

# Lives in the Cracks

## Embrace Urban’s Wilderness

Nature’s Passage: Reclaiming Space Through Safe Houses 1 & 2

### Introduction

How can we optimize the ecological and social value of small, often overlooked patches of greenery to establish a connected network of microhabitats that enhance urban biodiversity and community well-being?

The decline in landscape maintenance over the past decade in Britain and other Western countries underscores the need for innovative landscaping approaches to **revive public greenery**. Informal green spaces and spontaneous vegetation, which make up a significant portion of urban greenery, hold immense potential as **green corridors** or stepping stones, linking larger patches of green and promoting **ecological connectivity**.

### Brief

In response to the climate emergency and **urban land fragmentation**, this project aims to revitalise informal green patches and support spontaneous vegetation.

A proposed green corridor **connects existing informal green spaces and streetscapes**, embracing the idea of life emerging through cracks and **building on how nature reclaims fragmented urban environments**. Key design elements inspired by spontaneous vegetation include **cracks, openings/holes, and gaps**. The site serves as a vital **connector** between scattered vegetation and the larger green zone along the railway.

While the design promotes biodiversity by linking green spaces, the proposal also envisions a **community art and garden centre** uniting the two Safe Houses. This space will support **educational and creative activities** that encourage appreciation for **both designed and natural landscapes**.

### Importance & Social, Racial, Environmental Impact

#### 11 – Sustainable Cities and Communities

I aim to **enhance local biodiversity**, improve air quality, and **increase access to green spaces**, while creating an inclusive, safe, and creative environment that fosters **community bonds**. Greenery will be integrated to support both human **mental well-being** and to mitigate the loss of vegetation caused by urbanization.

#### 15 – Life on Land

I am exploring new methods to maximize the use of **wild plants** and strengthen connections between existing pockets of greenery to promote **biodiversity movements**. The project encourages the growth of spontaneous vegetation and incorporates **native flora and fauna** to support local ecosystems.

#### 13 – Climate Action

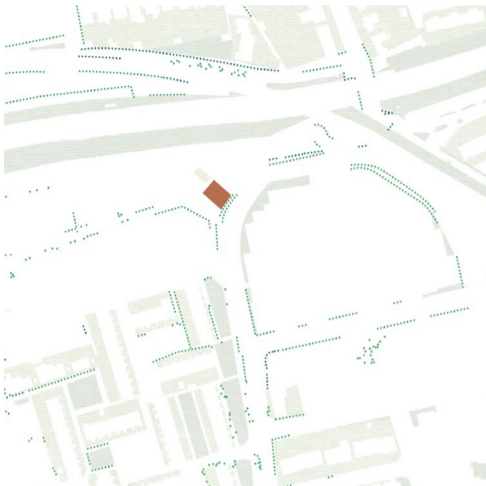
The design reflects local **topography** and dynamic **landscape patterns**, emphasizing the use of recycled materials and **low-maintenance planting** to reduce energy use and ongoing maintenance.



Site Analysis | Spontaneous Vegetation in Context

Safe House 1 & 2 are two old, **abandoned Victorian terraced houses** located at 137–139 Copeland Road. The houses are now used to host creative events and exhibitions.

Many spontaneous plants were observed on site. They often **thrive in specific conditions**: near existing plants where seeds are naturally dispersed, in low-traffic areas with minimal disturbance, and in pavement gaps that trap soil. **The map highlights how these factors collectively support its growth.**



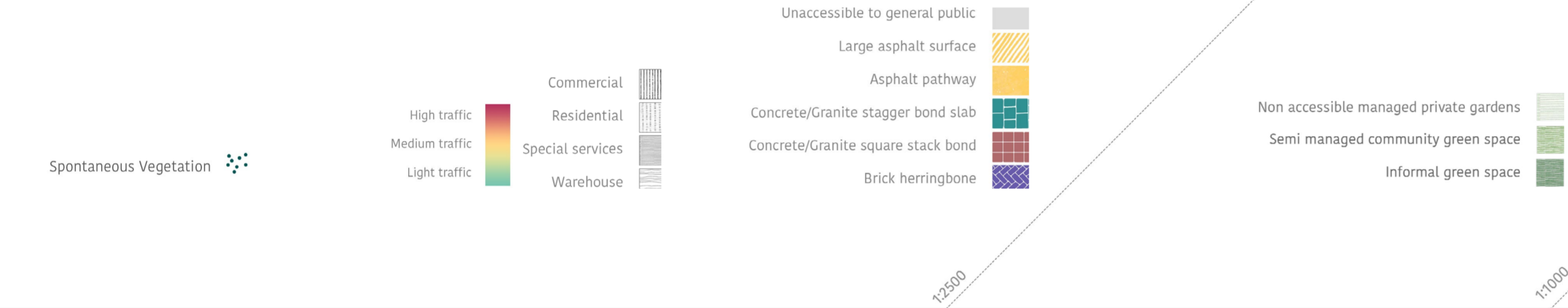
In relation to other green spaces



In relation to zoning



In relation to pavement surfaces

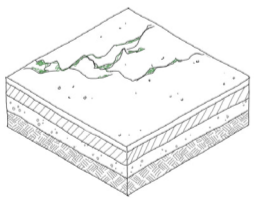


Safe Houses 1 & 2

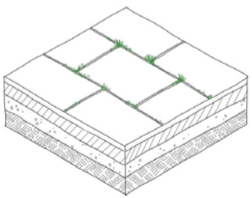


Where Can We Find Them?

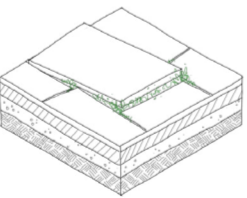
Spontaneous vegetation growing on **pavements** thrives under the conditions illustrated in the diagrams. Understanding these characteristics can help inform designs that better accommodate and support its growth.



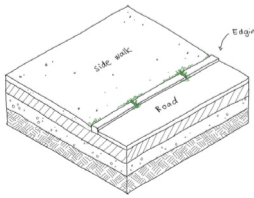
Asphalt cracks



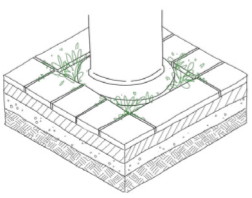
Paving gaps



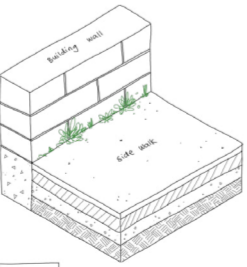
Uneven pavement



Street edges



Irregular shapes



Building foundations

Design Elements Exploration

Inspired by the conditions in which spontaneous plants grow, I approached the design through different spatial qualities—cracks, openings/holes, and gaps—experimenting with their potential applications in **architecture and spatial use**.



Cracks

Embracing existing or anticipated cracks highlights the passage of time, the beauty of imperfection, and the layered history embedded within a structure.



Holes/Openings

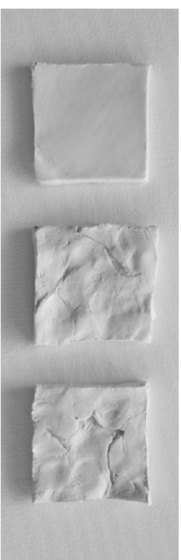
Windows, skylights, and ventilation openings serve as thresholds between interior and exterior spaces, framing views, admitting natural light, and facilitating airflow.



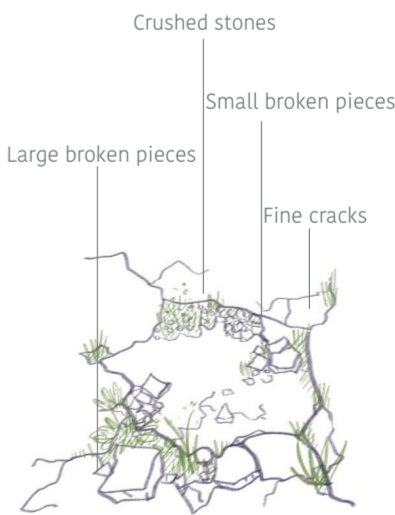
Gaps

Breathing spaces like expansion joints allow for structural movement while creating subtle transitions and separations between materials or forms.

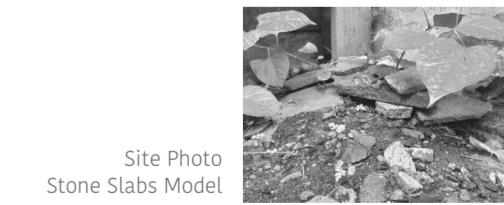
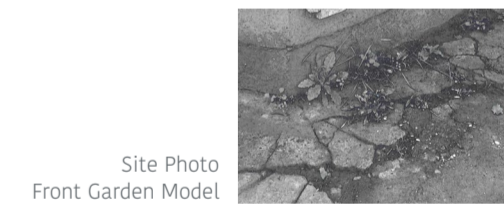
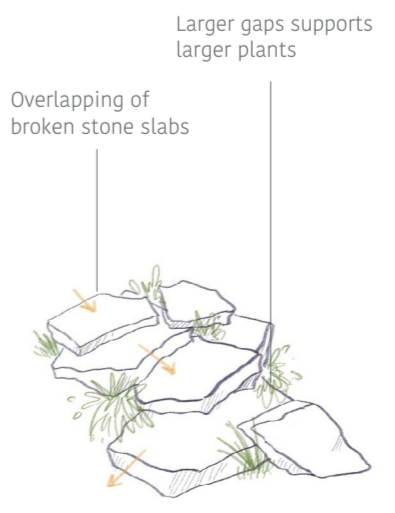
Forming of Cracks



Asphalt Cracks



Broken Stone



# Bringing Wilderness into Interior Spaces

Plants emerging from wall cracks and growing through fences creates **natural green walls**. Inspired by this concept, I experimented how **spontaneous vegetation mix with daily life** settings.

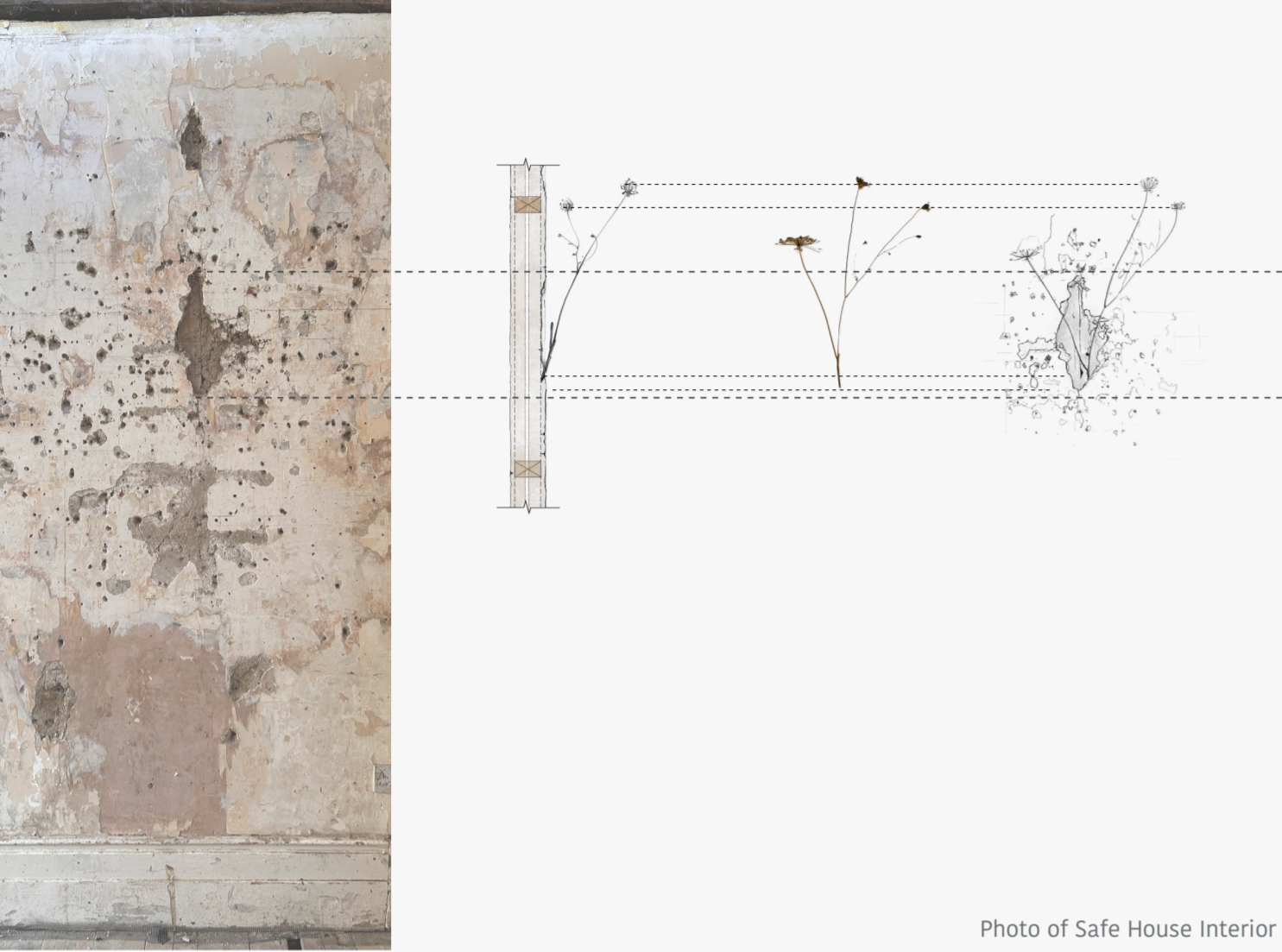
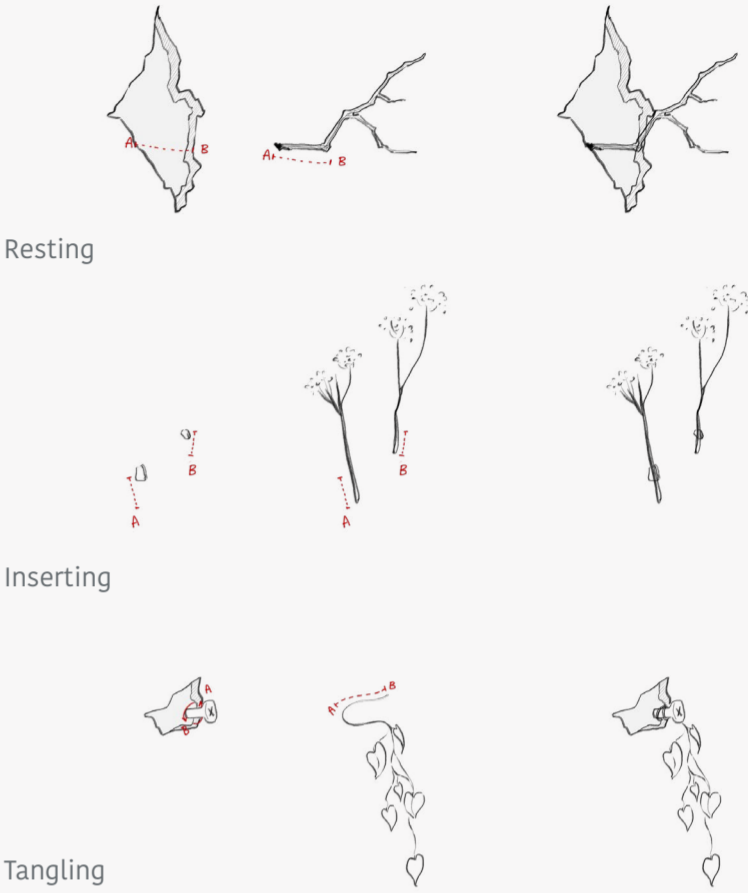


Photo of Safe House Interior



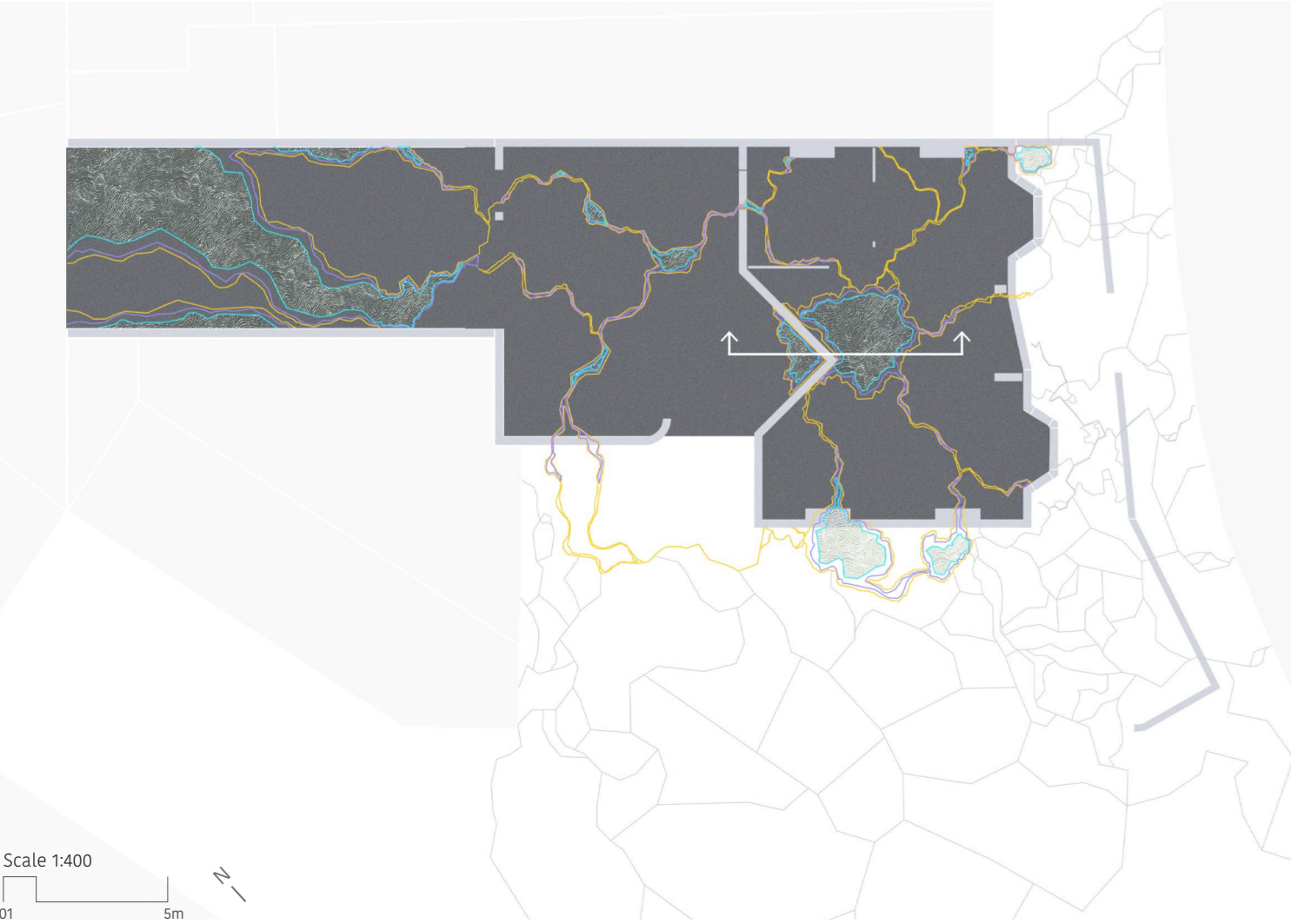
## Attachment System to the Wall



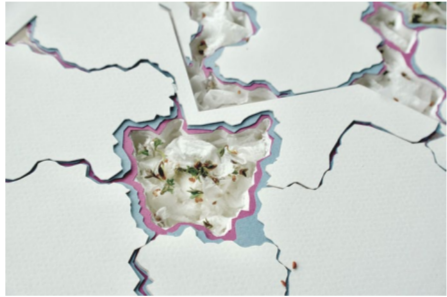
# Crack Planting

The design proposes **cracks spreading from the center of the Safe House, connecting with existing fractures in the public space**. These cracks symbolize continuity and transformation, with **varying depths** to support vegetation growth, while selected areas will be filled to ensure accessibility.

A shallow soil depth is suitable for grass and low-growing ground covers, which have relatively **small root systems**. However, larger woody plants and herbaceous perennials require a deeper planting bed to accommodate their **extensive root structures** and support healthy growth.

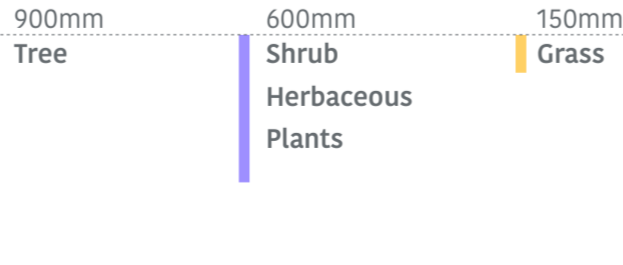


Scale 1:400  
01 5m

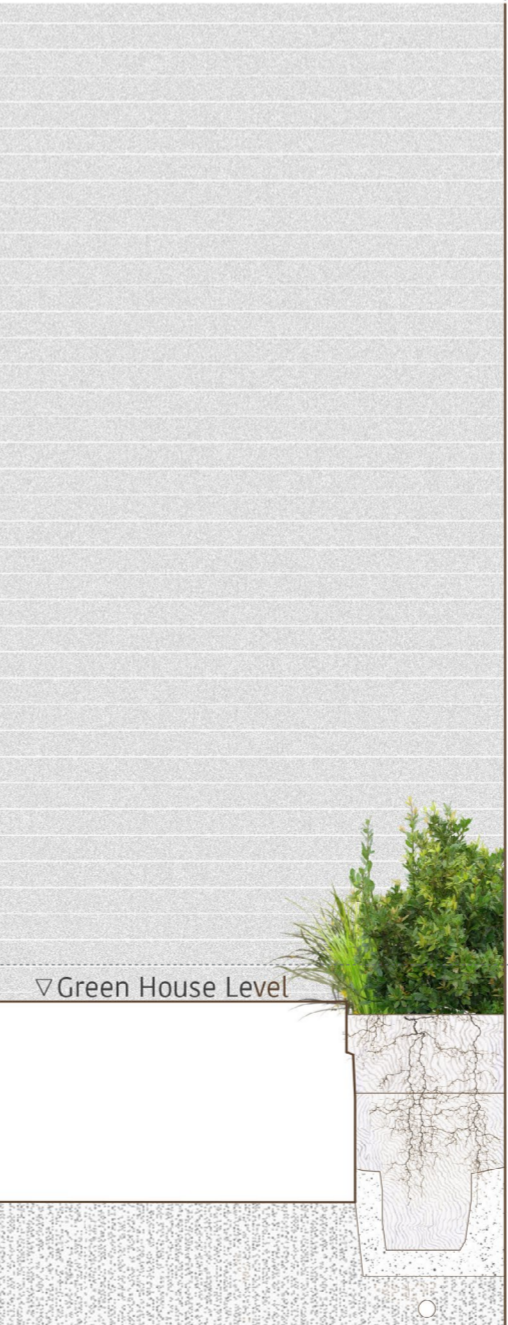


1:50 Concept Model

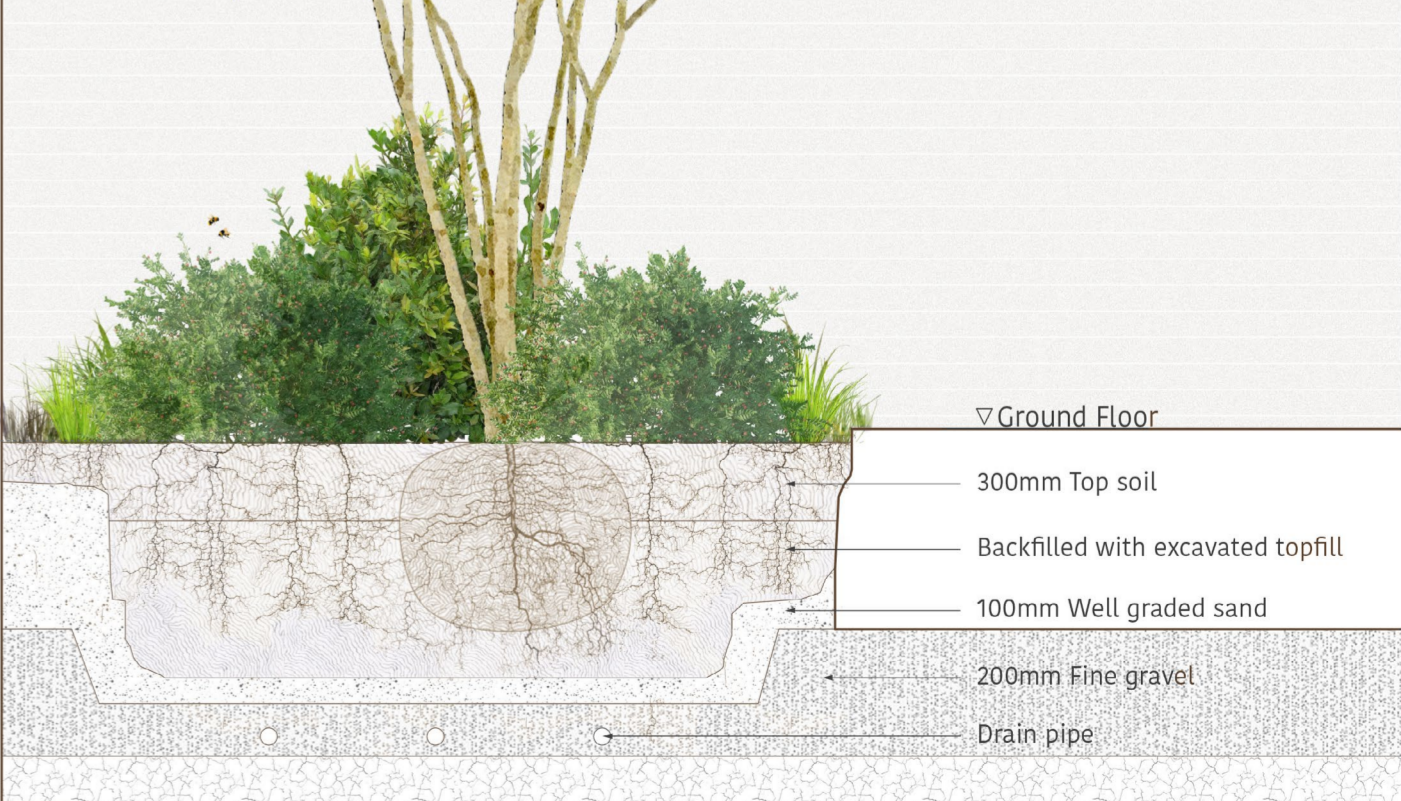
## Planting Depths of Plants



1 Row = 100mm



Structural brick wall



▽Ground Floor

300mm Top soil

Backfilled with excavated topfill

100mm Well graded sand

200mm Fine gravel

Drain pipe

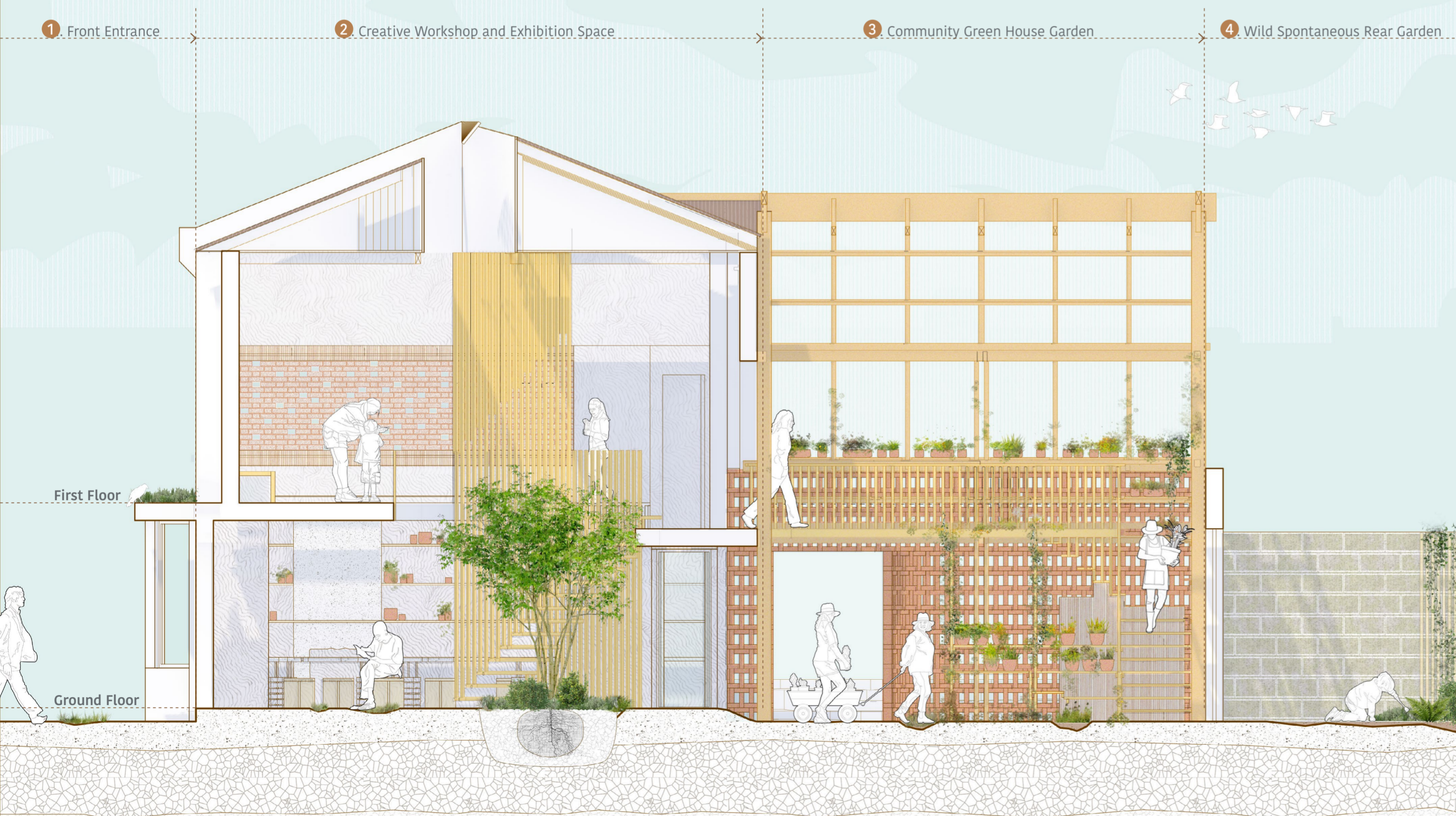


Location Plan

## Zones and Programmes of the Space

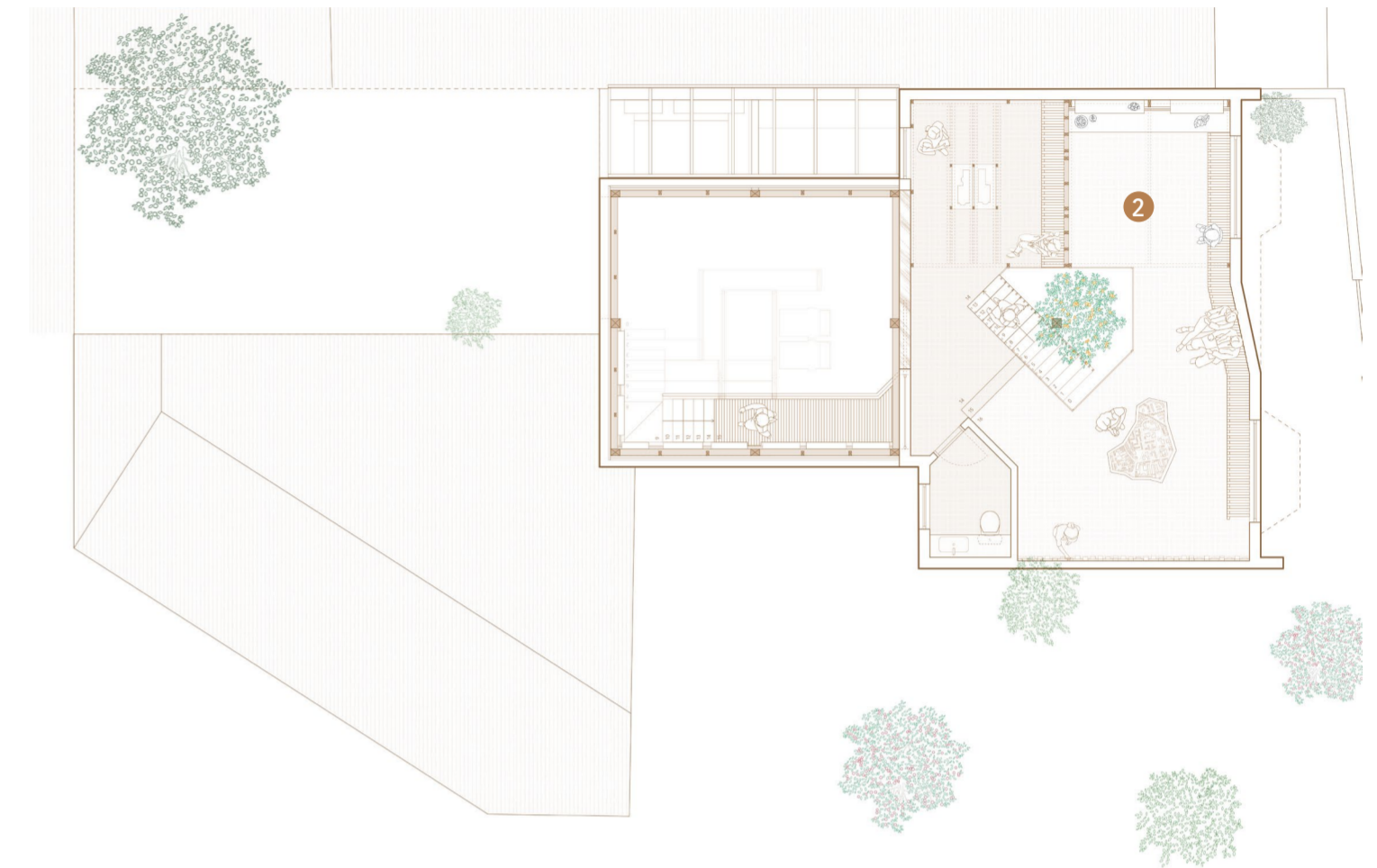


## Community Art and Garden Centre - Section



## Community Art and Garden Centre - Plan

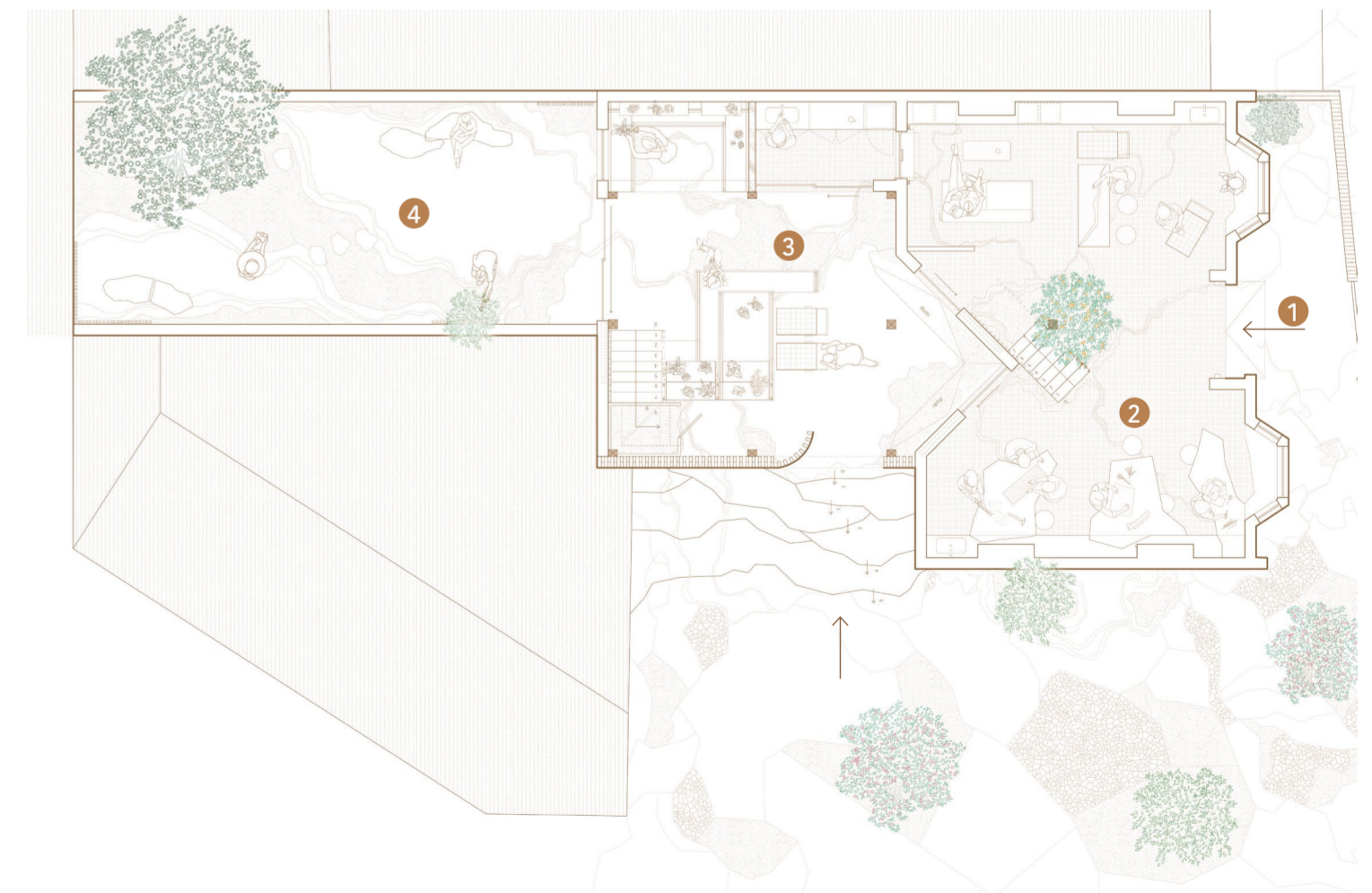
This community centre consists of **art workshops** located on the ground floor, focusing on **creative making** using materials from the garden and **found resources** from the surrounding area. These activities aim to foster a sense of **exploration** and **connection** to the local ecology. The handcrafted goods are then displayed on the first floor, **celebrating community creativity and engagement**.



First Floor

Scale 1:300

01 5 10m



Ground Floor

Scale 1:300

01 5 10m



Seed



Spout



Mature



Cut



Processed



#### 1. Seed Sowing

Sow seeds in upcycled containers and nurture them before transplanting into the garden.



#### 2. Route to Green House

At the heart of the house stands a tree, its cracks branching out like roots into every space.



#### 3. Green House

Controlled planting environment using pots and trays.



#### 4. Rear Garden

Wild and organic planting zone celebrating spontaneous vegetation and site in its original state.



#### 5. Workshop

Creative making using garden materials and found objects. Activities: Drawing Club, Botanical Printmaking, Earth Brick, Mini Terrarium, Print Mark-Making.



#### 6. Exhibition

Displays include the original Safe House model, art and crafts produced during the workshop.

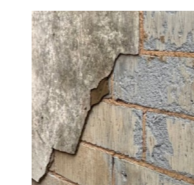


## Overview of the Community Art and Garden Centre

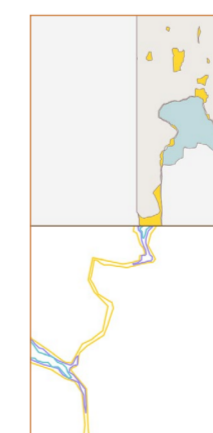
At the core of the green corridor is a community art and garden centre, guiding visitors through a space that **mirrors a plant's life cycle**, from seed to maturity, leading into creative workshops and an exhibition of the resulting work.



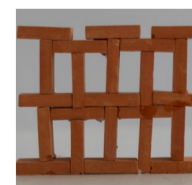
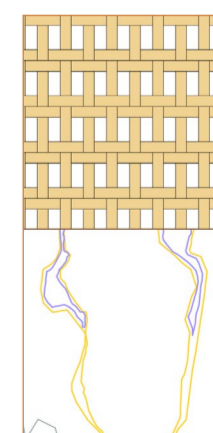
### Extending the Cracks to the Walls



Proposed ground cracks extending into the existing cracks in the garden



Proposed interior ground cracks connect to the existing cracks in the fireplace



Proposed cracks flow through the gaps in the newly built perforated brick wall