



BEGBROKE SCIENCE PARK
- PUBLIC ART PROPOSAL -

ASSEMBLE

Submission to accompany NMA Application
REVISED 15th June 2023

“What is a weed? A plant whose virtues
have never been discovered.”

Gertrude Jekyll

‘I markd the varied colors in flat spreading fields chekerd with closes
of different tinted grain like colors in a map the copper tinted colors of
clover in blossom... the sunny glare of the yellow charlock and the sunset
imitation of the scarlet head aches with the blue corn bottles crowding
their splendid colors in large sheets over the lands and “troubling the
cornfields” with destroying beauty.’

John Clare, ‘Leisure’

‘THE WEED GARDEN’ BY ASSEMBLE

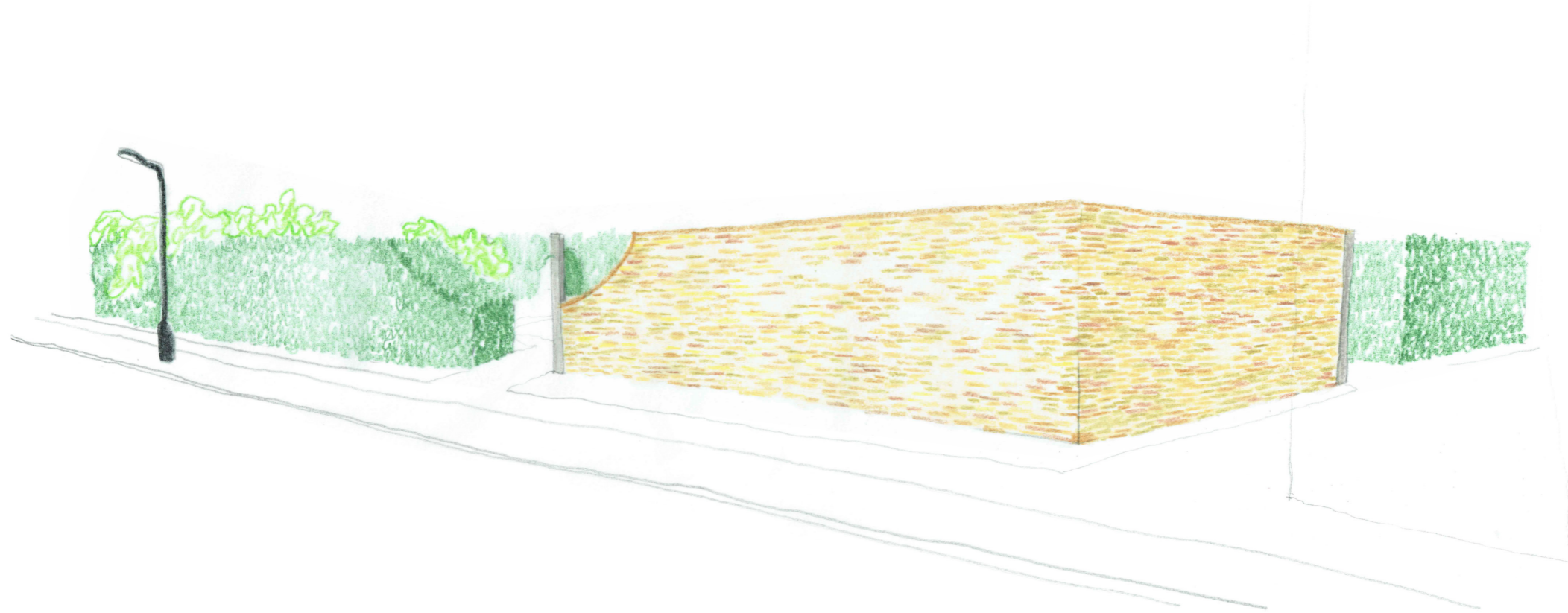
‘THE WEED GARDEN’ BY TURNER PRIZE-WINNERS ASSEMBLE IS AN ARTWORK AND A GARDEN THAT COMBINES ARCHITECTURAL ELEMENTS WITH PLANTING TO CREATE A SINGLE, COHESIVE WHOLE – A ‘TOTAL ARTWORK’ IN WHICH ALL ASPECTS EXIST TO COMPLEMENT ONE ANOTHER.

BECAUSE OF THE ECOLOGICAL CRISIS, AN INCREASING NUMBER OF ARTISTS ARE MAKING AND NURTURING GARDENS AS ARTWORKS, GIVING BACK TO THE WORLD AS OPPOSED TO PRODUCING OFTEN RESOURCE-HEAVY FORMS LIKE SCULPTURES. RECENT UK EXAMPLES INCLUDE GABRIEL OROZCO’S GARDEN FOR SOUTH LONDON GALLERY AND ANTHEA HAMILTON’S FORTHCOMING ‘THE GARDEN’ FOR STUDIO VOLTAIRE.

THESE GARDENS ARE A CONTINUATION OF A LONG TRADITION OF ARTISTS MAKING GARDENS, FOR EXAMPLE CLAUDE MONET’S GIVERNY AND VANESSA BELL AND DUNCAN GRANT’S CHARLESTON, AS WELL AS DEREK JARMAN’S PROSPECT COTTAGE.

A CELEBRATION OF BIODIVERSITY IN ITS TRUEST SENSE, ‘THE WEED GARDEN’ IS A GIFT FOR THOSE WHO CURRENTLY WORK AT BEGBROKE SCIENCE PARK AS WELL AS THOSE WHO WILL COME TO SPEND TIME HERE OVER THE COMING YEARS. DESIGNED TO BE BEAUTIFUL ALL YEAR ROUND AND SECLUDED FROM THE REST OF THE SITE, THE SPACE CREATED WILL BE TRANSPORTIVE, OFFERING AN OTHER-WORLDLY AND RESTFUL SPACE IN WHICH TO THINK, MEET OTHERS, OR JUST BE.

REBECCA HEALD & VICKIE HAYWARD



RESPONSE TO THE BRIEF

This document accompanies the Reserved Matters Submission following the grant of outline planning permission ref. 18/00803/OUT on 17 September 2018. The Reserved Matters Submission relates to the development of two new research facilities on the Begbroke Science Park campus. Condition 21 of the outline planning permission states:

'The reserved matters submission(s) required by Condition 1 of this permission, shall include details of the creation and/or enhancement of the public art in the vicinity of the new development as identified within Policy Kidlington 1, to the satisfaction of the Local Planning Authority. Thereafter, the proposed public art shall be in situ prior to the development hereby permitted, being operational.'

We are delighted to have been commissioned for this new Public Art opportunity for Begbroke Science Park. In response to a peri-urban site with a rich landscape character and a history of agriculture and research interwoven with the land, our proposal is for a weed garden for Begbroke.

All gardens are sites of active engagement with the land, and this site will be no different, enabling visitors, gardeners and members of the Begbroke community to understand the landscape of the site and in its valuing of 'weeds' challenge our perceptions of what belongs and what can contribute to a sense of place.

The weed garden will be an amenity for the current community at Begbroke, and will continue to grow and develop and be enjoyed as the community enlarges, but most importantly it will provide an amenity and a landscape feature that can continue to benefit the wider area as it develops into a neighbourhood.

Over the following pages we explain how this idea has developed in relation to the site and its history for facilitating the 'Weed Research Organisation' and set out the ambition for the Weed Garden as a public amenity.

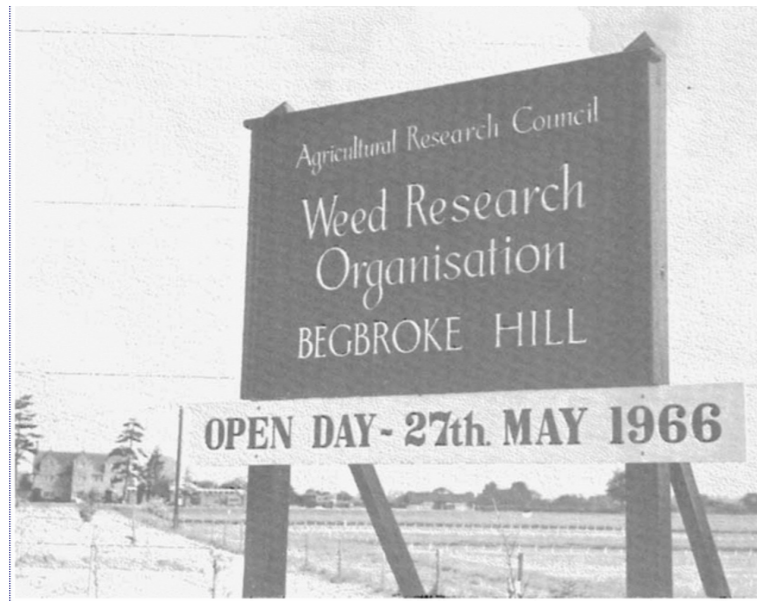


RESPONSE TO SITE

On visiting the site, we were fortunate to be given a guided tour by the Director Alistair Cory across the grounds and inside some of the buildings. We were pleasantly surprised to find how peaceful Begbroke Science Park is, in part because of its somewhat rural context away from the city centre. Despite the fact that there were approximately 300+ people on site at the time, Begbroke Science Park has a tranquil feel to it and you find yourself aware of the rustling leaves of the mature trees, the gentle swaying of the areas of wild grassland and the birdsong. The Grade II listed former farm buildings and walled gardens are a reminder of Begbroke's history as an operating farm.

We understand that the planned expansion of Begbroke Science Park will increase the capacity of laboratories twofold through the addition of two new buildings and the rearrangement of the car parking. We understand that Begbroke Science Park is part of a much larger development by Oxford University Development Ltd and that the adjacent farmland may potentially be developed in the future to provide a new district of housing, schools, landscape and potentially a new train station.

Our response to the brief is site specific and in reaction to our immediate findings.



Weed Research Organisation, Begbroke Hill



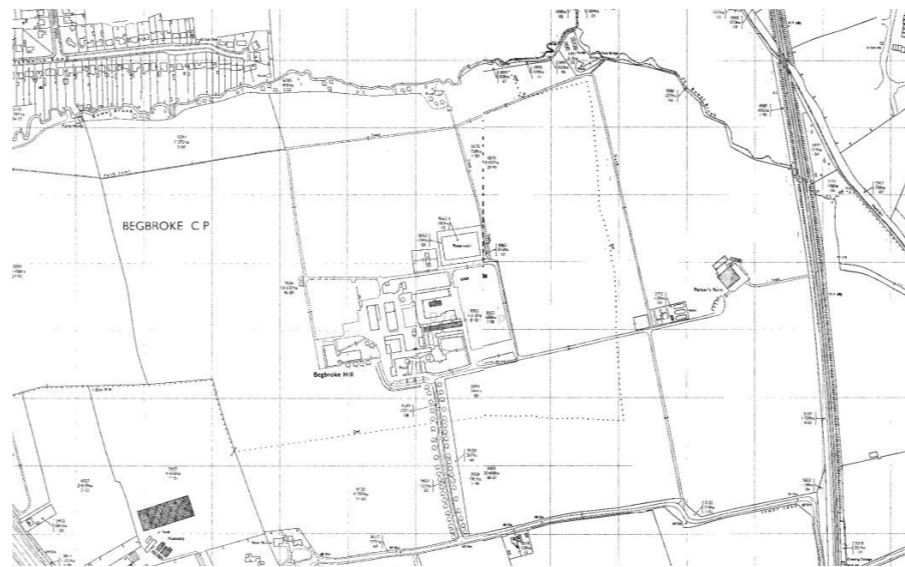
Weed Research Organisation, Begbroke Hill



Weed Research Organisation, Begbroke Hill



Site Map, 1880



Site Map, 1970

HISTORY OF THE SITE

The site of the Oxford University Begbroke Science Park has been used for farming for generations with the 17th century Jacobean farmhouse and its walled garden at the heart of the site. The stone farm buildings were sensitively restored in the 1960's and now house offices and conference facilities. Academic research began on the site in the 1960's when Begbroke Hill Farm became the headquarters of the Weed Research Organisation. This brought in a new approach to connecting to the land at Begbroke, still engaging with the organic make-up of the soil on site and its produce yet this time through academic study. In the 1980s, the Cookson group bought the site for its Technology Centre and in 1998 it was taken over by Oxford University.

Today Begbroke Science Park continues the site's tradition of exchange between science and industry, hosting 20 research groups and 30 companies on site. Many of the organisations have a strong focus on the Physical and Life Sciences, as well as Environmental Engineering, such as the Centre for Sustainable Water Engineering and Oxford Sustainable Fuels.

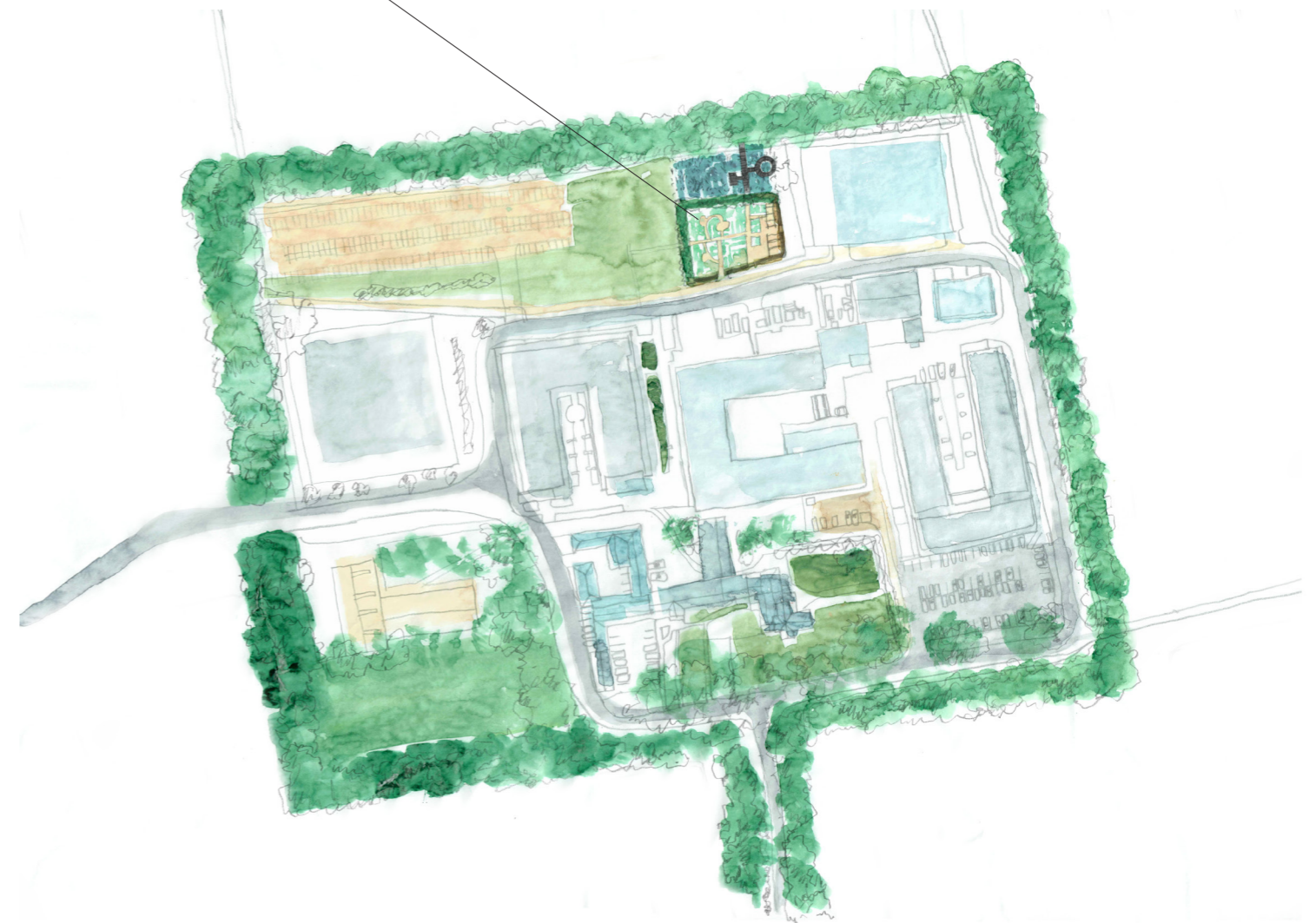


THE SITE TODAY

Begbroke Science Park is contained by a large enclosure of mature trees and shrubland that appears to have been cultivated from the 1970's onwards when the site was purchased by Oxford University as a Science Facility. The Science Park is like a large, walled garden in itself, the parkland interspersed with buildings, walls and areas of hardstanding.

Approximately 300 people are working on the site during the day and enjoy the landscape and fresh air during their lunch breaks. Outdoor events are sometimes held in marquees for networking and fundraising opportunities. Local walkers from Begbroke, Yarnton and Kidlington are known to pass around the perimeter of the site, when walking across the neighbouring landscape. Within the Park one can stumble across a number of beautiful walled gardens, a pond or through cultivated areas of wild grassland. Most striking and curious however, is a large and mature beech hedge that defines an area of untended landscape and creates an imposing, natural landmark.

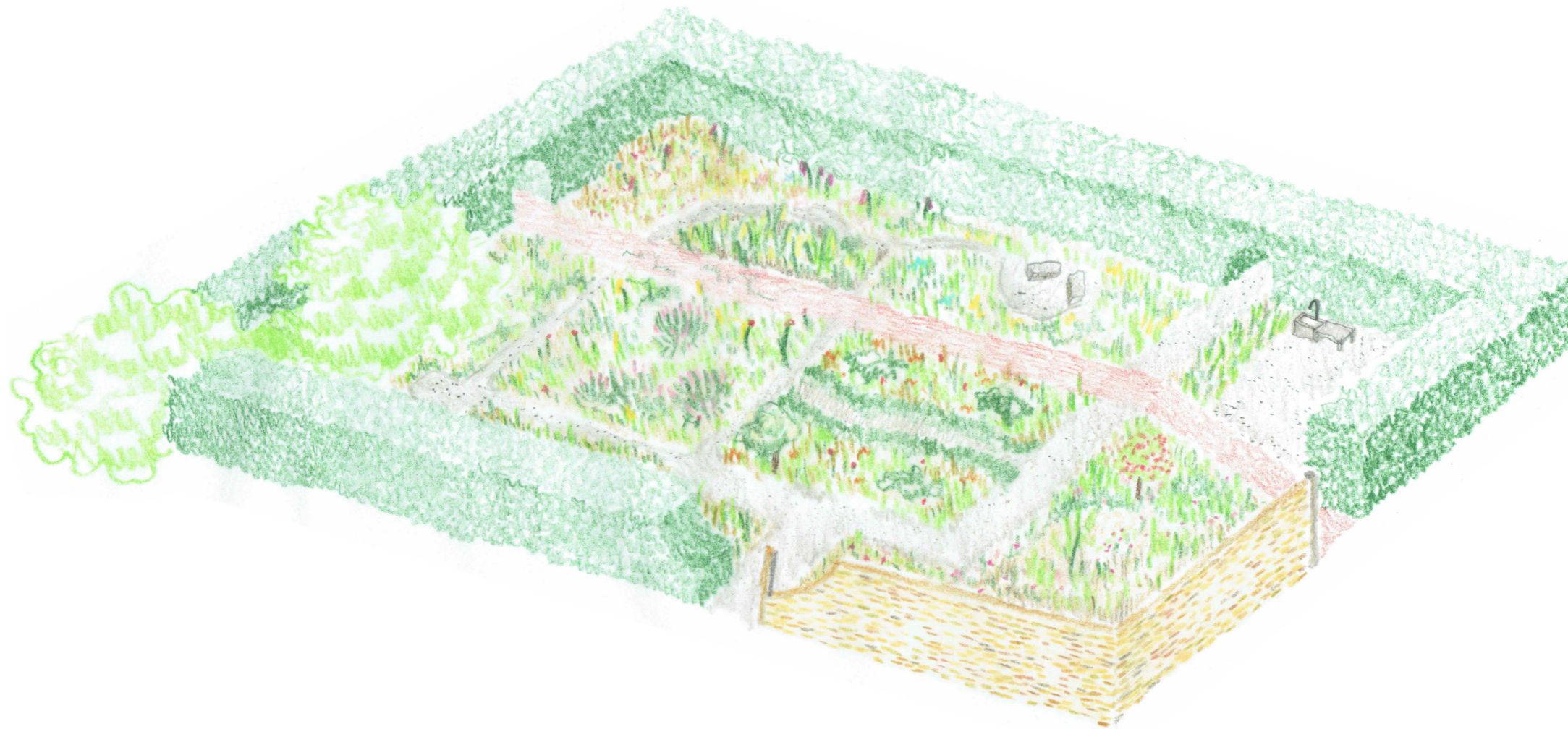
PROPOSED SITE
- THE WEED GARDEN -



PROPOSAL - A CULTIVATED WEED GARDEN

In response to the existing hedge, we propose to enclose this area of the site off to make it a haven for plants, animals and people. In part inspired by the site's history, and part by the rich abundance of plant-life already living in the space we've designated it a 'weed garden'. As Richard Mabey writes in his book 'Weeds: the Story of Outlaw Plants', 'plants become weeds because people label them as such'. So as a result the idea of the weed, and our relationship with these plants that have often evolved to cohabit with humans strike to the heart of the false distinction between nature and culture.

Our additions to the site will enclose it, creating a piece of public art in the tradition of the *hortus conclusus*, with the existing hedge extended and augmented by a limestone wall. We hope that the weed garden will be a space of reflection for the users of the Park providing them with a space to socialise and to think, but that it will also be a space for the flora and fauna of the site to dwell and to flourish.



PROPOSED PUBLIC ART DESIGN

This Public Art Proposal will complete the garden that is already defined by the existing mature hedge on site, by adding two new walls to create an enclosed weed garden. The new enclosure would combine an extension to the existing beech hedge, providing further ecological habitats, and a new wall built out of the oolitic limestone on which and of which Oxford is made.

Within this new enclosure the garden would provide a rich ecological environment with the existing weeds of the site added to and enriched by a complimentary planting scheme of related plants. Visitors will be able to enjoy the garden by walking through or around it on stone dust paths, or seated on a stone slab bench.

The garden will provide a practical amenity, a stone sink and counter as well as benches will help it be used for events, and a visual amenity with the rich mix of 'weeds' providing a year-round multi-sensory experience.



Existing weeded area within the hedge



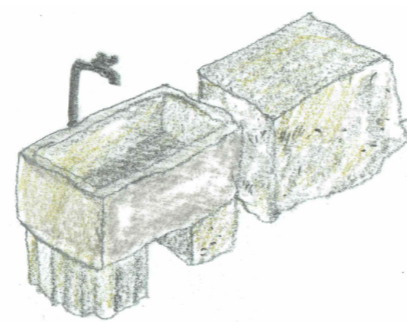
Existing limestone wall on the site



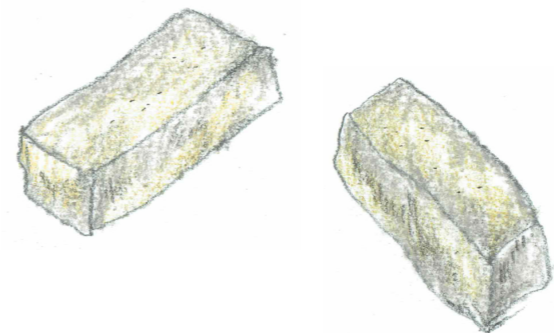
PROPOSED PUBLIC ART DESIGN

Within the perimeter of the hedge the enclosed garden will offer a different character to the wider landscaping, working with the existing weeds, hedge and three trees that already exist.

Carefully observing the weeds that already occur across Begbroke Science Park, but in particular within the area of the garden, our proposal is to selectively plant more of them. The soft landscaping will include raised areas of spoil with informal areas of existing weeds, offset against more formal areas of planted weeds, wildflowers and some new trees and shrubs. Our intention is to preserve and enhance the biodiversity and wildness of the existing landscape that will soon be lost to the new science buildings and car park.



Sink & counter



Pair of benches

Dotted amongst the garden we are proposing a family of stone objects that define the boundary, create benches and form a sink and stone counter.