



Skilled Ecology Consultancy Ltd.

The Cherries, Ashen Road,

Clare, Suffolk, CO10 8LG

T: 01787 277912

E: roger@skilledecology.co.uk

W: www.skilledecology.co.uk

Preliminary Ecological Appraisal Including a Protected Species Assessment at 9 Larksfield Road, Stutton, Suffolk. IP9 2RZ

On behalf of:

Mrs Rosemary Creasey

January 2023

Skilled Ecology Consultancy Ltd.

Registered company in England no: 7188811

Registered Office: 7 Trust Court, Histon, Cambridge, CB24 9PW.

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0 SUMMARY

- 0.1 Skilled Ecology Consultancy Ltd. was commissioned by Mrs Rosemary Creasey to undertake a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal including a Protected Species Assessment at 9 Larksfield Road, Stutton, Suffolk. IP9 2RZ. The report is required for a planning application for one new dwelling, as well as extensions and alterations to the existing dwelling.
- 0.2 The site survey was conducted on the 2nd January 2023 by experienced ecologist Roger Spring BSc MCIEEM (licensed to survey for bats (level 2) and great crested newts *Triturus cristatus* (level 1)). The surveys consisted of an inspection for preferred habitat types and signs and evidence of protected and priority species, such as for bats, great crested newts, reptiles, badgers *Meles meles* and nesting birds following Natural England (English Nature) Guidelines. A local biological record search was undertaken.
- 0.3 The proposed site is a small (approximately 0.08ha) residential plot including a semi-detached, brick bungalow with a pitched, tiled roof, as well as gardens mainly set to lawn with a small number of semi-mature trees and ornamental garden shrubs. The property also contained outbuildings including two mobile homes, one garage with attached shed and a second detached timber shed.
- 0.4 The site is positioned in a residential location. Housing with modest gardens were present north, south, and east. West of the site is a large garden dominated by lawn with greenhouses and refuse.
- 0.5 The site was generally considered low in ecological value with negligible potential to support protected, priority or rare species. No signs or evidence of such were identified during the survey.
- 0.6 Therefore, further ecological surveys or mitigation were considered unnecessary. However, to minimise any residual risk of impact, recommendations are provided later in the report for bats, birds and hedgehogs.
- 0.7 Biodiversity enhancements are also included in the report to create a net-gain in accordance with national planning policy.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

- 1.1.1 Skilled Ecology Consultancy Ltd. was commissioned by Mrs Rosemary Creasey to undertake a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal including a Protected Species Assessment at 9 Larksfield Road, Stutton, Suffolk. IP9 2RZ. The report is required for a planning application for one new dwelling, as well as extensions and alterations to the existing dwelling.
- 1.1.2 Wildlife such as nesting birds, bats, reptiles and great crested newts *Triturus cristatus* are protected by law. Protected and priority species and habitats, are also a material consideration for individual planning decisions under the National Planning Policy Framework, 2021 (NPPF) (MHCLG, 2021).
- 1.1.3 This study and report complies with the Chartered Institute for Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM) Guidelines for Preliminary Ecological Appraisals (Second Edition, 2017).
- 1.1.4 CIEEM guidelines indicate that ecological surveying typically remains valid for between 12 months and 18 months (CIEEM, 2019).

2 METHODOLOGY

2.1 Desk Study

- 2.1.1 The Suffolk Biodiversity Information Service were consulted for bat records. The results are listed in Table 1 below.
- 2.1.2 A search of the Multi-Agency Geographical Information for the Countryside (MAGIC) was also conducted, to check for statutory nature conservation sites.
- 2.1.3 These results were then combined with the findings of the site survey, in order to assess the risk of ecology issues, relevant to planning, occurring on the site.

2.2 Study Limitations

- 2.2.1 No major study limitations were found.
- 2.2.2 Botanical assessment was undertaken at a suitable time of year, though some late flowering species and annuals may no longer be present or identifiable to species level.

2.3 Initial Site Surveys

Habitats and Surroundings

2.3.1 The site was visited on the 2nd January 2023 to survey for ecology issues. This included the following:

- Noting the suitability of habitats present on the site, with regard to protected, priority and rare species; including plants, amphibians, reptiles, mammals, nesting birds, invertebrates and protected, priority or red-listed Birds of Conservation Concern (BoCC);
- Assessing the habitats surrounding the site and in the local area;
- Direct survey for evidence of protected species as far as possible, e.g. for bats, reptiles, great crested newts, badgers *Meles meles*, and nesting birds;
- Checking for invasive species such as Japanese knotweed *Fallopia japonica* and giant hogweed *Heracleum mantegazzianum*.

Bat Inspection

2.3.2 The assessment for bats was conducted by an experienced and licensed ecologist. Boundary trees were inspected for bat activity, suitability and potential for roosting following English Nature Bat Mitigation Guidelines (English Nature, 2004) and Bat Conservation Trust Best Practice Guidelines, therefore considerations were:

- the availability of access to roosts for bats;
- the presence and suitability of cracks, crevices, gaps around tiles, ivy growth and other places as roosts;
- signs of bat activity or presence, such as; the bats themselves, droppings, grease marks, scratch marks, urine spatter and prey remains.

2.3.3 Equipment available for use during the survey included a ladder, digital camera, high-powered torch, video endoscope, and binoculars.

2.3.4 The availability of access to roosts was assessed based upon the presence of holes large enough to allow entry to bats and lack of cobwebs and dirt.

2.3.5 The outside of trees and the outside and inside of buildings were inspected for gaps, cavities, access points and crevices, and any signs of bats (droppings, staining, urine spatter), in accordance with Natural England (English Nature) guidelines (English Nature, 2004).

Reptiles & Amphibians

2.3.6 The site was inspected for potentially suitable terrestrial habitats for foraging, sheltering or dispersing amphibians and foraging, sheltering, breeding and basking habitat for reptiles. High quality terrestrial refuges searched for, included:

- Log piles & rockeries,
- Thick leaf litter,
- Compost & manure heaps,
- Mammal burrows,
- Deep ground cracks;
- Refuse suitable for shelter;
- Tussock grassland;
- Hedgerows and any other potential habitats.

Badgers, Water Voles & Other Mammals

2.3.7 Signs and evidence of badgers, water voles and other protected, priority and rare mammal activity searched for included the following:

- Setts, holes and burrows;
- Foraging holes and other diggings;
- Latrines, droppings, spraints and scats;
- Mammal hairs;
- Paw prints and other tracks;
- Feeding remains;
- Scratch marks, bedding material and other signs.

3 RESULTS AND RISK

3.1 Site Description & Location

3.1.1 The proposed site is a small (approximately 0.08ha) residential plot including a semi-detached, brick bungalow with a pitched, tiled roof, as well as gardens mainly set to lawn with a small number of semi-mature trees and small number of ornamental garden shrubs. The property also contained outbuildings

including two mobile homes, one garage with attached shed and a second detached timber shed.

3.1.2 The site is positioned in a residential location. Housing with modest gardens were present north, south, and east. West of the site is a large garden dominated by lawn with greenhouses and refuse.

3.1.3 No ponds were identified within 250m (Ordnance Survey Maps, 2023).

3.2 Nature Conservation Sites

3.2.1 The closest statutorily designated nature conservation site is Stour & Orwell Estuary RAMSAR, Special Protection Area (SPA) and Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) approximately 1.5km south east. The site is designated for estuarine habitats supporting internationally important bird communities as well as notable plants and invertebrates etc. (MAGIC, 2023).

3.3 Data Search

3.3.1 The following information is a summary of modern, local bat records collated through SBIS.

Table 1 – Summary of local biological records.

Species	Approximate Location	Year
Mammals		
Daubentons	Alton Water	2020
Serotine	Alton Water	2021
Natterers	Stutton Churchyard	2008
Noctule	Alton Water	2021
Common pipistrelle	100m west	2014
Soprano pipistrelle	Stutton	2014
Brown long-eared	Stutton	2013

3.4 Protected, Priority & Rare Species

Vegetation & Habitats

3.4.1 Habitats included short improved grassland, small number of ornamental shrubs and semi-mature trees.

3.4.2 Trees and shrubs observed included: Irish yew *Taxus baccata* 'Fastigiata', yew *Taxus baccata*, Laburnum sp. lawson cypress *Chamaecyparis lawsoniana* butterfly bush *Buddleja davidii*, Forsythia sp., rose of Sharon *Hypericum calycinum*, Camellia sp. and rose *Rosa* sp.

3.4.3 Herbaceous plants and grasses recorded included: doves-foot cranesbill *Geranium molle*, selfheal *Prunella vulgaris*, dandelion *Taraxacum* agg., nettle,

bracken *Pteridium aquilinum*, Yorkshire fog *Holcus lanatus*, common comfrey *Symphytum officinale*, black knapweed *Centaurea nigra*, red dead nettle *Lamium purpureum*, cow parsley *Anthriscus sylvestris*, groundsel *Senecio vulgaris*, broad-leaved dock *Rumex obtusifolius*, cats-ear *Hypochaeris radicata*, annual meadow grass *Poa annua* and bramble *Rubus fruticosus*.

3.4.4 No protected, priority or notable plants were present and habitats were unlikely to support such species. No UK priority habitats were present.

3.4.5 No Schedule 9 Invasive Plants were present.

Bats

3.4.6 Trees present on the site were either too small in trunk diameter or immature to support features suitable for roosting bats. No signs or evidence of bats were observed on trees.

3.4.7 All buildings/structures present were inspected for suitability and potential for roosting, as well as for signs and evidence of bats. The outbuildings were all single-skin, poorly insulated and open to fluctuations in environmental conditions. Potential for roosting associated with outbuildings was considered negligible. No signs or evidence of bats were found.

3.4.8 The existing bungalow was well-sealed to bats with tightly fitting roof tiles and soffits. No clear access into the loft was identified. External potential for roosting was considered negligible. No internal or external signs or evidence of bats were found.

3.4.9 The construction zone was considered low in suitability for foraging bats.

Other Protected or Priority Mammals

3.4.10 Habitats present were low in suitability and potential to support other notable mammals, such as hedgehogs *Erinaceus europaeus* and badgers *Meles meles*, and negligible in suitability for other notable mammals such as brown hare *Lepus europaeus* and dormouse *Muscardinus avellanarius* etc.

3.4.11 No signs or evidence of badgers, hedgehogs or any other protected, priority or rare mammals were observed on or adjacent to the site.

Birds

3.4.12 Birds observed or heard on or close to the site during the survey included; jackdaw *Corvus monedula*, great tit *Parus major*, dunnock *Prunella modularis*, tern *Sterna* sp., woodpigeon *Columba palumbus*, robin *Erithacus rubecula* and herring gull *Larus argentatus*.

3.4.13 Herring gull are red-listed Birds of Conservation Concern (BoCC) species. Dunnock are amber-listed BoCC. All other birds recorded are common and widespread species.

3.4.14 No old bird nests were observed. The trees were considered theoretically suitable as bird nesting habitat for the occasional common species, such as wood pigeon.

3.4.15 The BoCC ratings are summarised as follows:

- Red-listed - highest conservation concern;
- Amber-listed - moderate conservation concern;
- Green-listed - least conservation concern.

Reptiles

3.4.16 The proposed construction zone was considered low in suitability or potential to support reptiles of any species. Habitats offered negligible safe basking, breeding or foraging habitat.

3.4.17 No reptiles were observed during the survey visit.

Great Crested Newts & Other Amphibians

3.4.18 The proposed construction zone is very small and includes habitats low in suitability as terrestrial habitat for amphibians of any species.

3.4.19 No ponds were identified locally.

Invertebrates

3.4.20 The proposed development area was considered negligible in ecological value or potential to support an assemblage of invertebrates of conservation concern.

3.4.21 Protected, priority or rare invertebrates were not observed during the survey visit.

Other Protected, Priority or Rare Species

3.4.22 No signs or evidence of any other protected or priority species were observed on the site, nor were there any particularly suitable habitats present for such species.

4 DISCUSSION OF RISK AND LEGISLATION

4.1 Protected & Priority Species

Bats

4.1.1 Bats are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 as amended

by the Countryside Rights of Way Act 2000 and under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017. Some bats are also UK priority species. A summary of the offences likely to be relevant to development are:

- Intentionally or deliberately kill, injure or take a bat;
- Intentionally or recklessly damage, destroy or obstruct access to any place that a bat uses for shelter or protection, whether bats are present or not;
- Damage or destroy a breeding site or resting place of any bat;
- Intentionally or recklessly disturb a bat while it is occupying a structure or place that it uses for shelter or protection;
- Deliberately disturb a bat anywhere.

4.1.2 Bats are likely to use the local landscape for foraging in low numbers. However, the proposed construction zone was considered low in suitability or potential for foraging and negligible in suitability or potential for roosting bats.

4.1.3 No signs or evidence of bats were discovered.

4.1.4 Therefore, the risk of significant impact or harm to bats or local bat conservation was considered negligible.

4.1.5 Therefore, further bat surveys or mitigation were considered unnecessary. However, to minimise any residual risk of impact, precautionary measures, detailed later in the report, should be followed.

Other Protected, Priority or Rare Mammals

4.1.6 It is possible that badgers and hedgehogs may use the local landscape. However, the proposed development site is very small in area and low in suitability or potential for such species. It is possible that hedgehogs may cross through the site, though significant use was considered highly unlikely.

4.1.7 Therefore, further surveys or mitigation for such were considered unnecessary. However, to minimise impact to hedgehogs, recommendations, detailed later in the report, should be followed.

Reptiles

4.1.8 Widespread reptile species including, grass snake, adder, slow worm and common lizard, are protected from intentional killing and injuring under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. They are also UK priority species.

4.1.9 Habitats present and proposed for impact were largely negligible in suitability or potential or reptiles. No safe basking, foraging or breeding habitat was present or proposed for impact.

- 4.1.10 Overall, it was considered unnecessary to undertake further reptile surveys or provide mitigation.

Amphibians

- 4.1.11 Great crested newts are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 as amended by the Countryside Rights of Way Act 2000, and the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017. Great crested newts are also UK priority species. A summary of the offences likely to be relevant to development are:

- Intentionally or deliberately capture or kill;
- Intentionally injure;
- Deliberately disturb, or intentionally or recklessly disturb in a place of shelter or protection;
- Damage or destroy a breeding site or resting place;
- Intentionally or recklessly damage, destroy or obstruct access to a place used for shelter or protection.

- 4.1.12 The site is very small and low in suitability for amphibians of any species. This combined with the lack of local ponds meant the risk of presence or significant impact to amphibians was considered negligible.

- 4.1.13 Therefore, further surveys or mitigation were considered unnecessary.

Birds

- 4.1.14 Wild birds are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and, with certain exceptions (e.g. pest species) in certain situations, it is an offence to intentionally:

- Kill or injure any wild bird;
- Take, damage or destroy the nest of any wild bird while it is in use or being built;
- Take or destroy the egg of any wild bird.

- 4.1.15 Some bird species (such as barn owls) are also specially protected under Schedule 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and others are UK priority species.

- 4.1.16 Protected and priority birds are likely to use the surrounding countryside. However, the site is very small and low in suitability for such species. The trees were theoretically suitable for nesting by low numbers of common birds, though much less likely to be used by notable species.

4.1.17 Overall, it was considered that the proposed development posed a negligible risk of significant impact to nesting or foraging birds.

4.1.18 Consequently, further bird surveys or mitigation were considered unnecessary. However, to minimise any residual risk of impact to birds, precautionary measures, detailed later in the report, should be followed.

Plants & Habitats

4.1.19 The site supports habitats negligible in suitability or potential for protected, priority or rare botanical interest. No UK priority habitats are proposed for impact.

4.1.20 No Schedule 9 Invasive plants were discovered.

4.1.21 Further botanical surveys or mitigation were considered unnecessary.

Invertebrates

4.1.22 The site is very small and considered negligible in suitability or potential to support protected, priority or rare invertebrates.

4.1.23 Consequently, the risk of impact to rare or priority invertebrates was considered negligible. Further invertebrate surveys or mitigation were considered unnecessary.

Other Protected & Priority Species

4.1.24 No signs or evidence of other protected, priority or rare species were observed on the site. The risk of presence or impact to such species was very low. Further ecological surveys or mitigation for any other protected, priority or rare species was considered unnecessary.

4.2 Other Issues

Designated Conservation Sites & Sensitive Habitats

4.2.1 The site is close to the Stour & Orwell Estuary Designated nature conservation site and falls within Zone A of the Zone of Influence (Zoi) of the Recreational Disturbance Avoidance Mitigation Strategy (RAMS); a collaborative project aimed to help prevent additional recreations pressure of European designated nature conservation sites (Hoskin *et al.*, 2019).

4.2.2 The proposal is for one new dwelling which will increase the local human population.

4.2.3 Consequently, a financial contribution to the RAMS is deemed necessary to mitigate pressures caused by the proposed local human population increase and possible increase in recreational pressure to the European protected site.

5 RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Impact Avoidance Precautionary Measures & Habitat Compensation

Bats

5.1.1 Risk of significant impact to bats was considered negligible, to further minimise impact, the below recommendations, should be followed:

- Works to the dwelling roof should be undertaken by hand with hand removal of tiles. If at any point bats or evidence of bat activity (droppings) are found, works should stop and an ecologist called for advice;
- Any proposed external lighting should be minimised. Where external lighting is required it should be warm white LED lamps with glass glazing, rather than plastic, as these produce the least amount of UV light possible, minimising the attraction effects on insects and minimising disturbance to local bats;
- Any external lighting proposed for the development should be aimed carefully, to minimise illumination of boundary habitats and avoid light spillage into the sky, or horizontally out, by using hoods or directional lighting;
- External lighting should be set on short timers and be sensitive to large moving objects only, to prevent any passing bats switching them on.

Birds

5.1.1 It is recommended that to prevent harm to nesting birds, any tree reduction should commence outside of the main bird breeding season (March until the end of August). If this timescale is not possible then an ecologist should check the site for active bird nests before vegetation clearance.

5.1.2 If an active bird nest was found, it would be necessary to protect the nest from harm or disturbance until the bird had finished nesting.

Hedgehogs

5.1.3 The risk of significant impact or harm to hedgehogs was considered very low. To minimise any residual risk of harm, the following construction related precautionary measures should be followed:

- Debris and refuse should be cleared away by hand, as far as practically possible. Waste materials should be removed off site immediately;

- During works construction materials should be stored on hardstanding to prevent wildlife from sheltering in the materials and being harmed by movement of the materials;
- Any temporary excavations for the development should be covered at night or should have a roughly sawn plank placed in them to facilitate escape for any wildlife which may fall in;
- No development/construction activities at night when hedgehogs are mostly active;
- In the unlikely event that a hedgehog is observed on the site, activities in that area should cease and the animal should be allowed to disperse of its own accord or an ecologist should be contacted for advice;
- To ensure continued potential movement of hedgehogs throughout the site and surrounding countryside it is recommended that for every 15m of new boundary fencing a gap should be cut at the base which should be at least 13cm in diameter.

European nature conservation sites - RAMS

5.1.4 Regarding mitigation for potential impacts to coastal statutorily protected nature conservation sites, the proposed site falls within the Zone of Influence (Zoi). The Zoi is the area where increased residential development will result in likely significant effects. As set out in the strategy, evidence shows that there is a 13 km Zone of Influence (ZOI) around the relevant Habitat Sites in the Suffolk Coast area (this includes East Suffolk, Ipswich Borough and Babergh and Mid Suffolk Council areas) of the RAMS scheme. Consequently, a financial contribution per new dwelling is needed due to the site's presence in Zone A of RAMS (Hoskin et al., 2019).

5.2 Enhancements

5.2.1 By following the below biodiversity enhancements, the development will improve the site for local wildlife and provide a net-gain in accordance with national planning policy (NPPF, 2021).

5.2.2 The addition of bat boxes and bird boxes on the proposed new house will increase the potential roosting and nesting sites for local bats and birds. Specifically, the following boxes should be used;

- 1 x Vivara pro sparrow terrace (or similar)
- 1 x Bat Brick (Stretcher bond brick fronted) by Bird Brick Houses (or similar)

5.2.3 Bat and bird boxes can be purchased on-line through suppliers such as The Wildlife Shop and NHBS.

- 5.2.4 A new boundary hedgerow will be planted. To maximise the ecological value of the new planting, the hedgerow should be planted as in double staggered rows, preferably 5 whips per linear metre, with spiral tree guards, including: 60% Hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*) 20% Field maple (*Acer campestre*), 10% Hazel (*Corylus Avellana*), 5% wild cherry (*Prunus avium*) and 5% guelder rose (*Viburnum opulus*).
- 5.2.5 Any new/restored lawn areas will be created by using a wildflower meadow mixture such as EM1 by Emorsgate Seeds.
- 5.2.6 Any other new soft landscaping will be native and wildlife attracting.

6 CONCLUSION

- 6.1 The site is very small in area and supports common and widespread habitats low in ecological value with negligible potential to support protected, priority or rare species. No signs or evidence of such were discovered during the survey visit.
- 6.2 Further ecological surveys or mitigation were considered unnecessary. However, to minimise any residual risk of impact to protected and priority species, recommendations are provided and should be followed.
- 6.3 By implementing the biodiversity enhancements provided, the proposed development will be enhanced further for the benefit of local wildlife to provide a net-gain in accordance with national planning policy.

7 REFERENCES

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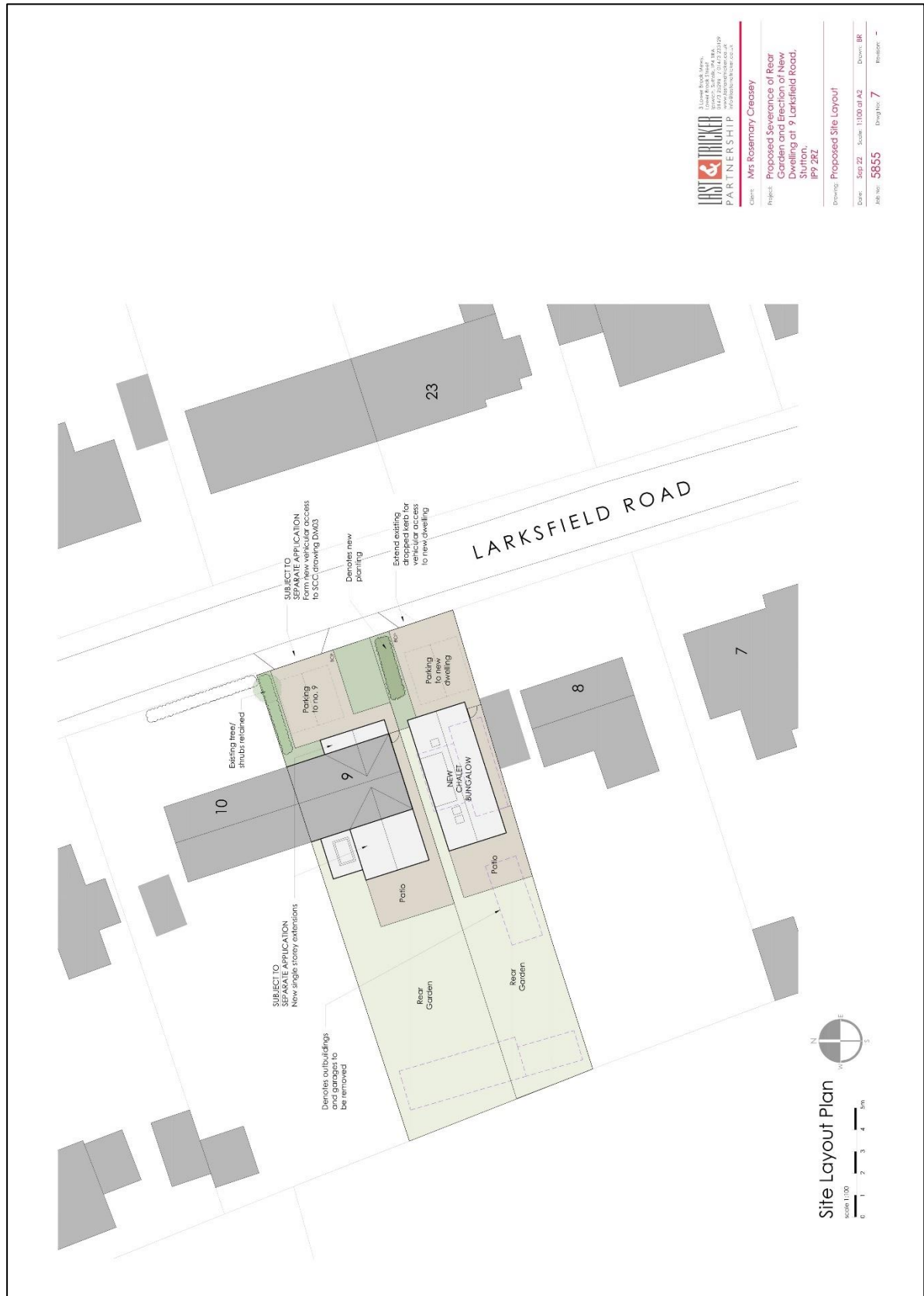
8 APPENDICES

8.1 Appendix 1: Maps

Figure 1 – Phase 1 Habitat map



Figure 2 – Proposed development.



8.2 Appendix 2: Photographs

Photograph 1 – Bungalow and rear garden at 9 Larksfield Road.



Photograph by Roger Spring 2022

Photograph 2 – Garage at 9 Larksfield Road



Photograph by Roger Spring 2022

Photograph 3 – Mobile home and outbuilding at 9 Larksfield Road.



Photograph by Roger Spring 2022

Photograph 4 – Outbuilding and second mobile home at 9 Larksfield Road.



Photograph by Roger Spring 2022

Photograph 5 – Inside an outbuilding at 9 Larksfeld Road.



Photograph by Roger Spring 2022

Photograph 6 – Inside the loft at 9 Larksfeld Road.



Photograph by Roger Spring 2022