Preliminary Planning Report
for Buraimi Oasis
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INTRODUCTION: Buraimi-Al Ain Comparison

Buraimi's main problem seems to be its geographical economic condition isolated from the developed areas of Oman but closer to areas in the U.A.E. For important reasons[1] Buraimi should not become a suburban area of Al-Ain, but develop in its own right. 2.

We found little economic activity in Buraimi. Most of the Arab population was working in Al-Ain. A large percentage of the shop keepers in Buraimi are now Persian, Pakistani, or Indian.

Physical planning will not bring about a productive condition in Buraimi, on its own. Economic activity must be generated locally, independent of Al-Ain, based on something which Buraimi can produce better than Al-Ain.

Since the whole area is now an importer of agricultural and food goods this may be the area on which to concentrate.

Agricultural self sufficiency does not seem to be a major area of concern on the Emirates side where a welfare state seems to be developing, resulting in a large part of the population contributing little, directly to the economy. 3.

The problems of Al-Ain and Buraimi can be seen as examples of situations representative of the Gulf States on one hand and Oman on the other. Arabian Gulf States have oil and are looking to oil as their chief source of income. Oman, which is a late starter as far as development is concerned has the advantage of a much more diversified economy based on food and agriculture as well as mineral wealth and oil. 4.

Buraimi can't catch up with Al-Ain's oil money because of Abu Dhabi's head start and reserves. On the other hand it is questionable whether it is desirable to have development dependent on such a specialized economy.

On a cultural and social level it is far healthier to have a community's liveli hood based on an economic system in which the population can participate. An example of this is the cultural loss reflected in the disappearance of all but a few scattered examples of the indigenous architecture of the Gulf States. Oman on the other hand still retains in many cases a strong cultural activity.

1. what reasons? ~~or mention~~ later.

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Because Oman is somewhat of a late starter, it has the advantage of observing the mistakes of neighbouring countries and evolving a much more sensitive development plan.

ECONOMIC PLANNING: Agricultural Potential.

At this stage we feel it is necessary to speak of planning on a general level. Physical planning proposals, pre suppose the development of a healthy economic situation out of which physical planning should grow.

Buraimi obviously requires Government investment.

As already mentioned, agriculture could be the key to Buraimi's development. In Buraimi more is needed than the type of experimental farm attempted in other parts of the country. These have been criticized for isolating themselves from the existing agricultural community. No matter how advanced mechanically and productively an experimental farm is it will do little to improve the overall area unless it effects the majority of the farmers directly.

In developing Buraimi's agriculture it may be wise to discover what problems the local farmers are having and in what areas they think there is some potential. For example, the Municipality representative working in Nizwa, who also knows Buraimi well, told us that in Buraimi the date production is falling due to palms becoming diseased; grapes have been unsuccessfully cultivated, but vegetables seem to thrive in the area.

The Government could possibly subsidize farmers directly in reclaiming desert land and provide them with some kind of insurance so that they will not be afraid of experimenting with new crops.

Experts help and advice is essential and should be applied to the agricultural community.

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Before any agricultural projects can be implimented a thorough land and water resources survey must be done for the Buraimi Oasis area.

Transportation and Communication

As the situation stands now, all of Buraimi is links are with Abu Dhabi.

A new road proposed connecting Nizwa to Ibri is to be extended to Buraimi through Al-Ain.

We think that an important link which should be made is with Sohar. Now only a very poor road connection exists, (3 hours travel time). Since Sohar is developing its fishing industry and the Buraimi area required food importation this seems to be a logical route to develop. If a Sohar Buraimi improved road connection were to be developed Buraimi's economic connection to Oman could be improved.

Government investment in roads or any industrial development in the area will create employment and directly aid in the economic development.

Physical Planning

The indigenous architecture of the Buraimi areas is distinctive and part of the heritage of the country. The Department of Antiquities has been requested to restore one of the local forts and use it as a museum.

The indigenous architecture is a response to the social and environmental conditions of the area and should not only be restored but learned from and built on. These things plus new economic conditions and advancements should go together in determining future physical planning.

Renovation and improvement of the town centre will give opportunities for local people to learn how to use their own materials in a better way, and provide work. We see the development of the Souk area as an opportunity to train local builders in more advanced uses of their materials at hand.

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The physical development of the Souk area must reflect an improved economic situation in the whole of the Buraimi Oasis. When we asked one shop keeper in one of the tin structures now found in the Souk area how much rent he was paying he said 10 Rials. He said tie would like to have better physical surrounding in which to work, and he would not mind paying more for it, if he could, but because of the lack of business in Buraimi this was impossible.

The development of the Souk area in particular should be phased. Immediate plans are necessary to upgrade the existing mud brick souk. Shop keeper who we talked to said that something should be done before the winter rains come.

Because of the need for immediate shelter tin makeshift structures were built to have shop keepers. Some of these structures are now based out by private individuals at very high rents 10 to 20 Rials per month. These structures are not only unsightly but become very hot, absorbing heat when the sun shines on them. On the other hand the interior temperatures of the mud brick souk are maintained at a moderate levels all year around due to the thermal properties of mud brick.

The second phase of developing the area should see the disappearance of these tin buildings and their replacement in the contact of a physical plan for the whole area, involving extentions to the souk and the development of other essential elements in the area.

A third phase, possibly even running concurrent with the other phases should involve the development of services, road access, and a careful program of building site allotments, which is apparently now being done in a somewhat random way. This third phase must cover the whole of the Buraimi Oasis area.

Conclusions

These proposals are based on research carried out over a short time in Buraimi, and subsequent discussions with a number of people interested in the area. This report should be seen as a sketch of ideas and developed over a much longer period involving a thorough planning study of the area. An architectural and social survey of the area must be made.

PHASE ONE

Improvements & Upgrading of existing Souk

As the mud brick souk building now stands there are many problems, but we feel strongly that the building has merit in context of the indiginous architecture of the area and is an important part of the town centre. The upgrading of this building will lead into the development of the whole area.

In Phase One of the planning, to be carried out as soon as possible, the upgrading work must be done. Phase two follows with the extention of the souk and the development of surrounding areas.

Improvements:

Walls: 1) In a few parts of the souk structural repairs on rebuilding of parts of mud brick walls are necessary.

2) Throughout the souk the mud plaster rendering is in bad condition and should be stripped off. This may also reveal other places requiring structural repairs.

In replastering interior and exterior walls we suggest the use of a material produced and available locally called Nearah. This rendering material retains the colour and quality of mud rendering but is more stable being of a lime or gypsum base. This should solve some of the dust problems in the interior. When applied the exposed surface of the wall should be roughened and suitably prepared to have a good bond. The colour should be kept consistant with that of mud rendering.

The existing walls are of ununiform height and the existing roofs are at different levels. These should be made uniform and built up to the required height.

The lower portions of the walls 80 cm to 1 m. must be stabalized because of seasonal flooding in the area. This can be done with bitument and cement rendering, or some other stabalizing material. An attempt should be made not to show a change in colour beteeen lower portions and rendering of the

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rest of the wall.

Drainage:

The existing site contours provide addequate drainage with approx 1 m. fall to the west and a smaller fall to the east. The only problem is found in isolated low pockets which may not drain easily, these should be leveled so that the whole area responds to the natural drainage.

The highest level within the souk seems to be somewhere east of the centre, approx ½ along its length. If a water point was located here for washing down, the passage the water would drain both ways.

Concrete cement (thin coat) could be applied to the floor.

Ventilation:

The existing souk is now very badly ventalated and the natural lighting is insufficient small high openings are proposed for each shop, along the north and south wall. The openings are high to allow hot air which collects under the roof in summer to escape; and small to allow in light but avoid glare, and to keep out rain. The openings are designed with a slopping self to keep out rain.

Roof:

The roof is in very bad repair and as mentioned earlier will not hold up to the winter rains.

Detail drawings are included here, giving suggestions on building a new roof. Two roofing types are used and are improvements upon typical roofs found in the area, and should be easy to construct.

The new roof proposed to cover the central passage encorporates a celestory to provide ventalation lighting and is designed in such a way as to accept the prevailing beaze.

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Materials:

The materials used in repairing and upgrading the souk are in many cases indiginous to the Buraimi area. Improvements on the uses of these materials are suggested.

Mud Brick should be used in repairing the walls because of its thermal properties its retention of coolness in the summer and warmth in winter. Improvements in its use are suggested in the surface rendering which will protect it from water. Imploying straw in the mixture for mud brick will increase its strength and lightness.

The roofing employs barasti which we have found to shed water well, but is improved upon by the use of roofing felts and in some cases cement. The treated mud layer of the flat roof has proved to be waterproof and is used because of its thermal properties.

Tiles (fired) should be used in the floors of the shops and passageways.

Falaj Improvements

The Falaj system has a variety of different uses in the Buraimi Community. A series of functions are listed in order, (from the head of the system) 1) drinking 2) Bathing 3) dish washing 4) car washing 5) animal drinking and washing 6) irrigation.

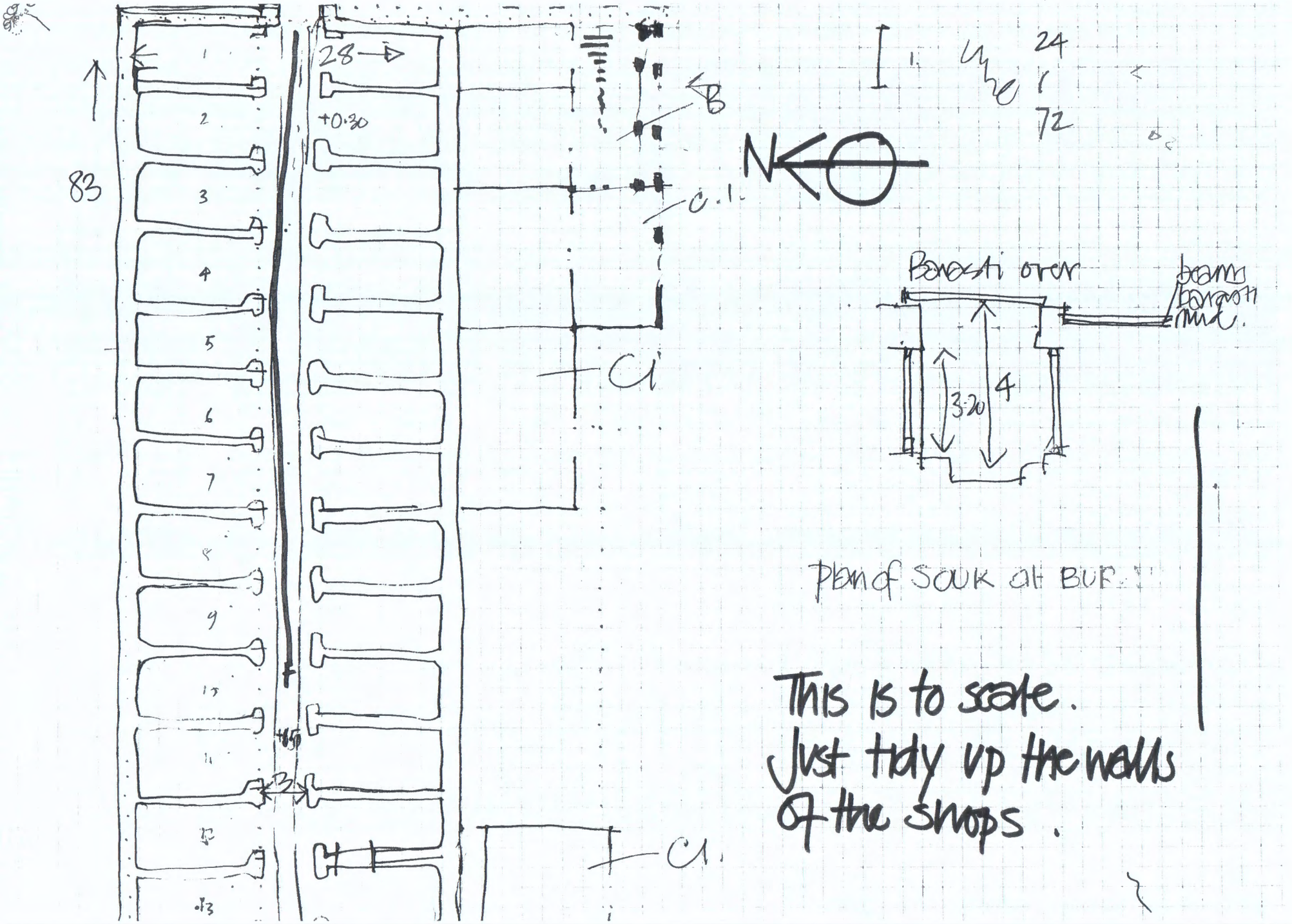
The water and area used for drinking is unhygenic, because it depends only on the direction of flow to insure its cleanlyness. The water is exposed to the air and may collect dirt or infection.

A system to purify the drinking water is proposed here and improvements on the washing areas. These improvements can be built into the existing Falaj system. The first area to be developed should be the point at which washing is done and drinking water is taken now. Similar drinking - washing centres could be set up further down stream if the water has had a sufficient run to clean itself.

Water Purification System.

This unit is built at the point that the Falaj emerges from the ground.

Water is pumped from the Falaj up into a holding tank, by hand or mechanical pump, into a holding tank. This tank must be filled periodicly so that the pump is not in constant use. Suspended particals will settle out in the holding tank. Water is drained from the holding tank at a constant rate, then flows through two tanks in series the first, filled with gravel and the second with sand. The filtered water flows into a final holding tank where it is disinfected with chlorine. The water can then be drawn off by taps and collected in jars to be taken home for drinking and cooking.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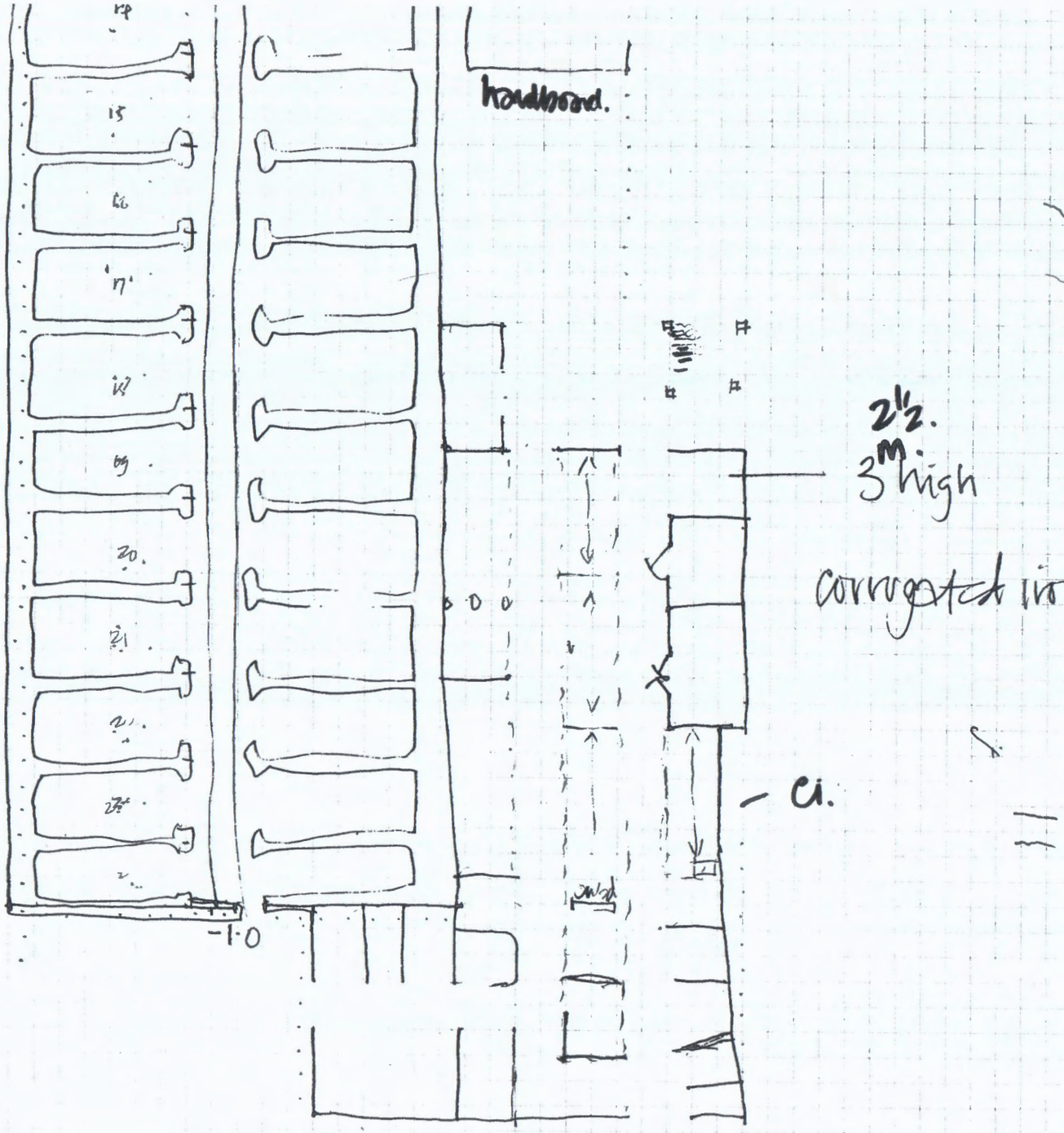
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BURAIMI OASIS - OMAN
SUQ DEVELOPMENT

PLAN OF OASIS
EXISTING

ALLAN CAIN
JOHN NORTON

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