



## ARCHITECTS COLLABORATIVE, AUROVILLE

“ SLOWING DOWN IS THE FIRST STEP IN SUSTAINABILITY ”

The Dream-weaving process facilitated by David Nightingale has been specifically evolved in Auroville to explore the possibilities of collaboration to produce results which aim to harness the **'highest common factor'** of the participants – harvest **the best ideas and weave them together** so that the sum is greater than the parts.

Often when people come together to work collectively on a joint project, the result is the **'lowest common denominator'** or else one member of the team usually ends up taking a decision making role and the others end up following.

In the case of the collaborative approach chosen for the Sustainable Livelihood Institute master planning, although each architect worked on separate design approaches in the beginning, he/ she **also committed to incorporating as many of the positive aspects of the other designs** as possible into their own schemes as well as adjusting the perceived problems in their own proposals.

As we move away from “my design / my idea”, it **becomes a collective, unified design with each participant having a similar level of intellectual and conceptual investment in the final result**. This is not only potentially more rewarding as a design process, where everyone learns from each other, but obviously has the potential to produce a richer more satisfying result for the client and the end-users.



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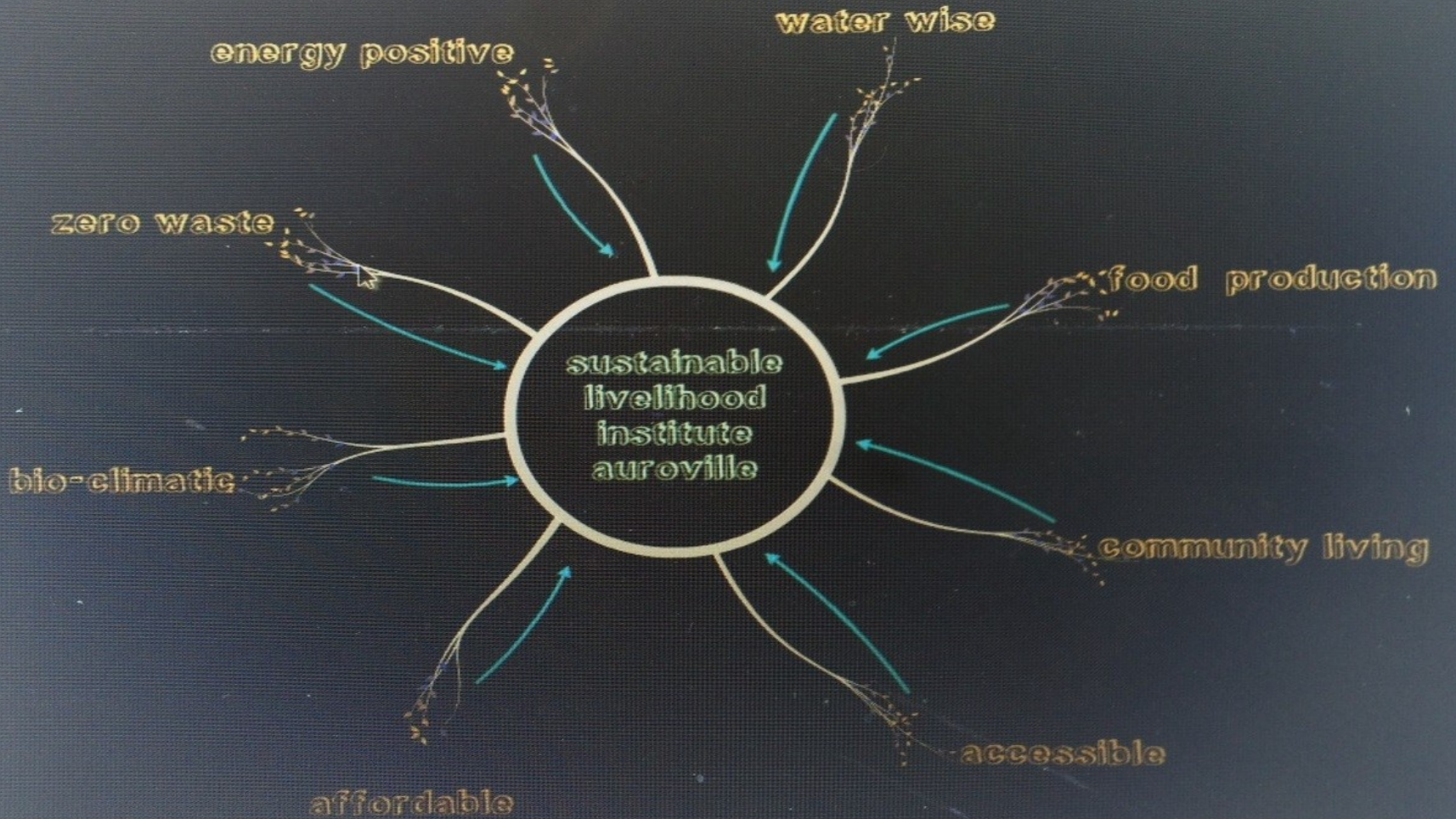
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**DREAM WEAVING, JULY 2014**

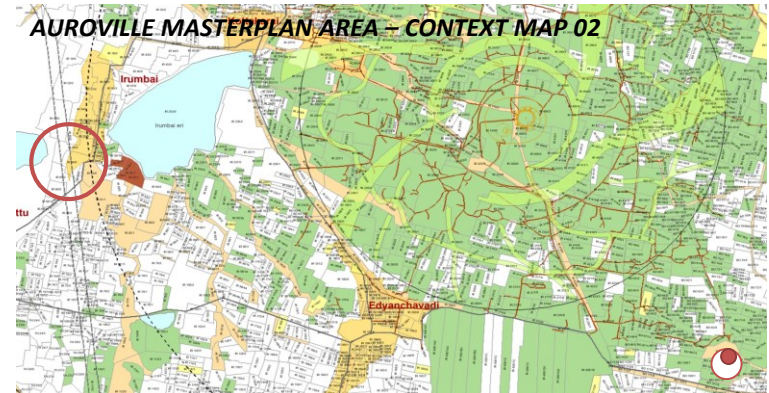
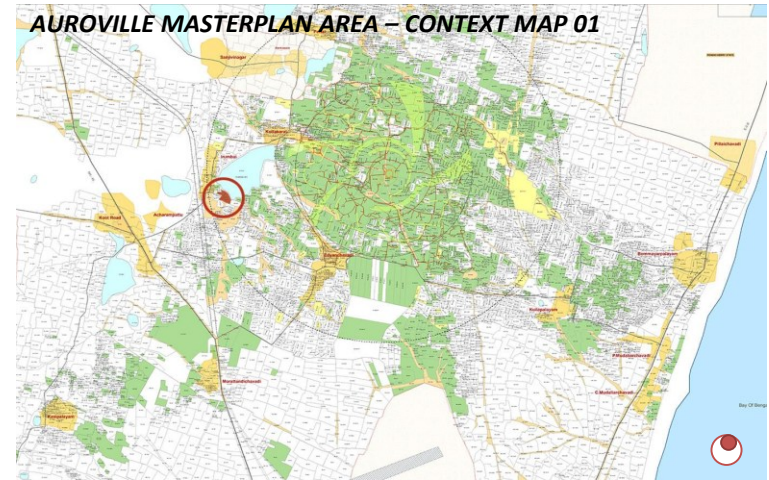


**DREAM WEAVING, MAY 2015**



### Key Points/ design ideas taken into account: SLI BRIEF

- A place for **transformative experiences**.
- A sense of **getting lost yet oriented** at the approach on the site
- Consideration of User group (Govt. officials, rural villagers, visiting trainees)
- Space **for farming, permaculture, spirulina farming** etc. as best practices examples
- Existing open **well** as an **important design factor** for residential development
- Natural beauty primarily considered – **developing landscape** around existing feature
- **Ponds** - to retain water towards wetland areas (maybe a series of interconnected ponds)
- Weaving the built layout according to landscape design
- Transition of spaces (covered walkways)



### Two entrances to the site

- From NH 65 – Irumbai exit – a short drive (500 mt) through Irumbai Village over perumboke lands
- Through the industrial & international zone of Auroville, through Kottakarai village and Irumbai temple

### Overlooking the Irumbai lake –

a man-made water catchment area serving the farm lands around. An opportunity to create a consolidated plan to rejuvenate the lake catchment area

Total area under consideration: **6.5 acres**

Total built up area in phase 01 – 21,000 sq ft

Total built up area in phase 02 - 25,000 sq ft





*SLI SITE ON GOOGLE MAP WITH AUROVILLE | E-W Axis of Matrimandir and Irumbai Temple*



*SITE PANORAMA*



*ENTRANCE FROM AUROVILLE*



*ENTRANCE FROM HIGHWAY*



**RETAINING THE  
OPEN LANDSCAPE**



**BUND ACTS  
AS SOUND  
BUFFER AND  
GREEN AREA**



**WELL DEPTH  
APPROX. 10 MTS  
AFTER SUMMER**



**KEY AXIS FROM  
MATRIMANDIR**

## KEY DRIVING FACTORS BEHIND INITIAL CONCEPT DESIGN:

- The essential qualities and characteristics of the site with the **vast expanse of land** and the powerful topic of **water, its scarcity and its abundance**
- The proximity of one of the **oldest and spiritual settlements** in the Master Plan area just adjacent to the site
- The chance to bring a deeper understanding of Auroville closer to the bioregion and vice versa.
- **A sustainable approach** in all aspects of work: a quest for minimalism (the search for the most refined and pure solution), the resourceful use of materials, the integration of light and air in balance with the other elements and a deep respect for the nature of things (and humans) are defining parts of the design.
- Simple frame structures, light weight roofing, pre-fabricated footings and a raised plinth, natural infill materials for walls and partitions and large covered walkways and assembly points help to manifest the design intent of a low-impact, maximum usability architecture.



SKETCH MASTERPLAN 01



SKETCH MASTERPLAN 02



SKETCH MASTERPLAN 03

The site for the **Sustainable Livelihood Institute** has been perfectly chosen for its location on the **outer edge of Auroville's Green Belt**, nestled between the village of Irumbai and the nearby lake and yet well shielded just a few hundred metres away from NH66.

Approaching through the village the **main entrance** connects to the west of the roughly six acre site. A second entrance across peromboke land accesses the south east corner of the plot, between farmland to the east and a small local catchment tank behind a high bund to the south, leaving the view over Irumbai lake to the north.

**Maintaining both these entrances** allows not only for ease of development in the future, but enables the provision of a link road along the west of the site, which facilitates servicing between the different functions of the institute as well as direct access for permanent residents and VIPs.

Early on in the dream-weaving process, whilst the group was exploring the design opportunities of the brief, it was discovered that **an existing well** on the site happened to lie at the **intersection of two prominent axes** – the first aligning with the Matrimandir to the east and the second with the Irumbai temple to the north. As the design process evolved the team therefore chose this auspicious alignment as the focus of the Master Plan.

To further emphasise this the water tank for the Institute has been located directly over the well, with stairs leading up to a platform providing wonderful views of both axes as well as the nearby lake. The East axis towards Matrimandir is centred around a small plaza terminating in an open air amphitheatre, whilst the axis from the Irumbai temple extends beyond the well to the south as a covered walk connecting the various buildings making up the rest of the campus (largely in Phase 02).

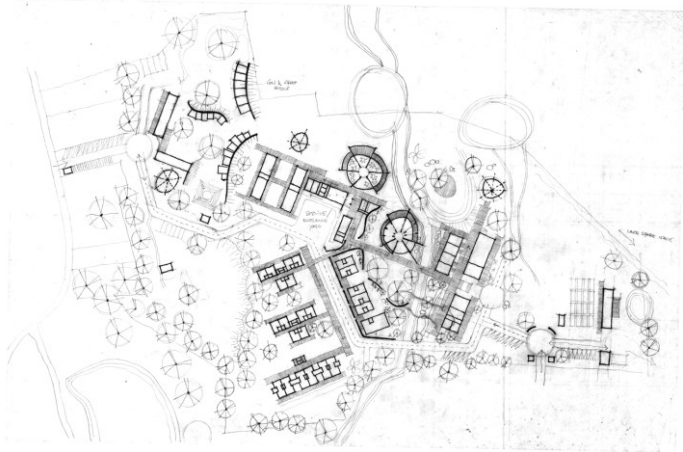
As one enters the site from the village on the west side, one arrives at the **welcome plaza** with a series of platforms and sculpted walls leading the visitor from the drop-off point to the **information centre** near the well. This has been situated within view of both the main entrance and the south axis and provides an immediate overview of the facilities of the Institute around the plaza. Along a covered passage to the east lies the **dining area** with its splendid views over the lake, and the kitchen and service area behind this to the north. Along the south side of the plaza are the buildings housing the first phase of classrooms and dormitories for the visiting groups.

After check-in, the visitor/s will have the opportunity to either ascend to the platform over the well to admire the view, or conversely descend a ramp down into the well to experience the cool silence of the clear water and to contemplate the **essential nature of our dependence on this life-giving element**. It is for this reason that the architects were happy to have the opportunity of utilising the serendipitous focus of the axes on the well, which allows the Master Plan to orient itself around a feature which highlights the **sustainable nature** of the goals of the institute!

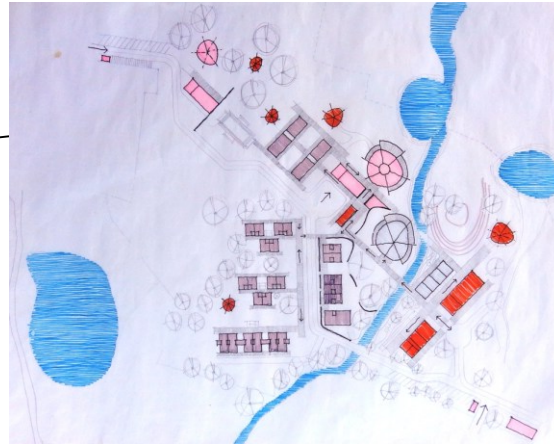
The buildings of the first phase are completed with the **quieter facilities**, including the manager's office and residence, lying between the axis and the internal road. As one then walks along the southern axis into the second phase one sees an area of agricultural planting to the east which is intended to be used by visitors to get hands-on experience of the techniques and innovations which they have come to learn. This area is framed between two further wings of buildings housing further classrooms and accommodation, and the southern axis finally terminates in the multi-purpose building.

The **services of the Institute**, including the maintenance yard, composting area and waste segregation, are located along the north fence behind the kitchen, which is nicely screened from the entrance by the curved wall of the welcome plaza. Whilst the parking has been dispersed along the western and southern boundaries, where the trees which have been planted as a buffer to the village can double as shade for the vehicles.

Since the construction of the Institute is foreseen to be in at least two phases, the architects felt it was necessary to **consolidate the buildings** of the first phase around the well, not only to already give the first phase a sense of cohesion but also to make the construction of the second phase easier without disturbing the existing functions.



SKETCH MASTERPLAN 04



SKETCH MASTERPLAN 05



SKETCH MASTERPLAN 06



1. Informal sit out



2. Man-made water body



3. Colonnade under building



4. Semi-covered corridor



5. Hydrological farming studies

## SLI / ZONING PLAN AS INTERMEDIATE OUTCOME OF DREAM-WEAVING SESSIONS



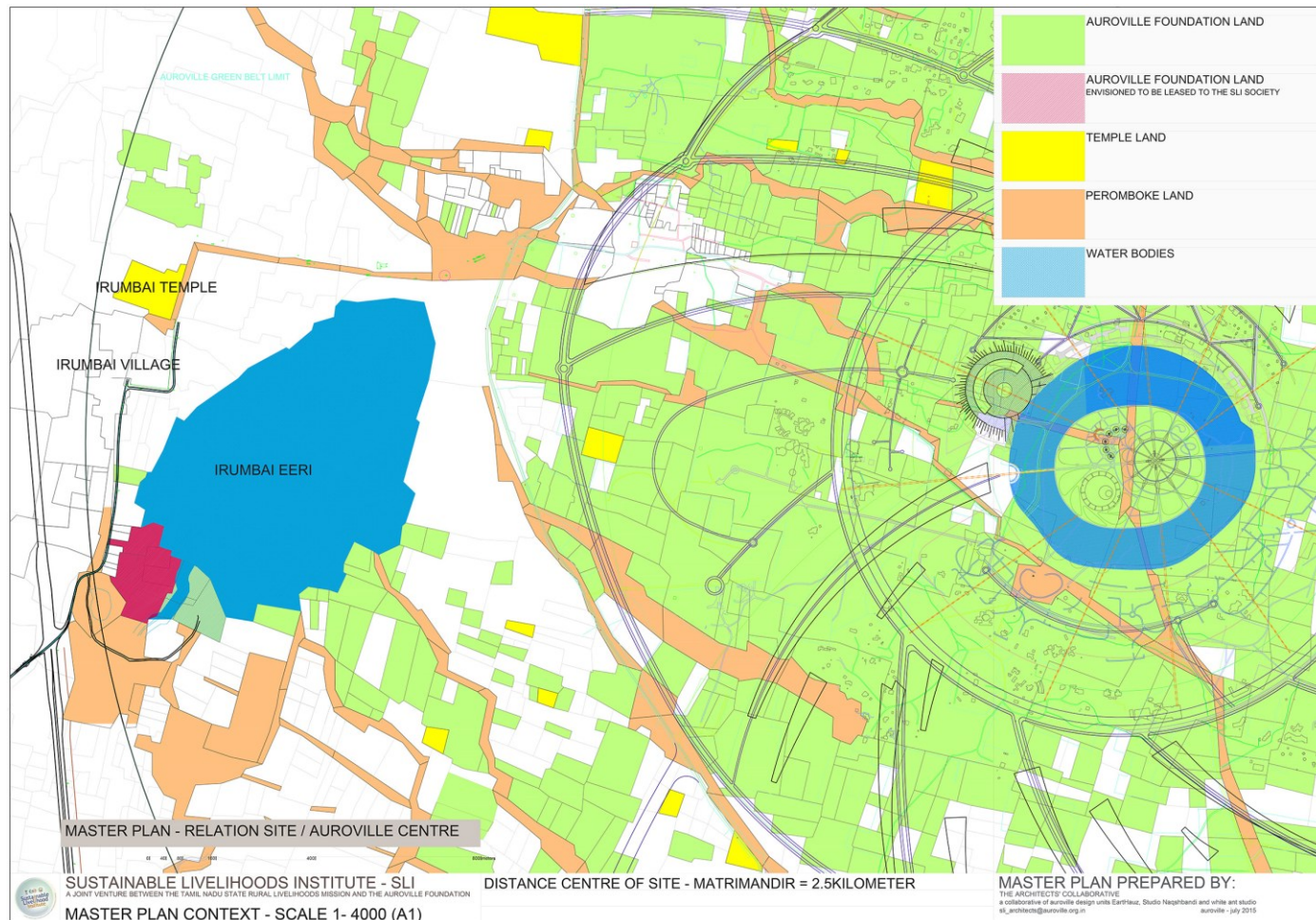
### Key Features of the SLI Masterplan

- An overhead water tank is to be built over the existing well and both are to become the centre of the masterplan to highlight the importance of water in sustainable practices.
- The axes of both Matrimandir and Irumbai temple cross at the well and are therefore emphasised in the plan to represent the joint nature of the project between Auroville and the Tamil Nadu government.
- The axis towards Matrimandir (roughly east/west) terminates in an open-air amphitheatre looking out over the Irumbai Lake.
- The north/south axis from Irumbai temple becomes the main pedestrian artery linking the different facilities of the campus.
- An area showcasing various trend-setting and forward-looking agricultural and landscaping practices is directly accessible to both classrooms and dormitories.
- An internal road connects the two entrances – facilitating ease of movement through the site as well as the construction of future extensions.

A final zoning plan shows the entire institute moved to the land west of the canyon/wadai on the grounds of an existing granite yard

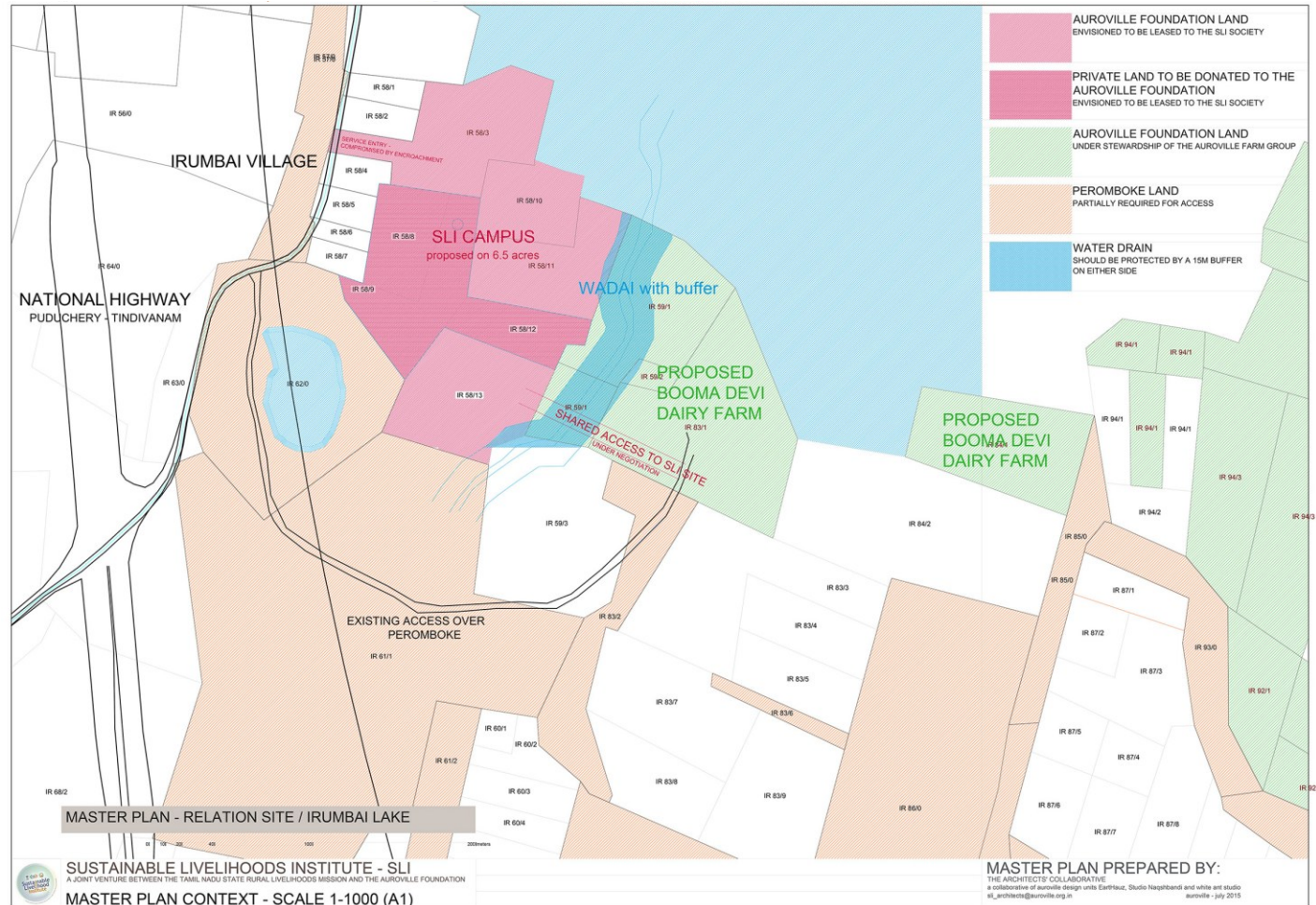
## Relationship of the campus site to Auroville's centre

- Institute located on the edge of Auroville's Green Belt – ideal as a symbol for Auroville's interaction with the Tamil Nadu state government.
- Ideal location to re-establish a long standing relationship with the Irumbai village and Panchayat. Spiritually the connection between the Matrimandir, the site and the important Irumbai temple is very interesting.
- Well connected to the city centre by road via Kottakarai and Edayanchavadi villages
- Visual connection to the Matrimandir, Auroville's spiritual and geographical center.
- The location next to the Irumbai eeri, the biggest waterbody in this area, gives the ideal context to highlight the importance of these waterbodies throughout history and their relevance for a sustainable future.
- The entire Irumbai lake area can with the impetus of the institute become a example for sustainable development.



## Key Features of the SLI Masterplan

- The site is accessible for vehicles via two entrances: One from Irumbai village directly, through the present day access to the granite yard (This access is compromised by a private house encroached on Auroville land); the second entrance is via a large stretch of Peromboke land along a beautiful Kolam, open fields and the edge of some informal settlement.
- The site is divided by a natural depression which serves as inlet into the eeri. Here plenty of landscape options arise.
- The campus is confined to the area west of the wadai, largely on the compound of an existing granite yard. Area as per survey is 6.5 acres which ideally should be fully leased to the society to be formed.



# SLI / MASTER PLAN – Overall concept

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