

# Land, Sea & Islands Centre

Arisaig

Proposed refurbishment and extension  
for Arisaig Community Trust

## DESIGN STATEMENT



# 1. Introduction

Arisaig Community Trust wish to refurbish and extend the 'Land, Sea & Islands Centre' (LSIC), a community-owned building located in the centre of the village of Arisaig.

The LSIC includes a very popular, and regularly updated and extended, exhibition illustrating the history of the village and surrounding area.

It is also the only public facility in the village that actively promotes services, businesses and goods in the local area. As such it occupies a vital role in the economic and social sustainability of this part of the west Highlands.

Since taking over ownership of the building in 2011 the Trust has increased visitor numbers (both tourists and locals) from less than 1,000 per year to almost 10,000 per year. They have also found a number of fundamental issues with the building:

- it is extremely expensive to heat and light;
- it does not provide adequate space for the continued promotion of local goods, businesses and services, and;
- there is inadequate storage for the

increasing volume of exhibition material. To address these deficiencies the Trust has embarked upon a project to explore the feasibility of refurbishing and extending the LSIC to better serve the community.

In April 2014 the Trust was awarded funding from the Scottish Government's 'Climate Challenge Fund' to carry out upgrades to the energy efficiency of the existing building. This will include improvements to the insulation and draught proofing, replacement of windows and doors and replacement of inefficient heating and lighting systems.

It has been established with Highland Council that this refurbishment work does **not** need planning permission. Consequently this Design Statement is predominantly concerned with the construction of the proposed extension, though reference is occasionally made to the refurbishment works where appropriate.

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Following village surveys and a public consultation event to find out how the community wished to see the LSIC develop, a Pre-application Enquiry was submitted to Highland Council in October 2013 to

establish the feasibility of constructing an extension to the existing building. This document provides supporting evidence to show how the resulting design proposals that have been developed with the community comply with the advice and policies referred to in Highland Council's response to this Pre-Application Enquiry.

It is set out in six parts:

1. This introduction;
2. Identification of community needs;
3. Details of the existing building, including its history and site analysis;
4. Pre-application enquiry and response;
5. Initial development options;
6. Refined development proposals.

This document should be read in conjunction with the accompanying application drawings for the project.

## **2. Community needs**

## Community Needs

Public consultation and discussions with key stakeholders were used to identify the strengths, weaknesses and opportunities for the Land, Sea & Islands Centre. These are summarised below. The list highlighted to the right formed the basis for the 'brief' for the design ideas for the centre.

### **Good things about the building:**

- Building feels nice to visit/good layout/clear
- Beautiful location/central location is good
- Historic building
- Beautiful view
- Volunteers
- Name?
- Good local archive
- Wet weather attraction – only one in this area
- Regular opening times
- Promotes local businesses - only facility in the village that does this
- Good tourist attraction
- Encourages local people to do crafts
- Preserves our heritage
- Meeting point/family friendly
- Disability friendly
- Tourist information
- Wifi

### **Problems with the building:**

- No storage
- Difficult & expensive to heat and run (have a look at the thermographic images of the building, to the right!)
- Inefficient and difficult to control heating and lighting systems
- Archway restricts entrance to exhibition area
- Lack of space to promote and store locally-produced goods, crafts and food
- Insufficient parking
- Name
- Poor drainage
- Need more info about the Smiddy
- Need to change exhibits more/more interactive things
- Unattractive/underused outside area
- More young people involved?
- Lack of information outside building
- Many visitors ask for tea/coffee
- Toilet provision inadequate if building to be extended

### **What people would like to see:**

- Gathering space for young people in winter months/hang out space/teenagers
- Improve LSIC energy efficiency
- Wildlife webcam
- Barter board
- Some exposed stonework
- More use of blacksmithing equipment around building so former use is clear to visitors
- Café/refreshments/café
- Star gazing (telescope)
- Themed exhibitions
- Archaeology meetings
- Art space
- More IT equipment
- Office space
- Repair dry stone dykes
- Nicer outside space
- More local information outside the building
- Clearer/better signage
- Renewable energy
- More input from businesses
- Wood-burning stove
- More storage!
- Covered porch area
- External cycle/mobility scooter store

### **3. The Existing Building**

## Existing Building - History

The age of the original building is not exactly known. The earliest available Ordnance Survey map (1873, below) shows a Smiddy (Smithy) on this site. The map also shows an adjacent building - probably a shed - which no longer exists. Both buildings also appear on the 1947 OS map shown below

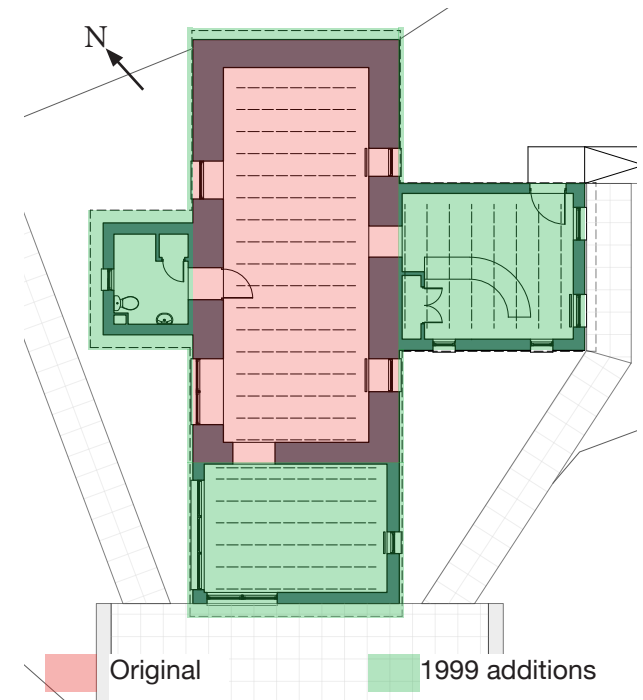
The building was refurbished and converted in 1999 to create a community-owned heritage centre that would provide information about the history of Arisaig and places of local interest. This conversion included the construction of timber frame extensions to accommodate a toilet, small reception area and a meeting room - the 'room with a view'. The diagram to the right

illustrates the chronological development of the building.

The refurbishment work also included the addition of white painted cement render over the original solid masonry wall as well as alterations to form overhanging eaves and verges.

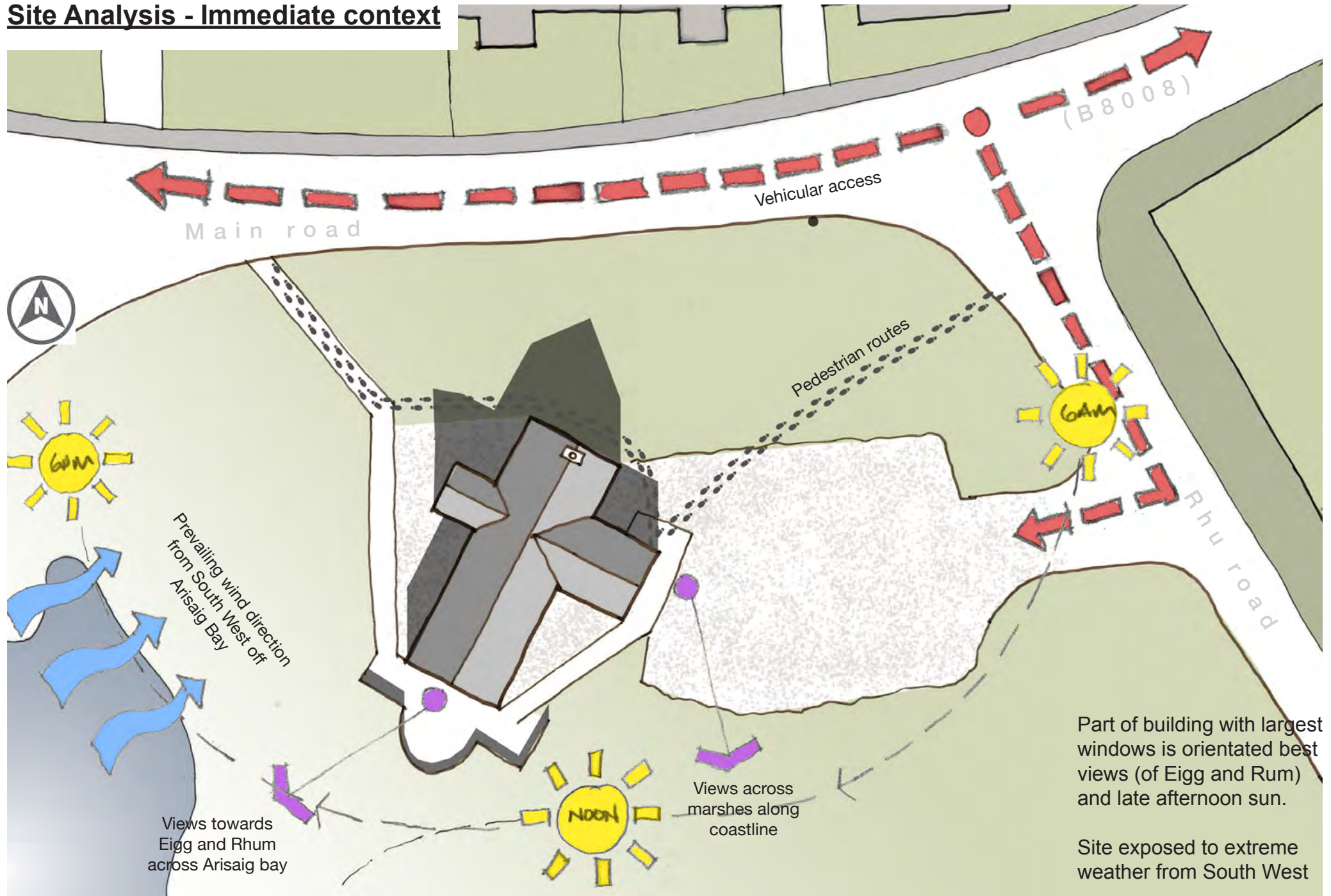
These latter alterations changed the character of the building from agro-industrial (refer photograph below right) to something more more pastiche, domestic and neo-Victorian.

The paving slab paths, stone wall and paved terrace to the south of the building, which were also added in the 1999 alterations, do not have any direct connection to the building. This makes them less well used than they otherwise could be.





# Site Analysis - Immediate context



## Site Analysis - Immediate context

The Land, Sea & Islands Centre is a single storey building located close to the centre of the village of Arisaig, western Lochaber.

Its position on the edge of Arisaig Bay (Loch nan Ceall) at the foot of the coastal escarpment leave it exposed to the prevailing south westerly winds and solar gains throughout the year. It also gives the building some of the best views in the village, across the bay towards the Rhu peninsula and island of Eigg.

As it is separate from the main line of buildings to the north of the B8008, the LSIC is reasonably prominent and can be

seen - and distinguished - from quite a distance, including from the sea (to the south west), as well as from each of the three road directions (south, west and east).

It sits directly in front of, though several metres lower than, the terrace of residential houses immediately to the north. The ground generally slopes down the building form the main road (B8008), resulting in minor surface water pooling in the parking area.

With the exception of the Health Centre, to the east, the buildings surrounding the LSIC are all residential and all generally one-and-a-half or two storeys in height.

The building has both vehicle and pedestrian access and is surrounded by a combination of mown grass, gravel and concrete paving slabs.

Access to the building is rudimentary, unsheltered and unwelcoming. The area of paving to the front has no direct connection to the building, resulting its lack of use.





## Site Analysis - Wider context and character appraisal

The archaeological and historical record of Arisaig is dominated until the early 20th century by a reliance on subsistence farming, continual land use and landscape development.

The 'Old Smiddy', from which the Land, Sea & Islands Centre was created, formed an integral part of this, providing implements and tools to enable those living in the area with the means of making a living.

It is one example of a number of purely functional agro-industrial buildings around Arisaig that served the needs of the

crofters, fishermen and visitors alike. Other examples of this type of building can still be found around the village, including the Byre at the top of the hill above Arisaig Hotel and the outbuilding adjacent to Mains House.

They are characterised by their unrendered stone walls, pitched slate (or corrugated iron) roofs and small openings.

Despite the prettification and domestication of the original Smiddy in its 1999 refurbishment the building still retains some of its agro-industrial characteristics, including the (generally) small windows, chimney stack, squat rectangular form and pitched roof.

Evidence of the building's former use is still on display, in the form of the cartwheel former, pillar drill and steel cone - all tools used in the Smiddy.

And it is this character that it is planned to use as the underlying theme for the proposed extension.

After all, just like the old Smiddy, the Land, Sea & Islands Centre is a community building, serving the needs of the village and those who visit. It is important that this function is properly conveyed through the design and appearance of the proposed extension.



### Placing The Ring

Many villagers remember the drams surrounding the Ringing Platform, placed on the ground outside the Smiddy in a round hole, now found only in a museum exhibit.

This is the sequence of how it was done:



A flat wood bar was then set up and rolled through a rope binder. The ends were then overlapped and welded together.



The wheel was placed on the ringing platform and the rope was rolled on the large ring in a clockwise direction. The rope was then rolled on the large ring in a clockwise direction.



## Existing Building - Analysis

Non-porous paint and cement render full of 'microfractures' which trap water, making walls damp and increasing heat loss = risk of mould inside and high energy bills

Overhanging eaves and boxed out fascias try to make the building look like a house instead of the semi-industrial public building that it really is

Existing windows draughty and have low thermal performance

No shelter at entrance. No porch or draught lobby. Poor door design so not clear if building is open when the door is closed - eg on dreich days



Lots of draughts around edges of walls, around skirting boards and around exposed roof beams = high energy bills and discomfort

Very little insulation to existing building = lots of heat loss and high energy bills

Existing night storage heaters expensive to run and difficult to control

Virtually no insulation below floor = heat loss and high energy bills

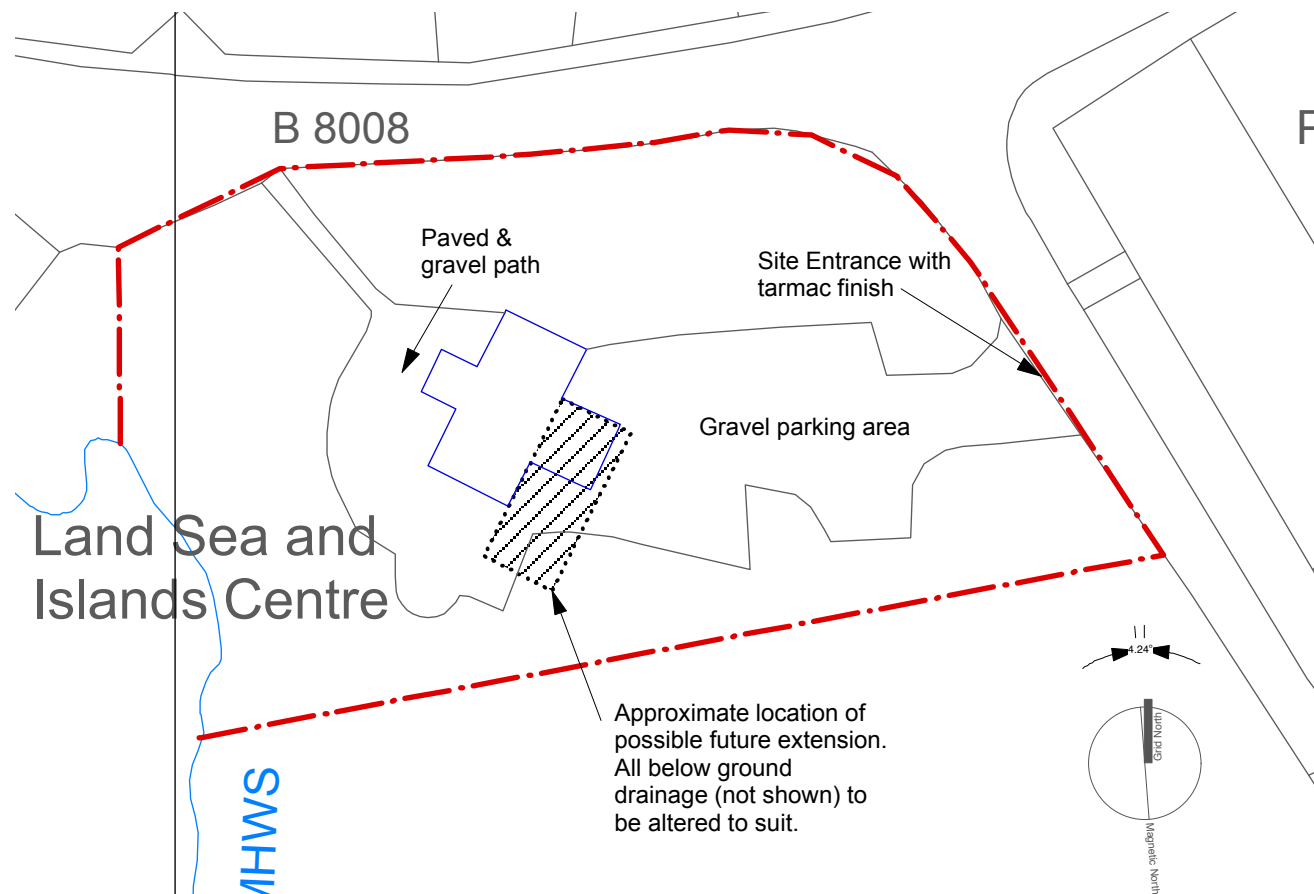


Existing building

## **4. Pre-Application Enquiry**



## Pre Application Enquiry



Land Sea and  
Islands Centre

Approximate location of  
possible future extension.  
All below ground  
drainage (not shown) to  
be altered to suit.

In October 2013 Sam Foster Architects submitted a Pre-Application Enquiry to the Highland Council to establish the relevant Local Plan policies that apply to this project. The drawing above is an extract from that sent as part of enquiry.

The Highland Council's response sent on 23rd November 2013 is summarised as follows:-

The Council advised of the policies within the local plan that are relevant within this project and past on advice in regard to consultees that should be contacted for this project.

In the section entitled 'Principle Siting and Design' the Council wrote "Given the prominent position of the Land Sea and Island Centre on the Seaward side of Arisaig Village Main throughfare, and its position within the wider designated area of

*great landscape value it is considered that an extension may be acceptable in this position subject to careful consideration of the scale, height and external materials proposed for the extension. Proposals for the extension should seek to contain development as far as possible within the existing boundary and retention and realignment of the existing stone wall would be welcomed".*

In the section entitled 'Conclusions' the Council wrote "the enquiry site fits largely within the existing rear curtilage of the Visitor's Centre and within the Arisaig Settlement Development Area (SDA). Proposals for a small scale extension to the centre utilising external materials in keeping with the existing building is likely to receive officer support. Given the proximity of the Centre to the coast, SEPA will be consulted on any proposals for extension for guidance on coastal flood risk".



## **5. Initial design options**

## Design Options for Community Consultation

As part of the design process Sam Foster Architects generated two concept building schemes for discussion with the Community. These posters consisted of site plans, external perspectives, external photomontages, internal floor plans, internal perspectives and material proposals. This information was presented in the form of A0 posters which were pinned in the Land Sea and Island Centre over a two week period. The two schemes are summarised as follows-

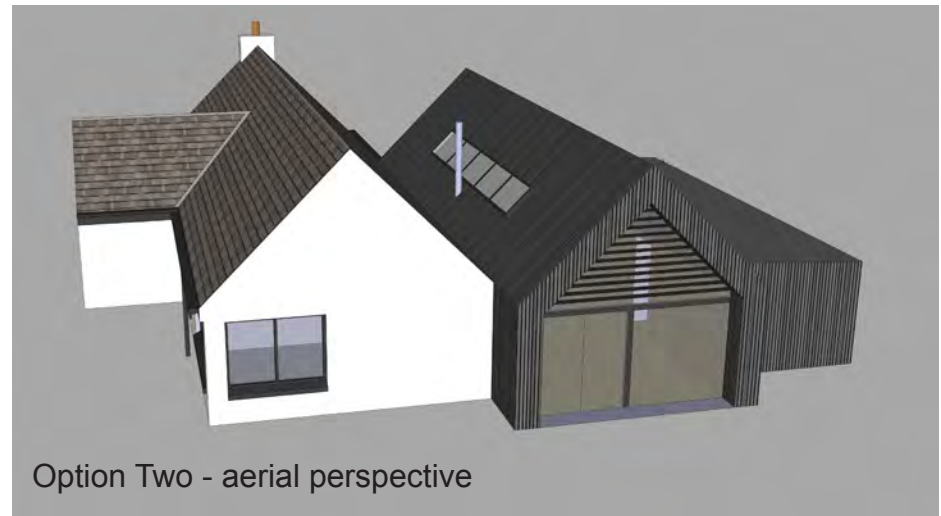
**Option One** : the building is made bigger by extending the existing entrance towards the carpark and creating additional space on the seaward side of this. The extension of the entrance houses the shop and toilets, while the new extension to the rear contains a small seating area. The existing 'room with a view' can be opened to the seating area and exhibition room, or completely closed off if needed. Dark, matt steel roofing and durable untreated timber are used to clad the roof and walls respectively, which compliment the render and slate of the existing building without mimicking it.

**Option Two** - the building is made bigger by creating an extension that is a similar (but slightly smaller) shape - and runs parallel to - the existing Smiddy. The main part of the extension is an open, flexible space that can be used for a variety of purposes, while the lean-to contains the admin area and toilets. The walls and roof of the extension are clad with charred timber - a durable and eco-friendly material which reflects the use of fire in the original building. By using the same material for the walls and roof the extension gives a similar impression of solidity to the original Smiddy building.

Details of these design options are shown on the following pages.

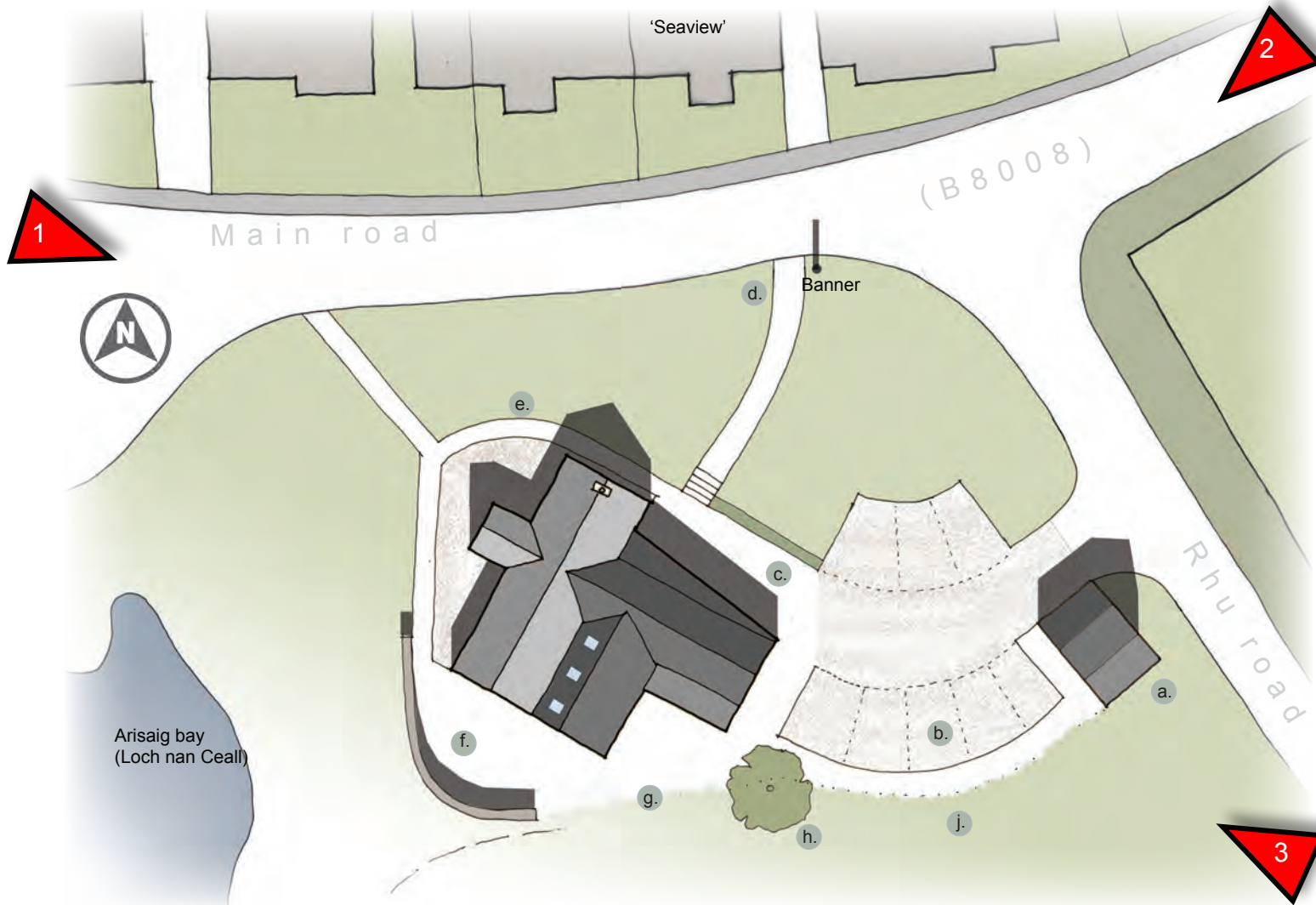


Option One - aerial perspective



Option Two - aerial perspective

## Option One - Site plan



a. New external store for electric bikes, mobility scooters and electric charging points. (There used to be a shed in this spot some years ago!)

b. Gravel carparking

c. Paved, level access area in front of the entrance to the centre. Angled steel canopy over the entrance to provide shelter for visitors at the entrance to the centre

e. New paved path around north of existing building to provide level access to the entrance

f. Simplified and slightly enlarged outdoor space to the south of the centre with direct access from new doors at this end of the building. New stone wall built along the edge with integrated seats and information panels on what can be seen in different directions

g. Blurred boundary between the seashore and paved area so that the centre feels part of the landscape. This edge could have sealife tanks and information boards

h. New rowan tree planted between the edge of the parking area and new extension

j. Blurred boundary between the seashore and path along the edge of the carparking so that the parking feels part of the landscape



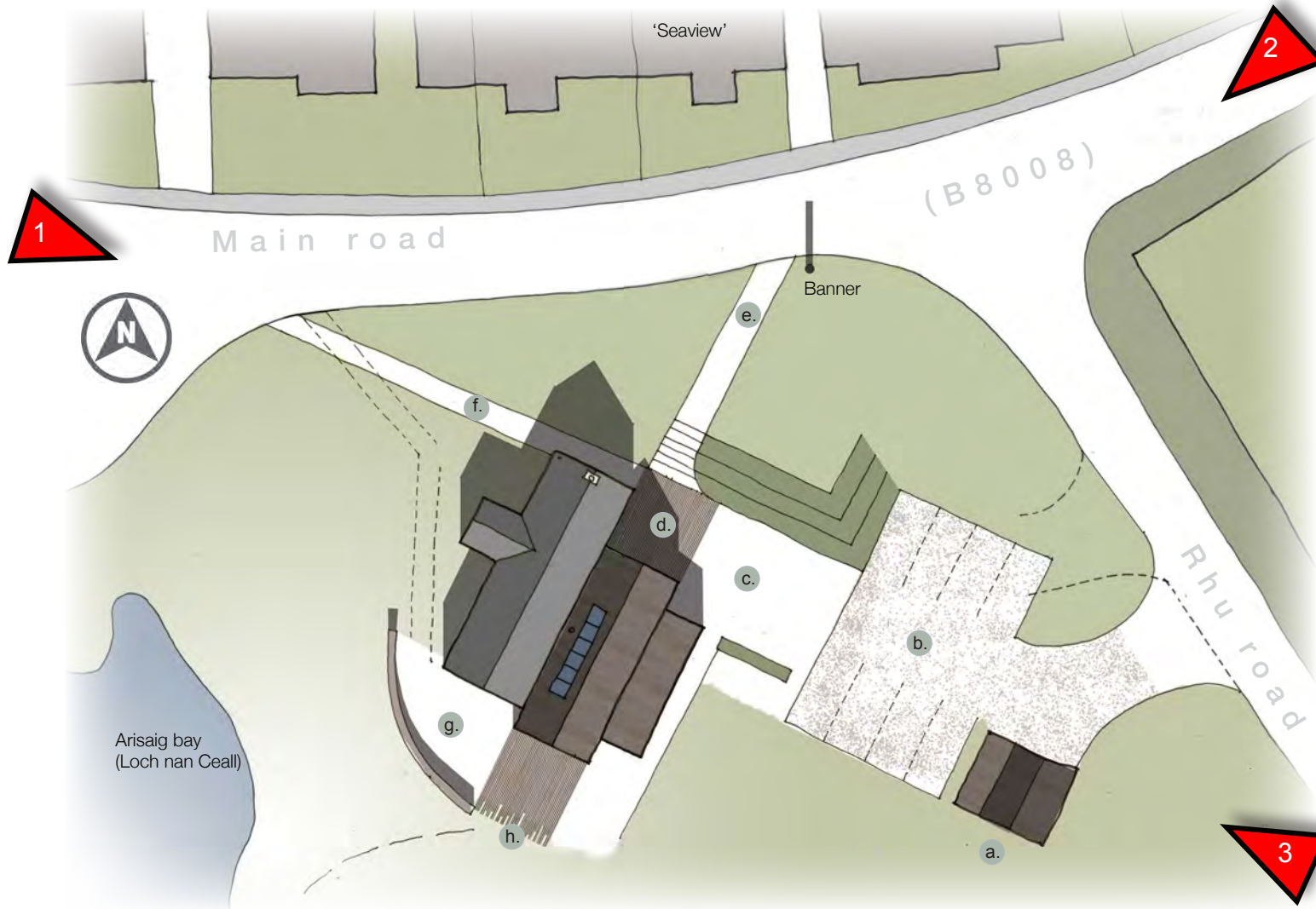
## Option One - Photomontages

See red arrows on site plan for key to photomontages





## Option Two - Site plan



a. New external store for electric bikes, mobility scooters and electric charging points. Store to be of a similar external form and materials to the new extension.

b. Gravel carparking with repositioned road entrance.

c. Paved, level access area in front of the entrance to the centre. Stepped grass landscaping along edge to create a useable outside space. Old pillar drill placed at edge between gravel parking area and paving.  
 d. Inset decking with non-slip surface across the full width of the main part of the new extension to clearly define the entrance to the building.

e. New gravel path and steps leading directly towards the entrance to the centre

f. New paved path around north of existing building to provide level access to the entrance. Existing paved paving spab path and gravel removed. This area to be grassed and new stepping stones laid.

g. Simplified and slightly enlarged outdoor space to the south of the centre with direct access from new doors at this end of the building. New stone wall built along the edge with integrated seats and information panels on what can be seen in different directions

h. Inset decking with non-slip surface across the full width of the main part of the new extension. Decking to merge with landscaping. This area could have sealife tanks and information boards. Existing seashore path to link to lead to this outside area.



## Option Two - Photomontages

See red arrows on site plan for key to photomontages





## Community Feedback on initial design options

The Community were asked to visit the Land Sea and Island Centre and look at the posters showing each scheme. They were also encouraged to comment on both or either schemes by leaving feedback on anonymous notes pinned next to the posters.

The main points we took from these were:

- There is a preference for any extension to run parallel to the existing Smiddy (not perpendicular);
- An increase in exhibition space is high priority;
- Partial separation of shop and seating area will make the space more flexible;
- Respondents were generally NOT in favour of having a cafe in the building, but would like a coffee machine or similar simple means of providing refreshments;
- There must be a mixture of open space and protected inside space;
- There is a general preference for timber cladding on the extension to differentiate this from the original building.

The updated design incorporated as many of the ideas and comments as possible to create a simple, flexible extension that can be used for a variety of functions.

It also draws on the pattern of windows at the south end of the building, as well as the use of chimney stacks, to visually relate the new extension to the existing building in a stronger way.

The main part of the extension has a traditional form and proportions that reflect the character of the existing Smiddy.

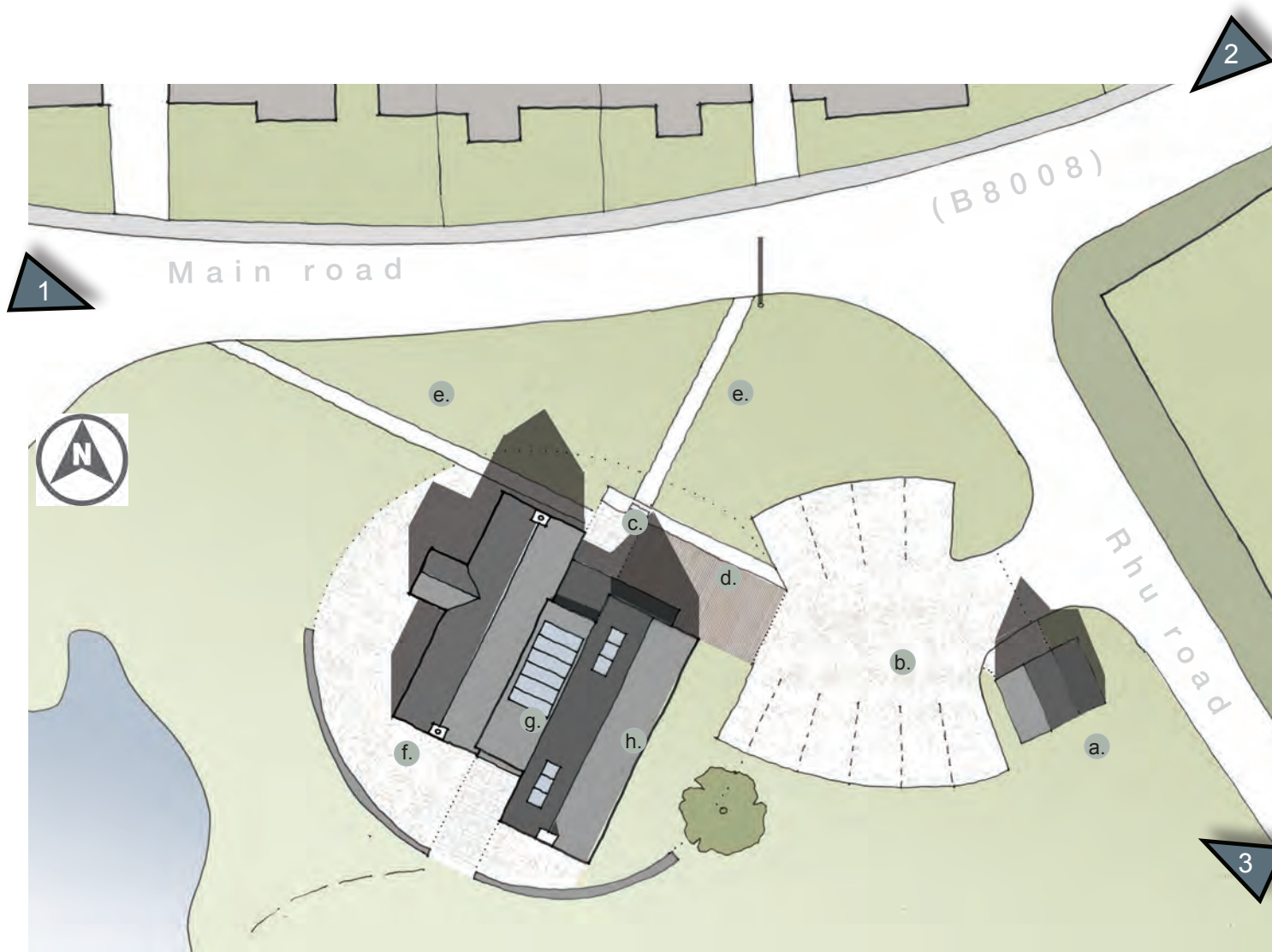
It is important that the refurbished Centre is clearly recognisable as a public building and not confused for a house. Because of this it is helpful to use external materials that clearly identify it as having a different purpose to the surrounding buildings.

(Background image: Design options boards on display in the Land, Sea & Islands Centre during public consultation period.)

## **6. Developed design proposals**



## Developed design - Site plan



a. New external store for electric bikes, mobility scooters and electric charging points. Store to be of a similar external form and materials to the new extension.

b. Gravel carparking area.

c. Front of extension stepped back from the gable of the existing building to retain visual prominence of existing building. Paved, level access area in front of the entrance to the centre. Stepped grass landscaping along edge to create a useable outside space. Old pillar drill placed at edge between gravel parking area and paving.

d. Inset decking with non-slip surface to clearly define the entrance to the building.

e. New path and steps leading directly towards the entrance to the centre

f. New stone walls built to create curved edge to external seating/activity area. Walls to include built in seats, display boards and sea-life tanks. Outside space used for seating and outside activities. Break in stone wall to meet existing path from sea-shore.

g. Low roof over new entrance and exhibition area. Glazing to provide plenty of daylight and solar heating. Built-in photovoltaic cells help to reduce risk of overheating and generate electricity. Canopy formed over entrance to provide shelter and clearly mark entrance to the building.

h. Main part of new extension to be the same shape and proportions as the existing Smiddy. Extension to protrude slightly past south end of Smiddy to take advantage of views to Arisaig bay and beyond.



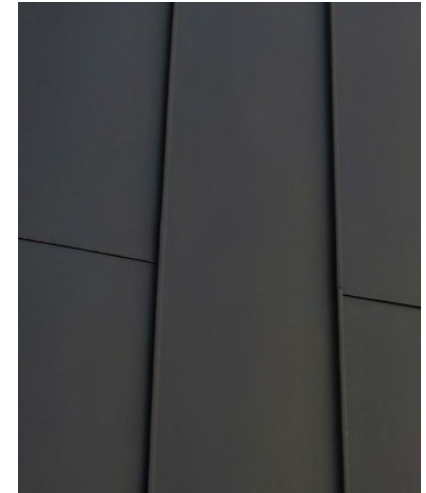
## Developed design - Photomontages

See blue arrows on site plan for key to photomontages





## Developed design - Material and Precedents



A combination of dark metal roofing and vertical timber cladding will give the building a simple, robust character that compliments that of the existing building. These materials are also very durable and are well suited to a west coast climate.



Overhead glazing gives excellent daylighting and creates wonderful patterns on wall and floor surfaces.

Simple, timber buildings elsewhere in the Highlands, reflecting their semi-agricultural setting.



# Developed design - Floor plan



Canopy over entrance to provide shelter. When the building is closed blinds containing information about the local area are pulled over the shop window and the large timber and steel entrance doors are closed. When the building is open the blinds are rolled up so shop goods are on display, and the large doors are fixed open

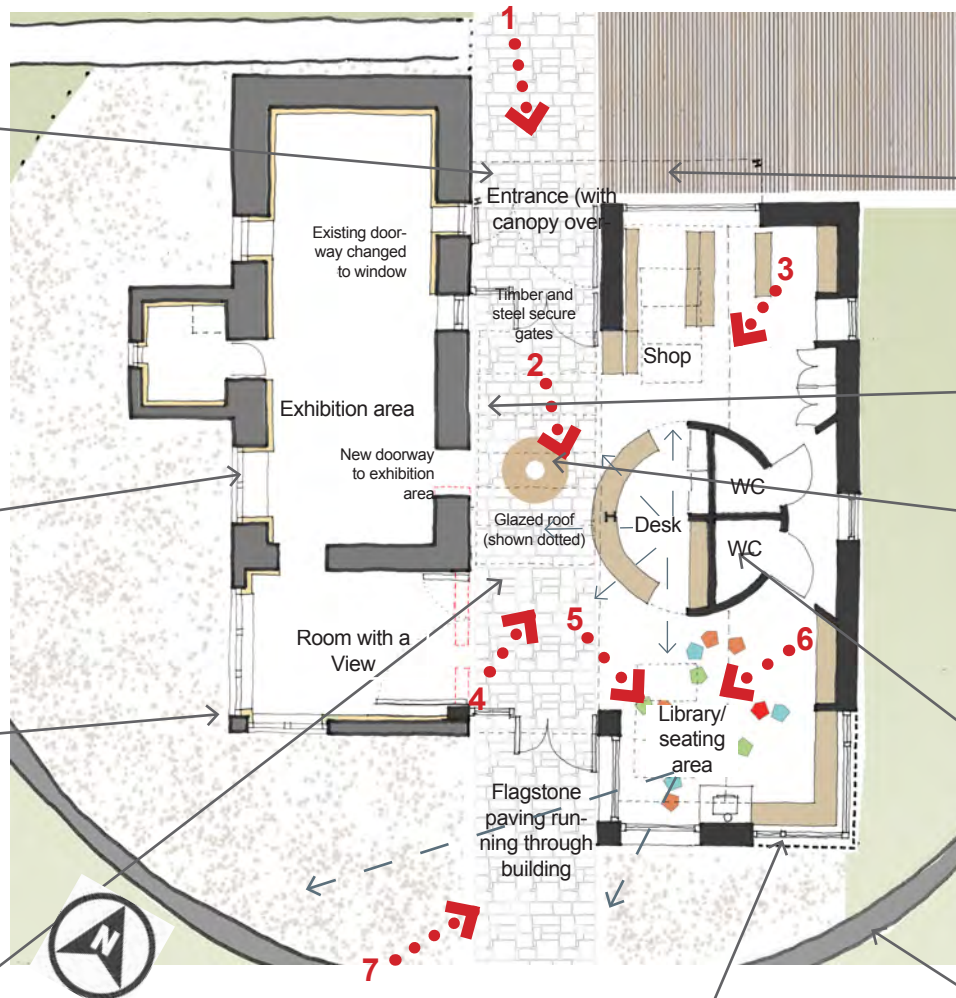
Existing building insulated, draughtproofed and fitted with new windows, doors and energy efficient lighting



Overhanging eaves removed to reinstate original detailing of the Smiddy and make it look less 'domestic'. (We'll also explore the possibility of removing the cement render and exposing the stone)



Large area of roof glazing to include 'building-integrated photovoltaics' - solar panels that provide shading, reduce the risk of overheating, control daylighting and generate electricity for the building



Original handcart from the Station positioned outside the entrance to display fruit, vegetables and other goods on sale

Exhibition area extends into this part of the building to provide more space for displays



Original cartwheel former from the Smiddy could be embedded into the floor of the extension to help orientate visitors

Large, circular block (like a Broch) containing the desk, toilets and storage. Ceiling space overhead to provide additional storage

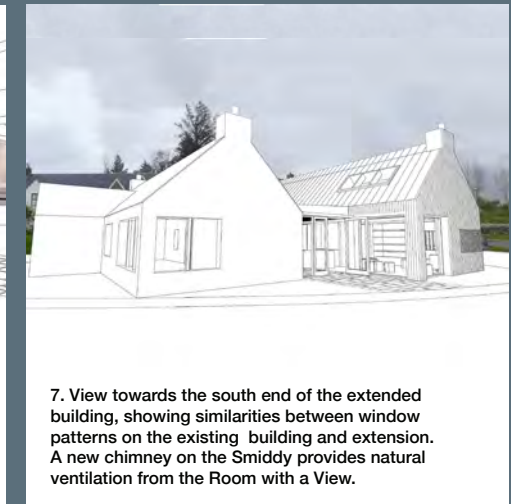
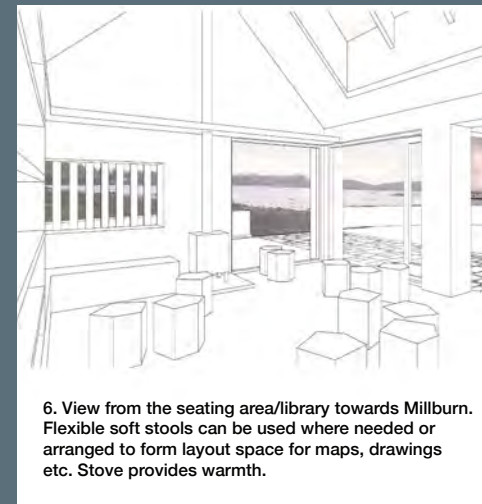
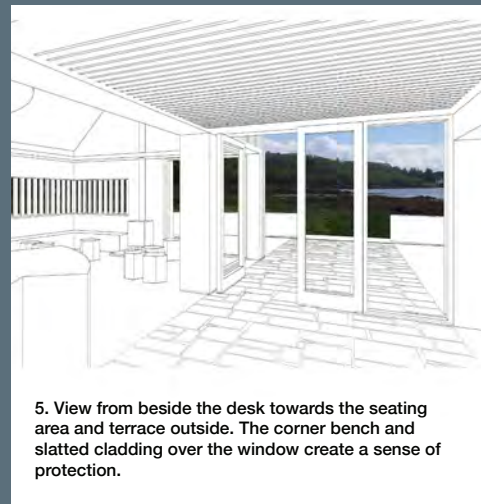
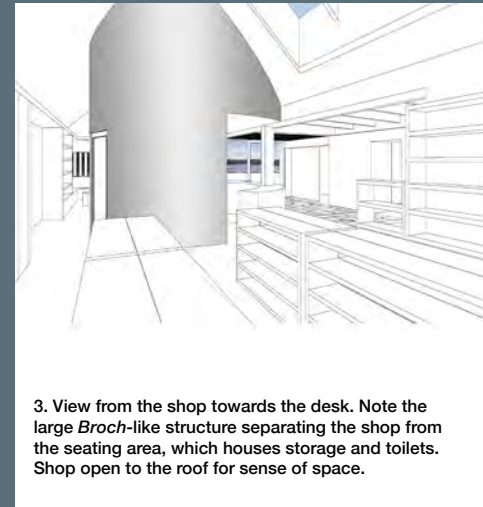
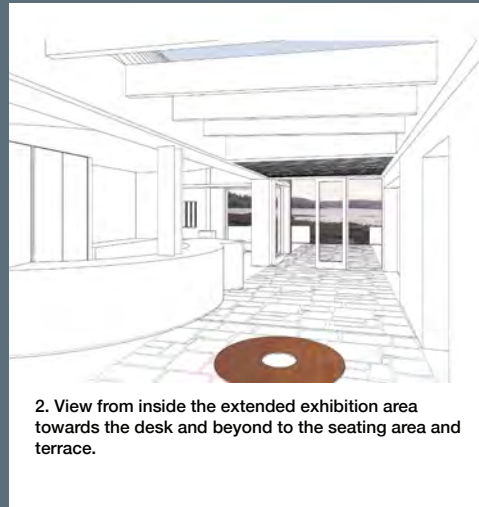
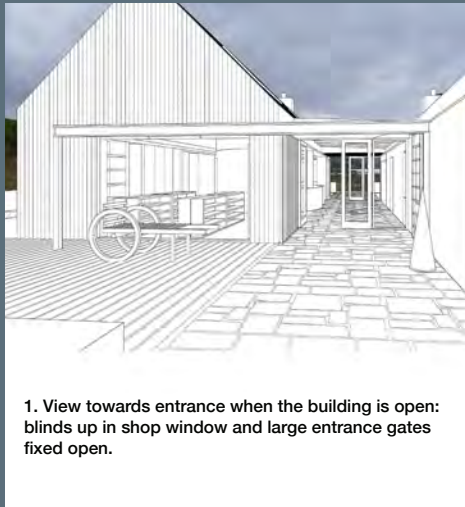


The new stone wall could include tanks for displaying objects found on the shore or on other walks



Slatted cladding over the window in the corner to give a sense of looking out of a 'hide' towards the Rhu Road

## Developed design - Internal and external perspectives



See red arrows on internal plan for key to internal perspectives



## Developed design - Summary of proposals

- The external landscaping has been carefully designed to improve access, clearly identify the entrance to the building and provide shelter, and create useable external space directly linked to the internal spaces;
- The external form of the proposed extension reflects the character, massing and proportions of the existing building. Separating the main part of the extension from the existing building with a low, glazed link;
- The external finishes for the proposed extension reflect the building's rural location and utilitarian function;
- The north gable of the extension is set back from the north gable of the existing building to give the existing building visual prominence and create a sheltered entrance;
- Removal of the projecting eaves and bargeboards on the existing building will help reinstate some of its austerity;
- The south gable of the proposed extension adopts a similar fenestration pattern to that of the south gable of the existing building, and extends beyond the south gable of the existing building to take advantage of the views to the west.





SAM FOSTER  
ARCHITECTS