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Preliminary Ecological Appraisal Including a Protected Species Assessment at: Wind Willow House, Hyams Lane, Holbrook, Suffolk. IP9 2QF

On Behalf Of:

Mr & Mrs Clark

November 2023

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0 SUMMARY

0.1 Skilled Ecology Consultancy Ltd. was commissioned by Mr & Mrs Clark to undertake a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal including a Protected Species Assessment at Wind Willow House, Hyams Lane, Holbrook, Suffolk. IP9 2QF. The report is required to accompany a planning application for a proposed new garage.

0.2 The survey was conducted on 31st October 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 biological record search was undertaken for the assessment.

0.3 The site is a small area of garden including: bare ground with scattered herbaceous plants, small quantity of ornamental shrubs and bedding plants, 2 x early mature cherry, 1 x early mature horse chestnut, 1 x early mature Norway spruce, 1 x early mature hawthorn and a short unmanaged row of early mature leylandii cypress.

0.4 The site is positioned in a semi-rural location at the edge of Holbrook village.

0.5 The site includes common and widespread habitats unlikely to support protected, priority or rare species. No signs or evidence of such were discovered during the survey visit. The trees and shrubs were considered potentially suitable for low numbers of common nesting birds. It was also considered likely that occasional bats will forage on the site, along with possibly hedgehogs.

0.6 Overall, it was considered that the risk of significant impact to protected, priority or rare species or notable habitats was very low. Therefore, further ecological surveys or mitigation were considered unnecessary.

0.7 However, to minimise any residual risk of impact to bats, birds, amphibians and hedgehogs, precautionary measures, detailed later in the report, should be followed.

0.8 Biodiversity enhancements are also included in the report in accordance with national planning policy.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

1.1.2 Skilled Ecology Consultancy Ltd. was commissioned by Mr & Mrs Clark to undertake a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal including a Protected Species Assessment at Wind Willow House, Hyams Lane, Holbrook, Suffolk. IP9 2QF. The report is required to accompany a planning application for a proposed new garage.

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, 2023 (NPPF) (MHCLG, 2023).

1.1.4 This study and report complies with the Chartered Institute for Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM) 2017 Guidelines for Preliminary Ecological Appraisal.

1.1.5 CIEEM guidelines indicate that ecological surveying typically remains valid for between 12 – 18 months.

2 METHODOLOGY

2.1 Desk Study

2.1.1 A biological record search was obtained through the Suffolk Biological Information Service (SBIS) and 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 The record search results were then combined with the findings of the site survey to assess the risk of bat issues, relevant to planning, occurring on the site.

2.2 Study Limitations

2.2.1 The site and surrounds were assessed based on their condition at the time of the survey visit. Botanical assessment was undertaken at a suitable time of year.

2.3 Initial Site Survey

Habitats and Surroundings

2.3.1 The site was visited on the 31st October 2023 by experienced ecologist Roger Spring BSc MCIEEM to survey for ecology issues. This included the following:

- Noting the suitability of habitats present on the site, regarding 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 experienced ecologists, licensed by Natural England to disturb and take bats for science and education. Trees, were inspected for 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 a small area of garden including: bare ground with scattered herbaceous plants, small quantity of ornamental shrubs and bedding plants, 2 x early mature cherry, 1 x early mature horse chestnut, 1 x early mature Norway spruce, 1 x early mature hawthorn and a short unmanaged row of early mature leylandii cypress.

3.1.2 The site is positioned in a semi-rural location at the edge of Holbrook village.

3.1.3 Waterbodies present locally included: lagoons associated with a water treatment facility approximately 210m south of the proposed construction zone, lakes linked to the Alton Water reservoir located approximately 220m south east and Alton Water reservoir itself approximately 500m south west of the proposed construction zone (Ordnance Survey Map, 2023).

3.2 Nature Conservation Sites

3.2.1 No statutorily designated nature conservation sites, such as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) are present within 2km of the site (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 closest local bat records.

Species	Approximate Location	Year
Protected Species		
Common pipistrelle	Holbrook	2014
Soprano pipistrelle	Alton Water	2022
Natterers	Stutton Churchyard	2008
Brown long-eared	1.6km east (Maternity Roost)	2012
Nathusius	Stutton	2010

3.4 Protected, Priority & Rare Species

Vegetation & Habitats

3.4.1 Habitats included: short, bare ground with scattered herbaceous plants (shaded by leylandii cypress), ornamental and native shrubs and trees.

3.4.2 The herbaceous plants included: ornamental geranium *Geranium* sp., herb Robert *Geranium robertianum*, garlic mustard *Alliaria petiolata*, ivy *Hedera helix*, petty spurge *Euphorbia peplus*, wood sorrel *Oxalis acetosella*, cleavers *Galium aparine*, *Iris* sp., violet *Viola* sp. and stinging nettle *Urtica dioica*.

3.4.3 Shrubs and trees included: 1 x early mature hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna*, 2 x early mature wild cherry *Prunus avium*, box *Buxus* sp., elm *Ulmus* sp., 1 x early mature horse chestnut *Aesculus hippocastanum*, 1 x early mature Norway spruce *Picea abies*, and row of leylandii cypress Cuprocyparis leylandii.

3.4.4 No Schedule 9 invasive plants were found. No protected or priority plant species were observed within the site. No UK priority habitats were present or proposed for impact.

Bats

3.4.5 Trees were either too small in trunk diameter or immature to support roosting bats. No signs or evidence of bats were associated with trees.

3.4.6 A very old Kent style bat box was present on the Norway spruce. The box was dilapidated with the top exposed and the cavities fill with debris. On inspection with a torch no signs or evidence of bats were found associated with the box and the box was considered negligible in potential for roosting bats.

3.4.7 The site was considered likely to support foraging bats around boundary trees during summer months. Trees are proposed for retention.

Other Protected & UK Priority Mammals

3.4.8 The construction zone is small in area and moderate in suitability for foraging by badgers *Meles meles,* if present locally.

3.4.9 The construction zone was unsuitable for aquatic mammals such as otter *Lutra lutra* or water vole *Arvicola amphibius*.

3.4.10 The site was considered moderate in suitability for hedgehogs *Erinaceus europaeus*. It could not be discounted that the occasional hedgehog may cross the site for foraging.

3.4.11 No signs or evidence of ground dwelling protected, priority or rare mammals were observed.

Birds

3.4.12 The following bird species were observed or heard on or close to the site during the survey: great tit *Parus major*, goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis*, blue tit *Cyanistes caeruleus*, green woodpecker *Picus viridis*, magpie *Pica pica* and jackdaw *Corvus monedula*.

3.4.13 No protected birds were recorded. No UK priority birds or red-listed Bird of Conservation Concern (BoCC) were heard or seen, though it is likely that on occasions such species may visit the garden for foraging. Nesting by common and widespread species was considered likely in shrubs and trees.

Great Crested Newts & Other Amphibians

3.4.14 The proposed construction zone is mostly bare ground with scattered herbaceous plants, shrubs and trees. The ground conditions were very dry given the density of tree cover mostly provided by the leylandii cypress. Overall, habitats were considered low in suitability as terrestrial habitat for amphibians such as great crested newts.

3.4.15 The waterbodies present nearby were all considered poor in suitability for great crested newts being lakes, lagoons or reservoirs not particularly suitable for breeding great crested newts, though may support other more common and widespread amphibian species.

3.4.16 No amphibians were observed during the survey visit.

Reptiles

3.4.17 The site was heavily shaded and with open ground conditions with little cover for reptiles. Negligible safe basking, foraging or breeding habitat was found present.

3.4.18 Reptiles were not observed during the survey visit, though late October is typically suboptimal for active reptiles.

Invertebrates

3.4.19 The construction zone was considered low in diversity of habitats, size and diversity of flora necessary to support a significant assemblage of invertebrates of conservation concern. It is possible that the occasional priority species may visit the site, though significant use by such species was considered highly unlikely.

3.4.20 No protected or priority invertebrates were observed during the survey visit.

Other Protected, Priority or Rare Species

3.4.21 No signs or evidence of any other protected or priority species were observed on the site. The risk of presence of such was considered negligible.

4 DISCUSSION OF RISK AND LEGISLATION

4.1 Protected 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 No signs or evidence of bats or bat activity were found. Potential for roosting was considered negligible.

4.1.3 The site will be visited on occasions by foraging and commuting bats, though given the small size of the site, dominated by leylandii cypress, a tree of low insect association and unlikely to provided significant quantities of flying insects for feeding bats. It was considered that the proposed development was unlikely to cause significant impact to locally foraging or commuting bats.

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

4.1.5 Therefore, further bat surveys or mitigation were considered unnecessary.

4.1.6 However, to minimise any residual risk of impact, precautionary measures, detailed later in the report, should be followed.

Birds

4.1.7 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.

4.1.8 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.

4.1.9 Given the rural landscape, protected birds and UK priority bird species will use the local habitats. However, the proposed construction zone was considered low in suitability for such species.

4.1.10 Shrubs and trees present were theoretically suitable for low numbers of common nesting birds.

4.1.11 Further bird surveys or mitigation were considered unnecessary. However, to prevent harm to actively nesting common birds, recommendations detailed later in the report, should be followed.

Other Protected, Priority & Rare Mammals

4.1.12 The site was considered low-moderate in suitability for any other protected, priority or rare mammals. No signs or evidence of such were observed on the site or adjacent to the site. It could not be discounted that the occasional hedgehog might visit the site, though significant use by many hedgehogs was considered unlikely.

4.1.13 Further surveys for any other protected, priority or rare mammals was considered unnecessary. However, to minimise any residual risk of impact to hedgehogs, precautionary measures, detailed later in the report, should be followed.

Great Crested Newts & Other Amphibians

4.1.14 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.

4.1.15 The proposed construction zone is small and considered largely low in suitability for great crested newts or other amphibians. This fact combined with the lack of local ponds meant the risk of presence or significant impact/harm to great crested newts or a significant population of other amphibians was considered very low.

4.1.16 Therefore, 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.

Plants

4.1.17 No rare, protected or priority plants or UK priority habitats will be impacted.

4.1.18 Therefore, further botanical surveys or mitigation for rare plants or habitats were considered unnecessary.

4.1.19 No Schedule 9 invasive plants were present. The risk of spreading such species was considered negligible.

Reptiles

4.1.20 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.

4.1.21 The proposed construction zone is small and the majority of the site was considered negligible in suitability or potential for reptiles, as are the surrounding habitats.

4.1.22 Overall, it was considered that the risk of presence or impact to reptiles is very low and further reptile surveys or mitigation were considered unnecessary.

Invertebrates

4.1.23 Habitats proposed for impact were unlikely to support an assemblage of rare invertebrates of conservation concern. The risk of presence or significant impact to such species was very low.

4.1.24 Further invertebrate surveys or strict mitigation were considered unnecessary.

Other Protected & Priority species

4.1.25 No signs or evidence of other protected, priority or rare species were observed on the site and it was considered that there was a 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 positioned a significant distance from statutorily designated nature conservation sites.

4.2.2 The risk of a significant direct or indirect impact to any nature conservation sites was considered negligible.

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

5 RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Precautionary Measures

Bats

5.1.1 To minimise any residual risk of impact to bats, the following precautionary measure 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 UV light possible, minimising the attraction effects on insects and minimising disturbance to local bats;
- Any new 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;
- External security lighting should be set on short timers and be sensitive to large moving objects only, to prevent any passing bats switching them only;
- Trees felled should be replaced elsewhere within the garden at Wind Willow House. New trees planted should be native broad-leaved species.

Hedgehogs & Amphibians

5.1.2 The risk of impact to hedgehogs and amphibians was considered low. To minimise any residual risk of impact or harm, the following precautionary measures should be undertaken:

- The site should be maintained until construction commences to prevent the site improving for wildlife before construction commences;
- During development, waste material should be removed off site immediately and construction materials should be stored on hardstanding or off the ground on pallets, to prevent wildlife from sheltering in the materials and being harmed by movement of the materials;
- During works, the site should be well drained and ground vegetation maintained short throughout the development, to prevent attracting wildlife into harm's way;
- Any excavations for the development should be covered at night or have a roughly sawn plank placed in them to facilitate escape for any wildlife which may fall in;

- No construction/demolition works at night when hedgehogs and amphibians are mostly active;
- In the unlikely event that a hedgehog or amphibian is observed on the site during development, activities in that area should cease and the animal should be allowed to disperse of its own accord. If rescuing is required and ecologist should be called for advice.

Birds

5.1.3 Any reduction or removal of shrubs or trees should be undertaken outside of the main bird nesting season (March – end of August). If this is not practical or possible then the site should be surveyed for nesting birds, prior to vegetation reduction.

5.1.4 Should nesting birds be discovered, the nest should be protected from harm/disturbance until the birds have finished nesting.

5.1.5 As detailed for bats, trees should be replaced on a one-for-one basis using broad-leaved native trees.

5.2 Biodiversity Enhancement

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, 2023).

5.2.2 The following bat and bird boxes will be installed on new buildings as biodiversity enhancement:

- 1 x Beaumaris bat box (or similar).
- 1 x Vivara pro sparrow terrace (or similar).

5.2.3 The bird and bat boxes will be installed high (just below the roof) on the newly erected building. The bird box will be installed facing a northerly direction or out of direct sunlight. The bat box will be facing a southerly direction.

5.2.4 Any new or restored grass areas can be created using a wildflower meadow mixture such as EM1 from Emorsgate Seeds;

5.2.5 Any other new soft landscaping will include native and or wildlife attracting species only.

5.2.6 It is understood that a new hedgerow will be replanted to replace the lost row of leylandii cypress on the site boundary. To maximise the ecological value for any new hedgerow it is recommended the hedgerow should be created by planting in a double staggered row, preferably 5 whips per linear metre, with spiral tree guards and include: 60% Hawthorn (Crataegus monogyna) 20% Field maple (Acer campestre), 10% Hazel (Corylus Avellana), 5% wild cherry (Prunus avium), 5% guelder rose (Viburnum opulus).

6 CONCLUSION

6.1 The proposed construction zone was considered low in ecological value with common and widespread habitats present. The risk of presence and significant impact to protected, priority or rare species or notable habitats was considered very low/negligible.

6.2 Further surveys or mitigation were considered unnecessary.

6.3 To minimise any residual risk of impact, recommendations for hedgehogs, amphibians, birds and bats are included in the report and should be followed.

6.4 With the recommendations followed as described in the report, the proposed development could proceed with a minimal risk of impact to protected, priority or rare species or notable habitats.

6.5 Furthermore, by following the biodiversity enhancements, the development would be enhanced even further 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.

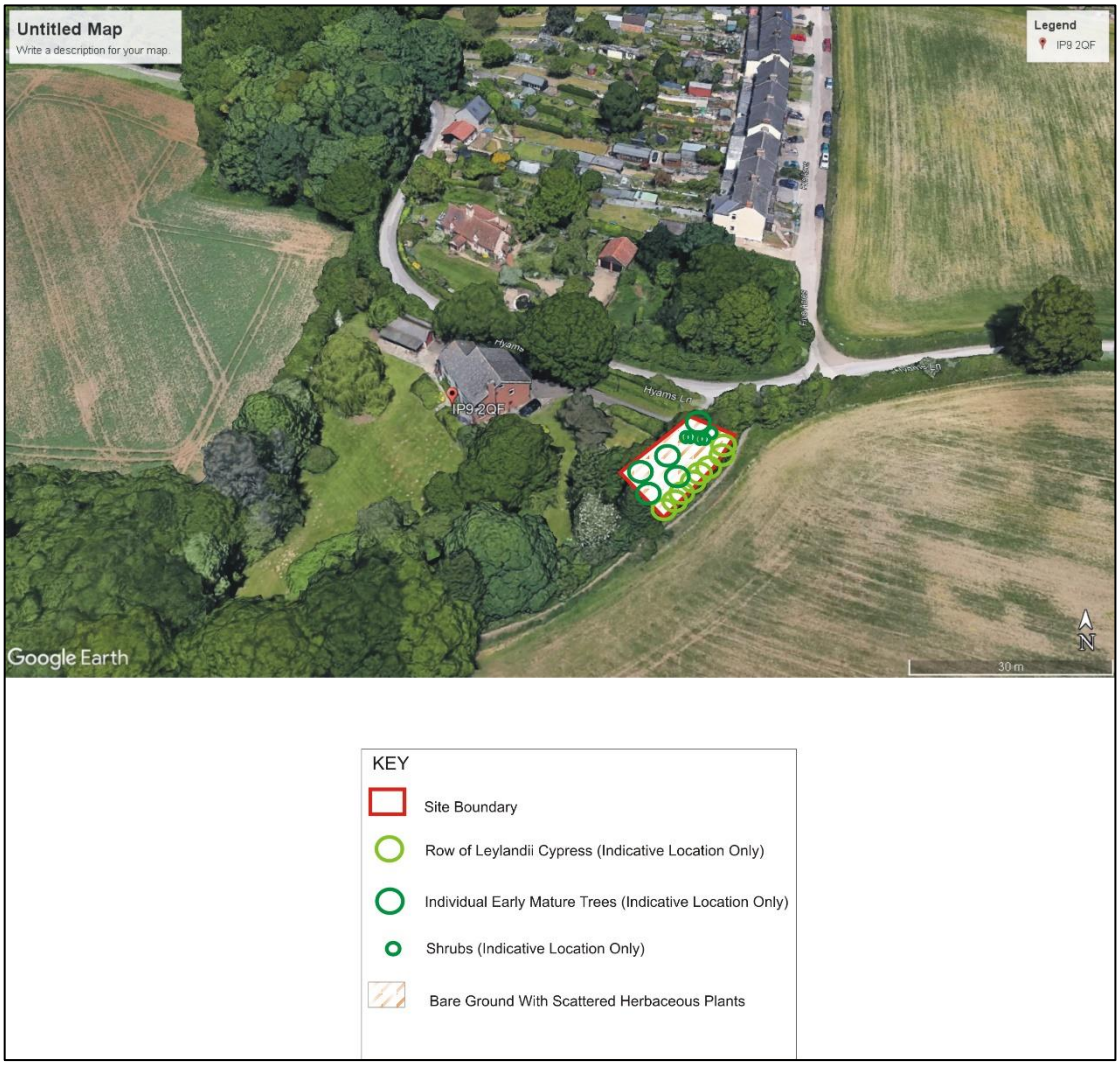
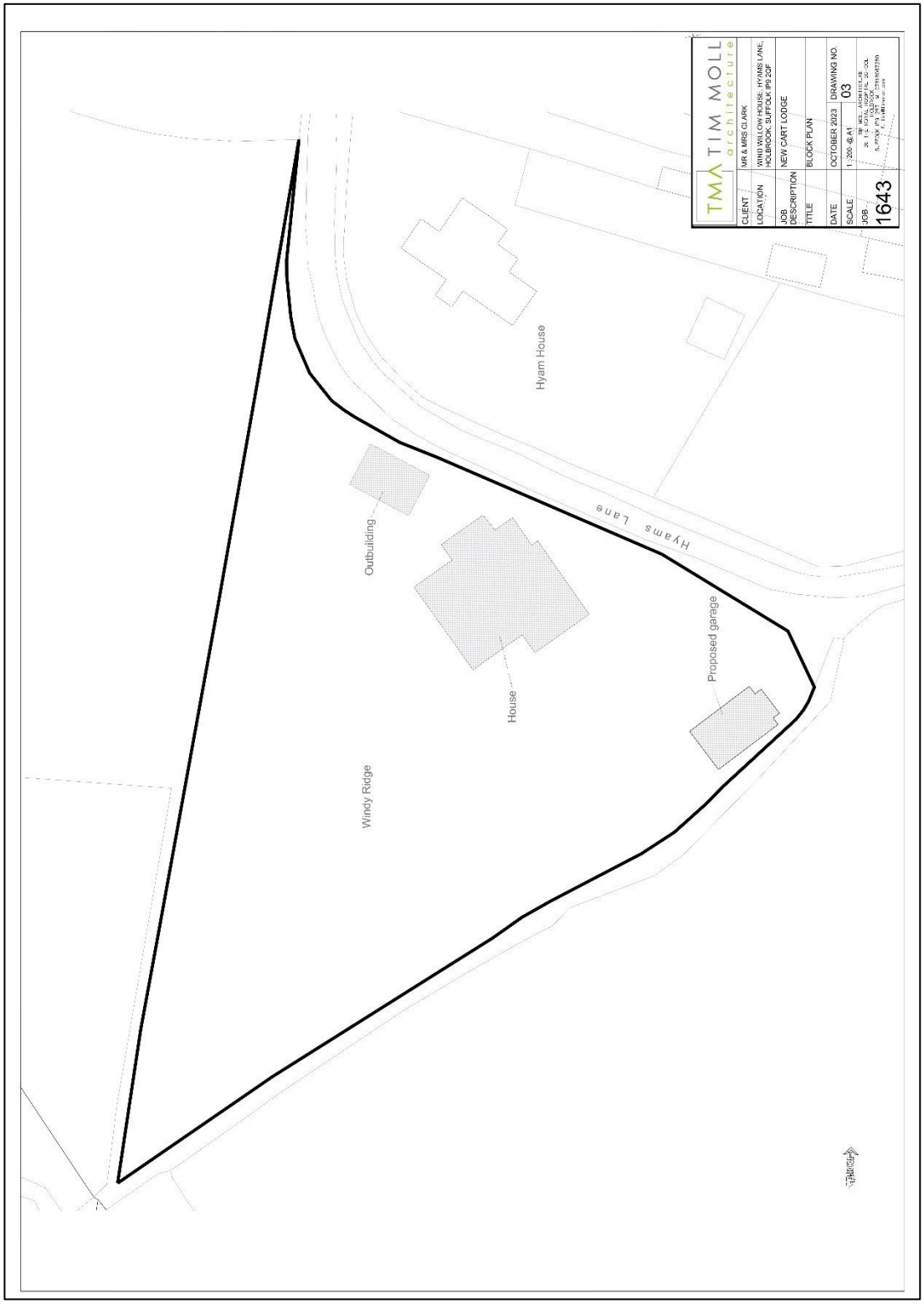


Figure 2: Proposed development.



8.2 Appendix 2: Photographs

Photograph 1: Main site area facing from north – south at Wind Willow House.

Photograph by Roger Spring 2023

Photograph 2: Main site area at the southern end at Wind Willow House

Photograph by Roger Spring 2023

Photograph 3: Main site area facing from south to north at Wind Willow House.

Photograph by Roger Spring 2023

Photograph 4: Dilapidated bat box on the Norway Spruce at Wind Willow House.

Photograph by Roger Spring 2023