

Austin-Smith: Lord

225052 Fort William Interchange Feasibility Study

August 2026

Contents

1. Context

- 1.1 Fort William - Area of Study
- 1.2 Site Context
- 1.3 Existing Facility

2. Initial Option review

- 2.1 Bus Station Typologies - Island Stances
- 2.2 Bus Station Typologies - DIRO (drive in reverse out)
- 2.3 Bus Station Typologies - DIDO Sawtooth
- 2.4 Feasibility Options
- 2.5 Progress to Date
- 2.6 Options - Nevis Terrace
- 2.7 Options - Existing Site
- 2.8 Options - Long term

3. Options & Phasing Concepts

- 3.1 Indicative Layout
- 3.2 Option 1 - Do Minimum
- 3.3 Option 2 - New Interchange on McFarlane Way

4. Final Options & Phasing Strategy

- 4.1 Proposed Plan
- 4.2 Phasing Strategy

5. Next Steps

- 5.1 Design Team Next Steps

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1. CONTEXT

Fort William - Area of Study

Introduction

This feasibility project was jointly commissioned by Hitrans and Highland council to review options for the improvement of Bus passenger experience in Fort William as part of a wider transport study and masterplan FW2040 being undertaken by Highland council.

The existing town bus station sits between the Railway Station and Morrisons supermarket, it has 8 stands (4 doubles) with a series of glazed shelters set back from the kerb edge. It currently handles around 60-80 departures per day depending on season.

The facility is accessed from Belford Way Northbound in a one way direction past the front of the station with exit via Macfarlane Way onto the main A82 roundabout. Southbound buses cannot enter the facility directly due to the existing junction geometry in front of the Hospital and have to travel to the main roundabout before turning back Northbound.

The main stands are timetabled for service buses only with Citylink, West Coast Motors, and Sheil Bus being the largest operators. The 8 stands are busy during peak hours but due to longer layovers and rural service patterns there are often only 2 departures per hour at off-peak times. During summer season Tour coaches will often use these stands if they are free to drop off passengers which can cause congestion of the stops for timetabled services.

The An Aird carpark adjacent to the site is used for tourist coach parking and more recently by Ember as a base for collection and drop off in addition to overnight charging, although more recently Embar have scheduled a service from Stand 8.

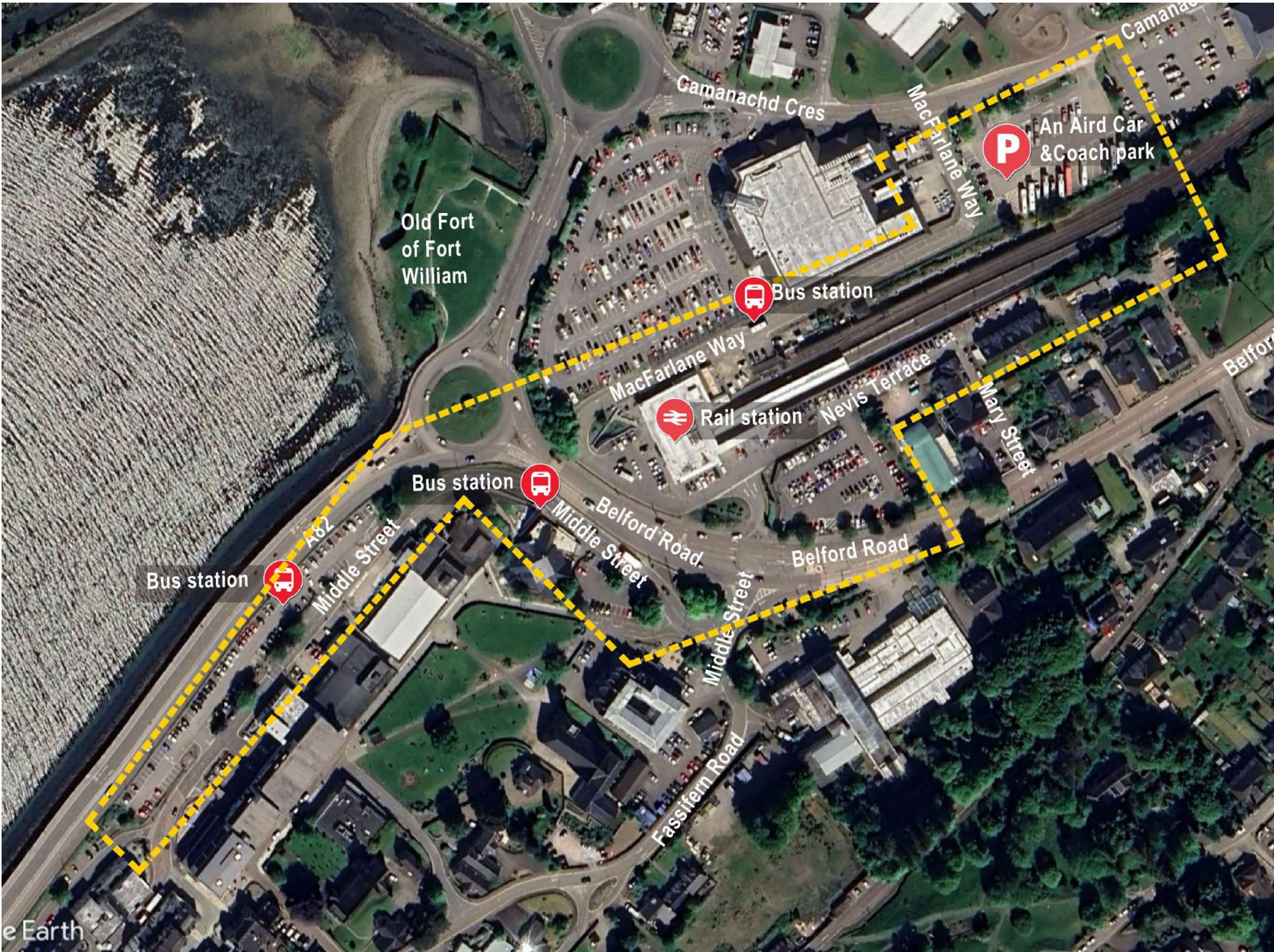
Shop Mobility sits behind the Station off Macfarlane way which is open to all vehicles which is not best practice as bus and coach manoeuvres are best separated from pedestrians and public cars wherever possible to increase safety and operational efficiency/ timetable accuracy.



Site Context

Whilst the siting of the Bus Station on Macfarlane way is convenient for the station and shopping Belford Road acts as a major severance between arrival by either Rail or Bus/ Coach with the High Street separated by 6 lanes of traffic which is currently crossed via an underpass subway with stepped and ramp access on both sides. This provides a poor passenger experience for the arriving visitor and coupled with the limited facilities and weather protection afforded by the shelters there is much room for improvement.

Whilst there is a single stop on Middle Street Southbound for local buses it occupies the full width of the pavement behind Nevis Sports with No corresponding Northbound stop until the one opposite the Leisure Centre on Belford Road.



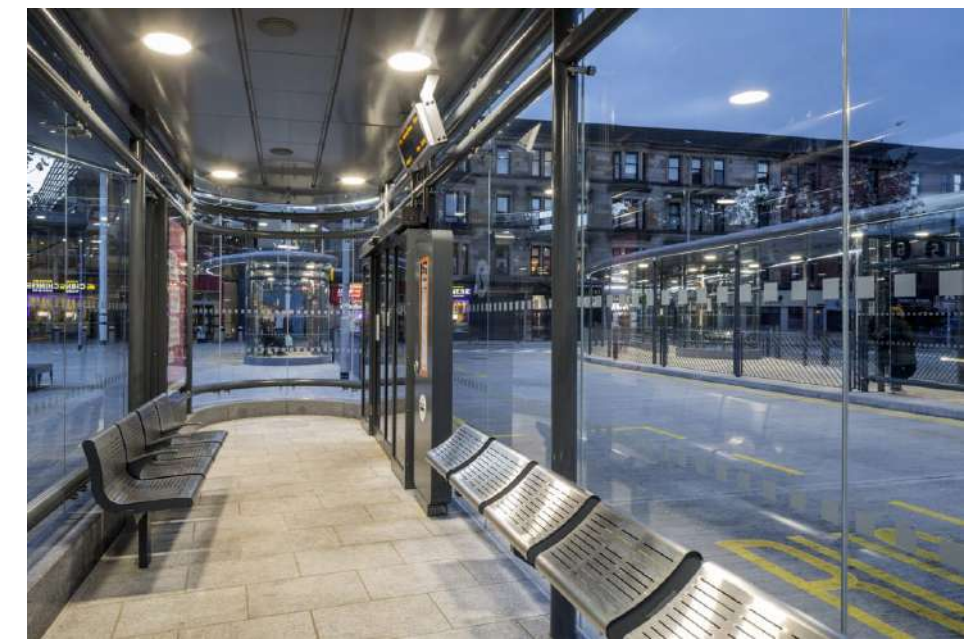
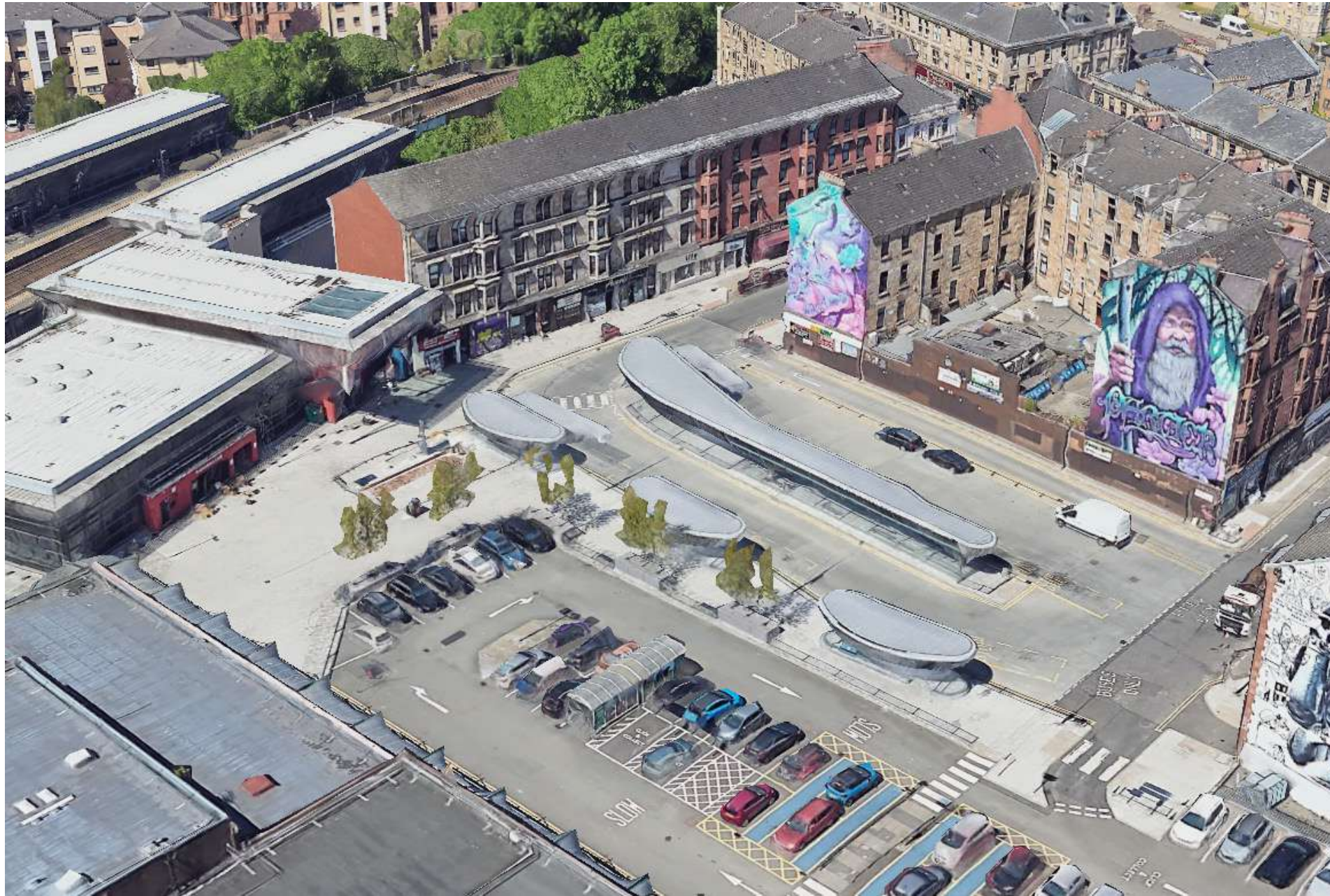
Existing Facility



2. INITIAL OPTIONS REVIEW

Bus Station Typologies – Island Stances

As the first activity of the study, we undertook a capacity review and search for sites that could be used to accommodate a similar sized facility in a location with better pedestrian connectivity with the town core. These were based around the 3 common bus station typologies: Island Stances, Drive in Reverse out / DIRO and Sawtooth layouts Drive Through / DIDO



Case Study : Partick Bus Station - Austin-Smith:Lord

Bus Station Typologies – DIRO (drive in reverse out)



Case Study : Wigan Bus Station - Austin-Smith:Lord



Bus Station Typologies – DIDO Sawtooth

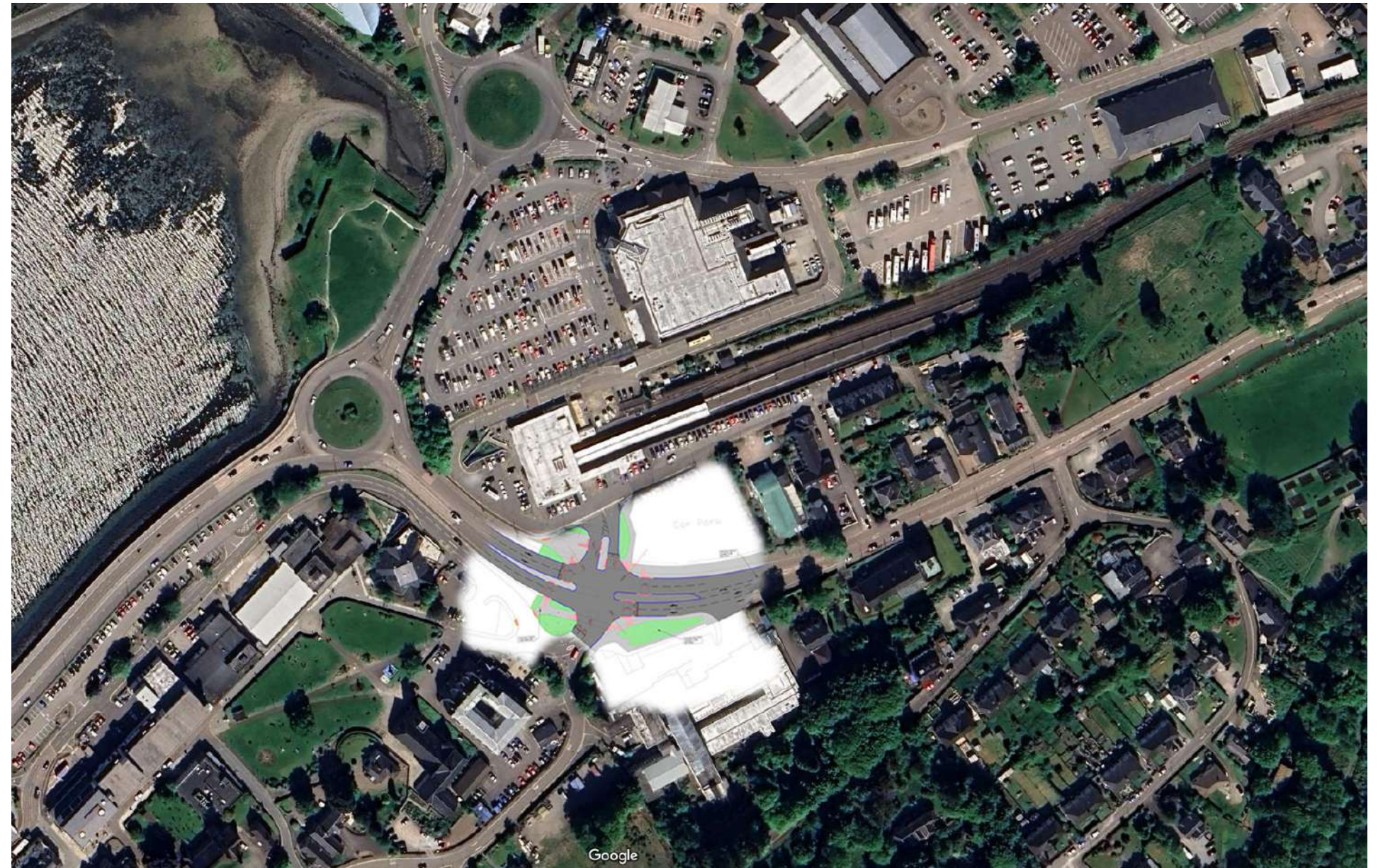


Case Study : Chester Bus Station - Austin-Smith:Lord

Feasibility Options

- ***Do Minimum – Improvements to the existing structure***
- ***Short Term – What can we do on the existing site***
- ***Long Term – Futureproof options for 2040 and beyond***

We approached the reviewed through the lens of timescale i.e. What can we do quickly as a do Minimum, what can we do in the Short-term utilising the existing suite and highway network and what may be possible in the longer term via the main masterplan in 2040 and beyond. In parallel and Aecom commissioned team have been looking at the Junction in front of Belford Hospital to allow Northbound access directly into the station frontage and to stream buses from general traffic improving the crossing for active travel and pedestrians.

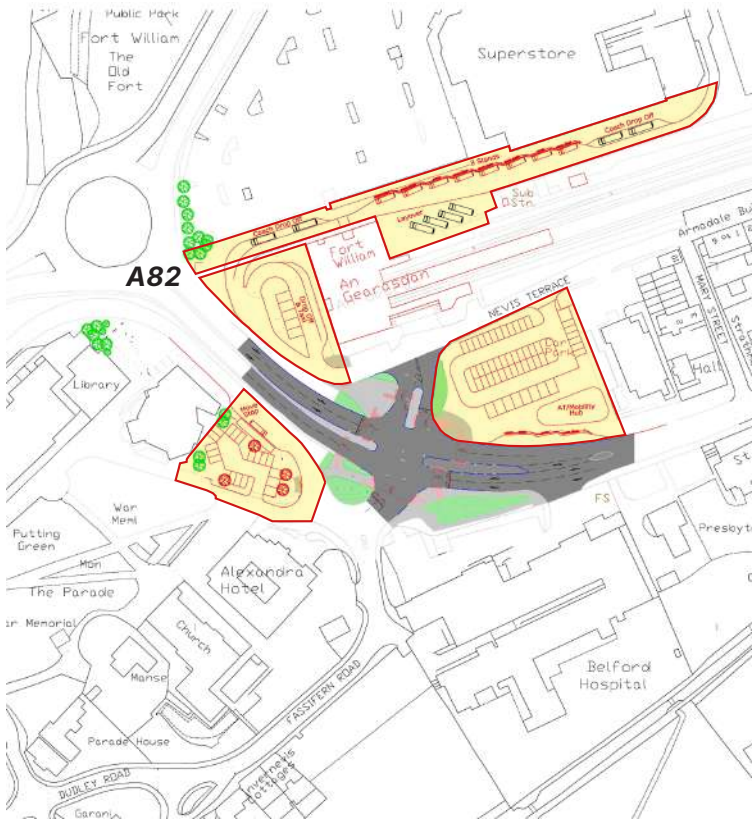


Progress to date

As part of the preparation for the feasibility we attended a public drop in event at the Nevis Centre to see what the public's priorities were for bus station improvements, these were focussed on the rain and wind ingress for passengers waiting in the shelters and boarding buses with the underpass also being mentioned as an unpleasant environment and a "barrier to bus use for the old and those with children".

FORT WILLIAM INTERCHANGE
IMPROVING FACILITIES AND CONNECTIONS

Indicative Alternative Layout



- Improved Northbound Stops on Belford Road
- Improved Southbound Stops on Belford Road
- New Drop off and Taxi area
- Increased Bus Capacity
- Better Passenger Comfort
- Layover provision
- Multiple operators in a single Interchange
- Coach Provision
- Improved junction with 2 way access into and out of the station forecourt



FORT WILLIAM INTERCHANGE
IMPROVING FACILITIES AND CONNECTIONS

Existing Bus Station Potential Improvements



- Enhanced flashings and weather protection
- CIS Information screens
- Automatic doors or Weather protection screens
- New seating
- CCTV
- Enhanced surfacing and drainage



Feasibility Review

In the initial feasibility site review we considered the following as possible locations for the Bus Station

1. The existing site on Macfarlane Way
2. The Nevis Terrace council carpark
3. Town side sites such as Middle Street Car park

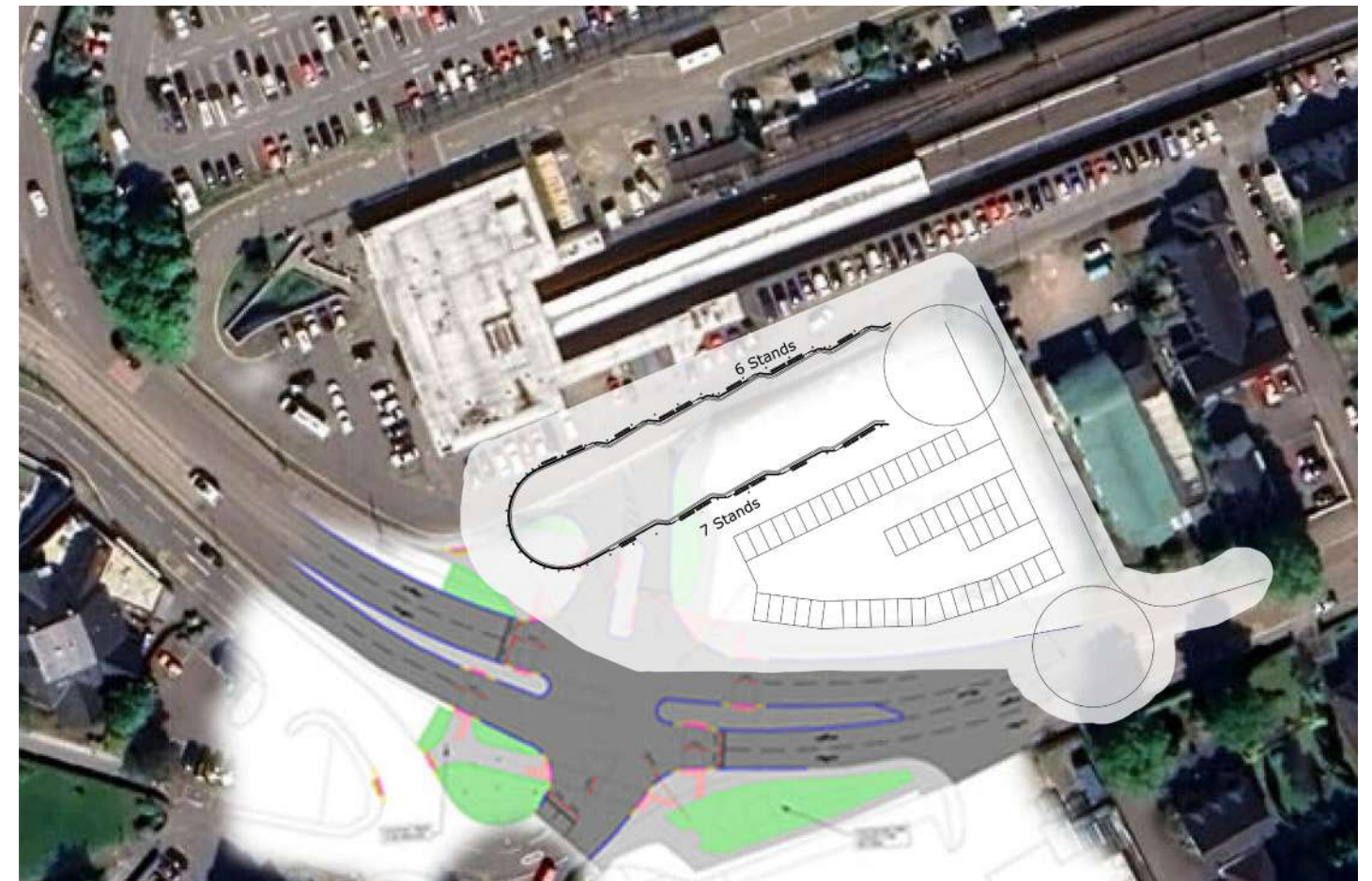
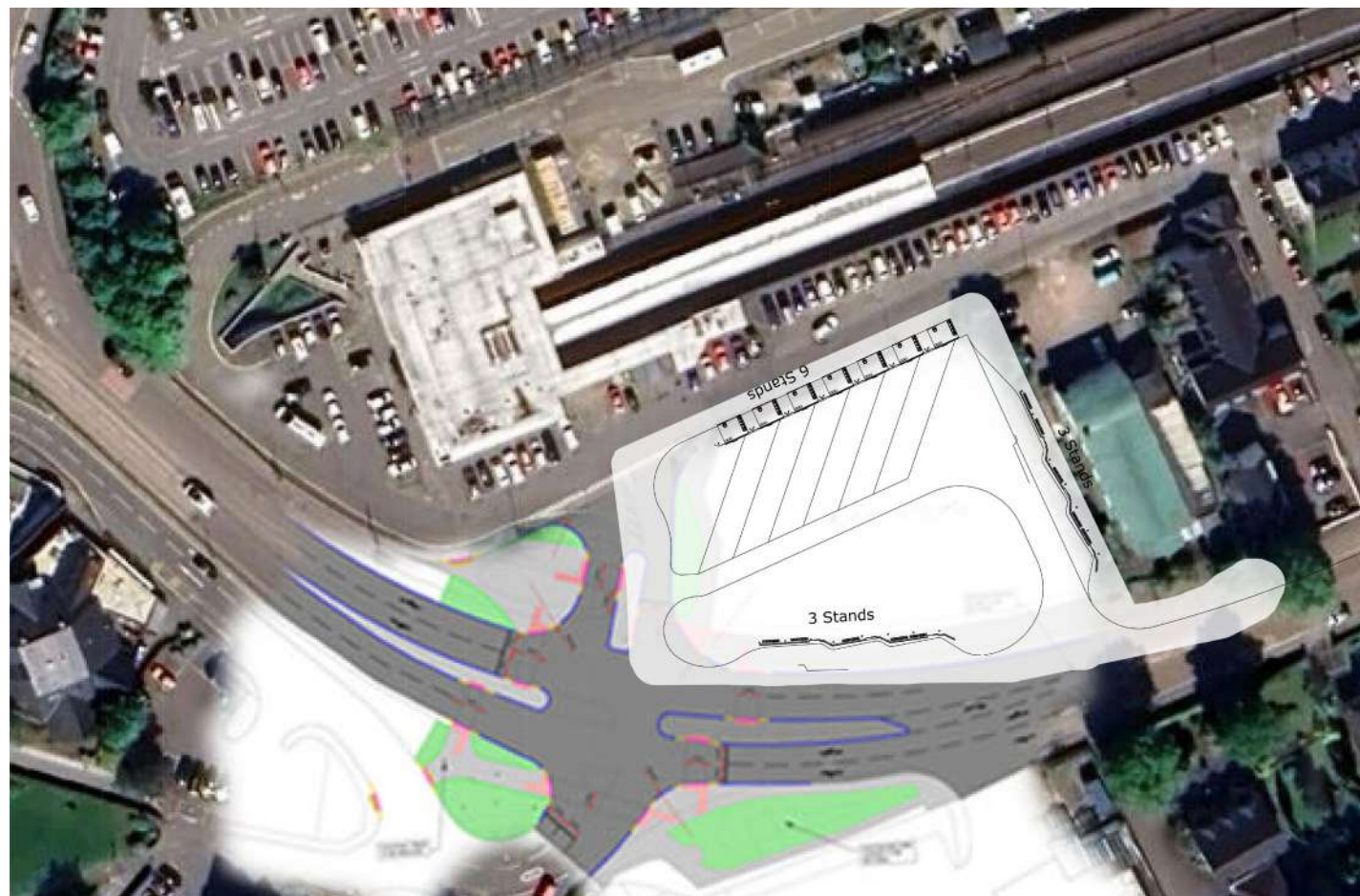
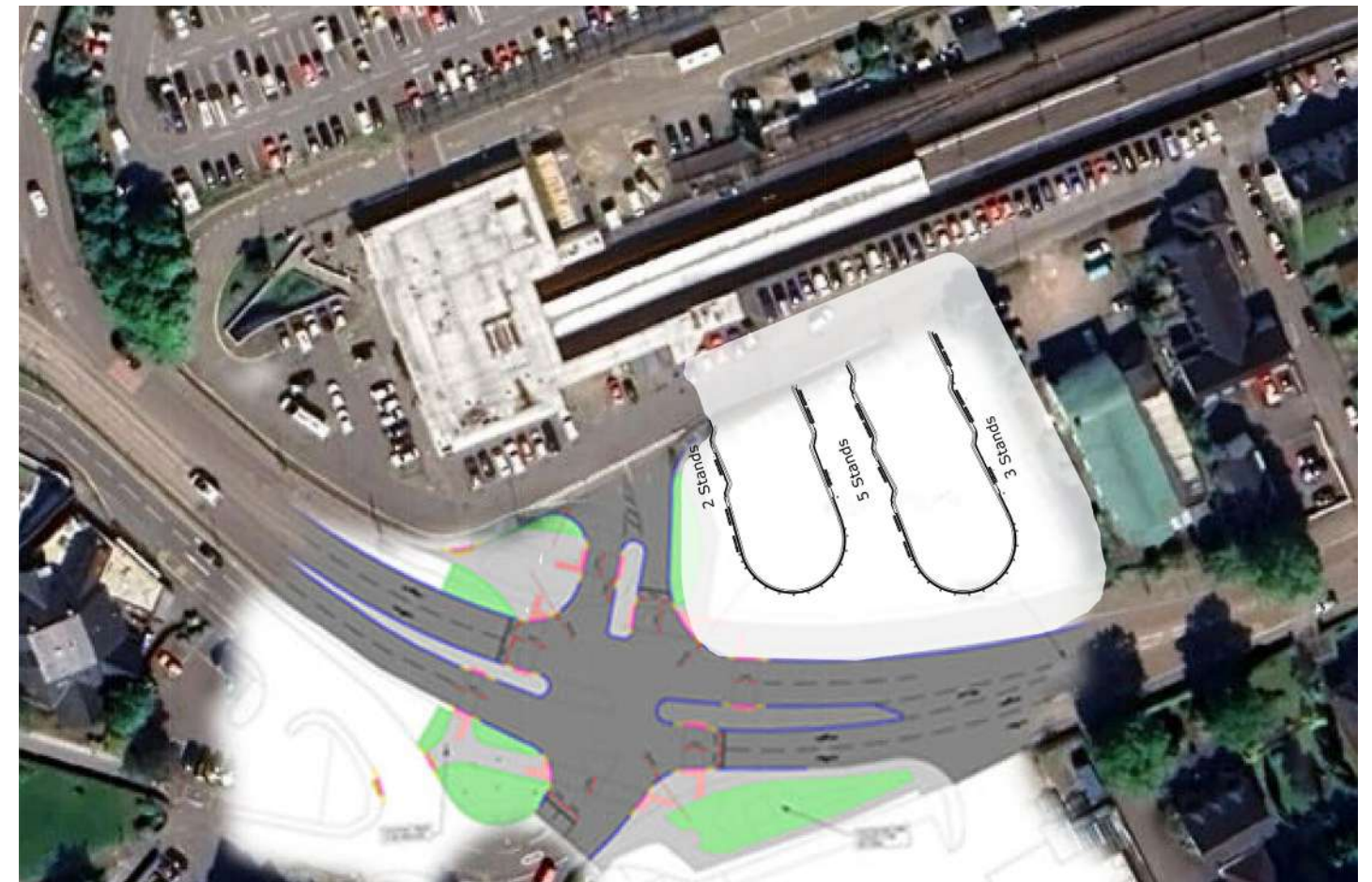
However due to the size and geometry of the buses and Coaches that access Fort William it became clear that the land take required for an 8 stand facility on sites 2 and 3 exceeded the available land and the challenges of changes in level and gradients to access the sites for buses and pedestrians were worse than the existing site (flat as it was built on reclaimed land) and would require major highway changes to the A82 such as a bypass or Loch side realignment and that if they came should be driven by wider connectivity factors than the location for the bus station from the FW2040 study.

Thus it was agreed in order to minimise cost and maximise the deliverability of the proposals in the short to medium term our focus for the preferred option should be the Existing site as it offers good opportunities for a single integrated transport hub.



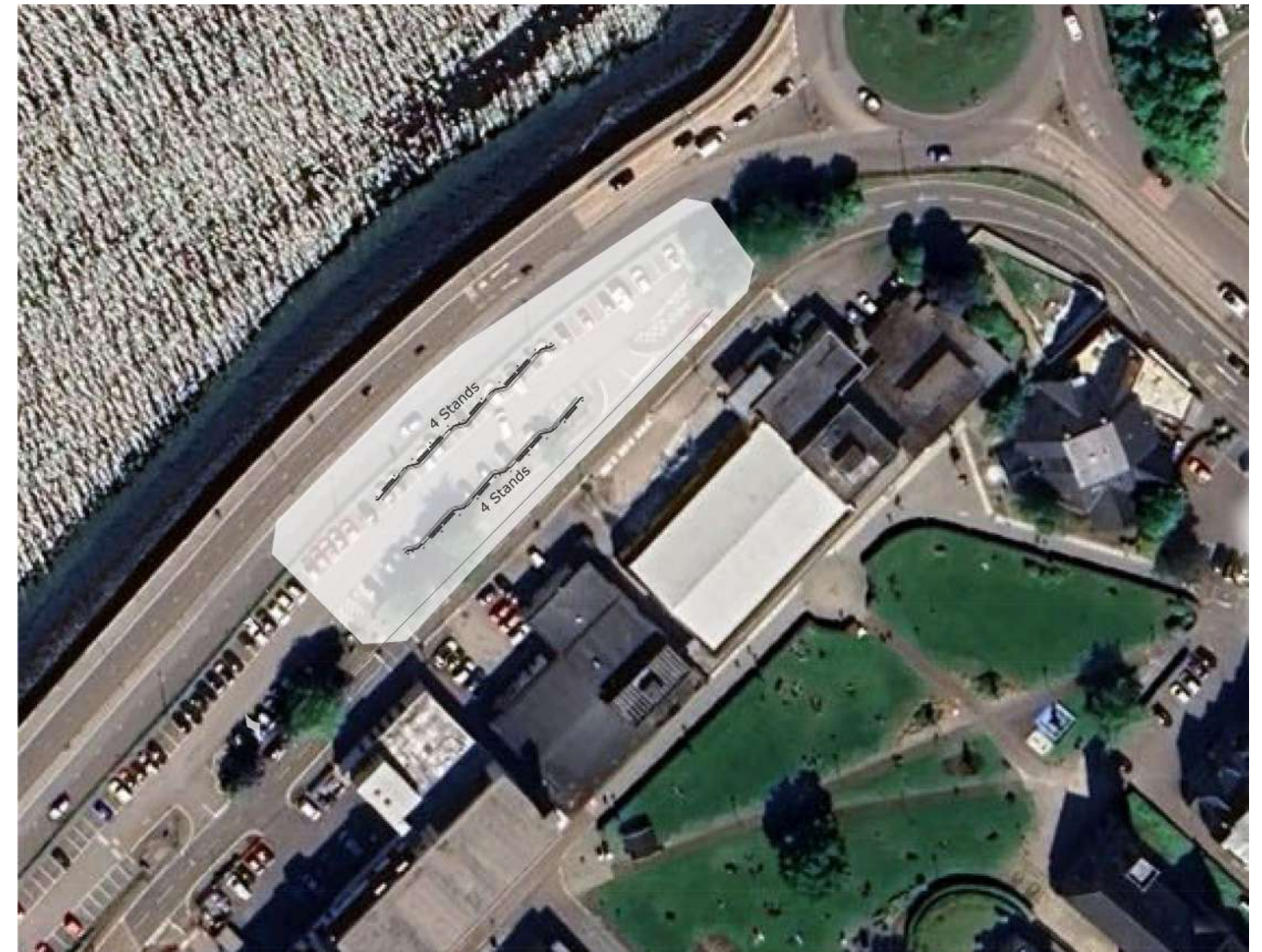
Alternative Site 2 – Nevis Terrace

- *Sheil Bus Option – DIRO and Drive Through*
- *Level Issues*
- *Capacity Issues*
- *Poor connectivity*
- *Passenger Bus conflicts*



Alternative Site 3 – Middle Street

- *Review Middle Street Options*
- *DIRO*
- *Drive through*
- *Conflicts with servicing*
- *Post Office*
- *Loss of Car Parking*



3. OPTION AND PHASING CONCEPTS

Preferred Option constituent parts

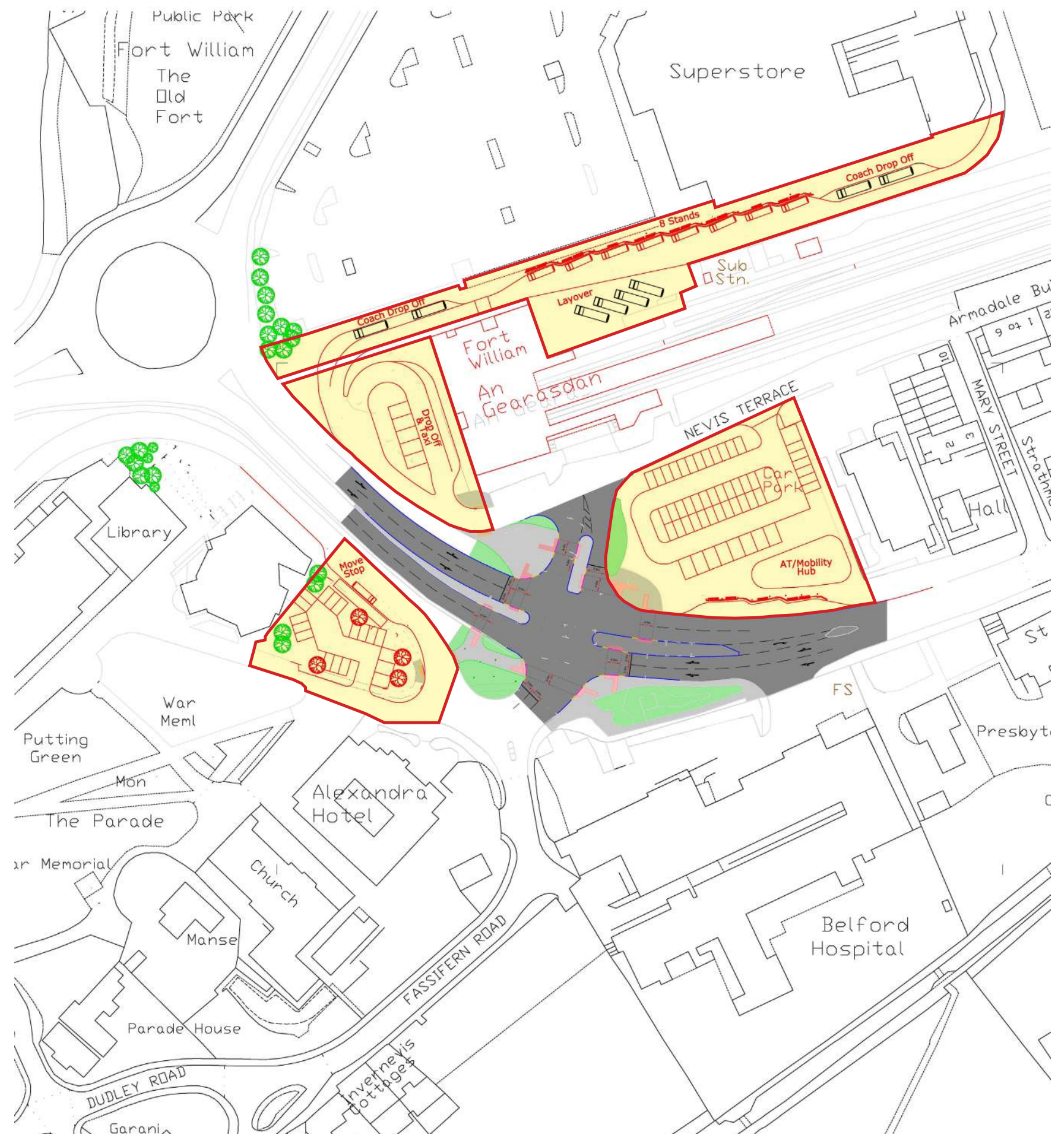
The proposed junction improvements would provide a much improved pedestrian and cycle access point to the town centre and as such provide an opportunity to repurpose the Nevis Terrace car park as a Mobility Hub with Blue badge parking, Cycle Hub and Hire, Shop Mobility improving the active travel offer to drive modal shift away from Private Cars to public transport. The site is also deep enough to accommodate a 2 or 3 bay sawtooth drive through bus stop Northbound allowing operators to run a higher frequency local through bus service stopping at the satellite hubs rather than going through the Macfarlane Way facility.

In addition to the Northbound Hub the bus stop southbound on Middle Street can be extended and relocated to provide a double stop with improved pedestrian access by relocating the vehicle entrance and adjusting the layout whilst retaining all of the existing trees, again strengthening the hierarchy of convenience for transport users improving Public transport user experience. Moving the cycle facilities from the front of the station allows space for a small taxi rank to be provided accessed off the new junction but turning back to discharge via Nevis Terrace and Mary Street. This would allow the access to Macfarlane Way to be controlled under a TRO to be bus and coach only one way. This will provide a safer more regulated environment for the council to manage and removes potential passenger/vehicle conflict.

Finally a new facility could be developed in Macfarlane way to provided a dedicated Bus and Coach interchange adjacent to the Railway Station and supermarket with space for additional departures and facilities as required.

In Summary the Key Benefits of this Proposal are as follows:

- Improved Active Travel facilities
- Integration of Shop Mobility
- New North and Southbound Satellite Hubs
- Separation of bus and private cars reduces vehicle/passanger conflicts
- Better control and regulation of the Bus Apron
- Allows for an element of onsite layover off stand
- Improves opportunities to provide a designed Passenger building not just stands



Option 1 - Do minimum Design and deliver (via contractor framework contracts)

Whilst the delivery of an improved passenger environment on Macfarlane way as part of a wider upgrade are achievable in the medium term the study identified several things that were “quick Wins” to improve the experience for current bus users which should be deliverable within 12 months at costs there is likely to be funding available for. As such the Phased proposal for the site starts with the upgrade of the existing shelter to improve weather protection with flashings to the rear of the canopy, Provide enhanced lighting CCTV and CIS information screens, improved gutters and downspouts. These works have been scoped to limit sacrificial spend whilst funds are sought for the full redevelopment, automatic doors were considered and rejected as unlike CIS and CCTV they are not easily removed and refitted.

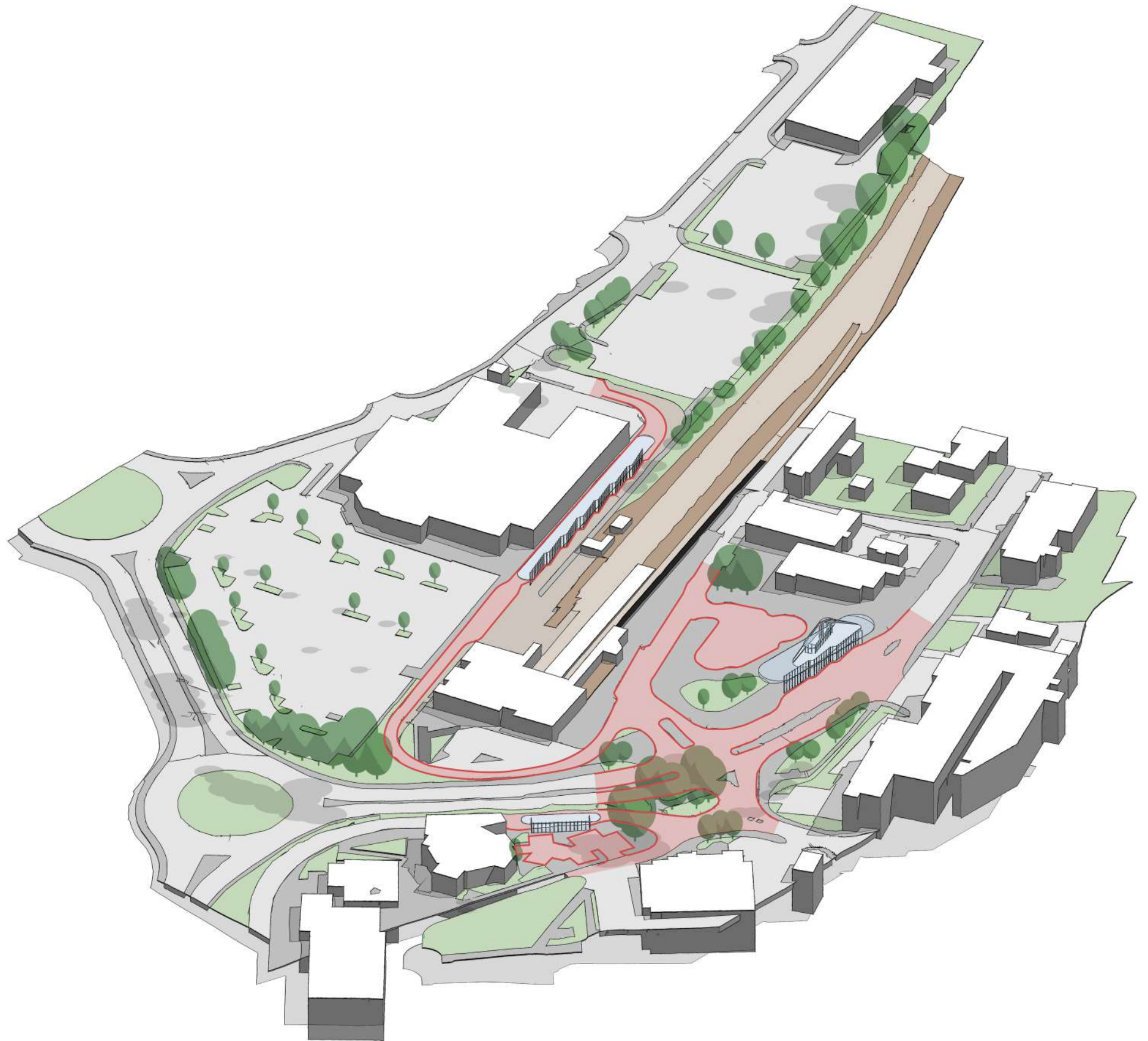
- ***CIS CCTV Lighting upgrade***
- ***New glass screen/automatic doors to key entry/exits and busier boarding points***
- ***Public realm and crossing upgrades***
- ***Flashings and weatherproofing to Morrissons***
- ***Quick win bus stops North and South to allow local faster frequency services to stop without needing to enter***
- ***the full interchange as required***

4. FINAL OPTION AND PHASING STRATEGY

Proposed Plan

Through a phased build up the scheme illustrated to the left can provide a massive improvement in the passenger experience for commuters and visitors to Fort William alike, support for commuting workers in the tourist economy to access better connected active travel options will increase patronage past core hours as many work early or late shifts. The proposal for the interchange needs to be developed through consultation and stakeholder workshops with operators and the public but the initial proposal is as follows:

- A new 8 Bay sawtooth facility with weather protection over the boarding points
- Automatic doors and a fully enclosed environment
- Translucent roof to maximise natural lighting
- Automatic LED lighting to provide a light and safe environment
- Customer Information screens centrally and at each boarding point
- CCTV coverage throughout including boarding points
- Options for Layover and Coach drop off to be considered
- Wider concourse through removal of the railway side footpath and narrowing of the carriageway to maximise concourse space
- Long term vision to provide an at grade crossing direct to the High Street with a landscaped forecourt providing a sense of arrival in Fort William.

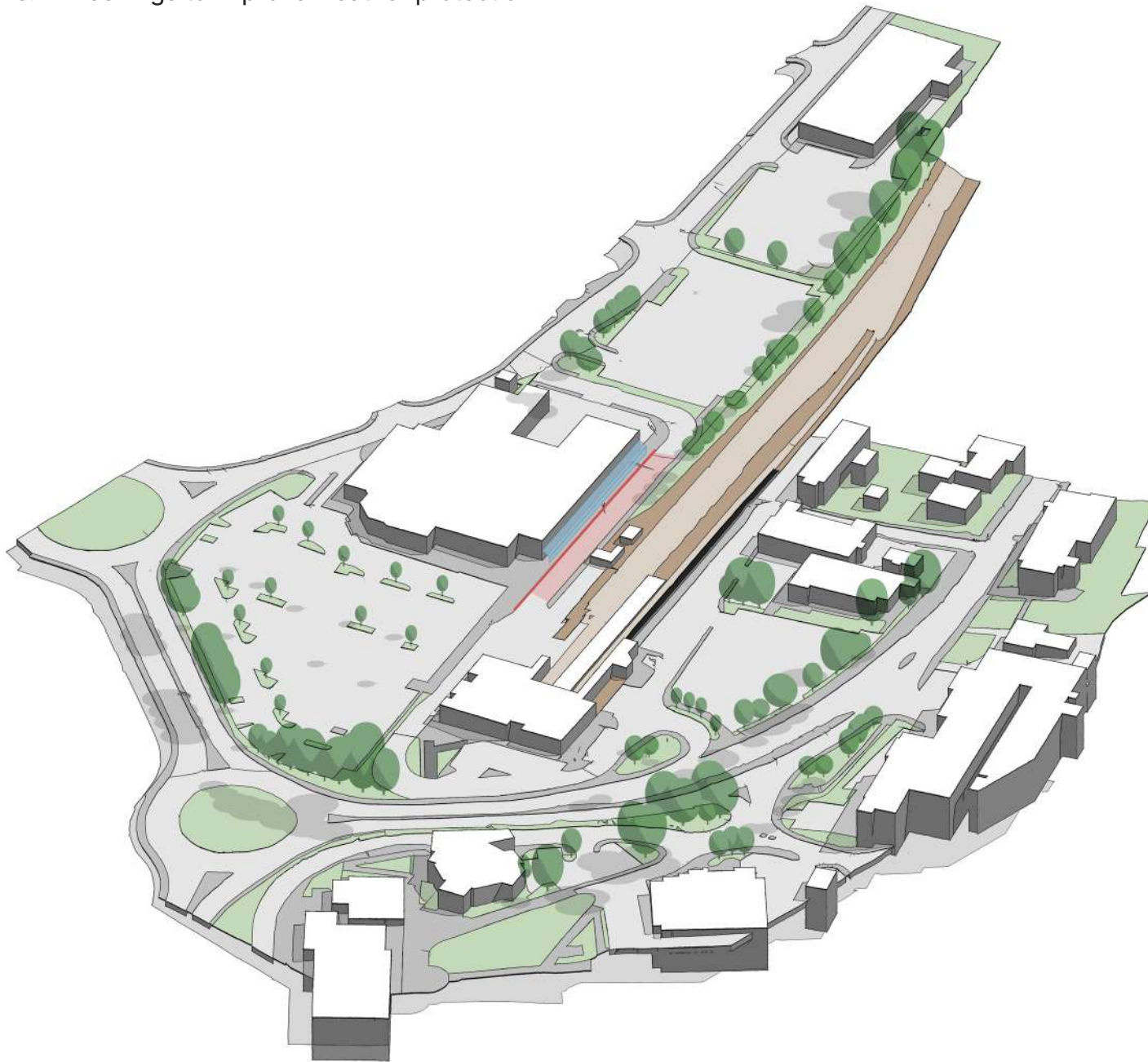


Phasing Strategy

Phase 1

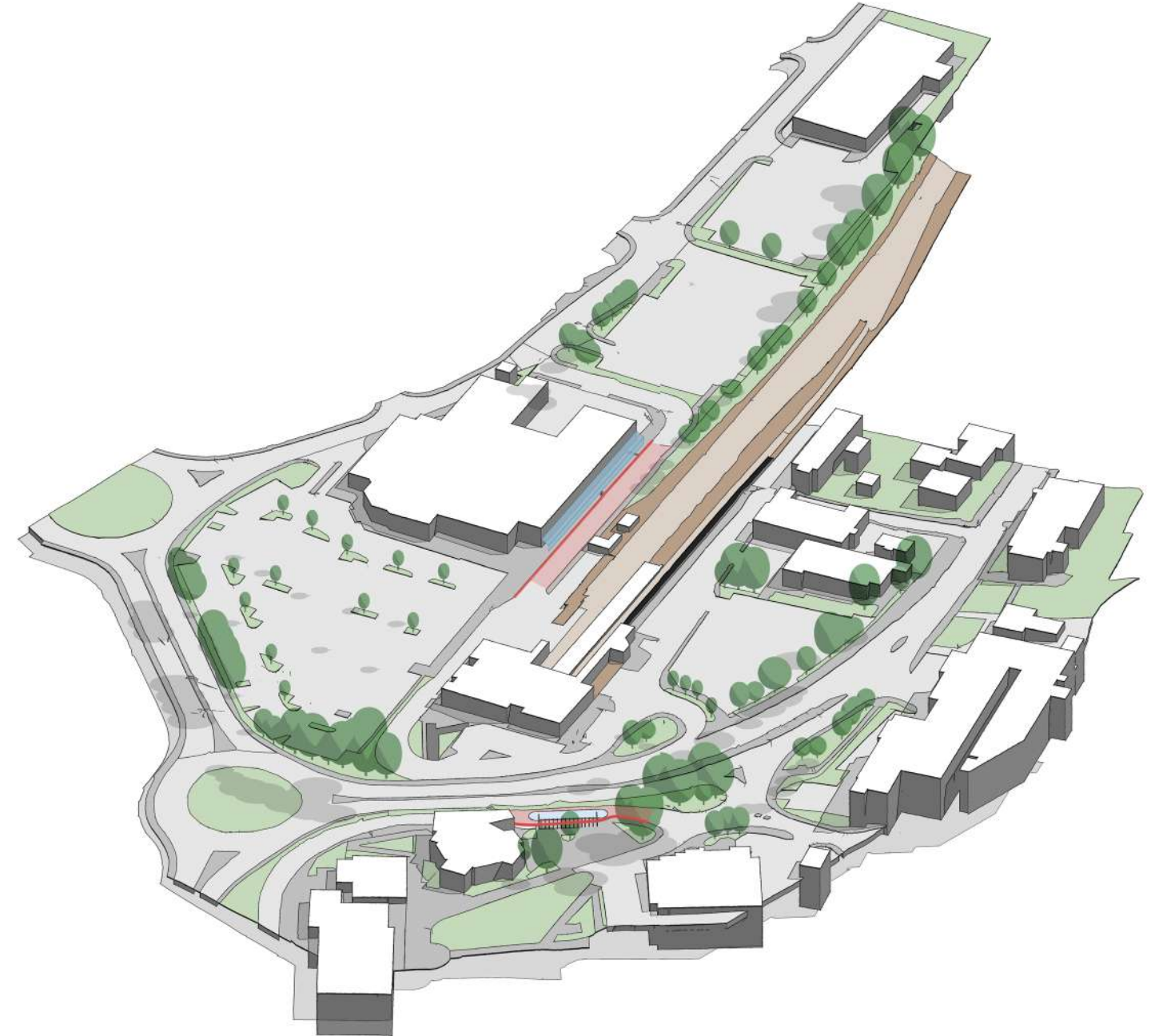
Refurbishment of the existing Bus Shelter behind Morrison's to include:

- a. CIS
- b. CCTV
- c. Lighting
- d. Glass Screens to the end of the current stands
- e. Flashings to improve weather protection



Phase 2

Reformatting of the carpark behind Nevis Sports to allow access from the rear with the existing single stand moved from its constrained position and extended into a double stand with new shelter serving South bound services. This can be delivered without major approvals using BIF funding.

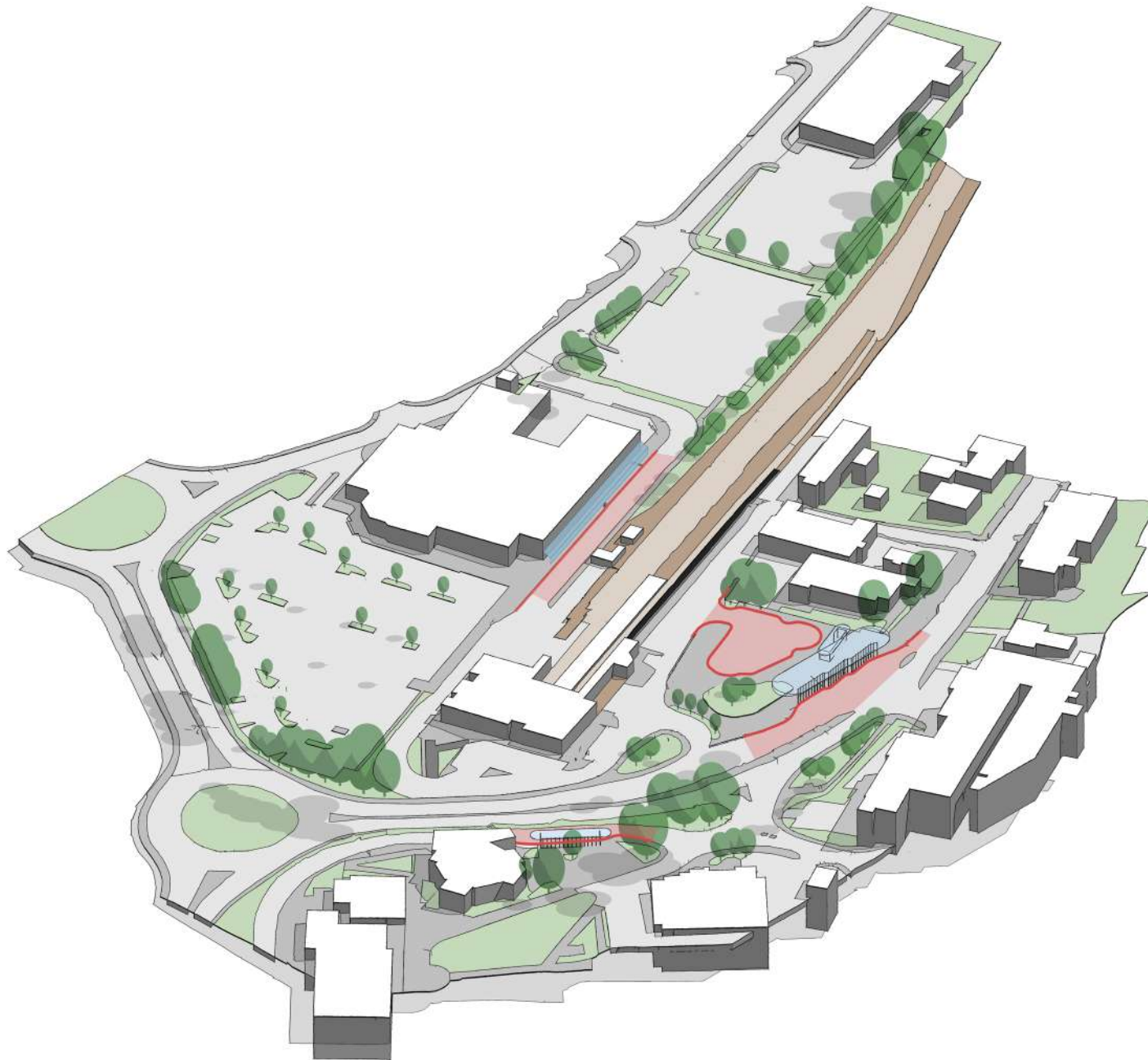


Phasing Strategy

Phase 3

Development of a new Mobility hub on Nevis Terrace carpark to include:

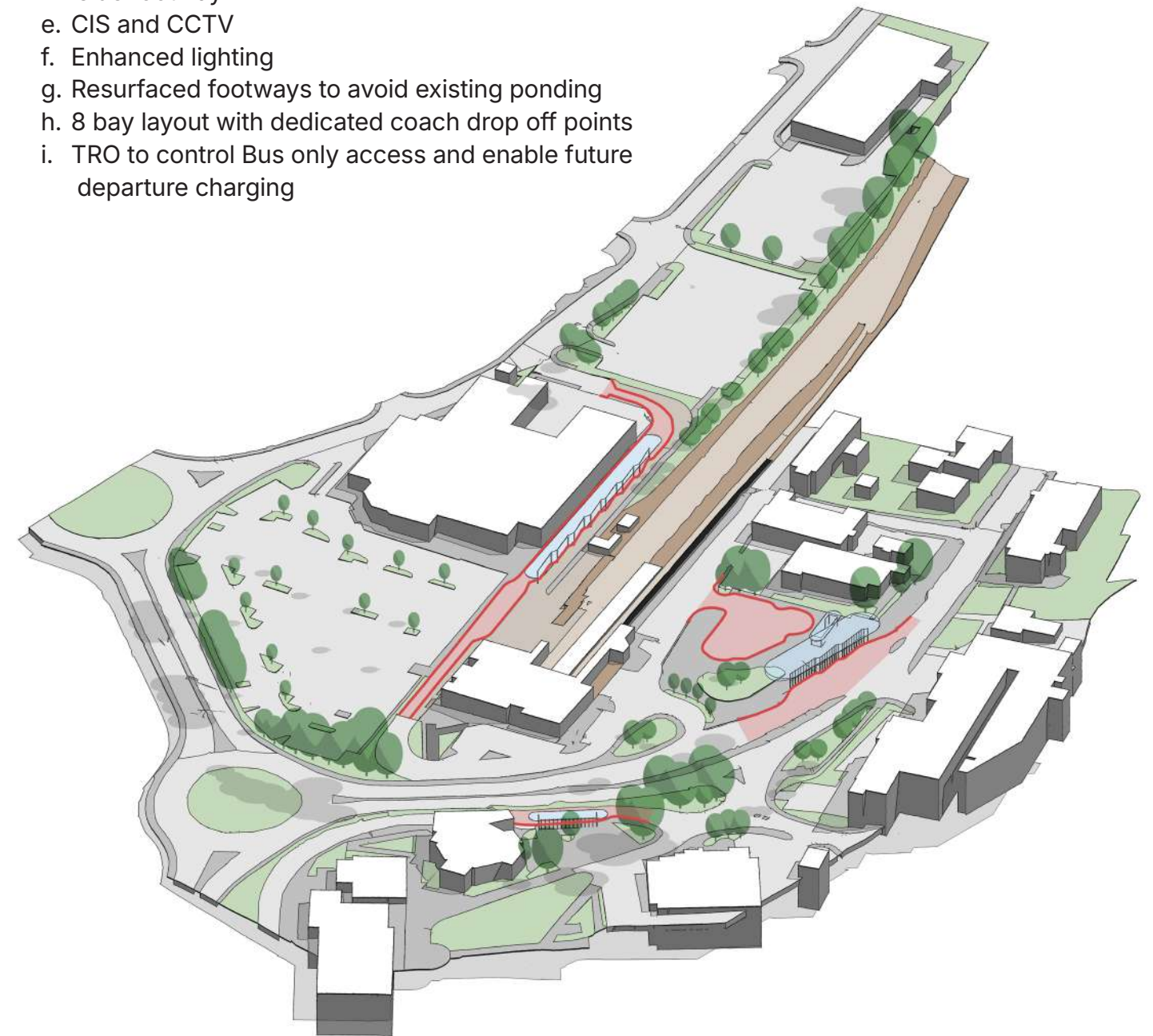
- a. 2 North bound bus stops for local services
- b. Shop Mobility
- c. Blue Badge parking
- d. Active Travel Hub



Phase 4

New Interchange on the existing site to include:

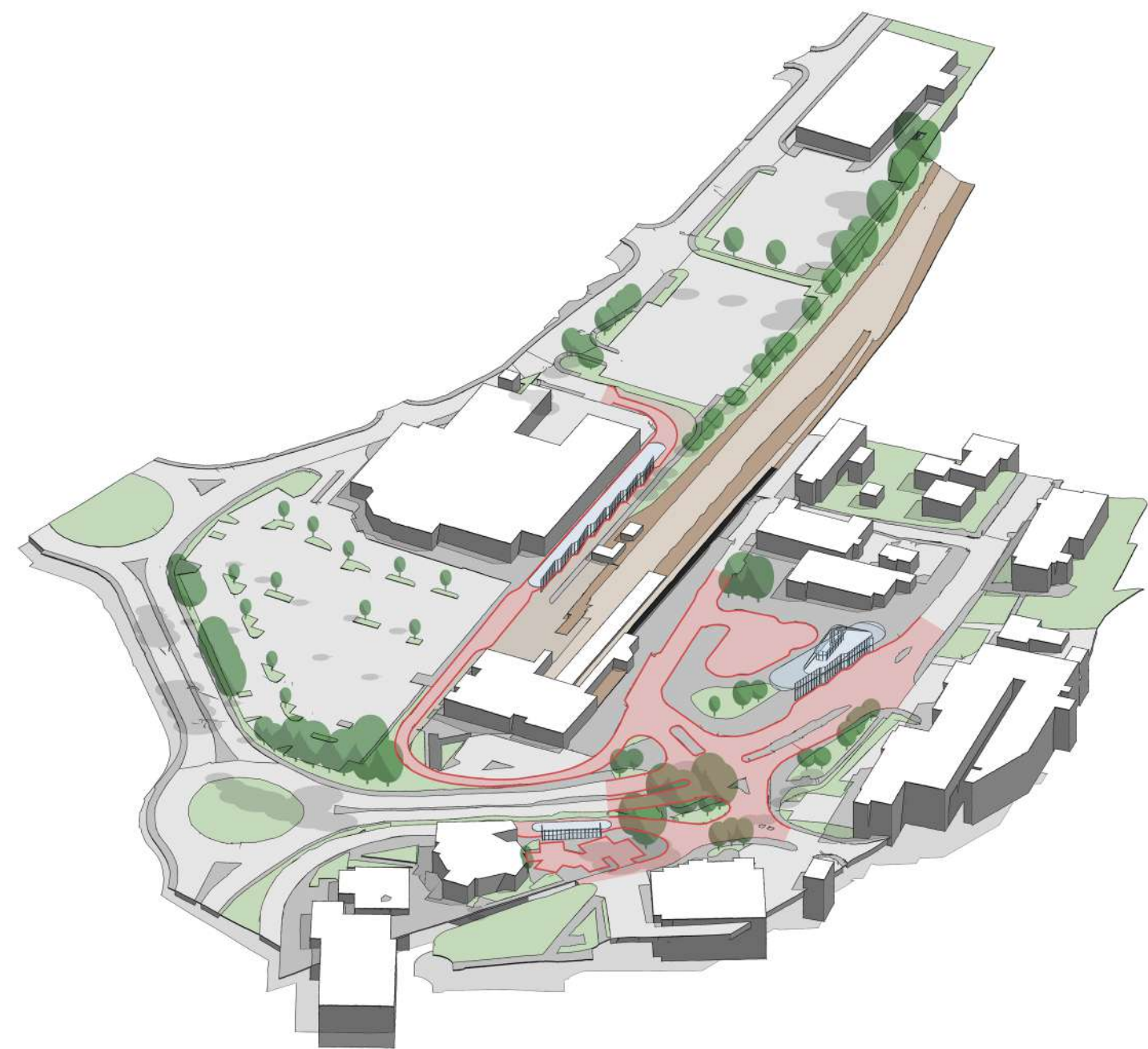
- a. New PTFE canopy structure
- b. Automatic Doors
- c. Sawtooth layout with weather protection at boarding points
- d. Wider concourse facilitated by removal of the Railway side footway
- e. CIS and CCTV
- f. Enhanced lighting
- g. Resurfaced footways to avoid existing ponding
- h. 8 bay layout with dedicated coach drop off points
- i. TRO to control Bus only access and enable future departure charging



Phasing Strategy

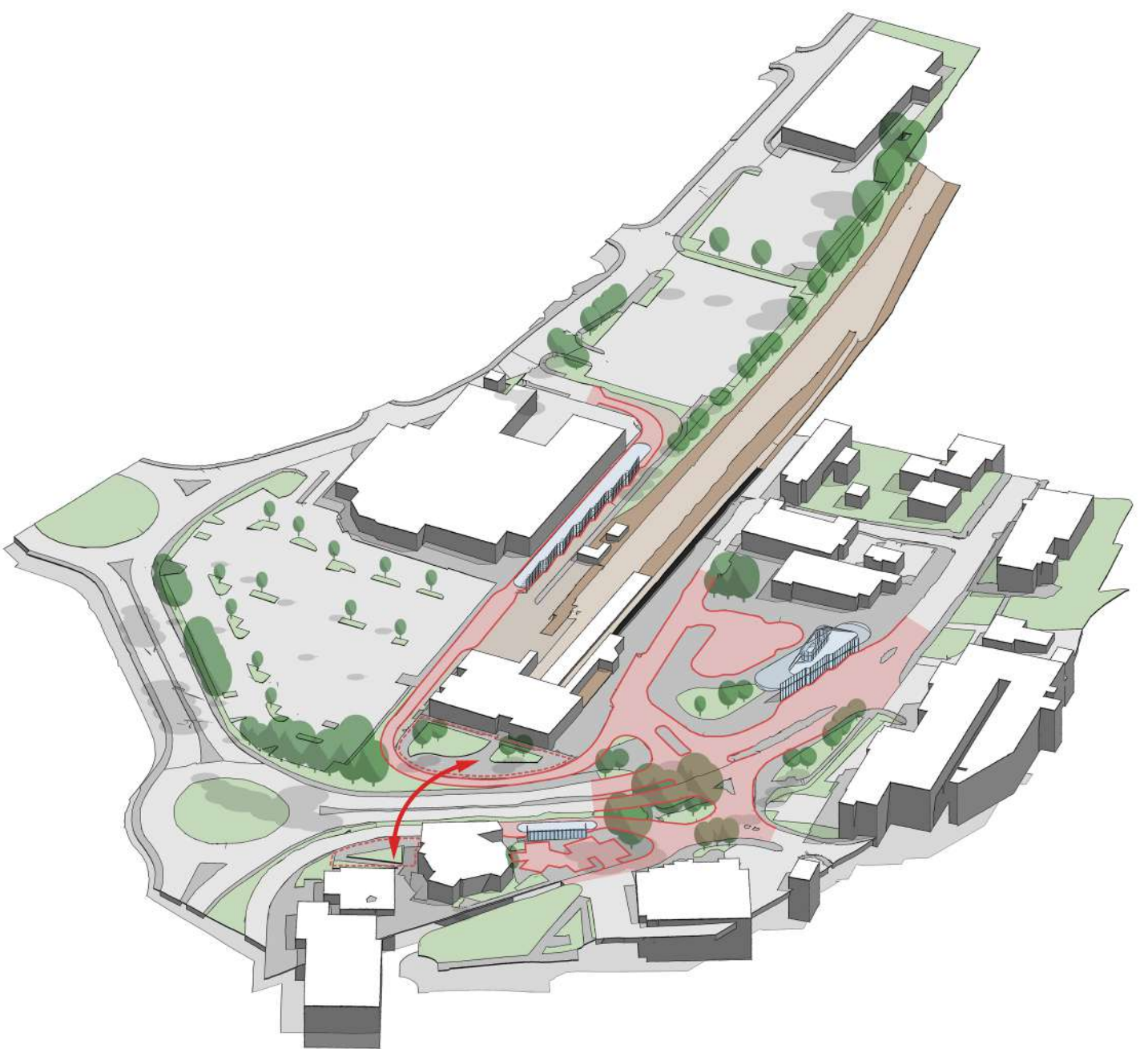
Phase 5

New Junction designed by Aecom as included in current consultations to allow left and right turn access into the site from North and South with improved active travel crossings.



Phase 6

Removal of the subway and replacement with an at grade crossing at a future date when wider traffic issues have been resolved. Station forecourt becomes pedestrianised with Taxi ranking moved to Nevis Terrace.



5. NEXT STEPS

Design Team Next Steps

- **Wider stakeholder consultation**
 - Sheil Bus
 - Ember
 - Stagecoach
 - National Express
- **Capacity test the existing site**
 - How many stands does it need to be future proofed
 - Driver facilities
- **Test at grade crossing capacity**
 - Is it sufficient to replace the underpass
- **Develop a taxi solution**
 - Station frontage solution
- **Develop a tour coach solution for the Railway Station**
 - Glenfinnan Viaduct
 - Mallaig
- **Develop a mobility hub brief**



APPENDIX A - COST PLAN

APPENDIX B - SCP INPUT

From: Bob Pinkett <bob.pinkett@scptransport.co.uk>
Sent: 19 August 2026 11:48
To: Richard Cronin <Richard.Cronin@austinsmithlord.com>
Cc: Jemma Richmond <Jemma.Richmond@SCPTransport.co.uk>
Subject: Re: Fort William

Hi Richard

We have had another look at Fort William bus activity and capacity. A few key issues to consider:

1. The daily number of departures is not excessive for 4 double stances/8 bus stops, as the operating day is effectively 24 hour:

Stance group	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri
1/2	9	10	9	10	12
3/4	14	14	14	14	14
5/6	13	13	13	13	13
7/8	22	22	22	22	22
TOTAL	58	59	58	59	61

- 2.
3. The physical space is sufficient for movement in and out around other vehicles, but we will need to track any new layout if significantly different to current
4. The services departures are mostly well spaced out and so conflicts on stances currently probably low - however ideally, we would want to undertake observations to see real world situation
5. Looking at real time information it appears that some buses/coaches arrive early and use the stances as layover - stricter enforcement of remote layovers (if we are providing additional space) would reduce this issue
6. At a high level I see no reason not to bring the 9 Ember services in from the in An Aird One car park stance and use the stances 7/8, with more local bus Shiel 42 moving to another stance - that has all Ember services in one location (plus twice a day West Coast Motors 918). If any other local buses can move out to on street stops that would help. Stance 1/2 has some capacity and is mostly more local services, so delays possibly limited and shorter layovers possible
7. We would need to schedule this out in detail to see how it would work but that's straightforward, the issue will be getting operator buy-in.
8. In summary I think there's enough space for a similar sized site to work, with sensible switches between stances to get operational efficiency. Even with some growth and catering for peaks I think it will work.

Hope that helps, I'm around all day today and tomorrow if you want to chat.

Regards

Bob Pinkett
Project Director

SCP

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