

Aerial axonometric illustration

Soft Light

The name *Soft Light* evokes the proposal's core vision: a landscape shaped through gentle interventions that respect the existing character, enhance ecological connections, and use light art to support atmosphere and orientation. The design responds to a setting where nationally significant sports infrastructure intersects with a richly layered recreational and ecological landscape. The design builds upon its existing spatial framework and cultural identity, clarifying its dual function as a space for everyday use and international events.

At the core of the strategy is a commitment to light-touch interventions. The proposal enhances existing axes of Salpausselänkatu and old Satamarata railway route, strengthens ecological connections, and introduces new programs for various user-groups through small-scale additions and reuse. Together, these measures reinforce Lahti's ambition to lead in sustainable urban transformation while preserving the character of the Salpausselkä ridge.

The green values of the Salpausselkä landscape are integrated throughout the proposal, with a focus on enhancing biodiversity. Native plant species extend the surrounding forest ecology into the heart of the area, existing trees are preserved wherever possible, and new flower meadows are introduced to support pollinators and add seasonal color.

Art forms a cohesive part of the area's identity. A lighting art concept reinforces this character by highlighting key urban spaces and places of significance throughout the year. Inspired by nature and movement, the concept aims to elevate the spirit of the place, create a vibrant and memorable public realm, and present a distinctive image of Lahti during moments of international attention.

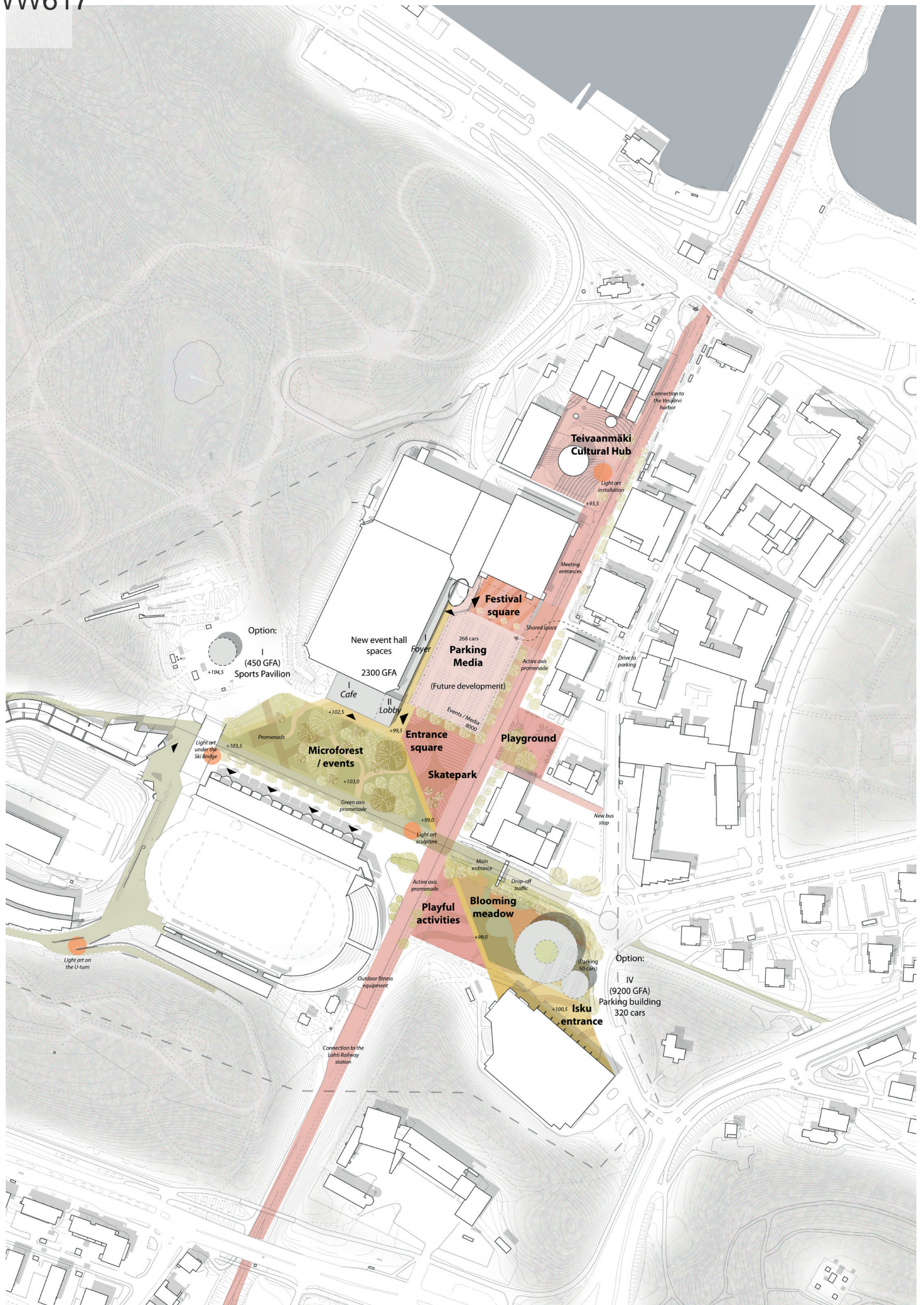


Illustration of the central area 1:2000

Salpausselänkatu is redefined as the site's primary arrival sequence, *the Green Axis*, bringing the surrounding harju vegetation into direct contact with the urban realm. The axis functions as a promenade, event interface, and ecological corridor. A series of open spaces along the street support both large-scale gatherings and everyday recreation. In everyday use, the promenade is designed as a shared space, allowing service access and disabled parking, while prioritising pedestrians.

The Green Axis becomes more than a route. It is a threshold between city and forest, designed for movement, pause, and ecological immersion. The main event area in front of Suurhalli evokes the surrounding forest and establishes a strong spatial identity to the site. Flexible gathering spaces are embedded within the natural setting, accommodating both event stalls and elements such as campfire sites—bringing the scents, textures, and calm of nature within reach of both visitors and city dwellers.

Ecological values and site-specific vegetation guide the design throughout. Ground materials range from wooden decking and wood chips, enabling flexible use, to forest floor plantings of heather, lingonberry, and blueberry. Felled trees are reused as seating and microhabitats, while natural water elements reference the region's kettle-hole topography and groundwater. Toward the southern end, the forested landscape transitions into an open, meadow-like clearing. Warm, low-glare lighting is applied consistently across the site to support orientation and atmosphere with minimal impact on local fauna.

Active Axis

The second primary axis, *the Active Axis*, follows the line of the former Satamarata railway, linking Lahti railway station and Vesijärvi harbor to the sports centre area through a new, inviting, and distinctively designed pedestrian and cycling route. Reimagined as a linear public spine, it supports a wide range of activities and urban encounters, with a particular focus on everyday use and the needs of local residents.

A sequence of urban-scale, playfully programmed plazas punctuates the route. Designed for all ages, the spaces include a play zone near the daycare, skate areas for youth, and activity points with seating for seniors. At the northern part of the axis, Teivaanmäki's former power plant becomes a cultural node, housing exhibitions, workshops, and outdoor art. The material palette emphasises reuse and tactile quality. Seating and skate features incorporate salvaged concrete elements from existing structures. Planting is applied more urbanly, for example through street trees, raised beds, and green wall structures. Lightweight canopy structures add shelter to open areas, enhancing comfort while supporting flexible and year-round use. The result is a richly textured sequence of spaces, seasonal in character and embedded in local material cycles.

The Active Axis, with its clear identity and strong spatial logic, provides a robust foundation for future development. Both ends of the axis can be further elaborated within the same concept: to the north, by exploring connections to the Ranta-Kartano route network and art concept; and to the south, by reinforcing the area's identity through the railway link. Over time, the urban realm may also extend into the adjacent Svinhufvudinkatu blocks through incremental, exploratory steps, such as temporary uses or adaptive reuse, should opportunities emerge to reprogram existing buildings for civic life.

Child-Friendly Urban Realm

The design supports children's development and well-being, promoting movement, learning, and the strengthening of social skills. It is increasing opportunities for contact with nature, encouraging physical activity, and supporting creativity. A continuous green axis runs through the plan, providing inclusive and equitable access to nature. Natural spaces require no special skills or equipment, they are open to all, offering a shared ground for experience and play.

The street environment is envisioned as an active, stimulating and car-free public realm, where children can move, explore and play freely and safely. Along the street, play pockets and activity zones invite children to engage in movement, interaction and creative play. Children are free to run, climb, balance, and explore. The design invites physical movement and playful discovery as part of everyday life. A clearly defined urban space supports children's independent mobility and fosters their confidence as active participants in the city.

Art and Light Shaped by Place

Public art is used to highlight key views, arrival points, and other site-specific elements, enhancing the unique character of the place. Light art plays a central role in increasing year-round comfort and atmosphere especially during the long, dark seasons typical in Finland. It appears both as integrated elements within structures and as independent installations.

A coherent lighting concept spans through the whole sports center area. As a main piece, a sculptural landmark at the central plaza marks the site on long approach views of Green and Active axes, reinforcing arrival sequences from various city directions. Additional light installations are located under the Skiing Bridge, within the Teivaanmäki cultural area, and near the U-turn of the cross-country skiing track, reinforcing the identity of key spaces during both everyday use and televised events.

In addition to light art, the area incorporates creative, participatory features that encourage community engagement and allow visitors to interact with and influence the space. For example, movable furniture, community-built elements, or designated walls for street art inspired by case studies such as Suvilahti in Helsinki. These inclusive features foster a stronger sense of belonging and shared ownership of the public realm.

Existing Structures

A central goal of the project is to avoid demolition. As well as reflecting the layered history of the site, the chosen approach helps prevent the significant carbon spike typically caused by new construction, thereby supporting Lahti's goals as a green city. Instead, existing buildings are repositioned as adaptable anchors for future use. Isku Areena is retained and reframed through soft landscape transitions. Teivaanmäki's power station is transformed into a civic culture hub. Along Svinhufvudinkatu, the spatial framework anticipates future change of the building blocks.

Targeted architectural additions improve access and usability across the Suurhalli and Messuhalli complex. A new main entrance annex is introduced in a more prominent and intuitive location, improving orientation for visitors and creating a clear arrival experience. The new foyer enhances internal circulation and enables more flexible use of Suurhalli. The integrated café space supports a variety of recreational functions that can flexibly adapt to changing needs—offering a platform for everyday services that also complement event-related use.

The proposal is designed to remain adaptable to a range of future scenarios, allowing the site to evolve without compromising its core values. Should the Expo Hall be repurposed or dismantled, the framework enables integrated transformation while maintaining spatial coherence. The large surface parking area can be released for development if the optional parking structure proposed at the southern edge of the area is implemented. In that case, media and support functions related to large events can be integrated into the new development as needed.

Soft Light responds to the theme Re-Sourcing by activating the latent potential of the Lahti Sports Centre. Centered on light-touch interventions that enhance the existing landscape and character, the design offers a clear framework for phased development, using reclaimed materials, targeted additions, and ecological strategies to establish a robust identity. New programs are introduced with lightness and clarity, and the site remains accessible and functional at every stage.



Perspective from the central area, along the pathway leading to the new annex building of the Suurhalli complex. Framing the view are two key axes: the Green axis and microforest to the right, and the Active axis and functional plaza to the left.