

FROME STATION



A REPORT FOR FROME TOWN COUNCIL

Joe Holyoak
architect and urban
designer

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This report was commissioned and funded by Locality, on behalf of the Town Council. It is intended to contribute to the ongoing Frome Neighbourhood Plan, which the Council is coordinating.

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Joe Holyoak
architect and urban designer
Studio 312
Zellig
The Custard Factory
Gibb Street
Birmingham
B9 4AA

0121 633 8918
jh@joeholyoak.co.uk

THE TASK

The task is to propose improvements to the setting of Frome railway station. It is perceived to be an unpleasant and disconnected place, in disappointing contrast to the quality of the town itself.

ANALYSIS

The station is a distinctive and historic 1850 building, statutorily listed Grade II. But it is disconnected from the town, located nearly one kilometre from the town centre. (*Figure 1*)

The location clearly cannot be modified. But other improvements can be made, some of which might be able to mitigate the locational problem.

The issues can be grouped under two headings; those perceived by people arriving at the station by train, and those perceived by people arriving at the station by road. Some are common to both groups. (*Figure 2*)

Arriving by train

The station interior is charming, an architectural room. As soon as one leaves the building, the quality of the surroundings drops alarmingly. One is faced by a bleak expanse of tarmac. It is enclosed by ugly wire fences, behind which are gaunt retail sheds. There is no indication of where the town centre is, and no bus stops are visible. (*Figure 3*).

Arriving by road

Assuming that one has found one's way from the town centre, the visitor probably approaches by the high pavement on the north side of the A362, Wallbridge. The station lies to the right, but this is not made clear. Station Approach is not signed. There is a Network Rail sign across the road, but it is not clearly visible. There is a large advertising hoarding, and a clutter of commercial signs. If and when one identifies Station Approach, it is difficult to cross the busy A362; there is no pedestrian crossing. (*Figures 4 and 5*).

The station is visible across the bleak expanse of tarmac, so it is at least clear where to go, even though the environment is not welcoming. Although the timber building is distinctive, it is blandly coloured. Cars parked in front of the building detract from its appearance. (*Figure 6*)

CONTEXTUAL ELEMENTS

The Jewson warehouse, to the north of Station Approach, has a customer car park in front of the building. Parked cars form an unsatisfactory edge to Station Approach; this cannot change while the current site use continues. In addition, lorries use Station Approach to access the yard, located next to the station.

A mobile snacks caravan occupies the end of the Jewson car park, adjacent to the A362 junction, every weekday morning. While it is not an attractive visual element, it is an encouraging sign of life,

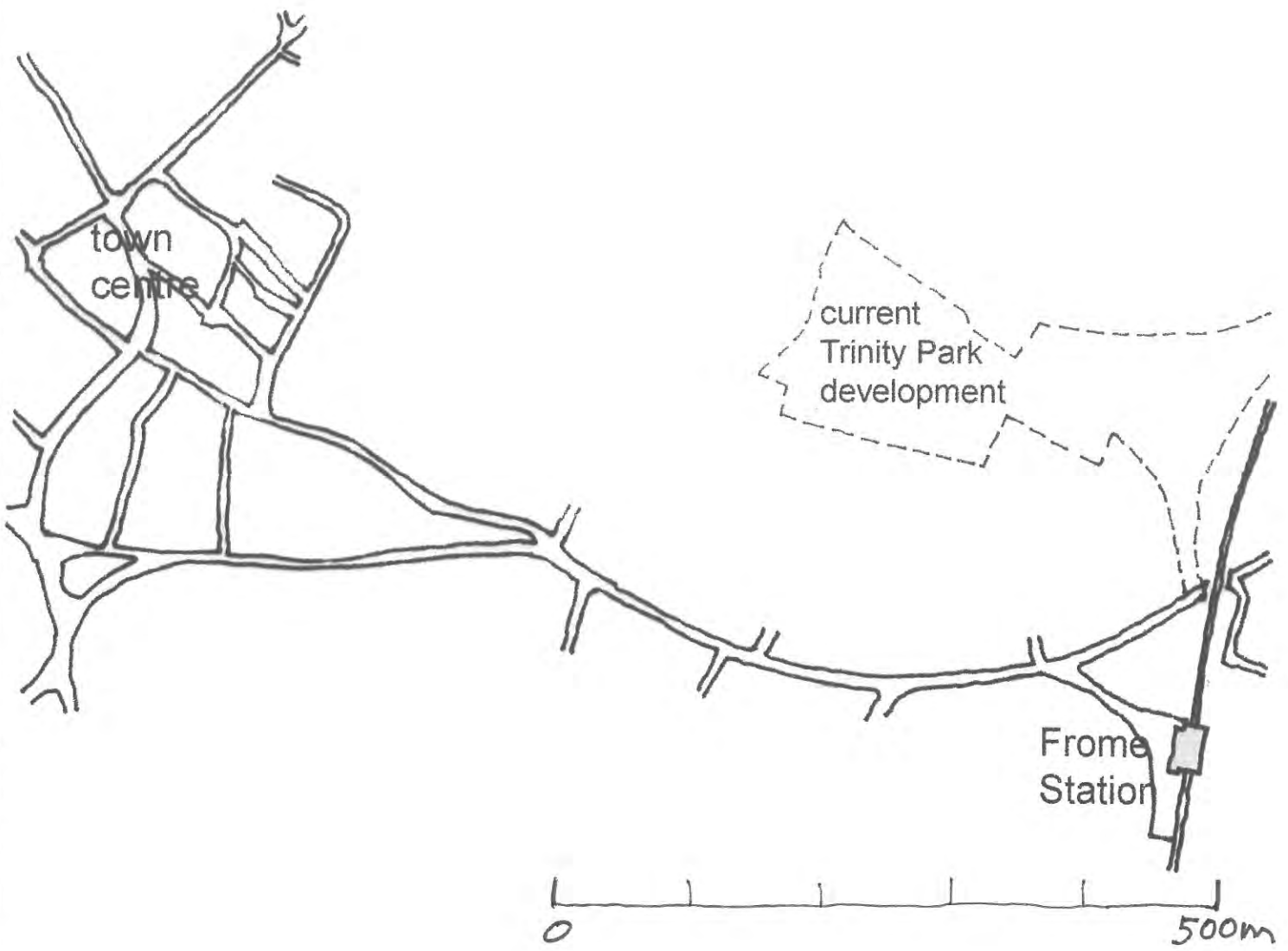


FIGURE 1.
Location plan.

ARRIVAL BY ROAD

- + Lack of announcement of where the station is.
- + Difficulty in crossing road.
- + Clutter of advertising and commercial signage.

Shack's caravan is an isolated sign of life

Wallbridge

Jewson

gradient up

ex-Focus

STATION APPEARANCE

- + Station is blandly coloured
- + Parked cars detract from architecture.

Prime Station

ARRIVAL BY TRAIN

- + Bleak expanse of tarmac - no place.
- + Lack of direction to town.
- + Ugly boundaries.
- + Absence of bus stops.

flatish area in front of station

0

100m

FIGURE 2.
Analysis.



FIGURE 3.





FIGURE 4 .
Station Approach to the right .

and a small social focus, serving customers, workers, rail passengers and passers-by.

To the north of the A362, a large new housing development, Trinity Park, is under construction. Many new residents will be living geographically close to the railway station, but it will not be easy to access.

The large retail building accessed from Station Approach, which used to be Focus, has planning approval to reopen as a Family Bargains store, and has applied for a liquor licence. This is likely to bring more people to the location.

The empty site to the south of Station Approach has planning approval for the development of new industrial units. Access will be from Station Approach, and through the car park.

Opposite the station there is a triangular piece of land which is not fenced from Station Approach and is not in use.

Topographically, Station Approach is in two zones; an uphill road from Wallbridge, leading to a flattish and more open area in front of the station.

PROPOSALS

Most of the issues resolve themselves into a focus on two areas – the space outside the station, and the junction of Station Approach with Wallbridge, with a third area connecting these two. (*Figure 7*).

The space outside the station

The primary need is for this space to become a *place*; a welcoming and distinctive place with an identity. The proposal is to pave this flattish area with good quality materials, as a shared space. We understand that there are discussions going on about the creation of shared space in the town centre; the station would be a relatively noncontentious location to put the idea into practice. The shared space would incorporate the triangular site opposite the station, dependent upon its ownership.

Car parking spaces in front of the station would be removed, and relocated opposite the existing spaces to the south. Drop-off and collection at the station entrance would still be possible. Taxis would occupy the triangular space opposite the station, and a bus stop would be located next to it, dependent upon negotiations with the bus company.

Trees would be planted in the shared space, to visually frame the station building, and to provide shade. Species selection would be on the basis of shape, shade, and ornamental properties. Three trees on the north side would separate the route in and out of Jewson's yard from station traffic. (*Figures 3 and 6*).

Adjacent to these trees would be seats, a large map of Frome, and a three-dimensional model of the town, cast in gunmetal or another robust material, on a raised base. The model could perhaps be delivered as a public art commission. The

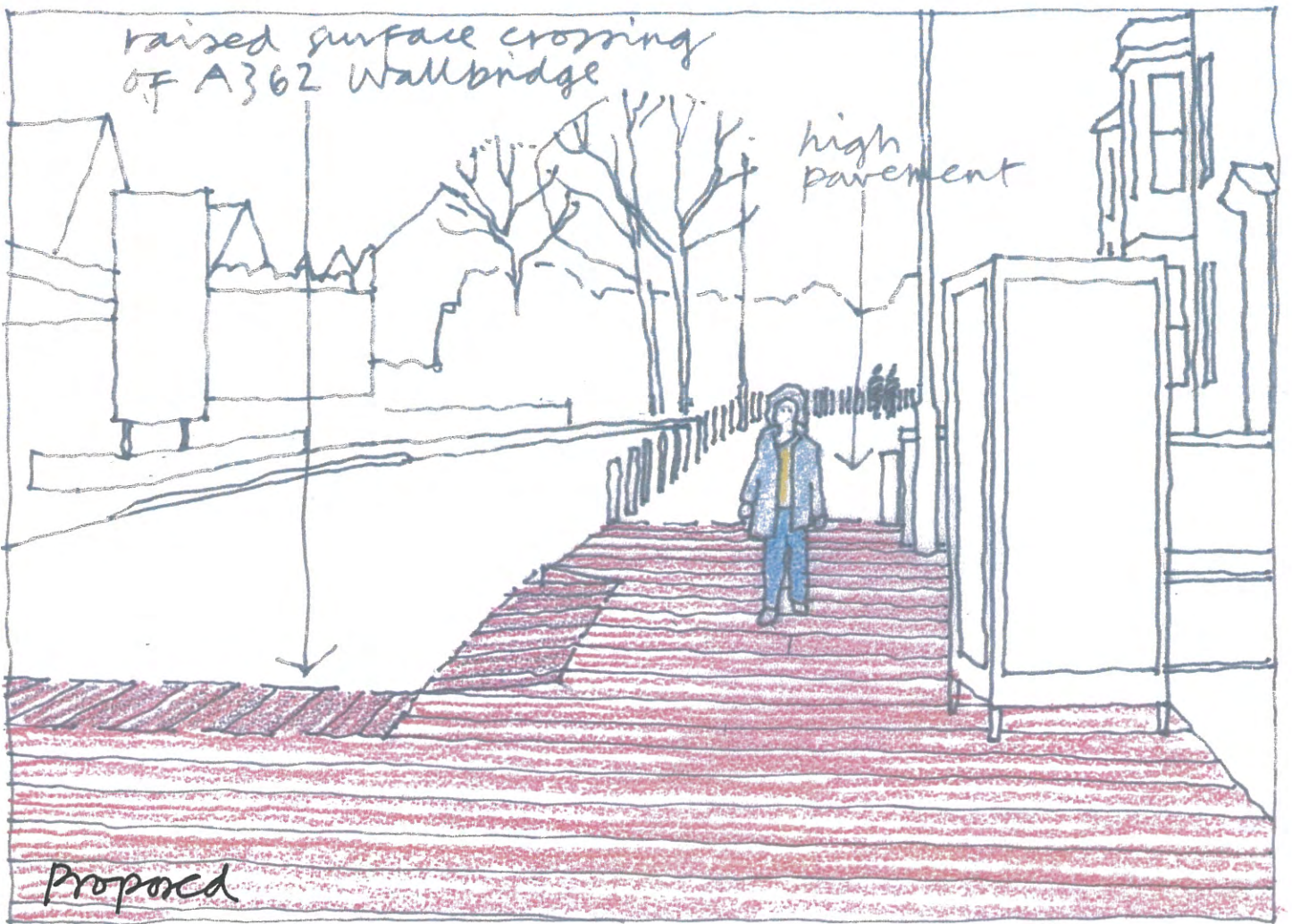


FIGURE 5.



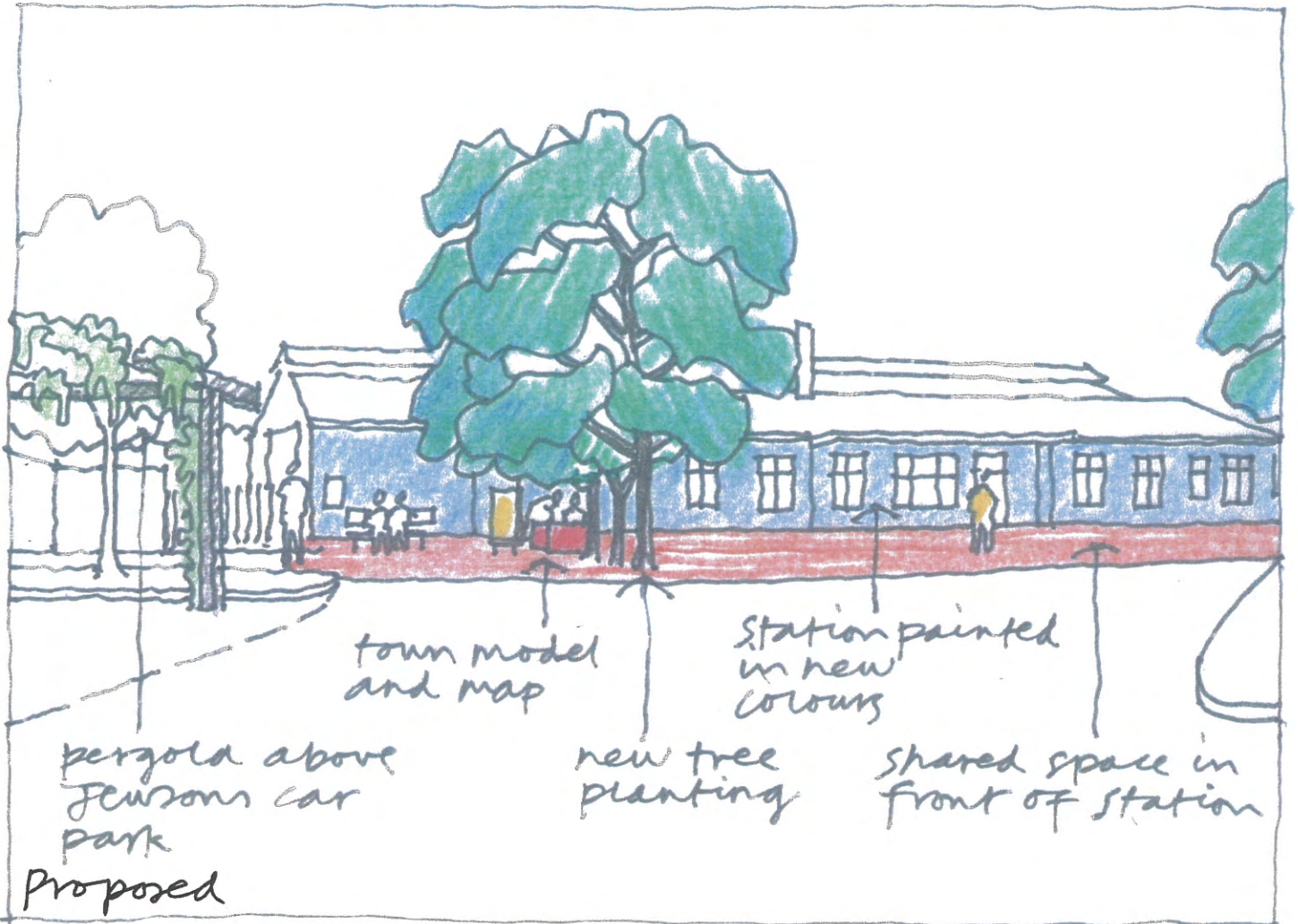
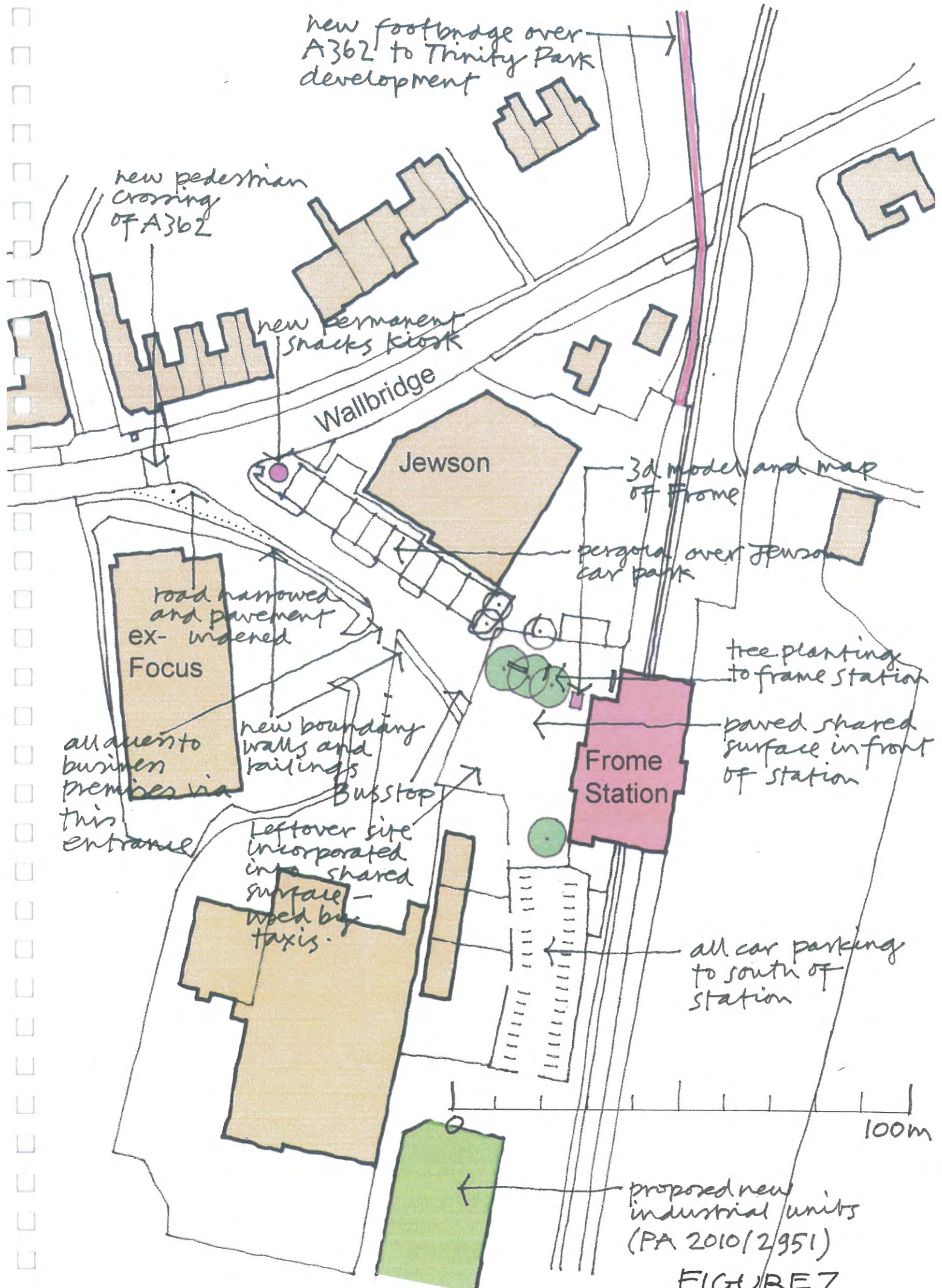


FIGURE 6





new footbridge over A362 to Trinity Park development

new pedestrian crossing of A362

new permanent snacks kiosk

Wallbridge

Jewson

3d model and map of Frome

pergola over car park

road narrowed and pavement ex-widened
Focus

tree planting to frame station

all access to business premises via this entrance

new boundary walls and railings

Busstop

Leftover site incorporated into shared surface - used by taxis

Frome Station

paved shared surface in front of station

all car parking to south of station

100m

proposed new industrial units (PA 2010/2951)

FIGURE 7
Proposals

map and the model would provide orientation and guidance to travellers arriving at the station.

The area adjacent to Jewson's yard requires tidying-up. Unless staffing levels at the station are to be increased, this is where passengers will continue to access and leave the platform when the station door is closed. Another seat can be located next to the building here.

From the north end of the platform, there is just enough space between the tracks and the house boundary to locate a raised walkway leading to a new footbridge over the A362. This would enable access to the station from the new Trinity Park housing development. Ideally, this would be the subject of a Section 106 agreement with the developer, although it is likely that funding is already allocated to other projects. But negotiations should be instigated with the developer and the planning authority. (*Figure 8*).

The new development proposed for the old yard to the south is not to be welcomed, as it will bring more heavy vehicles into Station Approach. But it has to be accommodated, and we consider that access through the car park, between two lines of perpendicular car parking spaces, is possible.

We propose that the station building be repainted in a stronger colour or colours, to enable it to have more architectural impact. Research needs to be done into how it was painted originally, and consultation with English Heritage and

other bodies, to determine the appropriate action.

The junction with Wallbridge (A362)

The highway of Station Approach at the junction is unnecessarily wide, and the pavements too narrow. It is proposed to narrow the highway, and widen the pavement to the west. No change is proposed to the highway on the east side; this is already a sharp turn for large vehicles from the east turning left into Station Approach, and vice versa. Narrowing is proposed on the western side.

On the widened pavement, a large and prominent station sign would be placed, and the existing advertising sign and clutter of commercial signs removed. A new raised pedestrian crossing (light-controlled if this is considered necessary) would connect to the area containing the telephone box in front of the Chinese takeaway. (There are already dropped kerbs here, but no marked crossing). This area in turn would connect, by another raised crossing of Wallbridge Avenue, to the existing high pavement, which is the route by which most people on foot approach and leave the station. All of these areas are proposed to be paved in a distinctive and good quality material. (*Figures 5 and 9*).

(Although the high pavement is beyond our immediate concerns, it is presently very poorly surfaced, and it would be good to see it resurfaced in a way that matches its distinctive character).

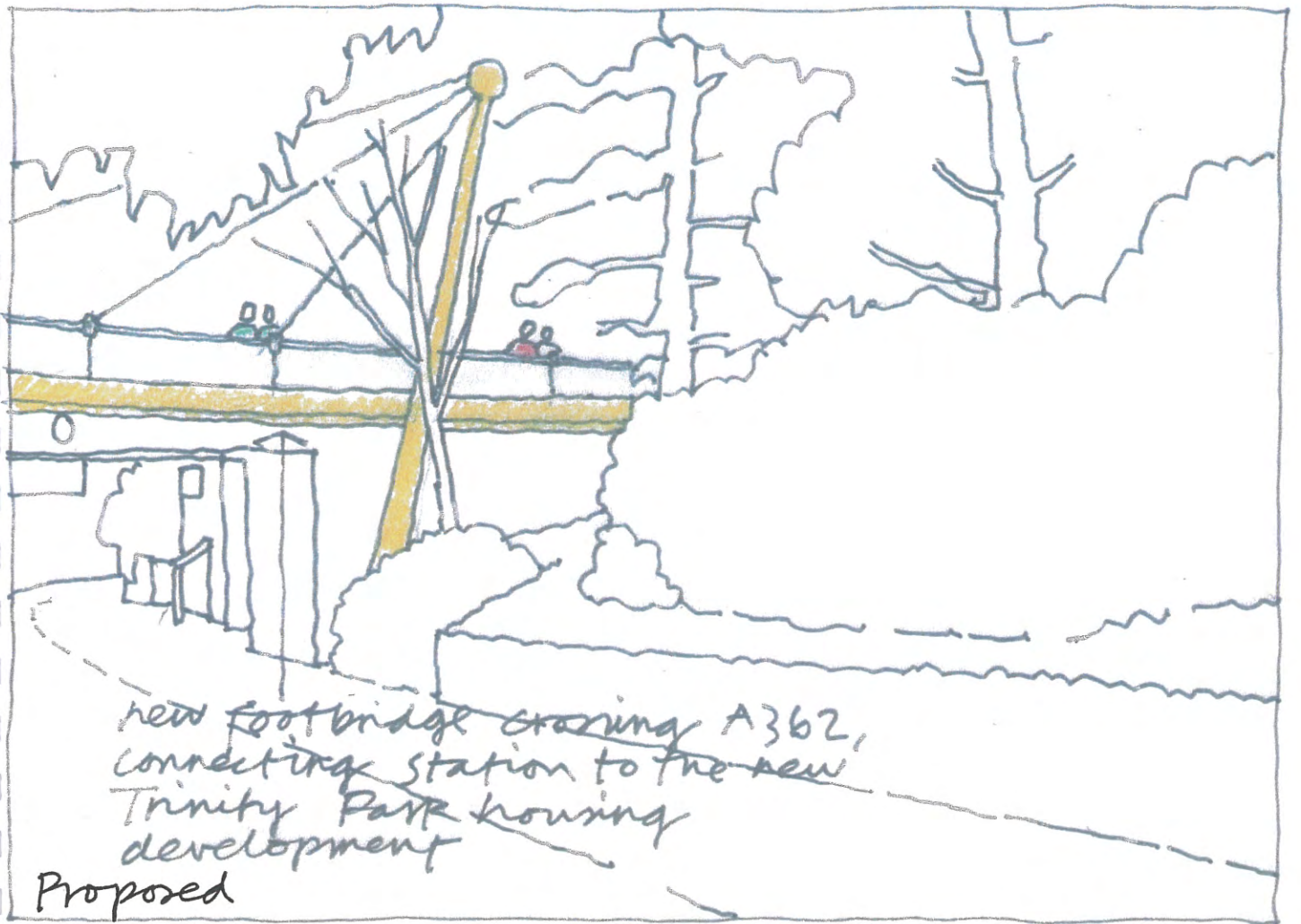


FIGURE 8



Existing



FIGURE 9



On the eastern corner of the junction, which is raised and quite prominent, we propose that the service provided by the existing snacks caravan be continued, but provided from a more distinctive permanent structure, which will act as a minor landmark, further emphasising the significance of the junction. This change may require a bridging loan for the operator. The site presently is occupied by a silver birch tree, but this looks to be in a rather poor state, and could be replaced. (Figure 10).

Station Approach connecting the junction to the shared space

To the south of Station Approach, we propose that the scruffy embankment and wire fence be replaced by a brickwork retaining wall, with steel railings on top. There are sections of good iron railings, presumably dating from the British Railways period if not earlier, remaining near the station, which could be used as a model.

There are currently two vehicular entrances to the businesses in the two large buildings to the south of Station Approach; we propose that the second one be closed, and that all access be gained via the first. The clutter of signage would be removed, and replaced by a sign which coordinates all businesses. (Figure 11).

In front of the Jewsons building, we propose that the customers' car park be covered by a timber pergola, to frame the edge of the road and to provide a more

attractive enclosure to it. The location and movement of cars would not be affected. This of course would be dependent upon Jewsons' agreement and funding. (Figures 3 and 6).

The empty platform

Finally, although it is a purely architectural issue which does not directly connect with the urban design issues which are the subject of these proposals, there is the matter of the empty platform.

The empty platform appears to us to be an unsatisfactory element. It is part of the station, but has no purpose, being an unused and inaccessible void, which those waiting for a train necessarily spend time looking at. We propose that it could become an art gallery, with artefacts either permanent or changing. One suggestion is that, within the bays of the platform, there could be placed enlargements of Brunel drawings. This installation could be the subject of another public art commission. The Railway Heritage Trust might be the source of some funding for this. (Figure 12).

new permanent shades kiosk replacing caravan



Proposed

FIGURE 10



unhealthy-looking tree

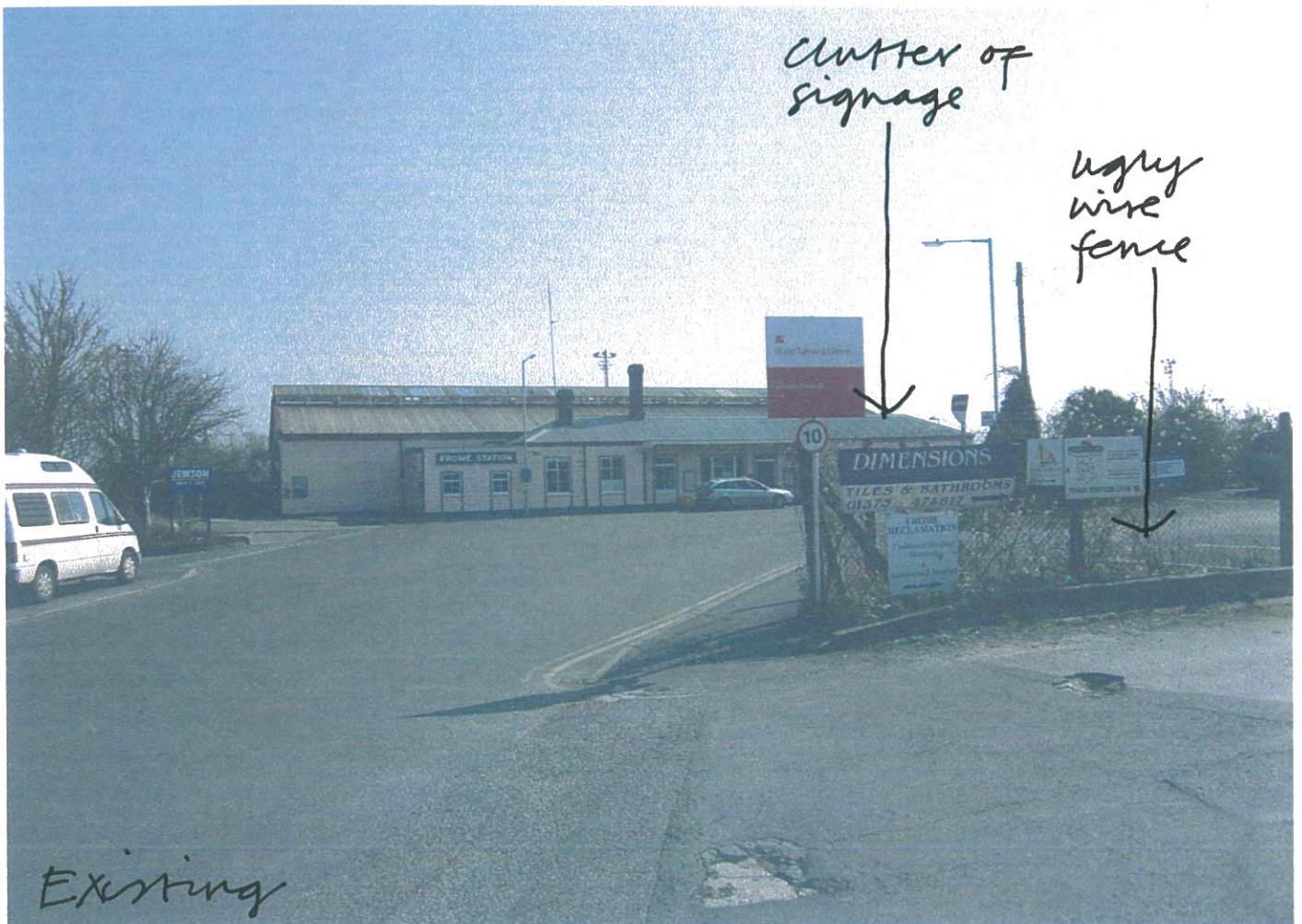
Existing

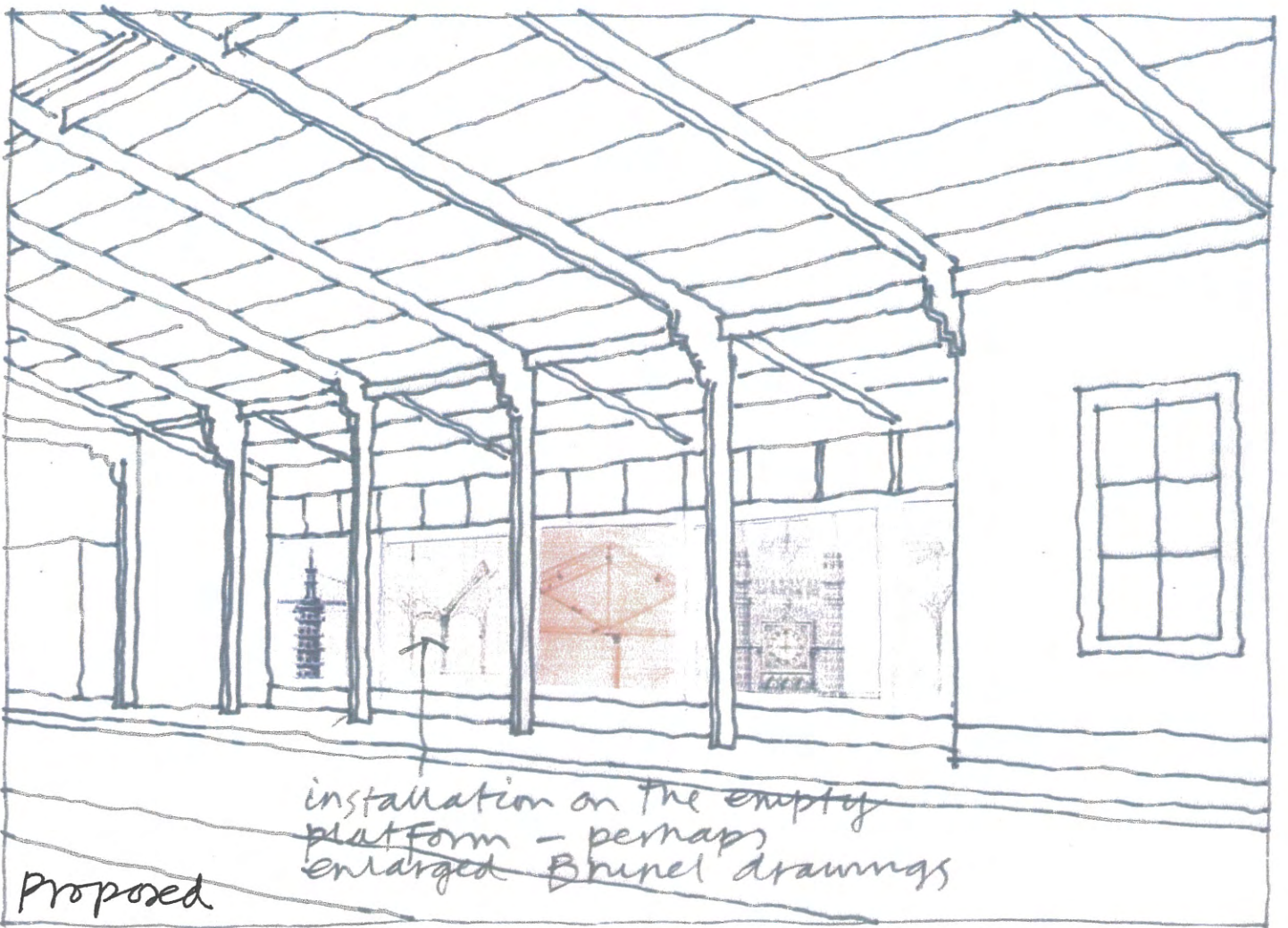
clutter of signage

prominent corner location



FIGURE 11





Proposed

installation on the empty
platform - perhaps
enlarged Brunel drawings

FIGURE 12



Existing