

# THE ABBOTSFORD CONVENT

## MASTER PLAN



Prepared by:  
Abbotsford Convent Foundation

30 September 2005

## **Contents**

- 1 Consultants
- 2 Introduction
- 3 The Site
- 4 Master Plan & Key Findings
- 5 Aims and Objectives
- 6 Land Use and Activities
- 7 Vehicular Circulation and Car Parking
- 8 Pedestrian Network
- 9 Address and Front Doors
- 10 Buildings and Works
- 11 Environmental Impact
- 12 Stakeholders
- 13 Appendix 1: Conservation Analysis

### **Consultants**

The Abbotsford Convent Foundation (ACF) has prepared this updated Master Plan with the assistance of the following consultants:

Principal Consultant:	Denton Corker Marshall, Architects and Planners
Conservation Analysis:	Nigel Lewis Richard Aitken, Conservation Architects
Traffic Analysis:	GTA, Traffic Consultants
Tenancy Analysis:	Colliers Jardine & Commercial Acumen
Structural Engineer:	Trevor Huggard and Associates
Services Engineer:	AHW Consulting Engineers
Quantity Surveyor:	Rider Hunt Melbourne
Building Surveyor:	Landewee & Associates
Town Planning Consultant	Glossop Town Planning

This document is an update of the Abbotsford Convent Foundation Master Plan dated January 2004 which was appended to the Crown Grant of the Abbotsford Convent Precinct to the Abbotsford Convent Foundation in April 2004. It incorporates the transfer of the northern site, and reflects the tenancy opportunities and discussions that have occurred since the original Master Plan was prepared.

## **Introduction**

On the 12<sup>th</sup> June 2001 the Bracks Government announced its decision to approve the development of an Arts, Education & Cultural Precinct at the Former Convent of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd in Abbotsford, now known as the Abbotsford Convent.

The Government announced the approval of the Business Plan on 2nd October 2002. 'The Government has now had the Abbotsford Convent Foundation's Business Plan independently assessed and they, with the community, can proceed with our formal blessing.'

In April 2004 the land and buildings to the south of St. Heliers Street were transferred under Crown Grant to the Abbotsford Convent Foundation.

On 8<sup>th</sup> July 2005 the title for the land to the north of St. Heliers Street was transferred to the Abbotsford Convent Foundation.

## **The Site**

The principal subject of the Master Plan is the site of the Abbotsford Convent.

The site is generally described as the land bound by St Heliers Street to the north; Clarke Street to the west; and the Main Yarra Trail bike path to the south and east. The exception being the inclusion of the Good Shepherd Nursing Home and Chapel located within this land parcel at the corner of St Heliers and Clarke Streets.

The close proximity and shared boundary between the Abbotsford Convent and the Good Shepherd Nursing Home and Chapel means that both parties require service access over parts of each others land. Discussions with the Sisters of the Good Shepherd have established a principle of co-operative understanding and the potential for shared use of land when necessary to provide access to facilities.

On 8<sup>th</sup> July 2005 the land to the north of St. Heliers Street was transferred to the Abbotsford Convent Foundation to operate on behalf of the precinct including the Collingwood Children's Farm. This land is currently used as carparking and lies between St. Heliers Street on the south and Johnston Street as its northern boundary. The western boundary is formed by the Lourdes building precinct and the hotel at the corner of Johnston Street and Clarke Street. A narrow strip of land runs between the hotel and the neighbouring child care center, which affords access to Clarke Street. The eastern boundary is formed by the public footpath adjacent to the Collingwood Children's Farm, and the escarpment alongside the Johnston Street bridge.

Although not part of the Abbotsford Convent site the adjacent Collingwood Children's Farm, the Yarra Bend Park and the Yarra River are critically important features and activity centres that will both impact upon and be impacted upon by the future development of the Abbotsford Convent site. In preparing the Master Plan the linkages between these entities and the possibility of shared enhancements and facilities has been included.

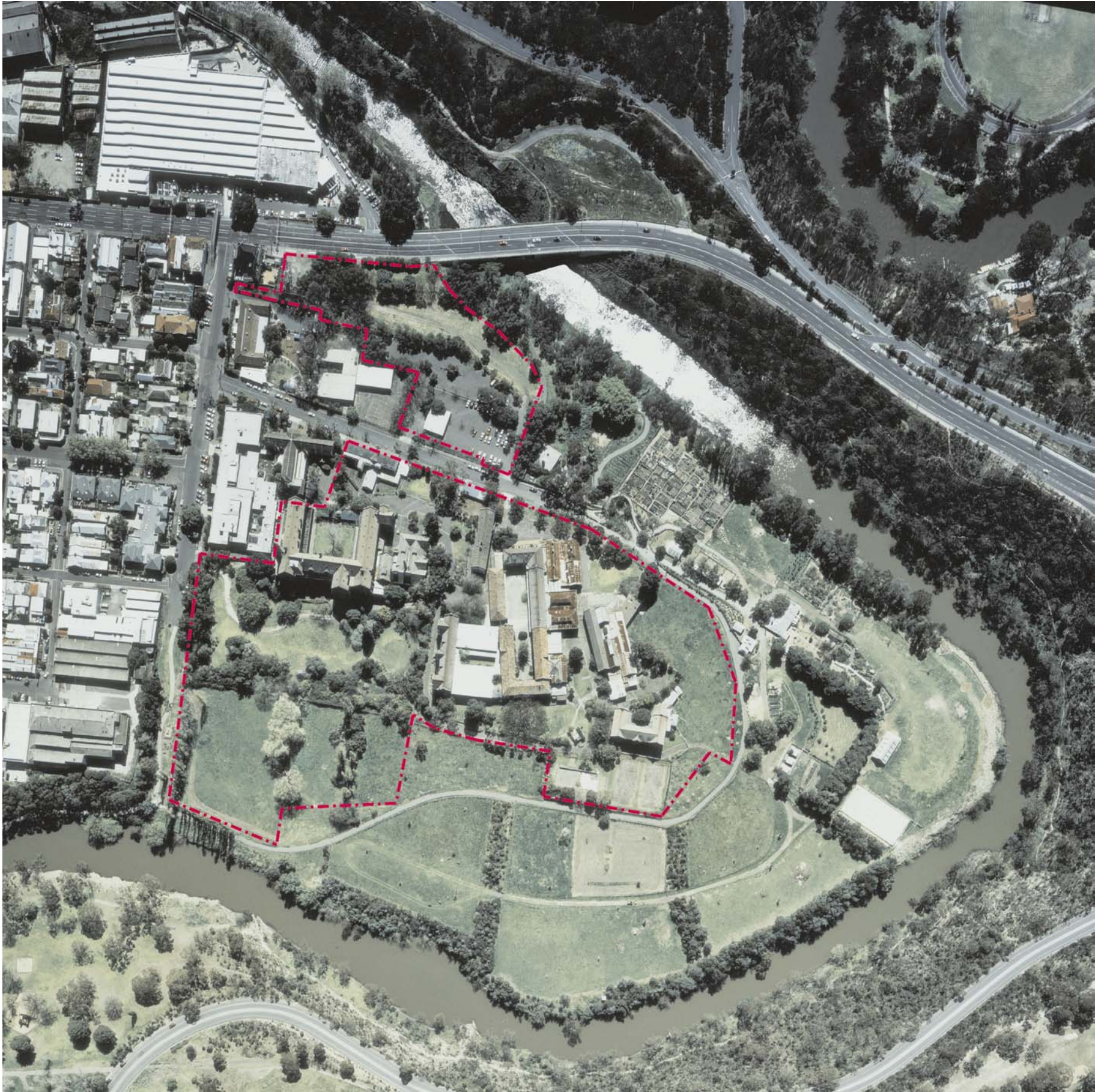


Figure 1. ACF site boundary as of July 2005.

### **Master Plan and Key Findings**

1. The Abbotsford Convent site must be considered within the context of the adjacent Yarra Bend Park, Collingwood Children's Farm, Main Yarra Trail bike path and the Yarra River. The site is by its location, heritage and landscape an integral part of this significant parkland and environmental precinct.
2. The development of the Abbotsford Convent and its Master Plan has the potential to act as a catalyst for the creation of a major new public entry point and activity centre in this parkland precinct. A comparable model is the relationship and juxtaposition of Heide and Banksia Park.
3. Issues of public awareness, access, circulation networks / paths and carparking should not be limited to the needs of users of the convent buildings, grounds and activities but must also address the needs of current and potential users of the Yarra Bend Park, Collingwood Children's Farm, the Main Yarra Trail bike path and the Yarra River.
4. The visitor's entry procedure to the precinct and overall experience should be carefully managed from the arrival point to build an awareness of the landscape, Yarra Bend Park, the Yarra River, Collingwood Children's Farm and the Abbotsford Convent. All of these facilities providing a potential range of related but varied activities will encourage repeat, sustained and stimulating visitations.
5. A central court to provide an activity focus and orientation point should be established within the Abbotsford Convent grounds.
6. The carparking facilities should be concentrated in one or two areas to achieve maximum efficiency and convenience to visitors.
7. Carparking should be landscaped to properly recognise vistas, sightlines, heritage feature and the landscape.
8. The convent site should be developed as a pedestrian precinct, with vehicle drop off points only for regular users, the elderly and disabled located within the convent grounds.

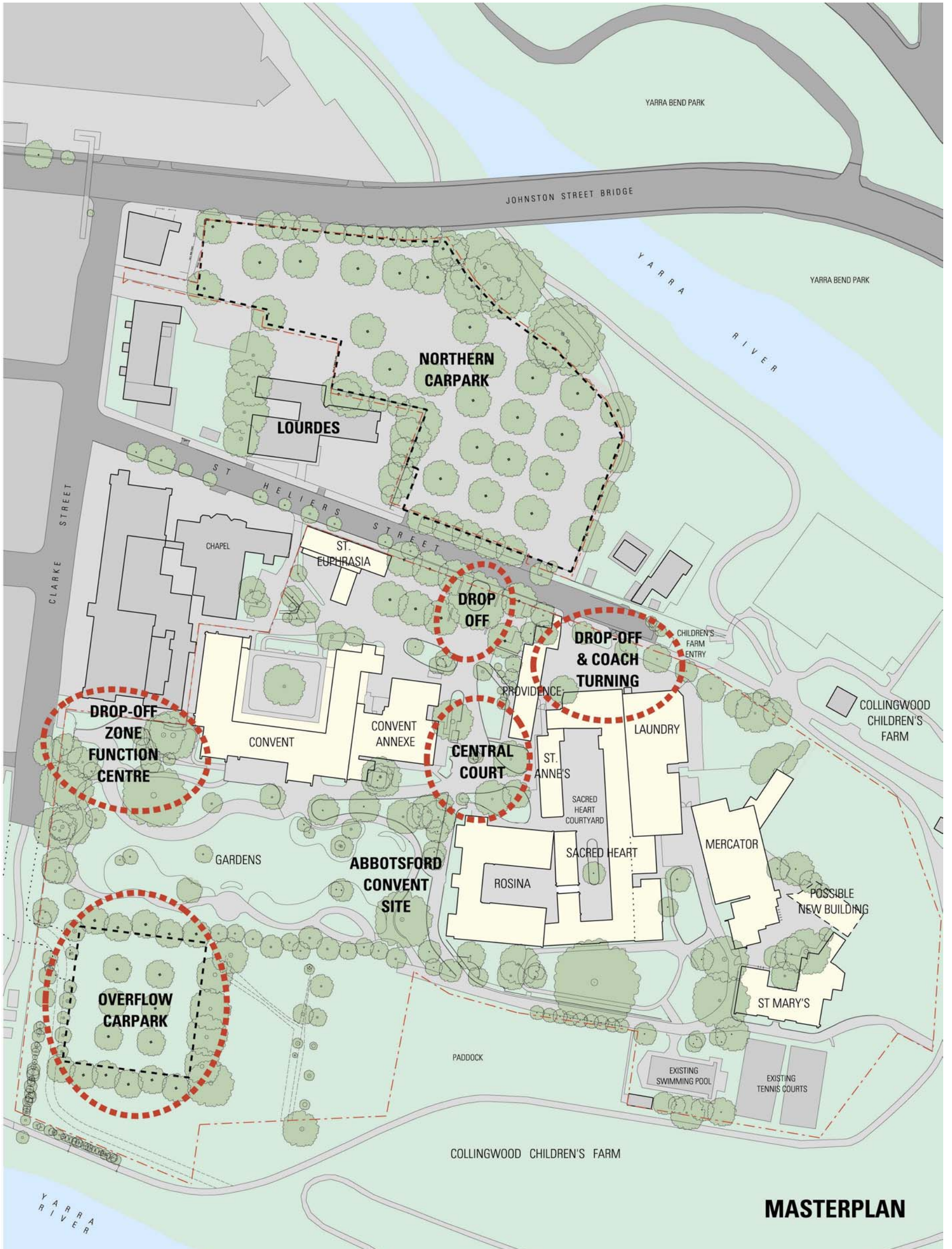


Figure 2. Master Plan



## **Abbotsford Convent Master Plan:**

### **Aims & Objectives**

1. Investigate and define the heritage attributes, potentials and constraints of the site and its surrounds.
2. Investigate and define the operational requirements for the proposed arts, education and cultural uses proposed for the site.
3. Retain the garden and landscape features that contribute to the special contemplative, tranquil qualities of the existing site experience.
4. Encourage public access
5. Provide precinct carparking spaces in a practical, efficient and unobtrusive manner.
6. Provide access points and drop-off points around the perimeter of the site and develop a pedestrian precinct and circulation within the site, and provide links where possible to the Main Yarra Trail bike path, Collingwood Children's Farm, the Yarra Bend Park and the Yarra River.
7. Provide a focal point for activities, circulation and site orientation to concentrate a 'critical mass' of activity to create a sense of liveliness without over developing the site.
8. Create distinct but integrated zones for each of the major different activities: commercial / hospitality; arts / theatre / well-being and education.
9. Encourage and provide maximum opportunities for casual use of the gardens, open space and river.

## **Land Use & Activities**

Each of the major groups of activities: arts and cultural activities, such as studios, galleries, theatres and rehearsal spaces; commercial & hospitality, food and drinks premises, primary produce sales and other well-being and education uses are to be clustered together to form zones of related activities within the Abbotsford Convent site.

A number of prospective tenants blur the traditional boundaries between land use classifications whilst being in sympathy with the guiding principles of the ACF. One example of this is the mixture of education, arts and culture within the Sacred Heart building. This would include but not be limited to artists' studios, performing arts rehearsal and performance spaces, a "Slow Food" precinct consisting of a restaurant, a cafe, a related educational facility and other uses consistent with the "Slow Food" philosophy and concept.

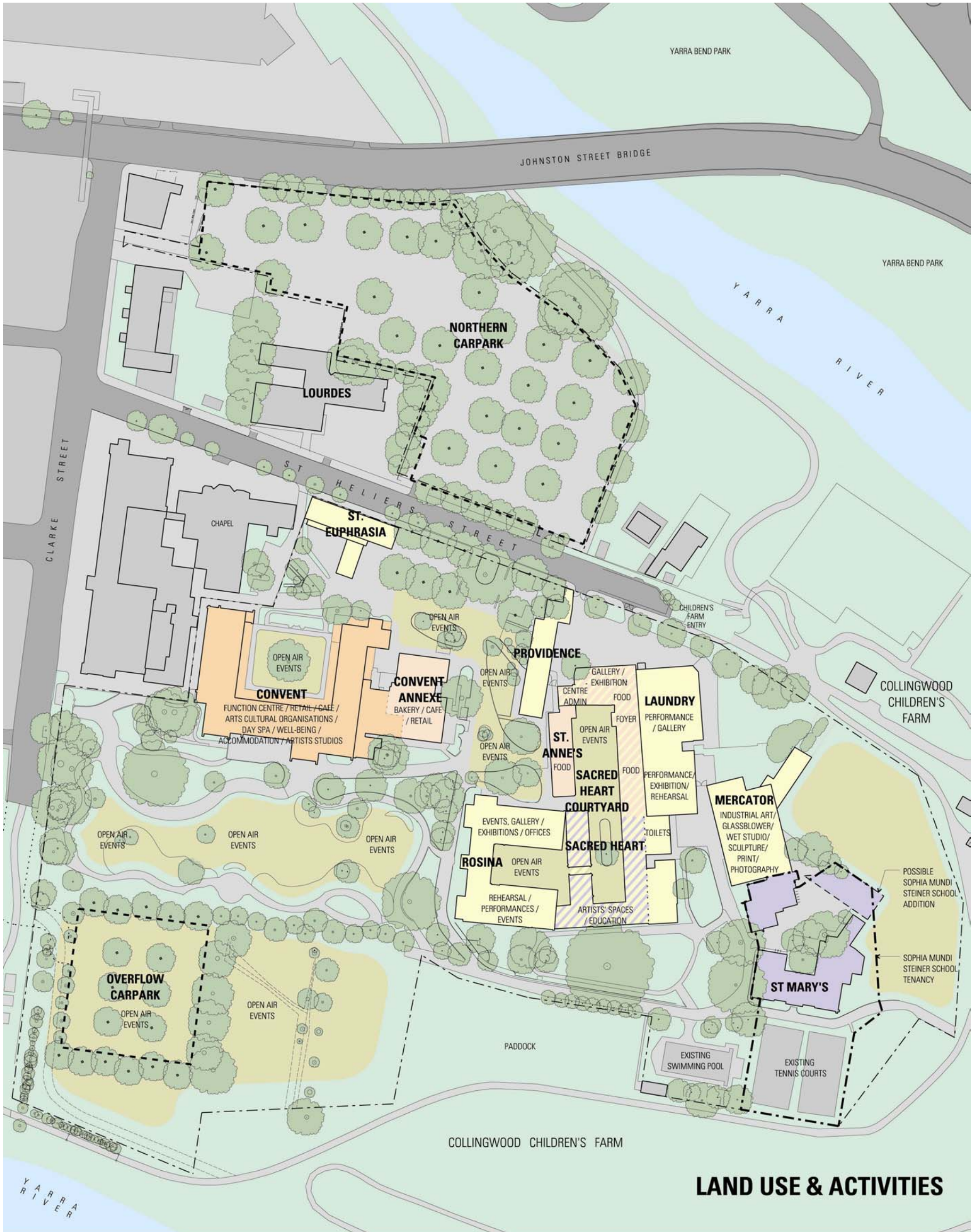
The diagram overleaf shows the anticipated layout for building usage but this may vary dependant on tenant demand. Whilst the mix of usages would be preserved the location of tenant type may vary. For example whilst the Laundries are shown as rehearsal, performance, gallery use, it may be that an alternative appropriate use could be tenanted within the building. This could include but not be limited to industrial artist, sculpture, stage set construction or similar activities

The areas of Yarra Bend Park adjacent to the Abbotsford Convent, the Collingwood Children's Farm, the Main Yarra Trail bike path and the River in this area have limited facilities and access for visitors. The development of the Abbotsford Convent project will generate a significant focal point and provide facilities for users of all of these entities.

The provision of new access and service facilities is likely to increase the visitations to the Yarra Bend Park, the Collingwood Children's Farm and the Main Yarra Trail Bike Path as well as attracting patrons to the Abbotsford Convent.

It is intended that the gardens and open spaces around the precinct be utilized for outdoor events and exhibitions to maximize community access and involvement. These would include, but not be limited to open days, concerts, cultural festivals, fetes, markets and theatrical performances.

In addition to events ACF are looking to create a Sculpture Garden to offer the community the opportunity to view works by local artists.



**LEGEND**

<span style="display:inline-block; width:15px; height:15px; background-color:orange; border:1px solid black;"></span> MIXED USE	<span style="display:inline-block; width:15px; height:15px; background-color:purple; border:1px solid black;"></span> EDUCATION	<span style="display:inline-block; width:15px; height:15px; background-color:grey; border:1px solid black;"></span> HARD LANDSCAPE	<span style="display:inline-block; width:15px; height:15px; background-color:yellowgreen; border:1px solid black;"></span> OPEN AIR EVENTS	<span style="display:inline-block; border:1px dashed black; width:15px; height:15px;"></span> ACF TITLE BOUNDARY
<span style="display:inline-block; width:15px; height:15px; background-color:yellow; border:1px solid black;"></span> ARTS	<span style="display:inline-block; width:15px; height:15px; background-color:lightorange; border:1px solid black;"></span> FOOD & CULTURE	<span style="display:inline-block; width:15px; height:15px; background-color:lightgreen; border:1px solid black;"></span> SOFT LANDSCAPE		<span style="display:inline-block; border:1px dashed black; width:15px; height:15px;"></span> ACF CARPARKING

Figure 3. Land Use and Activities

### **Vehicular Circulation & Car Parking**

Vehicle access and movement within the Convent precinct is restricted to service vehicles only. The intention is to create a pedestrian priority precinct and pick up and drop off associated with educational use.

Vehicle access to be provided along Clarke Street and St Heliers Street, to serve drop off/pick up facilities and the main carpark. Traffic in St Heliers Street past the proposed Entry Court and drop off is to be restricted to service vehicles only.

The Clarke Street and Johnston Street intersection could be signalised if required. A left turn slip lane should not be required; as there are unlikely to be large numbers of cars turning here during peak hours periods.

In addition to the various drop off facilities located around the perimeter of the precinct a school drop off / coach turnaround is to be provided on the open area to the north of the industrial school. This will allow safe drop off for pupils attending the Steiner School in the St Mary's building, and assist coach parties in visiting both the Abbotsford Convent precinct and the Collingwood Children's Farm. The coaches will be able to turn in the designated off road location rather than trying to manoeuvre on St Heliers Street.

The principal carpark for the precinct will be on the land to the north of St Heliers Street. This land currently serves as a public carpark, the amount of carparking provided on site as of 29 September 2005 is sufficient to meet the parking requirement of the Special Use Zone 4. It is anticipated that the current provision will be increased in a series of stages as funding permits and demand requires, such that adequate carparking is provided for the tenants on site at any time throughout the development of the precinct.

An overflow carpark for special events is proposed in the meadows to the south of the main Convent building. This carpark is to be accessed via Clarke Street. Carparking in this location is consistent with the original Master Plan as approved by the State of Victoria and incorporated into the Deed Agreement between the Abbotsford Convent Foundation and the State of Victoria.

A number of spaces for short term parking and drop off / pick up activities necessary for the arts and cultural occupants of the precinct, retail facilities and educational facilities are provided in St Heliers Street next to the turn around and central court/arrival plaza. Carparking in this location is consistent with the original Master Plan as approved by the State of Victoria and incorporated into the Deed Agreement between the Abbotsford Convent Foundation and the State of Victoria.

The locations identified above will provide the spaces needed to cater for the needs of the Abbotsford Convent development and the Collingwood Children's Farm plus additional spaces for visitors to the Yarra River.

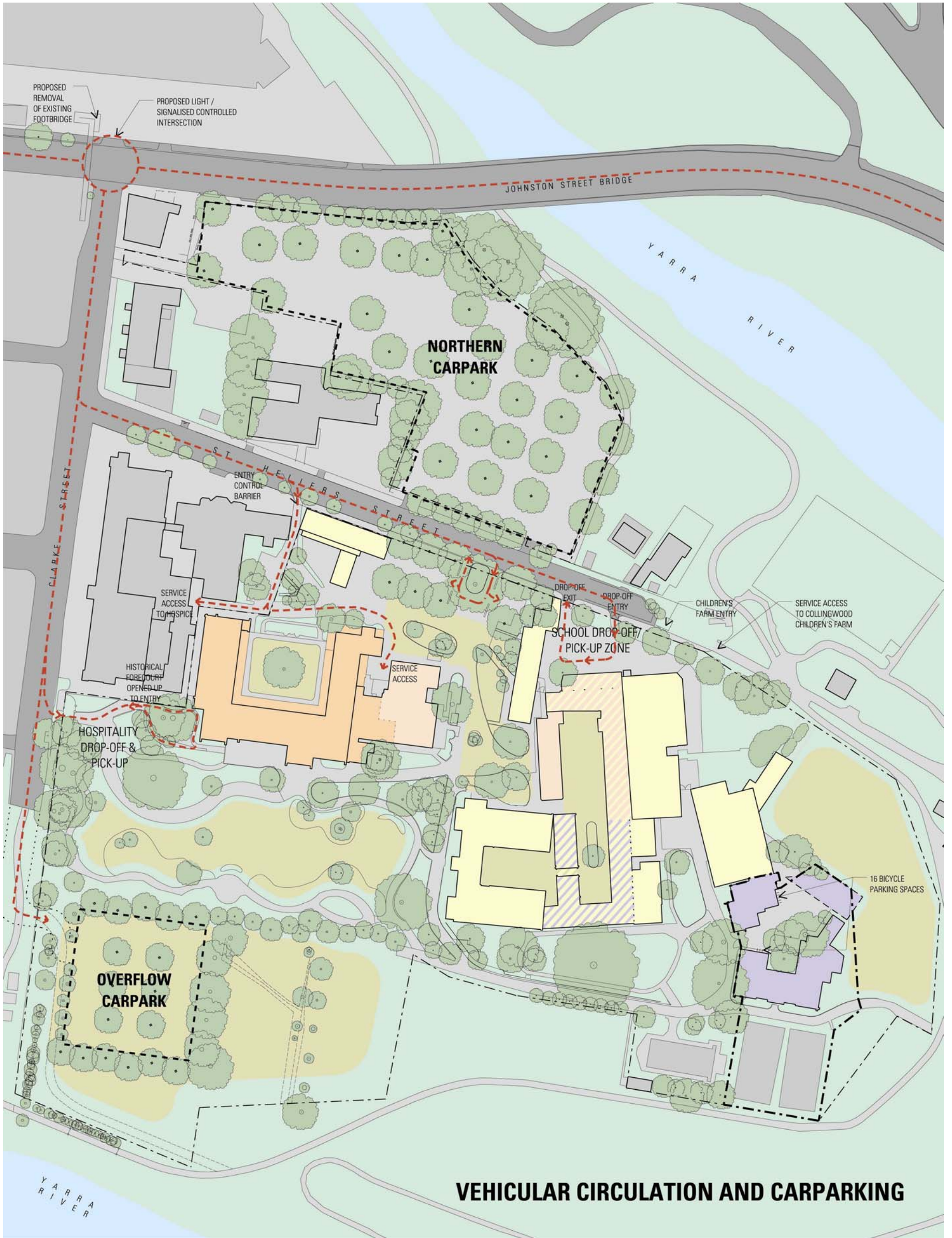


Figure 4. Vehicular Circulation and Carparking

### **Pedestrian Network & Access**

The Abbotsford Convent site, the Yarra Bend Park and the Collingwood Children's Farm are predominantly pedestrian precincts.

The major existing circulation route in the area is the Main Yarra Trail bike path. This is located on the Abbotsford side of the river. There is limited access to the areas of the Yarra Bend Park located on the other side of the river.

In the longer term options should be examined to link both sides of the Yarra River and thereby open up large parts of Yarra Bend Park and the Yarra River reserve to new visitors.

The Abbotsford Convent Site has been totally closed to the public over the past eight years. Previously, it was generally only accessible to occupants and 'those in the know'. The development of the Abbotsford Convent as proposed in this Master Plan will open the site and wider precinct to the public in a way that has not previously been available.

Since 1st May 2005, the Abbotsford Convent Gardens are open to the public from 9.30am – 4.30pm, Monday through Friday.

Future developments to the cycle/ pedestrian network include a link from the Main Yarra Trail bike path into the precinct's Central Court via the meadows on the southern side of the Gardens.

In order to encourage the use of bicycles the precinct will provide bicycle parking bays at convenient locations throughout the precinct.

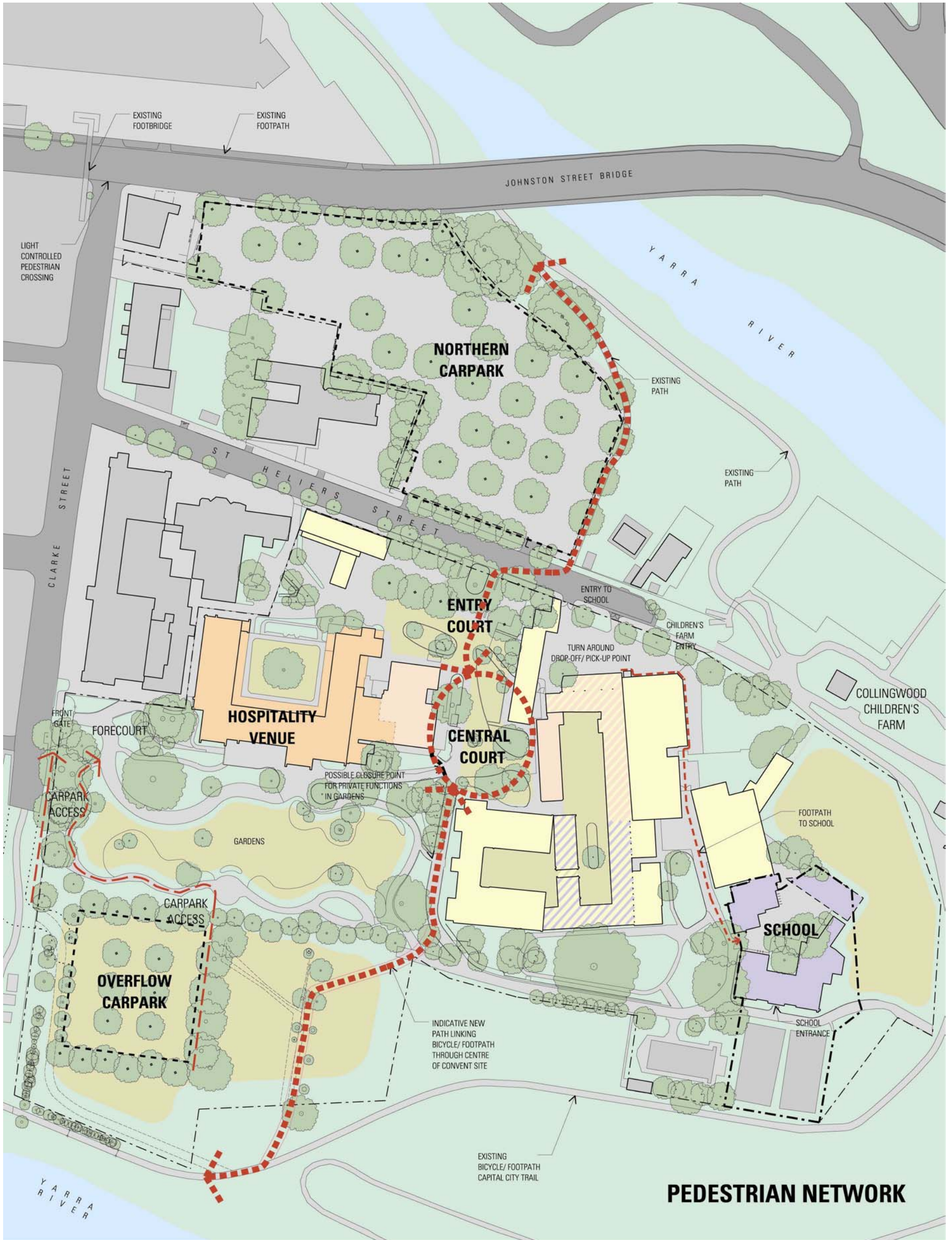


Figure 5. Pedestrian Network



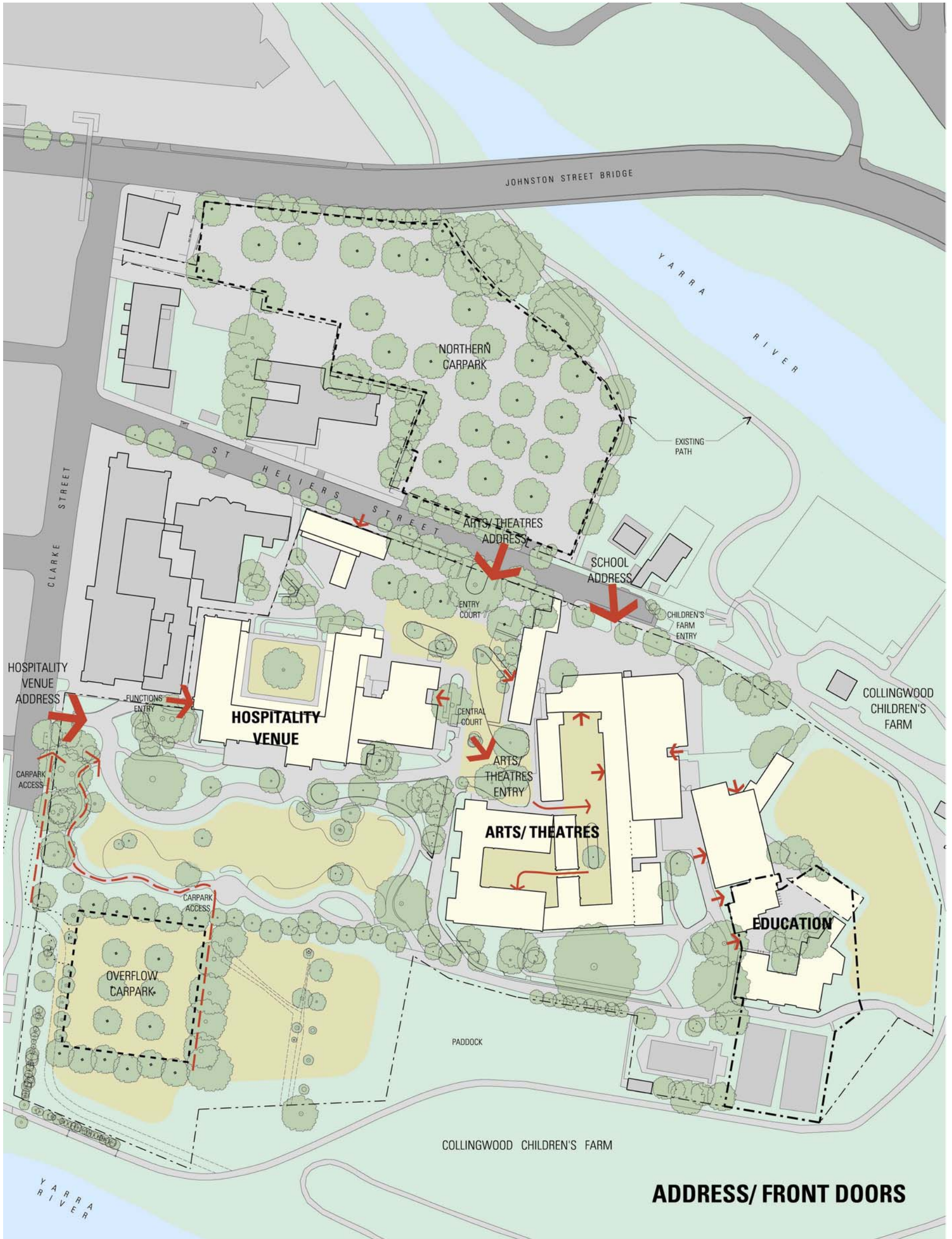
### **Address / Front Doors**

The Abbotsford Convent development is proposed to have two addresses. A principal address for the general visitor and a second address for the commercial hospitality patrons.

The principal address for the general visitor is to be the St Heliers Street entry point / carpark. The second address, for the commercial hospitality patrons in the southern wing of the main convent building will be the original entry in Clarke Street.

From the central court in the convent grounds visitors will have direct access to the 'front doors' of all the major arts and education facilities on the site, the retail facilities and the major gardens. The commercial hospitality facilities will also be accessible from the central court.

The central court will be a lively, active arena; an orientation place and a venue for outdoor markets and performance.



**LEGEND**

MIXED USE	EDUCATION	HARD LANDSCAPE	OPEN AIR EVENTS	ACF TITLE BOUNDARY
ARTS	FOOD & CULTURE	SOFT LANDSCAPE		ACF CARPARKING

Figure 6. Address/ Front Doors

## **Buildings and Works**

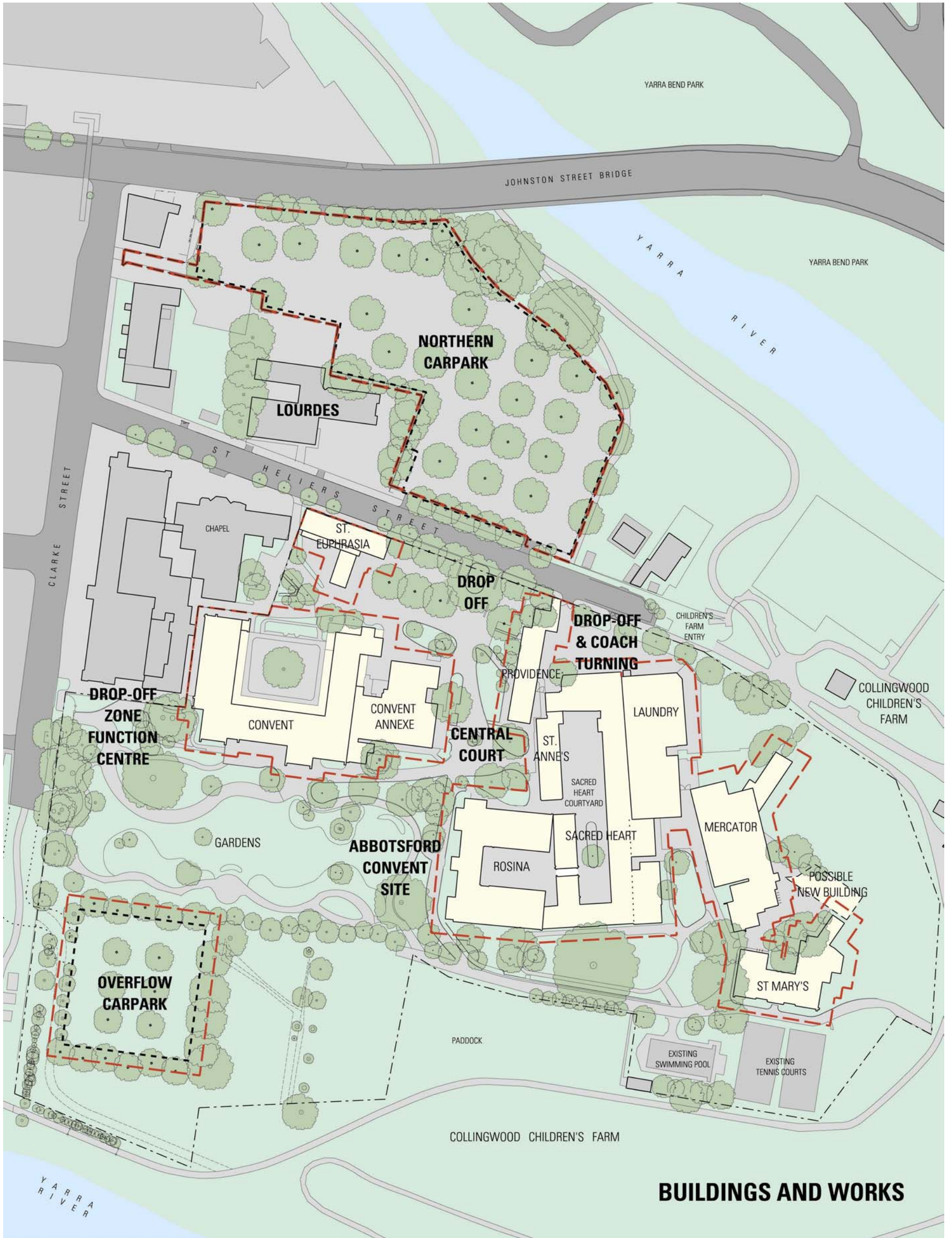
The Abbotsford Convent Foundation's primary aim is to conserve the existing buildings. The programme of works is directed towards repair and adaptive re-use of the existing fabric. In order to adapt the buildings to the requirements of prospective tenants a number of limited interventions are anticipated. These may include the following:-

1. Removal of intrusive additions (post 1963) which detract from the original design of the complex.
2. Making good of external walls after removal of later works.
3. Brick up later opening/ missing section of original wall after removal of later works.
4. Reconstruct original features and building fabric to original design.
5. Remove paint from face brickwork, or original rendered finish, by means approved by Heritage Victoria.
6. Remove later fill around buildings to original level.
7. Upgrade intrusive items to ameliorate their impact through colour, screening and other measures.
8. Restore/ reconstruct original ceiling/ wall/ door/ window/ fireplace or other features.
9. Cutting in of new external door openings.
10. Converting existing windows to doors.
11. Creating new windows.
12. The provision of disabled access ramps.
13. The provision of disabled access automatic doors.
14. The provision of new external covered ways or entry canopy.
15. The provision of new areas of decking.
16. New stairway.
17. New external enclosures for boilers, air handling units or other plants.
18. Removal and replacement of hazardous material.
19. Change of door swings
20. Bricking up of original doorways.
21. New door opening in wall.
22. Covering over of door/ window whilst retaining joinery in position.
23. Installation of new lift and enclosure for disabled access, food service, or move furniture to and from storage.

24. Installation of new removable internal walls/ partitions.
25. Retention and modification of existing toilet facilities.
26. Installation of toilets in a new location.
27. Upgrading/ re-using existing kitchen
28. Installing new kitchens in new locations, including associated services.
29. New skylights.
30. Where regulation/ proposed function necessitates install fire activated sprinklers.
31. Where regulation/ proposed function necessitates install new smoke control wall and door(s).
32. New buildings up to 15 sqm gross floor area and less than 2.7 metres high within building envelope. (Figure 7)
33. New footpaths as required for disabled access or where proposed function dictates.
34. Re-establish original pathways and accessways within the precincts hard and soft landscaping.
35. Repair and re-establish fencelines both within and to the perimeter of the precinct.
36. New stormwater storage and irrigation system to be located at northern edge of southern meadow.
37. New wayfinding and educational signage.
38. Roof repairs and general maintenance to buildings' fabric.
39. Painting of doors and windows
40. Repairs to floors, walls and ceilings as required to ensure the integrity of the building fabric.

The building envelope identified on the drawing overleaf identifies an outline within which a planning permit will not be required for new building and works. The envelope is offset from the face of the existing building by 5 metres, so as to allow for minor protrusions such as canopies.

Any new buildings (but not works) located outside the building envelope will require a planning permit from the responsible authority. The Planning and Environment Act (1987) defines the term 'works' and includes landscaping, pedestrian pathways, laying underground infrastructure and the like.



LEGEND				
<span style="display:inline-block; width:15px; height:15px; background-color:orange;"></span> MIXED USE	<span style="display:inline-block; width:15px; height:15px; background-color:purple;"></span> EDUCATION	<span style="display:inline-block; width:15px; height:15px; background-color:grey;"></span> HARD LANDSCAPE	<span style="display:inline-block; width:15px; height:15px; background-color:yellow;"></span> OPEN AIR EVENTS	<span style="border: 1px dashed black; display:inline-block; width:15px; height:15px;"></span> ACF TITLE BOUNDARY
<span style="display:inline-block; width:15px; height:15px; background-color:yellow;"></span> ARTS	<span style="display:inline-block; width:15px; height:15px; background-color:orange;"></span> FOOD & CULTURE	<span style="display:inline-block; width:15px; height:15px; background-color:lightgreen;"></span> SOFT LANDSCAPE	<span style="border: 2px dashed red; display:inline-block; width:15px; height:15px;"></span> BUILDING ENVELOPE	<span style="border: 2px dashed black; display:inline-block; width:15px; height:15px;"></span> ACF CARPARKING

Figure 7. Buildings and Works

### **Environmental Impact**

It is the intention of the Abbotsford Convent Foundation to have minimal additional development at the precinct, so as to respect and protect its unique genius loci. It has been an important part of both the initial campaign to save the precinct and the guiding philosophy behind its renewal that it should be an example of environmentally sustainable redevelopment.

### **Reuse of the building fabric**

The very fact that the buildings themselves are to be reutilized is a significant environmental benefit in that had the original proposal to replace them been undertaken the result would have been significant landfill costs, transportation costs, waste material, noise and pollution related to the demolition of the existing and creation of the new buildings.

The works required to recycle the buildings for new uses will be kept to a minimum and thus will have minimal impact on the local environment. Most of the work will be maintenance and repair with some adaptive reuse work.

Where use allows the ACF is looking to take advantage of the thermal mass of the buildings and encourage the use of natural ventilation and similar passive solar controls so as to minimize the use of energy.

### **Pedestrian Zone**

The ACF is committed to the precinct being largely a vehicle free zone with carparking at the periphery. The design creates a pedestrian zone within the precinct which ties into the local pedestrian and cycle path network.

### **Local Environment**

The ACF is committed to maintaining and enhancing the local flora and fauna within the precinct by restoring the original gardens and including native plants to assist in increasing the diversity of birds and animals within the precinct.

### **Cleaning up contamination**

The ACF has commissioned a hazardous material survey of the precinct and has removed the vast majority of the material identified. The remaining material has been encapsulated or made safe and where appropriate identified for removal.

In addition to hazardous materials the ACF has identified redundant underground fuel storage tanks and is undertaking to remove these so as to remove the risk of any future contamination.

### **Stormwater storage**

The ACF has received federal funding for a stormwater storage system which will be installed in the near future. This will provide a storage capacity of 225,000 litres and will be used to water the gardens. A second stage is envisaged which will use recycled stormwater to flush the public toilets within the precinct.

### **Stormwater runoff**

The ACF has undertaken an extensive survey of its existing stormwater infrastructure and has identified branches that discharge into the lower meadows to the south of the Convent Building together with a branch that crosses the neighbouring land of the Collingwood Children's Farm (CCF), all of which are in need of replacement or repair.

As part of the stormwater storage system the branches discharging into the meadows will be diverted into the storage system.

ACF is committed to preventing any stormwater runoff leaving its land other than by a controlled drainage system. It is looking to work with all parties to enhance the local environment and protect the River Yarra corridor.

### **Contractors obligations**

As part of all building works contracts ACF require that contractors act in an environmentally responsible manner including the collection and responsible disposal of demolished or waste materials, paints etc .

### **Stakeholders**

Prior to the preparation of the Abbotsford Convent Master Plan, consultations were undertaken with the following:

**Yarra City Council**

**City of Boroondara**

**Parks Victoria**

**Heritage Victoria**

**Sisters of the Good Shepherd**

**Collingwood Children's farm**

**Early Learning Centre, Melbourne University**

### **Other Key Stakeholder Consultations:**

The organisations and groups listed below in alphabetical order also received a briefing regarding the Abbotsford Convent Master Plan

Arts Victoria

Australand Pty Ltd

Dept of Education, Employment & Training

Dept of Infrastructure

Melbourne Water

Office of the Premier & Cabinet

Office of the Minister for Education & the Arts

Office of the Minister for Planning

Dept of Sustainability and Environment

Dept of Treasury and Finance

Richard Wynne, MLA for Richmond

State Government St Heliers Interdepartmental Working Group

Vic Urban formerly Urban & Regional Land Corporation

Vic Roads

Community meetings have been held and issues raised have been taken account of.

Feedback from a series of community consultation meetings has been accommodated within the Master Plan.