Skilled Ecology Consultancy Ltd.

The Cherries, Ashen Road,
Clare, Suffolk, CO10 8LG
T: 01787277912
E: roger@skilledecology.co.uk
W: www.skilledecology.co.uk

Preliminary Ecological Appraisal Including a Protected Species Assessment at: Cherry Cottage, Stoke Road, Clare, Suffolk.

On Behalf Of:

Pryke Developments Ltd.

August 2023

Skilled Ecology Consultancy Ltd.
Registered company in England no: 7188811
Registered Office: 7 Trust Court, Histon, Cambridge, CB24 9PW

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Figures & Photographs

0 SUMMARY

0.1 Skilled Ecology Consultancy Ltd. was commissioned by Pryke Developments Ltd. to undertake a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal including a Protected Species Assessment at Cherry Cottage, Stoke Road, Clare, Suffolk. The report is required to accompany a planning application for demolition of the existing cottage and replacement with two new dwellings.

0.2 The survey was conducted on 25th August 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.

0.3 The site includes: a detached, double-storey, brick cottage with a pitched, slate roof and a detached, small single-storey, brick, shed with a flat roof, as well as gardens including short improved grassland with a small number of early mature trees and shrubs. A short length of mature hedgerow is present on the northern (roadside) boundary. The hedgerow is less than 20m and technically this makes it not a true hedgerow, simply a line of shrubs and trees. This line of shrubs and trees if proposed for removal. A patio with a former brick pond -now dry was also present.

0.4 Immediately adjacent to the site habitats included: residential properties to the east, arable field north (across Stoke Road), a mechanics workshop to the south, golf course to the west, beyond an access track.

0.5 The site is considered 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.

0.6 Therefore, further ecological surveys or mitigation were considered unnecessary. However, to minimise any residual risk of impact, precautionary measures for amphibians, hedgehogs, bats and nesting birds are provided and should be followed.

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

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

1.1.1 Skilled Ecology Consultancy Ltd. was commissioned by Pryke Developments Ltd. to undertake a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal including a Protected Species Assessment at Cherry Cottage, Stoke Road, Clare, Suffolk. The report is required to accompany a planning application for demolition of the existing cottage and replacement with two new dwellings.

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) 2017 Guidelines for Preliminary Ecological Appraisal.

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

2 METHODOLOGY

2.1 Desk Study

2.1.1 Skilled Ecology Consultancy Ltd. have an office in Clare and have undertaken many local surveys. Data from past surveys are provided later in the report. It was considered unnecessary to order further biological records from Suffolk Biodiversity Information Service to accompany this report.

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 25th August 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. Buildings were inspected externally 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 buildings and 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 includes: a detached, double-storey, brick cottage with a pitched, slate roof and a detached, small single-storey, brick, shed with a flat roof, as well as gardens including short improved grassland with a small number of early mature trees and shrubs. A short length of mature hedgerow is present on the northern (roadside) boundary. The hedgerow is less than 20m and technically this makes it not a true hedgerow, simply a line of shrubs and trees. This line of shrubs and trees if proposed for removal. A patio with a former brick pond -now dry was also present.

3.1.2 Immediately adjacent to the site habitats included: residential properties to the east, arable field north (across Stoke Road), a mechanics workshop to the south, golf course to the west, beyond an access track.

3.1.3 Waterbodies identified within 250m included:

Two garden ponds approximately 210m south west.

A lake associated with the golf course approximately 150m south.

A private lake approximately 170m south east.

3.2 Nature Conservation Sites

3.2.1 No statutorily designated nature conservation sites were identified within 2km of the site (MAGIC, 2023).

3.3 Data Search

3.3.1 The following information is a summary list of biological local records collated through Skilled Ecology Consultancy Ltd. database.

Table 1 - Summary of local biological records.

Species	Location	Year
Brown long eared	380m south east	2022
Common pipistrelle	380m south east	2022
Soprano pipistrelle	380m south east	2022
Noctule	380m south east	2022
Barn owl	380m south east	2022
Common toad	250m south	2019
Grass snake	350m south	2017
Common lizard	380m south east	2023
Slow worm	380m south east	2023
Hedgehog	380m south east	2022
Yellowhammer	380m south east	2023
House sparrow	380m south east	2023
Kingfisher	250m south	2018
Starling	380m south east	2023
Bullfinch	380m south east	2023

3.4 Protected, Priority & Rare Species

Vegetation & Habitats

3.4.1 Habitats included a building, hardstanding, short improved grass, scattered early mature shrubs and trees and line of shrubs and trees (too short to be considered a hedgerow).

3.4.2 The grassland included: Bristly ox-tongue, greater lettuce *Lactuca virosa*, ground ivy *Glechoma hederacea*, perennial rye grass *Lolium perenne*, broad leaved dock *Rumex obtusifolius*, false oat grass *Arrhenatherum elatius*, ivy *Hedera helix*, bramble *Rubus fruticosus*, yarrow *Achillea millefolium*, cocksfoot *Dactylis glomerata*, nettle *Urtica dioica*, ox eye daisy *Leucanthemum vulgare*, dandelion *Taraxacum* agg., black medick *Medicago lupulina* and self-heal *Prunella vulgaris*.

3.4.3 Scattered shrubs and trees included: apple *Malus domestius*, plum *Prunus* sp., Cherry *Prunus* sp., rose *Rosa* sp., elder *Sambucus nigra* and cypress *Cupressus* sp..

3.4.4 The row of shrubs and trees on the northern boundary included: sycamore *Acer pseudoplatanus*, hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna*, elder *Sambucus nigra* and leylandii cypress *Cuprocyparis leylandii*.

3.4.5 No Schedule 9 invasive plants or protected or priority plant species were observed within the main construction zone. No UK priority habitats are proposed for impact.

Bats

3.4.6 No signs or evidence of bats or bat activity were found. The house, shed and trees were all considered negligible in suitability or potential for roosting bats. The house roof was in good condition with tiles flush to the roof, no noticeable gaps sufficient is size to allow entry to bats were found. The shed was well-sealed with a flat roof.

3.4.7 The site may be visited on occasions by foraging/commuting bats, though was not considered significant foraging/commuting habitat. The surrounding landscaping including lakes and the River Stour were high in ecological value for local bat populations.

Other Protected & UK Priority Mammals

3.4.8 The construction zone is small in area and low 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 low in suitability for hedgehogs *Erinaceus europaeus*, though it could not be discounted that the occasional hedgehog may cross the site.

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: wood pigeon *Columba palumbus*, blackbird *Turdus merula*, robin *Erithacus rubecula*, great tit *Parus major*, and dunnock *Prunella modularis*.

3.4.13 No signs or evidence of protected birds such as barn owls were observed. No red-listed Birds of Conservation Concern BoCC species were recorded, though low numbers are likely to visit the garden for foraging on occasions. Dunnock and wood pigeon are amber-listed BoCC species. All other bird species recorded were common, widespread green-listed BoCC species.

3.4.14 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

3.4.15 The proposed construction zone was considered low in suitability or potential as terrestrial habitat for great crested newts or other amphibians. No ponds or other waterbodies were present within 100m of the site.

3.4.16 Common toads are known to breed in nearby lakes.

Reptiles

3.4.17 The site was considered very low in suitability or potential for reptiles with negligible safe basking, foraging or breeding habitat present.

3.4.18 Reptiles were not observed during the survey visit which was conducted during optimal conditions 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.

3.4.21 No areas of deadwood or rotting tree stumps were present for breeding stag beetles.

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. 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 or access into buildings was considered negligible.

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

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

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

Birds

4.1.6 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.

4.1.7 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.

4.1.8 Protected birds and UK priority bird species have been recorded locally (CPERC, 2020).

4.1.9 The proposed construction zone was considered unlikely to support protected, priority or rare birds, though may on occasions support low numbers of common nesting birds associated with the shrubs and trees on the site.

4.1.10 Further bird surveys or mitigation were considered unnecessary.

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

Other Protected, Priority & Rare Mammals

4.1.12 The site was considered low 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 very 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 Habitats present were small in area and very low in suitability for great crested newts or other amphibians. Ponds were not located particularly close to the site and lakes are generally considered poor in suitability for breeding great crested newts. The lakes do support breeding common toads and possibly other common amphibians.

4.1.16 Overall, it was considered that the risk of significant harm or impact great crested newts or other amphibians was very low.

4.1.17 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

4.1.18 No rare, protected, priority or Schedule 9 invasive plant species were present. No UK priority habitats are proposed for impact.

4.1.19 Further botanical surveys or mitigation were considered unnecessary.

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.

3.4.23 The site was considered negligible in suitability or potential for reptiles. No reptiles were observed during the survey visit.

4.1.21 Therefore, the risk of presence and potential for impact was considered negligible. Further reptile surveys or mitigation were considered unnecessary.

Invertebrates

4.1.22 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.

4.1.23 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 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 was a significant distance from any designated nature conservation sites. The risk of significant direct or indirect impact to such sites was considered very low.

4.2.2 Further surveys or mitigation for protection of designated nature conservation sites 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:

Roof materials should be removed by hand. If at any point bats or evidence of bats (droppings) are found works should stop and an ecologist called for advice;

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 on.

Birds

5.1.2 Shrub and tree reduction should be outside of the main bird season (March to end of August). If this is not possible or impractical then a nesting bird survey should be undertaken before felling.

5.1.3 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.

Amphibians & Hedgehogs

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

Ground vegetation should be maintained short by regular cutting to prevent habitats improving for wildlife before any construction or demolition works;

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;

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 amphibians and hedgehogs 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.

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 following bat and bird boxes will be installed on the site as biodiversity enhancement. The boxes will be installed onto the walls of newly converted buildings:

2 x Eco integrated bat boxes (or similar).

1 x Vivara pro sparrow terrace (or similar).

2 x Starling Nesting Bricks by Bird Brick house (or similar)

5.2.3 The bird and bat boxes will be installed high (just below the roof) on the new buildings. The bird boxes will be installed facing a northerly direction or out of direct sunlight. The bat boxes 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 could include native and or wildlife attracting species only.

5.2.6 A new hedgerow is proposed on the site boundaries. To maximise the ecological of this new habitat it should be planted 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 site was generally 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 low.

6.2 Further surveys or mitigation were considered unnecessary.

6.3 To minimise any residual risk of impact, recommendations for birds, amphibians, hedgehogs and bats are also 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 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.

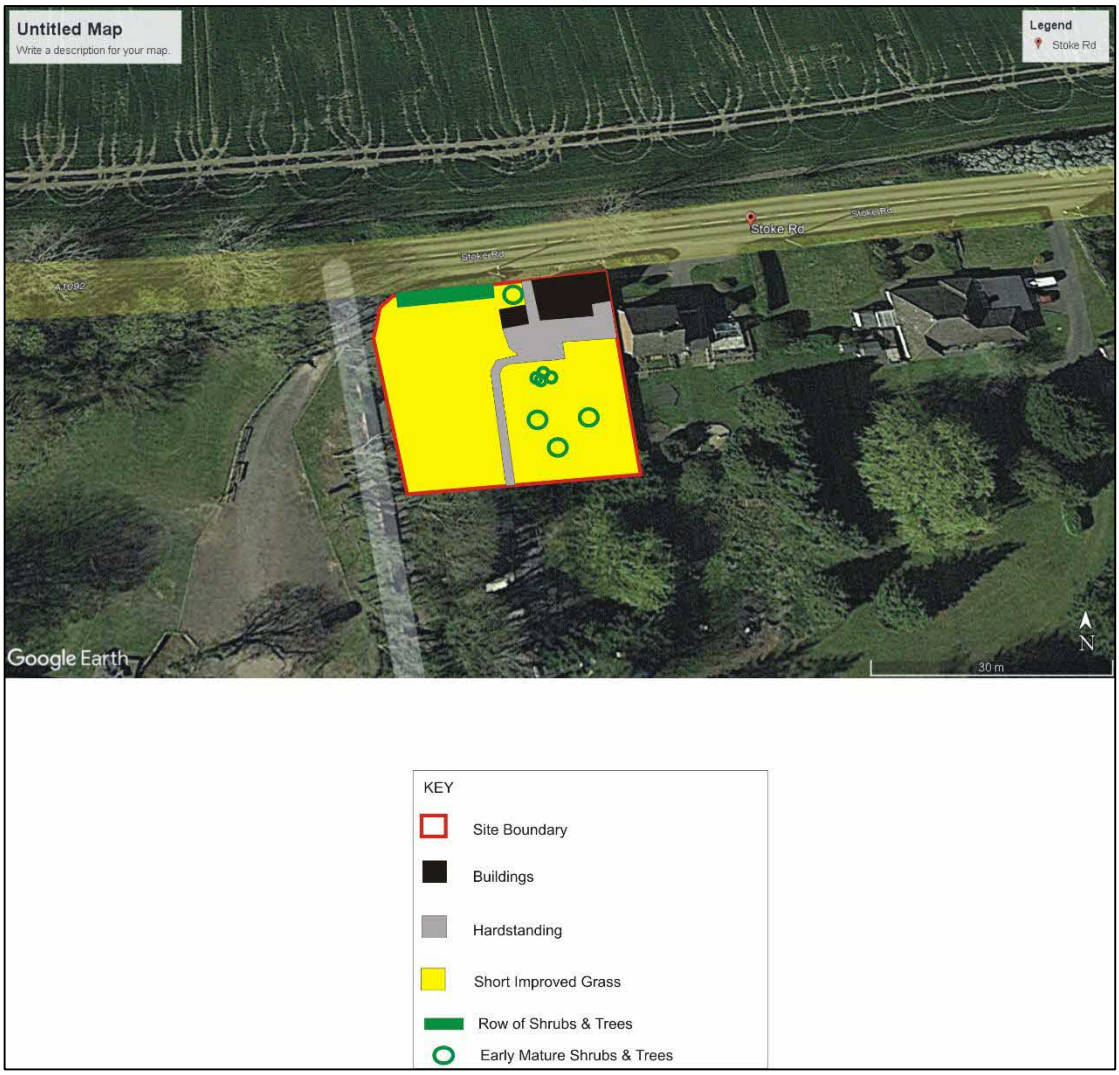
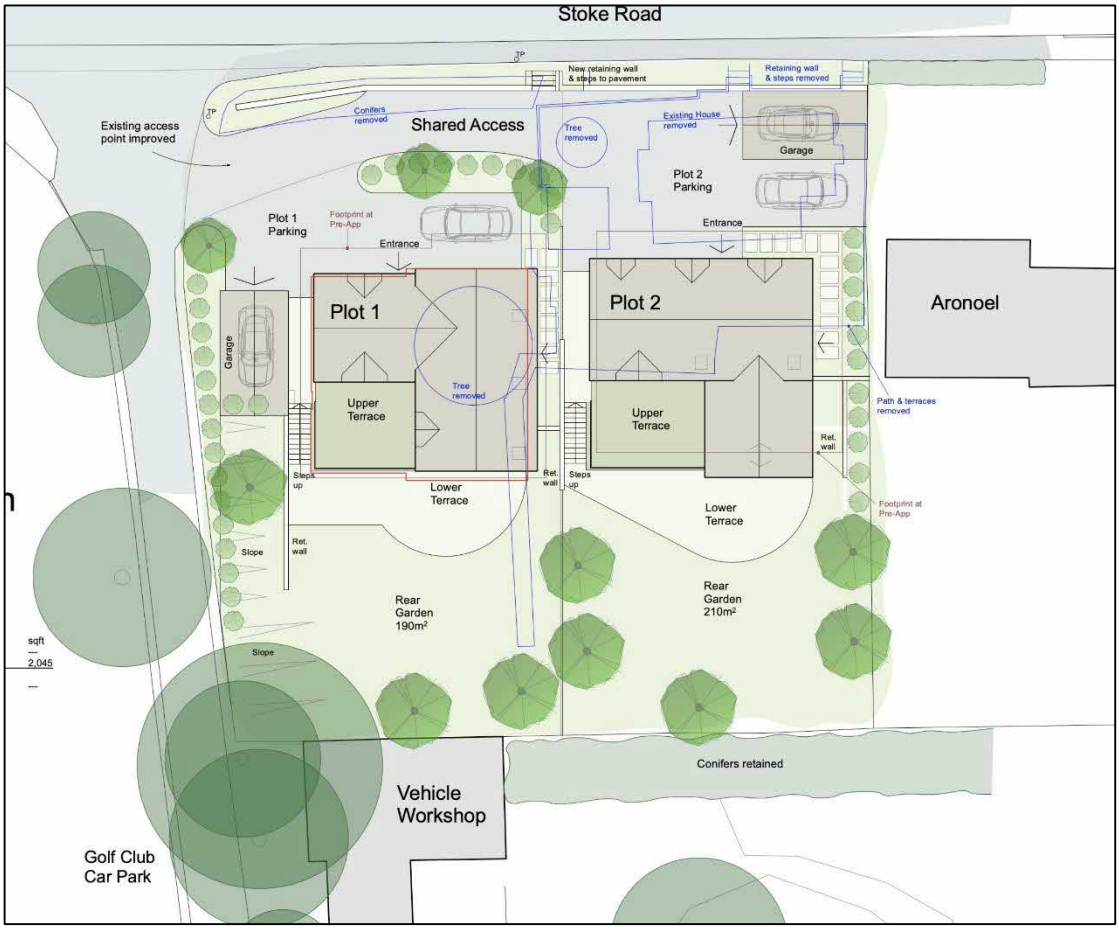


Figure 2: Proposed development



8.2 Appendix 2: Photographs

Photograph 1: North elevation at Cherry Cottage

Photograph by Roger Spring 2023

Photograph 2: Close up roof on north elevation at Cherry Cottage

Photograph by Roger Spring 2023

Photograph 3: Northern boundary at Cherry Cottage

Photograph by Roger Spring 2023

Photograph 4: House and shed at Cherry Cottage

Photograph by Roger Spring 2023

Photograph 5: Former pond at Cherry Cottage

Photograph by Roger Spring 2023

Photograph 6: Southern elevation at Cherry Cottage

Photograph by Roger Spring 2023

Photograph 7: Garden at Cherry Cottage

Photograph by Roger Spring 2023

Photograph 8: Garden at Cherry Cottage

Photograph by Roger Spring 2023

Photograph 9: Row of shrubs and trees on the northern boundary at Cherry Cottage

Photograph by Roger Spring 2023