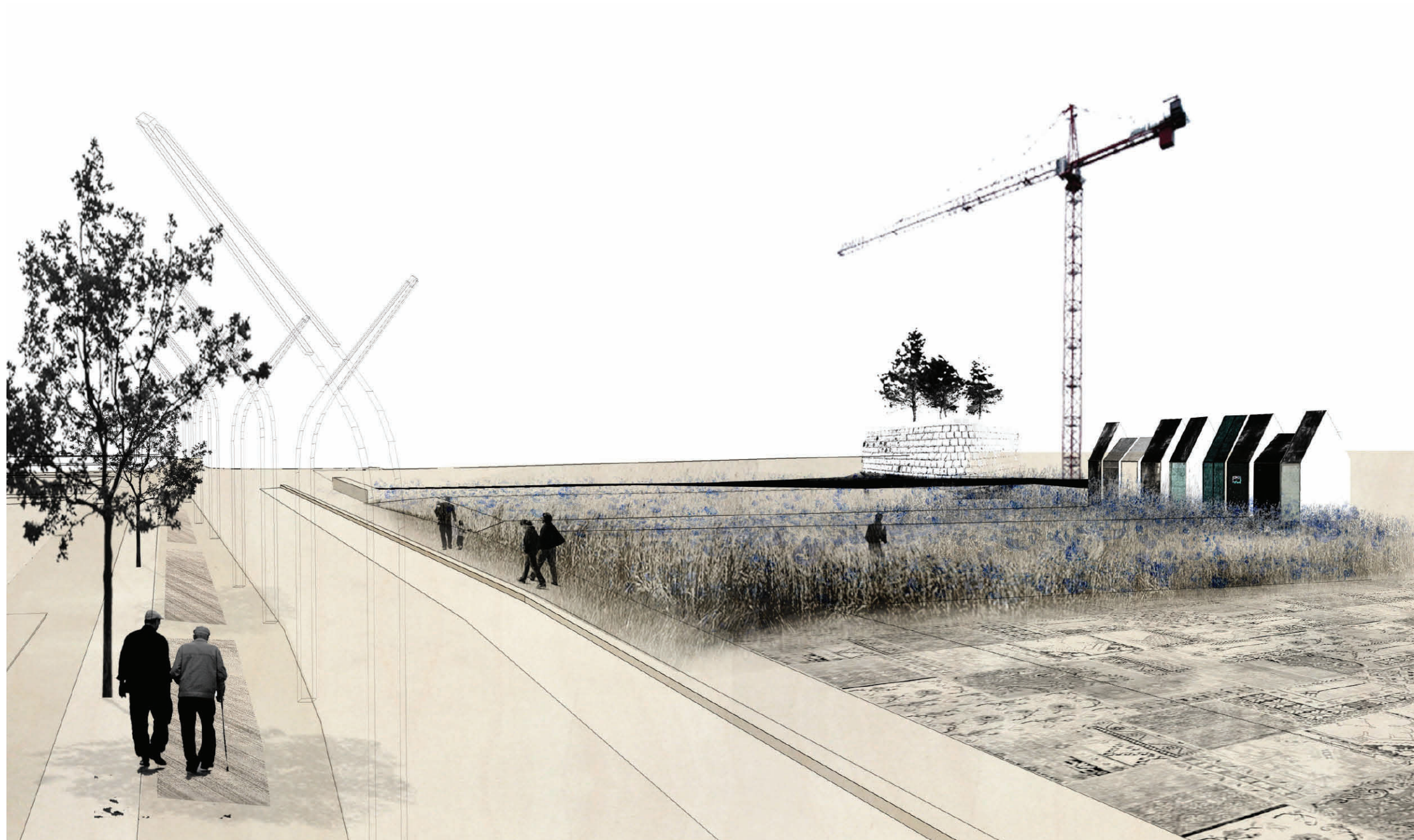


# SOW - SEW



## SITE CONTEXT & DESIGN CONCEPT

A city built on textiles, Manchester's urban roots lie in fields of flax. Before the influx of imported cotton locally grown flax cultivated the industrial patchwork of a landscape we see in the City today. With the site's historic link to the textile industry SOW-SEW proposes a re-introduction of these fields of flax as a propagator for artisan communities, academic researchers, amblers, rambblers, twitchers and more. As material production and industries return to the concept of 'localism' in their sourcing, the fields of flax promotes the notion of an urban agriculture and cottage industry that once began the building of Manchester.

## PROGRAMME

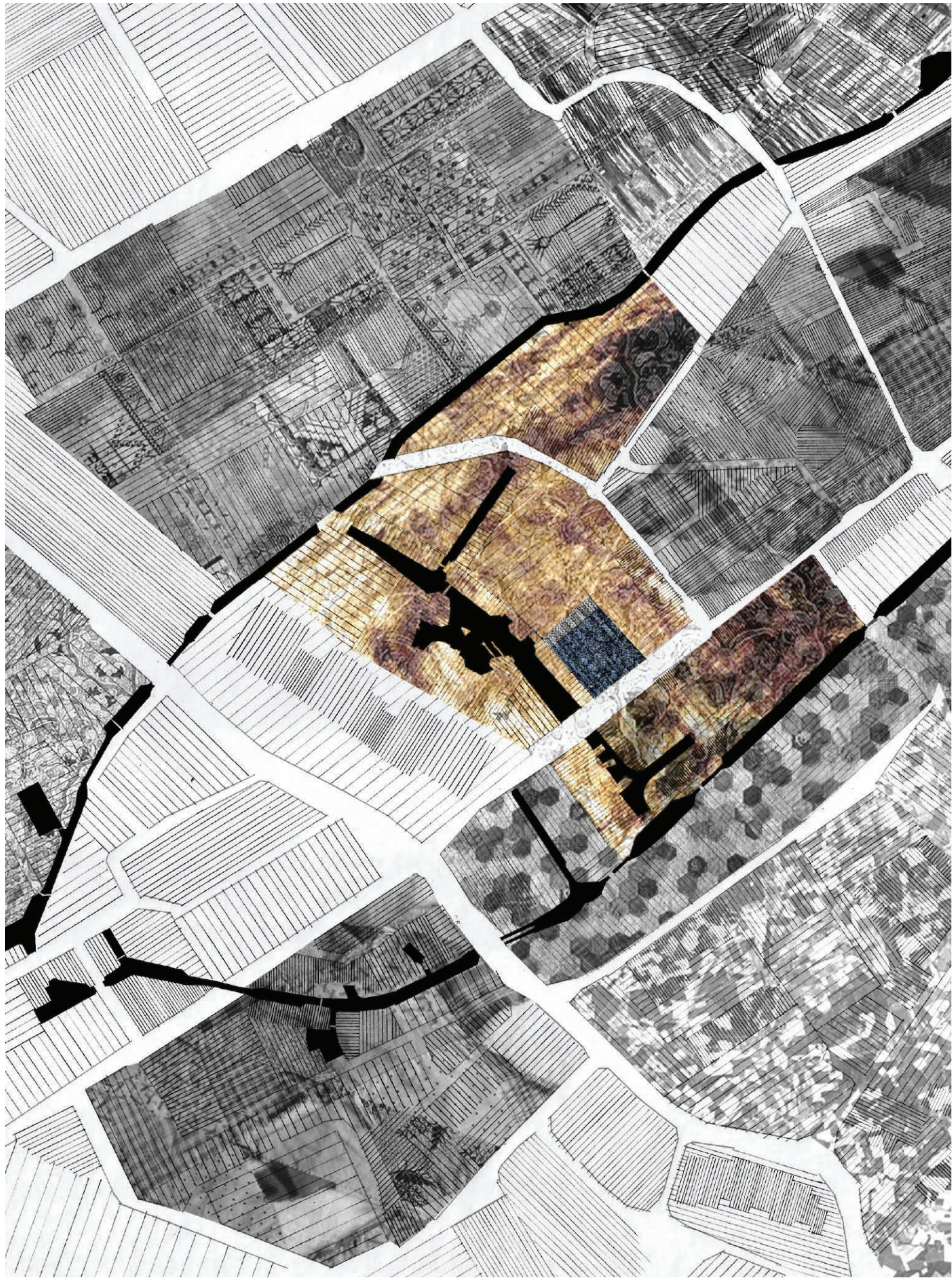
Located between field and canal, local weavers and craftspeople can occupy the 'off the shelf' sheds for a peppercorn rent. Neighbourly academics from the University of Manchester's School of Materials and the School of Agricultural and Forest Sciences at the University of Wales, Bangor invited to occupy this city research outpost to develop urban growing techniques and processing methods. For the local communities or passers-by pathways through the flax offer a mid-field picnic area for summertime sandwiches amongst the flowers and meander on toward the 'tea shed' at the water's edge.

## BIODIVERSITY

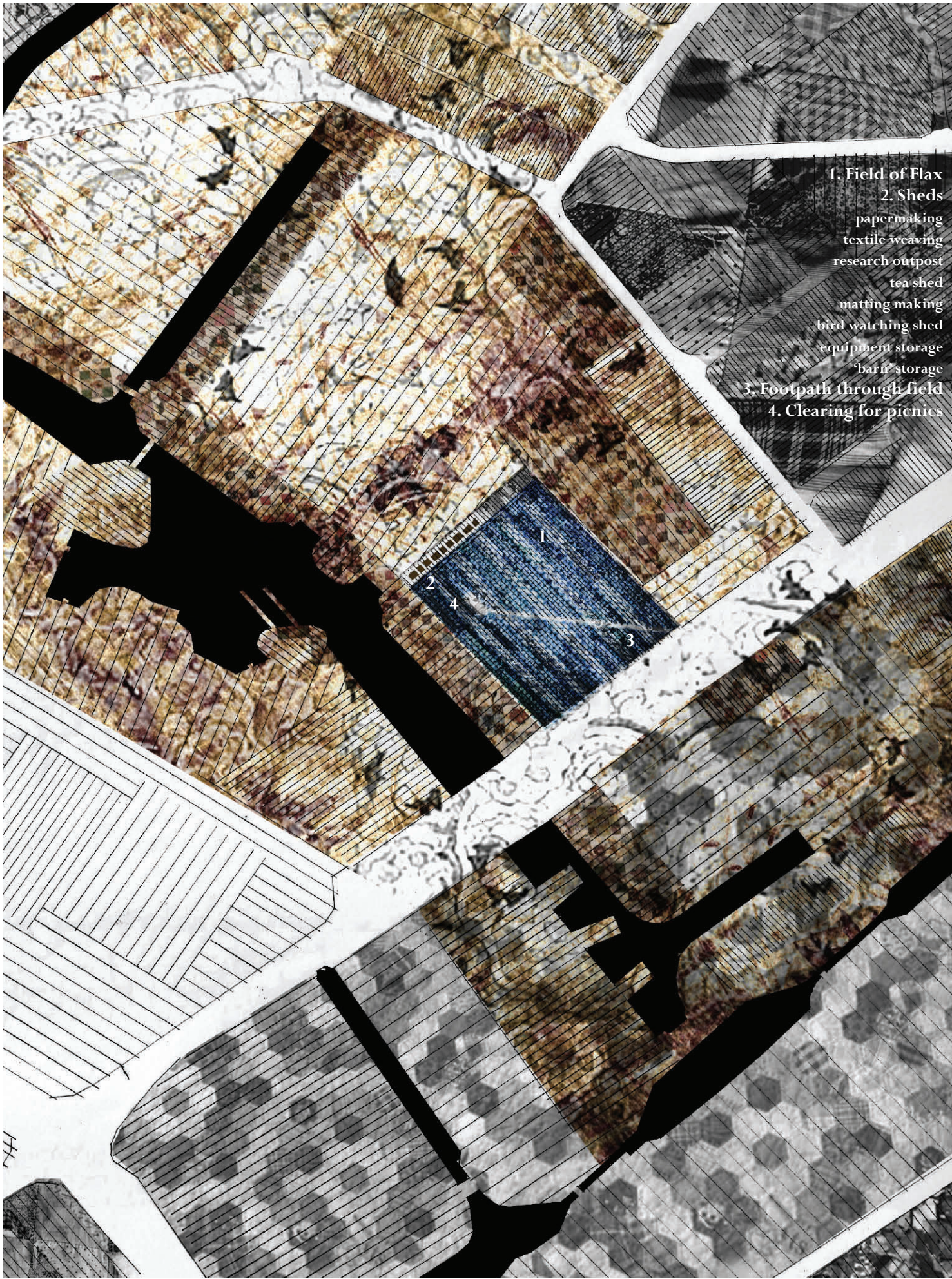
Softening the urban edges, from voluptuously ploughed worm rich earth clods to a blanket of blue and white flowers, the site, with its organically grown flax becomes a wonderfully diverse habitat edging the canals and pathways. Locals schools visit the outdoor education shed, twitchers occupy the bird-hide.

SITE LIFE COMPETITION, New Islington  
Chris Wilkins & Rachel Witham



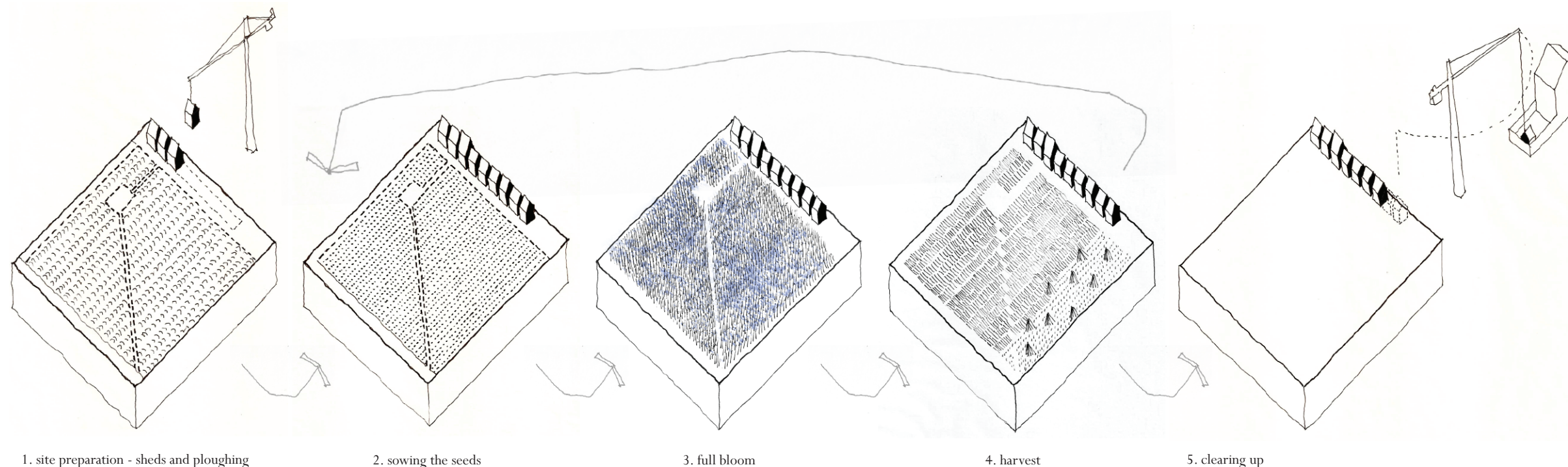


location plan



site plan





1. site preparation - sheds and ploughing

2. sowing the seeds

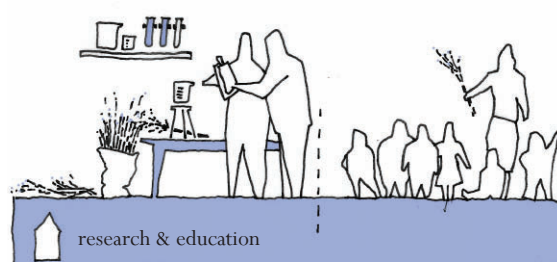
3. full bloom

4. harvest

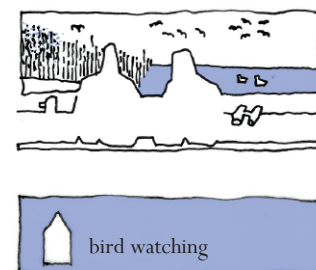
5. clearing up



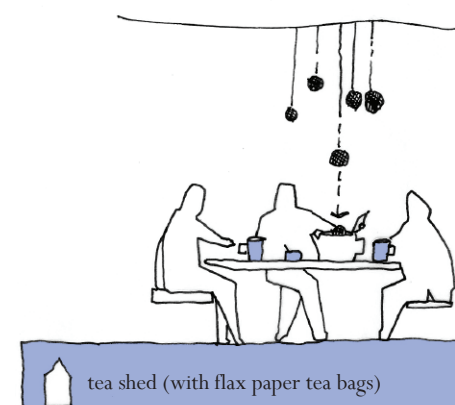
paper making



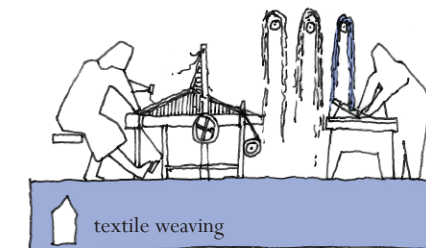
research & education



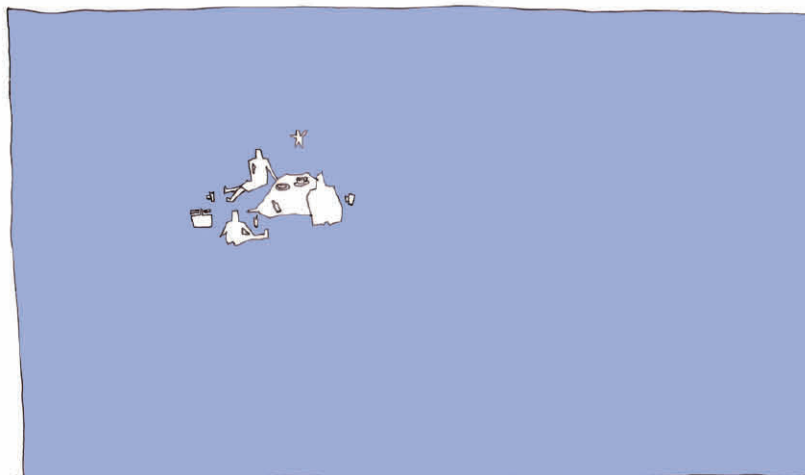
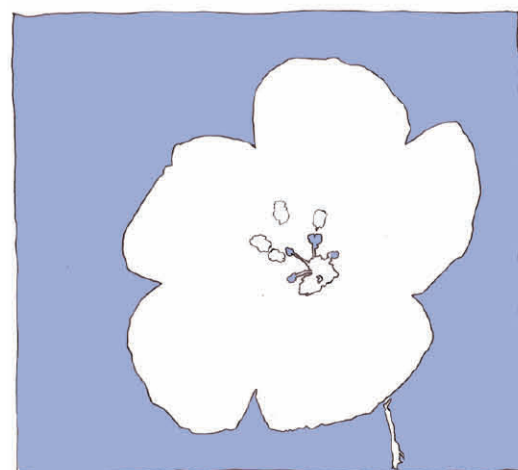
bird watching



tea shed (with flax paper tea bags)



textile weaving



## SITE LIFE & SEASONALITY

The re-introduction of the agricultural process to this most urban of sites acts as a marker of the passing seasons, the changing weathers on a subtly varying landscape. The early morning dog walker is greeted with wintertime mists passing over the frosty furrows of earth with views to the canal side community of artisans, sheds warmly lit with a wood burning stove. Each day the city commuter of springtime passes a seedling that little bit leafier until the summertime families and evening flauers promenade along Old Mill Street and through the sea of green and hazy blue. Autumn brings about a frantic harvest before the slow retreat to winter. Plough the earth and into the sheds to begin production, observation or creation.

Each season a new pattern is drawn by the preparation, growing and harvesting of the flax adding to the tapestry woven on to the site through hundreds of years of development. At the end of the year why not do it all over again or rotate our crop to another vacant lot in New Islington? When the site is ready for construction the wonderfully personalised sheds are craned off to provide community buildings within the development or into the back gardens of the new terraces. The site is ploughed, the soil improved by the cultivation and ready for its new beginning all in one day.

## ECONOMY

Funds for start-up and 'off the shelf' sheds to provide accommodation for a fledgling community are sought through the lure of a site in the city for a peppercorn rent encouraging artisan weavers, paper makers and tailors to take up residency in the heart of a vibrant community. Schools and research bodies contribute for their educational visits. Local residents, yearning for a patch of green in the city, makers in residence and visitors all encouraged to take ownership and contribute to some communal cultivation throughout the year.

## FLAX [*Linum usitatissimum*]

Annual, height: 50-100cm. 70-100 days to maturity. Produces fibres of great strength, fineness and durability. Once widely used in manufacture of textiles such as canvas and towelling, flax provides a more sustainable 'home grown' and less chemical and water intensive alternative to cotton. Now commonly used in the production of paper and insulation and in the automobile industry. Succession sowing prolongs the seasons enhancing the concept of legible landscaping staggering the theatre of sowing, harvesting and making.