



# Little Dorrit Park

Concepts  
for LB Southwark



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## LB Southwark

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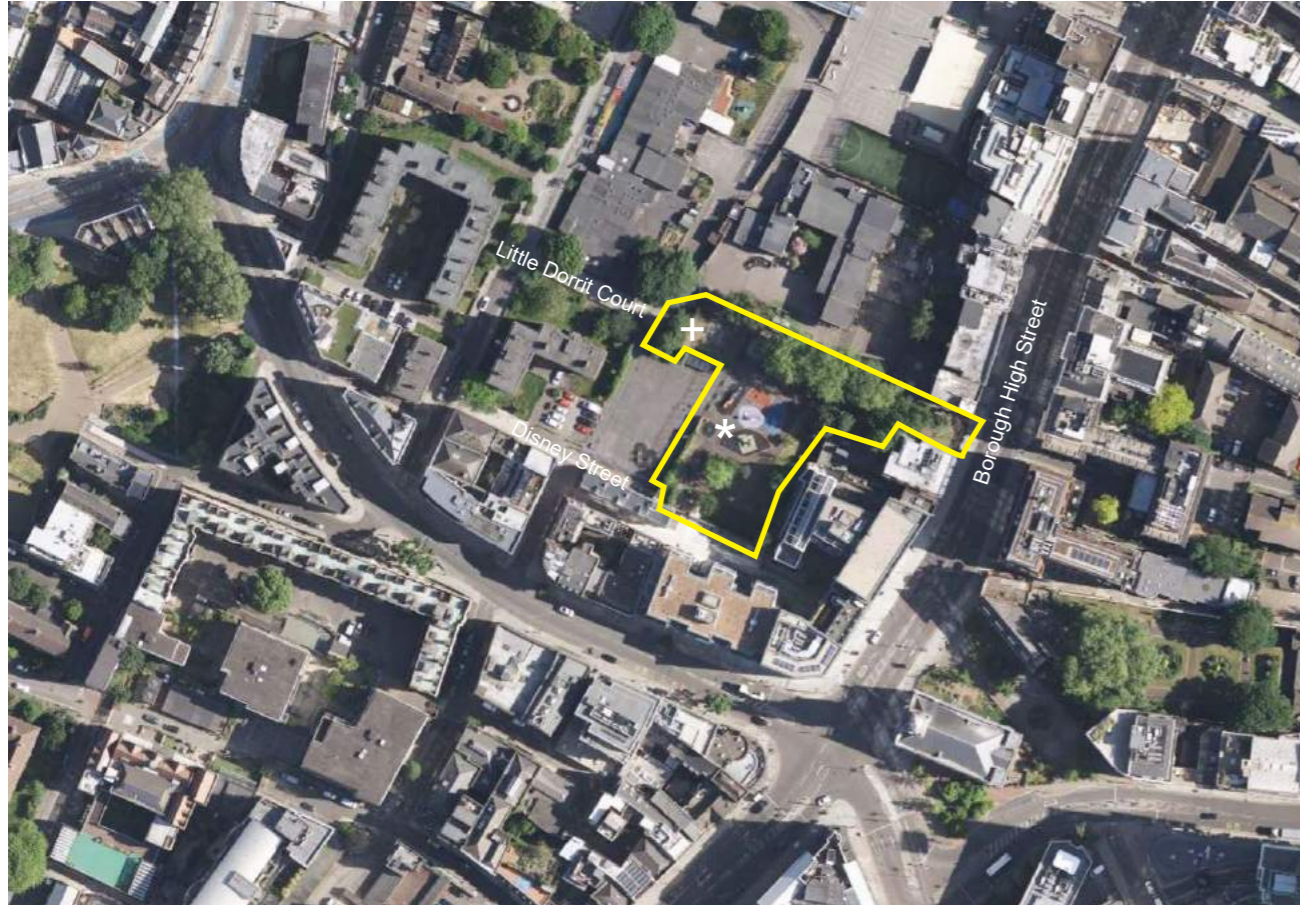
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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1

### Site Address



- + Peace Garden
- \* Play equipment

Site address:  
Little Dorrit Park, London SE1 1HJ

## 1.2

### Introduction and Brief

This document sets out the proposals to refurbish Little Dorrit Park in LB Southwark. It should be read with the existing and proposed plans.

Little Dorrit Park and Peace Garden is located in the Borough and Bankside ward in the London Borough of Southwark. Little Dorrit Park and Peace garden is a park of A 0.28 hectare which is situated on Borough High Street. The nearest tube station is London Bridge.

The park is named after the title character of the book by Charles Dickens, who himself lived in rooms in nearby Lant Street whilst his father was imprisoned in the Marshalsea Prison for debt. Dickens drew on his own experience of the area for his hero Little Dorrit who grew up in Marshalsea.

The playground was opened in 1902 on an area of land measuring just under a quarter of an acre. The tenement blocks surrounding the park were demolished in the 1970s and gradually the areas including the park were reconstructed, leading to further renovation in 2001. The renovation was carried out by Little Dorrit Park Group, set up by a group of local mothers including artist Danuta Solowig Wedderburn who created bronze plaques on the site. Works included playground improvements and landscaping.

In 2010 following consultation with children and parents from neighbouring St Joseph's Catholic Primary School, a wrought iron gate and new playground equipment were added. The park is supported by Bankside Open Spaces Trust (BOST).

Key drivers and aspirations for the playground include:

- a) Improve the play equipment for primary school children - accessible to both disabled and non-disabled children.
- b) To repair/renovate damaged surfaces.
- c) To create a space that will encourage use by the public and ultimately add value to the rest of the park.
- d) Better layout of the spaces to improve flow and sightlines (to reduce opportunities for crime and anti-social behaviour).
- e) Incorporate historical elements.
- f) Improve boundary treatments and access to and from Borough High Street.
- g) Provide recreational space for adults without children that is segregated from the play space(s).



## 2 Existing Site Assessment

# 2.1

## Existing Plan



## 2.2

### Site Assessment

Little Dorrit Park is a small oasis of calm, away from the business and pollution of the Marshalsea Road and Borough High Street. Aside from the wrought iron gate added in 2010, the Park lacks moments of delight and a sense of character.

The current layout of the Park privileges play and does not provide sufficient areas for recreational use by adults without children. Also the fences bounding the site obscure sight lines and their

current state creates an undesirable atmosphere. There is a strong east west directional route through the park which is well used as a cut through by local people. However, in general, surrounding pathways are dark and undesirable with an unsafe feeling. The impermeable fencing and hedging at the northern entrance from Little Dorrit Court creates many blind spots in the park.



Lacking a connection to Borough High St



Park entrances are unwelcoming



Surrounding paths are dark and can feel unsafe



Visually impermeable fencing and hedging along north of site obscures sight lines

## 2.2

### Site Assessment

The Park is dominated by its play provisions due to the current layout. Some equipment is outdated and lacks stimulation.

The 'Little Dorrit area' at the south corner of the park consists of outward facing benches which, whilst affording views into the park from different angles, is not social as users face away from each other.

The largest grassed open and sunny area of the park is underused, lacks moments of delight and offers the visitor little encouragement to venture from the main play area of the park.

The entrances do not provide a welcome to the park or an invitation to wander, the entrance from Borough High Street is hidden down Little Dorrit Court. At the entrance from Disney Place the visitor is guided by a visually unappealing and unwelcoming clutter and density of fences. The entrance from Redcross way into the park is poorly configured and lacks views into the park.

With regard to the planting, little ornamental planting remains and only the toughest municipal shrubs survive along the boundary with the rear of the buildings to the East including Lyon House. Along the north of the site are some magnificent mature trees.



Lack of recreational areas for adults without children



Uninviting social area



Existing Peace Garden feels disconnected



Grassed area lacks moments of delight and seasonal planting



## 2.3

### Site Photographs



Entrance when approaching from Borough High Street



View towards Borough High Street



Looking towards Little Dorrit Court



Northern park pathway



Approaching play area from Borough High Street



Little Dorrit train and seating for parents

## 2.3

### Site Photographs



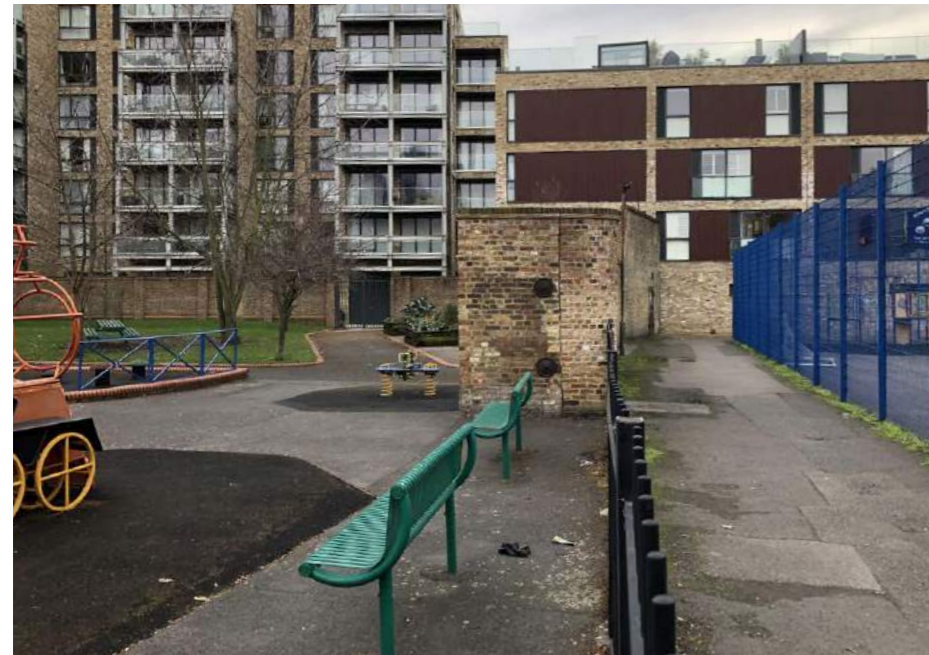
Existing grassed area and Little Dorrit gate



Little Dorrit area



Looking from Little Dorrit area towards dominant Play area



Little Dorrit Train, Historic wall, Disney Street, fencing at MUGA



Existing Peace Garden and fencing at school MUGA

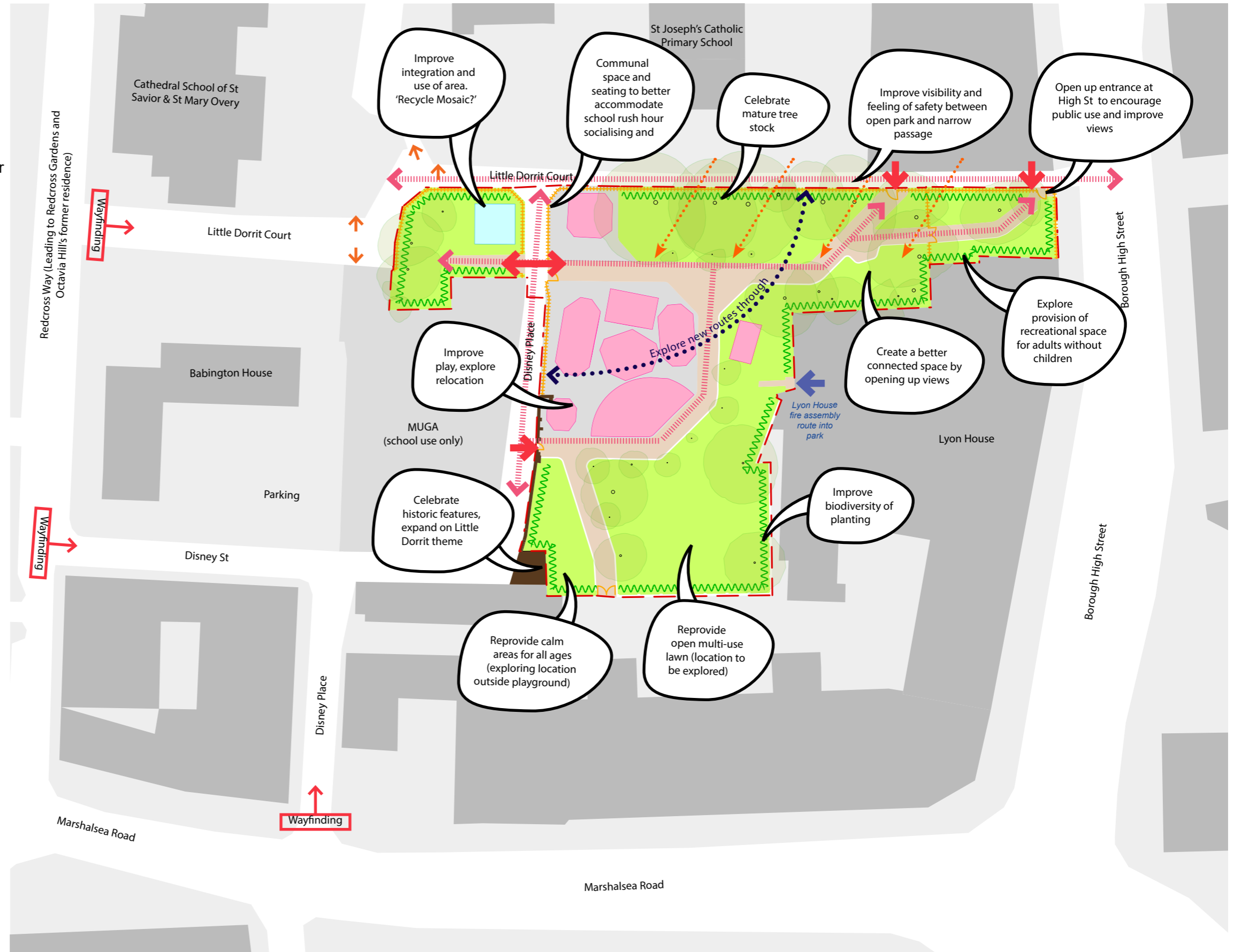


Existing Peace Garden and Dog Area, dog walkers are positive about it being enclosed to allow free roaming for dogs

## 2.4

### Initial Site Analysis

This schematic shows the initial site analysis, highlighting strengths, weakness and opportunities within the existing park. Taking into account issues highlighted in the brief it also considers wider issues such as connectivity and the immediate environs of the local streetscape.



## 2.5

### Existing Play Provision



1. Springer



2. Little Dorrit Train (climbing+slide)



3. Nest Swing (accessible)



4. Slide



5. Infant play



6. Junior climbing frame



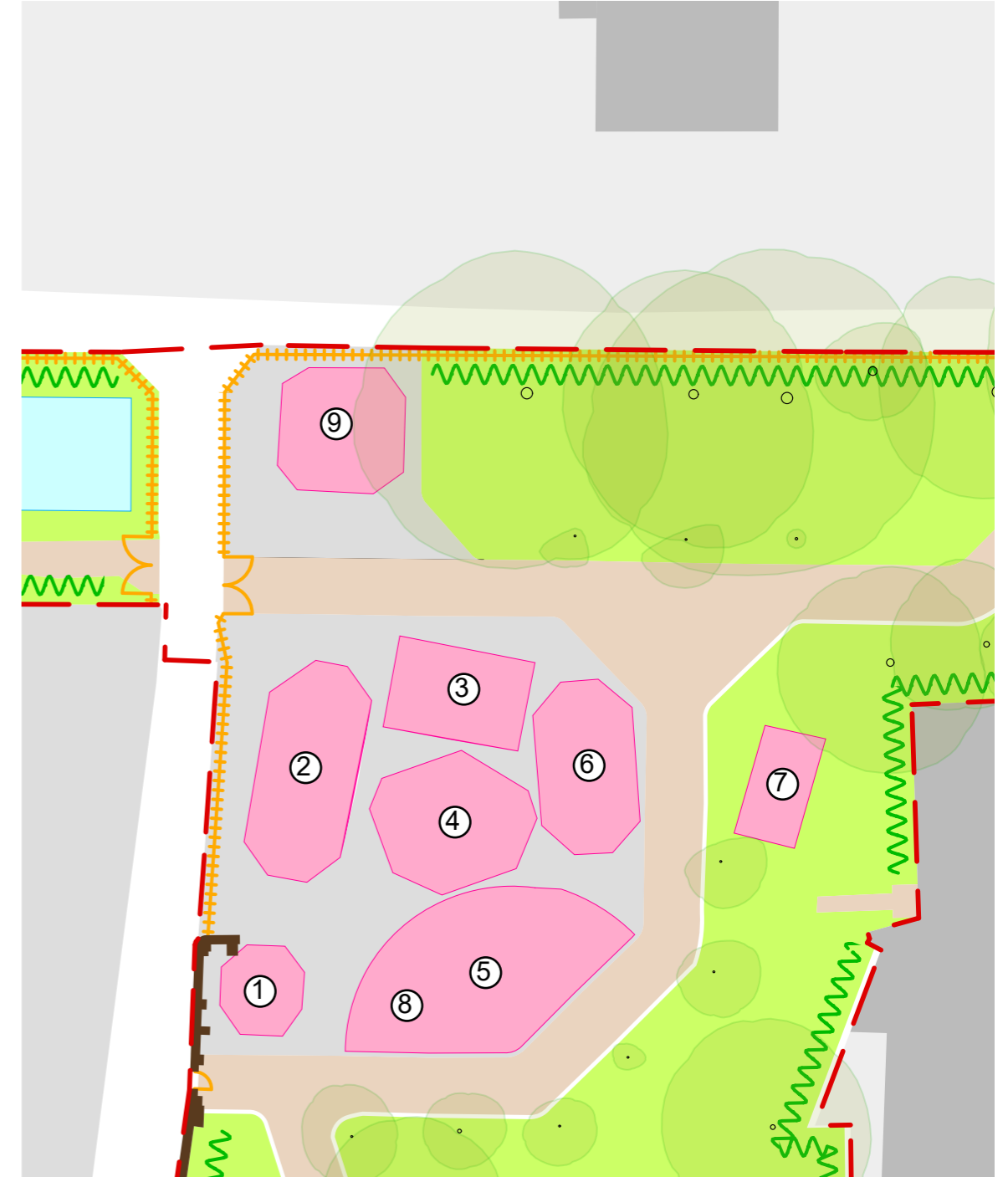
7. Swings



8. Rubber platform mushrooms



9. Roundabout





### 3 Consultation

## 3.1

### Consultation

The most successful methods of consultation were via face-to-face interaction in the park (57 consultees) and via the online questionnaire (65 consultees). Following the completion of the four forms of consultation, participants in all consultation sessions appeared to come to similar conclusions.

There is consensus across respondents that the following criteria are used when designing Little Dorrit and the Peace Garden:

- Improve the play equipment for children of diverse ages and consider alternatives such as natural play;
- Create new planted areas, wildlife areas and improve the condition of the grass;
- Better layout of the spaces to improve flow and sightlines – this may also serve to reduce conflict between users, ensure that the space works for all and that visitors made to feel welcome and comfortable irrespective of whether they are visiting the garden with children, are wanting to find a quiet solitary space for reflection, are walking their dog, eating lunch with colleagues etc;
- Improve boundary treatments and access to and from the High Street – participants specifically requested that any new design should also encompass the alleyway and improve routes to and from the park;
- Improve lighting;
- Incorporate historical elements/ a nature/ history trail within the design;
- Surfacing needs addressing;
- Maintain a separate dog area and an area for adults without children which does not overlook the play space(s);
- Consideration of nearby residents' homes and the balance between improving the community offer and lighting, whilst preserving residents' peace

In creating a concept design BOST advocate continuing to work with the community group through the Friends of Little Dorrit (FOLD) to establish a design which is shared with the community.

## 3.2

### Strategic Principles

The park currently has 4 pedestrian entrances: Two off Little Dorrit Court and Two off Disney Place.

Alterations to the fencing along Little Dorrit Court/ Birdcage alley will better integrate the street with the park and improve sight-lines. A communal space and seating area will be provided to better accommodate school rush hour socialising and play.

Opening up the entrance to Borough High Street will encourage public use, providing recreational space for adults without children.

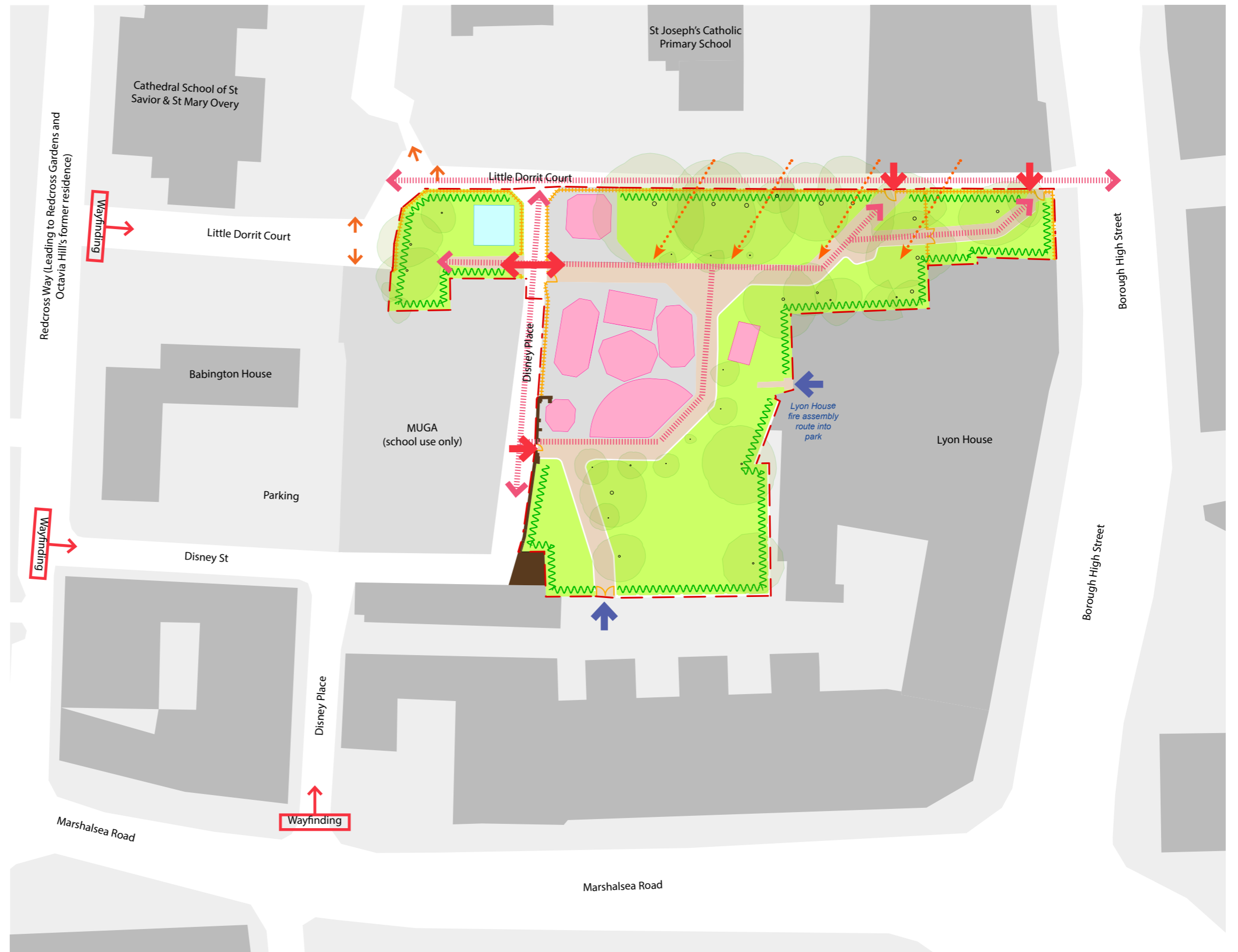
The double gate connecting the larger park to the existing Peace garden will become a more inviting entrance with seating and biodiversity planting increased.

Key zones of activity have been identified and include;

- Borough High Street lunch & entrance space
- Play
- Little Dorrit Themed Garden
- Open square/drop off, pick-up
- Wildlife retreat
- Open Lawn

A fenced playground for all ages is to be delineated.

A large amenity lawn to be provided maintaining flexibility of use. A wildlife area to provide calm.





## 4 Proposals



# 4.1

## Zoning Options

The consultation highlighted Play as the dominant area of the park to, users felt it's privilege limited its use by the wider public.

Options 1,2 and 3 show possible layouts that aim to reduce the possibility of conflict between users, ensuring that the park works well for all and that visitors feel welcome and comfortable irrespective of whether they are visiting the garden with children, are wanting to find a quiet solitary space for reflection, are walking their dog, eating lunch with colleagues etc;



Options 1 and 2 are preferred and will be explored further.



Existing



Option 1

-  Lunchtime/General Life
-  Play



Option 2



Option 3

Not further explored because of disconnect of areas and play from school entrances

## 4.2

### Option 1

The new layout replaces the boundary wall at Borough High Street with a visually permeable fence and perennial beds. A new high street entrance leading to a communal lunch, outdoor gym and table tennis play area will encourage use by adults without children. The new area will animate a currently underused part of the site.

Alterations to the fencing along Little Dorrit Court/Birdcage alley will better integrate the street with the park and improve sight-lines and park maintenance vehicle turn around space.

A nature trail is proposed between the existing mature trees with benches for socialising, also away from play.

The double gate connecting the larger park to the existing Peace garden will become a more inviting entrance. Increasing biodiversity planting around the open green lawn behind will attract wildlife and add character to the park.

Improvements will be made to the existing peace garden to create a feeling of immersion in nature, (remains a pet friendly area). A communal square seating area will be provided to better connect the areas of park and accommodate school rush hour socialising and play. The existing mosaic could be recycled to become a feature in the square.

The historic wall and wrought iron gate will remain becoming the backdrop to formalised seating and planting centred around the theme of Dickens' Little Dorrit.

Trees removed: 3  
New Trees: 11



# 4.3

## Option 2

The new layout replaces the boundary wall at Borough High Street with a visually permeable fence and perennial beds. A new high street entrance leads to an outdoor gym and communal lunch area, animating a currently underused part of the site. A table tennis table and benches will encourage use by adults without children.

Alterations to the fencing along Little Dorrit Court/Birdcage alley will better integrate the street with the park and improve sight-lines. The play provisions are situated in the north of the park close to school entrances and nature trail is proposed between the existing mature trees.

Enlarged entrance square by Little Dorrit Court will better connect the areas of park and accommodate school rush hour spill out and park vehicle turn around space. The existing mosaic could be recycled to become a feature in the square.

The double gate connecting the larger park to the existing peace garden will become a more inviting entrance. Improvements will be made to the existing peace garden to create a feeling of immersion in nature with a small infant play offer and seating.

Wherever possible biodiversity planting will be increased throughout the park to attract wildlife and add character. The historic wall will remain becoming the backdrop to seating and planting with a direct connection to the open lawn opposite.

Trees removed: 2  
New Trees: 8



# 4.4 Play Provision



1. Playtower  
2-8 yrs



2. Standing See-Saw  
Standing See-Saw, 4-10 yrs



3. Springer  
Bambi Springer, 2-6 yrs



4. Junior Climbing  
Limburg - modified with slide, 6-12 yrs



5. Swings  
Double swing, 3-14 yrs



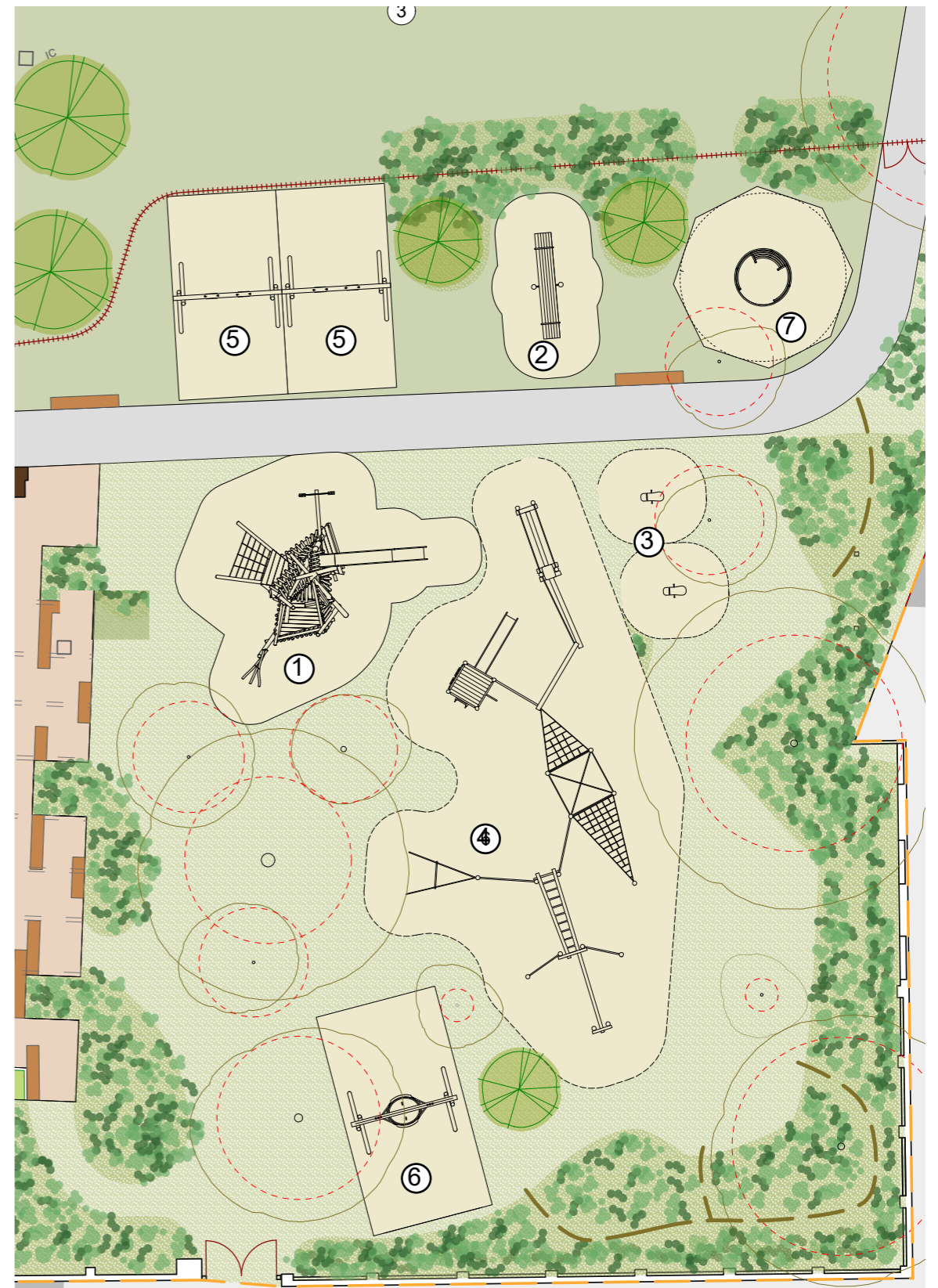
6. Nest Swing  
Nest swing, 3-14 yrs



7. Roundabout  
Wildlife wheelspin, 3 yrs +

### Considerations for making an inclusive playground

- Adapting play structures to encourage users of all abilities. Slides & ramps etc to be widened so that disabled and non-disabled children can play together.
- Play to provide a balanced offer with some higher and some lower challenge activities.
- Selecting the most appropriate surfacing
- Placing equipment and features at varying heights
- Allowing users to easily transfer to and from the play equipment
- Creating wide enough routes throughout the play space
- Providing flush transitions to allow people using mobility aids to move freely
- Providing a variety of non motoric play
- Creating opportunities for collaborative play



Option 1

## 4.4

### Play Provisions

Beside structures could be combined to create infant and junior climbing structures which are inspired by the Bleeding Heart Yard (Little Dorrit reference, see relevant pages)



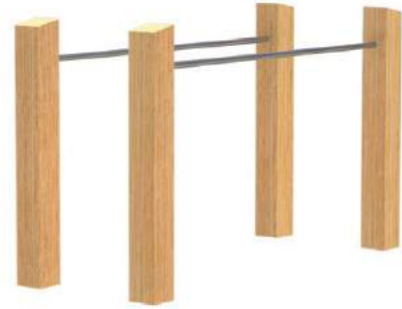
# 4.5

## Fitness Provisions

Option A - Largely Fixed Equipment (lower maintenance)



1. Sit Up Bench



2. Parallel Bars



3. Lifting Beam



4. Squat and Shoulder Press



5. Pull Up Dip Bars

Option B - Moving Parts Equipment (more maintenance required)



1. Sit Up Bench



2. Chest Station



3. Hip Station



4. Cross Station



5. Rider

4.6

Precedent Images - Nature garden & open square drop off/pick up



4.6

Precedent Images - Open lawn & wildlife edges





4.6

Precedent Images



## 4.7

### Bleeding Heart Yard

Bleeding Heart Yard is a cul-de-sac leading off Greville Street, near Hatton Garden. The yard's name derives from an old inn sign, the Bleeding Heart of Our Lady, which depicted the heart of the Virgin Mary pierced through by swords. The imagery inspired Charles Dickens in *Little Dorrit* (1855) where he suggests that the name actually relates to "the heraldic cognisance of the old family to whom the property had once belonged."

Dickens mirrors the spatial density and overlapping of spaces in Bleeding Heart Yard in the interactions of his characters in *Little Dorrit*. Characters of different classes and complexities coalesce and overlap, their lives become denser as they interact with one another. The *Little Dorrit* Garden will make reference to this spatial and metaphorical overlapping.

Timber planter structures take cues from London's Victorian rookeries and zone spaces for retreat and interaction.

