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**Preliminary Ecological
Appraisal Including a
Protected Species
Assessment at:
Cherry Tree Cottage, Seckford
Hall Road, Great Bealings,
IP13 6NS**

On Behalf Of:

Mr S. Curtis

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Skilled Ecology Consultancy Ltd.

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0 SUMMARY

- 0.1 Skilled Ecology Consultancy Ltd. was commissioned by Mr S. Curtis to undertake a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal including a Protected Species Assessment at Cherry Tree Cottage, Seckford Hall Road, Gt Bealings, IP13 6NS. The report is required to accompany a planning application for proposed demolition of existing garage and storage outbuildings and erection of new detached garage/store with games room.
- 0.2 The survey was conducted on 5th January 2024 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 small and includes: an existing derelict garage constructed from mixed, modern materials such as corrugated iron sheeting for walls and the roof, with light timber frame, as well as a small number of immature trees (blackthorn and elder), immature planted beech hedgerow, scattered ruderal herbaceous plants on disturbed soils. On the proposed construction zone boundaries were mature oak and Norway spruce (old, planted Christmas trees). A small number of recent tree stumps were present (oak and blackthorn). The Norway spruce will be thinned and new oak trees planted.
- 0.4 The surrounding landscape is dominated by arable fields, low density housing, a nearby golf course and pockets of oak dominated woodland. The river Fynn is located approximately 150m south of the site.
- 0.5 No signs or evidence of protected, priority or rare species were found. Potential for nesting birds was noted in the garage and trees, as well as potential for foraging bats, hedgehogs and stag beetles. The building and trees were considered negligible in suitability for roosting bats.
- 0.6 Further ecological surveys or mitigation were considered unnecessary.
- 0.7 However, to minimise any residual risk of impact to foraging bats, birds, stag beetles 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 S. Curtis to undertake a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal including a Protected Species Assessment at Cherry Tree Cottage Seckford Hall Road Gt Bealings IP13 6NS. The report is required to accompany a planning application for proposed demolition of existing garage and storage outbuildings and erection of new detached garage/store with games room.
- 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 5th January 2024 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. The garage and adjacent 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 and inside of the garage 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 is small and includes: an existing derelict garage constructed from mixed, modern materials such as corrugated iron sheeting for walls and the roof with light timber frame, as well as a small number of immature trees (blackthorn and elder), immature planted beech hedgerow, scattered ruderal herbaceous plants on disturbed soils. On the proposed construction zone boundaries were mature oak and Norway spruce (old, planted Christmas trees). A small number of recent tree stumps were present (oak and blackthorn). The Norway spruce will be thinned and new oak trees planted.

3.1.2 The surrounding landscape is dominated by arable fields, low density housing, a nearby golf course and pockets of oak dominated woodland. The river Fynn is located approximately 150m south of the site.

3.1.3 No ponds were identified locally (Ordnance Survey Map, 2024).

3.2 Nature Conservation Sites

3.2.1 The Deben Estuary RAMSAR, Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and Special Protection Area (SPA) is located approximately 1.8km south east and designated for its estuarine habitats supporting internationally important wintering bird communities, as well as rare plants and invertebrates (MAGIC, 2024).

3.3 Data Search

3.3.1 The following is a table containing a summary of bat records collated through the SBIS.

Table 1: Summary of local records.

| Species | Approximate Location |
|--|----------------------|
| Bats | |
| Serotine (UK & EU protected) | Martlesham 2021 |
| Barbastelle (UK & EU protected) | Little Bealings 2014 |
| Noctule (UK & EU protected) | Little Bealings 2021 |
| Common pipistrelle (UK & EU protected)- breeding roost | 500m north 2009 |
| Brown long-eared (UK & EU protected)- breeding roost | 500m north 2009 |
| Soprano pipistrelle (UK & EU protected) | Martlesham 2021 |

3.4 Protected, Priority & Rare Species

Vegetation & Habitats

3.4.1 The majority of the site was dominated by an existing building. Surrounding habitats were disturbed land with immature trees, an immature planted beech hedgerow and scattered ruderal herbaceous plants. Mature trees were present beyond the proposed construction zone.

3.4.2 Immature shrubs and trees etc. found included: ash *Fraxinus excelsior*, elder *Sambucus nigra*, ivy *Hedera helix*, blackthorn *Prunus spinosa* and spindle *Euonymus europaeus*.

3.4.3 Ruderal herbaceous plants included: cow parsley *Anthriscus sylvestris*, ivy *Hedera helix*, nettle *Urtica dioica*, ornamental *Euphorbia* sp., nipplewort *Lapsana communis*, bracken *Pteridium aquilinum* and common comfrey *Symphytum officinale*.

3.4.4 Three recent tree stumps were identified including 2 x blackthorn *Prunus spinosa* and 1 x oak *Quercus robur*.

3.4.5 Woodland beyond the proposed construction zone included oak *Quercus robur* and Norway spruce *Picea abies* (planted Christmas trees).

3.4.6 No Schedule 9 invasive plants were present. No protected or priority plant species were observed within the site. No UK priority habitats were present or proposed for impact. Oak woodland to the east of the site is a UK priority habitat Lowland Deciduous Woodland.

Bats

3.4.7 The existing garage is a dilapidated building constructed from mixed modern materials with a high quantity of corrugated iron sheeting which is typically poor in suitability for roosting given the high temperature fluctuations caused by conductivity of the metal. The timber frame was bolted together and was of light construction with negligible opportunities for roosting.

3.4.8 Overall, it was considered that the garage was negligible in suitability for roosting bats. No internal or external signs of bats were found.

3.4.9 Trees on the site and proposed for removal were all too small in trunk diameter and immature to support roosting bats. No signs or evidence of bats were found associated with trees.

3.4.10 The site itself may be visited on occasion by foraging bats, though significant foraging was considered unlikely. Adjacent habitats including mature woodland is optimal for foraging bats.

Other Protected & UK Priority Mammals

3.4.11 The construction zone is small in area, though is considered potentially suitable for foraging by badgers *Meles meles*.

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

3.4.13 The site was considered potentially suitable for hedgehogs *Erinaceus europaeus*. It could not be discounted that the occasional hedgehog may cross the site for foraging.

3.4.14 No signs or evidence of badgers, hedgehogs or any other ground dwelling protected, priority or rare mammals were observed.

Birds

3.4.15 The following bird species were observed or heard on or close to the site during the survey: goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis*, blackbird *Turdus merula*, wren *Troglodytes troglodytes*, robin *Erithacus rubecula*, woodpigeon *Columba palumbus* and great tit *Parus major*.

3.4.16 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 site for foraging.

3.4.17 Habitats were theoretically suitable for low numbers of common nesting birds.

Great Crested Newts & Other Amphibians

3.4.18 The proposed construction zone included mostly a building negligible in suitability as terrestrial habitat for amphibians, including great crested newts. However, adjacent habitats were potentially suitable as terrestrial habitat with a pile of building materials and ground crevices optimal for amphibians.

3.4.19 No ponds were present nearby (Ordnance Survey Map, 2024).

3.4.20 No amphibians were observed during the survey visit.

Reptiles

3.4.21 The site was considered very low in suitability or potential for reptiles with little safe basking, foraging or breeding habitat present primary due to heavy shade.

3.4.22 Reptiles were not observed during the survey visit.

Invertebrates

3.4.23 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 unlikely.

3.4.24 No protected or priority invertebrates were observed during the survey visit. Recent tree stumps were present.

Other Protected, Priority or Rare Species

3.4.25 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. The garage and trees were all considered negligible in suitability for roosting bats with negligible opportunities for roosting. No signs or evidence of bats were found.

4.1.3 The risk of significant impact to bats, bat roosts or local bat conservation from the proposed development 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 Widespread protected birds and UK priority bird species may on occasion visit the site, though, given the small size of the site/project, it was considered unlikely that the site would be of significant ecological value for such species. No signs or evidence were observed. The garage and trees were potentially suitable for small numbers of common nesting birds.

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

Other Protected, Priority & Rare Mammals

4.1.10 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 occasional hedgehog and possibly badger might visit the site, though significant use by many hedgehogs or badgers was considered unlikely.

4.1.11 Further surveys for any other protected, priority or rare mammals was considered unnecessary. However, to minimise any residual risk of impact to hedgehogs and badgers, 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 Theoretically, part of the site was considered potentially suitable as terrestrial habitat for amphibians, including great crested newts. However, no ponds were identified locally which means that the risk of great crested newts or any other amphibians being in the vicinity of the site and using the site for sheltering or foraging was considered negligible.

4.1.14 Further great crested newt surveys or mitigation were considered unnecessary.

Plants

- 4.1.15 No rare, protected or priority plants or UK priority habitats will be impacted.
- 4.1.16 Therefore, further botanical surveys or mitigation for rare plants or habitats were considered unnecessary.
- 4.1.17 No Schedule 9 invasive plants were identified or considered likely to be present.

Reptiles

- 4.1.18 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.
- 4.1.19 The proposed construction zone is small and considered very low in suitability or potential for reptiles.
- 4.1.20 The risk of presence or impact to reptiles is very low and 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.

Invertebrates

- 4.1.21 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.
- 4.1.22 The tree stumps present do not immediately provide breeding habitat for stag beetles, because they are too recent, though if left for a year or two will commence decomposition and will be potentially suitable for breeding stag beetles.
- 4.1.23 Further invertebrate surveys or strict mitigation were considered unnecessary. However, recommendations for stag beetles detailed below should be followed.

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 is positioned a significant distance from statutorily designated nature conservation sites. The proposal is not to increase local housing.

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:

- Roof removal of the garage should be by hand. If at any stage bats or evidence of bats (droppings) are found works should stop and an ecologist contacted for advice;
- Any new proposed external lighting should be minimised. Where external lighting is required, it should be warm white LED lamps (<3000k) 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.
- Trees felled should be replaced on a one-for-one basis using only native broad-leaved trees.

Hedgehogs, Badgers & Reptiles

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

- Removal of shrubs, trees, bramble and ivy growth should be undertaken by hand with hand tools rather than ripped out by plant machinery;
- Rubble/building materials on the site should be removed by hand;

- 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 badgers are mostly active.
- In the unlikely event that a hedgehog, badger or reptile 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 Removal or reduction of the existing garage and any trees should be undertaken outside the main bird nesting season (March to end of August). If this is not possible then an ecologist should survey the site for nesting birds before clearance commences.
- 5.1.4 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.

Stag beetles

- 5.1.5 To preserve stag beetle breeding habitat, tree stumps should be retained in situ. If this is not practical, they should be relocated elsewhere on the site to naturally rot providing long-term breeding habitat. The stumps should be partially buried when relocated.

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 the new building 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 Planting a small number of new trees will provide additional biodiversity net gain. The applicant is in the process of thinning Christmas trees planted adjacent to the garage and will replace with oak trees to compliment the adjacent oak woodland. This will provide significant net gain as the trees mature.

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, badgers, 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.

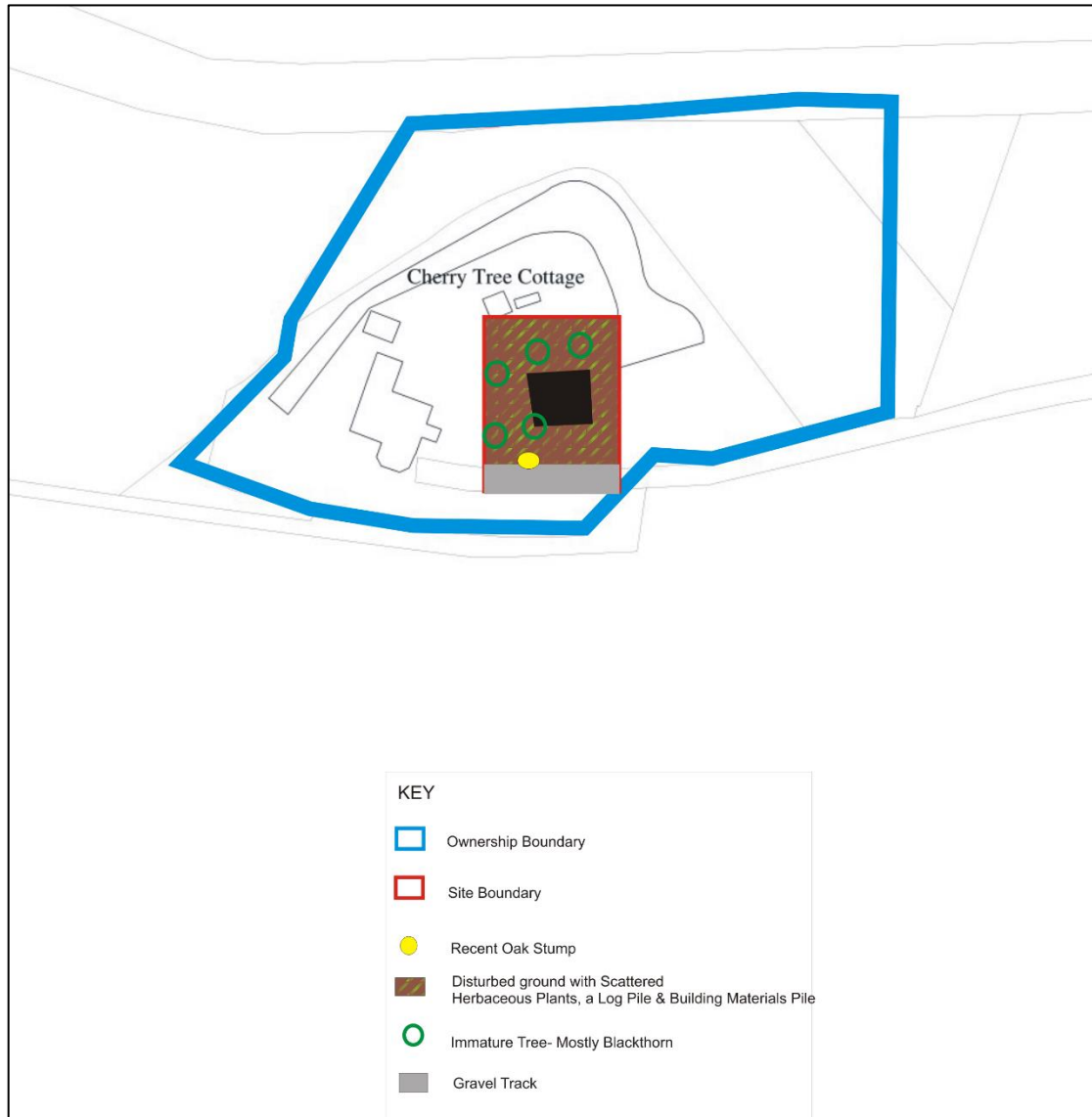
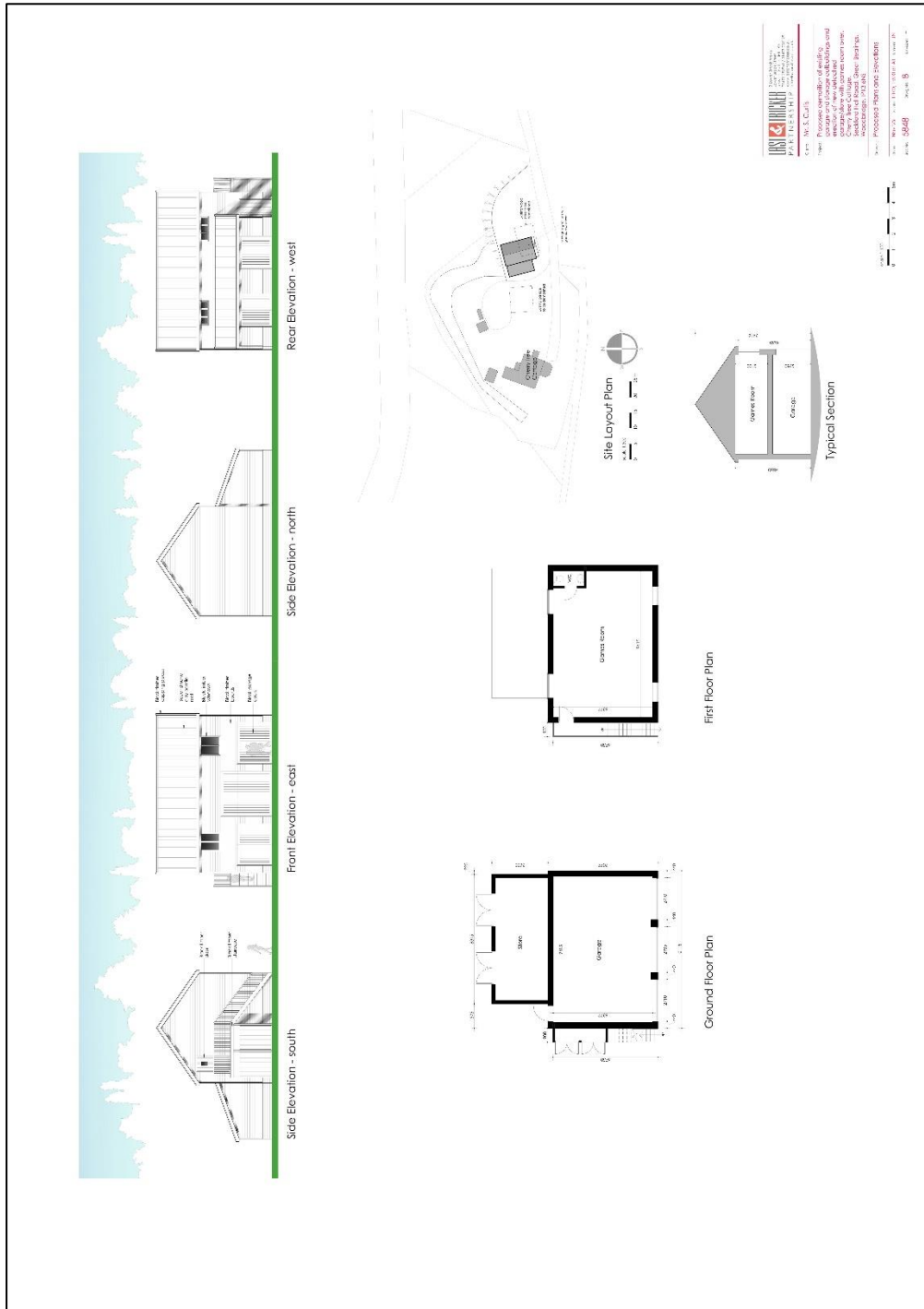


Figure 2: Proposed development.



8.2 Appendix 2: Photographs

Photograph 1: Main site area at Cherry Tree Cottage.



Photograph by Roger Spring 2023

Photograph 2: Main site area at Cherry Tree Cottage



Photograph by Roger Spring 2023

Photograph 3: Southern boundary of the site at Cherry Tree Cottage.



Photograph by Roger Spring 2023

Photograph 4: Eastern boundary of the site at Cherry Tree Cottage.



Photograph by Roger Spring 2023

Photograph 5: Inside the garage at Cherry Tree Cottage.



Photograph by Roger Spring 2023

Photograph 6: Inside the garage at Cherry Tree Cottage.



Photograph by Roger Spring 2023