

DESIGN RATIONALE – LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE

Project: **RATHFARNHAM CASTLE – STABLES & COURTYARDS**

Project no.: **Sd.05**
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Prepared on behalf of: **SOUTH DUBLIN COUNTY COUNCIL**

Prepared by: **DFLA**

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Rathfarnham Castle and associated outbuildings, view looking south

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1 Introduction

1.1 General

The development will consist of the refurbishment and change of use of the former stable buildings and former council depot yards, to provide mixed-use cultural/arts/cafe/restaurant uses together with retail use, WC's, storage areas and an associated area for 54 car parking spaces. The development will also include public realm upgrade works within the courtyards and the open space to the north of the proposed car park, and the reconfiguration of the existing pedestrian entrance to the north associated with the open space.

The objective of this report is to describe the nature and extent of the landscape proposals within this redevelopment.

DFLA have worked closely with South Dublin County Council and the design team to arrive at a proposal which maximises the opportunities for high quality usable and enjoyable open spaces and public realm

1.2 Documentation

This report should be read in conjunction with documents issued as part of the Part 8 Planning Proposal by Howley Hayes Cooney Architects, CORA Consulting Engineers, NRB Consulting Engineers, John Morris Arboricultural Consultancy, Homan O'Brien Consulting, Altamar Environmental Consultants, Irish Archaeological Consultancy, and others.

The following additional documents will be issued by DFLA as part of a Part 8 Planning Proposal Package:

No.	Scale	Size	Title
2000	1:250	A1	Landscape Plan
2401	1:50	A1	Landscape Sections 1
2402	1:50	A1	Landscape Sections 2
2500	various	A1	Typical Details

2 Landscape Appraisal

2.1 The Site

The subject site is situated directly to the north of Rathfarnham Castle and to the east of Rathfarnham Village, in Rathfarnham, Dublin 14. The existing buildings within the site are part of the Rathfarnham Castle demesne and consist of what were stables and outbuildings with varying uses arranged around a complex of three courtyard spaces. An additional area to the north is currently a public open space. The historic landscape associated with Rathfarnham Castle is of national significance in terms of architectural, historic and cultural interest. Over the last century the extent of the original demesne landscape has been lessened and divided by development, with several historic structures and landscape features removed.

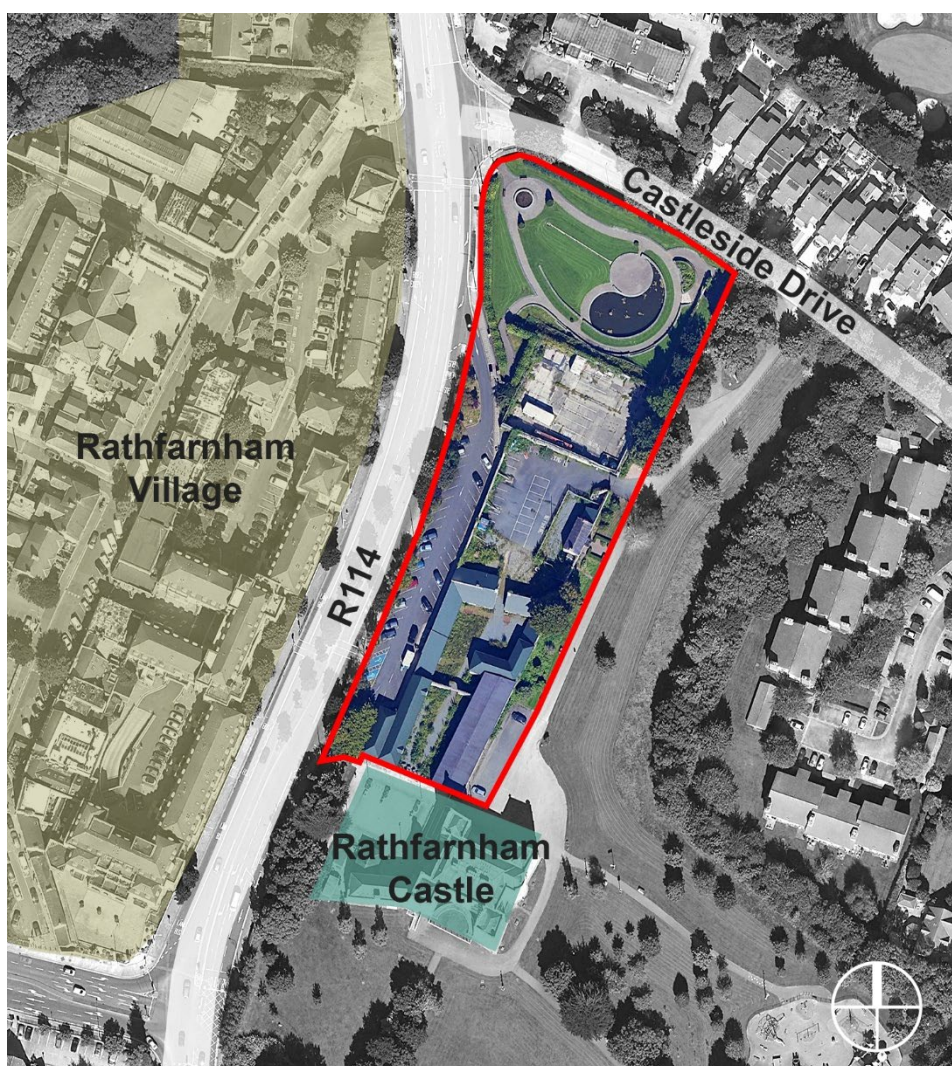


Fig 1: Site Location

There is a broadly continuous slope with a level change of approximately 2.8 metres between the higher point at the southern end of the site and the northern end adjacent to Castleside Drive.

The existing historic structures have been recently repaired and re-roofed, with the courtyard areas cleared of vegetation. Currently South Dublin County Council uses the two northern courtyards as a depot. An existing parking area is situated directly to the west and will be retained. There are no trees within the courtyards but significant specimens are present to the east, west and north of the site. Trees to the east and north are associated with the existing roadways and were most likely planted at the same time as their construction. Some larger specimens to the eastern boundary of the site may be part of the original demesne landscape and will not be impacted by the development.

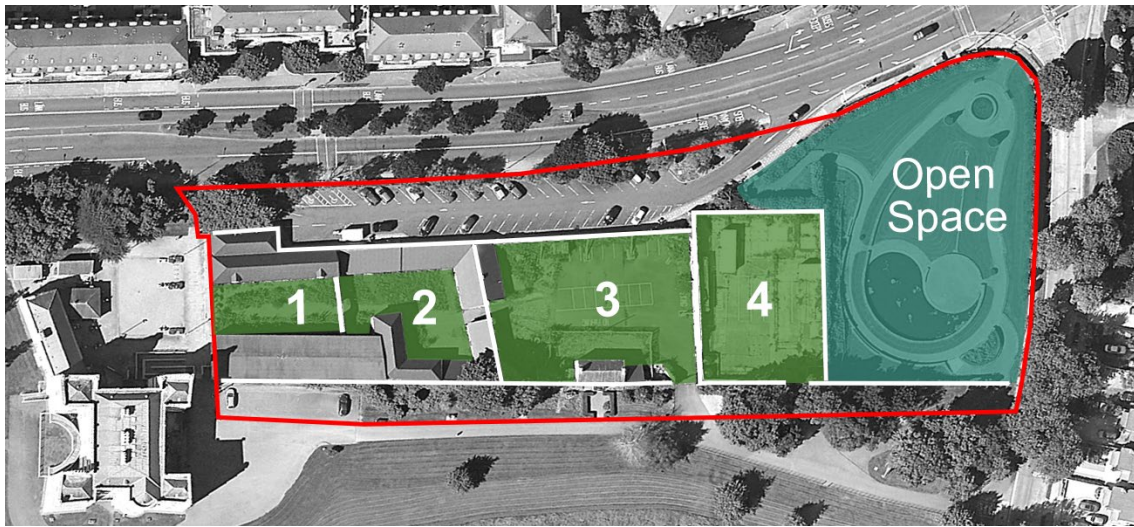


Fig 2: Existing Courtyards and Open Space Within Site

While each of the courtyards are externally connected to one another they all have particular and unique characters. These spaces would have been part of the demesne's working landscape, and were once home to stables, cow byres, workers accommodation and productive walled gardens. Courtyard 1 is intimate and enclosed and feels part of the castle which is directly to the south. Courtyard 2, although enclosed is a wider space and has a greater variation in form. Courtyard 3 opens wider still and has a formality, with the central placing of the Seismograph House. Courtyard 4 is the largest, and emptiest, with only the existing historic walls for context. There is a continuity of materials throughout the courtyards, with the dominant material being the stone buildings of calp limestone with occasional brick and granite detailing. The existing open space to the north is a relatively new addition, being constructed in the last 15 years. This open space is used primarily as a pedestrian link from the existing residential development to the east through to Rathfarnham Village.



Fig 3: Clockwise from top left 1) Courtyard 1 with view towards castle; 2) Courtyard 2 view south; 3) Courtyard 3 with Seismograph House; 4) Courtyard 4 view north; 5) Northern entrance to park from R114; 6) Northern boundary to open space; 7) Open Space view to west; 8) Existing parking area to west

2.2 Boundaries

The existing eastern boundary is generally defined by the walls of the outbuildings to the south and a remaining portion of wall associated with the now extinct walled garden to the north. To the north the site is bounded by Castleside Drive and an existing stone plinth wall with steel railing. To the south the boundary consists of the extent of the buildings around courtyard 1 and the steel railing boundary extending west to the R114. The western boundary is with the R114 and is mainly comprised of an existing stone wall between the car park and the roadway footpath.

2.3 Existing Trees

A Tree Survey was carried out by John Morris Arboricultural Consultancy on 28th January 2025. There are no trees or significant vegetation within the four courtyards. The open space to the north contains some pleached limes and box hedging.

Adjacent to the site to the east there are some examples of beech, ash, lime and yew. To the west, adjacent to the existing parking area, a line of mixed birch species borders the R114. There is a small group of small-leafed lime also in this location to the south. Further to the south a mature Monterey cypress, pedunculate oak and sycamore comprise some of the oldest trees within the area surveyed. The majority of the trees are in fair to good health apart from a semi-mature beech to the east and a recently planted pin oak to the east. The arboricultural site observations note that minor works are potentially required to clear canopies from adjacent buildings, footpaths and road signs.



Fig 4: Left: Parkland trees adjacent to north-east boundary. Right: Lime tree group with mature Monterey cypress in background

3 Development Proposals

The development will consist of the refurbishment and change of use of the former stable buildings and former council depot yards, to provide mixed-use cultural/arts/cafe/restaurant uses together with retail use, WC's, storage areas and an associated area for 54 car parking spaces. The existing courtyards will be upgraded with high quality hard and soft landscaping

3.1 Design Principles

DFLA have developed a number of design principles which have helped to formulate the public realm proposals. The design principles have emerged after having gained an understanding of the context and setting of the project, through site visits and workshops within the design team. The design principles (DPs) are summarised below:

- **DP1. An understanding of the wider context:** recognising Rathfarnham Castle and its associated outbuildings as a key node within the overall urban and historic fabric of Rathfarnham.
- **DP2. The site as a destination:** realise the potential of the outbuildings and courtyards as a destination and build on its existing positive qualities to create a distinct identity which would be attractive to locals and visitors alike;
- **DP3. Facilitate flexibility of use:** allow for future adaptability and flexibility of the courtyard spaces while at the same time ensuring a recognisable, enjoyable and welcoming experience.
- **DP4. Promote material and aesthetic quality:** avoid clutter and develop a coherent and legible space, with a sense of material unity.

4 Landscape Design Proposals

The landscape proposals aim to integrate the existing site context, architecture, improved circulation and accessibility, traffic, civil engineering, lighting, archaeological and ecological considerations with the public realm design. The proposed redevelopment of the existing stables and outbuildings and its associated public open space and courtyards will provide a high quality civic amenity for Rathfarnham and the wider area. It creates new opportunities for visitors to engage with the historic fabric of Rathfarnham Castle and the surrounding area, and to enjoy new facilities for recreation and rest. It is envisaged that the wider courtyards will be capable of hosting markets and events and outdoor terrace dining associated with the

various food and beverage offerings. A key consideration is the spaces remain adaptable to temporary events and can be configured for a variety of external uses.

The proposals show a lively, innovative and durable landscape and public realm which both integrates the existing and future architectural design intent into its surrounding context and is cognisant of civil engineering constraints. The proposals include:

- Universal access as an underlying principle throughout all of the proposed spaces;
- Opportunities for seating through the proposed public realm;
- Appropriate areas associated with intended building uses;
- Refining and clarifying pedestrian access from surrounding area;
- Providing a biodiverse environment where possible, with trees and planting where appropriate;
- The restrained use of high quality and appropriate materials throughout;
- The re-use of the existing cobbles within the courtyards within the public realm

4.1 Open Spaces

The open spaces within the site are designed to respond to and complement the proposed uses of the redeveloped historic structures and the new structures inserted. The overall design intent within the courtyards is to allow for flexible uses and events while providing ample spaces for seating and gathering. The open space to the north of the proposed car park area is within the footprint of the existing open space and provides a clear pedestrian route to and from Rathfarnham village.

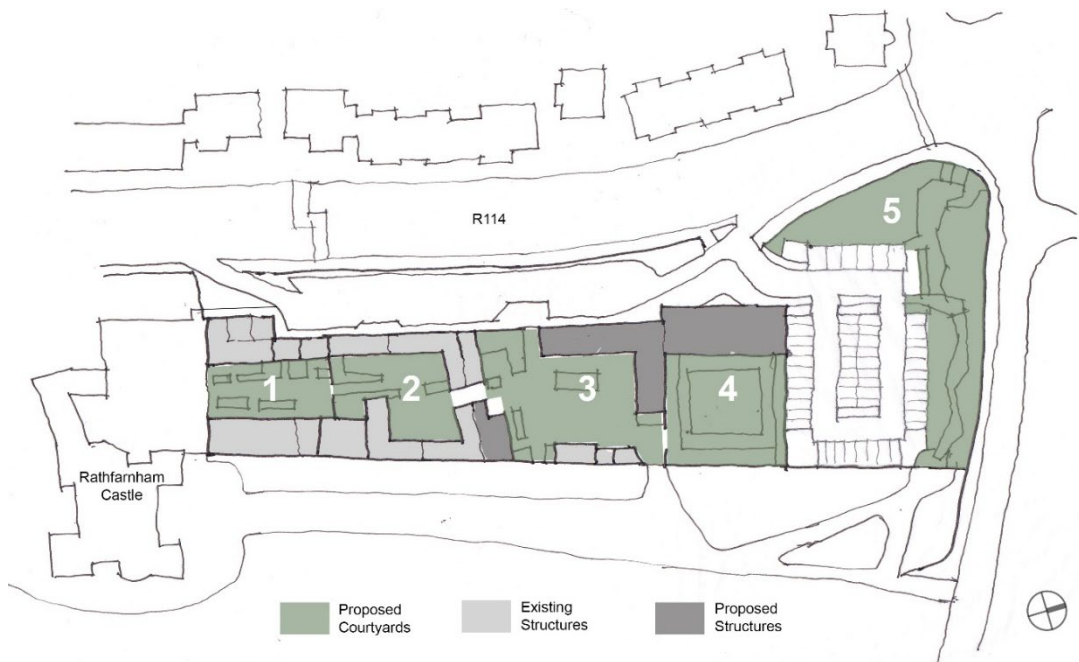


Fig 5: Diagram showing internal courtyard areas and public open space to north

1. Courtyard 1

Courtyard 1 is a primary pedestrian link from Rathfarnham Castle into the wider development. The existing buildings are proposed to be redeveloped into spaces for community uses and events. As such the courtyard space allows for a wide central access area from the castle through to the courtyards to the north, while also providing several seating areas that can be discreetly used by various groups.

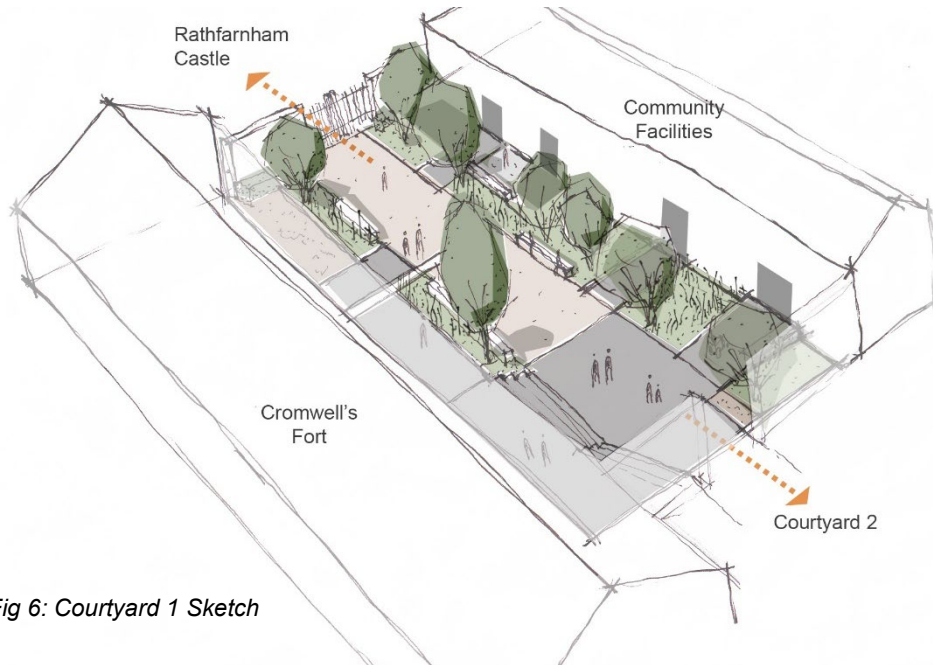


Fig 6: Courtyard 1 Sketch

2. Courtyard 2

The design intent of this courtyard revolves around the proposed uses of the redeveloped historic structures. There are various uses proposed including retail, dining, toilets and storage. Areas associated with the uses are softly defined with planting and with changes in material, yet there remains a clear pedestrian route through to the courtyards north and south.

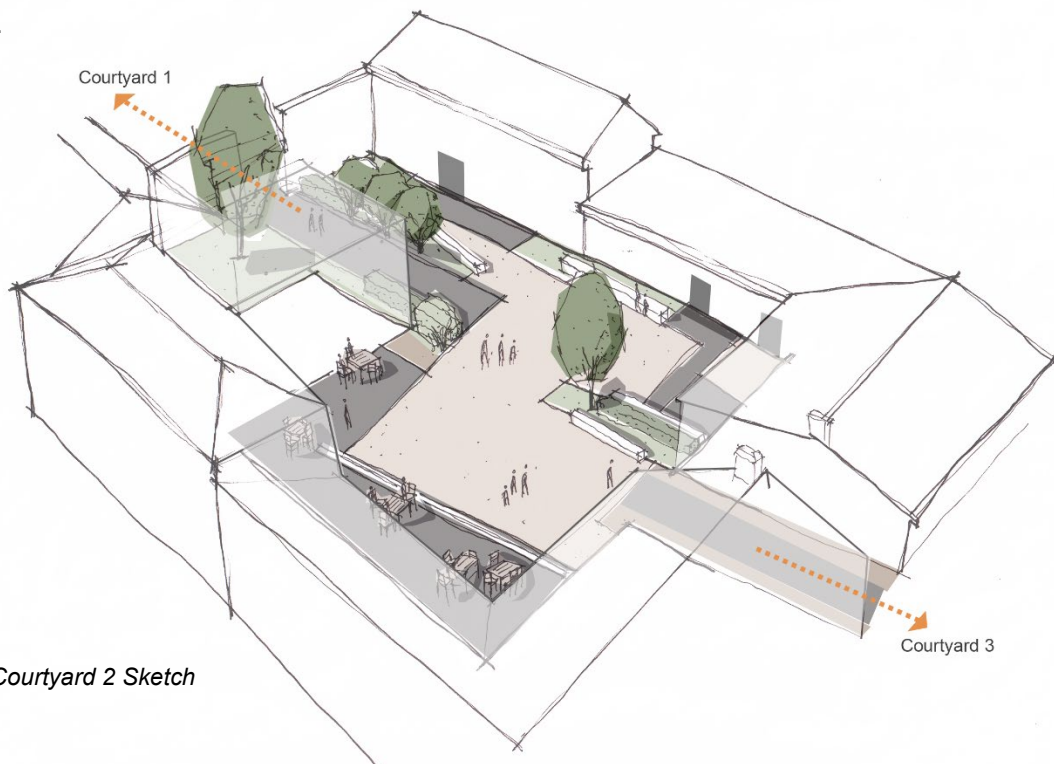


Fig 7: Courtyard 2 Sketch

3. Courtyard 3

This courtyard space could be considered the central focal point of the proposed development due to its scale, intended building uses and the pedestrian connections to the existing Rathfarnham Castle open space to the east and the existing car park area and Rathfarnham village to the west. The existing Seismograph House is a defining structure within the courtyard, while the proposed new insertions of a café/restaurant space and retail space further define and enclose the courtyard. Again, as with Courtyard 2, the open space proposed in Courtyard 3 responds to the proposed uses, providing implied external areas that can be flexibly used as terrace seating. The central area of the courtyard is left open, allowing the Seismograph House to remain a focal element of the space and providing space for temporary events or markets.

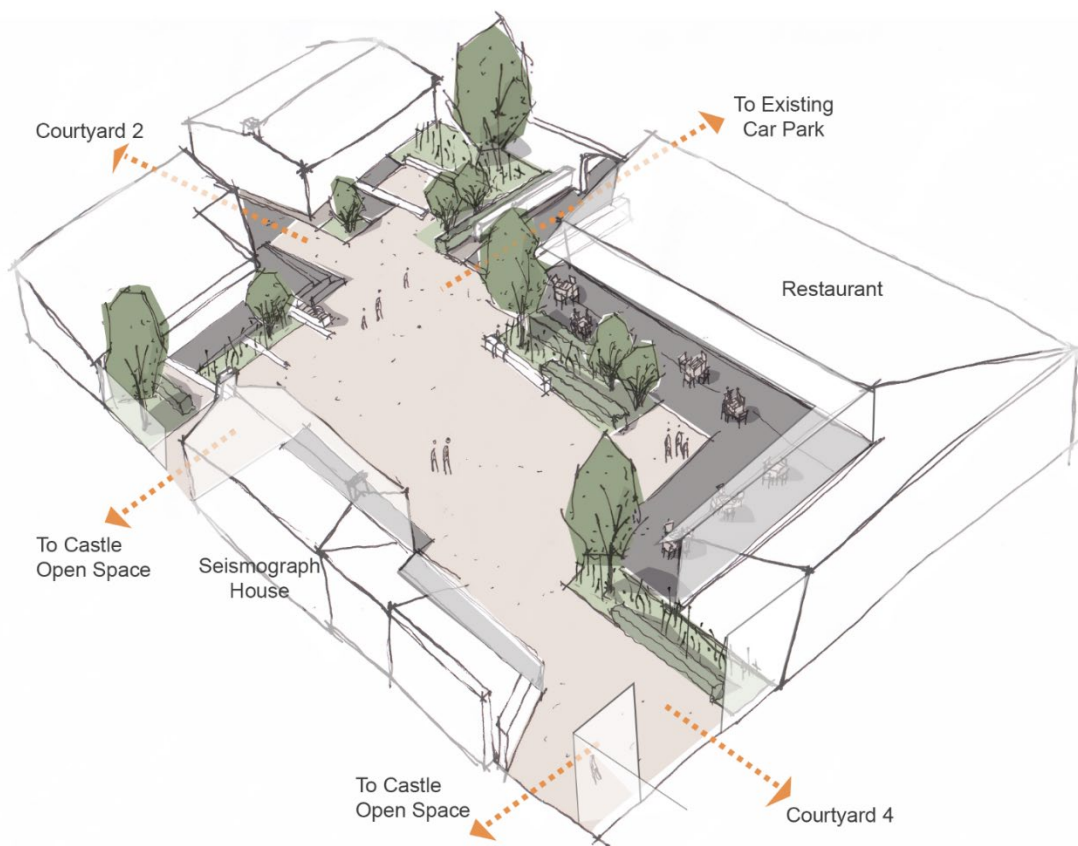


Fig 8: Courtyard 3 Sketch

4. Courtyard 4

The intention within courtyard 4 is to provide a adaptable open space that can be used for events such as markets, open air cinema events or a wide variety of community events and uses.

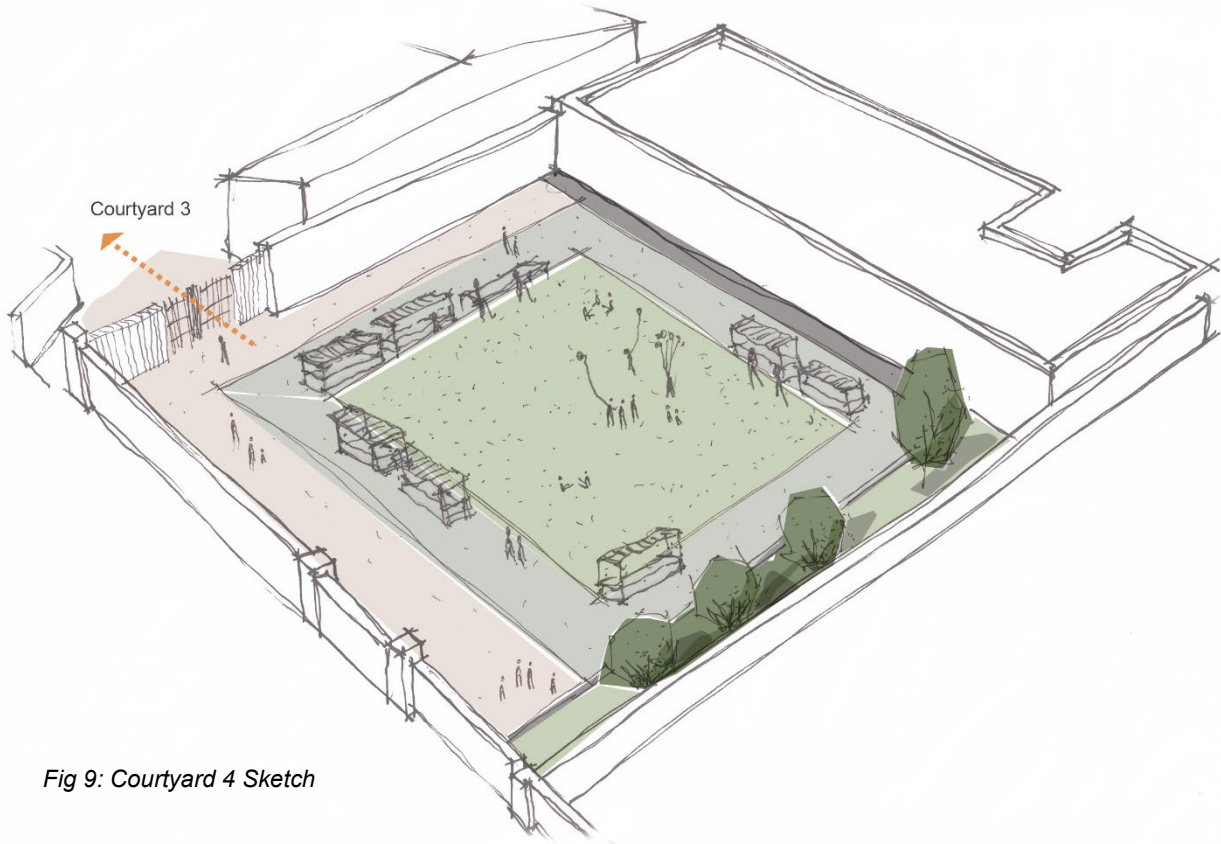


Fig 9: Courtyard 4 Sketch

To facilitate this the space remains open and unobstructed with the simple addition of a central grassed area that can provide for flexible uses. To reflect its former use as a walled garden a raised planting area is provided to the south-facing wall. This has the benefit of softening the space while also providing opportunities for community horticulture uses.



Fig 10: Temporary and Flexible Uses: Left – Community Events; Right: Outdoor Cinema or Music Events

5. Northern Open Space

The open space to the north of the proposed car park area provides several areas for seating and open spaces for rest and relaxation. A new entrance is created from the R114 and adjacent to the existing pedestrian crossing to Rathfarnham village.



Fig 11: Open Space Sketch

The new entrance leads onto an intimate plaza surrounded by structural planting and trees that provide interest all year. Further seating areas are found throughout the open space, each with a particular sense of place. A pedestrian route leads towards the existing open space of Rathfarnham Castle, while access is also provided to the south through the proposed car park towards the courtyard entrance, community spaces and Rathfarnham Castle.

4.2 Accessibility and Circulation

Accessibility and movement through all spaces is an integral underlying principle of the design proposals. Proposals have been designed to ensure the public realm is as accessible as possible. All slopes and gradients comply with Technical Guidance Document Part M (2022). Gently sloped routes are proposed where necessary to accommodate level changes across the site and incorporate landings where required. Coupled with alternative stepped routes and seating walls, where appropriate, the elements are sensitively integrated into the landscape design. Any areas of steps will have the required handrails and hazard warning paving.

Visitors can enter the development from the south, adjacent to Rathfarnham Castle, and progress through each courtyard and onwards to the proposed car park with universal accessibility throughout. The existing car park to the west is retained, with a new car park area situated to the north. The existing roadway and car park vehicular circulation is one-way. A new pedestrian crossing is proposed with the site to the south to improve the current access from the footpath on the R114 to the development and to Rathfarnham Castle.

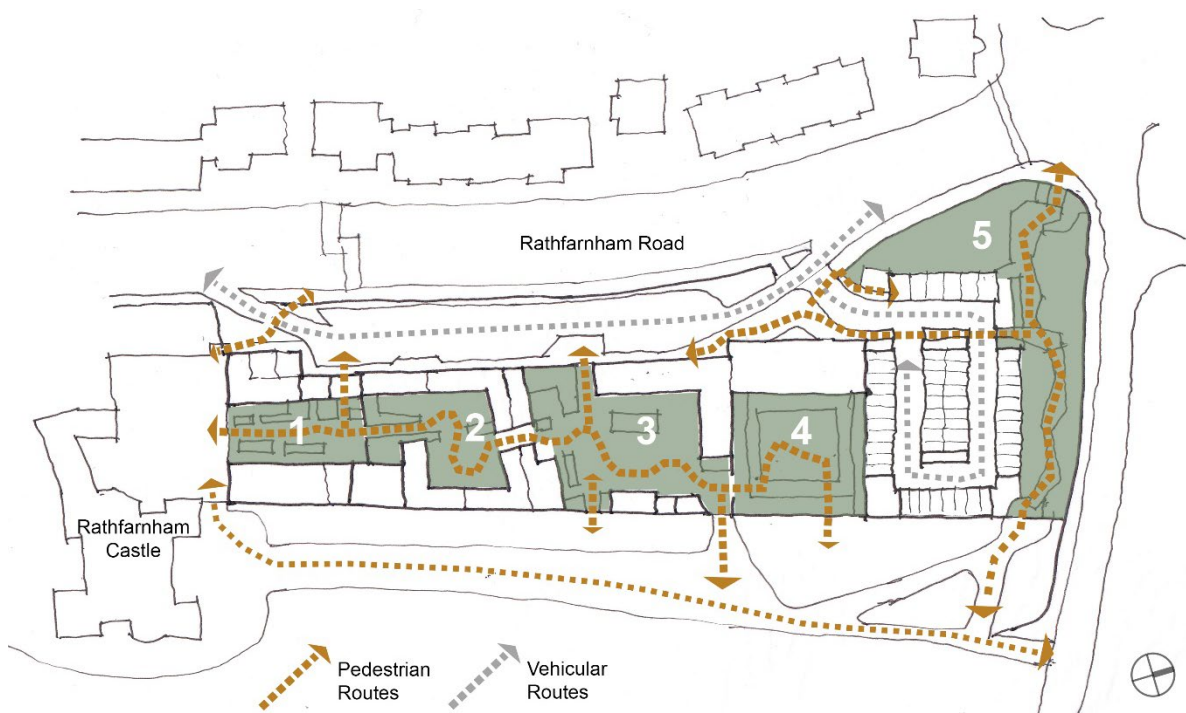


Fig 12: *Proposed Pedestrian and Vehicular Routes*

The ability to secure the site and each individual courtyard is facilitated with the inclusion of new gates and railings where appropriate. Within Courtyard 3 the currently blocked entrances will be reinstated to the east and west. New vehicular access gates are proposed to both the existing roadway/car park to the east and the new car park to the north. It is proposed to realign the existing pedestrian entrance to the north to allow for a more legible and coherent entrance to the park from the existing pedestrian crossing over the R114. Courtyard 4 will retain the existing vehicular entrance to the existing open space to the east. This will be occasionally used for service vehicle access.

5 Proposed Materials

DFLA's *Drawing Sd.05-DR-2001 Landscape Plan*, includes a legend and schedule of proposed materials including soft landscape and hard landscape finishes. It illustrates the location and extent of surface materials and furniture, groundcover and herbaceous planting, hedge and tree planting.

5.1 Tree planting

The design proposals include significant new tree planting throughout the site area. The tree planting will be a fundamental element in terms of establishing the character of the public spaces.

The proposed tree species are selected for suitability to local conditions and microclimate and biodiversity. Additionally, where a tree is proposed in close proximity to a building it is required that a suitable root protection barrier is specified to mitigate potential damage from tree roots to the historic structures. The tree planting strategy proposes a layering of various size trees appropriate to the space they occupy. Large specimen trees include both Oak (*Quercus robur*) and Beech (*Fagus sylvatica*).



Fig 13: Proposed Tree Planting Strategy

These specimens are distributed through the courtyards and open space and will provide significant scale while being the focal elements of the open spaces. These are the same species as planted in the demesne landscape of Rathfarnham Castle. Medium size ornamental and street trees are specified elsewhere to provide screening, seasonal interest and focal elements within the landscape.

Finally, smaller scale multi-stemmed trees are proposed within the courtyards and open space. These contribute towards the soft delineation of spaces while also providing seasonal interest.



Fig 14: Selection of pollinator friendly and native tree species, clockwise from top left: Oak (*Quercus robur*), Sweet Gum (*Liquidambar styraciflua*), Tibetan Cherry (*Prunus serrula*), Hazel (*Corylus avellana*), *Amelanchier lamarkii*, Cherry (*Prunus serrulata*),

5.2 Hedge, Groundcover and Herbaceous Planting

Low planting is used to make and reinforce sub-spaces within the courtyards and open space. This creates privacy where needed and helps to direct movement, while also adding visual interest and increasing the potential for biodiversity. Different planting types are subtly layered for a more natural appearance and gently interrupt some areas of hard landscape. Importantly, areas are left free of planting in order to provide adequate spaces for events and other uses. Typical species are shown below.



Figure 15: Typical species for low clipped vegetation, or boundary treatment with railing and/or low walls: Beech (*Carpinus betulus*) and Box-Leaf Holly (*Ilex crenata*).

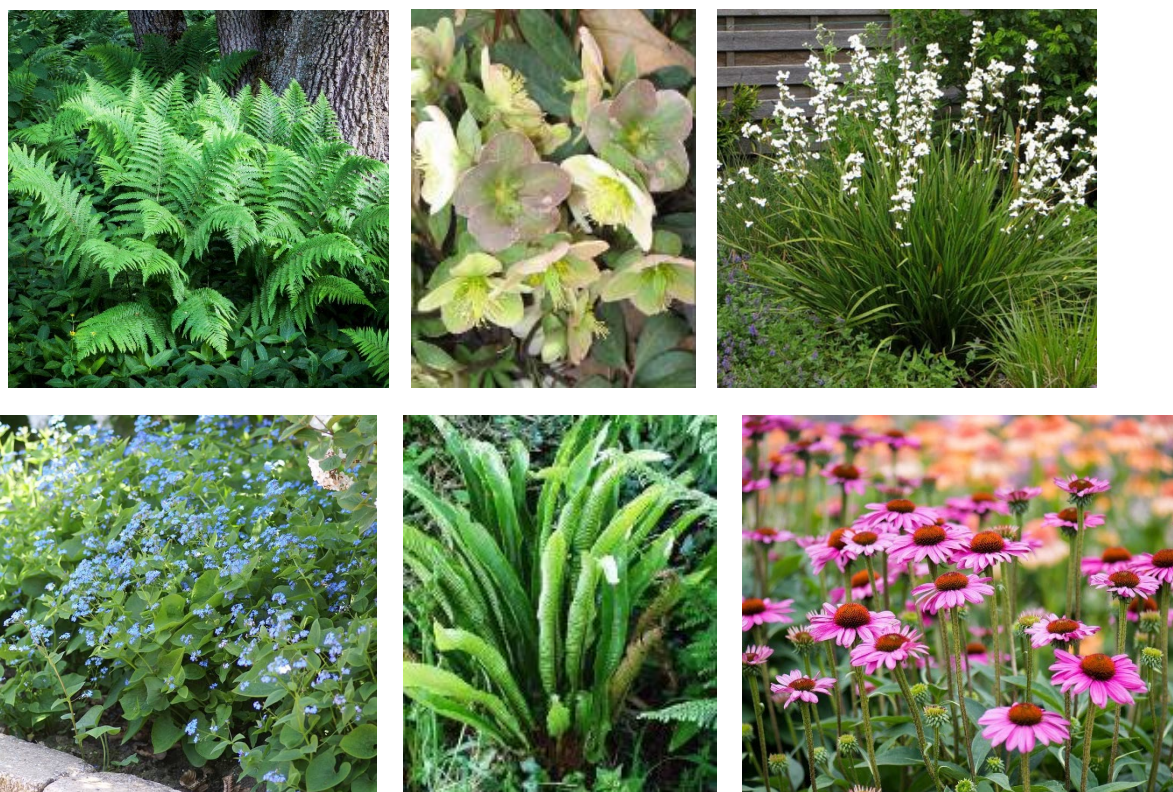


Figure 16 (Clockwise from top left) *Dryopteris felix-mas*; *Helleborus* spp.; *Libertia grandiflora*; *Echinacea purpurea*; *Asplenium scolopendrium*; *Brunnera macrophylla*



Fig 17: Proposed Planting Strategy

5.3 Hard Landscape Materials and Finishes

The selection of paving and other landscape materials is determined by proposed function, longevity and durability. There is a limited and muted palette proposed for paving materials in order to complement and not compete with the existing historic materials on site.



Fig 18: Proposed Hard Landscape Strategy

Overall, two main materials are proposed throughout: natural stone paving and self-binding gravel. Occasional re-use of the existing stone cobbles that are on site is proposed in appropriate areas away from main pedestrian access routes due to their uneven nature. Robust steel edging is also proposed throughout the site.



Fig 19: Typical Materials Proposed, clockwise from top left: Self-Binding Gravel; Natural Stone Paving; Reinforced Grass; Occasional use of natural stone elements within gravel; Reuse of existing cobble from site

5.4 Site Furniture

Seating is provided throughout the scheme, with many opportunities to rest and relax. All benches will have armrests and backrests in order to be available for the widest of user demands. The materiality of the site furniture will complement the proposed and existing site materials with the use of timber and steel. This reflects the past use of the courtyards and open space area as a working demesne landscape. The form will be robust yet lightweight. Areas have been provided for temporary seating that can be associated with the proposed restaurant and food offerings within the development. Bollards, cycle stands, litter bins and other incidental site furniture will be of similar material and robust form.

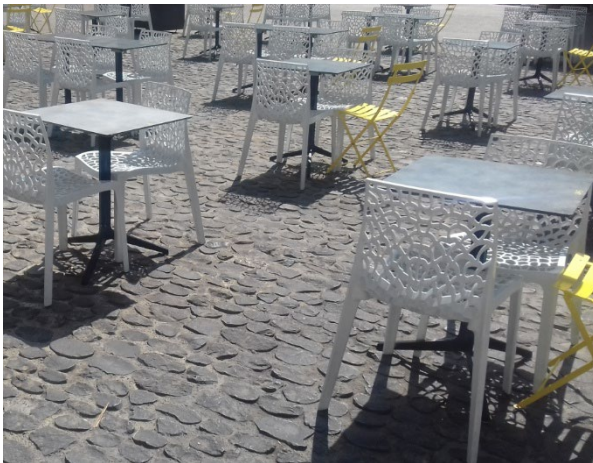


Fig 20: Typical Site Furniture, clockwise from top: Steel and timber benches; robust benches can also act as vehicular barriers; ample opportunity to place temporary seating



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