



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 of Land at Gillyflower House, Polstead Hill, Polstead, Suffolk. CO6 5AH.

On behalf of:

Kirkham Sheidow Architects

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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

- 1.1.1 Skilled Ecology Consultancy Ltd. was commissioned by Kirkham Sheidow Architects to undertake a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal including a Protected Species Assessment of Land at Gillyflower House, Polstead Hill, Polstead, Suffolk. CO6 5AH. The report is required for the erection of one new house.
- 1.1.2 The survey was conducted on 30th May 2023 by experienced ecologist Roger Spring BSc MCIEEM (licensed to survey for great crested newts *Triturus cristatus* and licenced to survey for bats – level 2). The survey 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 record search was undertaken.
- 1.1.3 The site is part of a garden and includes: improved grass (most short), trees planted by the applicant approximately 40 years ago, as well as some self-seeded trees and a small shrub bed with a few ornamental shrubs. A mature native hedgerow is present on the eastern boundary. The site is positioned in a semi-rural location within a garden. Surrounding habitats include residential properties with mature gardens to the north, south and west and an arable field immediately east, beyond a boundary hedgerow.
- 1.1.4 The features of highest ecological value present were the early mature trees and boundary hedgerow. The proposal aims to retain the hedgerow, though tree loss will be required, see Appendix 1 and the Arboricultural Impact Assessment for full detail.
- 1.1.5 No signs or evidence of protected, priority or rare species were observed on the site. No fresh badger activity was observed in the wider garden, though a gap in the southern boundary fence indicates historical or very occasional presence of foraging badgers. No setts were found.
- 1.1.6 The risk of significant impact or harm to protected, priority or rare species or UK priority habitats was considered very low.
- 1.1.7 Further ecological surveys or mitigation were considered unnecessary. However, to minimise any residual risk of impact, precautionary measures for bats, hedgehogs, amphibians, reptiles and birds are provided in this report and should be followed, along with tree planting habitat compensation.
- 1.1.8 With the recommendations followed as described, development could proceed with a minimal risk of harm or impact to local ecological value or to protected, priority or rare species and notable habitats. Biodiversity enhancement recommendations are also included.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

- 1.1.2 Skilled Ecology Consultancy Ltd. was commissioned by Kirkham Sheidow Architects to undertake a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal including a Protected Species Assessment of Land at Gillyflower House, Polstead Hill, Polstead, Suffolk. CO6 5AH. The report is required for the erection of one new house.
- 1.1.3 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 (MHCLG, 2021).
- 1.1.4 This study and report complies with the Chartered Institute for Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM) 2017 Guidelines for Preliminary Ecological Appraisals.
- 1.1.5 CIEEM guidelines indicate that ecological surveying typically remains valid for between 12 and 18 months (CIEEM, 2019).

2 METHODOLOGY

2.1 Desk Study

- 2.1.1 Skilled Ecology Consultancy Ltd. ordered a biological record search through the Suffolk Biodiversity Information Service (SBIS) which is summarised 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, to assess the risk of ecology issues, relevant to planning, occurring on the site.

2.2 Study Limitations

- 2.2.1 Botanical assessment was undertaken at a suitable time of year, though some early flowering species and annuals may not be visible or identifiable to species level.

2.3 Initial Site Survey

Habitats and Surroundings

2.3.1 The site was visited on the 30th May 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 ecologist, licensed by Natural England to disturb and take bats for science and education. Trees were externally 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, fissures, 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, high powered torch, digital camera 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 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 & Other Mammals

2.3.7 Signs and evidence of badgers, 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 site is part of a garden and includes: improved grass (most short), trees planted by the applicant approximately 40 years ago, as well as some self-seeded trees and a small shrub bed with a few ornamental shrubs. A mature native hedgerow is present on the eastern boundary. The site is positioned in a semi-rural location within a garden. Surrounding habitats include residential properties with mature gardens to the north, south and west and an arable field immediately east, beyond a boundary hedgerow.

3.1.2 The closest waterbodies to the site include one lake approximately 160m south west and one pond approximately 250m south west. The lake and pond are ornamental features with ducks and fish, likely interconnected. No other ponds were identified within 250m of the site (Ordnance Survey Maps, 2023).

3.2 Nature Conservation Sites

3.2.1 No statutorily designated nature conservation sites such as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) were identified within 2km of the site (MAGIC, 2023).

3.3 Data Search

3.3.1 The following information is a summary of local biological records collated through SBIS & MAGIC.

Table 1: Summary of local biological records.

Species	Approximate Location	Year
<i>Mammals: bats (all are UK & EU protected)</i>		
Brown long eared bat	100m west	2012
Soprano pipistrelle	100m west	2012
Common pipistrelle	Stoke-by-Nayland	2008
Natterers	1.1km north	2004

3.4 Protected, Priority & Rare Species

Vegetation & Habitats

3.4.1 The site includes: improved grassland (most short some long around trees), planted early mature trees and self-seeded immature trees, as well as a small number of ornamental shrubs and a boundary hedgerow to the east.

- 3.4.2 Plants recorded in the grassland includes: common vetch, cocksfoot *Dactylis glomerata*, red dead nettle *Lamium purpureum*, daisy *Bellis perennis*, white clover *Trifolium repens*, dandelion *Taraxacum* agg., cow parsley *Anthriscus sylvestris*, bulbous buttercup *Ranunculus bulbosus*, lesser trefoil *Trifolium dubium*, field forget-me-not *Myosotis arvensis*, barren brome *Bromus sterilis*, ox-eye daisy *Leucanthemum vulgare*, common mouse-ear *Cerastium fontanum*, hawkweed *Hieracium* sp., false oatgrass *Arrhenatherum elatius*, yarrow *Achillea millefolium*, perennial ryegrass *Lolium perenne*, nipplewort *Lapsana communis*, woodavens *Geum urbanum*, Yorkshire fog *Holcus lanatus*, meadow foxtail *Alopecurus pratensis*, cleavers *Galium aparine*, broad-dock *Rumex obtusifolius*, thyme-leaved speedwell *Veronica serpyllifolia*.
- 3.4.3 Trees planted 40 years ago and self-seeded included: ash *Fraxinus excelsior* (most self-seeded), silver birch *Betula pendula*, hornbeam *Carpinus betulus*, wild cherry *Prunus avium*, dogwood *Cornus sanguinea*, 2 x brambly apple trees *Malus domestica* (with mistletoe *Viscum album*), copper beech *Fagus sylvatica f. purpurea*, holly Polstead black cherry *Prunus* sp. and field maple *Malus domestica*.
- 3.4.4 The hedgerow included: horse chestnut *Aesculus hippocastanum*, field maple *Acer campestre*, oak *Quercus robur*, sycamore *Acer pseudoplatanus*, wild cherry *Prunus avium* and Norway spruce *Picea abies*.
- 3.4.5 No protected or priority plants were found. Mistletoe is an uncommon plant, though not particularly rare. No Schedule 9 invasive plant species were found. The hedgerow is a UK priority habitat, though did not meet criteria for an Important Hedgerow under the Hedgerow Regulations 1997.
- 3.4.6 Trees loss required is detailed within Appendix 1 and the Arboricultural Impact Assessment.

Bats

- 3.4.7 No mature trees are proposed for impact. Trees present did not supported features suitable for roosting bats. No external signs or evidence of bat activity were found. The site is likely to be visited by foraging bats, though given the small size of the site, the site is unlikely to be of significant value for local bat populations.

Other Protected & UK Priority Mammals

- 3.4.8 The site is small in size and moderate in suitability for foraging or sheltering by other protected priority or rare mammals such as badgers *Meles meles* and hedgehogs *Erinaceus europaeus* etc. No fresh signs or evidence of such were noted during the survey (on site or off site). A gap in the fence south of site beyond the construction zone though within the garden at Gillyflower House was likely caused by badgers entering the garden for foraging. No badger latrines, setts or other signs or activity were found.
- 3.4.9 It is likely that on occasions hedgehogs and badgers may cross the site for temporary foraging.

Birds

- 3.4.10 Birds observed or heard on or close to the site during the survey included: robin *Erithacus rubecula*, goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis*, bluetit *Cyanistes caeruleus*, skylark (in distance) *Alauda arvensis*, collard dove *Streptopelia decaocto*, blackbird *Turdus merula*, great tit *Parus major*, magpie *Pica pica* and wood pigeon *Columba palumbus*.
- 3.4.11 No signs or UK protected birds (barn owl etc.) were recorded. No old or active bird nests were found, though trees and hedgerows were potentially suitable for common and widespread birds. Skylark are red-listed Birds of Conservation Concern (BoCC) and UK priority species. all other birds recorded are green-listed BoCC.
- 3.4.12 The BoCC ratings are summarised as follows:
- Red-listed - highest conservation concern;
 - Amber-listed - moderate conservation concern;
 - Green-listed - least conservation concern.

Great Crested Newts & Other Amphibians

- 3.4.13 Habitats present and proposed for impact (short grass) were small in area, with some potentially suitable terrestrial habitat for great crested newts. However, no local ponds were present. The closest ponds to the site are village ponds with high fish and duck populations separated from the site by a road and residential properties considered to be significant amphibian dispersal obstacles.
- 3.4.14 No amphibians were observed during the survey visit.

Reptiles

- 3.4.15 Habitats present were considered low in suitability or potential for reptiles with little safe basking, foraging or breeding habitat present. Adjacent habitats (manicured gardens) were also low in suitability for reptiles.
- 3.4.16 The survey was undertaken in suitable weather conditions for active reptiles. Reptiles were not discovered during the survey visit.

Invertebrates

- 3.4.17 The main site area was considered low in suitability or potential for invertebrates of conservation concern with common and widespread habitats present. No significant deadwood habitat was present.
- 3.4.18 No notable invertebrates were discovered.

Other Protected, Priority or rare Species

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

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 have been recorded locally and are likely to forage over the site, though given the small size of the site, the site is unlikely to be significant in ecological value for local bat populations.
- 4.1.3 No bat roosting habitat is present or proposed for impact.
- 4.1.4 Therefore, the risk of significant impact to bats, bat roosts 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 to foraging bats, precautionary measures and habitat compensation, detailed later in the report should be followed.

Other Protected, Priority & Rare Mammals

- 4.1.6 The site was considered moderate in suitability or potential for any other protected, priority or rare species, though no signs or evidence of such were discovered within the construction zone during the survey visit. Even still, it could not be discounted that the occasional hedgehog or badger may cross the site.
- 4.1.7 Further surveys or mitigation for any other protected, priority or rare mammals were considered unnecessary. However, to minimise any residual risk of impact to hedgehogs and badgers, precautionary measures, detailed later in the report, should be followed.

Birds

- 4.1.8 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.
- 4.1.9 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.

4.1.10 It was considered unlikely that the main site area would be of significant value to any notable bird species or nesting birds of rare or uncommon species. However, trees and hedgerows were the features of highest ecological value for birds generally. The hedgerow will be retained along with some trees, though tree loss is expected.

4.1.11 Overall, it was considered unnecessary to undertake further bird surveys for rare or protected birds or provide mitigation for such species. However, to minimise any residual risk of impact to actively nesting birds and to compensate for habitat loss, precautionary measures, detailed later in the report, should be followed.

Great Crested Newts & Other Amphibians

4.1.12 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.

4.1.13 Great crested newts or other amphibians are highly unlikely to use the site given the significant distance from the closest ponds and the fact these ponds are separated from the site by amphibian dispersal obstacles including roads and residential housing. The ponds support fish and ducks which are generally considered negative factors for amphibian populations, particularly great crested newts which are prey items for fish.

4.1.14 Overall, it was considered that the risk of great crested newts, or other amphibians using the site and being impacted by the proposed development was very low. Further amphibian surveys or mitigation were considered unnecessary. However, to minimise any residual risk of impact, precautionary measures, detailed later in the report, should be followed.

Reptiles

- 4.1.15 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.
- 4.1.16 The site and adjacent habitats were considered low in suitability for reptiles. No reptiles were discovered during the survey visit. Therefore, the risk of significant impact or harm was considered very low.
- 4.1.17 Further reptile surveys or mitigation were considered unnecessary. However, to minimise any residual risk of impact, precautionary measures, detailed later in the report, should be followed.

Plants & Invertebrates

- 4.1.18 No rare, protected or priority plants were identified. No UK priority habitats are proposed for impact.
- 4.1.19 No Schedule 9 invasive plants were present within the construction zone.
- 4.1.20 Regarding invertebrates, habitats present were common, widespread and isolated from any habitat of high ecological value for invertebrates (such as woodland or species rich meadows etc.). The risk of presence of a significant assemblage of invertebrates of conservation concern was considered negligible.
- 4.1.21 Further invertebrate or botanical surveys or mitigation were considered unnecessary. However, to compensate for tree loss, recommendations detailed later in the report, should be followed.

Other Protected & Priority species

- 4.1.22 No signs or evidence of other protected, priority or rare species were observed on the site and it was considered that there was a very low risk of such species occurring on the site or being impacted by the proposed development.

4.2 Other Issues

Sensitive Habitats

- 4.2.1 The site is a significant distance from statutorily designated nature conservation sites and ecological sensitive habitats. The proposed development is small scale and overall it is considered that the risk of significant direct or indirect impact to nature conservation sites or ecologically sensitive habitats was negligible.

- 4.2.2 Further surveys or mitigation for designated nature conservation sites or other sensitive habitats were considered unnecessary.

5 RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Precautionary Measures & Compensation

Bats

- 5.1.1 To minimise any residual risk of impact to bats, the following precautionary measures should be undertaken:
- Any new proposed external lighting should be minimised. Where external lighting is required, it should be warm white LED lamps (<3000k) with glass glazing, rather than plastic, as these produce the least amount of heat and 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 from any buildings, by using hoods or directional lighting;
 - To prevent net loss of bat foraging habitat trees felled (numbers as per Arboricultural Impact Assessment) should be replaced on a one-for-one basis. New trees planted should be planted as heavy standards and all be native broad-leaved species.

Birds

- 5.1.2 Any reduction or removal of shrubs and trees required should be undertaken outside of the main bird nesting season (March – end of August) or the site should be surveyed for nesting birds, prior to vegetation reduction.
- 5.1.3 Should nesting birds be discovered, the shrub/tree should be protected from harm/disturbance until the birds have finished nesting.
- 5.1.4 To prevent net loss of bird foraging habitat trees felled (numbers as per Arboricultural Impact Assessment) should be replaced on a one-for-one basis. New trees planted should be planted as heavy standards and all be native broad-leaved species.

Hedgehogs, Reptiles & Amphibians

5.1.5 The risk of hedgehogs, reptiles or amphibians being significantly impacted by the development was very low/negligible, to minimise any residual risk of impact or harm or impact, the below recommendations should be followed:

- Before construction commences, vegetation should be maintained short to prevent the site being attractive to wildlife immediately prior to commencement of groundworks. Any long grass areas should be strimmed/cut short during fine and dry weather conditions during March-October when most wildlife should be active and not hibernating;
- During works waste materials should be removed off site immediately to prevent wildlife using the materials for shelter and being harmed by subsequent movement;
- Construction materials should be stored on hardstanding or on pallets to prevent wildlife from sheltering in the materials and being harmed by movement of the materials;
- No construction work at night when hedgehogs and amphibians are mostly active;
- Any excavations for the development should be covered at night or should have a roughly sawn plank placed in them to facilitate escape, the plank should not be placed at more than 30° and must be at least 30cm in width;
- If at any stage hedgehogs, reptiles or amphibians are observed on the site, works should stop immediately, and the animal should be allowed to disperse of its own accord, or an ecologist should be contacted for advice.

5.2 Enhancements

5.2.1 Biodiversity enhancement is a requirement for all developments under the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF, 2021). To provide such enhancement the below will be undertaken.

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

- 2 x Schwegler 1FD Bat Boxes (or similar if out-of-stock);
- 1 x House sparrow nesting box by www.BarkBoxes.co.uk.
- 1 x Schwegler Kestrel bird Box.

- 5.2.3 The boxes should be installed high (just below above 4m) and should be free from obstruction and light sources. The bat boxes should ideally be positioned facing a southerly aspect, while the bird boxes should be facing a northerly direction or otherwise be out of direct sunlight.
- 5.2.4 Wildlife boxes can be purchased on-line through suppliers such as The Wildlife Shop and NHBS.
- 5.2.5 Any new soft landscaping should include only native and/or wildlife attracting species. Prioritising fruit producing varieties is recommended. Further broad-leaved native trees could be added to the site. Tree planting above the already recommended one-for-one replacement planting will be required to meet 10% net gain. There is plenty of space for such planting as indicated within the proposed development plans. New tree planting will not only provide biodiversity enhancement, though when planted on the northern boundary will act as screening between the existing house at Gillyflower House and the new house.

6 CONCLUSION

- 6.1 At the time of survey, the main site area supported common and widespread habitats. No signs or evidence of protected, priority or rare species were identified. The boundary habitats including trees and hedgerows were the features of highest ecological value for wildlife. Tree loss is expected and will be compensated for in soft landscape design.
- 6.2 The risk of significant impact to notable wildlife was considered very low/negligible.
- 6.3 Further ecological surveys or mitigation were considered unnecessary. Recommendations for bats, hedgehogs, reptiles, amphibians and birds are provided and should be followed accordingly.
- 6.4 With recommendations followed as described, the development could proceed with a minimal risk of harm impact to protected, priority or rare species or notable habitats.
- 6.5 With the biodiversity enhancements followed as described, the proposed development would be enhanced for the benefit of local wildlife in accordance with national planning policy.

7 REFERENCES

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8 APPENDICES

8.1 Appendix 1: Figures

Figure 1: Habitat map of the site

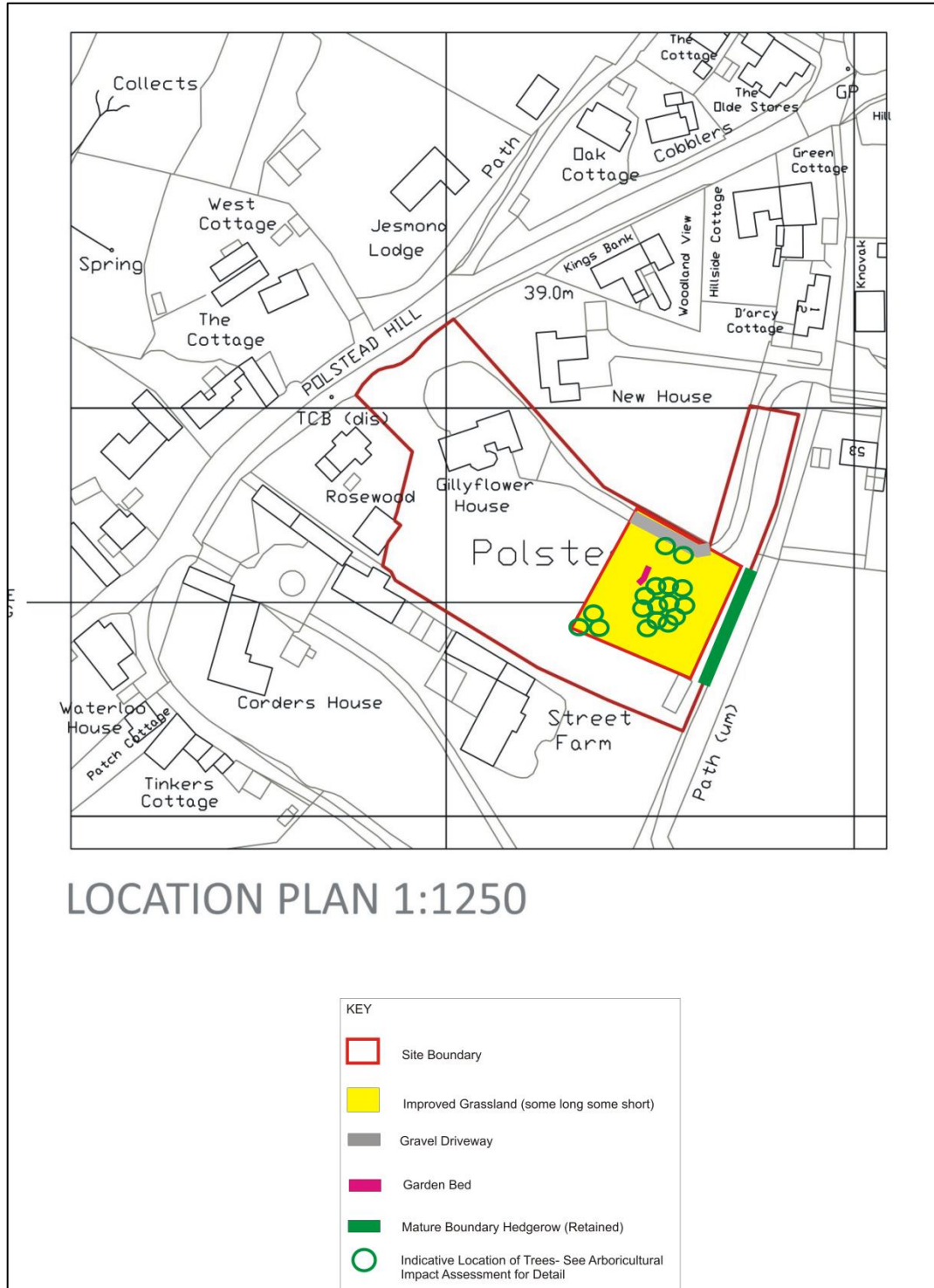


Figure 2 – Proposed development.

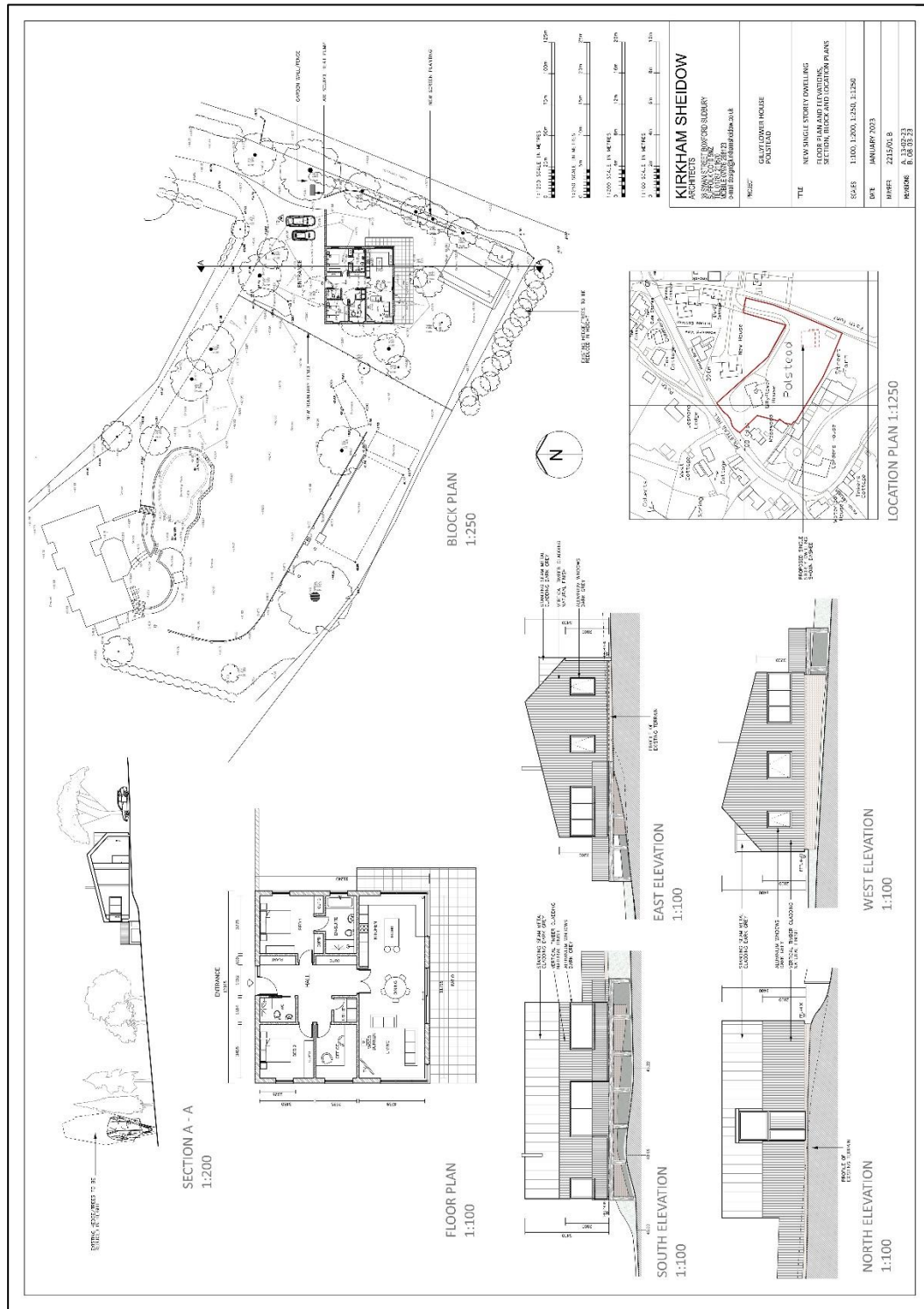
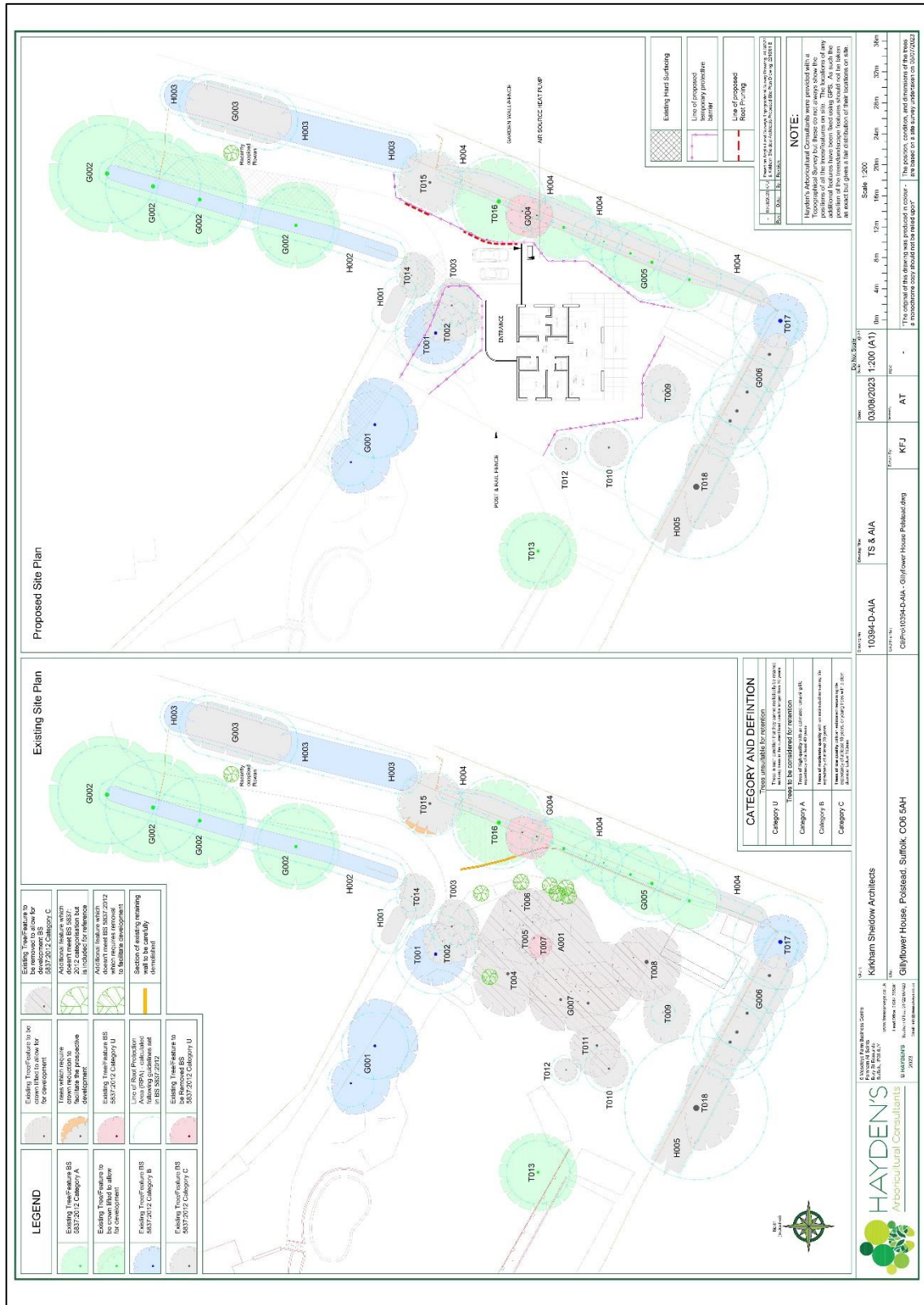


Figure 3: Tree loss



8.2 Appendix 2: Photographs

Photograph 1: Eastern site boundary with hedgerow proposed for retention at Gillyflower House.



Photograph by Roger Spring 2023

Photograph 2: Main site area looking from west to east across the site.



Photograph by Roger Spring 2023

Photograph 3: Main site area looking from north to south across the site.



Photograph by Roger Spring 2023

Photograph 4: South east corner of the site (garage proposed for retention at Gillyflower House).



Photograph by Roger Spring 2023

Photograph 5: Central area of the site at Gillyflower House.



Photograph by Roger Spring 2023