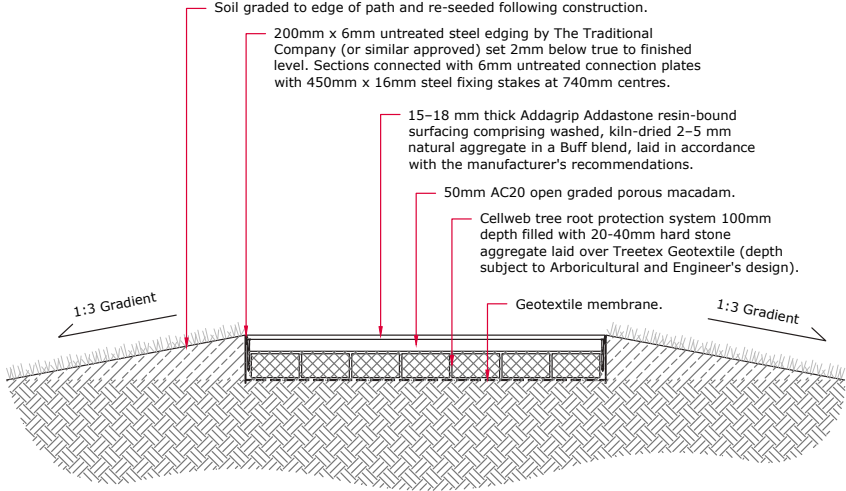
Perspective sketch looking onto a dry gill play area

Designing with Root Protection Areas

The design was developed and revised to consider precise root protection areas and to minimise ground disturbance and/or compaction. The following principles and methods were considered and integrated into design iterations:

- Avoiding Root Protection Areas (RPAs) wherever possible
- Using geocell systems to adopt ‘no dig’ approach with RPA’s
- Employing helical or screw pile technology to minimise impact of RPA’s (for potential use on play structures or boardwalks)

Examples of mitigation around RPA’s



DETAIL 3
Resin bound path in root protection area (no dig to BS5837).

Wakehurst Wild Play Foundations Area 3

Foundations in TPA must adhere to recommendations in Arboricultural method Statement.
Appropriate solutions to be based on site discovery.
Ground screw to be repositioned if roots present. For spade if in dense root areas.
Concrete pads to be repositioned if roots are present.
Concrete pads to be hand dug in root zones.
Ground screw length dependent on soil condition, a minimum of 500kg loading capacity per screw.

EAST SUSSEX
BN1 2PE

Section of large leaves over resin bonded rubber mulch



Design Evolution

The proposals have evolved through an iterative design process involving Studio Hardie, Southern Green, Wakehurst and specialist consultants.

Three-dimensional modelling, design workshops and landscape testing have been used throughout the project to better understand levels, sightlines, canopy structure, enclosure and relationships between planting and play equipment.

Successive iterations have progressively:

- Reduced visual impact.
- Simplified earthworks.
- Strengthened planting transitions.
- Improved accessibility.
- Refined the materials palette.
- Responded to arboricultural constraints.
- Strengthened ecological integration.

The final proposals represent a balanced response to landscape, heritage, ecology and visitor experience.

Design Principles

The following principles have guided the development of the proposals:

- Landscape before playground.
- Work with the existing topography.
- Retain mature trees wherever practicable.
- Integrate play within planting.
- Reinforce Wakehurst's botanical identity.
- Strengthen biodiversity.
- Minimise visual impact.
- Use robust natural materials.
- Deliver inclusive play.
- Create a landscape capable of evolving over time.

Stakeholder Engagement

The proposals have evolved through regular engagement between Wakehurst, Studio Hardie and Southern Green, supported by ongoing input from the project arboricultural consultant, ecologist and heritage consultant.

Design workshops have informed the evolution of the landscape strategy, planting approach, accessibility, materials palette and relationship with the wider estate, ensuring the proposals respond positively to both operational requirements and long-term aspirations for Wakehurst.

Section 4

Design Proposal

Overall Design Concept

The Wild Play proposals have been conceived as a landscape rather than a playground. The design seeks to create a series of interconnected outdoor rooms where play, learning and exploration emerge naturally from the existing landscape.

Rather than relying on formal boundaries or highly engineered spaces, the landscape is organised through subtle changes in topography, layered planting, natural materials and carefully integrated play structures. This approach allows the development to sit comfortably within the wider Wakehurst estate, creating a sequence of experiences that feel intrinsically connected to the surrounding woodland and gardens.

The proposals have also been developed in the context of the adjacent Lansdown Conservation Research Nursery, currently under construction immediately to the north. A direct pedestrian connection is incorporated between the two destinations, utilising the historic alignment of the former Wood Yard entrance (slightly repositioned to suit the new nursery layout). Together, the projects create a connected sequence of visitor experience, reinforcing Wakehurst’s wider ambitions for botanical research, conservation and education.

The arrangement of spaces encourages visitors to move naturally through the landscape, transitioning between open meadow, woodland edge and more enclosed play spaces before reconnecting with the wider gardens.

Site Layout

The overall layout has been informed by the existing landscape structure, mature trees and topography.

Primary accessible routes connect the principal play spaces whilst secondary informal routes encourage exploration and provide alternative journeys through the landscape.

Play experiences are arranged as a series of distinct but interconnected spaces, providing opportunities for climbing, balancing, imaginative play, quiet reflection and informal gathering. Existing trees, changes in level and new planting help define these spaces whilst maintaining visual continuity across the site.

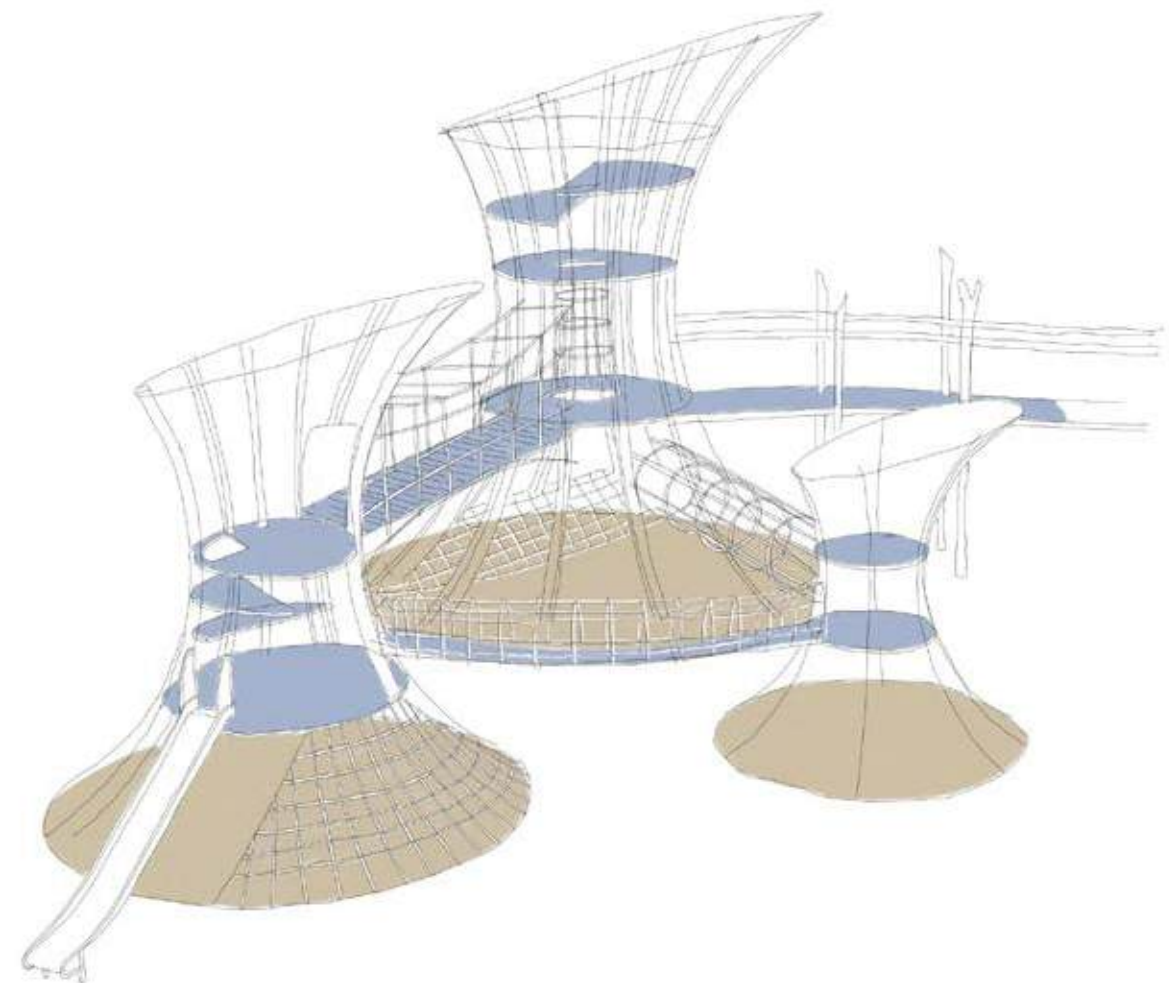
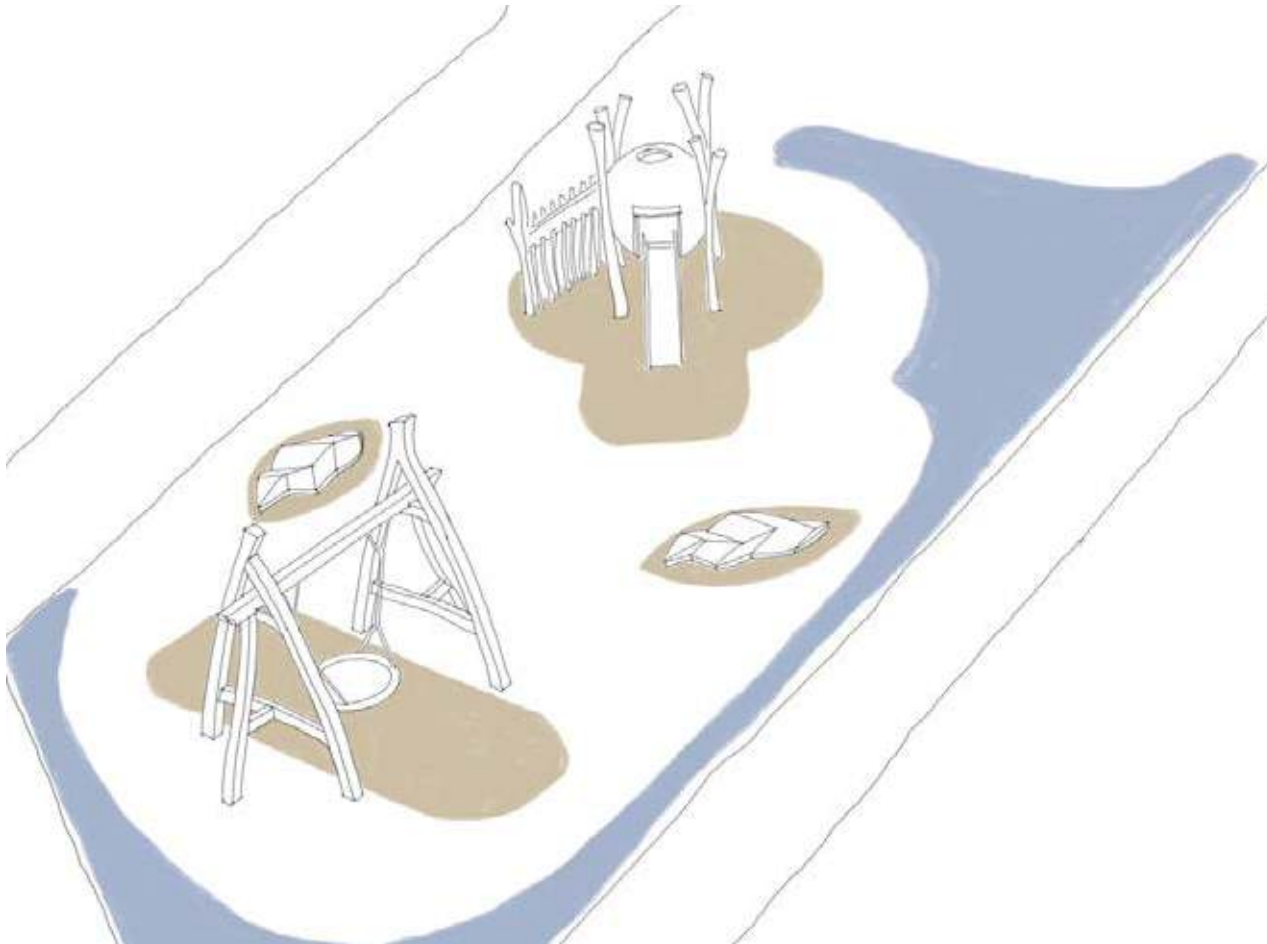
Suggested Illustrations

Play Structures

Play structures have been carefully integrated within the landscape rather than becoming dominant visual elements.

The equipment has been designed to encourage imaginative, physical and sensory play whilst responding to the site's woodland setting. The proposals include opportunities for climbing, balancing, swinging, gathering, exploration and quieter play, with accessible play opportunities distributed throughout the landscape.

Natural materials and bespoke timber structures reinforce the landscape-led character of the proposals.



Play equipment development & concept

Design Vision

The play equipment draws inspiration from the interconnected worlds of science and nature, reflecting the work of the Millennium Seed Bank and the Nature Unlocked programme. The concept explores the hidden relationships within natural ecosystems, using play structures, surfacing and landscape to create both physical and metaphorical pathways that encourage exploration, discovery and learning.

The design celebrates the life cycle of plants, from seeds and roots beneath the ground to fungi, grasses and flowering plants above, creating an immersive environment where children can experience nature through play.

Play Experience

The play strategy has evolved alongside the landscape proposals, ensuring that opportunities for exploration, learning and physical play emerge naturally from the surrounding landscape rather than being imposed upon it.

A series of interconnected physical challenges caters for a wide range of ages and abilities. Different play zones offer varying levels of difficulty, from accessible, parent-supported play to more physically demanding climbing experiences for older children. Many of the challenges are intentionally open-ended, encouraging children to invent their own routes and ways of playing rather than following prescribed activities.

The equipment is designed to be experienced on multiple levels, with opportunities to travel through, under, over and around the structures. At ground level, engaging obstacles create accessible routes for exploration, while taller climbing structures provide greater challenge, adventure and rewarding viewpoints.

Complementing the physical play are simple sensory experiences inspired by close observation of nature. Looking closely at naturally occurring patterns, colours, textures and forms has informed a series of interactive features that celebrate the beauty and complexity of plant life.

Key Design Themes

- Fungi-inspired Play Towers – Large landmark climbing structures inspired by the distinctive forms of woodland fungi, creating memorable destinations that are instantly recognisable to children.
- Layers of Nature – Using climbing nets, ropes, ladders and platforms: Play opportunities represent the hidden and visible layers of the natural world, including root net-works, underground ecosystems and plant growth.
- Seed Pods & Plant Forms – Adventure play elements inspired by seed pods, grasses and botanical structures create a playful trail through the landscape.
- Accessible Sensory Play – Inclusive sensory experiences encourage exploration through touch, sound, movement and natural materials.

Play Feature

- Oversized Seed pods – Large climbable seed forms that can be opened to reveal tactile textures
- Seed Pod Climbers – Timber play pods based on seed casings, connected by rope tunnels and climbing routes.
- Sensory Seed Textures – Sculptural seed forms showcasing the diverse textures found in nature, from smooth and polished to rough and spiky surfaces.
- Adventure Climbing Zone – Interactive climbing features that emulate long grasses and blown up natural features..
- Root & Shoot Tunnels – A network of elevated ground level routes symbolising the growth of roots and shoots as plants develop.
- Natural Gill Stream Play – A low-level dry stream that follows the existing landform, encouraging imaginative and seasonal natural play.



Merging play equipment and landscape

The landscape has been designed as a low-tech, low-impact solution that works with the site's existing topography rather than against it. By responding to the natural contours of the land, the play experience feels integrated into the landscape while reducing environmental impact and construction requirements.

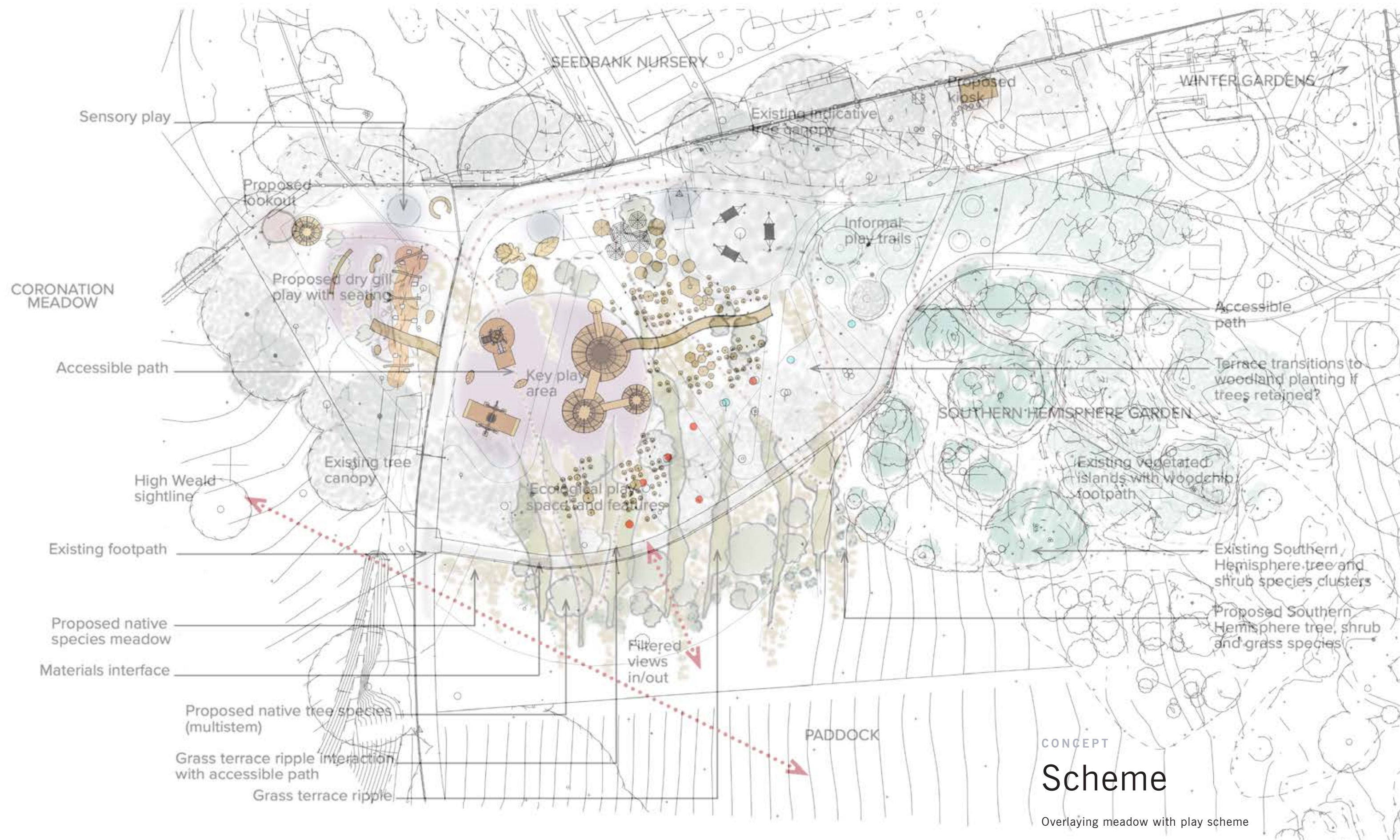
The dry gill stream has been designed to work around existing Root Protection Areas (RPAs) while maximising play opportunities using the site's natural levels. Rather than relying on fixed equipment, this area encourages open-ended natural play that evolves with the changing seasons.

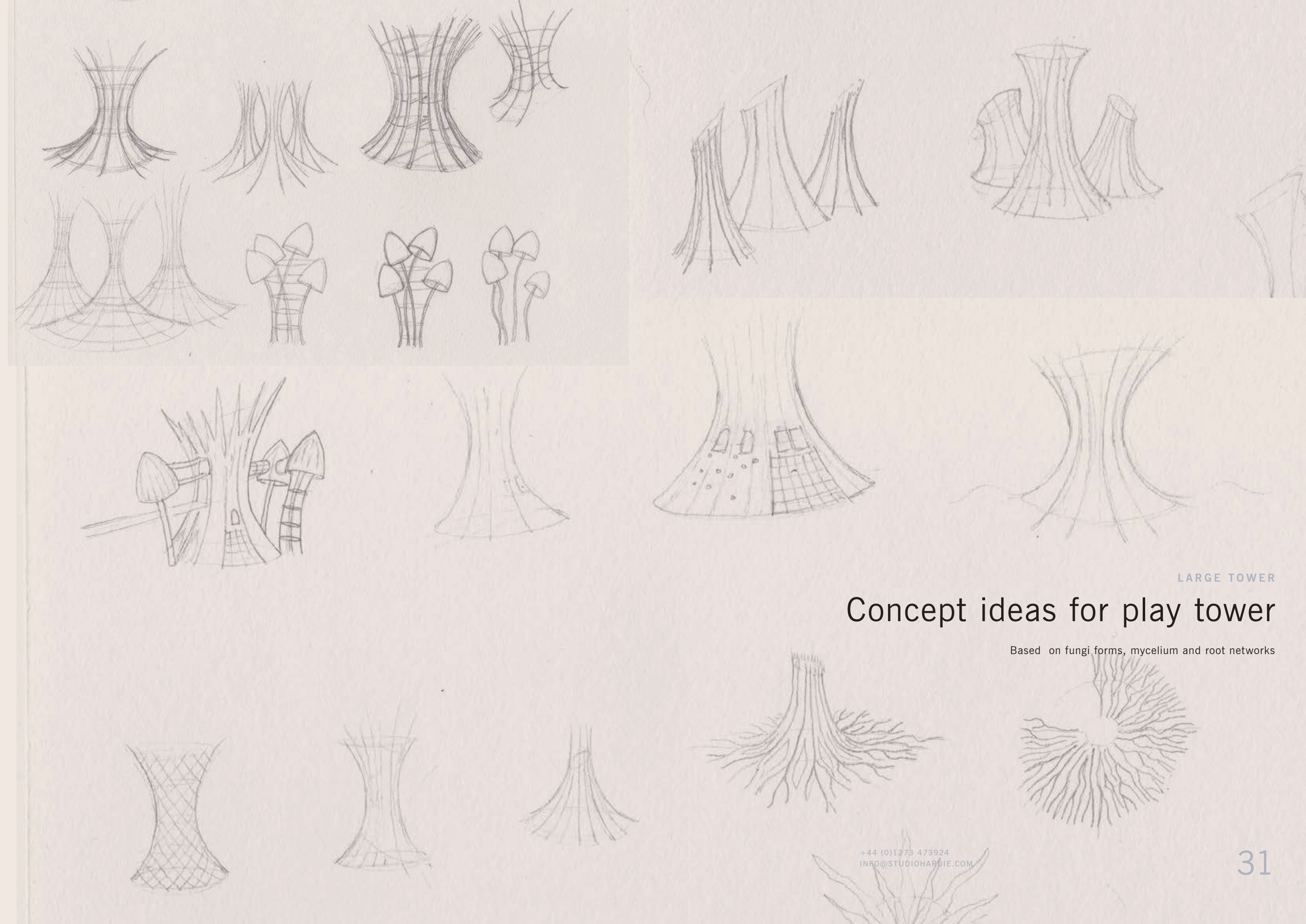
The Lookout

The Lookout forms the culmination of the play journey and provides a destination for visitors of all ages to enjoy panoramic views across the High Weald.

The structure is conceived as a lightweight skeletal framework that provides access to two viewing levels via both ramps and stairs. The ramps are positioned to the east to maximise accessibility while maintaining uninterrupted views across the landscape.

Designed as an understated architectural intervention, the frame-work is intended to become enveloped by climbing plants over time, gradually transforming into a hidden destination that feels as though it has emerged naturally from the landscape itself.





LARGE TOWER

Concept ideas for play tower

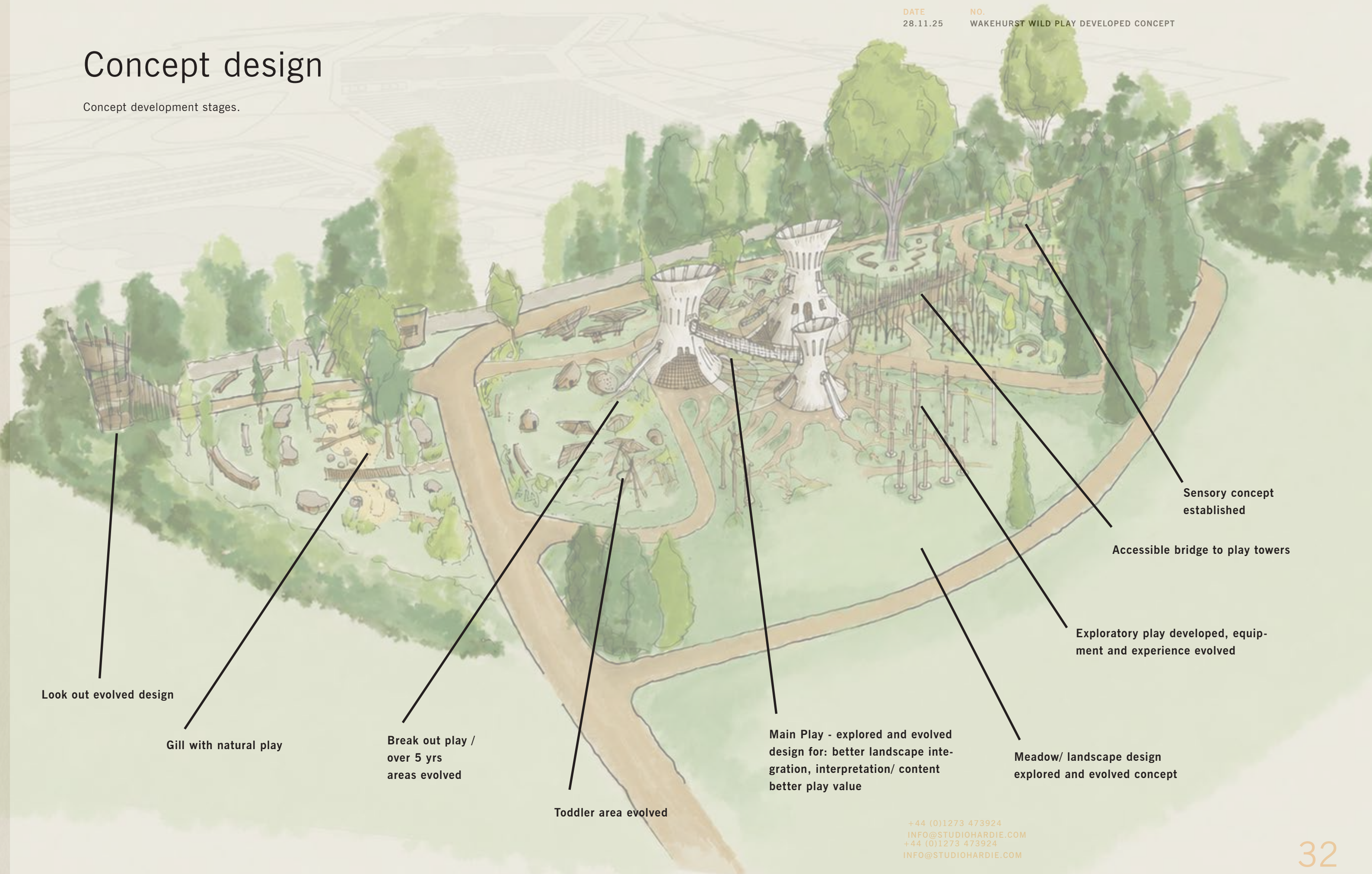
Based on fungi forms, mycelium and root networks

DATE
28.11.25

NO.
WAKEHURST WILD PLAY DEVELOPED CONCEPT

Concept design

Concept development stages.



Look out evolved design

Gill with natural play

Break out play /
over 5 yrs
areas evolved

Toddler area evolved

Main Play - explored and evolved
design for: better landscape inte-
gration, interpretation/ content
better play value

Meadow/ landscape design
explored and evolved concept

Exploratory play developed, equip-
ment and experience evolved

Accessible bridge to play towers

Sensory concept
established

+44 (0)1273 473924
INFO@STUDIOHARDIE.COM
+44 (0)1273 473924
INFO@STUDIOHARDIE.COM

PLAYFUL STRUCTURES

The Main Play Zone

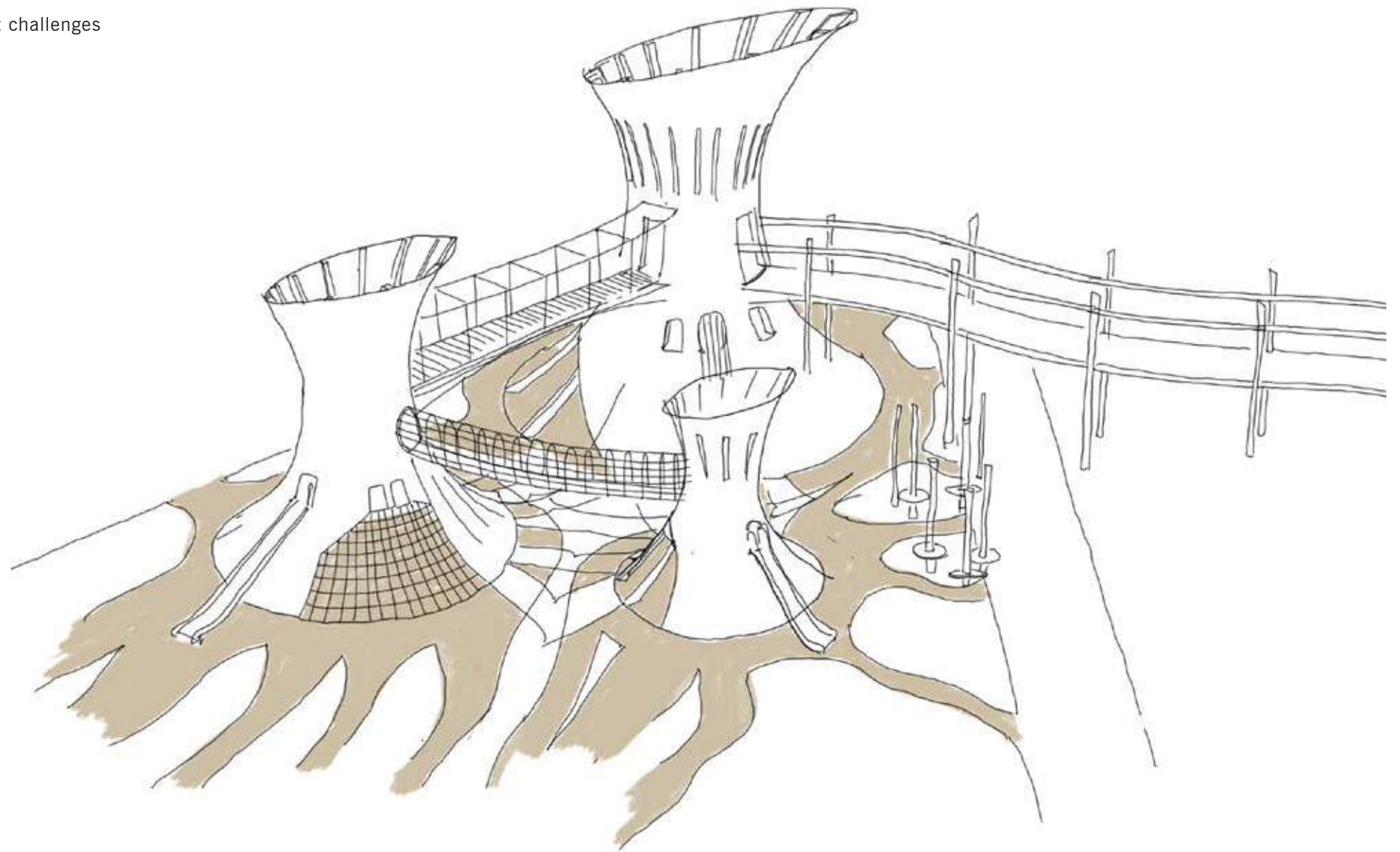
The Main Play Zone forms the heart of the play experience whilst remaining visually integrated within the surrounding woodland and planting structure.

The zone provides a more energetic play environment, with a series of difficult challenges for adventurous play. Here we have moved away from more literal representation and explored more abstract nature based forms.



PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

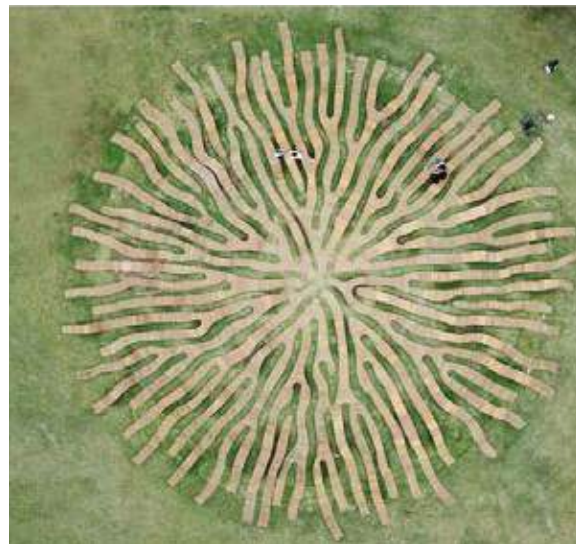
- Develop scheme in relation to RPAs and path network
- Develop scheme to allow for multiple routes and challenges
- Use topography for greater play value
- Develop ground surface patterns and materials for play value and content
- Develop interiors for play value and interpretation
- Develop accessible routes and offers through equipment
- Explore theme of mycelium/ roots/ connection
- Explore viability of growing plants up the structures
- Develop 'feature' passing places on accessible ramp
- Ensure lower level has accessible spaces and interactive play



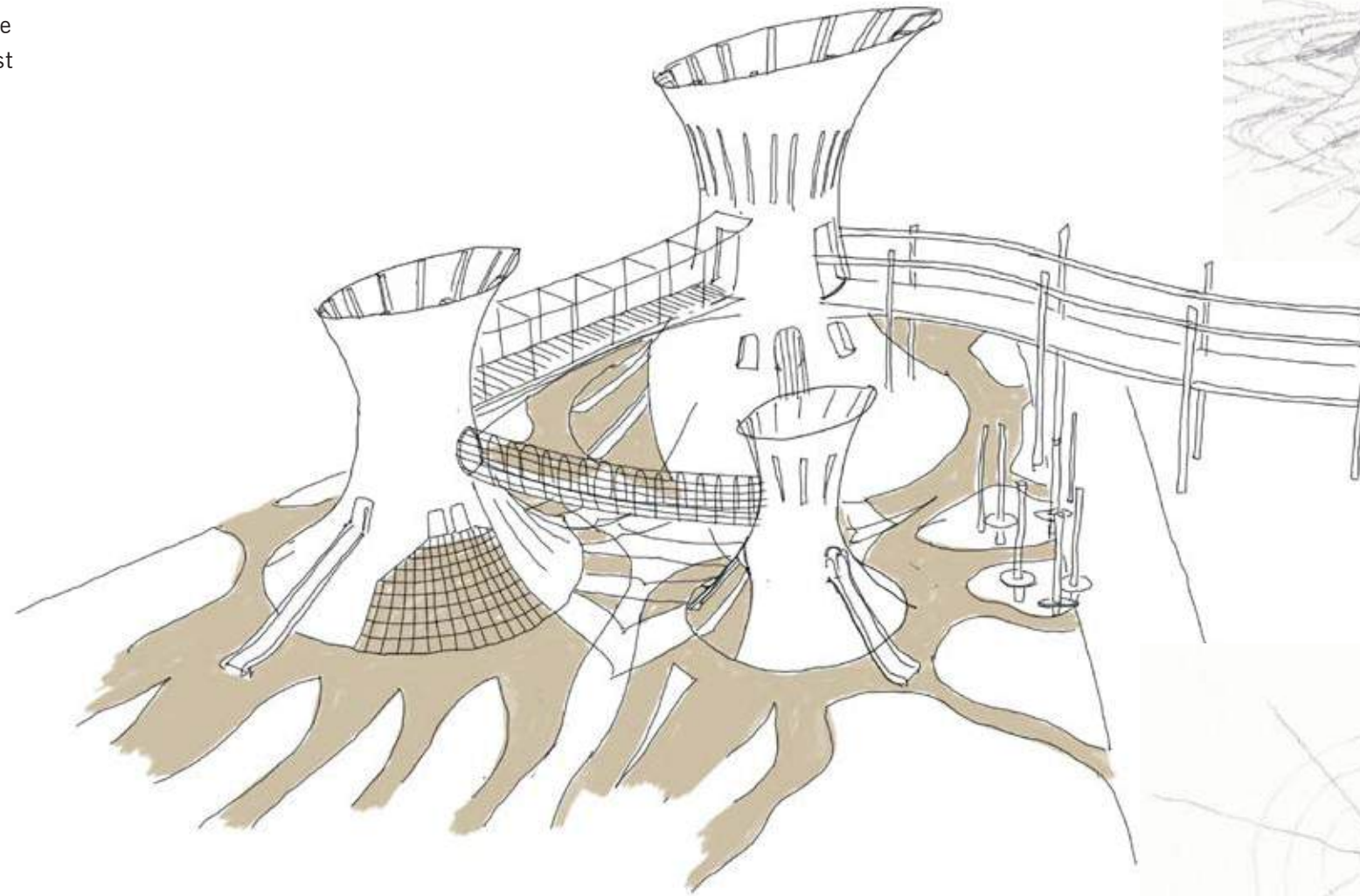
DEVELOPMENT

Mycelium / Roots

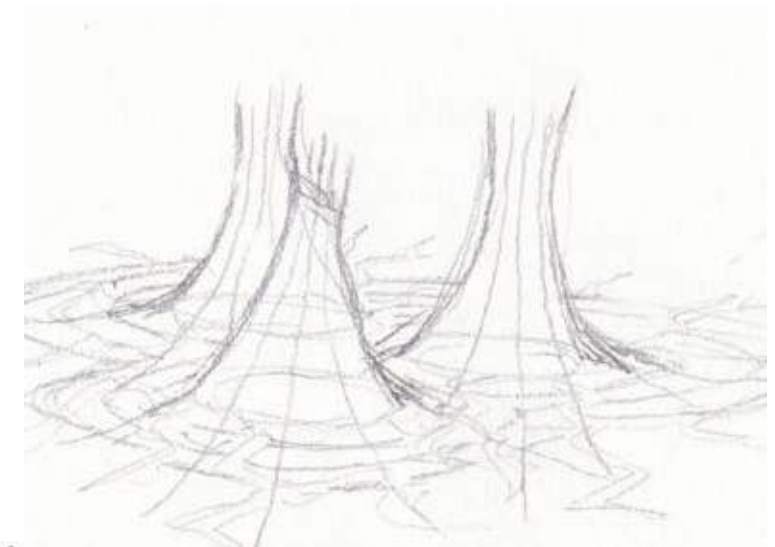
The structural language draws inspiration from natural mycelium networks and root systems, reinforcing the connection between the play surfacing, structures and the wider woodland landscape whilst creating opportunities for exploration, climbing and discovery.



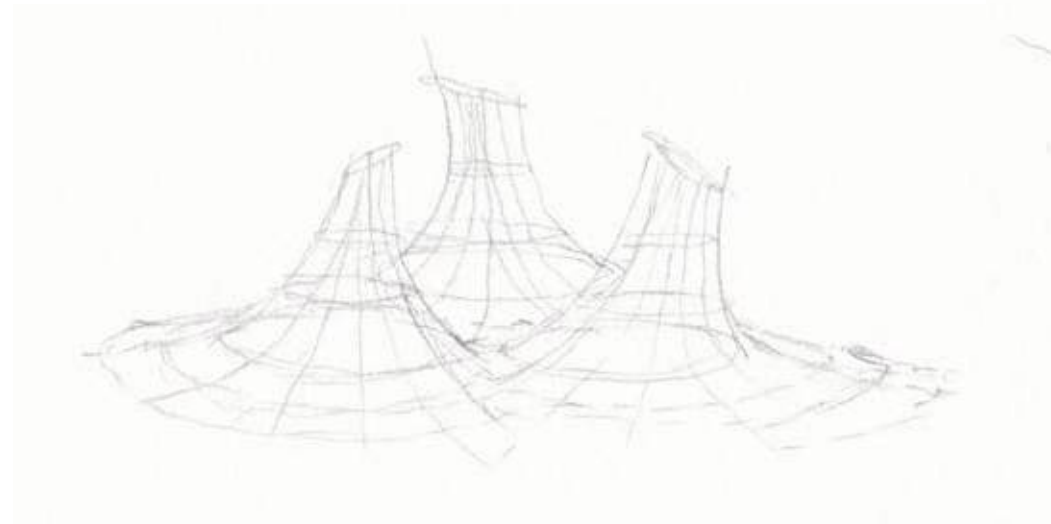
ABOVE -SHOWING HOW SURFACING
COULD BE USED TO EXPLORE NET-
WORKS

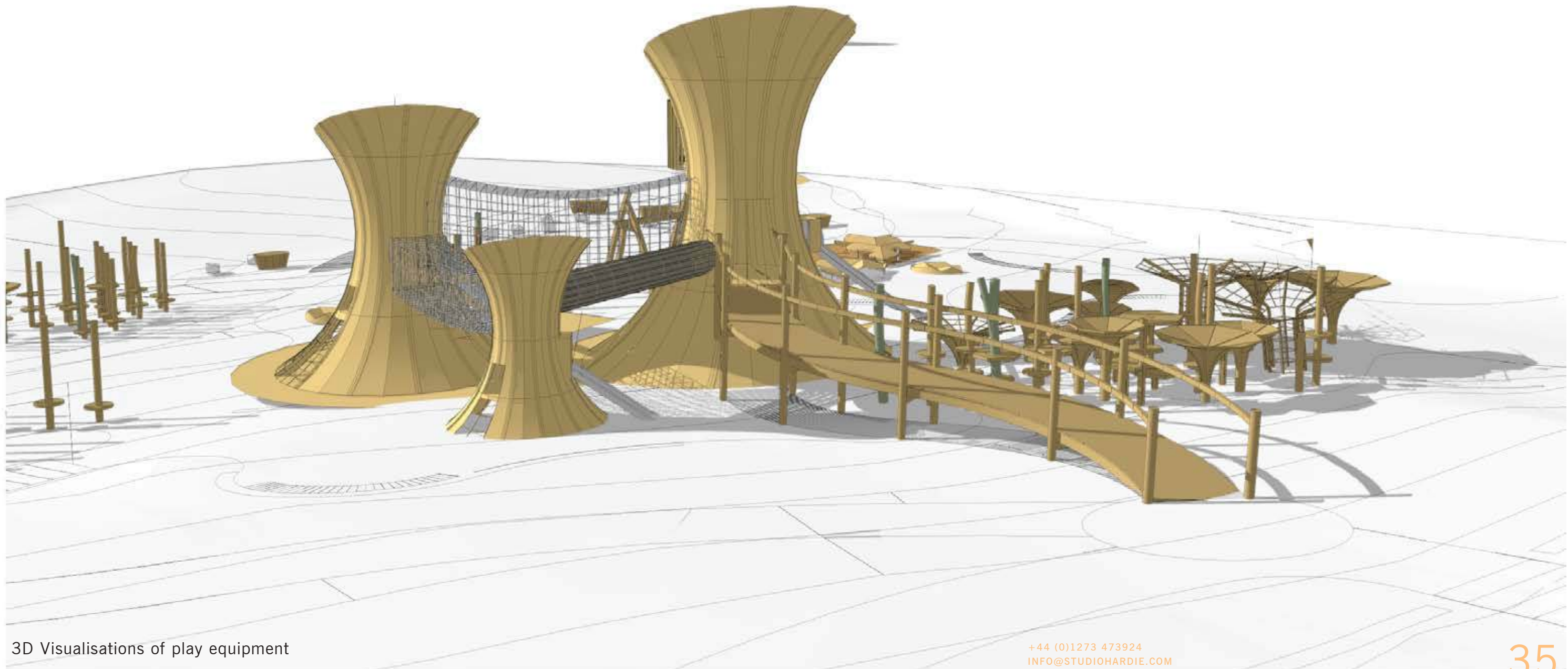


RIGHT -SHOWING HOW STRUCTURES
CREATE A WEB BETWEEN THEM



ABOVE -SHOWING HOW STRUCTURES
CREATE A WEB BETWEEN THEM





3D Visualisations of play equipment



Sensory / Seating

Creating small, quieter spaces and interesting sensory discoveries, facilitating SEND.

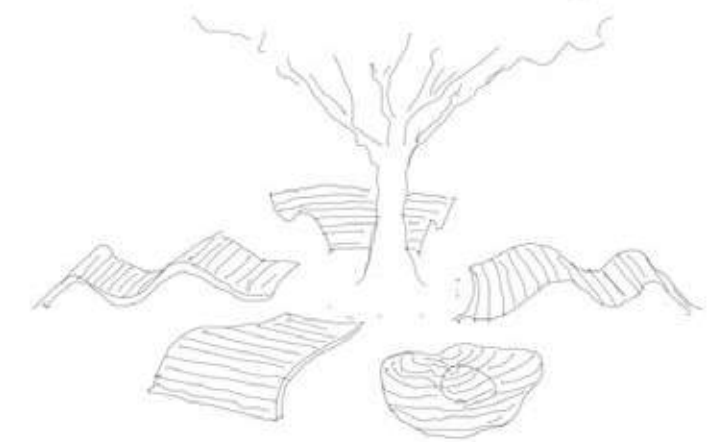
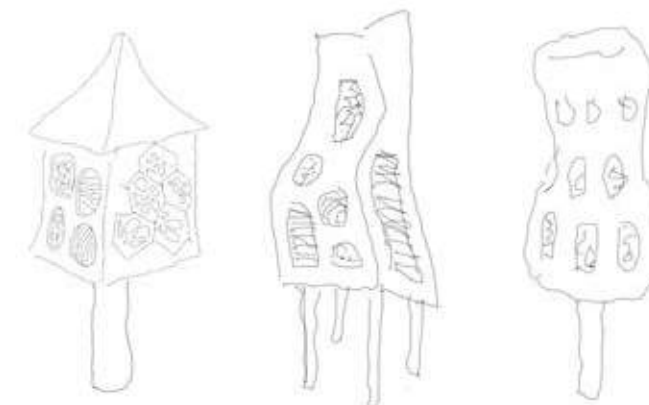
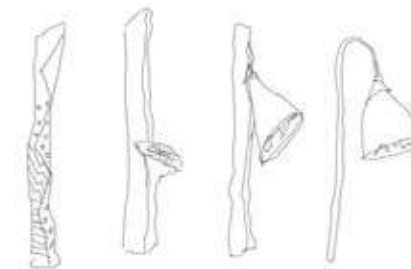
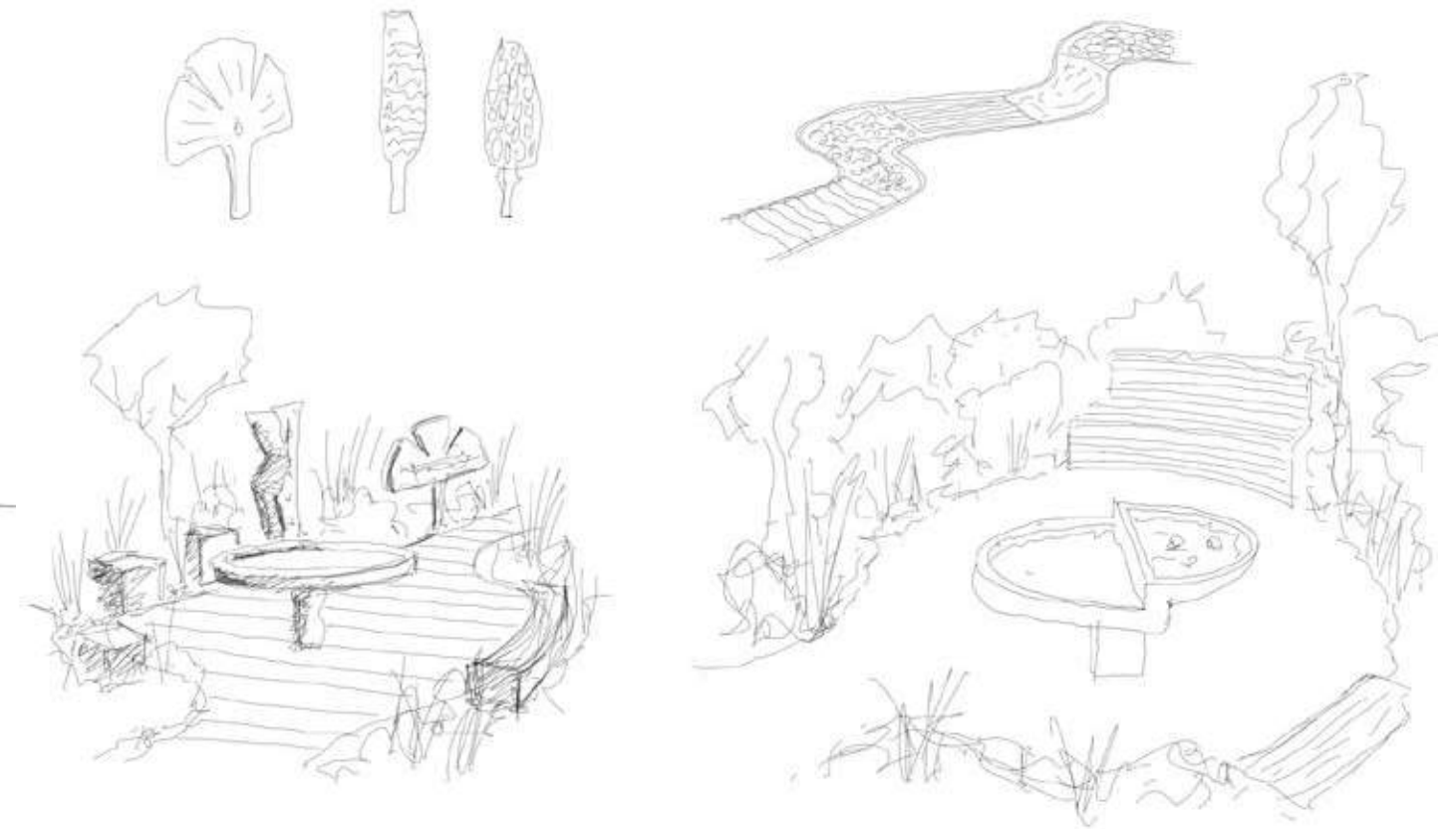
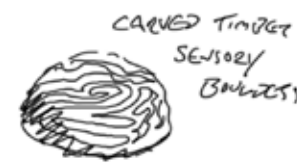
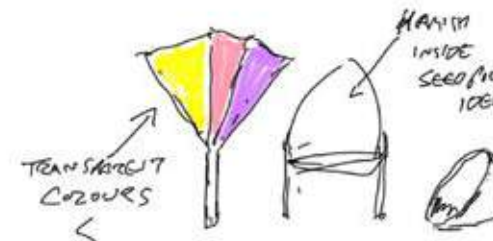
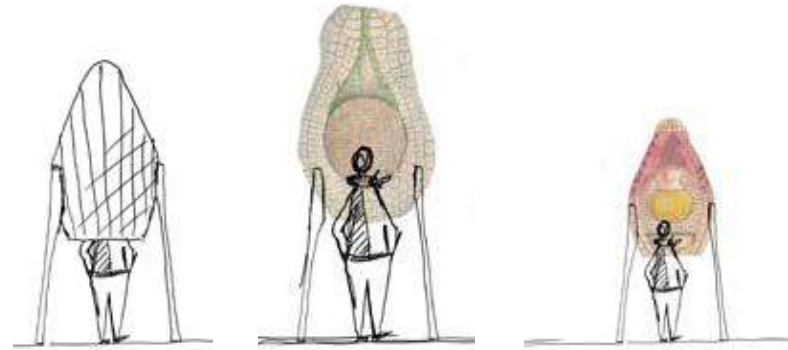


Quieter Areas / Sensory Discoveries

SEND

Experience through touch, feel and sight. Messy tactile play, direct connection with tactile nature.

Discoveries, facilitating children's curiosity and game play.



Toddler and Family Zone

A series of small less demanding challenges with appropriate size climbing and swinging equipment, designed to be family friendly.

DATE
28.11.25

NO.
WAKEHURST WILD PLAY DEVELOPED CONCEPT



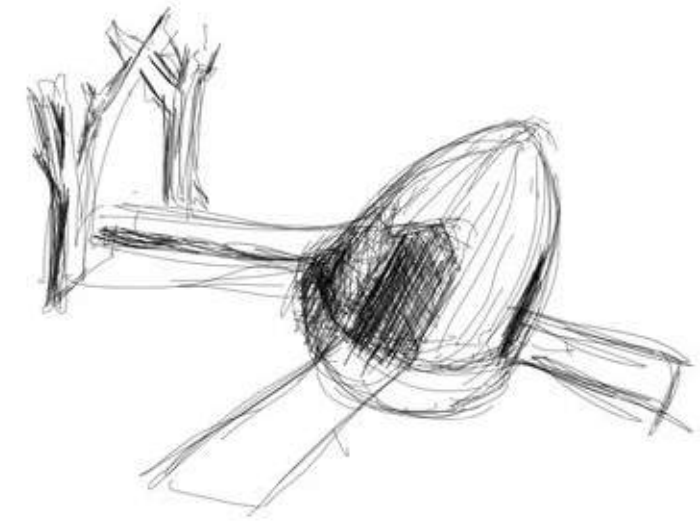
BELOW - SEED POD TOWER WITH RAMP AND SLIDE



ABOVE - ACCESSIBLE BASKET SWING



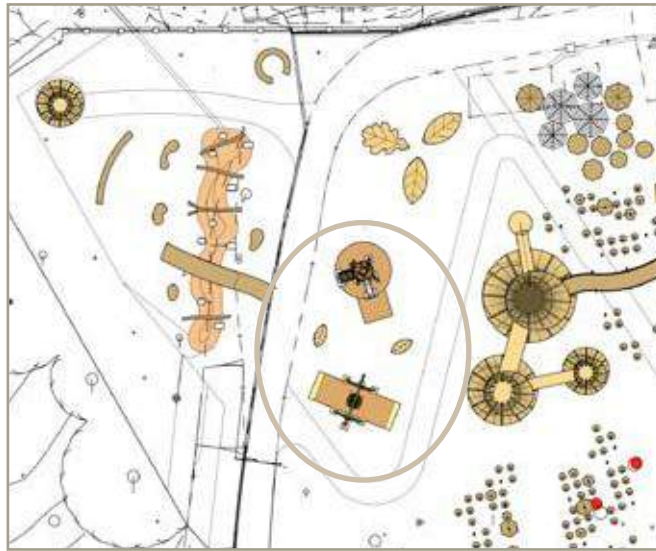
ABOVE - LARGE LEAVES FOR CLIMBING AND SITTING



TODDLER

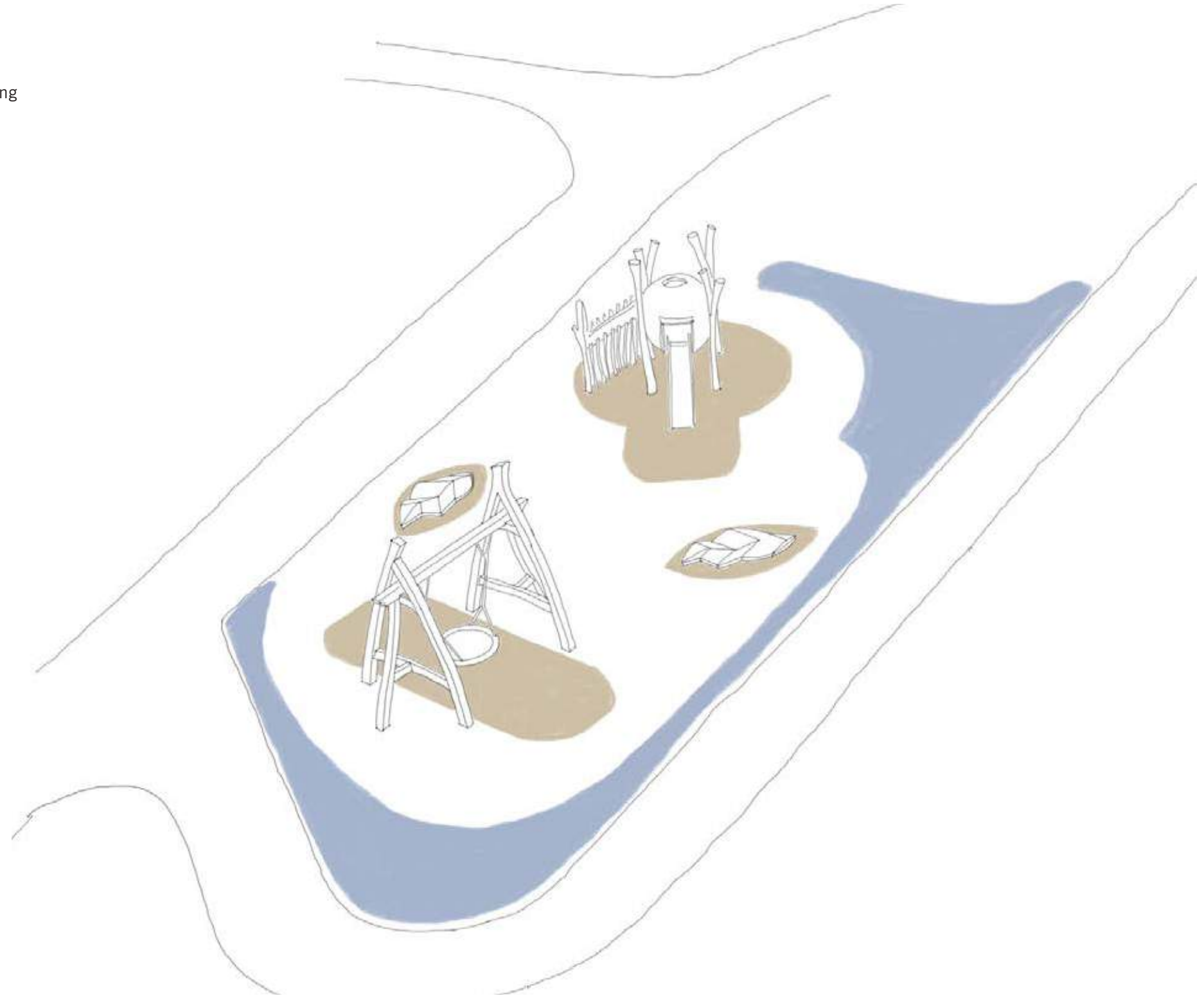
Toddler and Family Zone

A series of small, less demanding challenges with appropriate-size climbing and swinging equipment, designed to be family friendly.



PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

- Develop scheme in relation to RPAs and path network
- Ensure easy supervision for younger children
- Allowance for simple sensory play
- Explore materiality and sensory textures
- Develop ground surface patterns and materials for play value and texture



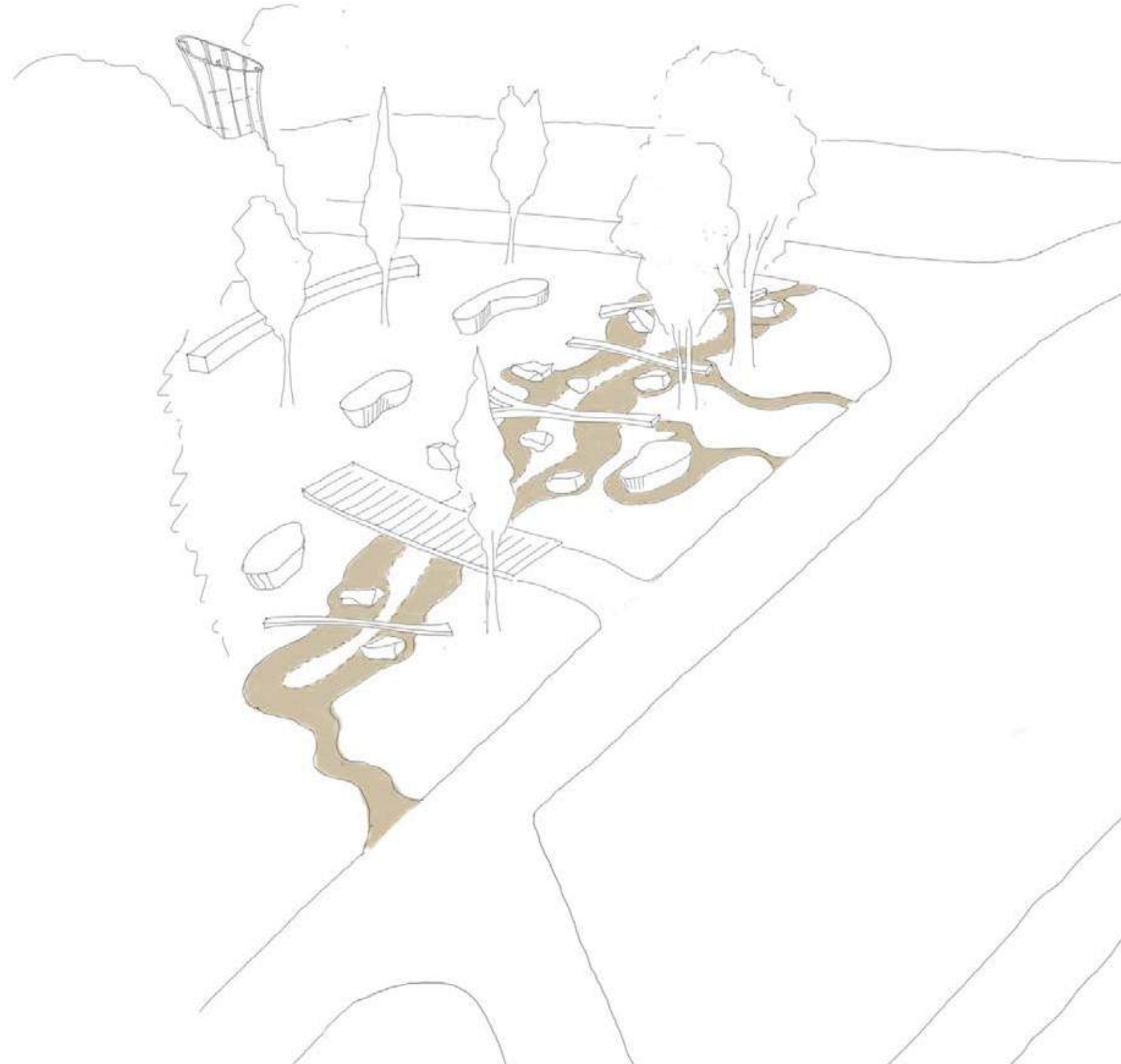
Low Level Natural Play

Using natural materials to create a soft, natural play space, un- prescribed play. This could take the form of dry swale for cost saving purposes.



PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

- Develop scheme in relation to RPAs and path network
- Develop rain catching dishes and low maintenance water play
- Explore materiality and sensory textures
- Develop scheme to allow for multiple routes and challenges
- Develop seating platform design
- Use topography for greater play value
- Develop ground surface patterns and materials for play value and texture
- Develop accessible routes and offers through equipment
- Consider potential shelter to west of area





ABOVE -MAIN BRIDGE COULD BE AN
ACCESSIBLE WOBBLE BRIDGE FOR
ADDITIONAL PLAY VALUE

ABOVE -DIFFERENT CHALLENGES TO
CROSS THE GILL

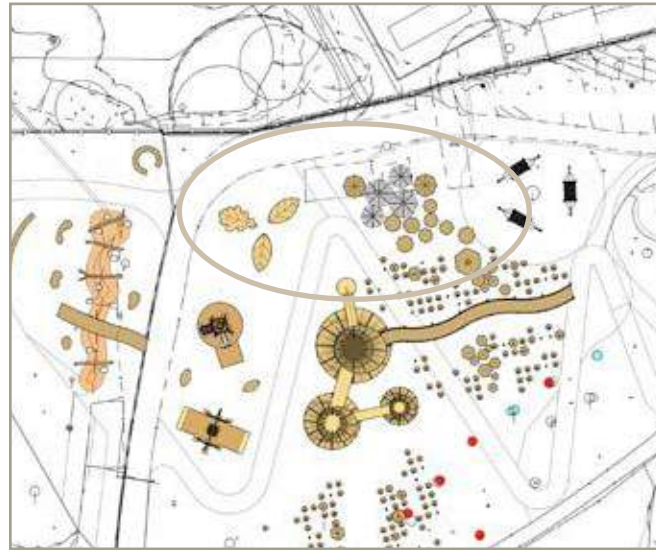


BELOW -ILLUSTRATION OF GILL ZONE

FEATURE PLAY

Over-5s Play Features

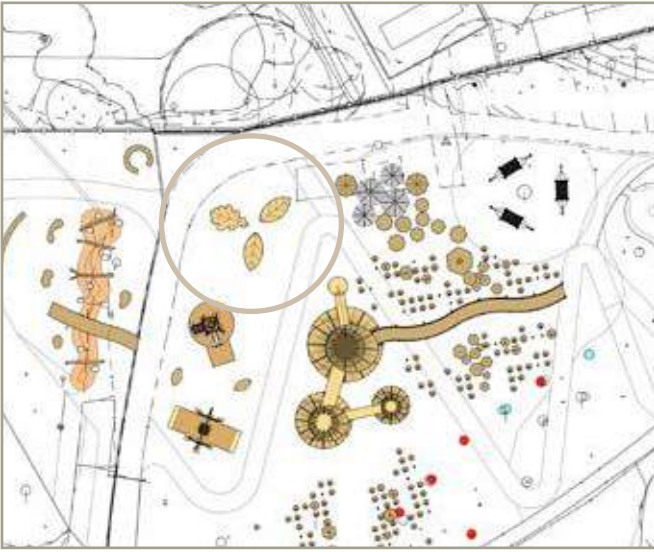
A series of medium sized play structures/ challenges with varied types of activity, set slightly apart from the main big play zone.



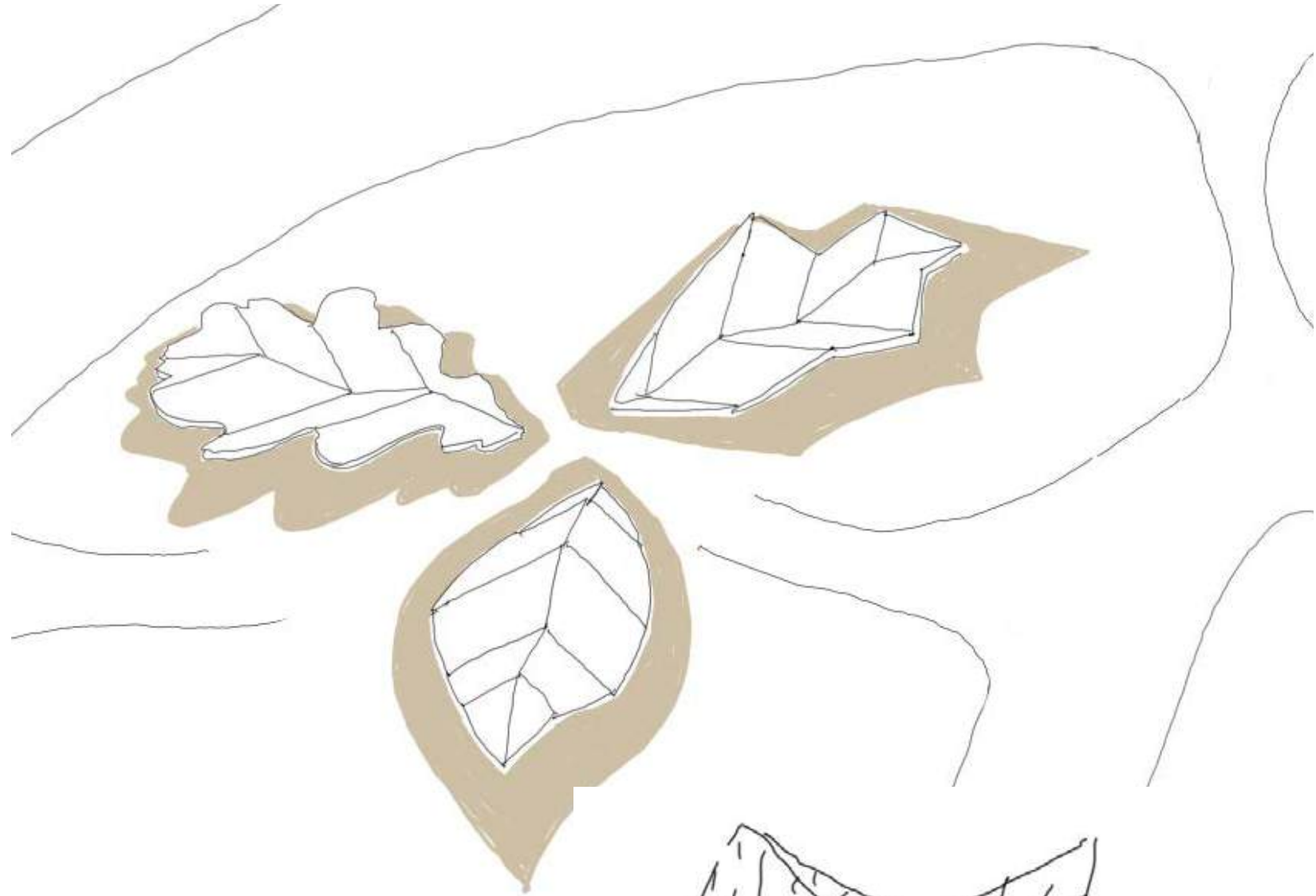
PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

- Develop scheme in relation to RPAs and path network.
- Develop scheme to allow for multiple routes and challenges.
- Use topography for greater play value.
- Develop ground surface patterns and materials for play value and content.
- Develop accessible routes and offers through equipment.
- Develop exact locations to allow for flow through the equipment.
- Develop wheelchair transfer sections on leaves.

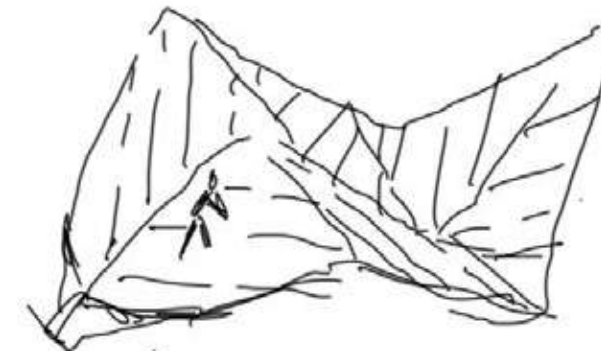




ABOVE -LARGE LEAVES FOR CLIMBING



ABOVE -TIMBER LEAVES COULD RE-
SEMBLE NATIVE OR EXOTIC SPECIES



ABOVE -LARGE LEAVES FOR CLIMBING

Site Wide Adventure + Connecting Zones

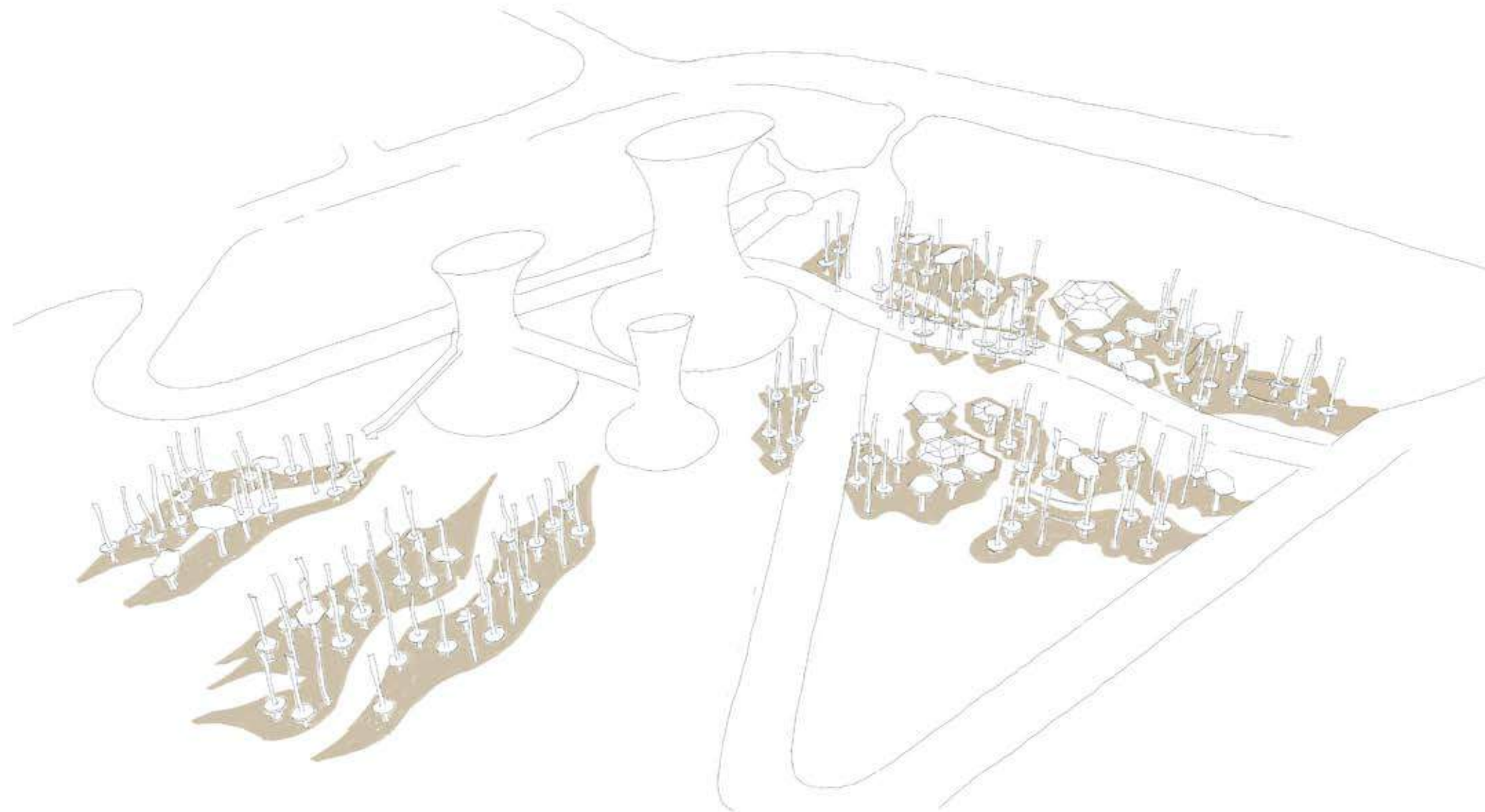
A background series of challenges and tasks to move between zones, this connects each space with a wide range of challenge and skill. Based on enlarging plants and fungi children can explore these trails at multiple levels through a range of physical challenges. These features weave through the accessible paths to enable all to engage.

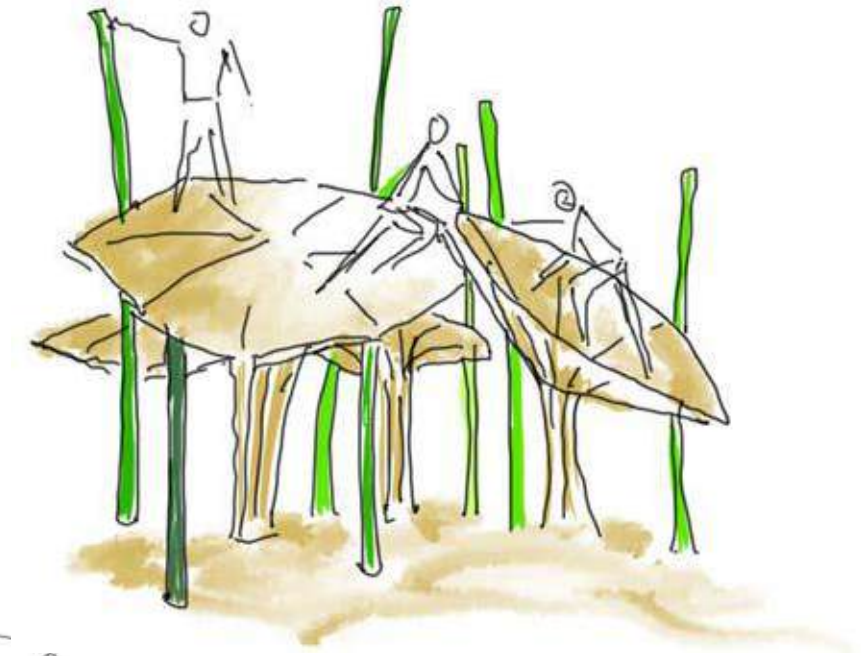
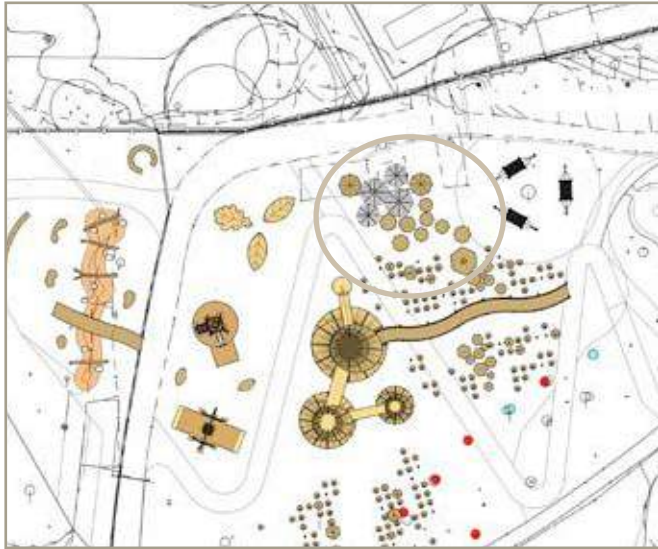
The exact layout would be developed in relation to final path, topographic and planting design informed by the RPAs.



PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

- Develop scheme in relation to RPAs and path network
- Develop scheme to allow for multiple routes and challenges
- Use topography for greater play value
- Develop ground surface patterns and materials for play value and content
- Develop to emulate natural forms

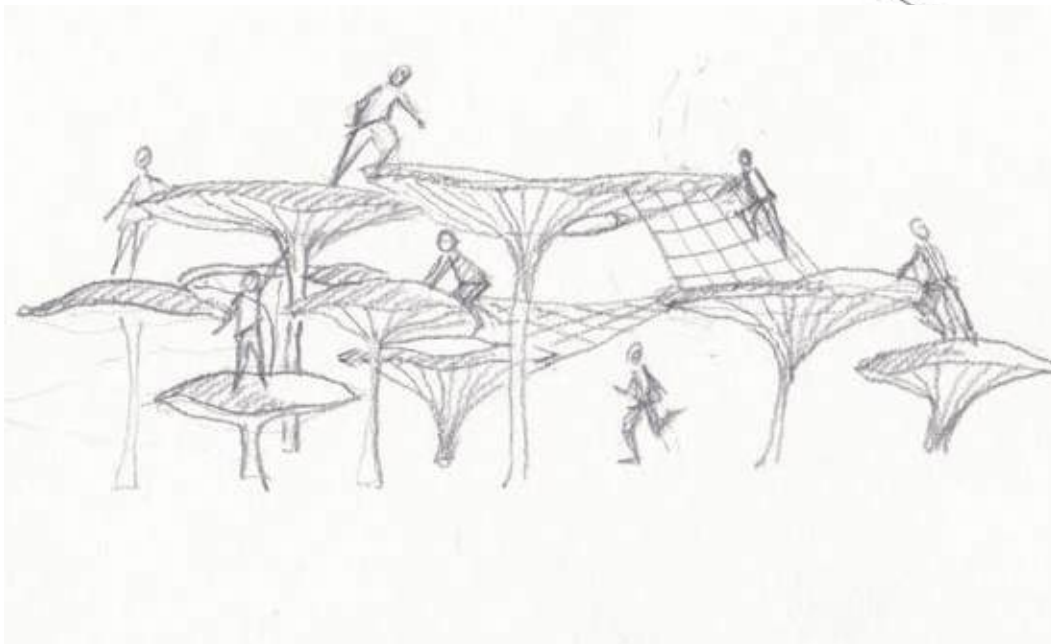




ABOVE -CLIMBING PLATFORMS PROVIDING VARIOUS LEVELS OF PHYSICAL CHALLENGE



BELOW -CLIMBING PLATFORMS EMULATING FUNGI FORMS WITH ACCESSIBLE ROUTES UNDERNEATH



Materials & Appearance

A restrained palette of natural materials has been selected to complement the existing landscape and historic setting.

Primary accessible routes comprise Addagrip resin bound gravel to match existing Wakehurst paths. Secondary paths utilise rolled natural gravel to reinforce a more informal woodland character.

Natural oak, Robinia timber, sandstone, natural boulders and bark play mulch have been selected for their robustness, longevity and compatibility with the surrounding landscape.

Rubber safety surfacing has been limited to locations where accessible connections and inclusive play require a firmer surface, utilising a muted blend of dark brown and beige to minimise visual impact.

The limited material palette ensures the surrounding landscape remains the dominant visual element.

High Weald Colour palette and materials

Hardscape and play equipment material colours are expected to align with the AONB/National Landscape High Weald Colour Palette, drawing on the High Weald Character Area Main Palette and Elements Palettes. For example,

- Gravels and sands used in landscaping will be guided by the instruction to *follow where possible the colour range of local bed rocks rather than be imported from different regions of the country*
- Landscape timber features will be selected to align appropriately with the wood colour palette

Landscaping

The landscape proposals have been developed as an integral part of the play experience rather than a backdrop to it. Planting, landform and routes combine to create a sequence of connected spaces, with broad planting drifts and woodland edge planting reinforcing the existing landscape framework.

Detailed landscape strategy is provided within Section 5.

The retained blockwork wall will be softened through climbing plants and associated woodland-edge planting.

Boundary Treatments

The proposals adopt a landscape-led approach to enclosure. Rather than introducing new fencing or engineered boundaries, existing woodland structure and new native planting provide natural enclosure and screening. The retained blockwork wall will be softened through climbing plants and associated woodland-edge planting.

The retained blockwork wall will be softened through climbing plants and associated woodland-edge planting.

The existing belt of predominantly non-native evergreen planting will be selectively thinned over time and replaced with a more diverse native woodland-edge structure, improving landscape character whilst maintaining visual screening during establishment.

Signage

Interpretation and visitor signage are not proposed as part of this application. Should additional signage be required in the future, it will be developed in accordance with Wakehurst’s established visitor signage strategy.

Lighting

No external lighting is proposed as part of this application. The proposals have been designed to retain the existing character of the landscape outside normal visitor hours.

Sustainability

The proposals seek to minimise intervention within the existing landscape by working with the existing topography, retaining mature trees wherever practicable and adopting light-touch construction techniques where appropriate.

Natural, durable materials have been selected to ensure longevity and minimise future replacement. Existing meadow disturbed during construction will be reinstated and the planting strategy has been developed to establish a resilient landscape capable of evolving over time.

Maintenance

The landscape has been designed to integrate with Wakehurst’s existing horticultural and estate management practices.

Robust materials, layered planting and durable construction will ensure the landscape remains resilient whilst allowing planting communities to establish and mature naturally over time.

MATERIALS FOR WOOD- LAND PLAY EQUIPMENT:

ALL PLAY EQUIPMENT DESIGNED, CONSTRUCTED, INSTALLED AND MAINTAINED IN ACCORDANCE WITH EUROPEAN STANDARDS BS EN1176 AND BS EN 1177.

THE STRUCTURES WILL BE CONSTRUCTED FROM NATURAL MATERIALS AND APPROPRIATE TRADITIONAL MANUFACTURE TECHNIQUES. ANY HARDWEARING COMPONENTS WILL BE MADE FROM STAINLESS STEEL/ GALVANISED STEEL OR ALUMINIUM SUCH AS, PIVOTS, BEARINGS AND RIGGING TERMINATIONS.

STRUCTURES ARE DESIGNED TO REQUIRE LOW MAINTENANCE.

SELECTION OF NATURAL/ SITE ONE MATERIALS:
SITE WON BOULDERS, CUT STONE AND TREE TRUNKS
WOODLAND WILDFLOWERS & BULBS
HAZEL HEDGING

TIMBER:
APPROPRIATE TIMBER SELECTION WILL TAKE PLACE PRIOR TO CONSTRUCTION, GRADING OF TIMBER WILL ELIMINATE ANY FAULTY TIMBER WHERE EXCESS CRACKING OR SPLINTERING WILL OCCUR
ROBINIA TIMBER FOR LARGE STRUCTURAL ELEMENTS OF BESPOKE EQUIPMENT
GOOD STANDARD GREEN AND AIR DRIED OAK, CHESTNUT, DOUGLAS FIR AND LARCH FOR SMALLER ELEMENTS.

CLADDING
STRUCTURAL TIMBER GRADED TO C16 OR C24 AND PEFC™ OR FSC® APPROVED.
ALL TIMBERS AND SURFACES TO BE CHECKED FOR SPLINTERS OR PROBLEMATIC DEFECTS.
ALL TIMBER WILL BE OF SUFFICIENT SIZE TO WITHSTAND EXCESSIVE USE AND WEATHERING ISSUES.

TIMBER FINISH:
SAWN, SANDBLASTED OR PLANED FINISH ON ALL STRUCTURAL TIMBERS.
NO TREATMENT IS REQUIRED ON OAK, DOUGLAS FIR OR LARCH. THE TIMBERS WILL GRADUALLY TURN SILVERY GREY. ANY SENSITIVE PARTS OF THE STRUCTURES WILL BE PRESERVED USING CHILD AND ENVIRONMENTALLY SUITABLE FINISH, (LOW MAINTENANCE.)
STRUCTURES ARE DESIGNED TO ALLOW ANY MOISTURE OR RAINWATER TO BE SHED THROUGH VENTILATION GAPS AND WEEP HOLES.

TIMBER DECKING:
AIR-DRIED OAK DECKING 6MM GAPS, REED PROFILED FOR GRIP, ROUNDED/ CHAMFERED EDGES. FIXED WITH COUNTERSUNK SS SCREWS.

FIXINGS:
STAINLESS STEEL / GALVANISED SCREWS AND BOLTS OR TIMBER PLUGGED TIMBERLOK FIXING
ALL STRUCTURAL TIMBER POSTS FOOT PLATES TO BE HOT DIPPED GALVANIZED STEEL, BOLTS CHEMICALLY FIXED TO SUBMERGED COMPETENT ROCK OR CONCRETE PADS.

PATH SURFACING
GRAVEL (FULLY ACCESSIBLE)
RUBBER BOUND MULCH: PROVIDES A POROUS ACCREDITED SOLUTION THAT IS SENSITIVE IN APPEARANCE TO THE WOODLAND ENVIRONMENT AND FULLY ACCESSIBLE.
PLAY BARK
GRASS MATTING WILL BE USED WHERE HIGH WEAR AREAS ARE ANTICIPATED AND WILL ALSO PROVIDE SAFETY SURFACING AROUND PLAY EQUIPMENT SITUATED WITHIN GRASS.

FOUNDATIONS:
STRUCTURES HAVE BEEN DESIGNED AND SET OUT TO REQUIRE MINIMAL FOUNDATIONS. FOUNDATIONS WILL NOT INTERFERE WITH ANY TREES ROOT SYSTEM AND MICRO POSITIONING OF EQUIPMENT WILL BE DEPENDANT ON TREE ROOT POSITIONS. CONCRETE PADS WILL BE SUBMERGED BELOW FINISHED GROUND LEVEL AND COVERED WITH SOIL OR MOT AND RESIN BONDED RUBBER MULCH. STEEL FLITCH PLATES WILL BE BOLTED AND CHEMICALLY FIXED TO EXISTING COMPETENT ROCK OR SMALL CONCRETE PADS. TIMBER PLAY EQUIPMENT WILL BE BOLTED TO STEEL FLITCH PLATES USING M12 STAINLESS STEEL ROD, WASHERS AND NYLOCK NUTS TO BE COUNTERSUNK INTO TIMBER AND TIMBER PLUGGED WHERE IN PREDOMINATE POSITIONS.

ROPE AND RIGGING:
NATURAL HEMP APPEARANCE POLYPROPYLENE 3 STRAND SYNTHETIC HEMP AND 16MM BRAIDED NYLON STEEL REINFORCED ROPE WITH ALUMINIUM FERRULES OR SPLICED WITH STAINLESS STEEL THIMBLES AND STAINLESS STEEL SOCKET PINNED SHACKLES SECURED WITH STAINLESS STEEL OR HOT DIPPED GALVANISED EYE BOLTS. SMALLER APERTURE SAFETY NETS TO BE KNOTTED CONSTRUCTION.

SLIDES:
SLIDES MANUFACTURED FROM UN-POLISHED STAINLESS STEEL.

SAFETY SURFACING:
GRASS MATTING COMPLYING TO EN1177 (FULLY ACCESSIBLE)
RESIN BONDED RUBBER PLAY MULCH COMPLYING TO EN1177 (FULLY ACCESSIBLE)
PLAY BARK TO EN1177

Proposed materials



MATERIALS STONE BOLDERS, GRAVEL, ROBINIA AND OAK LOGS



MATERIALS GREEN OAK, WEATHERD OAK, BEIGE COMBINATION ROPE



MATERIALS ROBINIA POLES, GREEN OAK





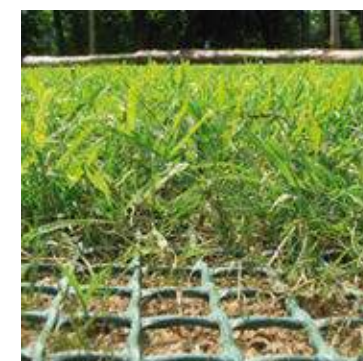
MATERIALS NATURAL PEELED LOGS, GRASS MATT



MATERIALS NATURAL TONE RUBBER BONDED MULCH + GRASS MATT



MATERIALS GRASS REINFORCEMENT AND EARTH BANKING



Section 5

Landscape Strategy

The landscape strategy seeks to integrate the Wild Play experience with Meadow Terrace, the Southern Hemisphere Garden and the wider High Weald landscape through a carefully layered planting framework. This approach draws on the four typologies developed during the concept design process.

Rather than introducing abrupt changes in character, planting transitions gradually across the site through overlapping communities and broad drifts, allowing the landscape to read as a natural extension of the surrounding gardens.

The planting strategy has also been developed in response to the adjacent Lansdown Conservation Research Nursery. Along the northern boundary, layered woodland edge planting will create a buffer where practicable between the two areas, softening the retained concrete block boundary wall. This approach allows both projects to remain visually connected to the wider estate whilst retaining their own character.

The landscape sequence progresses through:

- Existing and reinstated meadow;
- Meadow-edge ornamental planting;
- Transitional planting;
- Native woodland-edge planting;
- Native buffer planting;
- Wall screening planting.

This approach strengthens ecological connectivity whilst reinforcing Wakehurst’s distinctive botanical identity.

Planting Strategy

The planting strategy combines native woodland-edge communities with carefully positioned botanical planting inspired by the Southern Hemisphere Garden.

The resulting landscape provides immediate structure through the use of semi-mature trees, feathered trees, extra heavy standard trees and multi-stem shrubs whilst creating a diverse understorey of grasses, herbaceous planting and woodland ground flora.

Broad planting drifts and repeated species allow planting communities to overlap, softening transitions and creating a coherent landscape composition. The Soft Landscape General Arrangement illustrates how planting integrates the site ecologically whilst providing narrative, visual and functional value.

Relationship with Woodland Setting & Registered Park and Garden

The proposals have been developed to strengthen the relationship between the play landscape, surrounding woodland and wider Registered Park and Garden.

The landscape-led approach avoids formal boundaries, allowing planting and existing trees to become the defining framework for the development. The proposals reinforce the existing sequence between managed garden spaces, meadow and woodland, creating a contemporary intervention that complements rather than competes with the wider historic landscape.

Tree Retention & Protection

Existing mature trees have informed the design from the earliest stages of the project.

The layout has been carefully arranged to retain significant trees wherever practicable, with routes, structures and planting responding to Root Protection Areas and existing canopy structure.

Construction techniques have been developed alongside the project arboricultural consultant, adopting sensitive construction methods where appropriate.

Further detail is provided in the Arboricultural Impact Assessment and Arboricultural Method Statement.

Biodiversity Enhancement

The proposals seek to strengthen biodiversity through the introduction of a layered planting framework comprising meadow reinstatement, native woodland-edge planting, native buffer planting and structurally diverse planting communities.

Habitat connectivity is strengthened through the gradual transition between meadow, woodland edge and planted areas, whilst carefully positioned botanical planting reflects the adjoining Southern Hemisphere Garden. The biodiversity strategy will continue to be refined alongside the project ecologist, with detailed mitigation and enhancement measures set out within the Ecological Assessment.

Hard Landscape and Materials Approach

The hard landscape strategy uses a restrained palette of natural, robust materials.

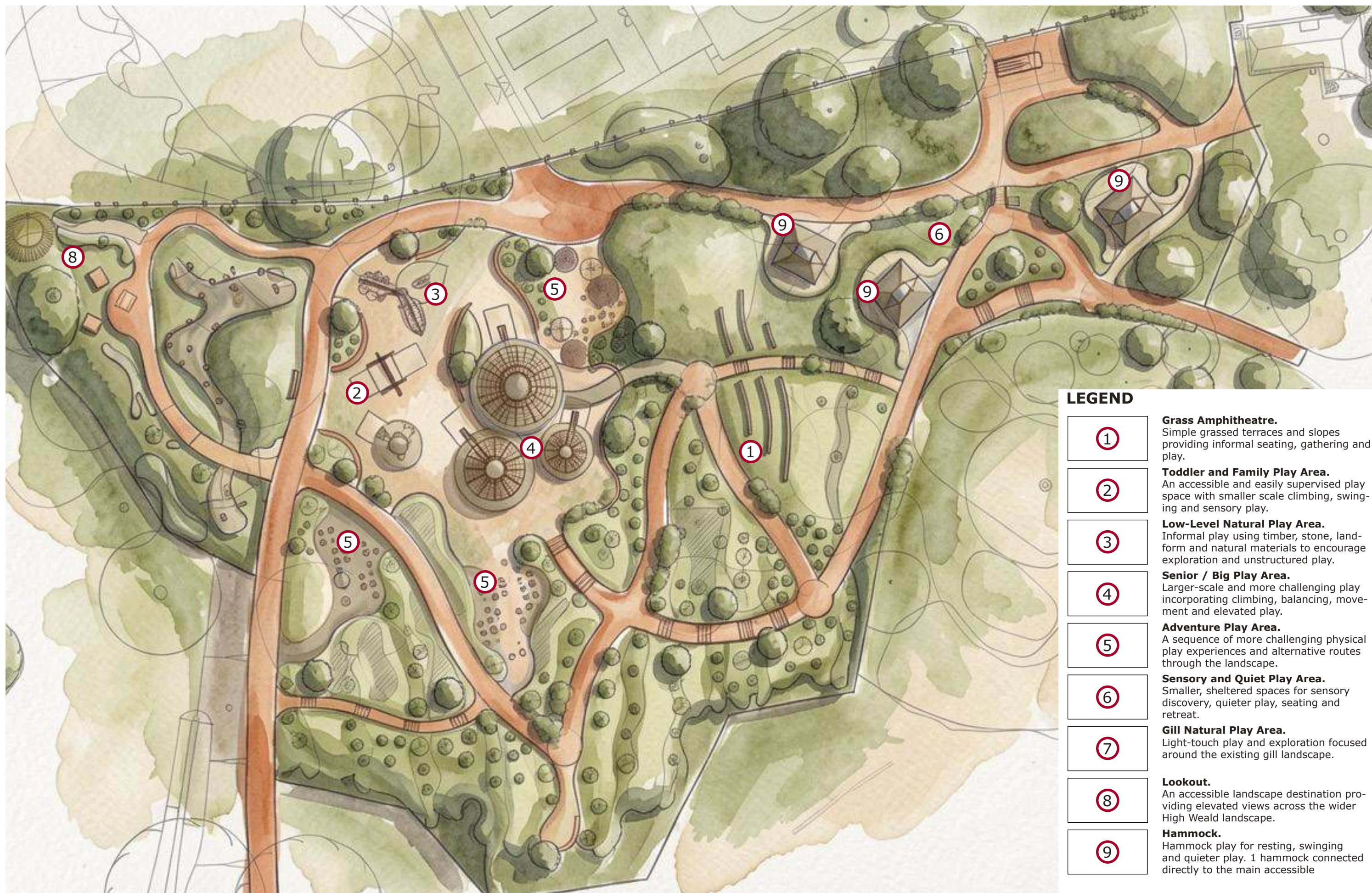
A clear hierarchy of routes will provide firm and accessible connections between the principal play areas, inclusive play features, seating and gathering spaces. More informal secondary paths will encourage exploration and alternative routes through the landscape.

Resin bound natural aggregate will be used for the principal accessible routes, selected to match existing paths within the wider gardens. Secondary routes will use informal rolled gravel, with planting allowed to soften path edges where appropriate.

Play safety surfacing will respond to the accessibility and character of each area. Bark safety mulch will provide a natural loose-fill surface beneath selected equipment, while accessible play areas and connections will use muted earth-toned rubber safety surfacing. Grass safety matting will be used where impact attenuation and greater wear resistance are required while retaining the appearance of natural grass.

Steps, boardwalks and handrails will comprise of sandstone, seasoned oak, Robinia timber and understated steel detailing. Timber decks and boardwalks around the gill will be treated as light-touch interventions, with their construction developed to minimise disturbance to existing trees.

Natural play boulders, rustic tree-trunk seating and oak picnic furniture will be integrated throughout the landscape. Accessible seating and picnic provision will be connected to firm routes, while informal seating and natural play elements will sit within the wider planted landscape



LEGEND

①

Grass Amphitheatre.
Simple grassed terraces and slopes providing informal seating, gathering and play.

②

Toddler and Family Play Area.
An accessible and easily supervised play space with smaller scale climbing, swinging and sensory play.

③

Low-Level Natural Play Area.
Informal play using timber, stone, landform and natural materials to encourage exploration and unstructured play.

④

Senior / Big Play Area.
Larger-scale and more challenging play incorporating climbing, balancing, movement and elevated play.

⑤

Adventure Play Area.
A sequence of more challenging physical play experiences and alternative routes through the landscape.

⑥

Sensory and Quiet Play Area.
Smaller, sheltered spaces for sensory discovery, quieter play, seating and retreat.

⑦

Gill Natural Play Area.
Light-touch play and exploration focused around the existing gill landscape.

⑧

Lookout.
An accessible landscape destination providing elevated views across the wider High Weald landscape.

⑨

Hammock.
Hammock play for resting, swinging and quieter play. 1 hammock connected directly to the main accessible

Section 6

Access

Inclusive Design

Inclusive design principles have informed the proposals from the outset, with in-depth gradient analyses and route options explored.

The landscape has been designed to ensure visitors of all ages and abilities can experience the site, with accessible routes connecting the principal play spaces, seating areas and inclusive play features.

Pedestrian Access

Existing visitor movement has informed the layout of new routes alongside gradient analyses and iterative tests to assess the best possible routes for inclusive design with minimised impacts. Primary accessible paths provide clear connections through the site whilst secondary informal routes encourage exploration and discovery within the landscape.

Accessible Routes

Accessible resin bound paths provide firm, level connections between entrances, principal play spaces and seating. Accessible picnic facilities and inclusive play features, including the accessible hammock, are positioned adjacent to the primary route network.

Safety

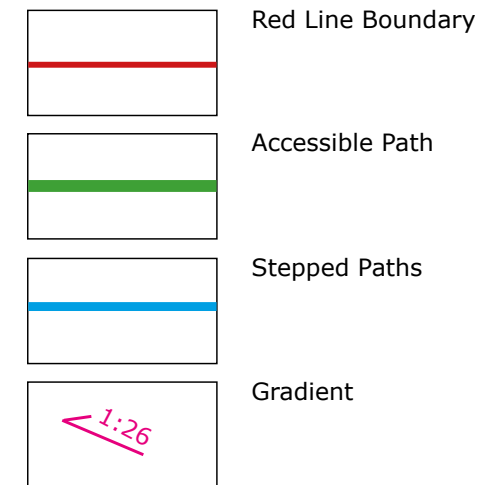
Visitor safety has been carefully integrated into the design through appropriate surfacing, natural surveillance, clear circulation routes and carefully considered changes in level. Safety surfacing has been limited to areas where required, allowing the wider landscape to retain its natural character. Maintenance access has also been considered to ensure the landscape can be effectively managed over the long term.

Landscape Base Plan With Accessible Routes

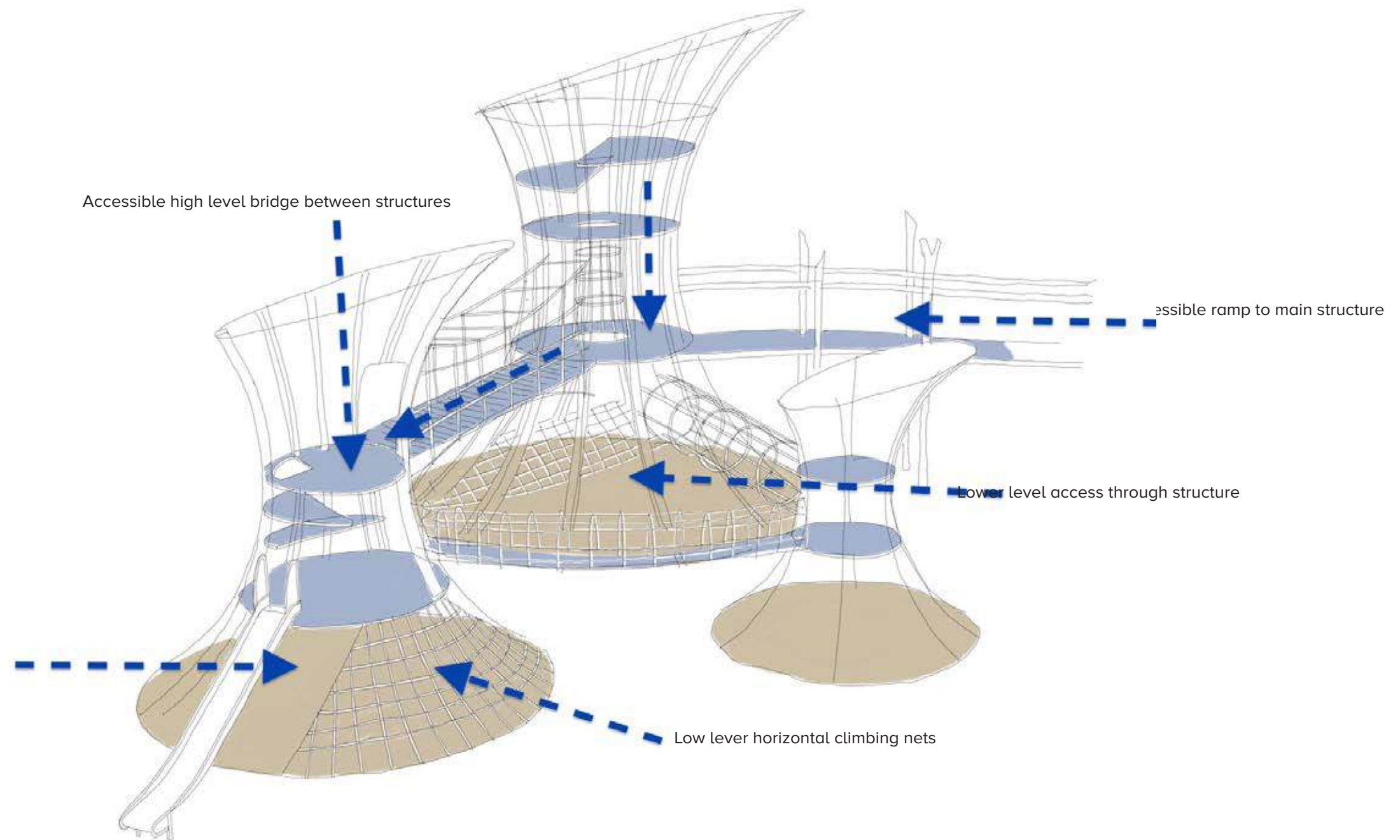


Accessible Paths

LEGEND



Accessible route into and around main climbing structures



Section 7

Outreach Plan and community social benefits.

Kew Outreach Plan (2022–2027) :

An accessibility audit of Wakehurst has been completed and is informing all future plans. Wild play is informed by and implements Wakehurst strategic plan to improve accessible facilities.
An accessible maps has been created and is available online Wakehurst Accessible Map.pdf.
Provide enhanced mobility support through a new Discovery Bus. - We have a bookable mini-bus to get people to site from stations and various other locations.
Expand the Community Access Scheme (CAS) to Wakehurst and increase participation from underrepresented groups by 10% each year. Steady year on year with over 110 CAS group members at Wakehurst Wakehurst Community Access Scheme | Kew
Establish a Community Open Week at Wakehurst to attract and engage new audiences. Highly successful reached 1003 in 2026 from target of 800

Visitor diversity targets for Wakehurst
By 2026/27, Wakehurst aims to increase:
Young visitors from 6% to 8%.
Visitors from ethnic minority backgrounds from 4% to 8%.
Visitors from lower socio-economic backgrounds from 10% to 12%.
Overall, the strategy positions Wakehurst as a site for improving accessibility, widening participation and growing community partnerships.
complements rather than competes with the wider historic landscape.

Visitor Diversity Targets for Wakehurst and EDI

By 2026/27, Wakehurst aims to increase:
Young visitors from 6% to 8%.
Visitors from ethnic minority backgrounds from 4% to 8%.
Visitors from lower socio-economic backgrounds from 10% to 12%.
Overall, the strategy positions Wakehurst as a site for improving accessibility, widening participation and growing community partnerships.
Handy breakdown from the doc page 27:

Habitat connectivity is strengthened through the gradual transition between meadow, woodland edge and planted areas, whilst carefully positioned botanical planting reflects the adjoining Southern Hemisphere Garden. The biodiversity strategy will continue to be refined alongside the project ecologist, with detailed mitigation and enhancement measures set out within the Ecological Assessment.

Implementing Wakehurst EDI Strategy

Wakehurst is specifically identified as expanding its Community Access Scheme, helping increase access for underrepresented audiences. Affordability measures will continue, including expansion of the £1 ticket scheme for individuals on Universal Credit , the Community Access Scheme, and improvements to transport access.
A stronger focus on engaging priority audiences:
Children and young people
People from lower socio-economic backgrounds
People from ethnic minority backgrounds
Disabled people
International audiences
Kew will measure success through increasing the number of people from diverse backgrounds accessing its spaces, services and collections, and by improving visitor inclusion and accessibility outcomes.
Community engagement and co-creation are key themes, with work increasingly designed with communities rather than for them.

Habitat connectivity is strengthened through the gradual transition between meadow, woodland edge and planted areas, whilst carefully positioned botanical planting reflects the adjoining Southern Hemisphere Garden. The biodiversity strategy will continue to be refined alongside the project ecologist, with detailed mitigation and enhancement measures set out within the Ecological Assessment.

Intended outcomes

By delivering this outreach strategy, Kew will contribute towards the targets outlined in 'Our manifesto for change 2021–2030', achieving the following outcomes:

- Numbers of visitors to the gardens, from presently under-represented communities, increased ten-fold – from 22,000 (2021/22) to 233,299 (2030/31).
- Visitor profiles diversified at Kew Gardens and Wakehurst to be more representative of our local audiences.
- Outreach strategy participants representative of target audiences – at least 80%.
- Increased awareness about the value of plants and fungi and the work of Kew in science and horticulture (all target audiences) – 90% of participants.
- Increased confidence, improved wellbeing and connections in the community – gained by 90% of all target audiences.
- At least 350 young people equipped with leadership skills to address environmental challenges.
- Positive actions for the environment taken by 90% of all target audiences (eg. sowing seeds, growing plants, creating habitats for wildlife, raising awareness about plants and fungi and the environment).

For Kew Gardens we will benchmark our visitor profile against the percentages of target audiences living within our catchment area (London and the South East). For Wakehurst benchmarking will be against the South East or the UK as a whole, depending on the availability of data.

Audience	Kew Gardens *London/ South East (average)	Wakehurst *South East/UK
Young people (16–24) (Office for National Statistics – 16–24 year old population; Trust for London – age distribution of population)	23%	10%
Ethnic minorities (Office for National Statistics – population estimates 2019)	25%	9%
Lower socio-economic backgrounds (Poverty in the UK: statistics, House of Commons Library April 2019/20 – after housing costs). Social grade DE	21%	18%
Disabled people (Office for National Statistics – Family Resources Survey: financial year 2020–21)	15%	20%
Senior citizens (over 65) (Trust for London – population by age groups)	22%	20%

Visitor profiles – 2021 to 2027

Please note it is not possible to aggregate percentages due to overlap between audiences.

Audience	Kew Gardens visitor profile		Wakehurst visitor profile	
	2021/22	2026/27	2021/22	2026/27
Young people (KG: 16–29, W: 17–25)¹	4%	10%	6%	8%
Ethnic minorities²	10%	15%	4%	8%
Lower socio-economic backgrounds³	7%	9%	10%	12%
Disabled people (and senior citizens)⁴	22%	22%	18%	18%

¹Percentage corresponds to relative percentage of all Day Paying Visits.
²KG – percentage extrapolated through Visitor Insights Programme focusing on Day Paying Visitors. W – estimate taken from an ALVA research report, 2021.
³KG percentage equates to relative percentage of all Day Paying Visits – social grade DE. For Wakehurst this percentage reflects social grade C2DE taken from an ALVA research report, 2021. We anticipate the new £1 Universal Credit ticket will contribute to a significant step change in the proportion of day paying visitors on low incomes with an increase of up to 3% or 4% in the first year. Dramatic increases are not expected in future years. Our objective is to ensure this proportion of our visitor base continues to grow, or at least remains level, as our overall visitor base increases over the next ten years.
⁴This percentage is based on 'concession' tickets – visitors with a disability and senior citizens (65+). While we cannot separate out this data, it is worthy of note that 44% of State Pension age adults have a limiting long-term illness or disability (Department for Work and Pensions – Family Resources Survey 2018/19).

Section 8

Conclusion

The Wild Play proposals represent a carefully considered landscape intervention that responds positively to the historic character, botanical significance and woodland setting of Wakehurst.

By working with the existing landscape, reinforcing ecological connectivity and adopting a restrained palette of natural materials and planting, the proposals create a distinctive play environment that feels embedded within the wider estate rather than imposed upon it.

The design strengthens the relationship between the gardens, woodland and surrounding landscape whilst providing an engaging, inclusive and accessible destination that supports Wakehurst’s ongoing role as a place of learning, exploration and connection with nature.

Studio Hardie Limited
Unit 4 Phoenix Works
North Street
Lewes
BN7 2PE

www.studiohardie.com

Southern Green Ltd
221 Durham Road
Low Fell
Gateshead
NE9 5AD

www.southernngreen.co.uk
