

Design and Access Statement

Proposed House, Birchwood House, Livingston Village



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Report Issued; 17 January 2024



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1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose of Report

Mill Architects Limited were approached by the applicants in the autumn of 2022 for the proposed development of a private home on their current land in Livingston village.

Following a pre-planning enquiry earlier in 2023 we would request that the Council consider this application for detailed planning permission for the development of an independent residential dwelling house within the garden ground of Birchwood House.

This document provides supplementary information and sets out the design ethos behind the design proposals that form the subject of this planning application, explaining the approach and process that has resulted in the proposals for the development.

The first section of this report provides an overview on Birchwood House, the clients and their vision for the new build ultimately setting the brief for the project.

The second section of this report provides an overview of the site and existing buildings, its location and surrounding context both in terms of surrounding landscape character and the built form present on and adjacent to the site.

The third section details the design development process that has been undertaken, explaining how the design has evolved during the feasibility stages and how the proposals satisfy the project brief. Details of the massing and form of the proposals will be presented along-with justification for the proposed palette of materials to be used.

Applicant

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2.0 PROJECT BRIEF

The applicants have owned the property at Birchwood in Livingston Village for the last 40 years. As a much-loved family home, it has become apparent in recent years that the property has now become a large commitment for the applicants and as such they are now looking to downsize.

Birchwood House sits within extensive garden grounds which have been developed and enhanced over the time period for which the applicants have been responsible for Birchwood. The beautiful peaceful setting provides the opportunity to develop a house for the applicant within the large garden ground to the west of the main house. This forms the basis of this application for planning permission.



Fig 01: Aerial view of Birchwood House.

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3.0 SITE LOCATION AND LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

The site proposed for development is within Livingston Village. Birchwood lies to the eastern most boundary of Livingston Village Conservation area as designated by West Lothian Council. Situated along the northern banks of the River Almond Livingston Village dates back to the 12th Century originating as a farming settlement. Since 1962 the village has been surrounded by the development of the new town of Livingston.

The house at Birchwood dates back to 1850 and represents a good example of traditional masonry architecture of individual villa dwelling houses of the era. The building has been altered and extended over the last 40 years with a number of ancillary buildings and extensions updated and re-purposed to the rear of the property.

In the development of the new town of Livingston the southwestern corner of the former garden ground associated with Birchwood was developed by the LDC (Livingston Development Corporation) to form two new dwellings in the form of modern two storey semi-detached properties.

The site proposed for development which forms the basis of this application is the garden ground to the northwestern corner of the Birchwood property, directly to the north of those two properties built by the LDC approximately 60 years ago.



Fig 02: Birchwood House viewed from the Southerly aspect along the gravel driveway.

3.1 Site Features & Topography

The applicants and owners of Birchwood house have looked after the grounds over the decades with dedication and rigour maintaining the landscape and allowing new saplings to grow into the young and mature trees presently on site (*See HEL Tree survey report*)

The Birchwood House property features an expansive garden surrounding its premises, primarily extending along the West and South perimeters. This generous expanse provides abundant amenity space for the proposed property and the existing Birchwood House.

Throughout the garden and along the boundaries, a diverse array of trees, ranging from young to mature, occupy the landscape. A tree survey was carried out to document the many trees located within the site boundary and determine their root protection areas.

From the tree survey report the designs were altered accordingly – specifically in relation to the large mature sycamore tree located at the Northern site boundary. This led to reduction of the proposed property footprint to avoid the root protection zones reflecting our commitment to responsible design and environmental stewardship. (*See HEL Tree survey report*) The adjustments made to the design reflect a conscientious effort to preserve the integrity of the site's existing landscape, particularly in consideration of the significant sycamore tree.



Fig 03: Birchwood House Existing Garden

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3.2 Built Context

The site is located within the local conservation area and is enclosed by strong landscaping including mature trees, stone walls and the Folly Burn to the West. Birchwood House is situated in large towards the Northeast of the site within the existing boundary line. The remainder of the site is occupied by well-maintained garden space. With an abundance of landscaping including substantial open green space, many trees, and bushes.

To the South of the application site and to the West of Birchwood house lies Birch Court which was built by the LDC during the overall development of Livingston Village and the wider new town. The building constitutes two private dwelling houses in a semi-detached form. The building is generally of two storeys in height and is typical of mid-twentieth century residential architecture.



Fig 04: National Cycle Route 75 viewed from Northeast towards Southwest

3.3 Existing Drainage Arrangements

Existing drainage scheme relies on a combined surface and foul system that serves Birchwood House and Birch Court. (See Utilities Survey)

4.0 DEVELOPMENT PROPOSALS

4.1 Development Overview

This design and access statement demonstrates the culmination of a developed design process which has been undertaken and proposes the development of a new storey and ½ private dwelling house to the rear of the site.

The applicants have found their existing property to be too large for them at present and are looking to split their land in half to establish a more manageable, smaller dwelling and subsequently protecting the land from future developers looking for profitable projects of a larger scale.

The proposed house looks to make use of the site's natural light through Southwest facing aspects and large glazing panels which look out onto the vast garden to the West and beech trees to the South. Furthermore, materials and forms have been selected to respect the local context.

The proposed site for development has clearly defined boundaries to all aspects. To the front of the site (south) the site is bounded by the two previously mentioned dwelling houses that were developed by the LDC beyond which lies mature tree and hedge planting to Main Street. To the west the site is bounded by a free-flowing water course within a wooded landscape strip. The watercourse in turn feeds into the River Almond. To the east the site is bounded by a section of mature tree and hedge planting which provides a dense natural boundary to the adjacent Birchwood House. The north of the site (rear) is bounded by a large existing masonry wall on which there is a further defined natural boundary with significant tree and hedge planting within the garden ground of adjacent properties.

In the development of the brief a schedule of accommodation was developed to ensure an adequate level of accommodation could be accommodated on the proposed site, including the provision of suitable access and egress from the site along with an appropriate provision of amenity ground.

4.2 Proposed and Existing Site Access

Existing Site Access

The existing Birchwood House is primarily accessed from Birch Court, with a secondary access point directly on to Main Street in the form of a large timber vehicle access gate, although this is not currently used regularly by the applicant.



Fig 05 – View of the current primary access and driveway to Birchwood house. Viewed looking North East.



Fig 06 – View along Main Street facing West, showing the large timber access gate to the existing Birchwood House.

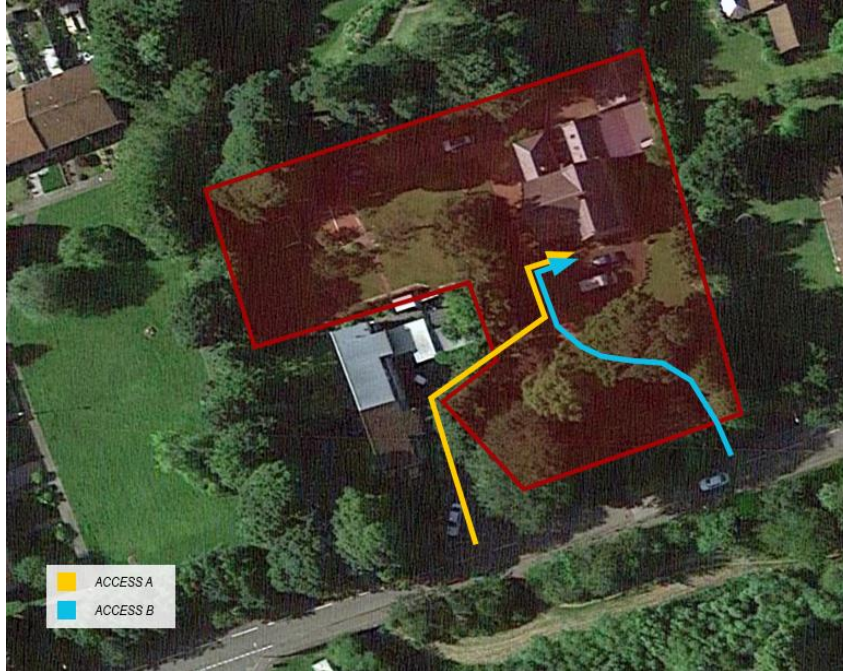


Fig 07 – Existing access diagram. Access A is the primary route the current owners use to access Birchwood House. Access B is a secondary entrance to Birchwood House and is rarely used by the owners.

Proposed Site Access

The proposed site layout has been developed to provide access directly from Birch Court, the end of which currently provides access to the existing Birchwood House. Birchwood House also has access directly onto Main Street in the form of a large timber vehicle access gate, although this is not currently used regularly by the applicant.

To ensure that no further additional traffic is created on Birch Court it is proposed that current access to Birchwood House from Birch Court is blocked, allowing access to be formed to the proposed site for development. Access to Birchwood House will be provided directly from the existing access point on Main Street.

To ensure that any vehicles approaching the proposed site for development can enter and exit in forward gear suitable turning and parking provision will be provided within the site in close proximity to the proposed dwelling.

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Fig 08 – Location of proposed driveway and access. View of the current garden of Birchwood House. Viewed from the most Southerly edge of proposed development boundary looking North.



Fig 09 – Proposed private entrance for Birchwood House. View towards the timber access gate along the secondary gravelled driveway entrance from Main Street. Viewed from Birchwood House garden facing South.

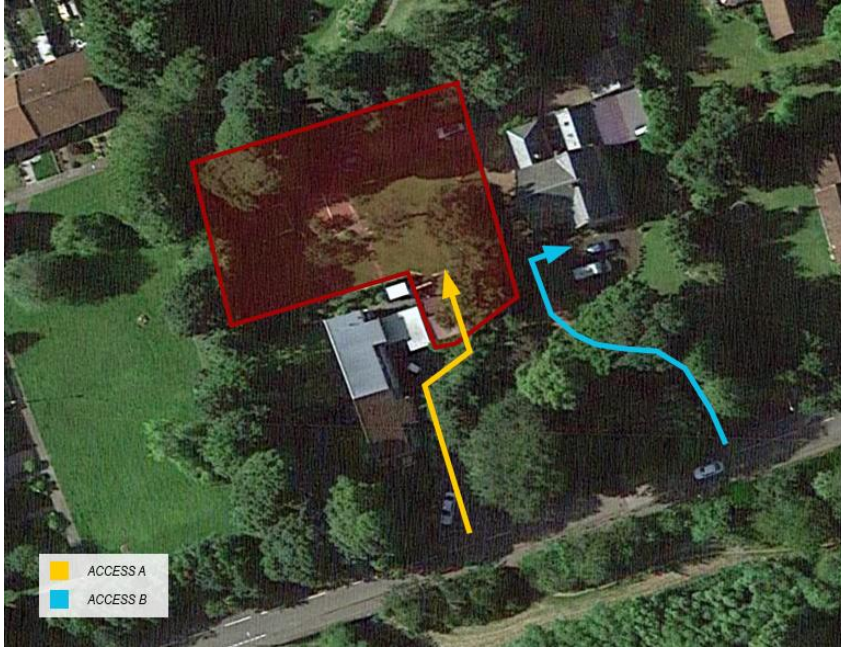


Fig 10 – Proposed access diagram. Access A for the proposed development and access B for the existing Birchwood House.

4.3 Building Design, Building Form & Materials

The use of traditional forms and materials in a contemporary manner allows the proposed building to remain respectful and complimentary to the architecture in the surrounding area while still being recognised as a new addition to the built heritage of the conservation area.

A natural stone base course and natural slate roof finish reflect the aspirations for this project to tread lightly on the site while achieving a highly sustainable and environmentally conscious approach to the building design.

A prefabricated timber kit will serve as the structural framework, complemented by timber cladding for the exterior. This strategic choice significantly reduces on-site construction time subsequently minimising associated costs. Prefabricated timber kit construction maximises efficiency and precision whilst maintaining a high-quality final build. Additionally, the sustainable and aesthetically pleasing nature of timber cladding enhances the overall appeal of the structure, aligning with contemporary architectural and environmental considerations.

Renewable technologies will be adopted throughout the development of this property including the likely provision of ground / air source provision, along with the provision of a solar array. A natural breathing super insulated envelope is to be considered for the development of the building which will also allow the energy consumption of the building to be greatly reduced.



Fig 11: Proposed elevation North

4.4 Proposed Drainage Arrangements

The proposed drainage arrangement for the development will include Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems to collect excess water and decrease flow rates to local watercourses and drains. This will include a soak away, in addition to extra planting and permeable hard standing.

4.5 Landscaping

The landscaping proposal will maintain its overall integrity, with minimal alterations expected. In instances where removal is required to respect the root protection zones of the tree survey report (*See HEL Tree Survey Report*), a comprehensive replanting scheme will be implemented. This approach not only ensures the maintenance of the landscape's aesthetic appeal but aims to preserve local wildlife habitats and biodiversity.

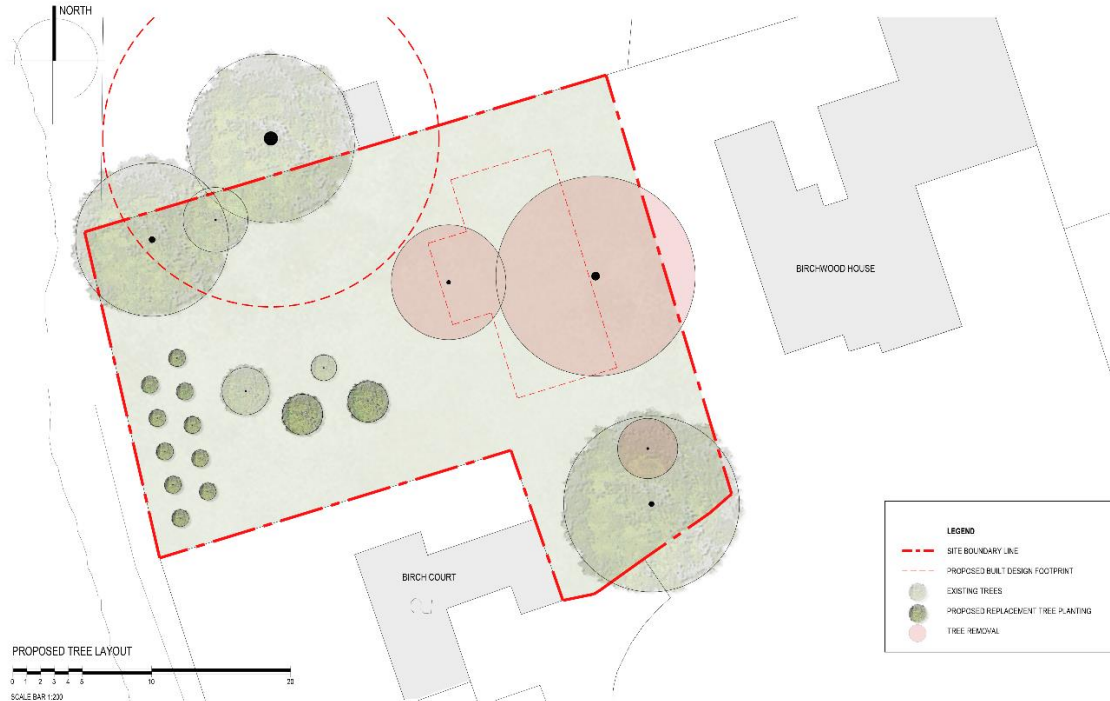


Fig 12: Existing, proposed and to be removed trees.

4.6 Sustainability

The new build home upholds a high standard of sustainability focusing on high thermal efficiency design standards through high quality insulation, high-performance windows, and material choice as well as an airtight design that prioritises thermal retention in winter and passive cooling in the summer. The many Southwest facing windows have been strategically integrated for solar heat gain along with Photovoltaic panels lining the South-westerly facing roof elevation. (See Appendix A for Elevation drawings)

Native landscaping

Where possible the existing landscape will not be altered. Where any trees or planting have been removed there will be subsidiary planting to accommodate any loss. The focus on replanting aims not only to compensate for changes but also to enhance biodiversity. Additionally, the landscape is strategically positioned near the River Almond, maintaining its status as a riparian habitat corridor.

Durable and future proof design

Additionally, the design is to high quality and standards with allowance for future flexibility of use. With the potential for the upstairs library/snug to turn into a fourth bedroom for a larger family depending on future homeowner's needs.

Additionally, in anticipation of evolving sustainable technologies, a generously proportioned plant room has been incorporated, ensuring the home's preparedness for the integration of future advancements.

Furthermore, the durable and ecological timber kit and cladding not only looks appealing and fits in with the local context but is a durable material which can be easily reused and recycled at the end of the building's life cycle.

5.0 PLANNING HISTORY

5.1 Policy Review

There is limited planning history associated with Birchwood House, and this appears to be limited to works associated with tree crown reductions and removals, both of which were accepted by the planning authority.

Application Ref; 0727/TCA/21 – Felling of 2no. diseased and dead Birch trees; and selective branch removal of 1no. Birch tree.

Application Ref; LIVE/0058/TCA/14 – Crown reduction of 3 trees.

Assessment against Planning Policy:

In the development of designs associated with this Pre-Application enquiry consideration to applicable planning policy informed the overall approach to the proposals. Upon review of the West Lothian Local Development Plan 2018 the principal policies which were deemed to be applicable to this application were assessed;

Policy Des 1 – Design Principles

All development proposals will require to take account of and be integrated with the local context and built form. Development proposals should have no significant adverse impacts on the local community and where appropriate, should include measures to enhance the environment and be high quality in their design.

Development proposals which are poorly designed will not be supported.

When assessing development proposals, the developer will be required to ensure that:

- a. there is no significant adverse impact on adjacent buildings or streetscape in terms of layout, scale, massing, design, external materials or amenity;*
- b. there is no significant adverse impact on landscape character, built heritage, habitats or species including European sites, biodiversity and Protected Species nor on amenity as a result of light, noise, odours, dust or particulates;*
- c. the proposed development is accessible for all, provides suitable access and parking, encourages active travel and has no adverse implications for public safety;*
- d. the proposal includes appropriate integrated and accessible infrastructure, open space, green infrastructure and landscaping;*
- e. sustainability issues are addressed through energy efficient design, layout, site orientation and building practices;*
- f. the development does not result in any significant adverse impact on the water environment as required by the Water Framework Directive and related regulations and as appropriate, mitigation to minimise any adverse effects is provided;*
- g. there are no significant adverse effects on air quality (particularly in and around Air Quality Management Areas), or on water or soil quality and, as appropriate, mitigation to minimise any adverse effects is provided; and*
- h. risks to new development from unstable land resulting from past mining activities are fully assessed and, where necessary, mitigated prior to development.*

It is considered that the proposals included within this application satisfy all aspects of the above-noted policy requirements. The overall scale, massing and design of the proposed dwelling house sits comfortably within the overall grain of the built fabric in and around Livingston Village.

The identified strong natural boundaries that form the perimeter of the proposed site embed the building within its surrounding context with no detrimental effect on surrounding buildings and natural environment.

POLICY HOU 3 – Infil/Windfall Housing Development within Settlements

In addition to sites already identified in Policy HOU 1 of the LDP, new housing development will also be supported on sites within settlement boundaries provided:

- a. the development will be in keeping with the character of the settlement and local area;*
- b. the site is not identified for an alternative use in the LDP or the proposal complies with Policy EMP 1 - Safeguarding and Developing Existing Employment Land;*
- c. the site does not form an area of maintained amenity or open space unless the proposal conforms with the terms of policy ENV 21 (Protection of formal and informal Open Space) and is acceptable in landscape and townscape terms;*
- d. the proposed housing use is compatible with nearby uses, there is no adverse effect on the character of the local area and a satisfactory residential environment can be achieved;*
- e. the site benefits from good accessibility by public transport and active travel to shopping, education, recreational and other community facilities;*
- f. existing physical infrastructure, including roads, drainage, sewage, and education have the capacity to accommodate the proposed development;*
- g. the proposal complies with Policy INF 1 and Policy TRAN 2, as applicable, where additional infrastructure would be required as a result of the development;*
- h. the site is not at significant risk of flooding in the terms of policy EMG 2 (Flooding); and*
- i. the proposal complies with other LDP policies and relevant Supplementary Guidance.*

Proposals for development within or adjacent to sensitive locations such as Special Landscape Areas (SLAs), Gardens and Designed Landscapes, Historic Battlefields, Conservation Areas or

affecting the appearance, character and setting of Listed Buildings and Scheduled Ancient Monuments and any other historic or archaeological asset will be subject to additional scrutiny and may require to be supported by the submission of additional information. In these circumstances, there is an expectation that the standard of design will be higher than in less sensitive locations.

It is considered that the proposals included within this application satisfy the policy requirements of HOU 3. While it is accepted that additional scrutiny to any application for development will be required given the sites location within the Livingston Village Conservation Area, it is considered the combination of the location within the 'backlands' of the area, and the significant screening of the site from Main Street will allow the proposed addition to sit comfortably and 'quietly' within the Conservation Area.

It is considered that this site can clearly be identified as an opportunity for windfall / infill housing development. The garden ground associated with the existing Birchwood House is of a considerable size and could in some instances be considered too large by modern standards for maintenance and upkeep purposes.

The development of a new dwelling house within the garden ground at Birchwood House would still ensure more than adequate amenity and garden ground provision would be afforded to both the existing Birchwood House and adjacent proposed dwelling house.

5.2 5.2 Pre-app Response

Subsequent to studying the pre-application advice response to the proposal the following additional policy considerations were raised by the officer.

INF1 – Infrastructure Provision and development

In the response to our recent pre-application planning enquiry the officers noted that a planning consent for the site is likely to attract developer contributions principally for addressing financial support for the local school catchment area. While the applicant understands the requirement in general for development contributions, they will be seeking advice from the relevant officer in the possibility to reduce or commute these contributions subject to the sale of their current residence.

Given the profile of the applicant it can be clearly demonstrated that as the proposed dwelling will be occupied solely by a retired couple no further pressure will be placed on the local school catchment.

ENV9 – Woodland, Forestry, Trees, and Hedgerows

While the development site is located within the Livingston village conservation area and therefore is subject to restrictions on the removal of trees it should be noted that there are no protected trees within the site boundary. It is recognised that the mature trees around the site create a special quality, one that has been enjoyed and enhanced by the applicant over the last forty years.

In accordance with recommendations received through the pre-application process a full tree survey has been carried out and supplements this application. In the process of assessing the tree survey it became apparent that the proposed location for the new dwelling should be adjusted to ensure the protection of Class A sycamore tree within the neighbouring property.

The proposals require the removal of only 2 silver birch trees and 1 European beech tree. Both silver birch trees were allowed to grow from sapling by the applicant a number of years ago. The European Beech is considered of little significance as it is represented by a topped stump within the existing hedge line. On completion of the construction replacement tree planting of similar species will be provided within the site boundaries.

In accordance with the guidance provided by Heritage Environmental Limited (HEL), the proposal aims to incorporate the planting of 9 fruit trees, specifically domestic apple and plum varieties, to offset the direct loss of three trees. Additionally, an extra three trees are suggested to contribute to landscape enhancement, along with the introduction of 50m of new hedgerow to mitigate the partial loss of the existing hedgerow.

ENV23 – Conservation Areas (Designations)

Given the site's location within the conservation area, appropriate design and landscaping considerations have been made to maintain local character and uphold architectural and historical interest, ecological consideration and retain the local built environment language.

6.0 SUMMARY

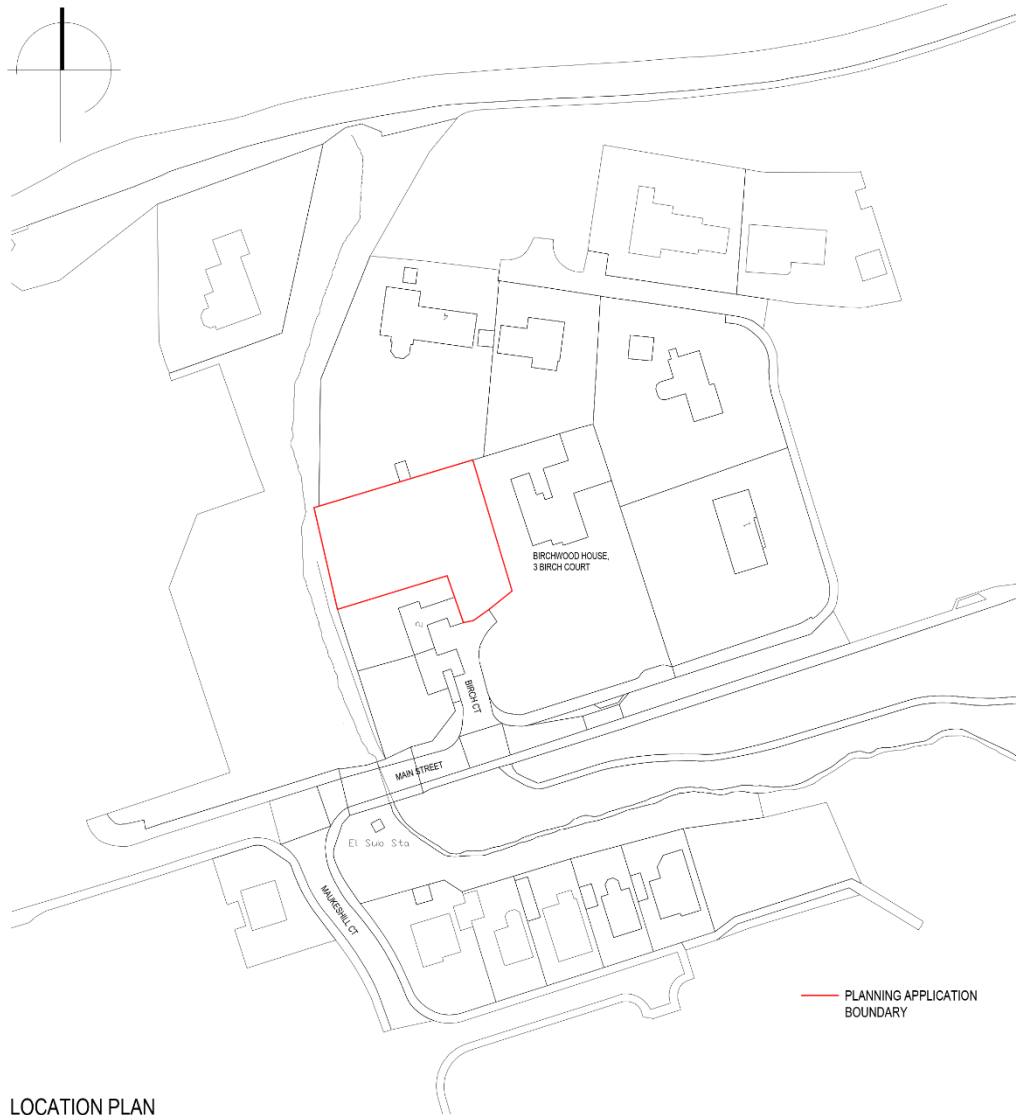
This design and access statement enquiry demonstrates the potential for the development of a new independent dwelling house within the garden ground of the substantial Birchwood House in Livingston Village.

This additional dwelling house could provide a modest addition to the attractive, predominantly residential neighbourhood. Following our assessment and pre-planning approval it is considered that the development of this site satisfies planning policy with regards to both use and proposed design.

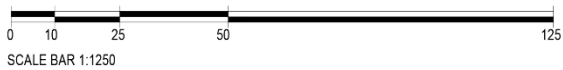
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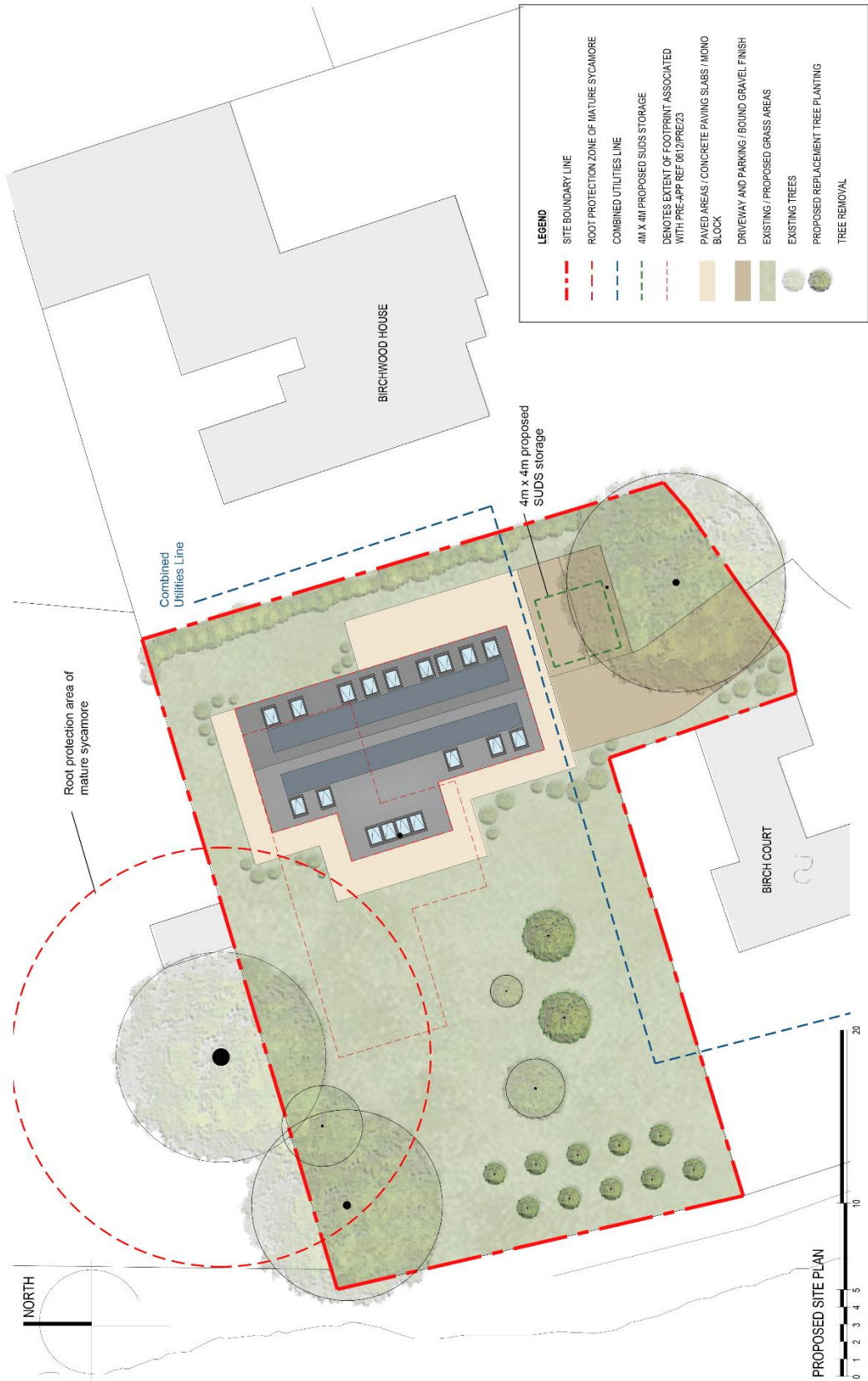
7.0 APPENDICES

7.1 Appendix A – Application Drawings



LOCATION PLAN







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FIRST FLOOR



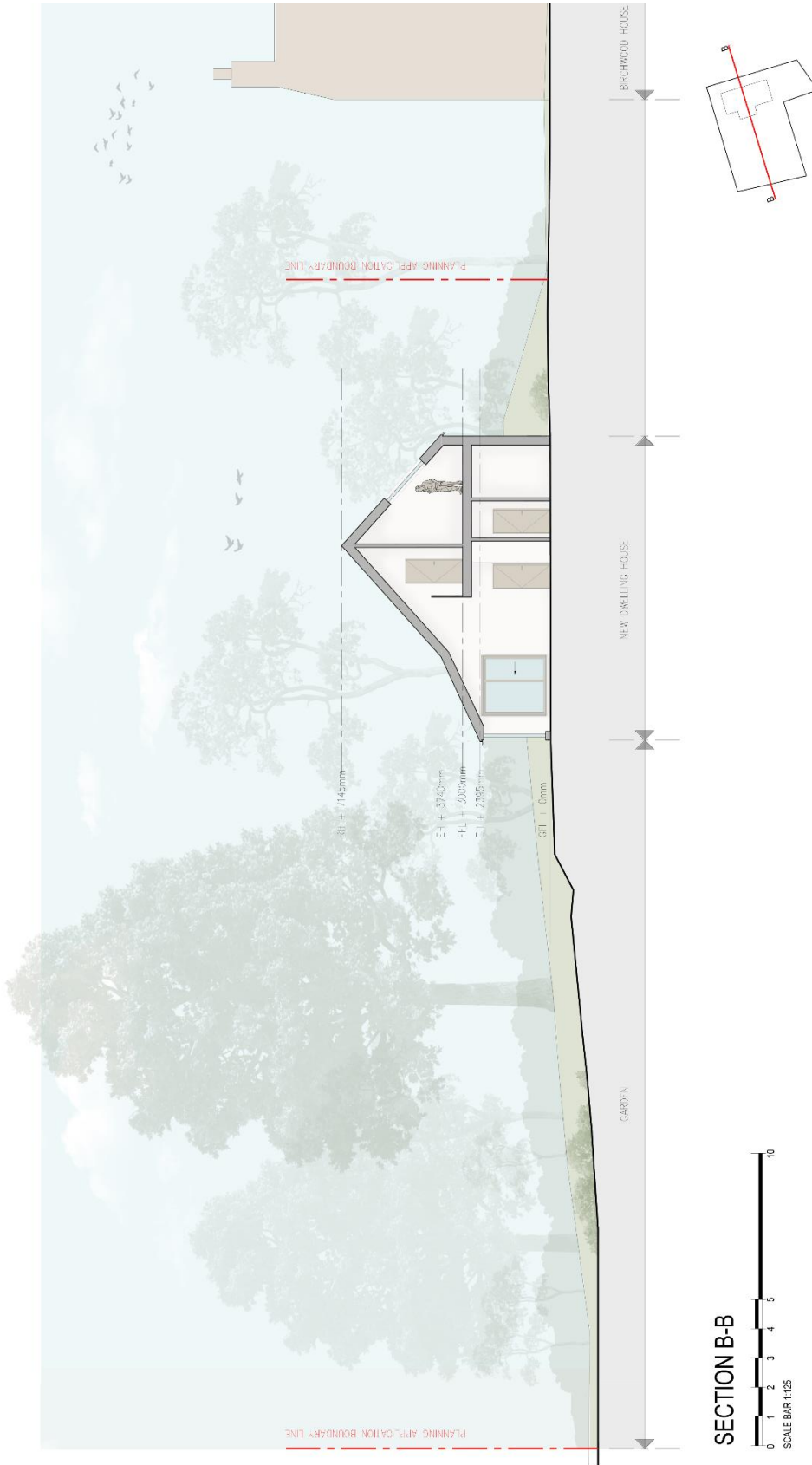
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GROUND FLOOR

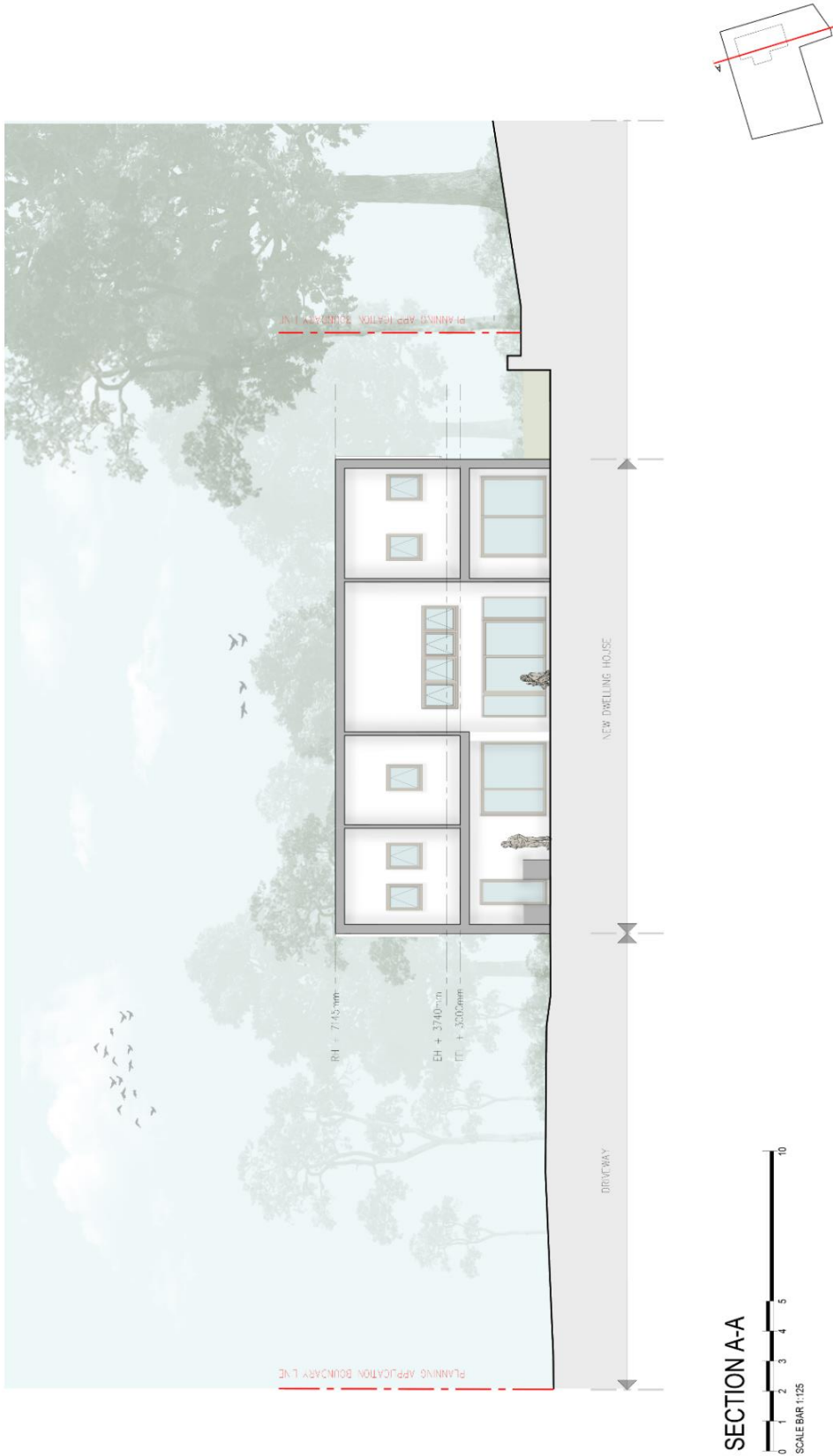


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LEGEND

- SITE BOUNDARY LINE
- PROPOSED BUILT DESIGN FOOTPRINT
- EXISTING TREES
- PROPOSED REPLACEMENT TREE PLANTING
- TREE REMOVAL

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7.2 Appendix B – Site Photos



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