

# As Found Masterplan

## *La Friche Josaphat, Brussels*

Graduation project Master Architecture TU Delft (2024)  
Chair of Urban Architecture by Prof. ir. Paul Vermeulen

Masterplan in collaboration with  
Tarini Vajpeyi and Prajwal Gaikwad

As part of the project to reimagine La Friche Josaphat as a new urban development, the goal was to propose an urban vision for the site. Together with colleagues, I conducted an “as found” study of the friche, analyzing its existing ground conditions, vegetation, and traces of human interaction. This study uncovered a rich, layered palimpsest of soil and biodiversity, showing the highest diversity due to past interventions like soil removal and the activity of the train. This informed our masterplan, which speculated on how rewilding could be extended across the site.

The masterplan envisions a new living environment where nature, industry, and housing are intricately intertwined. By selectively removing concrete in certain areas and retaining some industrial boundaries, we aim to connect the wild friche with the urban landscape. A core concept within this vision is the creation of “mediator” spaces—zones that enable a fluid interaction between nature and human activities. These interventions not only support the ecological system but also cater to residential, commercial, and community needs. The goal is to allow nature to lead, with architecture adapting to the evolving, rewilded landscape.

Masterplan drawing  
As Found masterplan  
“La Friche Josaphat” -hand drawing



## From Humus to Human

**Masterplan drawing**  
As Found masterplan  
"La Friche Josaphat" -hand drawing



**Nino Vogels**

**Urban Architecture**

Soil is a dynamic and constantly evolving entity, far from being a static substance. Its composition and characteristics undergo continuous changes influenced by various factors, with the introduction of new seeds being a key element. Seeds from different regions and parts of the world can be transported by wind, water, animals, or human activities to new locations, contributing to the biodiversity and altering the soil composition.

Brussels was born from its natural soil. Situated alongside the unpredictable waters of the river Zenne and surrounded by numerous ponds, this area, while inhospitable to our distant ancestors, proved to be more suitable for habitation compared to other regions. In the beginning of the 10th century, 'Bruocsella', the settlement (sele, sala, zaal) in the swamp (bruoc, broek, meaning marshland that floods in winter) came into being (Fig.27).



Fig.1

Fig.1  
Map Brussels Jacob van Deventer, 1555  
Image © KBR

## Dynamic of La Friche

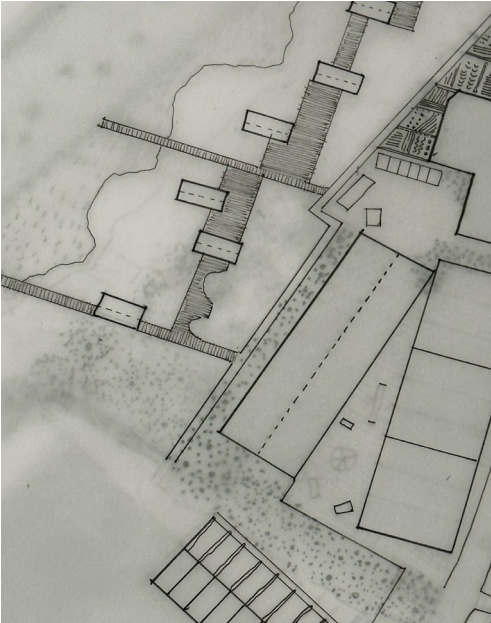
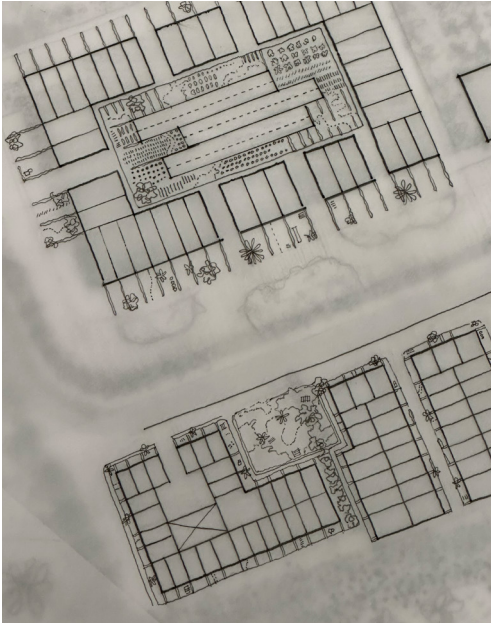
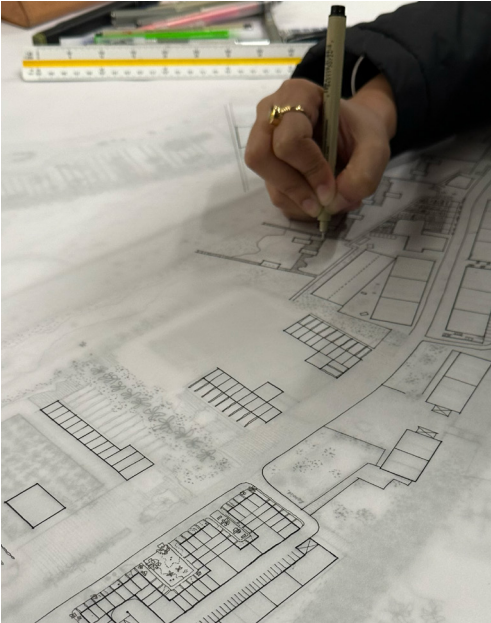
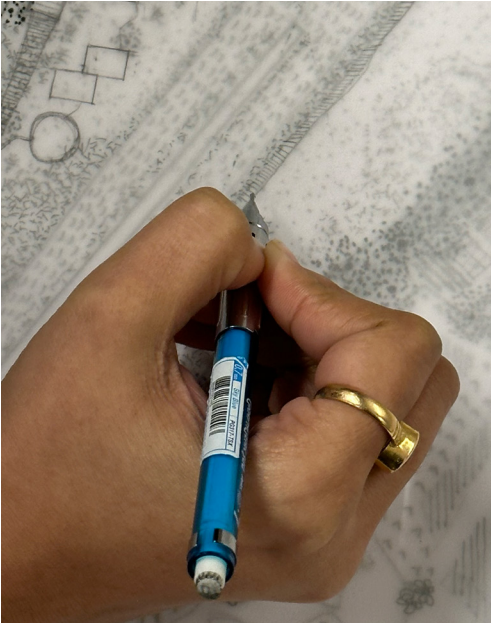
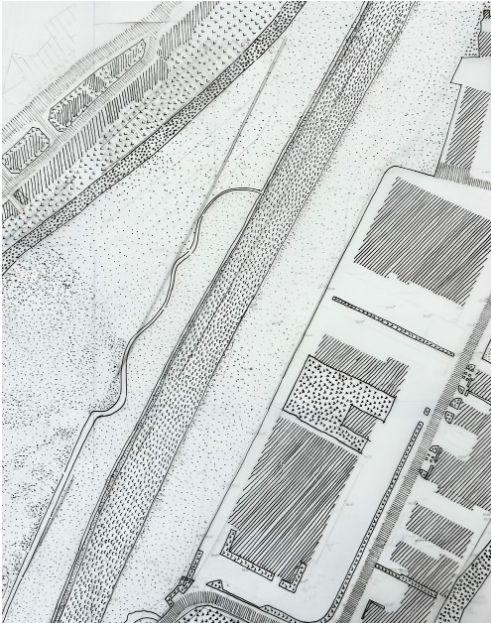













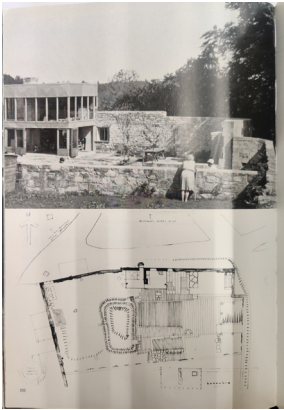
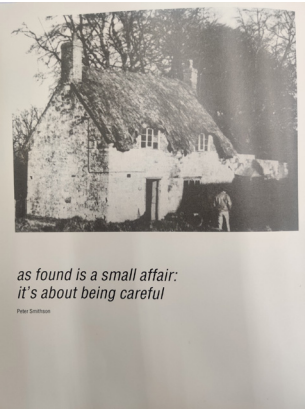




Fig.4 As found mapping, hand drawn  
(by Nino Vogels, Prajwal Gaikwad & Tarini Vajpeyi)

Underlayer (Ground conditions)	Overlayer 1 (vegetation)
 concrete/asphalt	 Peripheral tree line
 firm ground	 friche trees
 trackbed	 shrubs/low bushes
 turf	 planted trees
 planted/managed ground	 communal gardens
 Marshy soil	 private gardens
 marshy soil - triangle patch	

From Humus to Human



Manifesto - As found

We started our master planning with a study of the "as found" friche. What exists already and how can we draw conclusions and make investigations from this data? What are the existing ground conditions? What kind of vegetation grows here and why? What are the ecological hotspots and why only those areas? What are the traces of human intervention? Finally, how do these factors lead to a holistic understanding of this palimpsest?

The friche is a palimpsest - layer upon layer, soil upon soil. The west side already reveals remnants of this layering where a triangulated zone becomes exclusively lush with trees, contrasting the other more grassy areas of the friche. It is most likely that this area was more polluted than others, which led to a different kind of intervention in this particular zone - possibly, the removal of more soil or the refilling of a deeper layer of topsoil. The area is now the most biodiverse on the friche. We wondered why it was so? Interestingly, the commons sit adjacent to this triangle. We speculate that the two work in symbiosis and conjunction and possibly fuel one another.

Making this study our point of departure, we now speculate on the future of this friche. What if, like this triangulated fragment, other plots within the friche had been exposed to a specific kind of removal and refilling of soil? What if the concrete that sits atop the eastern front would be peeled off? Would the friche grow back here? Perhaps, yes. Remnants of the wild friche already dot the industrial landscape.

We look at the hard edge of this industrial "port" as an opportunity waiting to be "rewilded". The hard surfaces will be punctured and the friche will slowly reveal itself, flowing towards the city, extending its fingers beyond the boundaries of the bordering trees and thus, the architecture will follow. Simultaneously, the city begins to infiltrate the friche with its "urban green".

1. The peeling off of concrete in parts where the friche has already begun to reveal itself. These punctures grow and form connections between the wild nature of the friche and the city.

2. As a rule, we retain the ground surfaces of the industries as outlines or borders within which we build. We do not exceed the limits of these boundaries in order to let the friche erupt from the remaining paving. We retain the Rova industrial buildings and move the remaining industries to other parts of Brussels. The primary access road is also retained.

3. For the masterplan vision, we imagine a new kind of living environment - where housing, industry and nature are intertwined. A kind of densification of functions that prevents isolated operations.

4. The zoning of programmes in this new neighbourhood masterplan is determined in a layered system with varying degrees of "living with nature", Typologies of mixed housing and retail towards the city in the east reinvigorate the surrounding urban fabric, low rise housings with mediator community functions are placed in the middle, and finally, scattered housing with commoning/ reseach activities are closest to the wild friche.

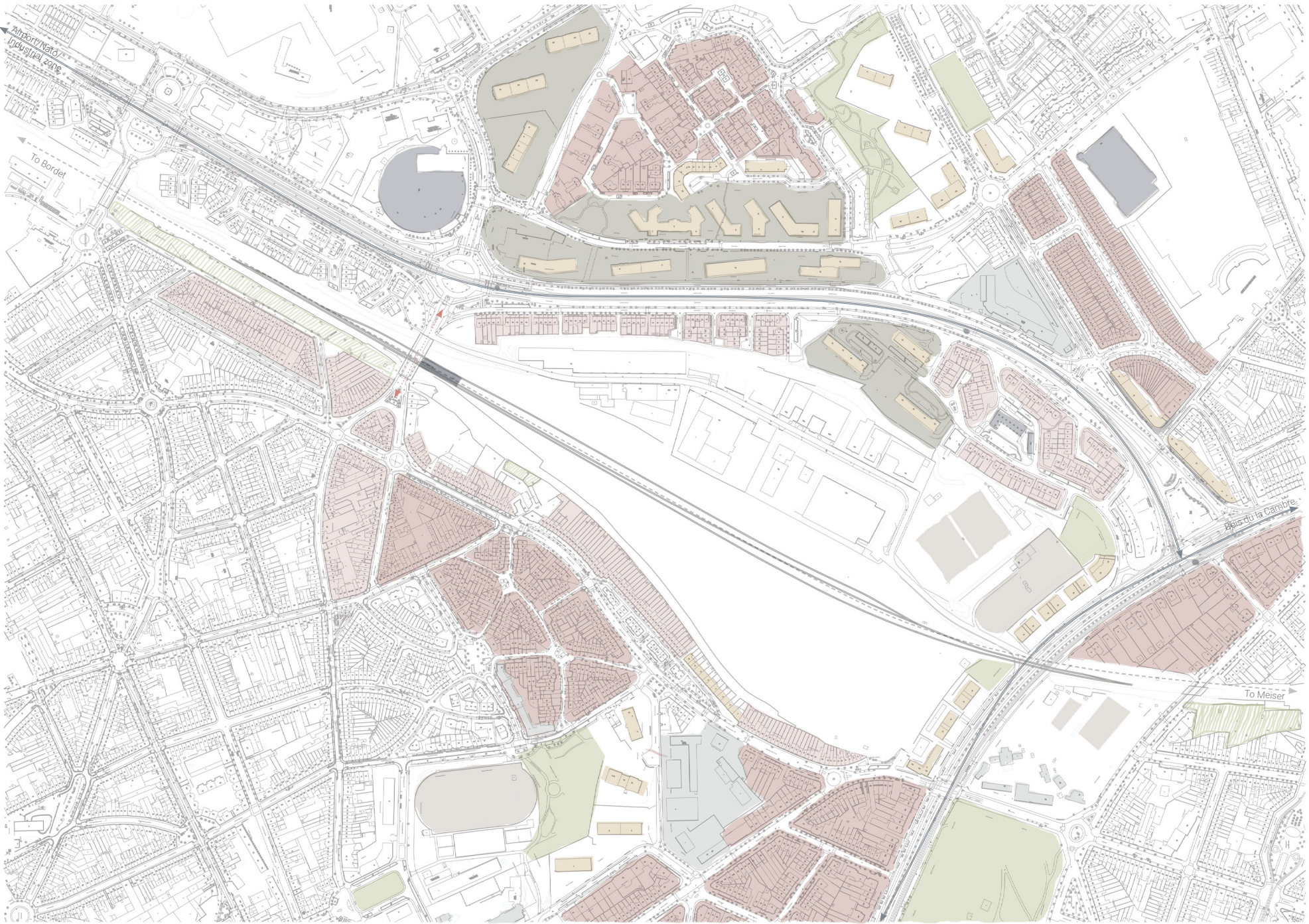
5. Each rewilded, peeled off zone cannot exist by itself for long. This we conclude through our study of the western part. Thus, the wild friche needs a mediator, just as the commons facilitate the triangle and mediate between the city and the wild friche. Therefore, the mediator function is born, where human interventions aid natural flows while keeping them in a healthy state and connected to the new urban environment. These functions support the wild friche and the wild friche feeds their commercial/productive/residential/ educational/ ecological functions.

6. Mediator functions can we defined as an intervention which negotiates between two or more types of ecosystems, two or more types of programs, two or more types of green. One can imagine architecture that may be functionally ambiguous or flexible, or some kind of infrastructure that aids the confluence of these ecosystems, or even landscapes. We hope to find our own proposals in these mediators.

7. The train tracks are green corridors where migratory birds perch on electrical poles. We imagine a wetland that runs along the tracks , forming a buffer and resting place for them and other non-human species.

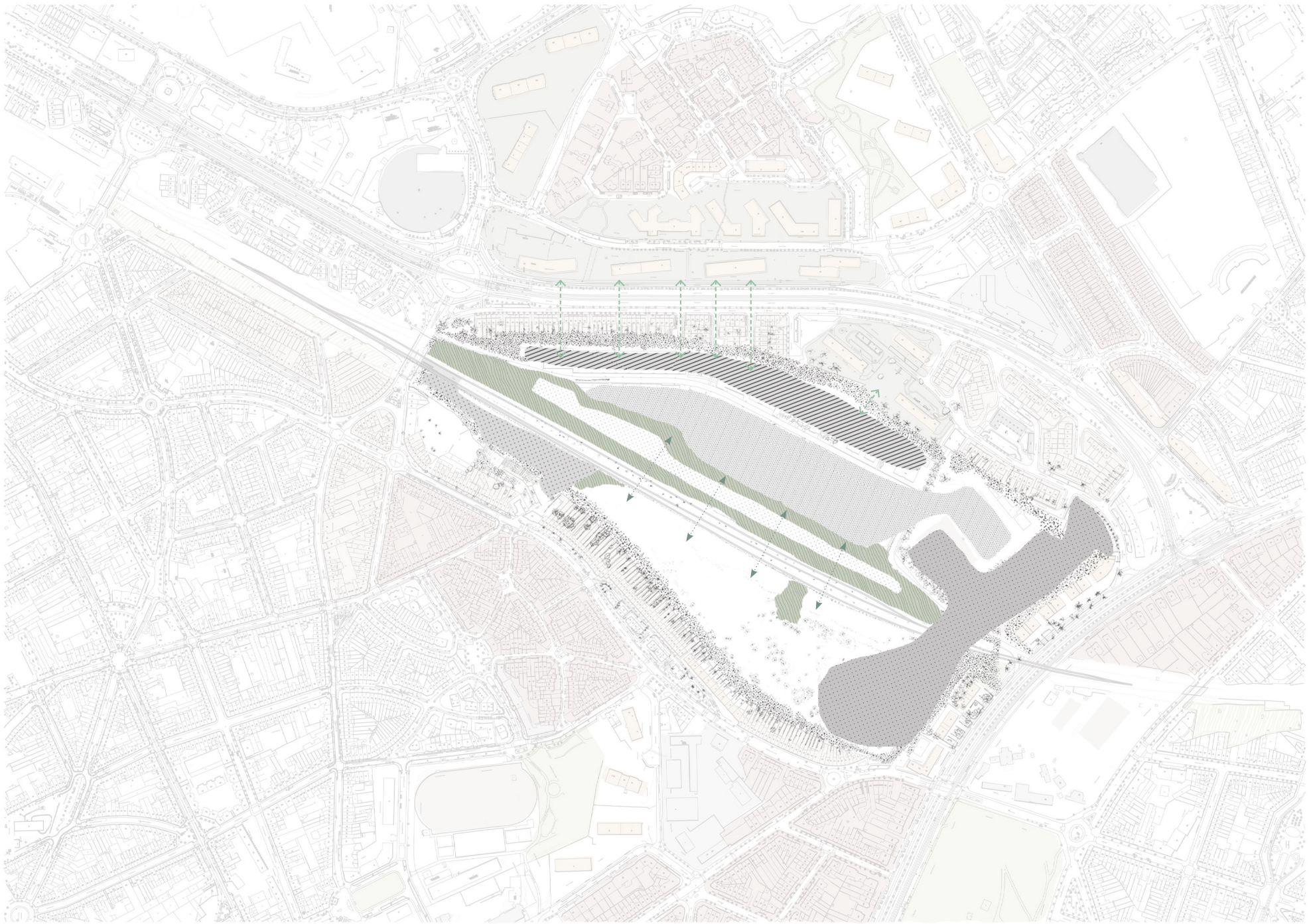
8. On the two ends are the bridging functions - the train station and the wahis park, connecting the two ends of the friche to one another. Another kind of mediator function, negotiating between two kinds of zones.

9.The eventual aim is to allow nature to take precedence, and to let architecture follow. What kind of architecture will come about when nature takes the lead? How will boundaries be negotiated? How will it create its space in the as found?



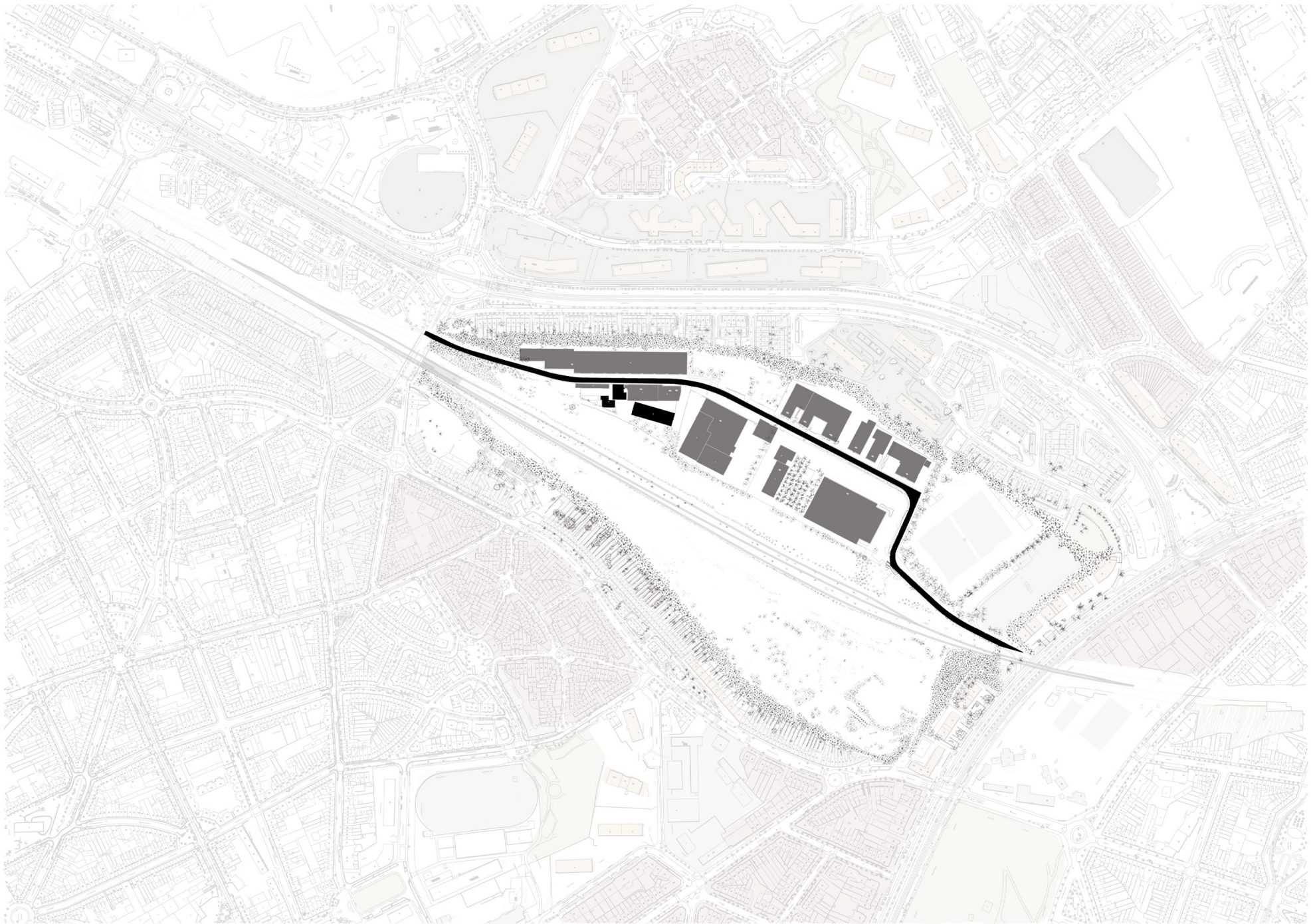
1. Context study

- |                   |                       |                    |
|-------------------|-----------------------|--------------------|
| Schools           | Garden city           | Residential greens |
| Commercial        | Garden city (2)       | Public parks       |
| Sports facilities | High rise residential | Communal greens    |



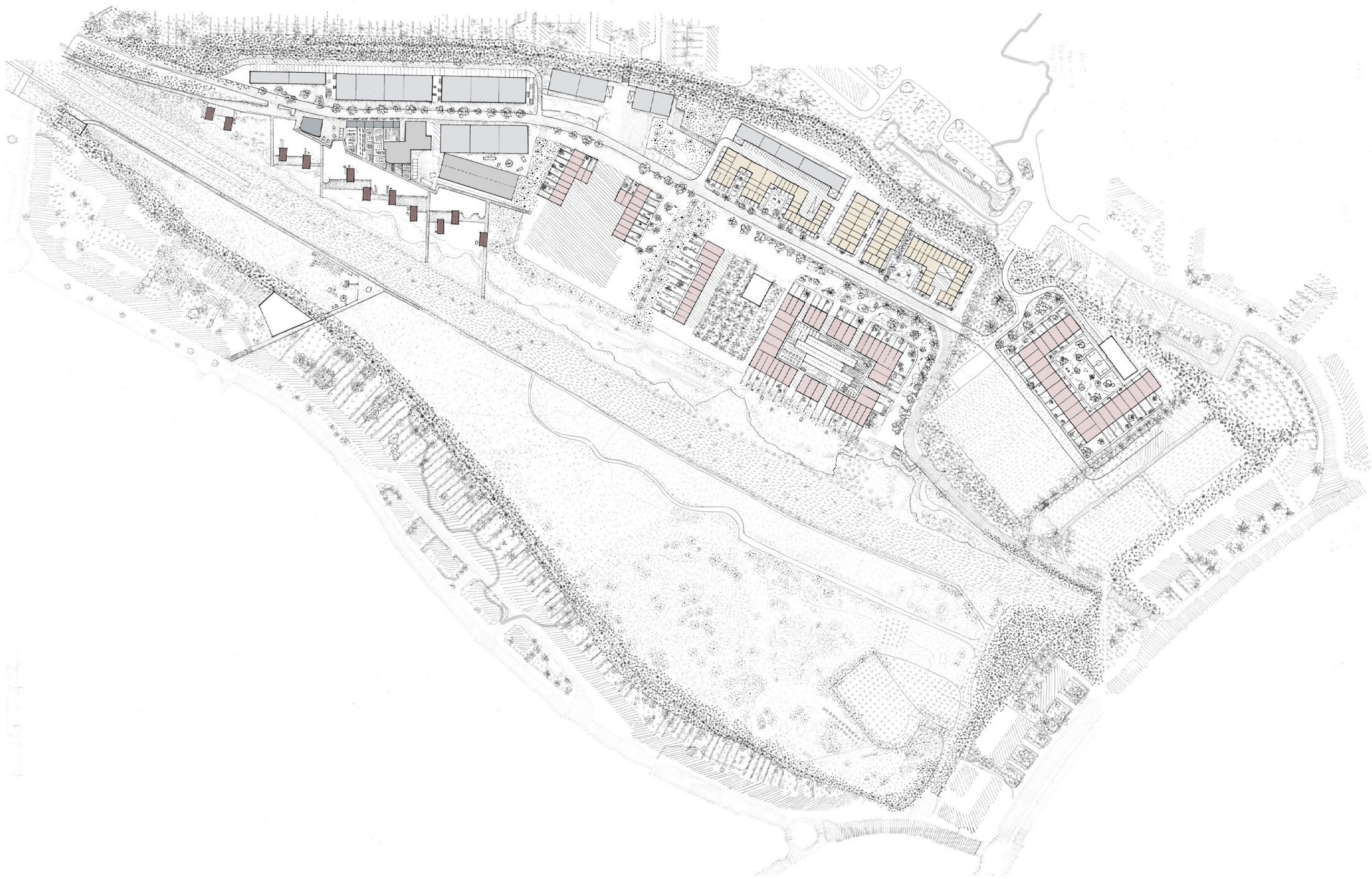
2. Masterplanning vision

- Housing with public front
- Low rise housing with mediator
- Friche housing/communing
- Educational/ research zone
- Wetland
- Bringing in the friche zone
- Bringing in the urban greens



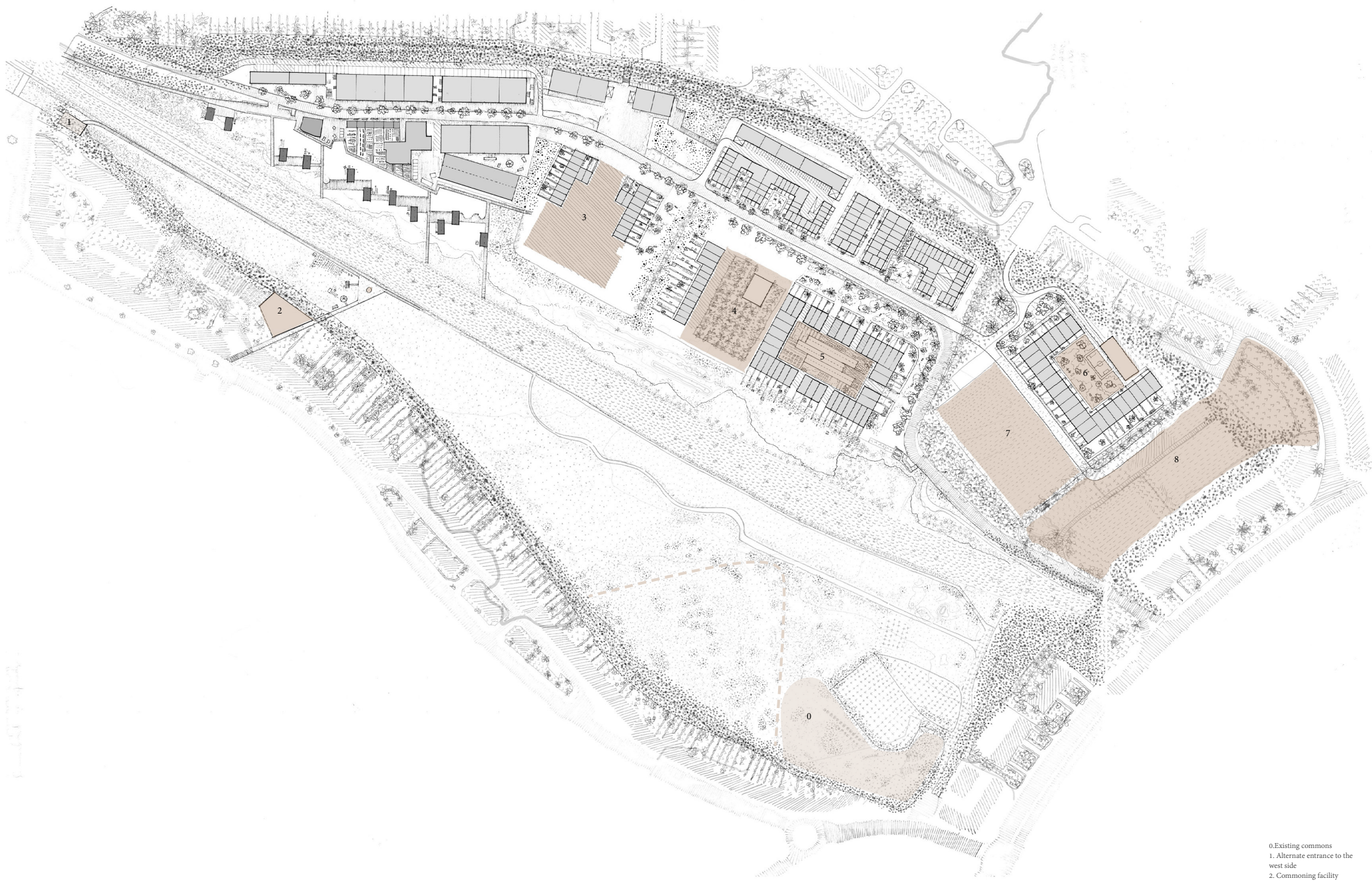
3. What to keep?

As found/ original entities  
Building extents & Surfaces



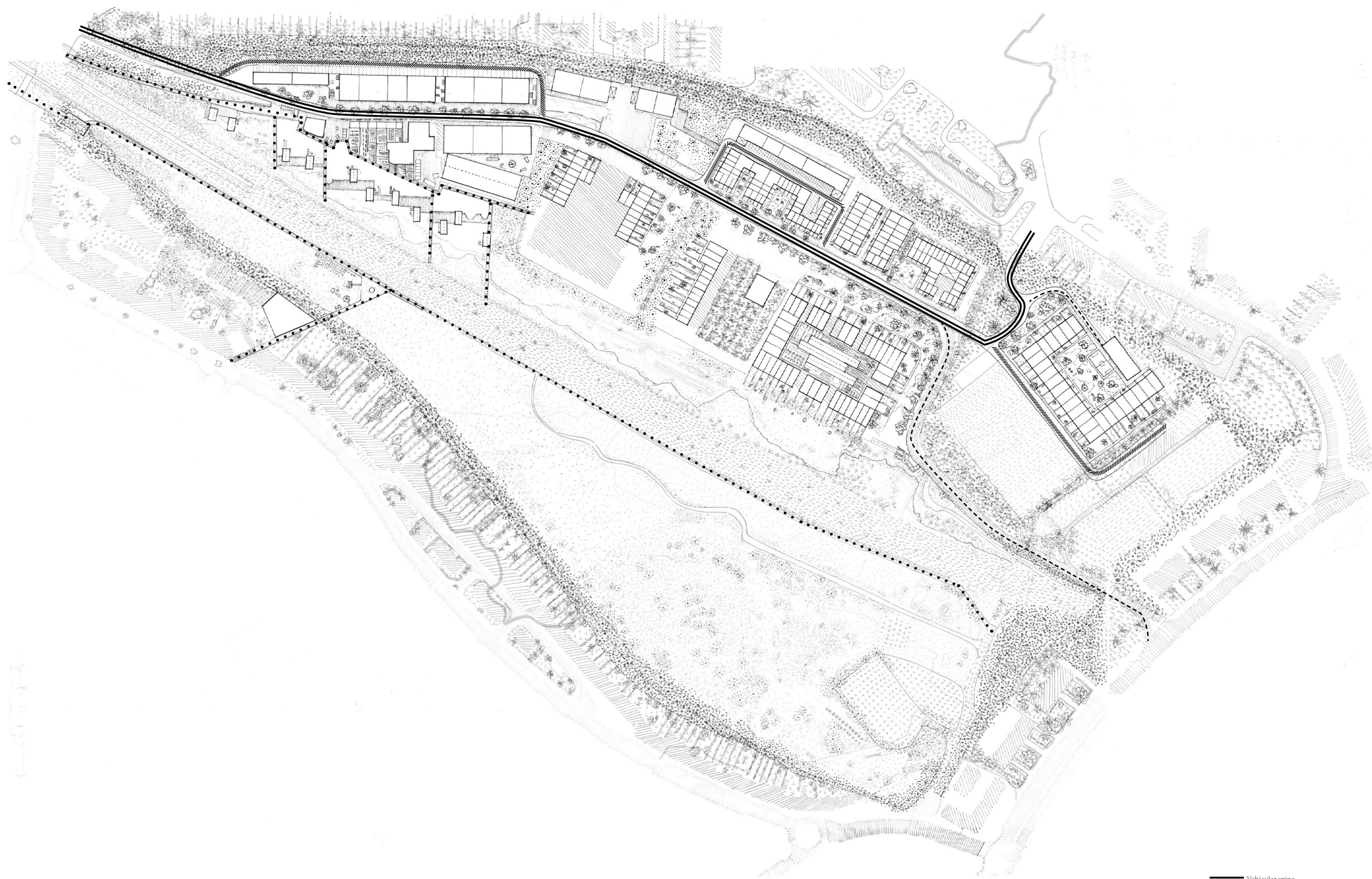
4. Proposed functions/zoning

- Housing + public / retail front
- Production / Small businesses
- Research residences
- High rise residential



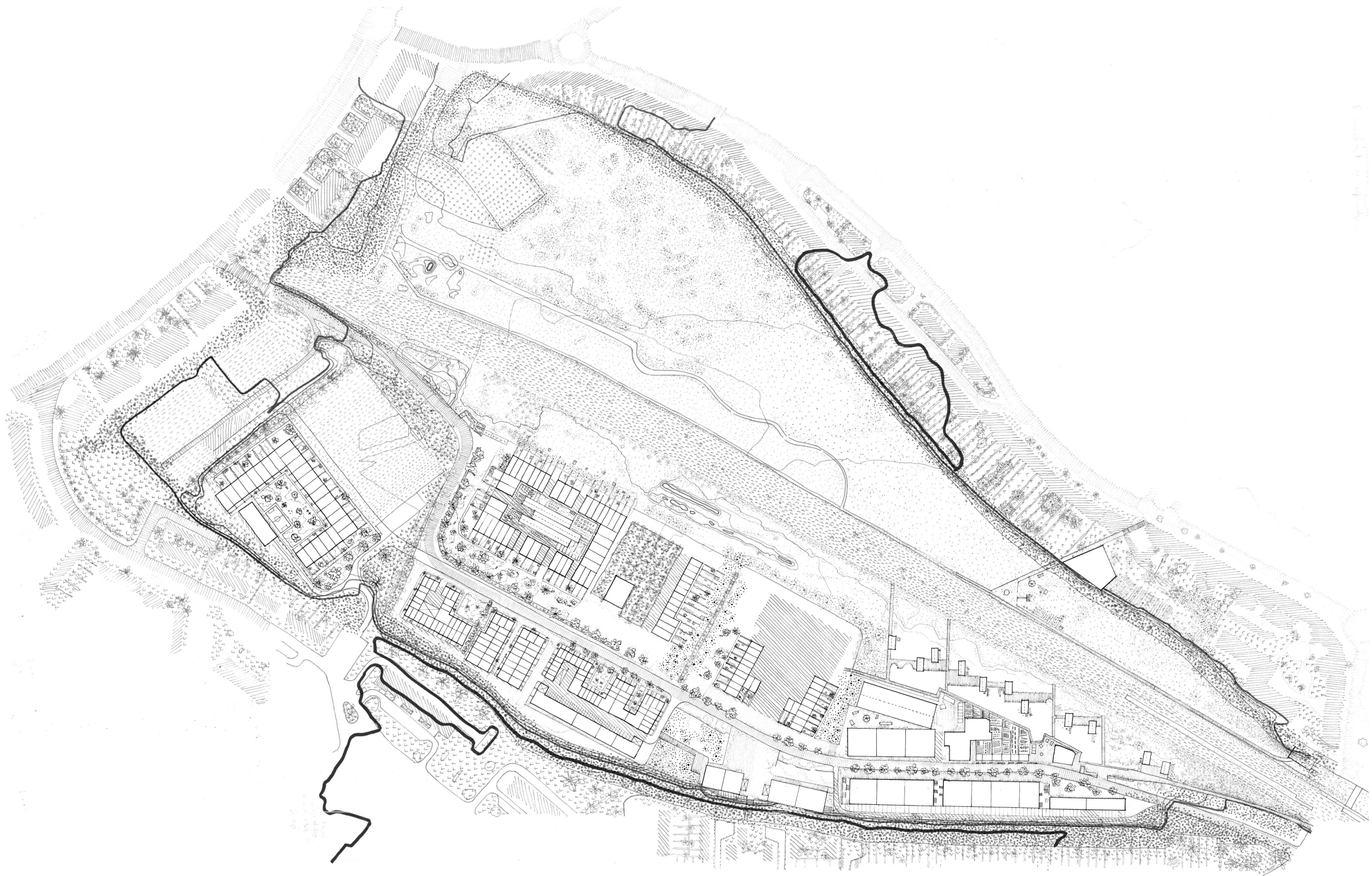
5. Mediators

- 0.Existing commons
- 1. Alternate entrance to the west side
- 2. Commoning facility
- 3. Bathhouse of enchantments
- 4. Repository of remembrance
- 5. Urban farming incubator
- 6. Sports/ public park
- 7. School



6. Routing/ circulation

- Vehicular spine  
(Cars, loading/ unloading trucks + bikes)
- Secondary vehicular roads for parking  
& servicing
- - - Pedestrian + bike path

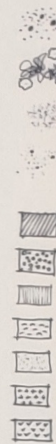






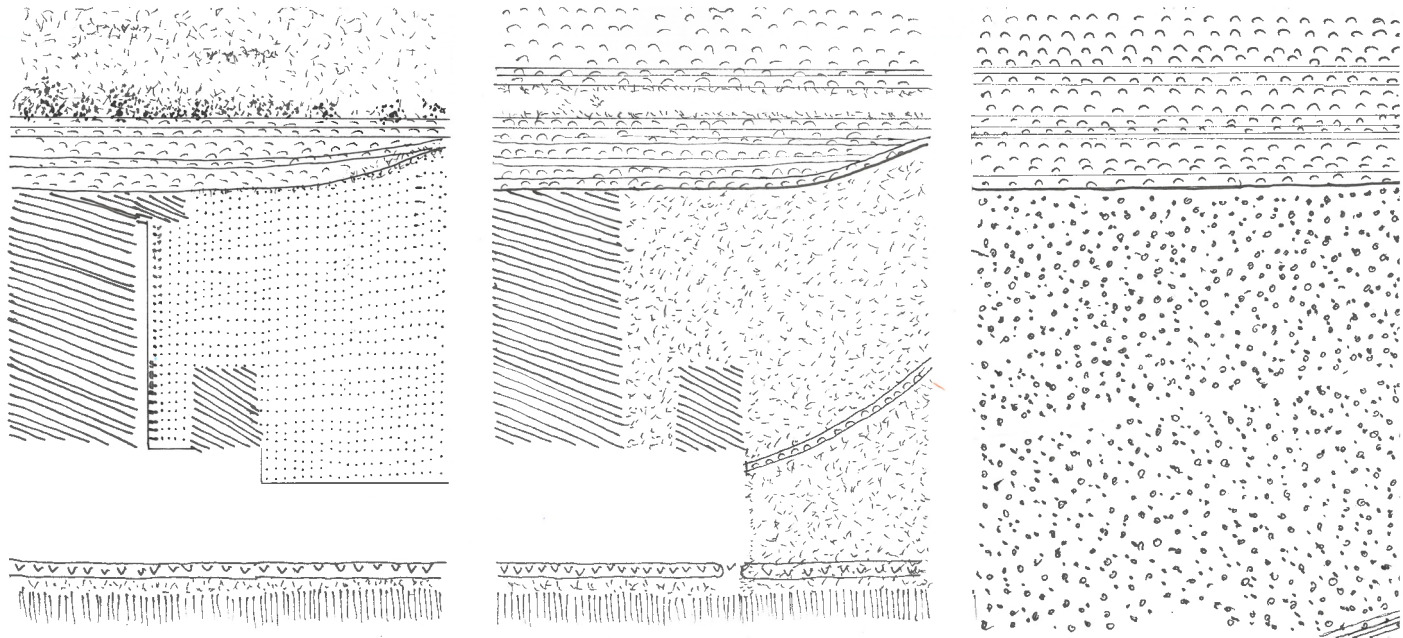


Legend



From Humus to Human

The chosen location is an existing patch of Serbian spruce trees in La Friche Josaphat. Originally planted as Christmas trees, they now symbolize the dynamic landscape and flow of life. These spruces hold cultural significance, often planted to commemorate important events or honor those who have passed, symbolizing growth and resilience. To protect and enhance the value of this ‘last green in town,’ I propose a Repository of Remembrance. The trees are surrounded by a gallery of niches where visitors can retreat, reflect, and engage in personal acts of remembrance. These niches offer views leading to a memorial garden, creating a serene atmosphere for contemplation. The housing units function as a protective fort or kasbah, facilitating interaction between the city and a space dedicated to reflection and remembrance.



Fragment Masterplan drawing  
As Found masterplan  
"La Friche Josaphat" -hand drawing

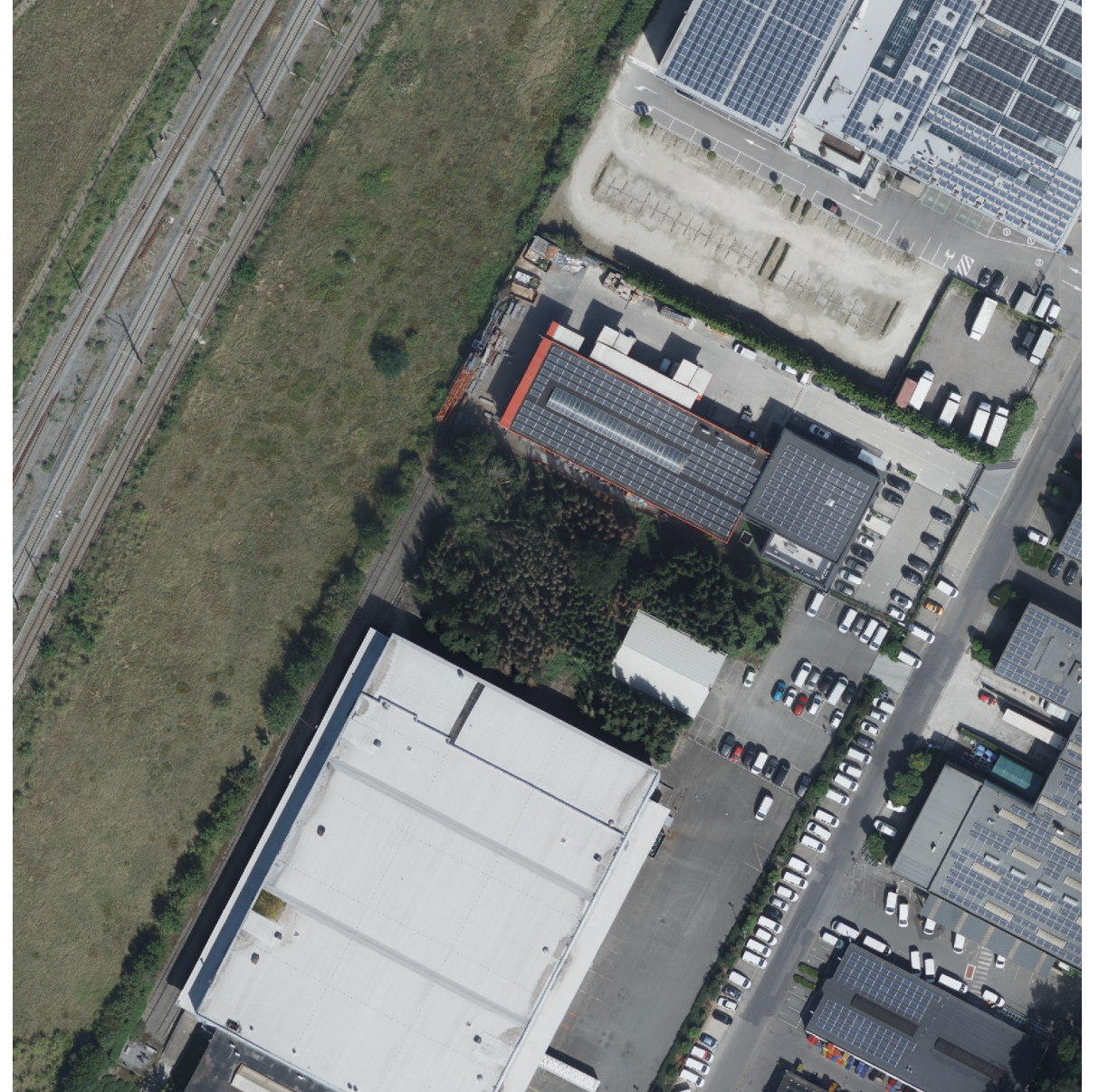
## From Humus to Human

1990



Nino Vogels

2024



Urban Architecture

