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**Preliminary Ecological
Appraisal Including a
Protected Species
Assessment at:
Hill Farm House, Brent Eleigh,
CO10 9PB.**

On Behalf Of:

Mr O. Scott-Cowley

February 2024

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0 SUMMARY

- 0.1 Skilled Ecology Consultancy Ltd. was commissioned by Mr O. Scott-Cowley to undertake a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal including a Protected Species Assessment at Hill Farm House, Brent Eleigh, CO10 9PB. The report is required to accompany a planning application for a new cart lodge, including driveway extension.
- 0.2 The survey was conducted on 14th February 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 proposed construction zone is very small (approximately 150m²). The site includes: short improved grass (Modified Grassland – less than 9 species per square metre), and an ornamental garden bed. A high brick wall is present along most of the western site boundary. A gateway is present at the southern end of the wall which is proposed for improvement to allow for greater vehicle traffic.
- 0.4 The site is positioned in a garden in a rural location with the broader landscape dominated by grassy and arable fields. A small number of residential properties and a commercial yard with significant areas of hardstanding are present to the west. Three ponds are present within 250m of the site. The closest of which is approximately 50m west in an isolated location surrounded by buildings and hardstanding.
- 0.5 No signs or evidence of protected, priority or rare species were found. The site was considered low in ecological value. The risk of significant impact to protected, priority or rare species or notable habitats was considered very low/negligible. Therefore, further ecological surveys or mitigation were considered unnecessary.
- 0.6 However, to minimise any residual risk of impact to bats, nesting birds, amphibians and hedgehogs, precautionary measures, detailed later in the report, should be followed.
- 0.7 Biodiversity enhancements are also included in the report in accordance with national planning policy.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

- 1.1.2 Skilled Ecology Consultancy Ltd. was commissioned by Mr O. Scott-Cowley to undertake a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal including a Protected Species Assessment at Hill Farm House, Brent Eleigh, CO10 9PB. The report is required to accompany a planning application for a new cart lodge including driveway extension.
- 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 No local biological record search was ordered through the Suffolk Biodiversity Information Service (SBIS). An Ecological Impact Assessment by AGB Environmental, 2021 has been undertaken on adjacent land and buildings including great crested newt eDNA tests on local ponds. The results of which are summarised below along with the results from a search of the Multi-agency Geographical Information for the Countryside (MAGIC).
- 2.1.2 The desk study search results were then combined with the findings of the site survey to assess the risk of ecological 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 14th February 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. The 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 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.

2.3.7 Adjacent ponds were assessed for suitability for great crested newts by undertaking the Habitat Suitability Index assessment as developed by Oldham *et al.* 2000.

Badgers & Other Mammals

2.3.8 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 proposed construction zone is very small (approximately 150m²). The site includes: short improved grass (Modified Grassland – less than 9 species per square metre), and an ornamental garden bed. A high brick wall is present along most of the western site boundary. A gateway is present at the southern end of the wall which is proposed for improvement to allow for greater vehicle traffic.

3.1.2 The site is positioned in a garden in a rural location with the broader landscape dominated by grassy and arable fields. A small number of residential properties and a commercial yard with significant areas of hardstanding are present to the west. Three ponds are present within 250m of the site.

3.1.3 Ponds identified locally (Ordnance Survey Maps 2024) included:

- Pond 1: approximately 50m west in an isolated location surrounded by buildings and hardstanding. The pond is medium-sized with little aquatic vegetation, duck usage and water infill from drains and gutters from adjacent buildings and roads (pond never dries).
- Pond 2 approximately 140m south west a medium sized former cattle slurry pit (approximately 30 years ago) now surrounded by dense vegetation with 100% shade over the pond (drying likely).
- Pond 3 approximately 210m south east a large manmade irrigation reservoir with 20% aquatic vegetation, duck presence, never dries.

3.2 Nature Conservation Sites

3.2.1 Brent Eleigh Woods is the closest statutorily designated nature conservation site located approximately 980m south. The woods are designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) primarily for ancient woodland habitats with ponds and notable flora and fauna (MAGIC, 2024).

3.3 Data Search

3.3.1 On review of MAGIC and the Ecological Impact Assessment by AGB Environmental 2021, great crested newt surveys in 2016 discovered presence of great crested newts in Pond 3 and a second pond approximately 460m south west of the site. Environmental DNA testing of Ponds 1 and 2 failed to find great crested newts in spring 2020 (AGB Environmental, 2021).

3.4 Protected, Priority & Rare Species

Vegetation & Habitats

- 3.4.1 Habitats proposed for impact included: short improved grassland (Modified Grassland – less than 9 species per square metre), and an ornamental garden bed.
- 3.4.2 Plants found in the grassland included: nettle *Urtica dioica*, spear thistle *Cirsium vulgare*, perennial rye grass *Lolium perenne*, annual meadow grass *Poa annua*, common chickweed *Stellaria media*, common mallow *Malva neglecta*, sowthistle *Sonchus oleraceus*, daisy *Bellis perennis*, groundsel *Senecio vulgaris*, self-heal *Prunella vulgaris* and snowdrop *Galanthus* sp..
- 3.4.3 Plants in the garden beds included: bay *Laurus nobilis*, laurel *Prunus laurocerasus*, *Berberis* sp., rose *Rosa* sp., butterfly bush *Buddleja davidii*, silk tassel bush *Garrya elliptica*, Mexican orange *Choisya ternate* and other ornamental shrubs and bedding plants.
- 3.4.4 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.

Bats

- 3.4.5 No trees or buildings will be impacted as part of the application. No potential bat roosting habitat will be affected. Adjacent trees were mature though no noticeable features for roosting bats were observed.
- 3.4.6 The habitats adjacent to the site will be used by foraging bats during mild weather, though the site itself is small and highly unlikely to be of significant value for foraging/commuting bats.

Other Protected & UK Priority Mammals

- 3.4.7 The construction zone is small in area and low in suitability for foraging by badgers *Meles meles*, if present locally.
- 3.4.8 The construction zone was unsuitable for aquatic mammals such as otter *Lutra lutra* or water vole *Arvicola amphibius*.
- 3.4.9 The site was considered low in suitability for hedgehogs *Erinaceus europaeus*. It could not be discounted that the occasional hedgehog may cross the site for foraging.
- 3.4.10 No signs or evidence of ground dwelling protected, priority or rare mammals were observed.

Birds

- 3.4.11 The following bird species were observed or heard on or close to the site during the survey: woodpigeon *Columba palumbus*, great tit *Parus major*, rook *Corvus frugilegus*, buzzard *Buteo buteo* and jackdaw *Coloeus monedula*.
- 3.4.12 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. No trees are proposed for impact, though the shrubs were considered dense enough for nesting by low numbers of common nesting birds.

Great Crested Newts & Other Amphibians

- 3.4.13 The proposed construction zone included short grassland and a well-maintained garden bed dominated by shrubs. Habitats were considered very low/negligible in suitability as terrestrial habitat for great crested newts. The site is within a high brick wall considered an obstacle, though not complete obstruction, to access for any great crested newts or other amphibians which may be breeding in ponds to the west. The two closest ponds to the site have been proven absent of great crested newts in 2020. Fresh Habitat Suitability Index assessment indicated the ponds are either average in suitability for breeding great crested newts (Pond 1) or below average (Pond 2). See detail below.
- 3.4.14 No amphibians were observed during the survey visit.

Table 1: Habitat Suitability Index score for Ponds 1 & 2 near the site at Hill House.

| Pond | Pond 1 | Pond 2 |
|----------------------|---------------|---------------|
| SI1 - Location | 1 | 1 |
| SI2 - Pond area | 1 | 0.4 |
| SI3 - Pond drying | 0.9 | 0.5 |
| SI4 - Water quality | 0.33 | 0.33 |
| SI4 - Shade | 1 | 0.2 |
| SI6 - Fowl | 0.67 | 0.67 |
| SI7 - Fish | 0.67 | 1 |
| SI8 - Ponds | 0.65 | 0.65 |
| SI9 - Terr'l habitat | 0.67 | 1 |
| SI10 - Macrophytes | 0.4 | 0.3 |
| HSI | 0.69 | 0.53 |

HSI Pond suitability
 <0.5 = poor
 0.5 – 0.59 = below average
 0.6 – 0.69 = average
 0.7 – 0.79 = good
 > 0.8 = excellent

Reptiles

- 3.4.15 The site was considered very low in suitability or potential for reptiles with negligible safe basking, foraging or breeding habitat present.
- 3.4.16 Reptiles were not observed during the survey visit.

Invertebrates

- 3.4.17 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.
- 3.4.18 No protected or priority invertebrates were observed during the survey visit.

Other Protected, Priority or Rare Species

- 3.4.19 No signs or evidence of any other protected or priority species were observed on the site. 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. No buildings or trees will be impacted. Therefore, the risk of presence or impact to roosting bats was considered negligible.

4.1.3 The adjacent habitats will be visited by foraging bats, though given the small size of the site/project the risk of significant impact to foraging/commuting bats was considered low.

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

4.1.5 However, to minimise any residual risk of lighting impacts upon foraging/commuting bats, 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 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 risk of impact to nesting birds of any species was considered negligible.

4.1.9 Further bird surveys or mitigation were considered unnecessary.

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 might visit the site, though significant use by many hedgehogs 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, precautionary measures, detailed later in the report, should be followed.

Great Crested Newts & Other Amphibians

- 4.1.12 Great crested newts are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 as amended by the Countryside Rights of Way Act 2000, and the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017. Great crested newts are also UK priority species. A summary of the offences likely to be relevant to development are:
- Intentionally or deliberately capture or kill;
 - Intentionally injure;
 - Deliberately disturb, or intentionally or recklessly disturb in a place of shelter or protection;
 - Damage or destroy a breeding site or resting place;
 - Intentionally or recklessly damage, destroy or obstruct access to a place used for shelter or protection.
- 4.1.13 Great crested newts have been recorded in a pond (Pond 3) approximately 210m south east of the site (MAGIC, 2024). Absence of great crested newts was confirmed through eDNA testing of the two closest ponds (Ponds 1 & 2) in spring 2020 (AGB Environmental, 2021). These two ponds were separated from the proposed construction zone by hardstanding and buildings poor for amphibian dispersal. A brick wall is also present providing a further obstacle for dispersing amphibians.
- 4.1.14 Furthermore, the site and proposed development is small and proposed for land negligible in suitability as terrestrial habitat for great crested newts (short grass and a well maintained garden bed).
- 4.1.15 Overall, the risk of significant impact or harm to great crested newts was considered very low and further surveys or mitigation were considered unnecessary. However, to minimise any residual risk of impact, precautionary measures detailed later in the report, should be followed.
- 4.1.16 The above assessment was confirmed by checking the Natural England Rapid Risk Assessment Tool detailed below.

Table 1: Natural England Rapid Risk Assessment Tool.

| Component | Likely effect (select one for each component; select the most harmful option if more than one is likely; lists are in order of harm, top to bottom) | Notional offence probability score |
|--|---|------------------------------------|
| Great crested newt breeding pond(s) | No effect | 0 |
| Land within 100m of any breeding pond(s) | No effect | 0 |
| Land 100-250m from any breeding pond(s) | 0.01 - 0.1 ha lost or damaged | 0.01 |
| Land >250m from any breeding pond(s) | No effect | 0 |
| Individual great crested newts | No effect | 0 |
| | Maximum: | 0.01 |
| Rapid risk assessment result: | GREEN: OFFENCE HIGHLY UNLIKELY | |

Plants & Habitats

- 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 identified or considered likely to be present.

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 considered very low in suitability or potential for reptiles.
- 4.1.22 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) 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.

Hedgehogs & Amphibians

- 5.1.2 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:

- The site should continue to be well-maintained until construction commences to prevent the site improving for wildlife before construction commences.
- The shrubs in the garden bed should be removed by hand and cleared away rather than ripped out by plant machinery to allow for any wildlife present to disperse naturally.
- 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.

Nesting Birds

- 5.1.3 To prevent harm to actively nesting birds, shrub removal should occur outside of the main bird nesting season (March – end of August).
- 5.1.4 If this timescale is not possible then an Ecologist should check the shrubs for active bird nests before clearance works commence.
- 5.1.5 If an active nest was found, clearance works would need to wait until the birds had finished nesting.

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 stables as biodiversity enhancement:
- 1 x Beaumaris bat box (or similar).

- 1 x Vivara pro Sparrow Terrace.
- 5.2.3 The bird and bat boxes will be installed high (just below the roof) on the newly erected cart lodge 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 New tree planting has occurred as part of the proposed works. Trees planted included 6 x cherry *Prunus* sp., 1 x pear *Pyrus* sp., and 5 x hornbeam *Carpinus betulus* (see Photograph 5 below). This new planting will provide significant biodiversity net gain in accordance with national planning policy.

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, nesting 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.

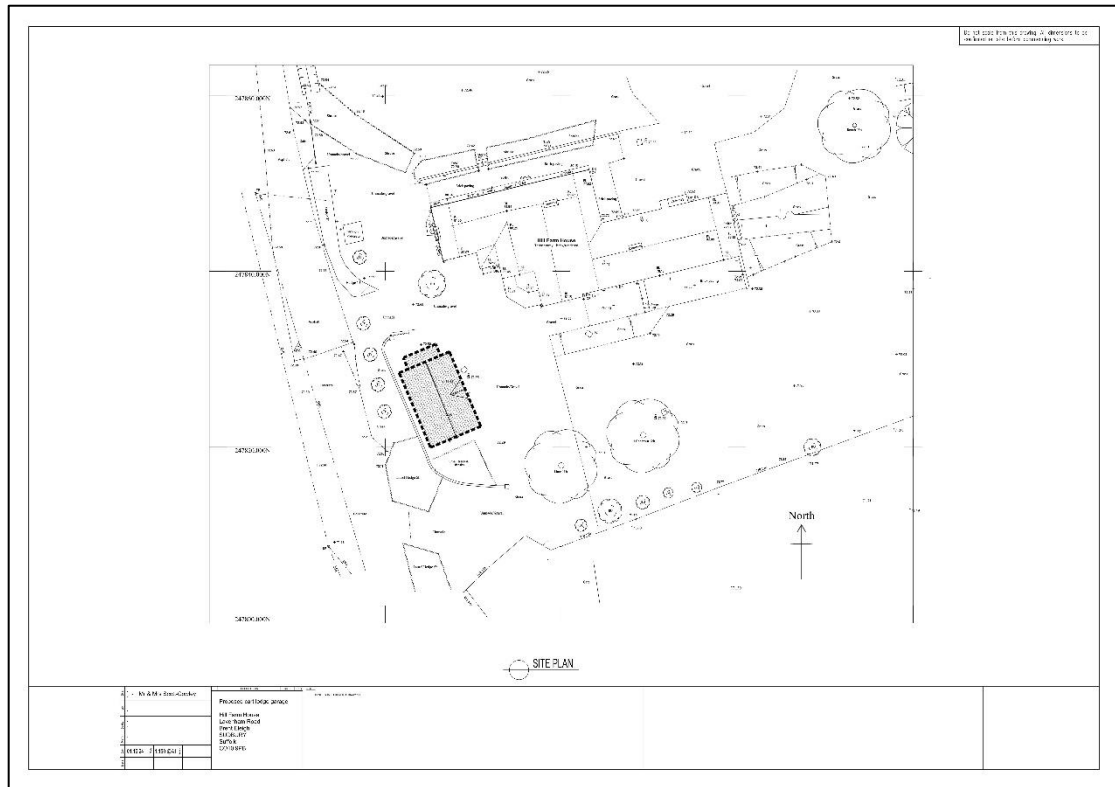
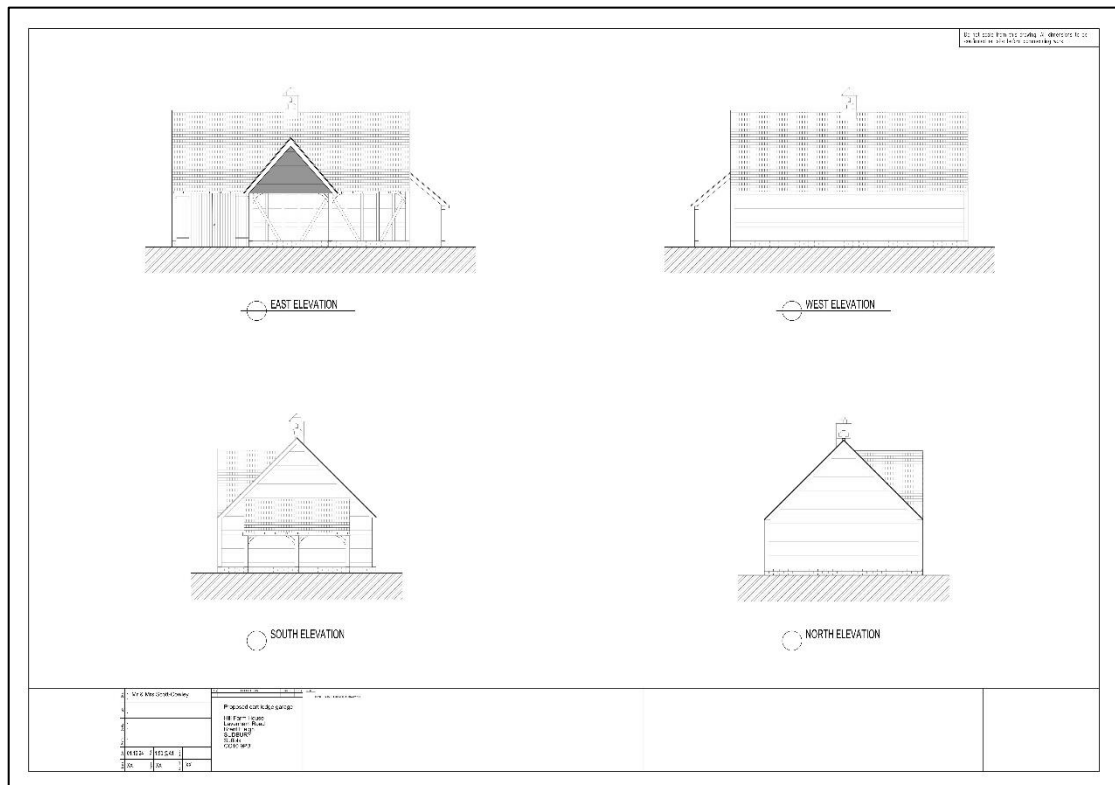


Figure 3: Proposed development.



8.2 Appendix 2: Photographs

Photograph 1: Main site area facing south and west across the site.



Photograph by Roger Spring 2024

Photograph 2: Main site area facing west.



Photograph by Roger Spring 2024

Photograph 3: Main area facing north west across the site.



Photograph by Roger Spring 2024

Photograph 4: Entrance to be improved for regular vehicle use.



Photograph by Roger Spring 2024

Photograph 5: Western side of boundary wall at the site. New trees planted as part of the proposed development.



Photograph by Roger Spring 2024

Photograph 6: Pond 1 near the site.



Photograph by Roger Spring 2024

Photograph 7: Pond 2 near the site.



Photograph by Roger Spring 2024

Photograph 8: Pond 3 near to the site.



Photograph by Roger Spring 2024