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Reimagining Camanachd Square

Introduction



A team led by Rural Design was appointed in early 2022 to prepare an Options Appraisal of Camanachd Square in Portree and to assist Portree and Braes Community Trust (PBCT) in identifying potential development opportunities for the site that could benefit the wider community.

The two principal assets within the site are the Community Centre Building and the King George V Playing Field.

Both of these key amenities have suffered from considerable neglect in recent years. The Community Centre Building has fallen into disrepair and the outdoor spaces have been affected by a lack of maintenance.

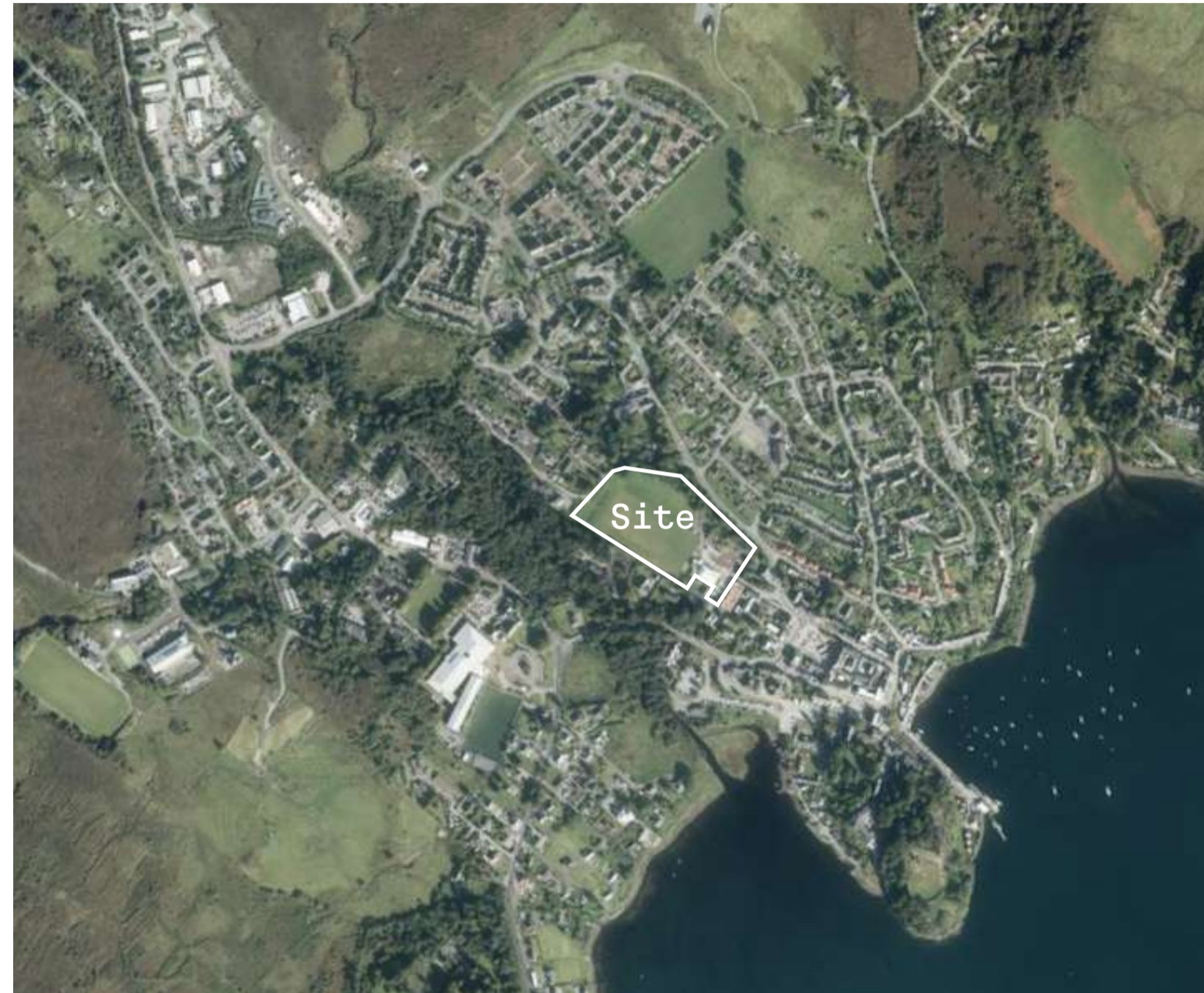
The word “re-imagining” is very fitting, as a fresh look at the functions required of the Community Hall will be essential. The needs of the community have evolved since the hall was first built, whilst the growth of community-led development has dramatically changed the way community buildings are delivered and managed. This project represents an excellent opportunity for a community driven project to create a lively new hub space for the residents of Portree and Skye as well as the many visitors the island receives.

The Camanachd Square site is located near the centre of Portree only a few minutes walk from Somerled Square, the main public space in the town.

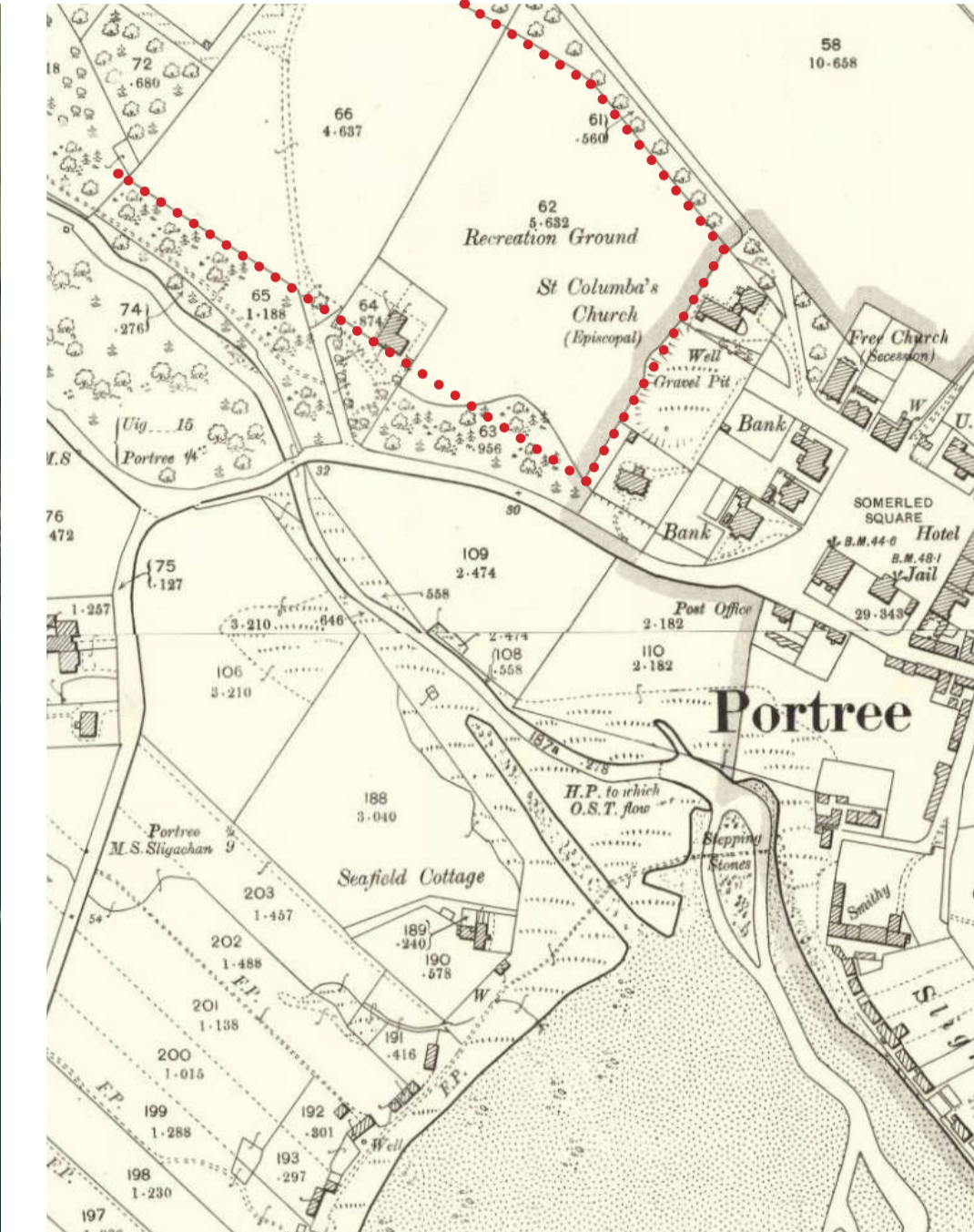
The site contains the King George V playing fields, The Community Centre and its car park, The Portree Nursery, a multi-use games pitch (known as the Red Pitch) and a small children’s play area. The site also includes the footprint of a Swimming Pool building which was demolished in 2012.

This part of the town has been used for recreation for over a century as the map from 1901 shows. The King George V Playfield was subsequently formed on this area after the Second World War and is currently leased to the Council for use only as playing fields and recreation.

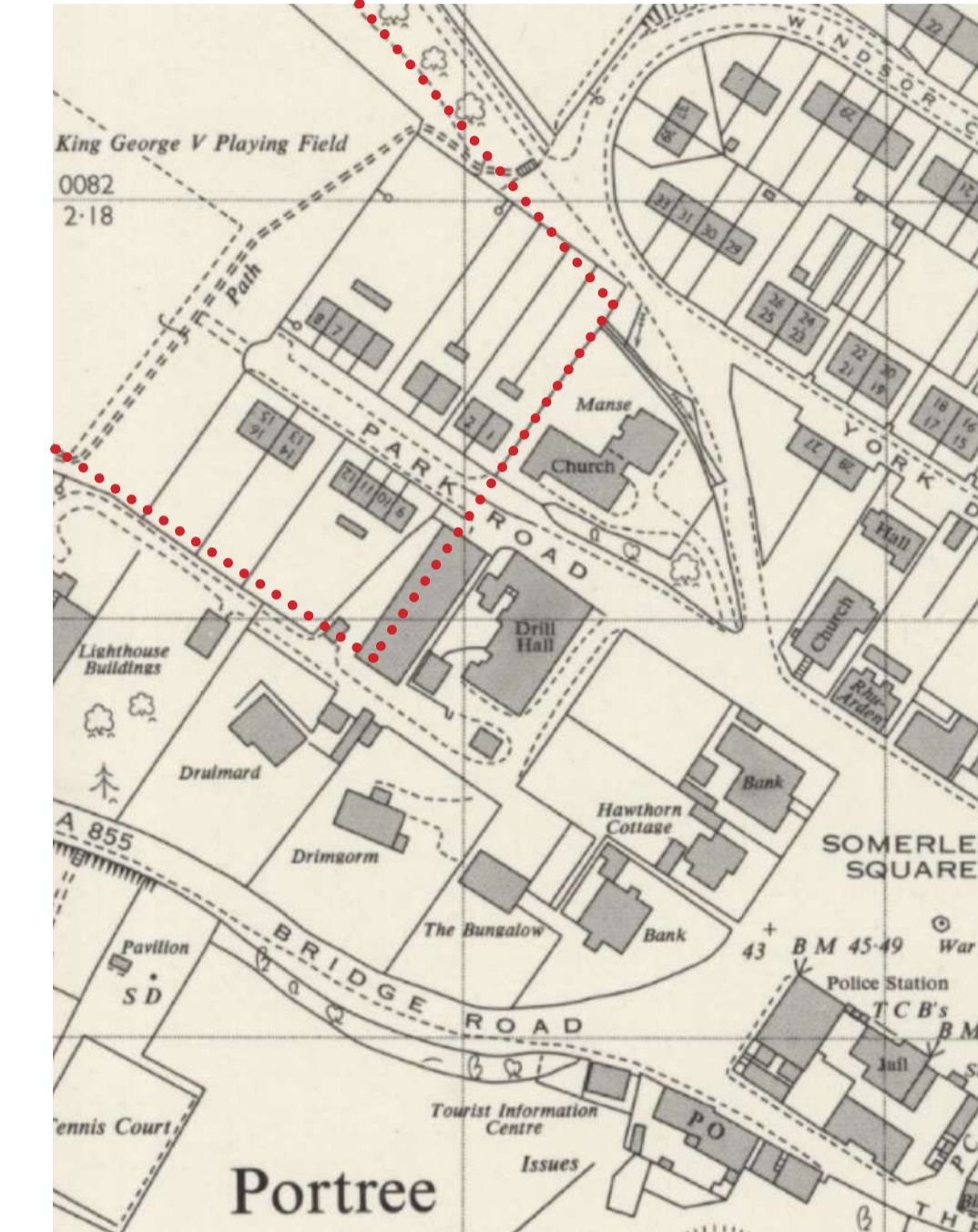
Today the site is close to the main vehicle routes within Portree and so is easily accessible both from within the town and further afield. The square is used day to day as a drop off for children going to the nearby Primary School. The two main public car parks in the town - Somerled Square and the Bayfield Parking area - are only a short distance away and within a few minutes walk of the site. As Portree expands to the north in the coming years the walking and wheeling routes linking to the town centre will pass around and possibly through Camanachd Square and the KGV.



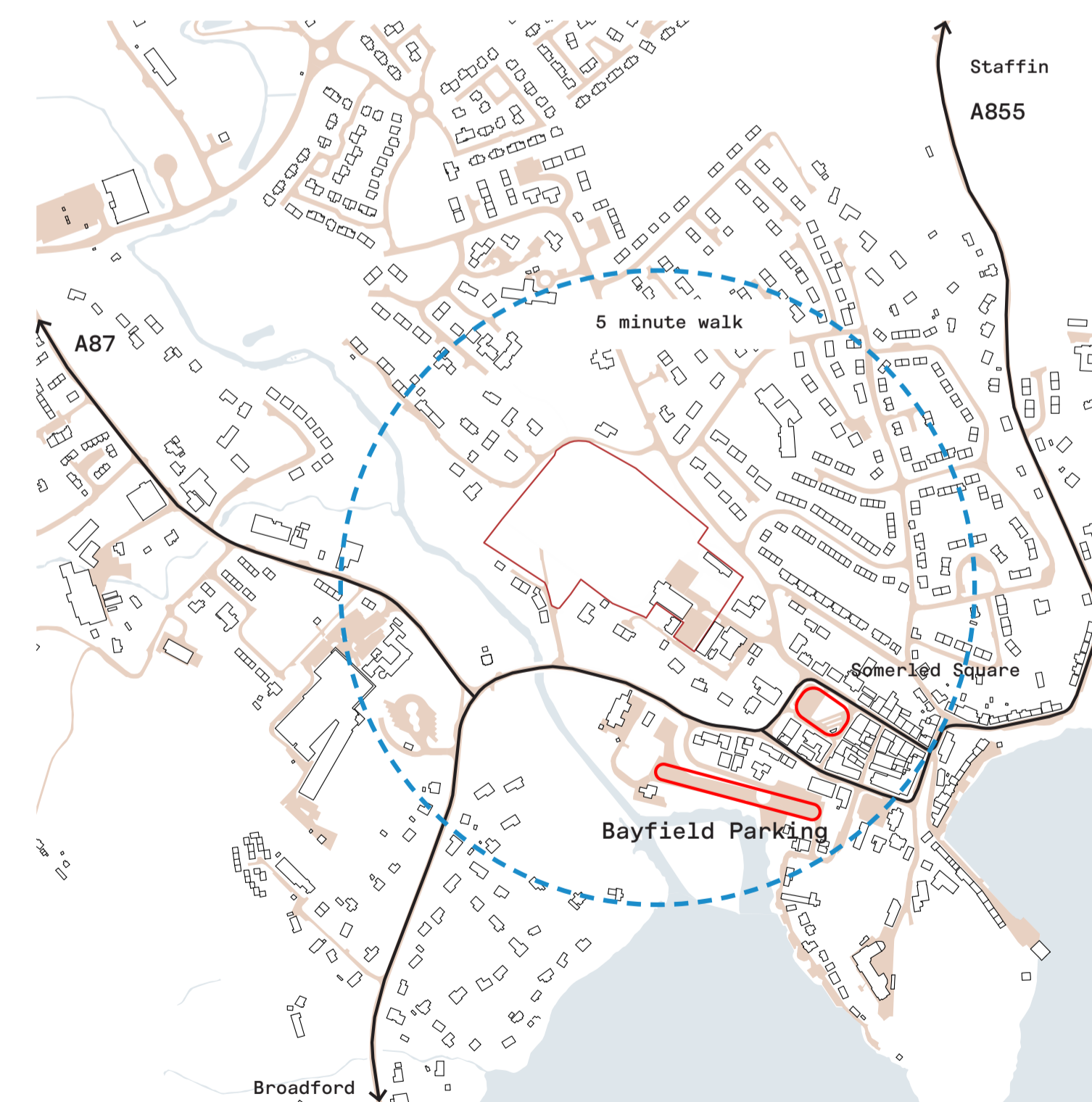
Location



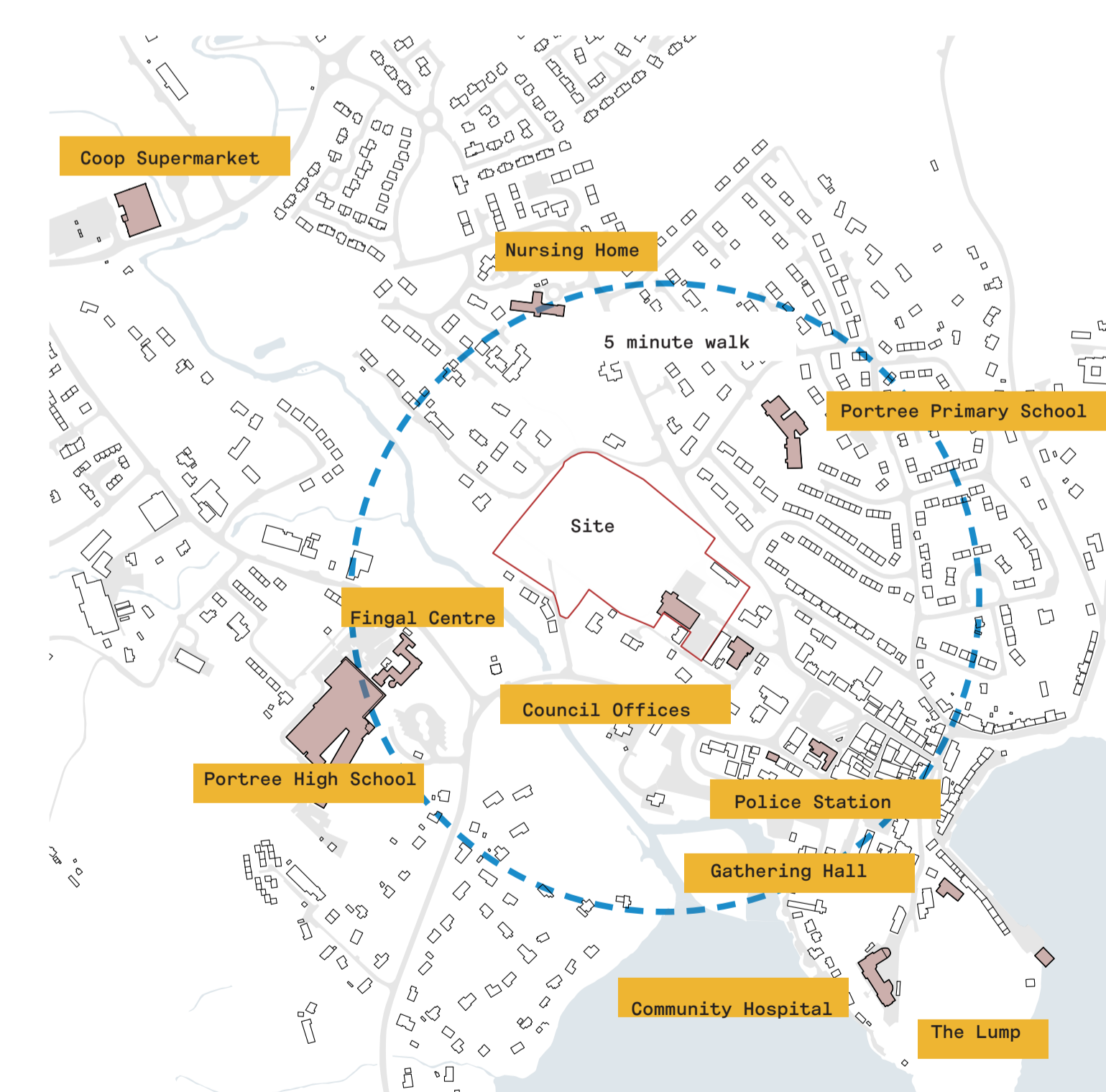
1901



1965



Connections



Amenities

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The process so far

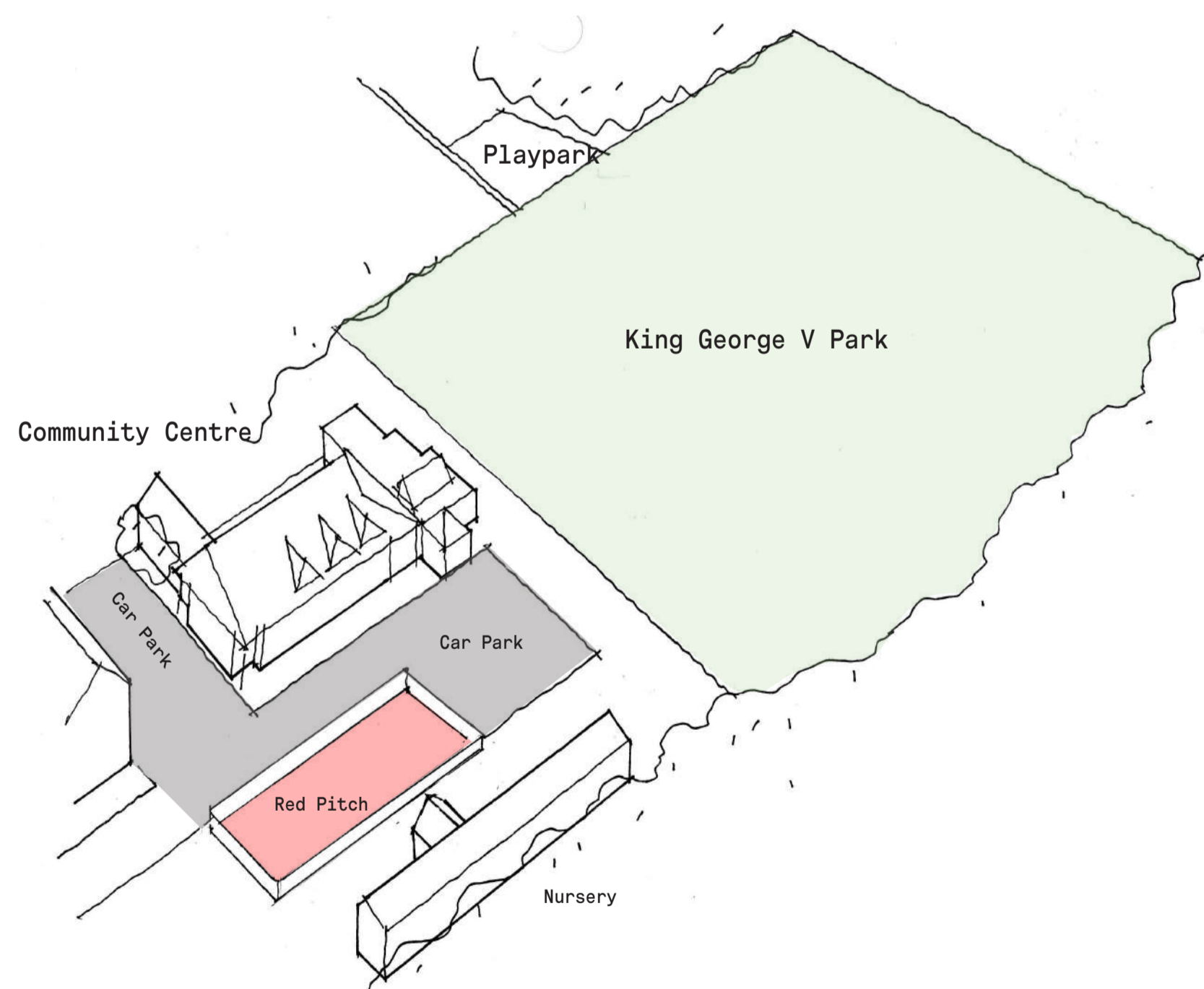
To ensure that the initial ideas in the study reflect the needs of local organisations and complement existing indoor and outdoor spaces in the town, we contacted existing organisations on the site, existing and potential users, and other organisations who provide community space in the town. Some of the ideas and thoughts that were shared with us are noted here.

The Community Centre

- The size and scale of the main hall is useful. Potential uses for the whole hall include pantomime, dances, music, indoor sports / children's events. Others are interested in using part of the space if it could be divided off (e.g. fitness classes). Heating and acoustics would need to be addressed.
- The smaller hall is popular for smaller classes and events.
- Ancillary facilities need to be up to scratch - secure storage for sports and arts organisations, toilets, reception area etc.
- The building should offer indoor facilities (toilets etc) and possibly indoor space for events on the pitch to use (eg evening dance after the agricultural show, indoor space if weather is poor).
- Scope for arts spaces.
- There is potential to provide for space for small business opportunities such as independent retailers and/or food businesses.

The King George V Park

- Pitch is poorly drained, soggy and uneven in parts.
- Area as a whole is poorly maintained: dog dirt on the pitch, dirty play equipment.
- The area needs to work for a number of uses: football training and matches, community events (including the agricultural show), informal green space, play, and ideally a running/cycling track.
- A running track would be very useful for running and cycling groups (measured flat distances with a good surface, somewhere safe for kids to learn how to ride bikes, potentially also a vehicular access route for event setup).
- A vehicular access route onto the park for event setup would avoid damage to the grass and drainage.
- Toilets and changing facilities would be useful for football, sports, running etc. and general family use.
- Lighting to areas of the park would be useful.
- Shelter from inclement weather would be useful - e.g. a simple roofed structure or access to the community centre.
- Informal outdoor green space for people to meet and relax would be good (picnic benches etc.).
- Red pitch is seen as an important resource for young people, but in poor condition and needn't stay where it is.
- Play park is tired and range of equipment does not appeal to all age groups.
- Widespread desire for Camanachd Square not simply to be more car parking - it's seen as a focus for community activity, indoor and outdoor.



Aerial view of the site

3 Reimagining Camanachd Square The Community Centre

Three basic potential strategies for redeveloping the site and the Community Centre building have emerged during the first stage of the study -

Option 1

Repair and renovate the existing building and implement modest upgrades and repairs to the existing external environment. There is however little potential to improve how the existing spaces work with this option.

Option 2

Demolish the existing Community Centre and redevelop this part of the site with an entirely new building. This option could prove expensive, could take a long time to deliver and cause disruption to the use of the KGV.

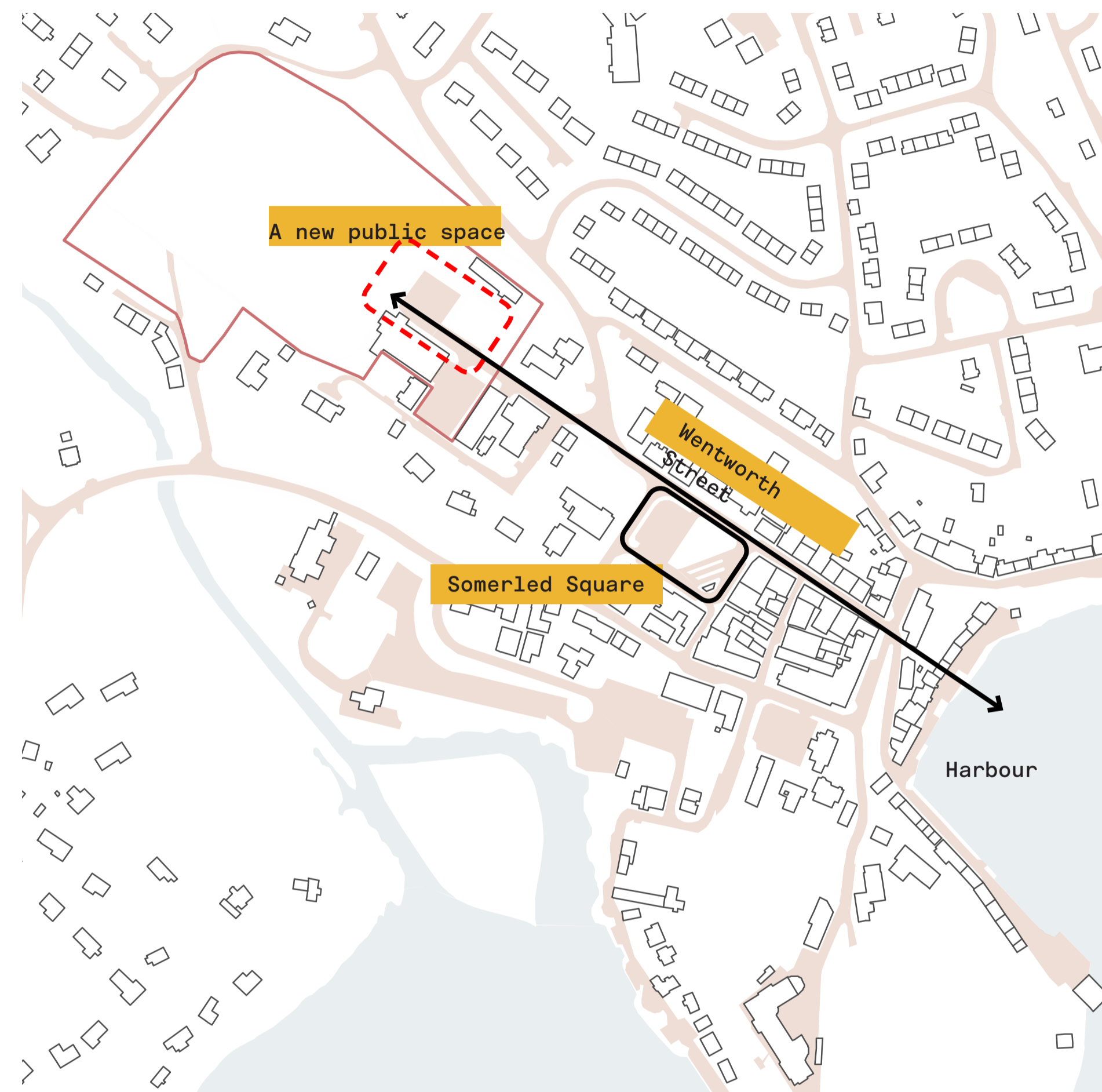
Option 3

Carefully assess and consider what works with the existing building - retain what works and remove what does not and add new elements where needed. Review and reorganise the external spaces around the Community Centre to make them more useful and to allow them to facilitate different uses and events. This option could be achieved in phases, keep disruption to a minimum and as it reuses the existing building fabric is potentially the most sustainable option.

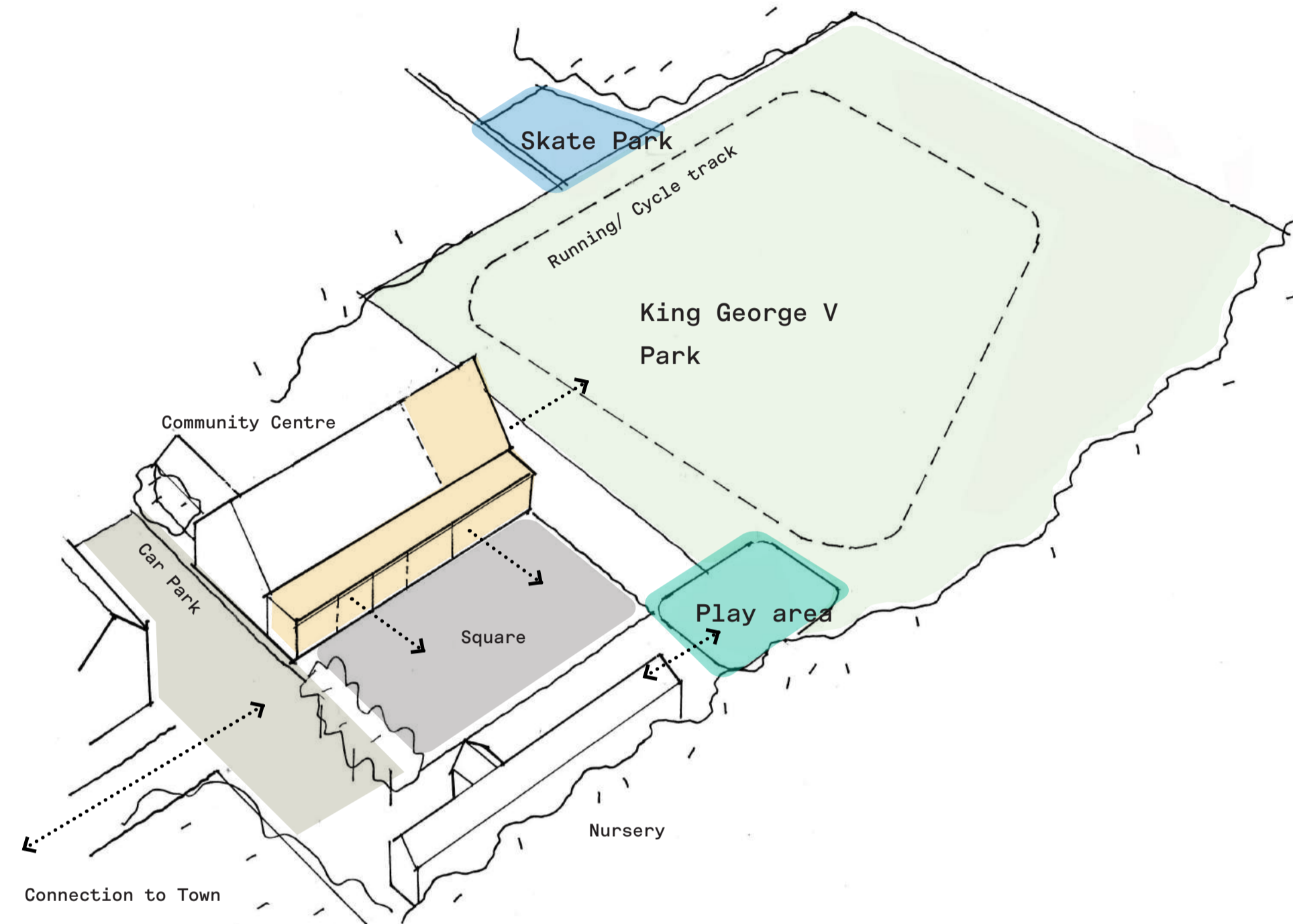
The diagrams opposite explore the potential of Option 3. The existing main hall structure and, where possible, the envelope is retained and enhanced, the poor quality sections of the building are removed and replaced with new spaces. New extensions can allow the Community Centre to address the external spaces - a new public square and the existing park - and so better facilitate the many needs and potential uses identified in the Community Consultation exercise. The project offers the opportunity to new civic place for the town - a new *community square*.

Camanachd Square could be a lively useful gathering place that a reinvigorated Community Centre and the existing nursery would overlook. In time other uses and buildings might also address this new public space.

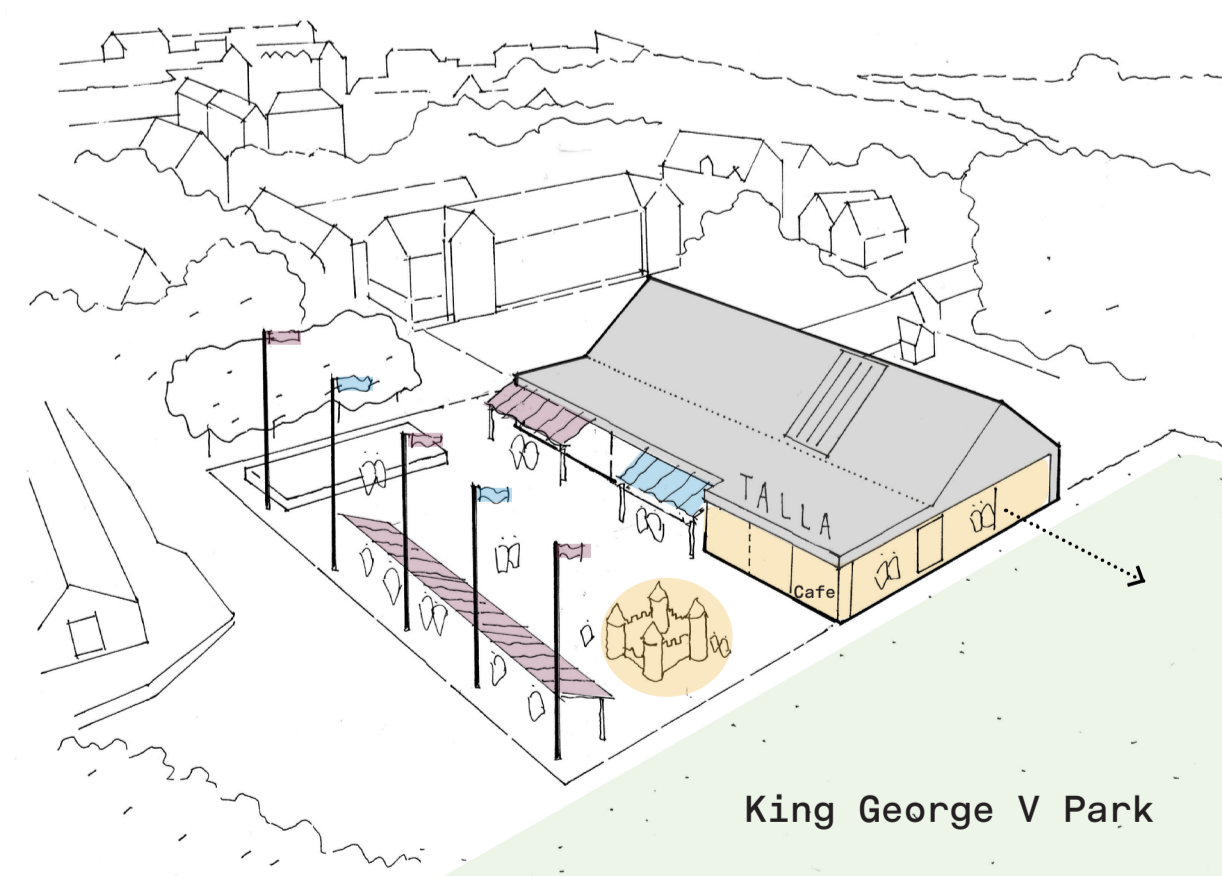
This new public space and Community Centre would also better facilitate activities on the King George V park.



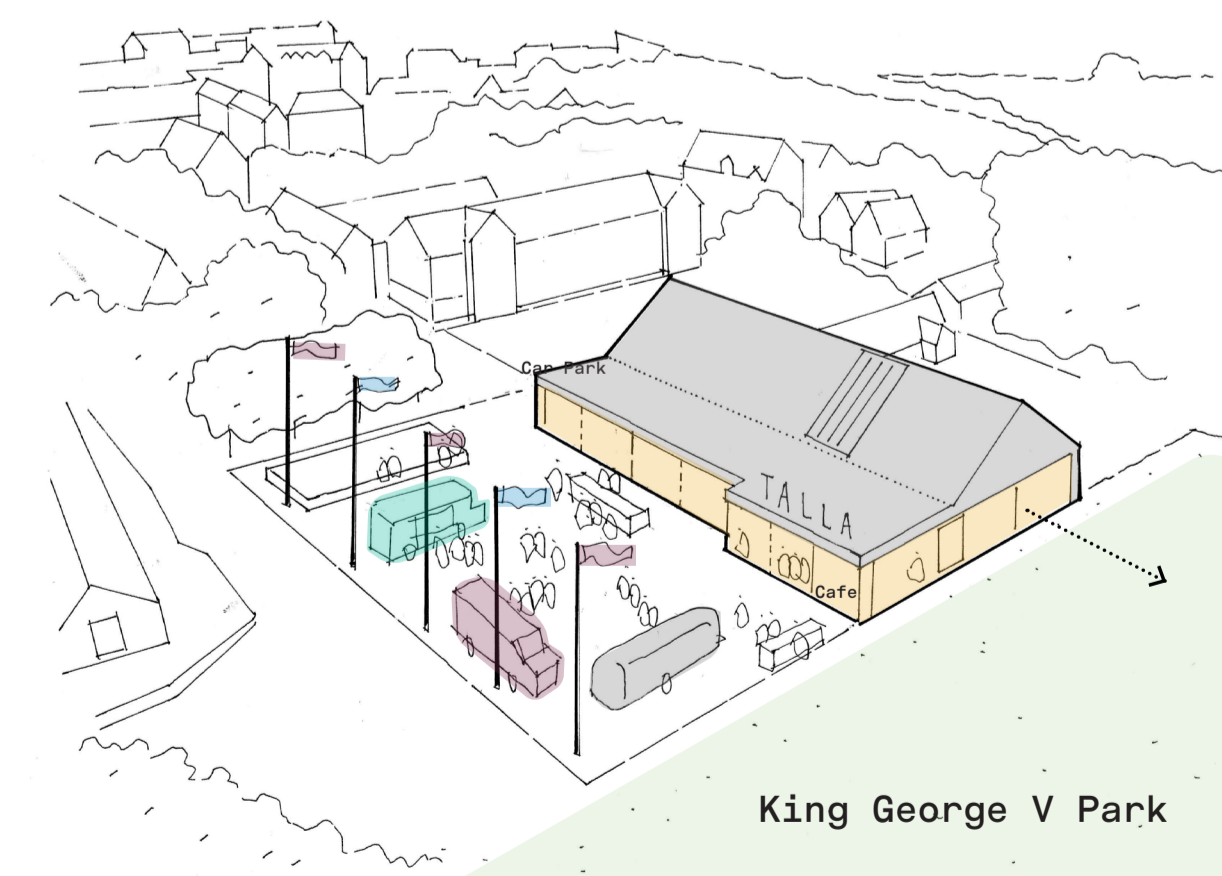
A New Public Square



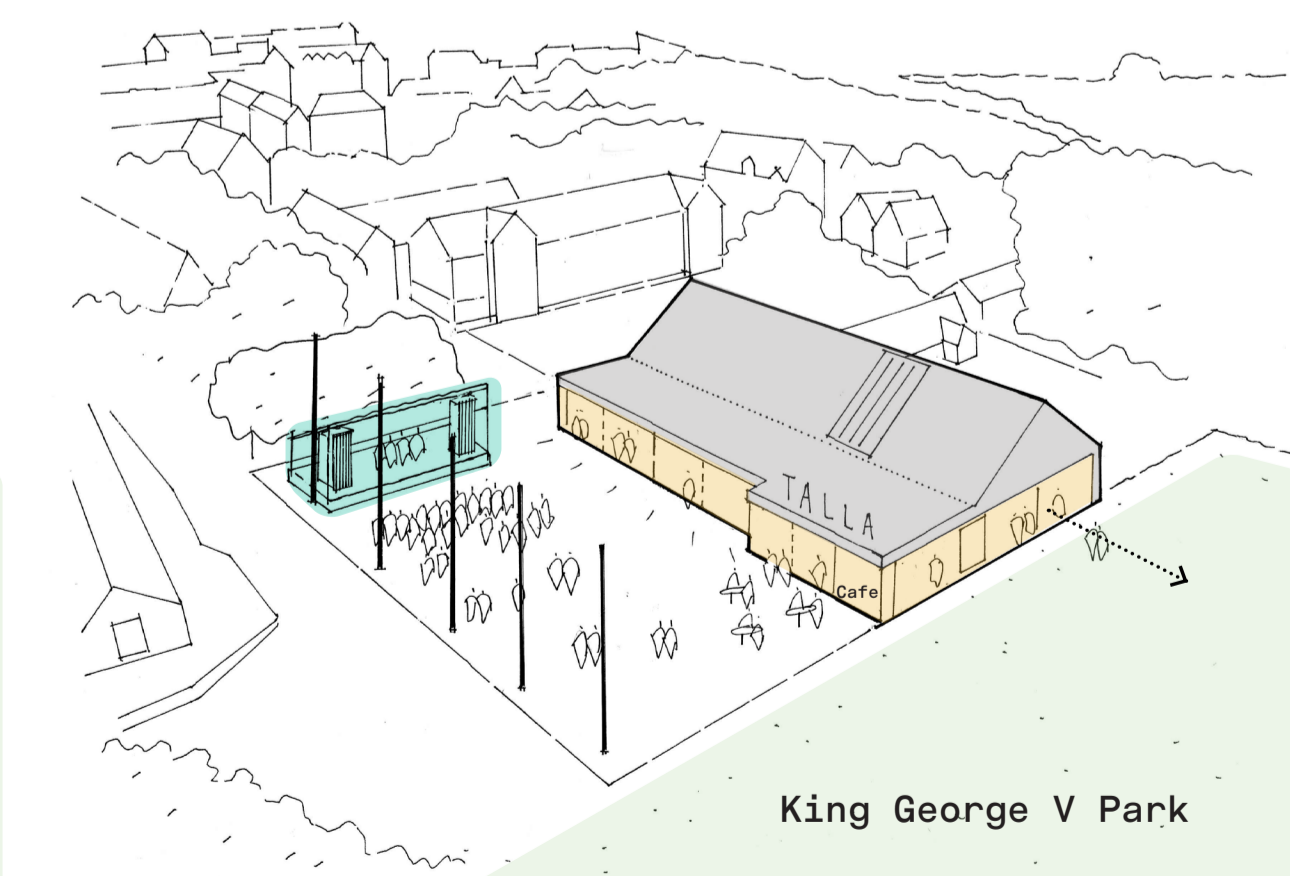
New connections and relationships to better facilitate different uses



Gala Day/



Food/ farmers markets



Outdoor performances

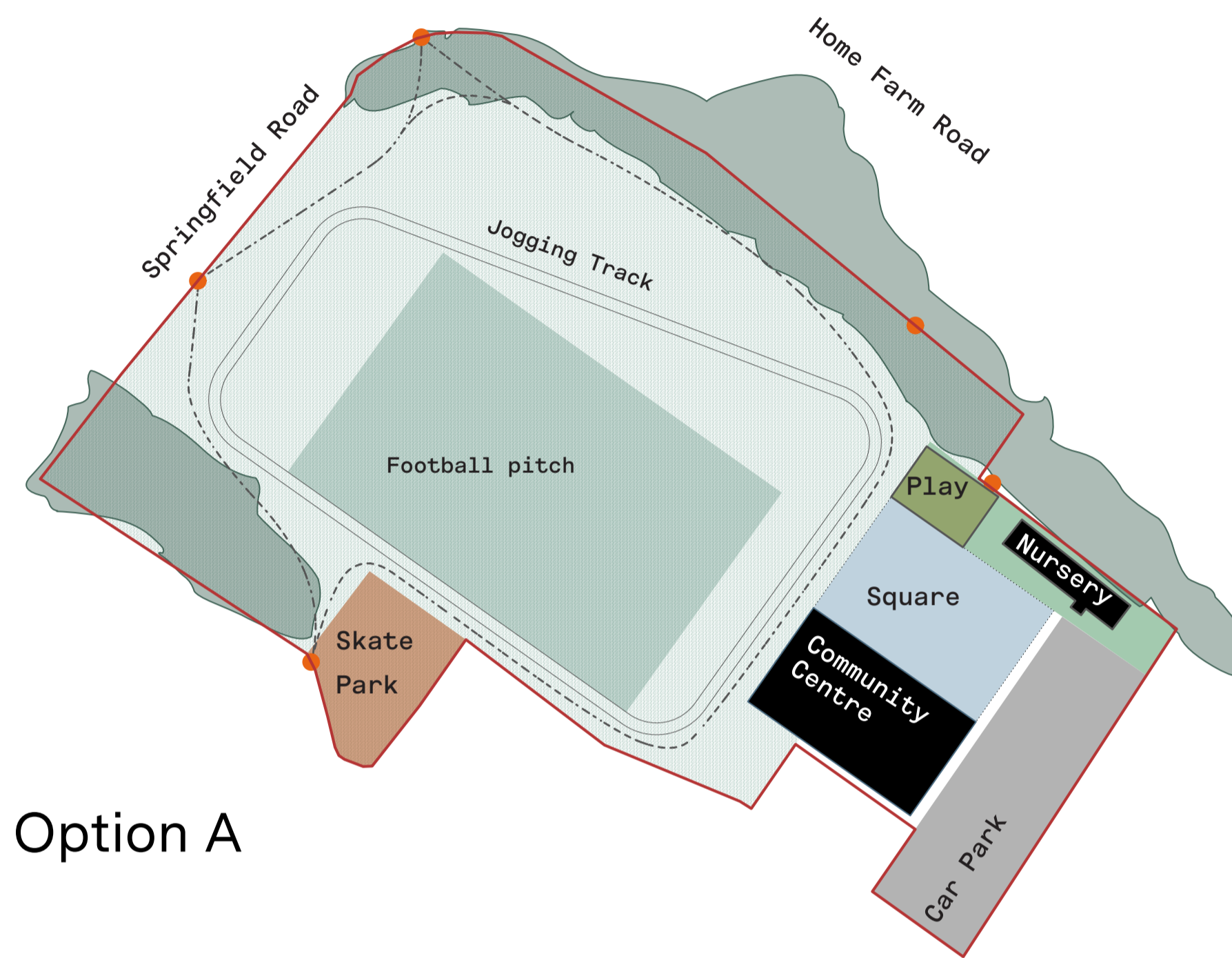
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The KGV

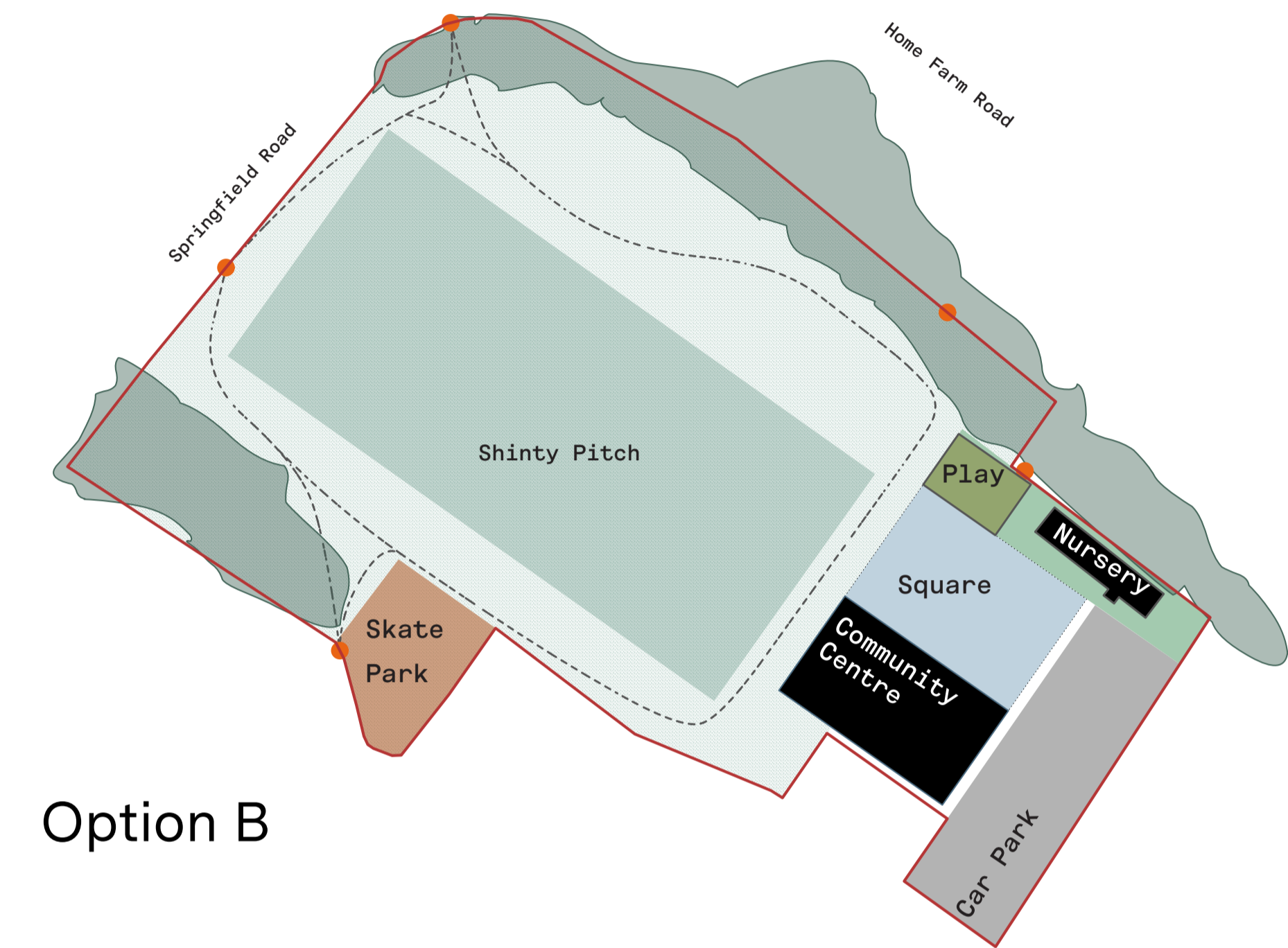
These diagrams show some initial studies into how areas for different activities on the King George V might be arranged to better facilitate and encourage use of the park. In all these options it is foreseen that the Play area is relocated to be closer to the Nursery building. A skate or bike park could be formed on the site of the current playground.

Option A

This shows a jogging or running track around the park enclosing an area that could contain a football pitch. The track could be used by vehicles during the agricultural fair to protect the grass and park from damage.



Option A



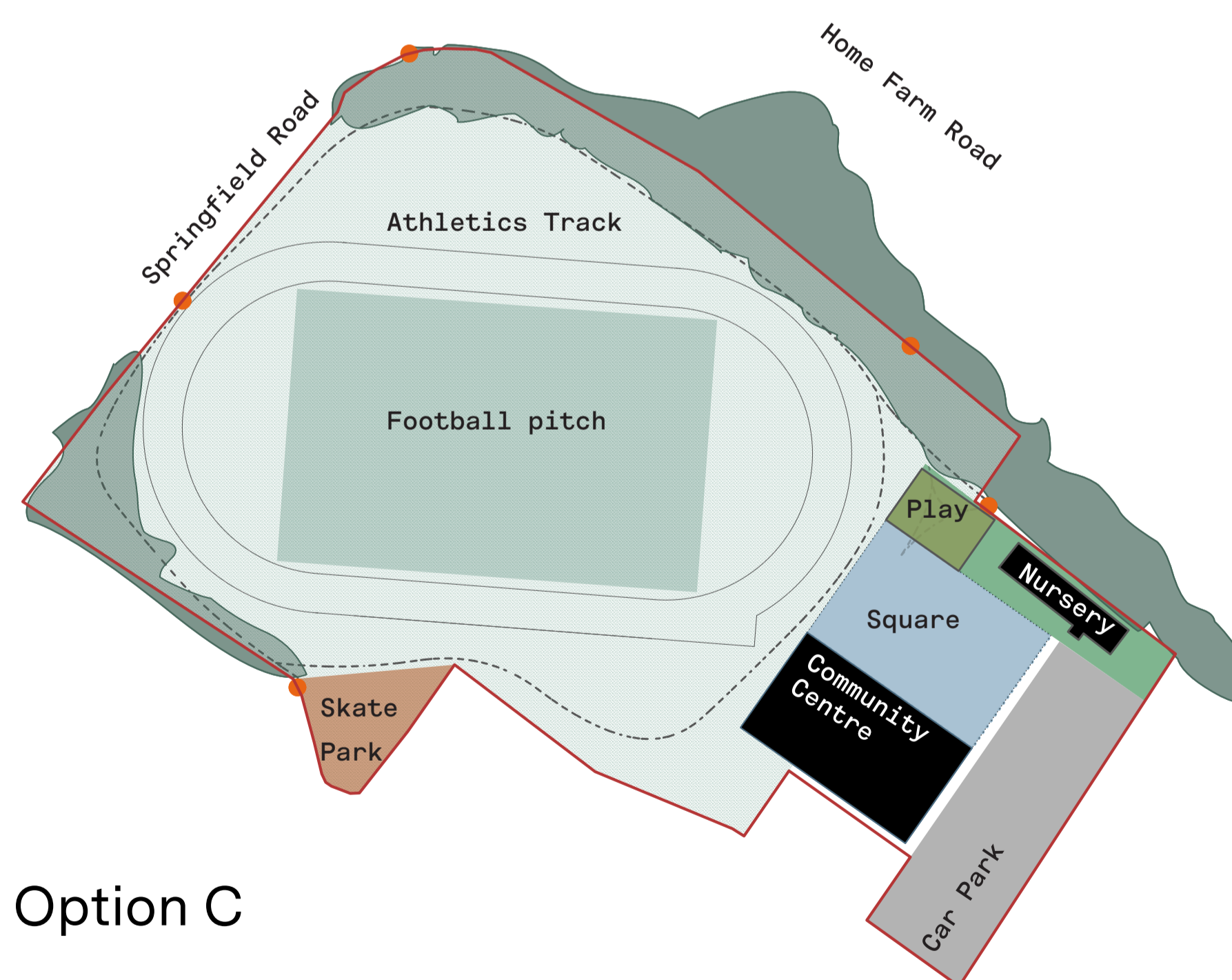
Option B

Option B

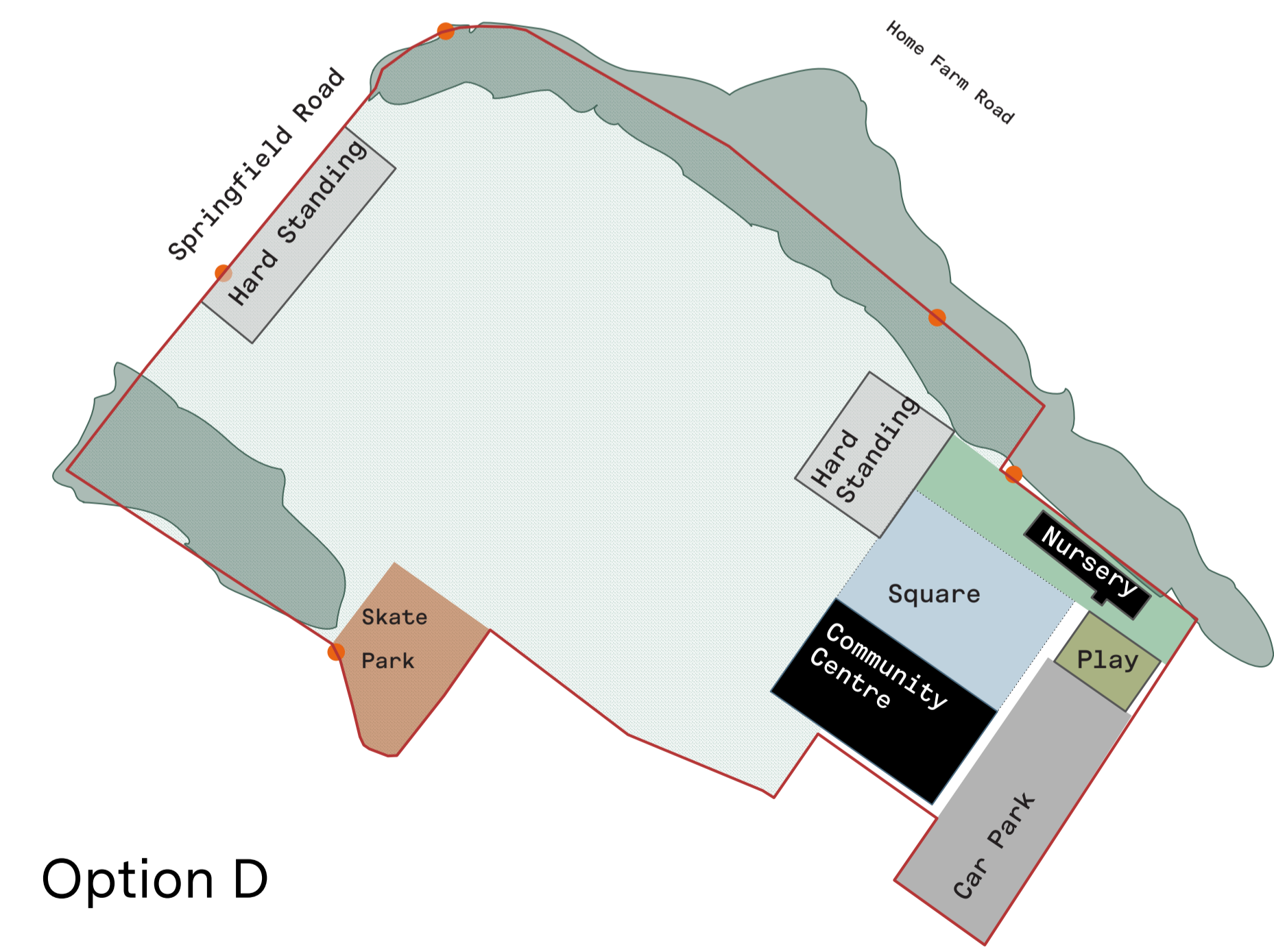
This shows a shinty pitch on the park. This would occupy most of the length of the KGV.

Option C

This shows an athletics running track on the park. This would occupy most of the area but could enclose an area sufficiently large for a football pitch.



Option C



Option D

Option D

This option shows only minimal interventions in the park - the old swimming pool site is retained as an area of hard-standing for overspill parking and a second new area of hard-standing is formed accessed from Springfield Road to facilitate events on the KGV such as the Agricultural Show.

5 Reimagining Camanachd Square What do you think?

A Reinvigorated Community Centre



Soft Play



Skill learning



Ceilidh/ Weddings



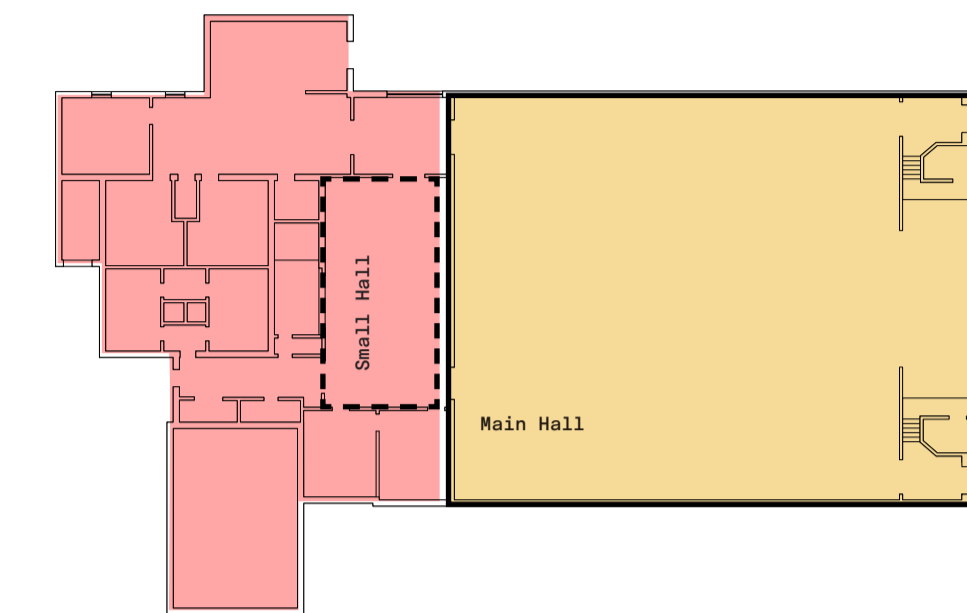
Art workshops



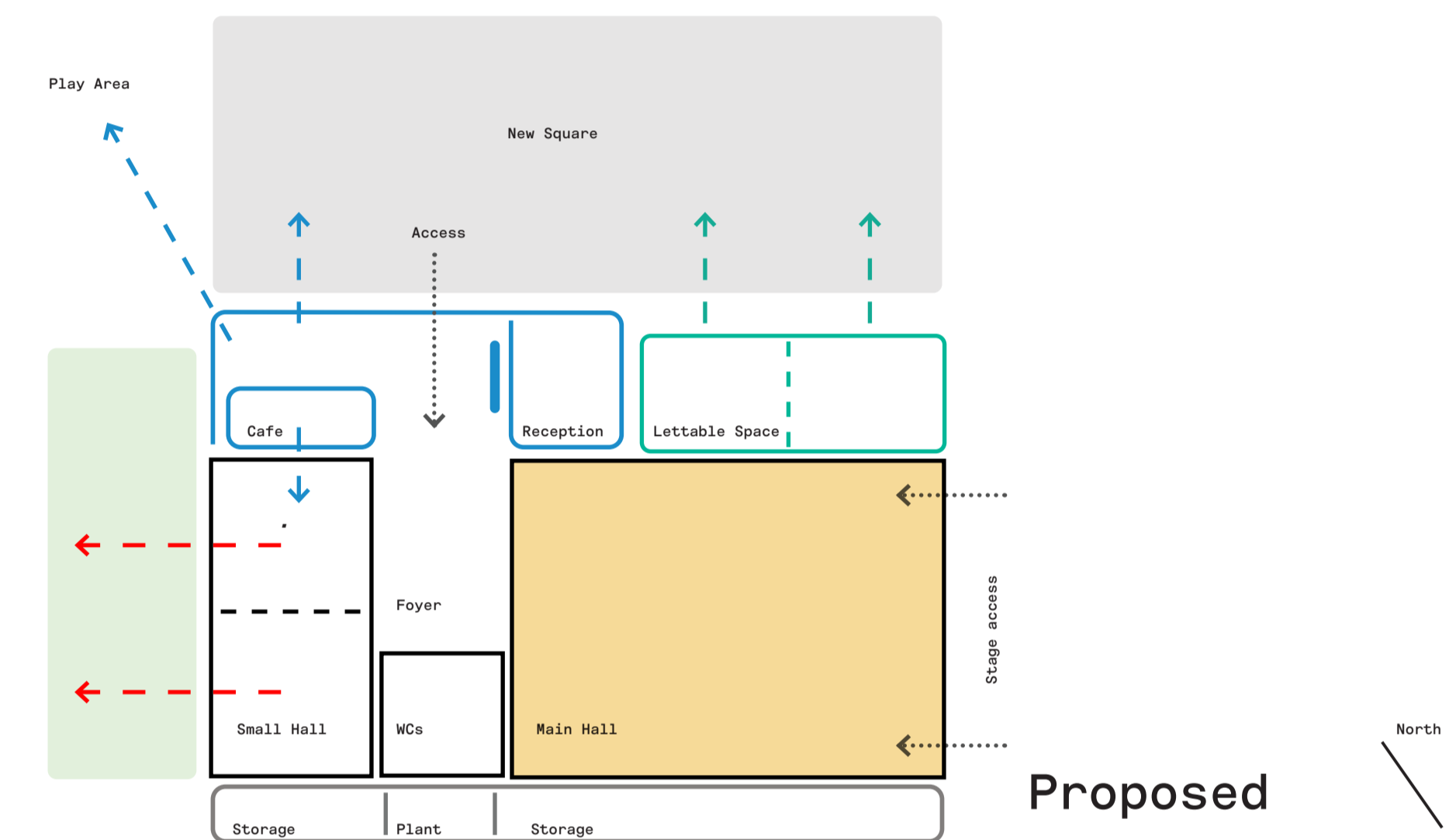
Music venues



Pantomime



Existing



Proposed

This diagram shows how a remade Community Centre might work.

The existing main hall is retained but “wrapped” in new accommodation creating frontage to the new square and allowing spaces to open out to the King George V park. These spaces could replicate the size of the existing small hall but be flexible and accommodate a wide variety of activities throughout the day.

New spaces onto the square could contain lettable space for local businesses or organisations who would essentially become anchor tenants.

A cafe space near the entrance could facilitate activity and events within the building, the square and the park.

What do you think of the ideas on Board 3 and these pictures?
What sort of activities would you like to see inside the building?

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What do you think?

A new Community Square



Food Festival



Outdoor Cinema



Outdoor Performances



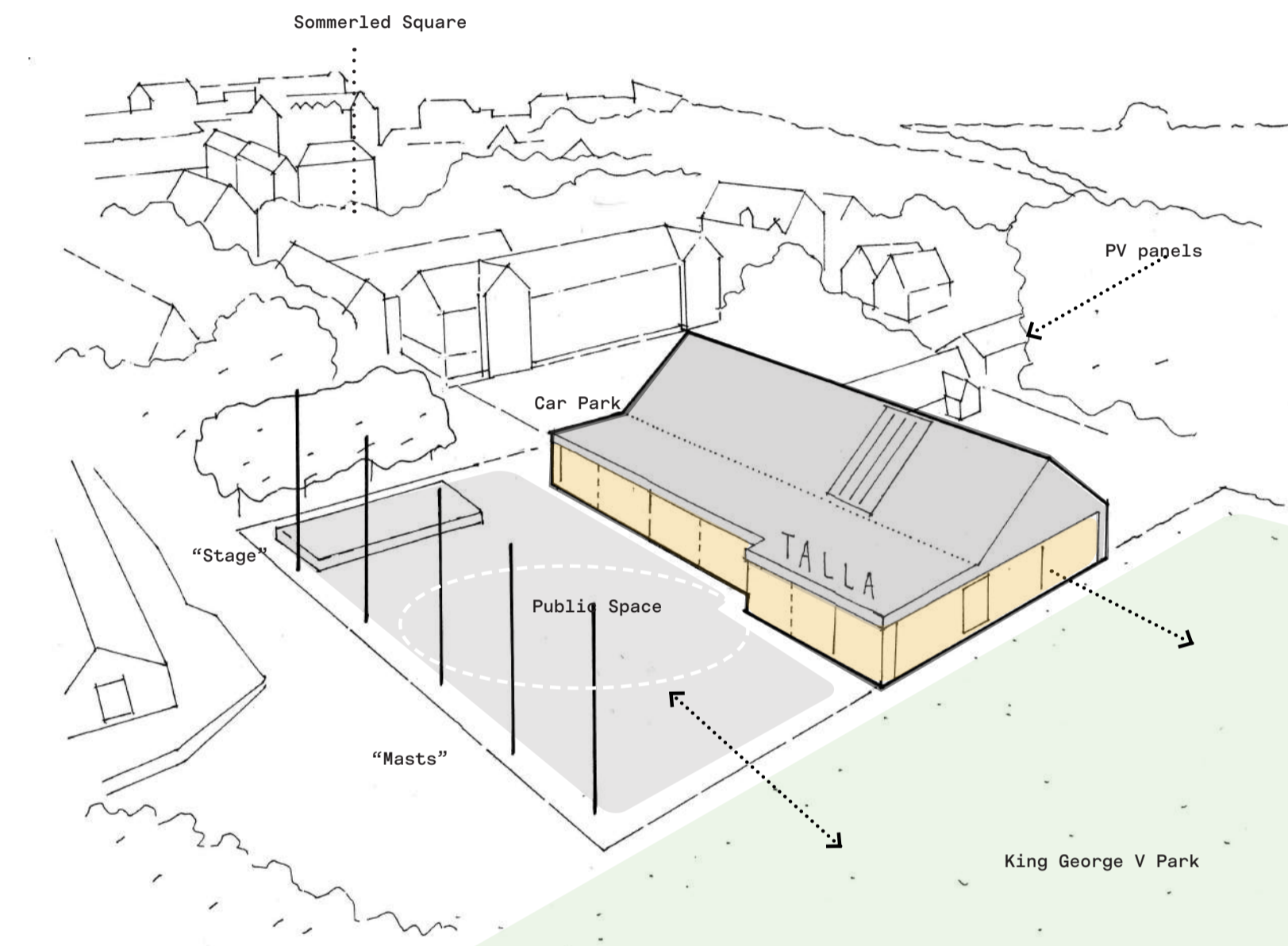
Farmers' Market



Community Events



Nature-based Play Areas



The space in front of the Community Centre could become a new Community Square - a hard-working, flexible space for the community. There is the potential to create infrastructure to this new space to allow it to facilitate different events and to make a new place within the town and community -

A raised area that can be used as a stage

“Masts” to mark the place - these could have lighting mounted on them and also provide a framework structure for awnings, screens, flags and banners.

The parking is rationalised and possibly screened by new trees. Alternatively the new public square could be used as an overspill car park for larger events.

The square could facilitate food vans in the warmer weather as an alternative or complement to a cafe within the Community Centre

What do you think of the ideas for the car park and red pitch on Board 3 and these pictures?

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Reimagining Camanachd Square

What do you think?

Sport and Events on the KGV



Community Events



Agricultural Show



Bike track for children



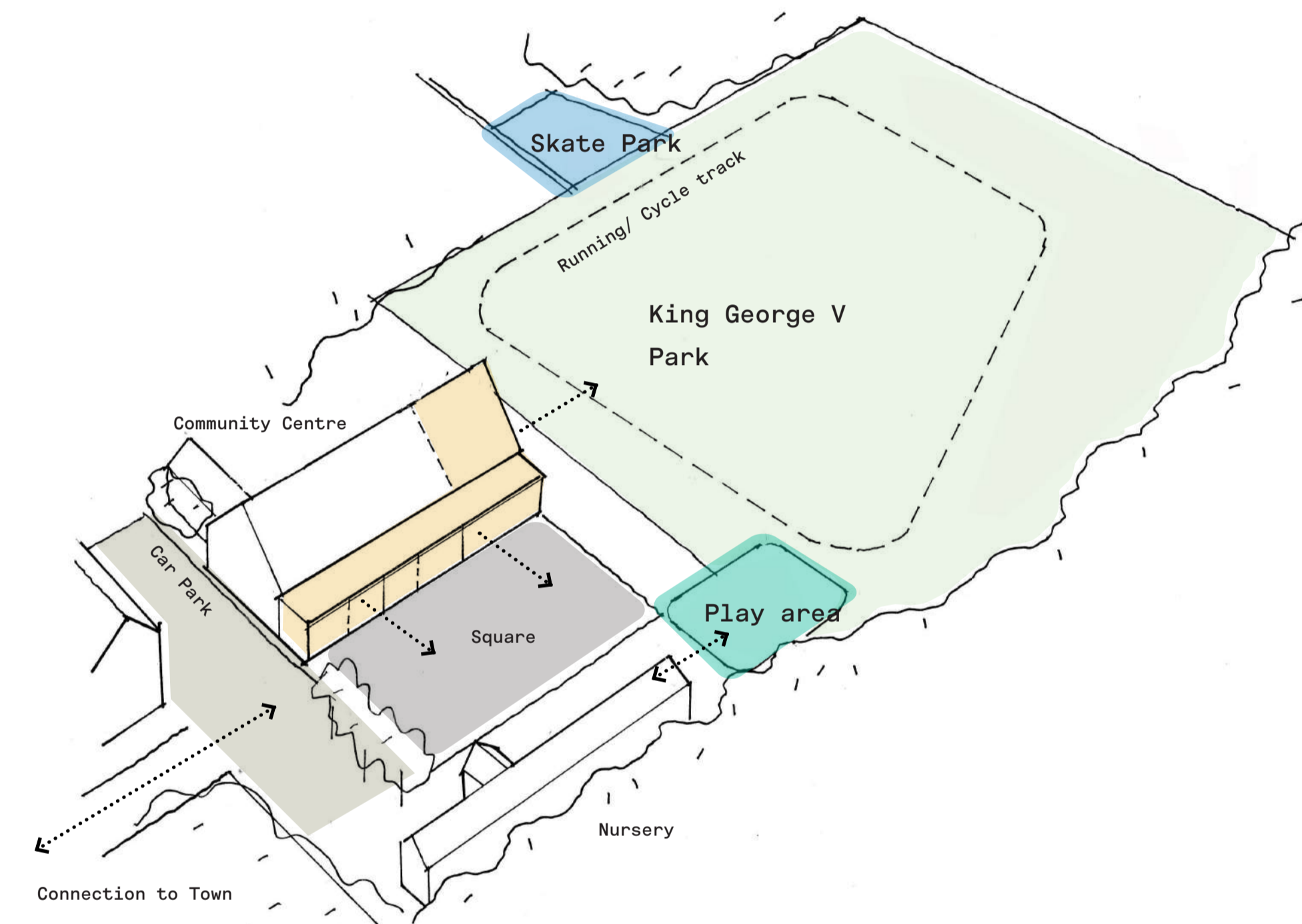
Skate/ Bike park



Boot Camp exercise



Football



What do you think of the ideas on Board 3 and these pictures?

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Reimagining Camanachd Square

What do you think?

Casual activities on the KGV



Picnic



A Family Space



Walking



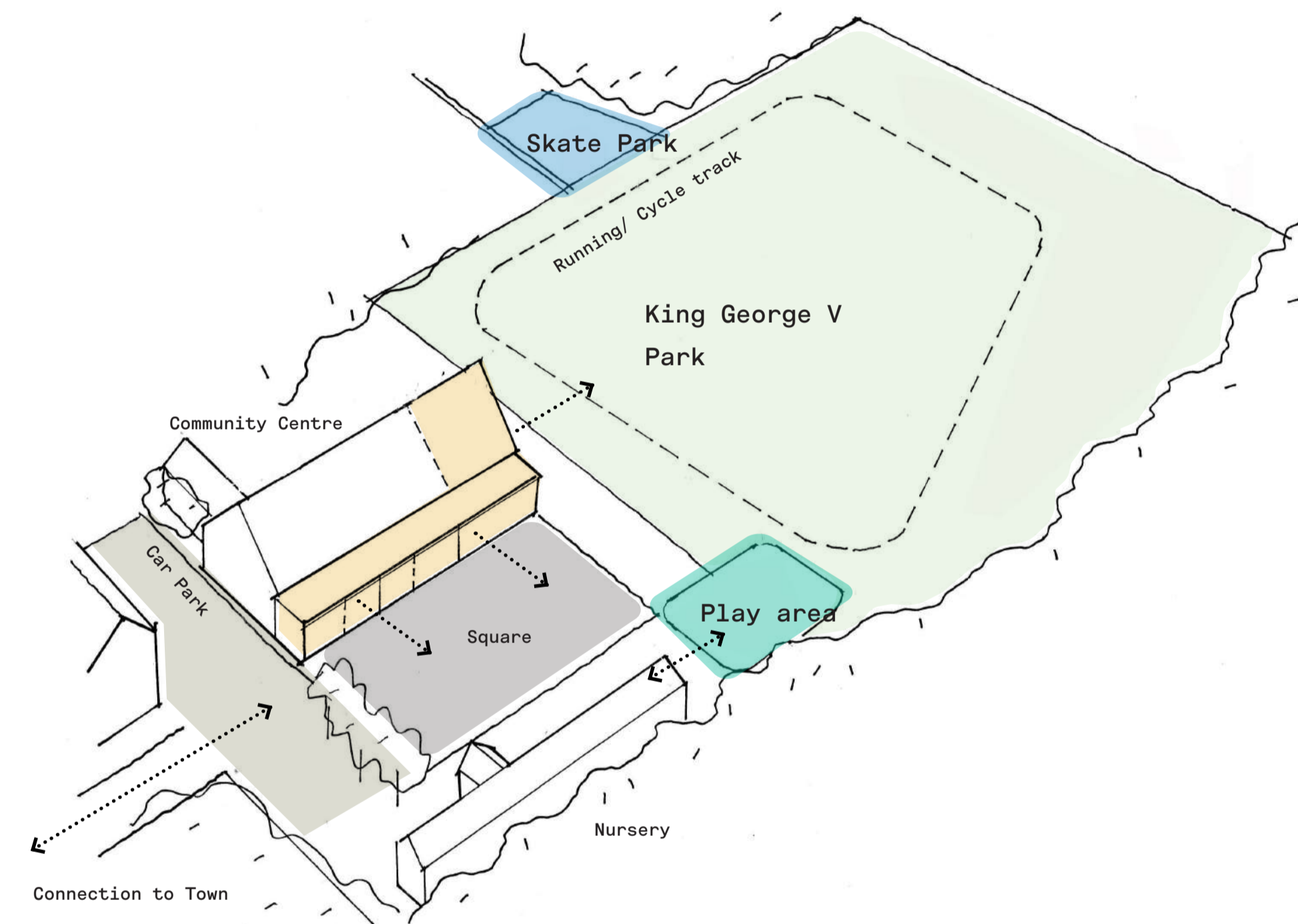
Dog Walking



Informal Kickabout



Park Benches



What do you think of the ideas on Board 3 and these pictures?