

Hampstead Heath | Swimming Ponds
Safety, Access & Security Improvements
Design & Access Statement
06.06.22

Document History

Revision	Purpose description	Originated	Checked	Authorised	Date
Rev 01	Draft	ZPV	ZPV	ZPV	28.05.2022
Rev 02	Revision	ZPV	ZPV	ZPV	06.06.2022
Rev 03	Planning Issue	ZPV	ZPV	ZPV	06.06.22

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Planning Consultant: Metropolis Planning
& Design

Accessibility Consultant: IDACS

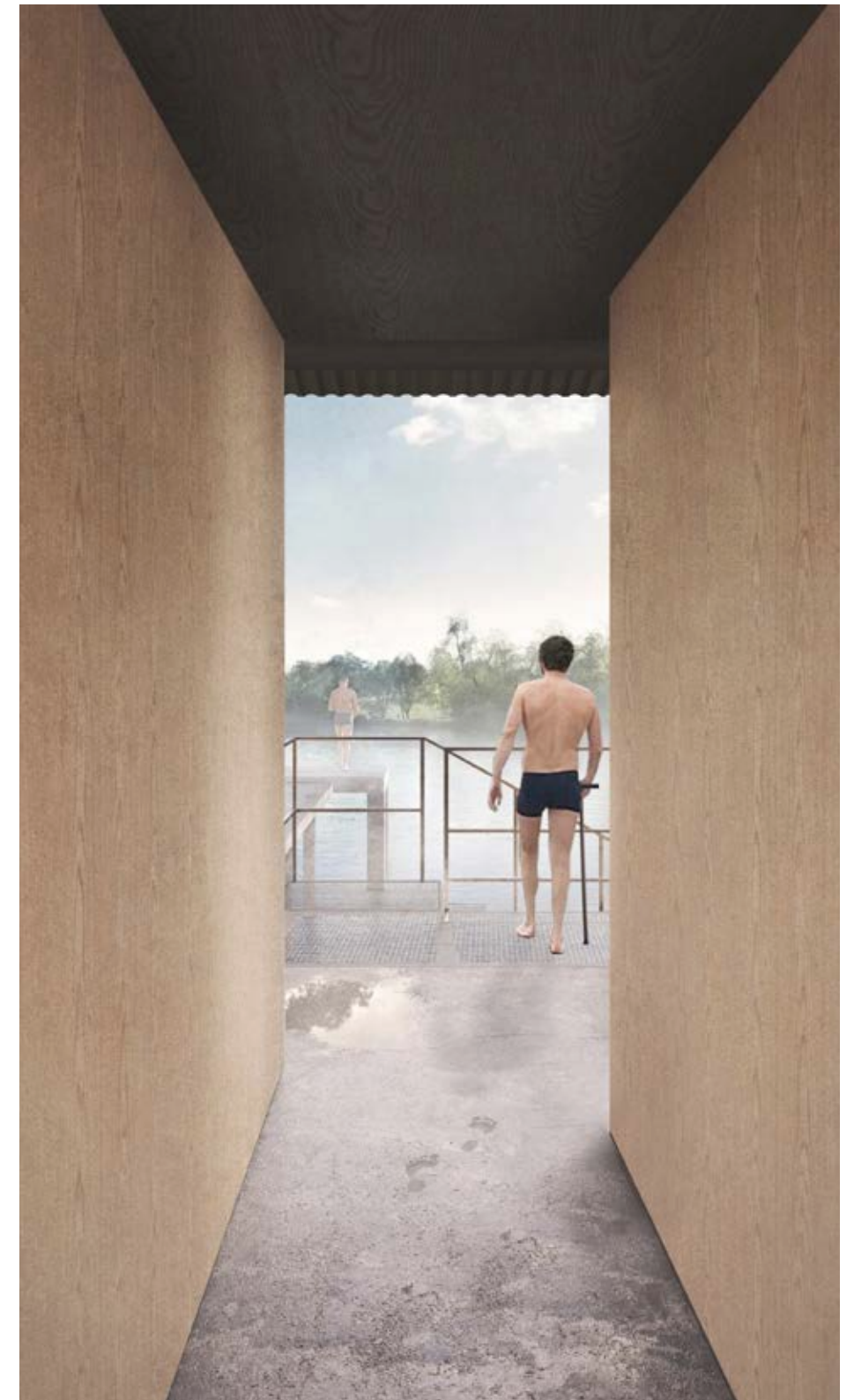
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View from the proposed pavilion at the Men's Pond

1.00 INTRODUCTION



Hampstead Heath

1.01 INTRODUCTION - Executive Summary

This report has been prepared by Zoë Polya-Vitry on behalf of the City of London to accompany a planning application for improvement works at the Men's, Mixed and Ladies' bathing Ponds on Hampstead Heath, underpinned by three key principles:

- Inclusive Access
- Security
- Safety

The designs have been developed with a focus on being "light-touch", to have minimal impact on the natural setting of the Heath, whilst making a significant change to the users who may not be able to enjoy the bathing facilities as they should in the current context.

The core of the matter is the City of London's wish for everyone to enjoy the uniqueness of the bathing ponds; this is what underpins the works proposed in this submission.

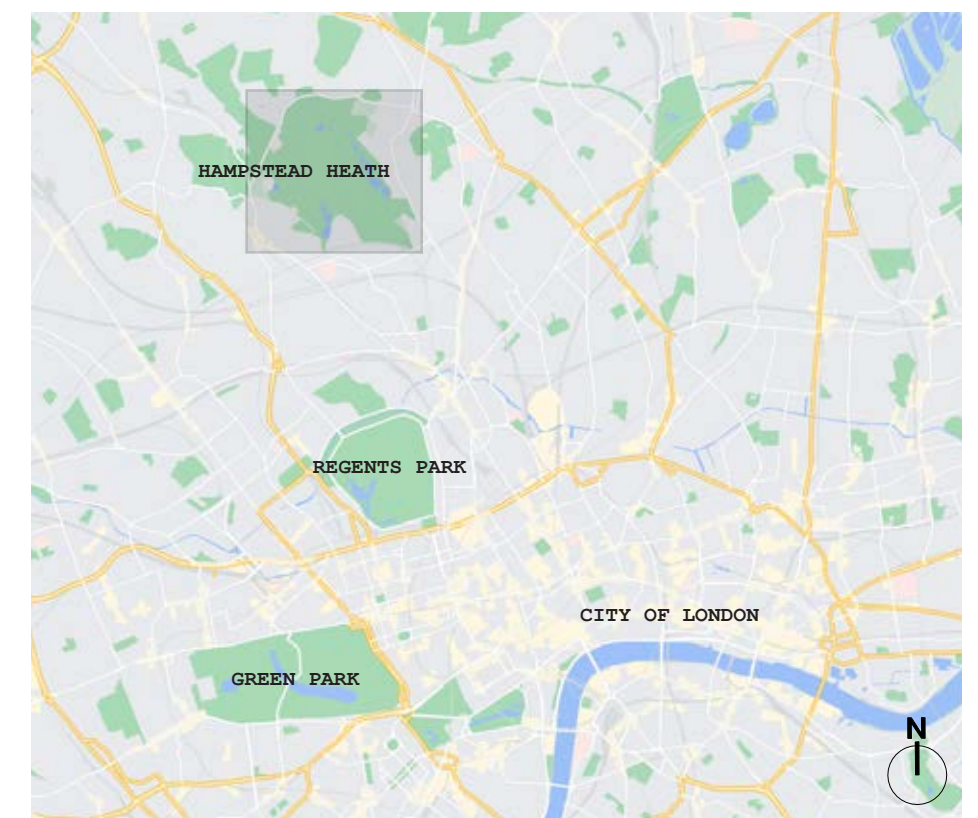


Aerial photo of Hampstead Heath

1.02 INTRODUCTION - Site Context

Hampstead Heath is a public open space of enormous local and regional importance and the largest open space in northwest London and receives over 7 million visitors a year. There are around thirty ponds on the Heath, all of which are man-made, built as reservoirs for drinking water around 300 years ago and fed by natural springs. Other than acting as reservoirs, the ponds also contribute to the Heath's diverse wildlife habitats and provide much-loved open-water swimming facilities.

This application focuses on Highgate Men's, Kenwood Ladies' and Hampstead Mixed Bathing Ponds.



Map of Central London showing location

1.03 INTRODUCTION - Planning Context

A 'Planning Statement & Community Consultation Report' has been produced by Metropolis and accompanies this application.

The planning context for the application is summarised below:

Planning Context

Hampstead Heath lies mostly within the London Borough of Camden with the adjoining Hampstead Heath Extension and Golders Hill Park within the London Borough of Barnet administrative boundary.

Hampstead Heath is a public open space of enormous local and regional importance, which is recognised by its designation as Metropolitan Open Land and Open Space. The Proposed Development lies wholly within the London Borough of Camden administrative area.

The development plan for the Proposed Development, therefore, comprises the:

- London Plan 2021
- Camden Local Plan 2017

The Heath is a Site of Metropolitan Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC).



1.02 BRIEF - Summary of Brief

Zoë Polya-Vitry was appointed in Summer 2021 following a City of London review of the Swimming Facilities on Hampstead Heath, namely:

- Highgate Men's Bathing Pond
- Kenwood Ladies' Bathing Pond
- Hampstead Mixed Bathing Pond

The review had identified a series of Capital Works necessary to improve safety, access and security across the Bathing Ponds.

The brief is to create inclusive layouts which will enable ambulant disabled and wheelchair users to enjoy these unique bathing facilities whilst retaining the natural feel of each venue.

The intention is to incorporate any environmental benefits which would compliment the Heath's wider aspirations for sustainability and biodiversity.

3.00 SITE HISTORY

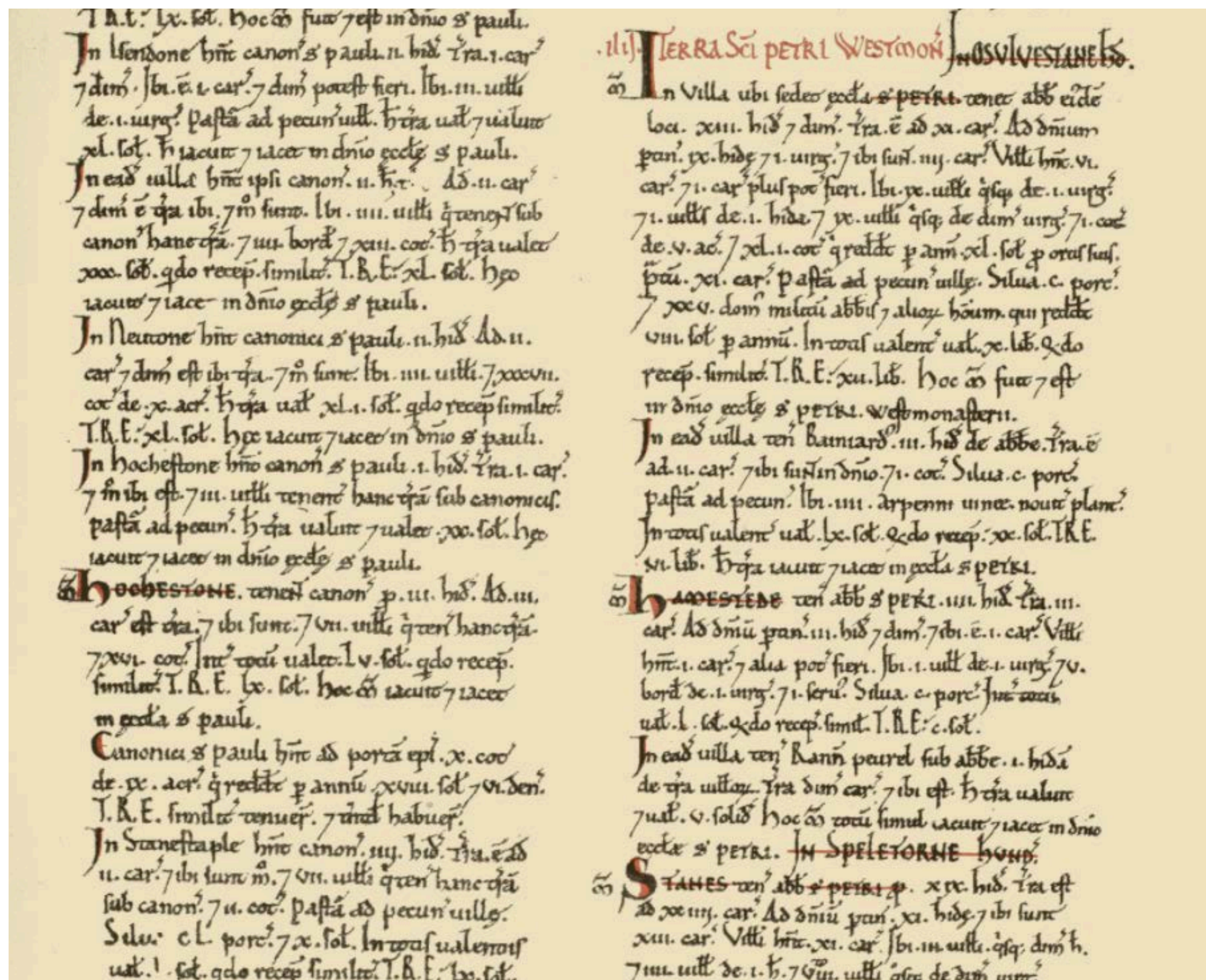
3.01 SITE HISTORY - History of the Heath

The Heath first entered the history books in 986 when Ethelred the Unready granted one of his servants five hides of land at "Hemstede". This same land is later recorded in the Domesday Book of 1086, where the word "Hemstede" is underlined in red in the second column, as held by the monastery of St. Peter's at Westminster Abbey, and by then is known as the "Manor of Hampstead".

Westminster held the land until 1133 when control of part of the manor was released to one Richard de Balta; then during Henry II's reign the whole of the manor became privately owned by Alexander de Barentyn, the King's butler. Manorial rights to the land remained in private hands until the 1940s when they lapsed under Sir Spencer Pocklington Maryon Wilson.

Over time, plots of land in the manor were sold off for building, particularly in the early 19th century, though the heath remained mainly common land. The main part of the heath was acquired for the people by the Metropolitan Board of Works. Parliament Hill was purchased for the public for £300,000 and added to the park in 1888. Golders Hill was added in 1898 and Kenwood House and grounds were added in 1928.

The City of London Corporation has managed the Heath since 1989.



Extract from the Domesday Book, 1086.



John Constable, Hampstead Heath with pond and bathers, 1821

3.02 SITE HISTORY - History of Heath Bathing

The Hampstead Water Company dug the Hampstead Ponds in the early part of the 18th Century for use as fresh-water reservoirs supplying a large part of North London. The iron-rich water of the springs was popular, and Hampstead Heath became a fashionable destination. Liking it to a spa, people came to 'take the waters'.

Around 1777, the Vale of Health Pond was created, together with another series of six ponds (the Highgate chain).

It is not known when people first began swimming in the ponds, but it is thought William Blake was referring to bathing in the Hampstead ponds in his poem Jerusalem written sometime between 1804-1820. He writes: 'The Ponds where boys to bathe delight'.

At a similar time, John Constable painted Hampstead Heath, with Pond and Bathers, 1821 which depicts bathers enjoying wild swimming.

Over the years, the Heath and its ponds have provided inspiration to countless local writers, poets and artists who have immortalised this beautiful site in words and images. In 1961, Sylvia Plath, then living in Primrose Hill, mentions the ponds in her poem Parliament Hill Fields calling them the 'linked ponds'.

3.03 SITE HISTORY - History of the Bathing Ponds

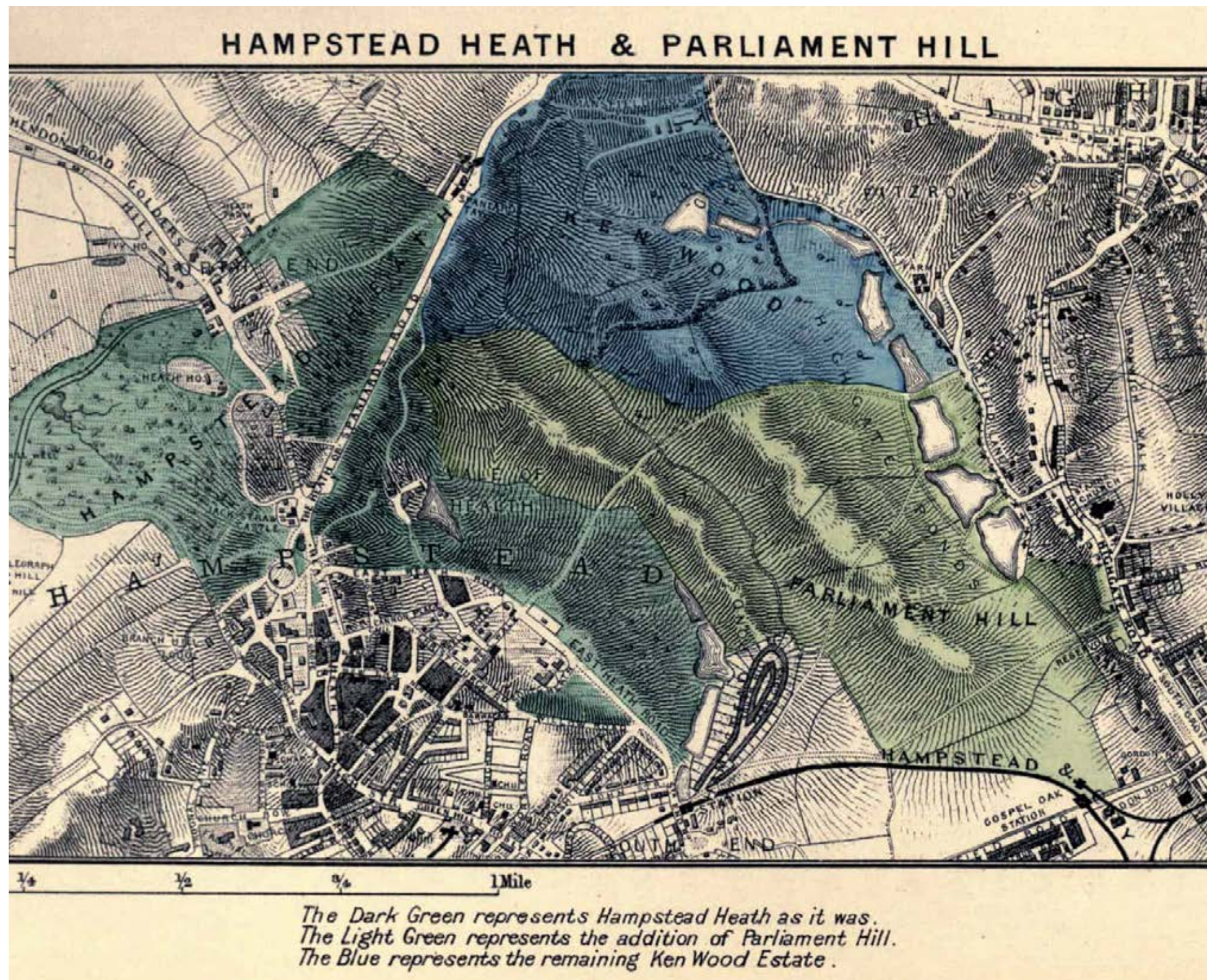
Swimming in the ponds is a long established tradition, but only became formally permitted at the Men's Pond in the 1890s and at the Kenwood Ladies' Bathing Pond in 1926.

Following the passing of the Baths and Washhouses Act in 1846, the first public swimming bath opened in 1849, and within three years there were seven in London. Swimming became more popular, with the ponds on the Heath attracting increasing numbers.

In 1884 the Mixed Bathing Pond was in use for swimming, but without facilities of any kind. Clothes were simply left on the bank. By 1889 the Metropolitan Board of Works had provided a shed for changing.

The Men's Pond was opened for swimming on 1 May 1893. A bathing shed, diving stage and platform were provided.

The Kenwood Ladies' Bathing Pond opened to the public in 1926.



Hampstead Heath & Parliament Hill (1894), with the additions colour-coded

4.00 HIGHGATE MEN'S POND

4.01 MEN'S POND - Existing Site

The Highgate Men's Pond (TQ27855 86576) is situated on the eastern side of Hampstead Heath.



Aerial photo of Highgate Men's Bathing Pond



Aerial photo of Hampstead Heath



1. Changing compound



2. WC block



3. Lifeguards' hut

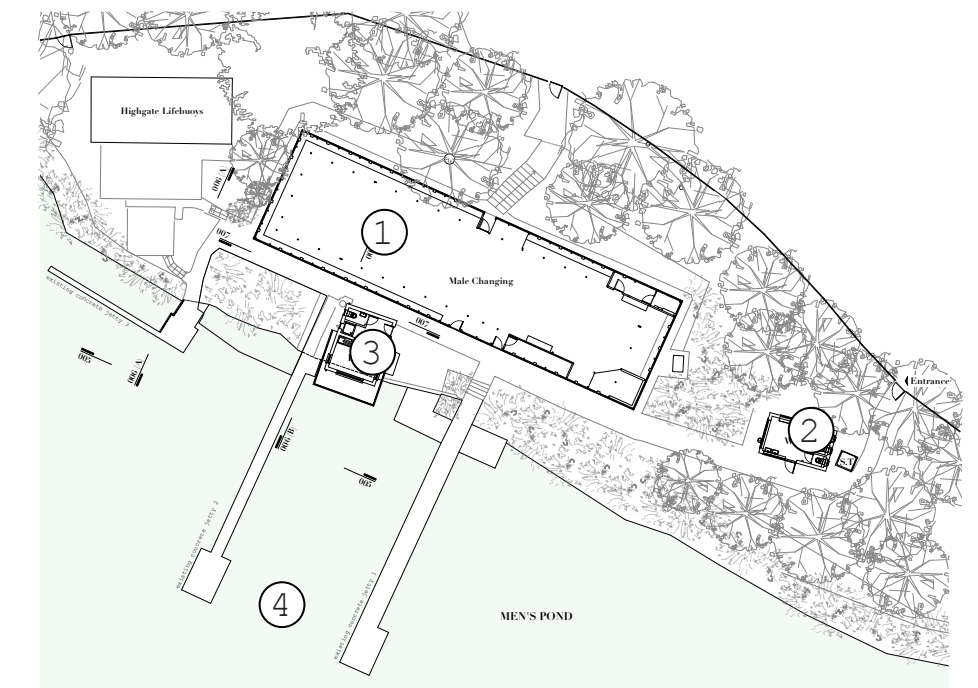


4. Concrete jetty

4.02 MEN'S POND - Existing Buildings

The existing buildings and structures on the site are as follows:

- a single-storey corrugated metal enclosure with a perimeter overhang forms the changing compound
- a single-storey timber clad building with a concrete platform is used for the lifeguards' hut
- a small brick building with a tiled roof housing the toilets
- three concrete jetties

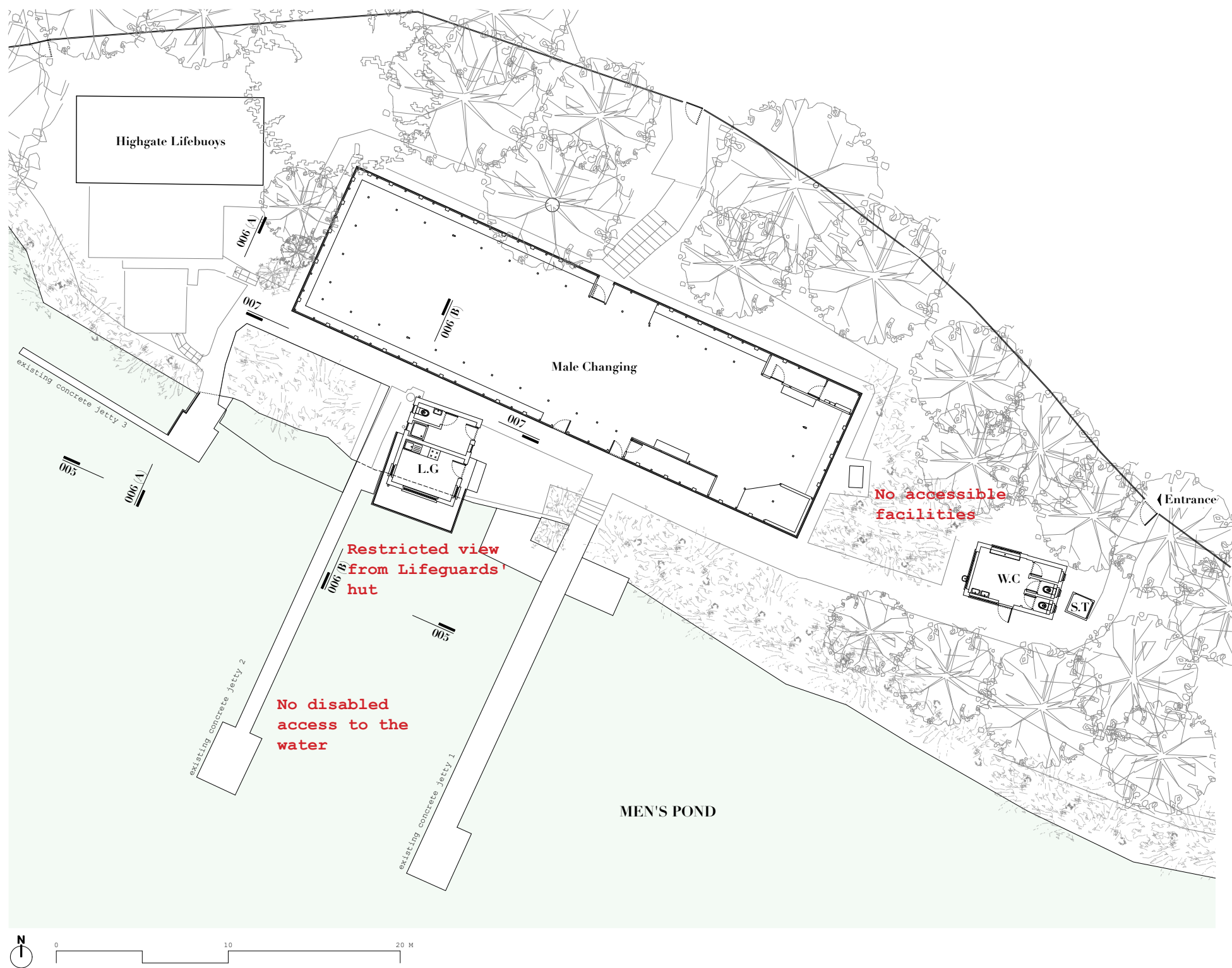


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4.03 MEN'S POND - Constraints

Following an 'Accessibility improvements Concepts appraisal' undertaken by the Access Consultant (IDACS) and site visits by the Design Team, the following access constraints on the site have been identified:

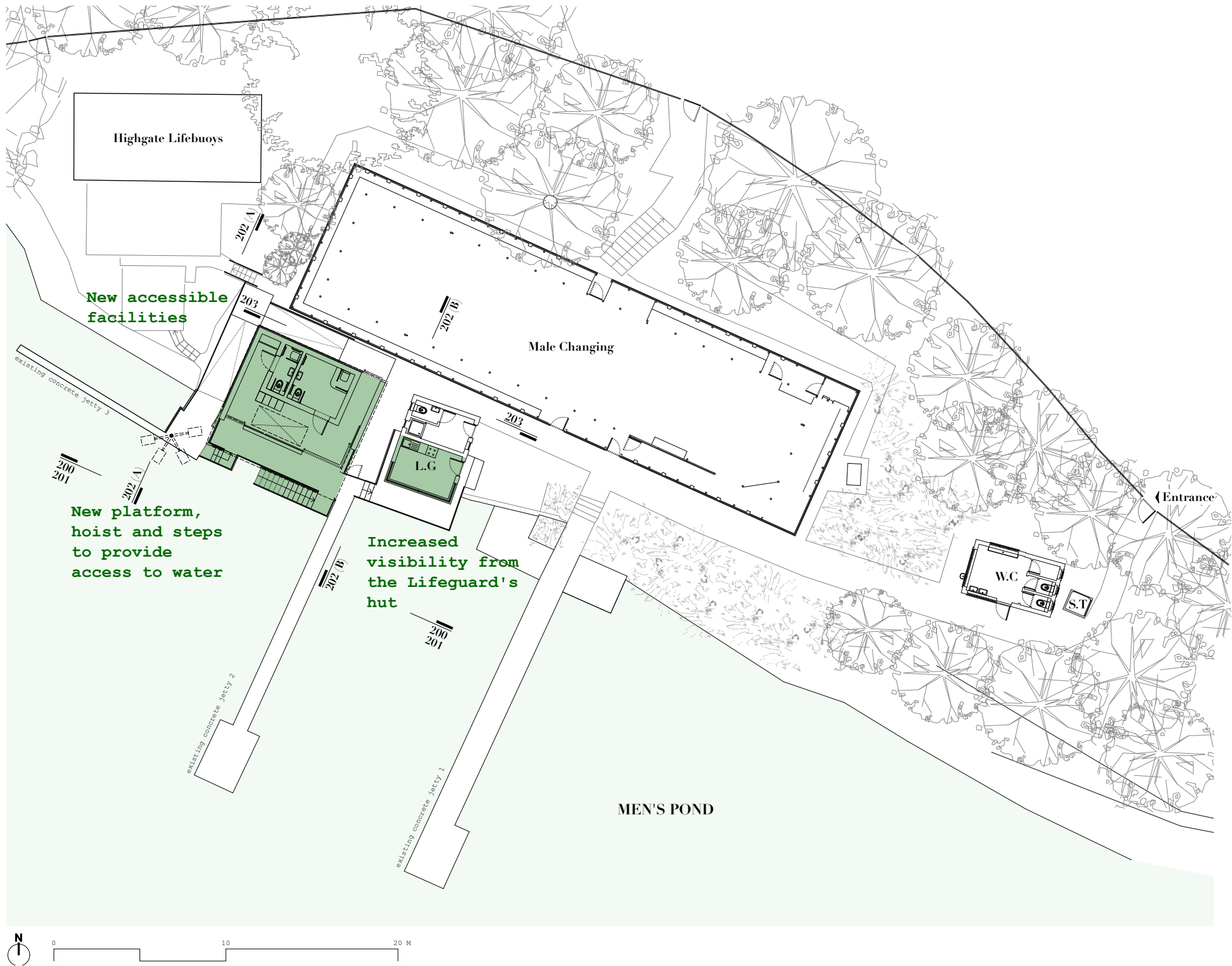
- The existing changing and showering areas are communal and there is a single step up into the existing showers. No specific changing or showering facilities are provided for wheelchair users and ambulant disabled people
- There are two existing WCs available for swimmers, however neither are adapted to meet the needs of wheelchair users and ambulant disabled people
- The only access to the water is via the concrete jetties, none of which provide suitable access for wheelchair users and ambulant disabled people
- The lifeguards' hut is located adjacent to the water's edge with a relatively restricted visibility.



4.04 MEN'S POND - Opportunities

Working alongside the Access Consultant, the following opportunities have been identified, in order to make the facilities more accessible:

- Creating wheelchair and ambulant accessible changing, showering and toilet facilities within a new 'pavilion' building adjacent to the water
- Creating wheelchair access to the water via a new ramp to an existing concrete platform with a new hoist
- Creating ambulant access to the water via a set of new steps adjacent to the new building
- Creating a direct route from the lifeguards' platform to the new accessible facilities and hoist
- Increasing visibility from the lifeguards' hut with an enlarged window

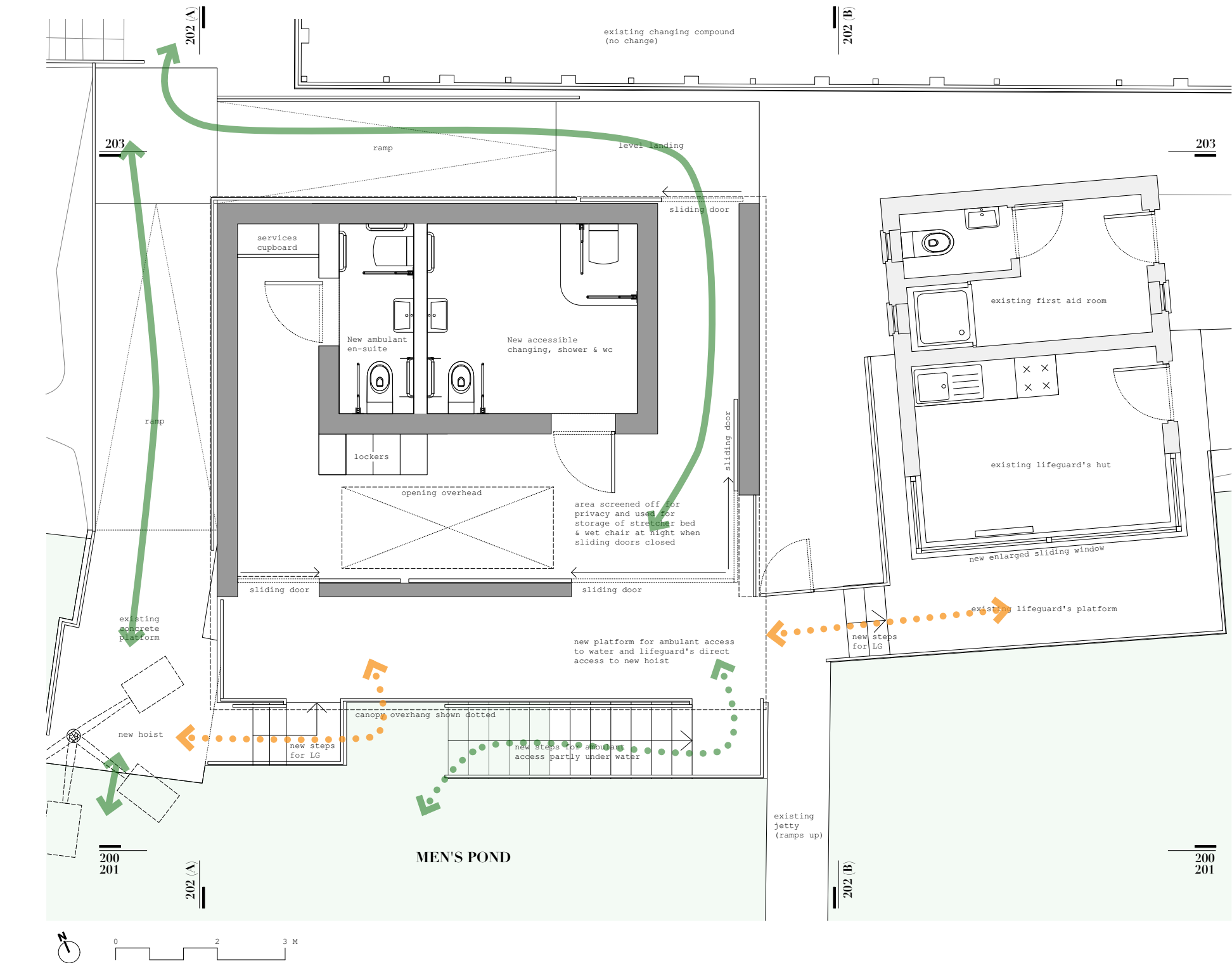


4.05 MEN'S POND - Proposed Uses

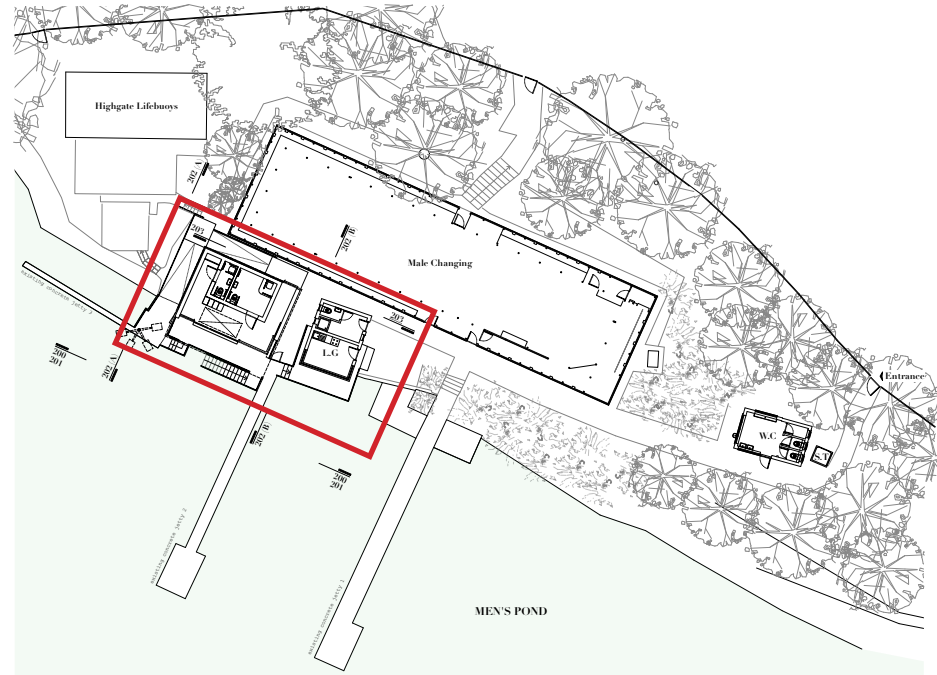
The new facilities are proposed to be housed in a new 'pavilion' building.

They new building provides the following:

- a dedicated accessible changing, shower and wc
- a separate ambulant accessible changing, shower and wc
- outdoor area with lockers for prosthetic limbs - this area is partly screened off and can be closed off at night with sliding doors to provide secure storage of equipment



Sketch proposal for the new pavilion to house new accessible facilities



Key:

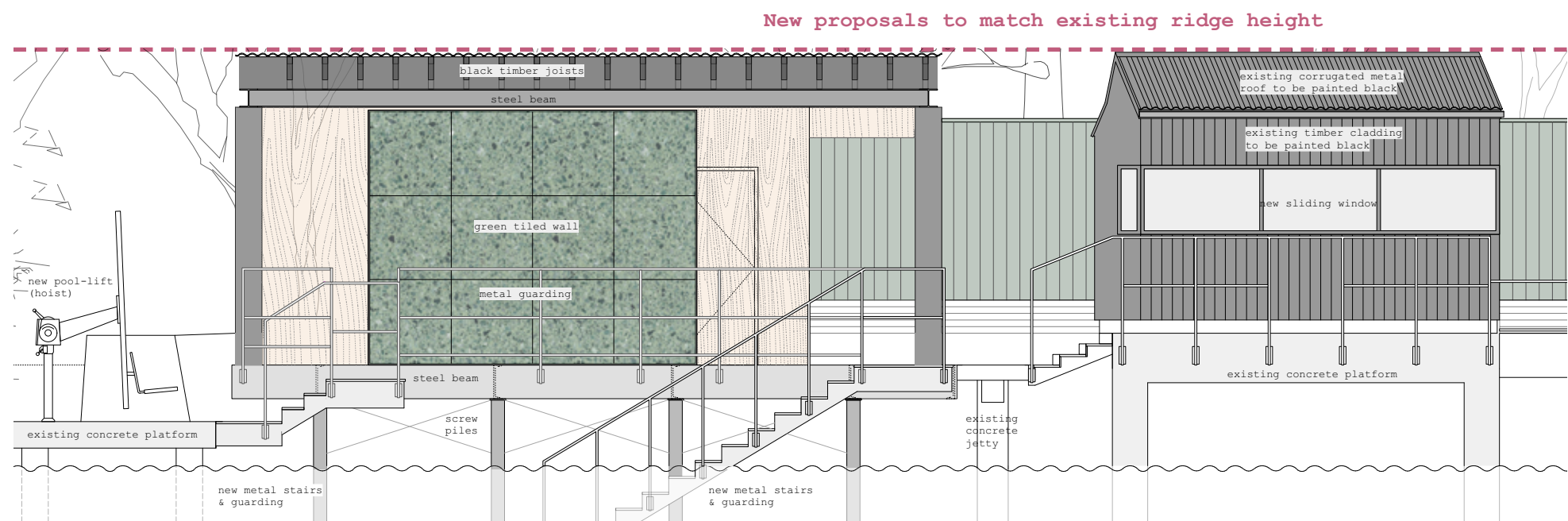
4.06 MEN'S POND - Scale & Massing

The new facilities are to be housed in a single-storey pavilion, which will be of a similar scale to the adjacent lifeguards' building.

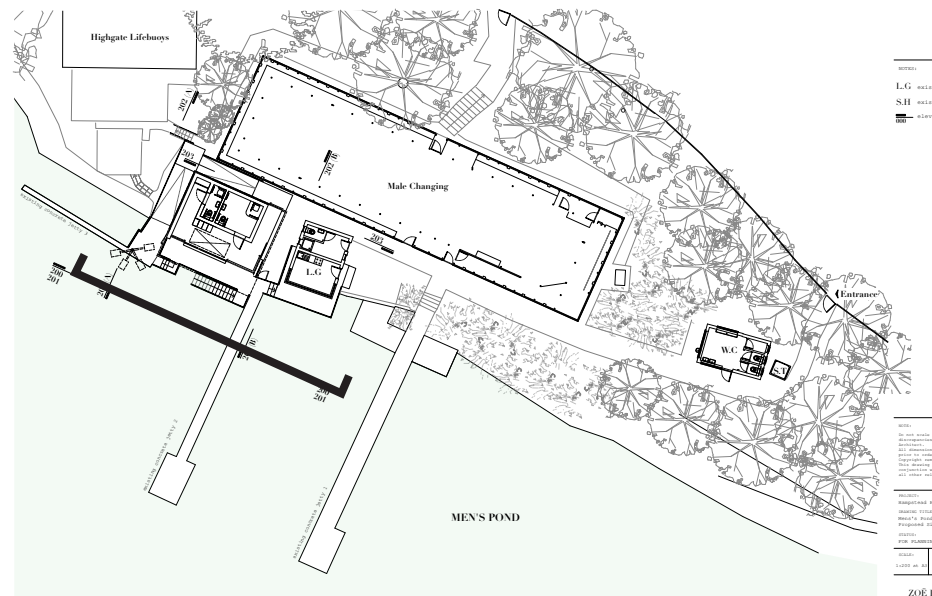
The new pavilion has been designed for specific needs and its layout and size, informed by the requirements for accessible changing, shower & wc described in the Sports England guidance.

The new pavilion is expressed as a simple single-pitched volume, which opens up towards the water. It has been conceived as a light structure hovering over the pond's bank, with a delicate undulating roof floating above a timber enclosure.

A set of steel stairs and metal mesh platforms link the two structures thereby providing visual link and a direct route for the lifeguards along the water front.



Proposed south elevation of the new pavilion showing its roof being no higher than the existing building



Key:

4.07 MEN'S POND - Appearance & Materials

The materials for the new pavilion have been chosen to complement the existing structures on site and for them to remain secondary to the ever-changing colours of the Heath's landscape.

The external walls of the new pavilion are to be clad in black timber, rendering it recessive against the backdrop of trees. The existing lifeguard's hut is to be painted black to visually link the two buildings, in addition to the stairs and viewing platforms physically linking them. Corrugated metal has been selected for the new roof for its durability but also to be in keeping with corrugated roofs and structures already on site.

Within the new pavilion, a fixed screen separates the circulation space from the viewing platform. It is proposed to surface this plane with green coloured textured tiles. The reflective nature of the tiles will capture the reflections bouncing off the water, whilst the small scale of the texture will mimic the foliage of the surrounding trees. Internally, the walls of the semi-outdoor spaces will be lined in natural timber to provide warmth and a connection to the surrounding woodland. Brushed concrete is proposed for the new paths; the natural colour of the concrete combining with the durability and slip-resistant nature of the brushed finish.

The aspiration is to use components containing recycled materials where feasible.



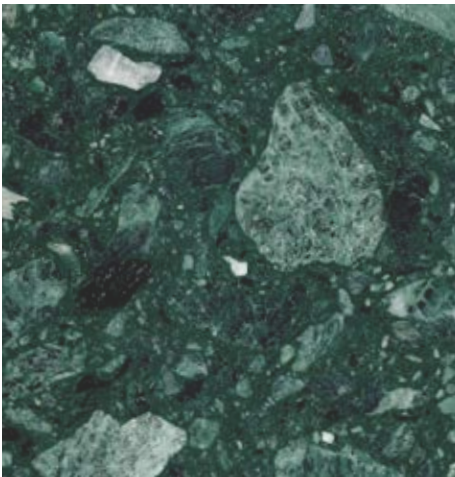
Black tinted/stained timber cladding for new external walls



Black corrugated steel roof



Birch plywood for new internal linings



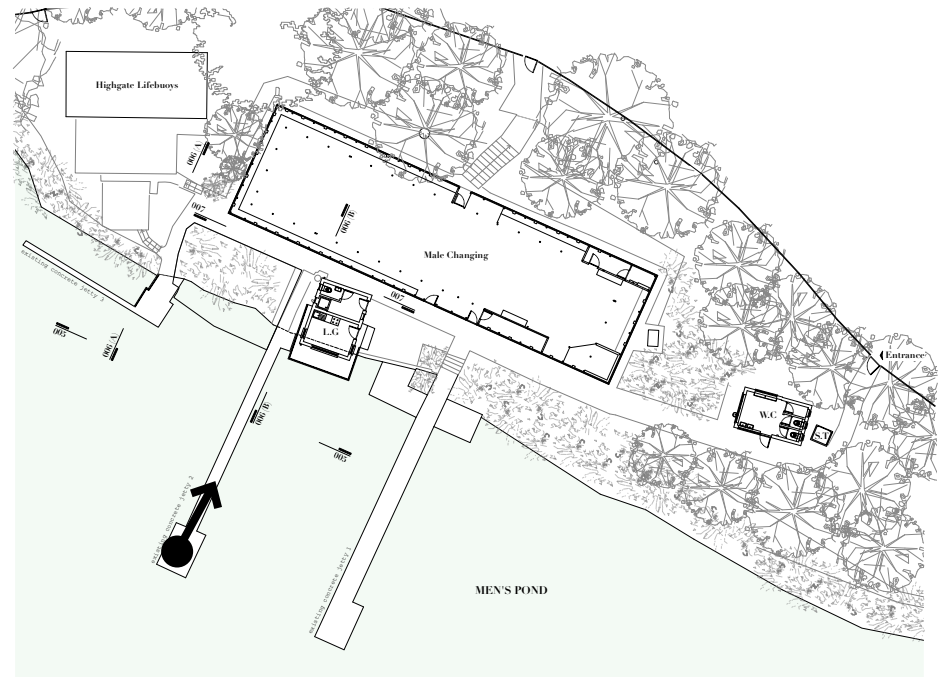
Green tiles for screen & brushed concrete paths

4.08 MEN'S POND - Existing View

The view to the left is from the concrete jetty looking towards the new facilities.



Existing view



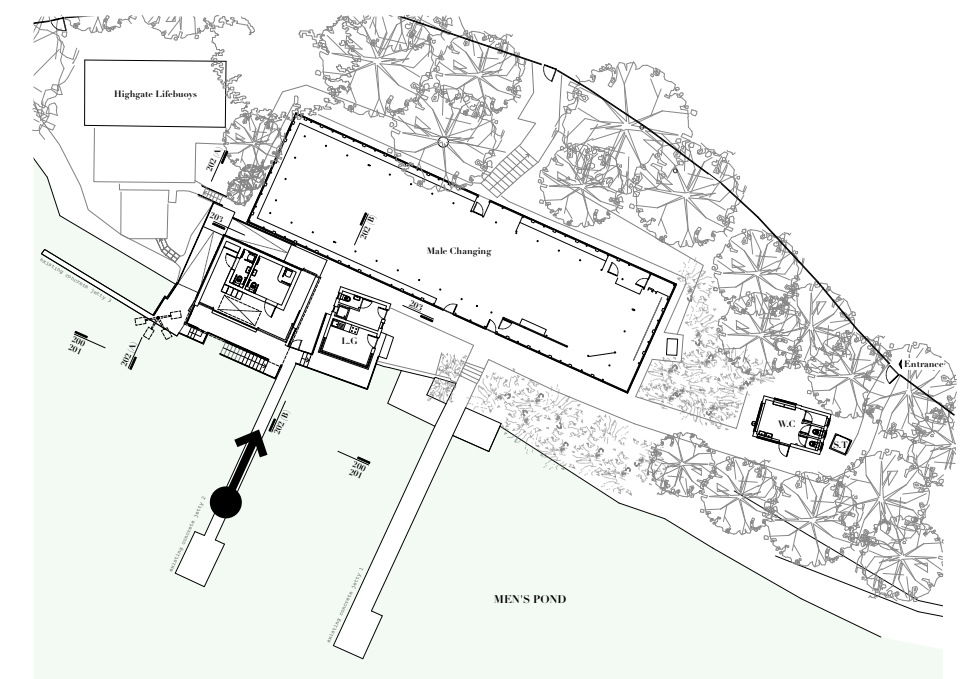
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Proposed view

4.09 MEN'S POND - Proposed View

The view to the left is an artist's impression of what the new bathing facilities will look like.



Key:

5.00 HAMPSTEAD MIXED POND

5.01 MIXED POND - Existing Site

The Hampstead Mixed Bathing Pond (TQ27221 86237) is located to the south-east edge of Hampstead Heath.



Aerial photo of Hampstead Mixed Bathing Pond



Aerial photo of Hampstead Heath



1. Female Changing Facilities



2. Male Changing Facilities



3. Existing WCs

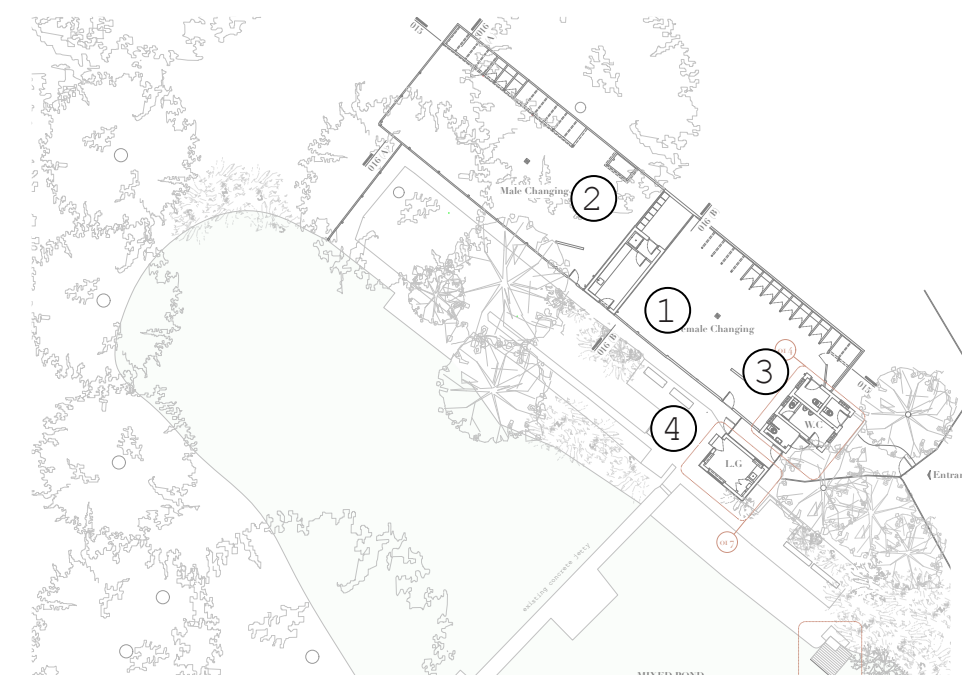


4. Lifeguards' hut

5.02 MIXED POND - Existing Buildings

The existing buildings and structures on the site are as follows:

- a series of single-storey metal, brick and timber clad buildings, painted black, housing separate male and female changing facilities
- male, female & accessible WCs
- the lifeguards' hut
- staff facilities
- one concrete jetty



Key: