



Brady Mallalieu Architects

# A FRAMEWORK FOR ACTION:

Green Skibbereen at Myross Wood House

*A Centre of Excellence for Climate Action & Sustainability in West Cork*



Myross Wood House



*“a greener future for West Cork”*

# CECAS: A Centre of Excellence for Climate Action & Sustainability in West Cork

from this



re-use  
events start-up  
education business



retrofit a place to stay energy  
visit nature produce  
events re-wilding

## Summary

Green Skibbereen are developing a new Centre of Excellence for Climate Action and Sustainability (CECAS) at Myross Wood House in Leap, West Cork.

CECAS will become a Knowledge Hub and Learning Centre that will spearhead the drive towards net zero carbon in West Cork through education, advocacy, explanation and inspiration via events, exhibitions, education, publications, monitoring and experimentation both physical and digital. CECAS will be a centre to support Climate Action and a catalyst for science based solutions to sustainable questions.

Green Skibbereen has been established to address the challenges of net zero carbon in West Cork through actively engaging, educating and facilitating via connected communities of local people, businesses and organisations.

They will work in partnership with other organisations and interests in developing flagship projects and programmes spanning energy, agriculture, marine and tourism sectors. This will develop Skibbereen and West Cork as a grass roots, cross-sector model for community action on climate change, equitable and sustainable development.

This framework of actions considers how this might be realised through the inhabitation of Myross Wood House in West Cork. It has been prepared by Brady Mallalieu Architects in consultation with Green Skibbereen and a wider team of consultants. The resultant framework proposes start-up, short, mid and long term actions that might, collectively, realise this vision.

It demonstrates how collaborative design processes inform frameworks for action which can address climate change and sustainability at a grass roots level, working alongside local communities. These ideas and actions then diffuse into the wider local region.



hands on training  
workshops learn by doing  
reduce reuse recycle  
business education  
innovate visit  
ecology

**Vision** Green Skibbereen is developing an important new Climate Action Centre in partnership with the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart (MSH) within Myross Wood House and its grounds at Leap, County Cork.

Green Skibbereen will work with the local community alongside educational, governmental and industry partners in West Cork to explore the potential of the historic house and grounds and develop exciting proposals to retrofit and upgrade the property as the *net zero* centre of the region.

CECAS will develop in stages, as it grows in scope and ambition. It will begin simply by establishing a base in Myross Wood House to host events, training, educational visits and provide workspaces for like-minded start-up businesses, researchers and makers. This will re-use and renovate the building to improve its energy efficiency, using the house as a live, hand-ons, educational experience of appropriate retrofitting.

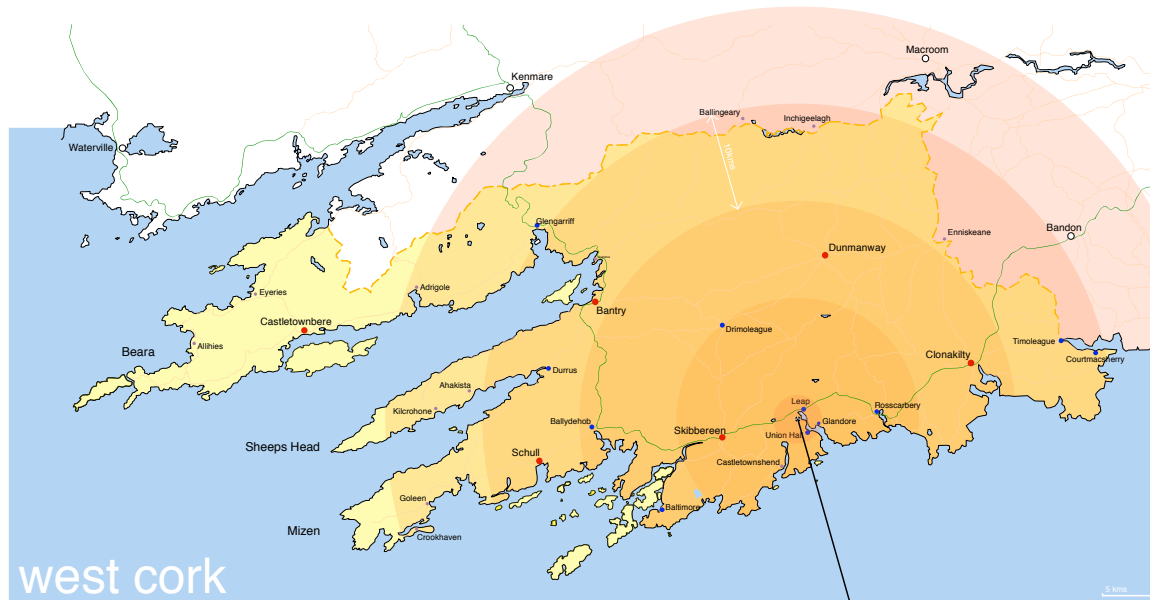
The courtyard will become a collective laboratory, open to the public and local businesses, working across sectors including energy, agriculture, marine and tourism. The rooms in the house will host guests and help fund our activities.

As activity and funding increases the programme will expand, taking over more of the building and managing more of the grounds. The walled garden will be brought back to life growing organic produce that can be sold or served in the on-site cafe. Larger events, such as conferences, weddings or concerts could be hosted too.

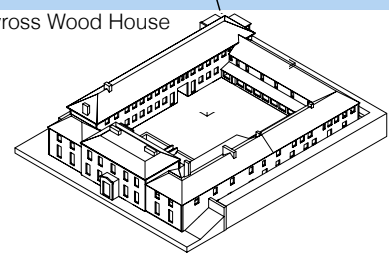
This re-imagining will secure the future of the house, upgrade its energy standards, all the while respecting history and tradition. Improvements will be monitored by ongoing research and innovative new approaches to retrofit and low carbon design explored. More ambitious new elements will be added, like a roof to part of the courtyard, to host outdoor events and live-build workshops.



# Myross Wood House



Myross Wood House



Myross Wood House, and its grounds, will become the new home for the Centre of Excellence for Climate Action and Sustainability (CECAS) continuing to play a part in the social, leisure and recreational life of the local area and host the annual Novena ceremony which can attract 1,000 people. The estate is designated a Special Area of Conservation adding to the ecological mission of CECAS and encouraging exploration of the issues at the interface of conservation and public interest and access through tourism and the impact this can have on the natural world.

Myross Wood House was originally a country house dating from the late 18th century purchased by the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart in 1946 as a retreat centre. The house is in a very scenic location overlooking mature woodland and the sea.

It is situated off the main N71 road from Cork City to Killarney in close proximity to the village cluster of Leap, Union Hall and Glandore. It sits within a demesne of 100 acres of mainly woodland with a sea frontage onto a shallow inlet of Glandore Harbour. It is 8 kms from Skibbereen and 20 kms from Clonakilty, the main towns of West Cork.

The house is a mixture of historic, well preserved Georgian architecture with a rear service courtyard surrounded by more utilitarian buildings that offer the potential for a variety of levels of restoration and sustainable reinvention. The building also provides a wide range of spaces from large function rooms down to cell like single bedrooms and includes a well equipped commercial kitchen. The central courtyard also provides protected space for a larger scale of usage as workshops or events spaces.



## Activities CECAS Information Hub Visitors Centre

The beating heart of the CECAS project will be the information hub in Myross Wood House. This will comprise of:

- a reception area
- a physical library, study centre and browsing area
- a digital hub with high speed internet and workstations connecting to a sustainability database.
- cafe as social hub
- exhibition area
- West Cork Knowledge Centre for sustainability with database and benchmarking to monitor zero carbon progress and help build a Green collective intelligence in the region.
- a new visitor attraction for the tourist industry and as a destination on the Wild Atlantic Way tourist initiative.

## CECAS Events Hub

CECAS will have a multi purpose events space suitable for:

- conferences
- talks, demonstrations and presentations
- trade shows for sustainable products
- exhibitions
- sustainable product launches

## Training Hub Education and Research Hub

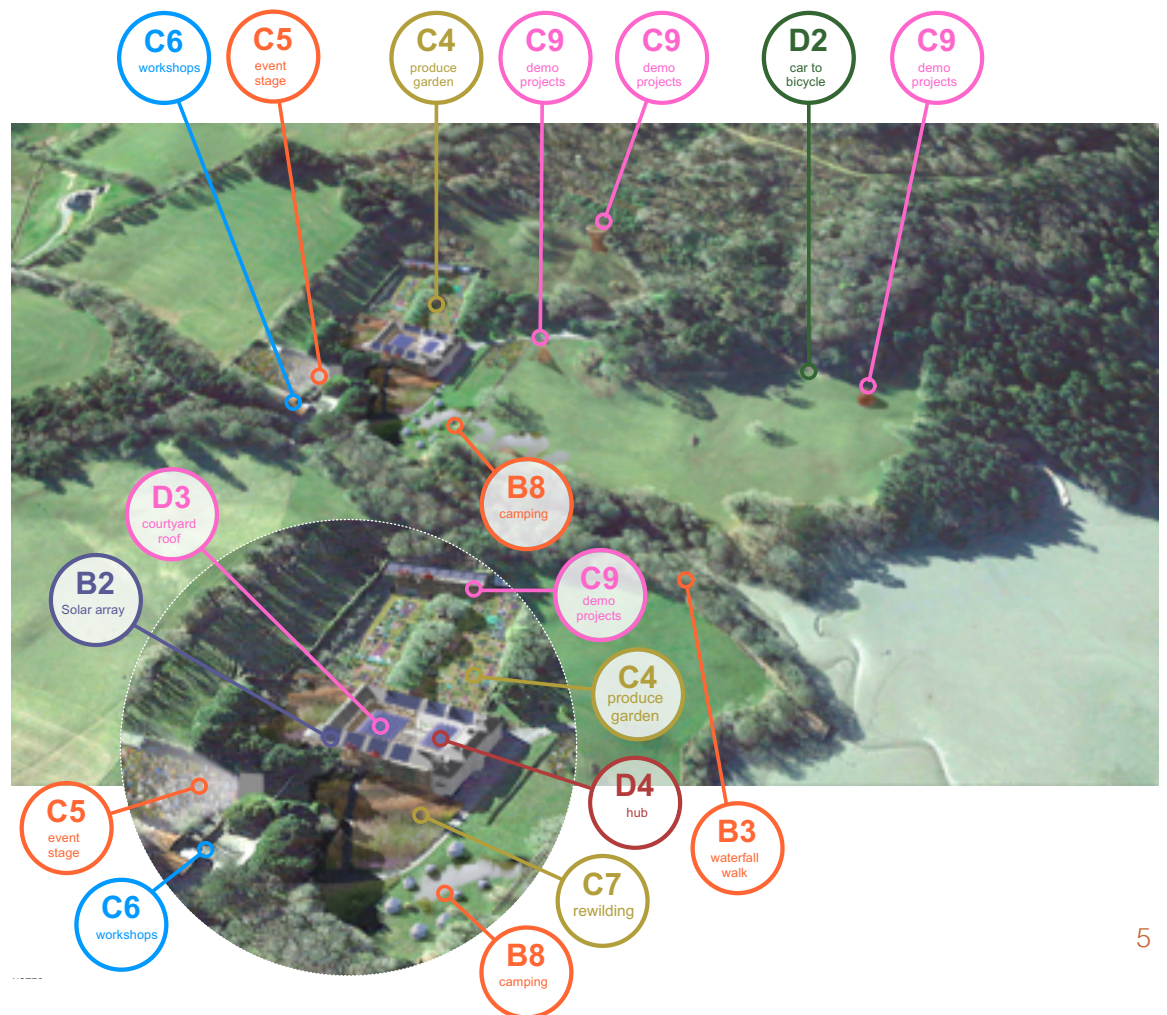
CECAS will have workshops, laboratories and classrooms for:

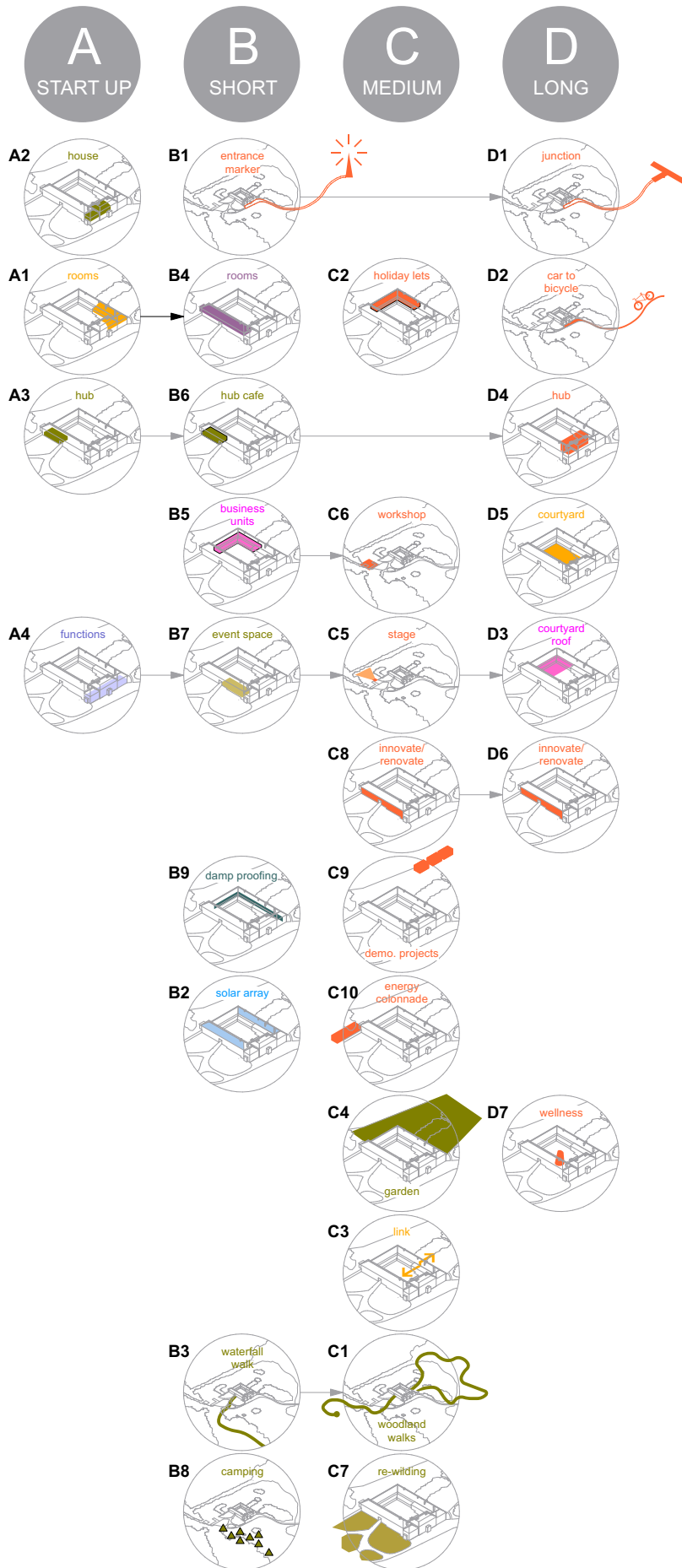
- hands on training courses, residential when required, in sustainable construction techniques
- training courses on regenerative farming and organic horticulture
- classroom based training courses
- web based training courses
- experimental construction and assessment / monitoring projects
- demonstrations,
- residential courses,
- field study trips,
- workshop facilities for experimental construction,
- use of estate for landscape and horticultural courses,
- use of historic house for conservation courses.

## Outreach and Business Community Links

Beyond the activities at Myross Wood House and estate, CECAS will organise events, exhibitions, lectures, rallies, demonstrations throughout West Cork and engage with householders, trade and industry and community organisations. CECAS will encourage broad engagement on environment issues + all aspects of sustainability and lifestyle:

- The house, cafe/restaurant and the grounds will offer opportunities for community and lifestyle activities.
- facilities will be available for community events, festivals, music, art and performance.





## A phased approach

In the pages which follow we outline a proposed sequence of phases of actions allowing Green Skibbereen to establish the CECAS in Myross Wood House and its wider estate. We have grouped these activities into four stages:

### A: Start up

This can be accomplished immediately and quickly establishes a presence for Green Skibbereen on the site. Existing rooms are used to help generate an income and to host events.

### B: Short Term

Having established a presence on the site the inhabitation of the building expands to create spaces for local businesses, researchers and makers. Internal and external spaces are used for collaborative initiatives which explore environmental themes. The courtyard becomes a collective laboratory which is open to the public.

### C: Mid term

By now we imagine the work and presence of Green Skibbereen is well established and the building will be occupied more fully. Section by section each part of the building will be retrofitted to improve energy efficiency and suit its new activities. The building and site now gather together a rich mix of uses and visitors including the CECAS visitors hub, event spaces, business incubators, workshops, a research base and revenue earning uses such as holiday lets for tourists. The site is now managed more fully, parts are re-wilded and the walled garden brought back into productive use.

### D: Long term

More substantial physical additions are proposed in the long term once the work of the group has been consolidated and CECAS's presence has become well established in West Cork. A new hub space is built on the back of the old house addressing circulation and accessibility in the building, positively addressing the courtyard and creating additional event spaces. Activities in the courtyard are sheltered under a new roof enabling a wider range of activities to be carried out throughout the year. Activities

## A: Start up

### A1 rooms

The front section of Myross Wood House includes a collection of bedrooms in good decorative order and already fitted with en suite bathrooms so these can readily be offered for rental on a bed and breakfast / airbnb basis. The kitchen at lower ground level and the ground floor function rooms are also available for breakfast or other catering requirements connected to this. The location within a grand country house and the connected estate would make these rooms very desirable as holiday lets.

### A2 house

The front of the house can also be used to create a flat for a member of Green Skibbereen. One wing of one floor would create a good sized three bed flat. Some minor modifications would need to be made to create a kitchen and bathroom and locks adjusted to create a 'front door'.

### A3 CECAS hub

The existing building has a hall to its south eastern corner. This can readily be occupied as a base for Green Skibbereen becoming the visitor hub for the CECAS. It has a kitchen to the rear and toilets accessible from an entrance lobby. We imagine the space might be inhabited simply with furniture to allow for a range of informal 'drop-in' relaxed seating and loose chairs that allow for talks and community gatherings. Walls around the hall could be used for displays relating to the work and interests of the group. The space will become the centre of start-up and future activities in the house and on the wider site: e.g. school visits might use it as a base. Students from the architecture school might rest here whilst building in the courtyard or grounds. Curious visitors might shelter from the rain and warm up.

### A4 functions

The ground floor of the main house is in good decorative order and consist of a fine suite of rooms with catering from the well equipped modern kitchen adjacent. These spaces could be hired out for a variety of different uses such as business meetings and presentations, small wedding and social functions, community events, yoga or keep fit classes etc



A1  
rooms

A2  
house

A3  
CECAS  
hub

On taking control of the building, Green Skibbereen's targets will be to:

- Establish 'base camp' within the building to commence the initial functioning of CECAS. (A3)
- Develop 'pop up' revenue earning facilities that require low expenditure to activate and generate income for the centre. (A1, A2 and A4)
- To put management systems in place to meet the obligations required of them by the license with the building owner.



A3  
CECAS  
hub



## B: Short term

### B1 entrance marker

A new sculpture at the junction with the N71 road will help visitors find the site.

### B2 solar array

A combination of PV and solar thermal panels will be installed to provide renewable energy.

### B3 Waterfall Walk

The existing walk through the woods and past a tranquil waterfall to the estuary will be improved and used as part of an educational and mindfulness programme.

### B4 Rooms

A range of different rooms will be brought into use to allow visitors to stay on site, perhaps participating in live-build activities, conferences or events.

### B5 Business Units + B9 Workshops

A suite of ground floor spaces around the L-shaped 'cloister' will be used for like-minded businesses, start-ups and researchers. This will help build a community of knowledge and action.

### B6 CECAS base/HUB cafe

The Hub established in the start-up phase will evolve into a cafe and reception space to the rooms available upstairs (see B4). This will host further activities, exhibitions and events.

### B7 Event space and wellness centre

The former chapel space will evolve into a flexible event space and wellness centre. Alongside more general programmed events, such as large gatherings, conferences, classes, talks and recitals the activities of the wellness centre might include meditation, counselling, mindfulness, yoga and related therapies.

### B8 Camping

The grounds of Myross Wood House will be used for eco-camping.

### B9 Damp/retaining wall

Damp problems along the retaining wall to Myross Wood House will be addressed.

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Having established an initial presence in the start-up phase occupation now grows into more of the house and site as the scope of the group expands.

The activities suggested in this stage balance environmental initiatives with revenue generation to try and establish an ethically and economically sustainable community at Myross.





## C Mid term

### C1 Woodland visits

Woodland walks will be restored and established around the site supporting the wellness and mindfulness hub.

### C2 Holiday lets

The upper floors of two rear wings of the existing building will be converted into holiday lets allowing visitors to stay on site and providing an income for the project.

### C3 link to garden

The courtyard will be linked to the garden allowing visitors to move around the site more easily.

### C4 Produce garden

The walled garden will be replanted to create organic produce. Organic fruit, vegetables and flowers grown in the garden will be used to supply and kitchens of the main building and sold to visitors.

### C5 Event stage

An outdoor events stage will be built to host a programme of concerts and gatherings.

### C6 outbuildings/ workshops

The existing workshops will be renovated and brought back into use.

### C7 re-wilding

Sections of the grounds will be re-wilded to improve bio-diversity and engage with natural rhythms and cycles.

### C8 Innovation-retrofitting

The existing building will be upgraded to improve its energy performance as part of a pedagogical programme of activities.

### C9 demonstration projects

Several live projects will be carried out within the existing building and ground, allowing visitors to get involved and see the results.

### C10 Energy colonnade

Visitors will be able to see a range of energy sources in a new-build colonnade that will provide renewable energy for the building.



The third phase of activities occupies the remaining parts of the existing house and makes stronger physical connections to the wider site. Holiday lets are included on the upper floors and the walled garden restored and brought back into use.

Events are envisaged within the garden and walks identified and enabled within the estate. These events and walks can be developed to evolve the ethos of Green Skibbereen.



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## D Long term

### D1 junction improvement

With an expected increase in the volume of visitors the road junction to the site will be improved.

### D2 car to bicycle

Visitors will park their cars upon entry to the site and ride to Myross Wood House on bicycles. Less ambulant visitors will be able to use electrical buggies.

### D3 courtyard roof

A new roof will be added to the courtyard creating a sheltered space for live-construction projects

### D4 hub

A new-build hub will be constructed on the rear of the front building and become a focus for visitors. It will address circulation problems in the existing building to make it more accessible.

### D5 courtyard

Integrated with the new courtyard roof new landscape works will make the space more attractive and usable

### D6 innovations- renovation

The C8 and C9 projects will develop and evolve, improving the performance of the building, adapting it to new uses and providing an ongoing pedagogical resource for visitors who can get hands-on at each stage.

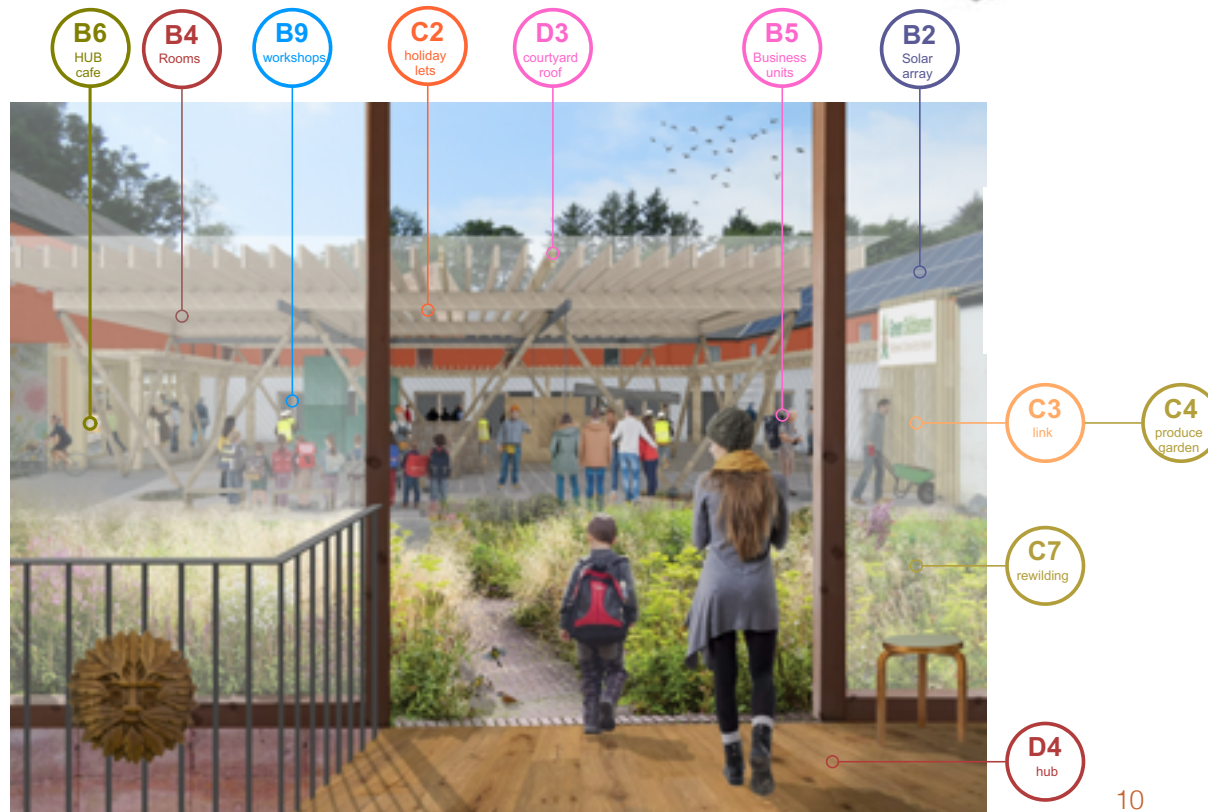
### D7 Wellness space

A dedicated new wellness space will be constructed in the courtyard providing a focus for the wider programme which has built-up over each stage.



As the success and popularity of the project grows the final group of activities collect the long term actions propose more substantial interventions within and amongst the existing structures. These projects will require significant levels of funding.

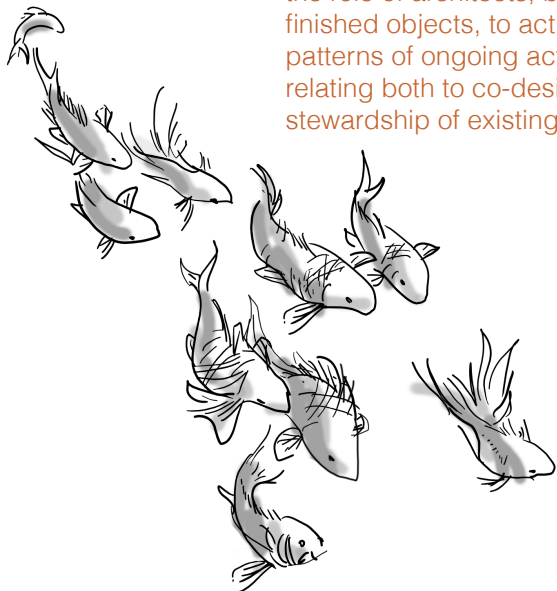
Collectively they will consolidate the overall operation of the centre and usability of the building resolving issues of circulation and access to the courtyard. This will realise the initial vision of CECAS provide a strong platform for the future.



## Swimming with the shoal:

## Working with people and processes, fixed objects and fluid action plans

The approach taken at Myross House provides evidence of the value of collaborative design processes and a shift in the role of architects, beyond the design of finished objects, to act as instigators of patterns of ongoing actions and processes, relating both to co-design but also to the stewardship of existing buildings.



One fish starts swimming with another and together they form a shoal. As others join them they swim together for a time. Never a fixed group, others come and go, perhaps splitting off, going it alone or recombining into new shoals. Unlike a school, a shoal of fish might contain members of different sizes and species. Each member adjusts their behaviour to remain close to the other fish in the group. Together they have a strength that they would not have as individuals, borrowing the slipstream of other fish to save energy and confound predators.

Inevitably our work as architects involves working with others and the image of the shoal recalls the act of swimming with others, whoever they might be, perhaps clients, community groups, individuals, builders or consultants. As Brady Mallalieu Architects we have worked with many people over the years, tailoring projects to closely meet their needs. The result of this process is generally a building, a physical entity that, we hope, will serve the people we have worked with as we move on to other shoals and projects, to different conversations with other fish.

More recently, we have begun to understand the shoal in another way. Rather than swimming amongst the shoal to help tailor a building, we instead swim with others to establish a shoal of activities and processes. Collectively they form the larger project, evolving in time as new opportunities emerge and others dissolve, new individuals and groups enter the frame and others leave. This loose, fluid collective is a shoal of both people and actions.



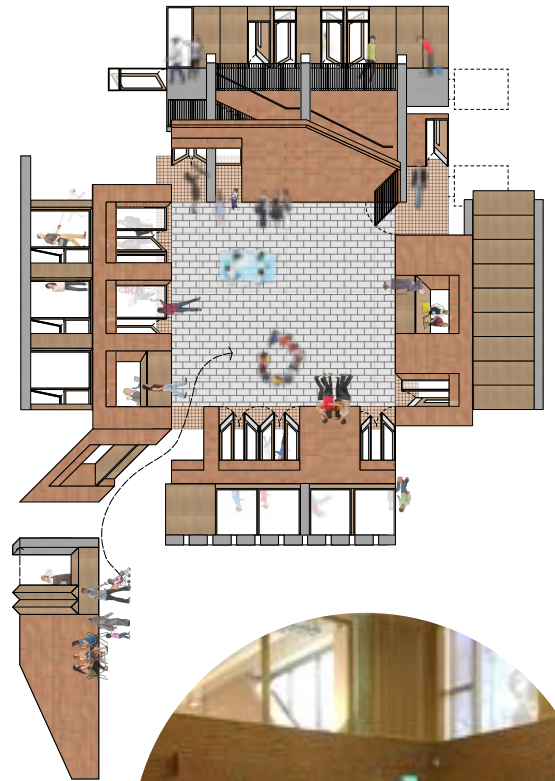
We discuss both of these approaches below, drawing upon our experience of two recent projects: In London, at Brickworks, swimming with the shoal allowed us to design a space for it, a tailored habitat for the shoal to thrive within. With Green Skibbreen in West Cork, Ireland, we proposed a fluid set of actions which contribute to the ongoing life of the shoal itself.

### A habitat for the shoal - Brickworks

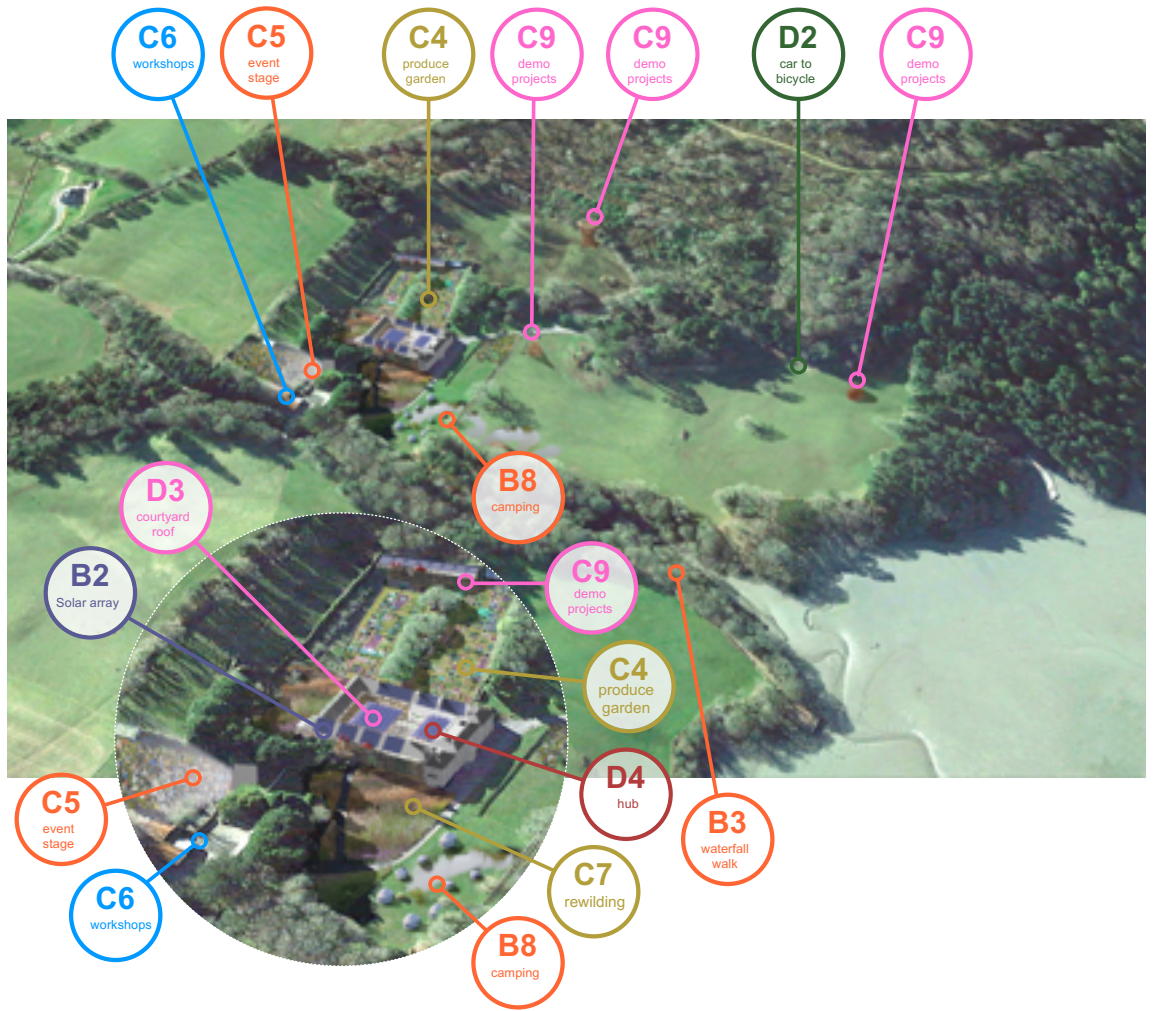
For Brickworks our shoal was gathered by Islington Council, the client for the project, and included eight different community groups and building users, together with locals from the housing estate where the site was located. We designed a new community centre with them through a series of design workshops. It is arranged over three floors around a central 'inhabited lobby'. This double height space provides a social focus for the building, hosts events and activities in its own right whilst giving access to the other more programmed spaces in the building which include; a large hall, community kitchen, children's drop-in centre, therapy rooms, roof garden, meeting room, music recording space and offices serving charities and community groups. Whilst each of these spaces is provided to address specific, known needs we were careful to imbue the building with the potential to accommodate both these predicted uses and prompt unexpected events, exchanges and activity.

The central 'inhabited lobby' is key to this.<sup>1</sup> It creates a loose, unprogrammed space surrounded by landings, openings, thresholds and doorways to adjoining spaces. People have to pass through the space to get to another, it is a place where you meet someone or catch a glimpse of something going on elsewhere. It is a place to gather, a living, civic, community space with a roof. Under this roof the activities of the centre are visible and accessible to all: Children from the estate can hang out there and get help with their homework, elders gather in a drop-in cafe, basic cooking skills are taught in a teaching kitchen, children and parents can access the help of two charities, a church can meet and the life of a myriad of groups, activities and support services have a home. Brickworks was grown and tailored in response to the needs of the local community it serves.

We hope that the habitat we have created for the shoal which inhabit the community centre will allow it to swim there happily for some time to come. The interior spaces are designed to be robust and flexible allowing different groups to adapt and inhabit the space over time.



*'a collection of actions which might be carried out over the short, medium and long term'*



### A shoal of actions - swimming with Green Skibbereen

During the spring lockdown of 2020 we were appointed by Green Skibbereen to work with them to consider how they might occupy Myross Wood House, near Leap, in West Cork, Ireland as a centre for community action on climate change. They are a recently formed group of individuals committed to grass roots activities that help the local community, businesses and organisations shift to low and zero carbon footprints. To help achieve these aims they are in the process of inhabiting a former Catholic retreat centre which will become a base for educational events, exhibitions, training and a broader range of activities relating to wellness and the environment. The process of re-inhabiting the building will become a demonstrative and hands-on pedagogical process as it is gradually re-used, retrofitted and upgraded.

We worked with them to develop the scope and nature of these activities and explore both how they might occupy the building and the opportunities the building presents to them. The result of this process was not a fixed masterplan or final layout for the building but a collection of actions which might be carried out over the short, medium and long term. We envisage these actions changing through the life of the group and their residency at Myross. New actions might be added as other opportunities are identified or grant

funding obtained, whilst others might prove unviable to remain unimplemented. Action by action Myross Wood House will evolve into the centre for community action they envisage.

Startup actions simply occupy the spaces that were there as a base for the group and take over some of the existing dormitory bedrooms as accommodation for tourists and students. In the short and medium business units and workshops are established, parts of the building are upgraded to improve energy efficiency, renewables installed and the wider estate brought back into productive use. Longer term, once confidence and viability have been established, more significant interventions are made in the building. Collectively we identified twenty nine independent actions that the group might focus on. Some will happen, some will remain dormant, some will suggest others. The project, assuming it could be described as such, is ongoing and perpetually incomplete.

The shoal of actions were identified by working with Green Skibbereen, itself a shoal of individuals, alongside our fellow design team members and by exploring the building and estate. Working under the restrictions imposed by the covid pandemic we were limited in the way we could engage more with the local community. Happily this is now getting easier and we can draw them more closely into the shoal.

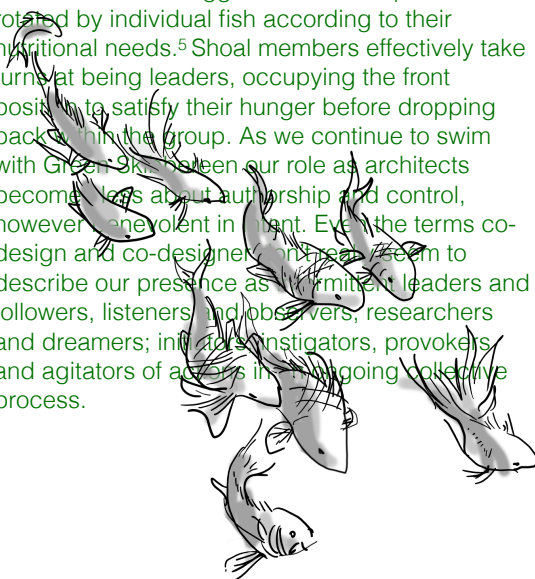
## Fixed objects and continuous processes

The definition of a project as a series of processes rather than as a fixed object is nothing new. German architect Gottfried Semper published *The Four Elements of Architecture* in 1851.<sup>2</sup> Significantly this interpreted buildings as the assembly of a series of craft and construction activities relating to the hearth (metalwork/ceramics), roof (carpentry), enclosure (weaving) and mound (masonry/earthwork). We tend to think of buildings as being 'completed' once these processes have ended and the 'finished' building is inhabited. Even then occupation, gravity and the weather continue to mould the building.<sup>3</sup>

In *Building in Time* Marvin Trachtenberg contrasts this idea of the building as a fixed object, which he associates with one of the architects of the Italian Renaissance, Leon Battista Alberti, with the ongoing processes of construction in the pre-renaissance era.<sup>4</sup> Here important large buildings were constructed over decades or even centuries, the processes outlasting the lifespan of its participants. This leads to a very different way of understanding a building as a collaborative process over a prolonged duration, as an unfinished entity which others will add to in the future. This sense of continuous evolution over a long duration is not dissimilar from the way a village, town or city might evolve.

Something of this outlook is present in our experience of swimming with Green Skibbereen. Working with them we have identified a shoal of actions which will be nurtured to life. The pattern of actions is open to change. We hope others will add to it and swim amongst it. What the actions will grow into, and where they will end up, will help form the next chapter in the ongoing life of Myross Wood House. We are not seeking a final form for the building, to make the fish of the shoal assume a certain formation, limit how they might swim or who might swim alongside them. Instead we hope, alongside others, to instigate actions that will help the shoal thrive.

Recent research suggests that shoal positions are rotated by individual fish according to their nutritional needs.<sup>5</sup> Shoal members effectively take turns at being leaders, occupying the front position to satisfy their hunger before dropping back within the group. As we continue to swim with Green Skibbereen our role as architects becomes less about authorship and control, however benevolent in intent. Even the terms co-design and co-designer don't seem to describe our presence as 'firmities': leaders and followers, listeners and observers, researchers and dreamers; initiators, instigators, provokers and agitators of actions in an ongoing collective process.



## References:

1. Brady Mallalieu have evolved several inhabited lobbies in different projects. See: Andrew Carr, *Inhabited Lobbies: the social life of space in the work of Brady Mallalieu Architects*, Architectural Research Quarterly, Volume 22, Issue 2, June 2016, pp. 104-118.
2. Gottfried Semper, *The Four Elements of Architecture and Other Writings*, trans. by Henry Francis Mallgrave and Wolfgang Hermann (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 102.
3. For more on time in architecture see: Andrew Carr, *The Quick and the Dead: Temporality, temporal structure and the architectural chronotope*, Architectural Research Quarterly, Volume 21, Issue 2, June 2017, pp. 94-112.
4. Marvin Trachtenberg, *Building in Time* (New York: Yale University Press, 2010).
5. Krause, Jens & Hoare, Dan & Hemelrijk, Charlotte & Rubenstein, Daniel. (2000). *Leadership in fish shoals*. Fish and Fisheries. 1. 10.1111/j.1467-2979.2000.tb00001.x.