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Preliminary Ecological Appraisal Including a Protected Species Assessment at:

The Old Rectory, The Street, Stowlangtoft.

On behalf of:

Mr & Mrs Godfrey

March 2024

Skilled Ecology Consultancy Ltd.
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Contents

Figures, Photographs & Tables

0 SUMMARY

1.1.1 Skilled Ecology Consultancy Ltd. was commissioned by Mr & Mrs Godfrey to undertake a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA) including a Protected Species Assessment at The Old Rectory, The Street, Stowlangtoft. The report is required for erection of a new garage.

1.1.2 The survey was conducted on 28th 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.

1.1.3 The site is small and includes: very short, manicured, improved grass (Modified Grassland). A gap will also be required in a mature holly hedgerow likely requiring three holly *Ilex aquifolium* trees to be removed. A small number of garden rose *Rosa* sp. bushes (probably three) and 1 x immature holme oak *Quercus ilex* will also require removal/relocation.

1.1.4 The site is positioned in a manicured garden within a rural location. Immediately north of the proposed construction zone is a short length of Japanese rose *Kerria japonica* hedge. Japanese rose is a Schedule 9 invasive plant, though it is not proposed for impact and can be retained in situ. Other trees and garden beds in the garden will not require impact.

1.1.5 The proposed construction zone supported common and widespread habitats negligible in suitability or potential for protected, priority or rare species. No signs or evidence of such were observed during the survey visit.

1.1.6 Further ecological surveys or mitigation were considered unnecessary. However, to minimise any residual risk of impact, precautionary measures for bats, hedgehogs and amphibians are provided in this report and should be followed.

1.1.7 With the recommendations followed as described, development could proceed with a minimal risk of harm or impact to local ecological value or to protected, priority or rare species and notable habitats. Biodiversity enhancement recommendations are also included.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

1.1.2 Skilled Ecology Consultancy Ltd. was commissioned by Mr & Mrs Godfrey to undertake a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA) including a Protected Species Assessment at The Old Rectory, The Street, Stowlangtoft. The report is required for erection of a new garage.

1.1.3 Wildlife such as nesting birds, bats, reptiles and great crested newts *Triturus cristatus* are protected by law. Protected and priority species and habitats, are also a material consideration for individual planning decisions under the National Planning Policy Framework, 2023 (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 Appraisals.

1.1.5 CIEEM guidelines indicate that ecological surveying typically remains valid for between 12 and 18 months (CIEEM, 2019).

2 METHODOLOGY

2.1 Desk Study

2.1.1 A herpetofauna record search was obtained through the Suffolk Biodiversity 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 These results were then combined with the findings of the site survey, to assess the risk of ecology issues, relevant to planning, occurring on the site.

2.2 Study Limitations

2.2.1 Botanical assessment was undertaken at a suitable time of year, though some early flowering species and annuals may not be visible or identifiable to species level.

2.3 Initial Site Survey

Habitats and Surroundings

2.3.1 The site was visited on the 28th February 2024 to survey for ecology issues. This included the following:

- Noting the suitability of habitats present on the site, with regard to 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 an experienced ecologist, licensed by Natural England to disturb and take bats for science and education. Adjacent trees were externally inspected 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 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: very short, manicured, improved grass (Modified Grassland). A gap will also be required in a mature holly hedgerow likely requiring three holly *Ilex aquifolium* trees to be removed. A small number of garden rose *Rosa* sp. bushes (probably three) and 1 x immature holme oak *Quercus ilex* will also require removal/relocation.

3.1.2 The site is positioned in a manicured garden within a rural location. Immediately north of the proposed construction zone is a short length of Japanese rose Kerria japonica hedge. Japanese rose is a Schedule 9 invasive plant, though it is not proposed for impact and can be retained in situ. Other trees and garden beds in the garden will not require impact.

3.1.3 Local waterbodies within 250m included (Ordnance Survey Maps, 2024):

- One medium sized pond approximately 160m north east of the site. The pond is close to Stowlangtoft Stream likely to support fish and may flood into the pond introducing fish to the pond.

3.2 Nature Conservation Sites

3.2.1 No statutorily designated nature conservation sites such as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) were located within 2km of the site (MAGIC, 2024).

3.3 Data Search

3.2.1 A herpetofauna record search was obtained on behalf of Skilled Ecology Consultancy Ltd. by SBIS. Please see summary below.

Table 1: Summary of local herpetofauna records

Species	**Approximate Location**	**Year**
Mammals: Bats		
Great crested newt	1.8km north	2019
Common toad	300m east	2015

3.4 Protected, Priority & Rare Species

Vegetation & Habitats

3.4.1 The site includes manicured gardens with short improved grassland (lawn-Modified Grassland), a rose garden bed, holly *Ilex aquifolium* hedgerow and 1 x immature holme oak *Quercus ilex*.

3.4.2 Plants found in the grassland included: perennial rye grass *Lolium perenne*, daisy *Bellis perennis,* annual meadow grass *Poa annua*, yarrow *Achillea millefolium*, germander speedwell *Veronica chamaedrys*, snowdrops *Galanthus nivalis* and daffodil *Narcissus* sp.

3.4.3 Immediately north of the proposed construction zone is a Japanese rose *Kerria japonica* hedgerow proposed for retention.

3.4.4 No protected, priority or notable plants were found on or adjacent to the site. No Schedule 9 invasive plant species were found within the construction zone, though Japanese rose is a Schedule 9 invasive plant and is located in a hedgerow immediately north of the site. No UK priority habitats were present or proposed for impact.

Bats

3.4.5 No structures are present on the site. Trees were negligible in suitability or potential for roosting bats. No signs or evidence of bats were noted on trees.

3.4.6 The boundary trees are likely to be visited by foraging bats during mild weather conditions, though the site itself was considered low in suitability for foraging bats.

Other Protected & UK Priority Mammals

3.4.7 The site is small in size and very low in suitability for foraging or sheltering by other protected priority or rare mammals such as badgers *Meles meles* and hedgehogs *Erinaceus europaeus* etc. No signs or evidence of such were noted during the survey (on site or off site). It is possible that the occasional hedgehog may use the site for temporary foraging.

Birds

3.4.8 Birds observed or heard on or close to the site during the survey included: skylark *Alauda arvensis*, robin *Erithacus rubecula*, jackdaw *Coloeus monedula*, great tit *Parus major*, blackbird *Turdus merula*, starling *Sturnus vulgaris* and wood pigeon *Columba palumbus.*

3.4.9 Skylark and starling are both UK priority birds and red-listed Bird of Conservation Concern (BoCC). Both species were heard from a distance. No old or active bird nests were found, though the holly hedgerow was considered theoretically suitable for low numbers of common nesting birds.

3.4.10 All other birds recorded during the survey are green-listed BoCC.

3.4.11 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

3.4.12 Habitats present and proposed for impact included short improved grass, manicured garden beds and a holly hedgerow. The base of the holly hedgerow and garden beds around roses were well tended, weeded and mostly bare ground. All habitats were considered negligible in suitability as terrestrial habitat for great crested newts or other amphibians.

3.4.13 No amphibians were discovered during the survey visit.

Reptiles

3.4.14 Habitats present were considered negligible in suitability or potential for reptiles with little safe basking, foraging or breeding habitat present.

3.4.15 The survey was undertaken in suitable weather conditions for active reptiles. Reptiles were not discovered during the survey visit.

Invertebrates

3.4.16 The site was considered negligible in suitability or potential for invertebrates of conservation concern with common and widespread habitats present. No significant deadwood habitat was present, though some minor deadwood was noted around the holly hedgerow.

3.4.17 No notable invertebrates were discovered.

Other Protected, Priority or rare Species

3.4.18 No signs or evidence of any other protected or priority species were observed on the site, nor were there any suitable habitats for such.

4 DISCUSSION OF RISK AND LEGISLATION

4.1 Protected & Priority 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 Bats are likely to use the local landscape, including the garden at The Old Rectory, though habitats proposed for impact were small in area and considered negligible in suitability or potential for roosting bats. No signs or evidence of bats were found.

4.1.3 Therefore, further bat surveys or mitigation were considered unnecessary. However, to minimise any residual risk of impact to bats, precautionary measures detailed later in the report should be followed.

Other Protected, Priority & Rare Mammals

4.1.4 The site was considered small in area and very low in suitability or potential for any other protected, priority or rare mammal species and no signs or evidence of such were discovered during the survey visit. Even still, it could not be discounted that the occasional hedgehog may cross the site and adjacent garden area.

4.1.5 Further surveys or mitigation for any other protected, priority or rare mammals were considered unnecessary. However, to minimise any residual risk of impact to hedgehogs, 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 It was considered unlikely that the site would be of significant value to any notable foraging birds or nesting birds of any species.

4.1.9 Overall, it was considered unnecessary to undertake further bird surveys for rare or protected birds or provide mitigation for such species. Theoretically the holly hedgerow was considered potentially suitable for very low numbers of common nesting birds. Therefore, to prevent harm to actively nesting birds, recommendations detailed later in the report, should be followed.

Great Crested Newts & Other Amphibians

4.1.10 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.

4.1.11 Great crested newts have been recorded within 2km of the site, though not particularly nearby (SBIS, 2024). However, the closest pond was over 100m from the site and habitats proposed for impact are small in area and were considered negligible in suitability or potential for great crested newts.

4.1.12 Overall, the risk of significant impact to great crested newts or any other amphibians was considered very low.

4.1.13 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.

Reptiles

4.1.14 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.

4.1.15 The site is small in area and very low in suitability for reptiles. No reptiles were discovered during the survey visit. Therefore, the risk of significant impact or harm was considered very low.

4.1.16 Further reptile surveys or mitigation were considered unnecessary.

Plants & Invertebrates

4.1.17 No rare, protected or priority plants were identified. No UK priority habitats are proposed for impact.

4.1.18 Schedule 9 invasive plants were present adjacent to the site (Japanese rose), though not within the construction zone. To prevent accidental spread of the plant during works, recommendations detailed later in the report, should be followed.

4.1.19 Regarding invertebrates, habitats present were common, widespread and isolated from any habitat of high ecological value for invertebrates (such as woodland or species rich meadows etc.). The risk of presence of a significant assemblage of invertebrates of conservation concern was considered negligible.

4.1.20 Further invertebrate surveys or mitigation were considered unnecessary.

Other Protected & Priority species

4.1.21 No signs or evidence of other protected, priority or rare species were observed on the site and it was considered that there was a very 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 a significant distance from any statutorily designated nature conservation sites. The site supports common and widespread habitats low in ecological value.

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 & Compensation

Bats

5.1.1 To minimise any residual risk of impact to bats, the following precautionary measures should be undertaken:

- Any new proposed external lighting should be minimised. Where external lighting is required, it should be warm white LED lamps (<2700k) with glass glazing, rather than plastic, as these produce the least amount of heat and UV light possible, minimising the attraction effects on insects and minimising disturbance to local bats.

- Any 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.

Hedgehogs & Amphibians

5.1.2 The risk of hedgehogs or amphibians being significantly impacted by the development was very low/negligible, to minimise any residual risk of impact or harm or impact, the below recommendations should be followed:

- Before construction commences, the site should continue to be maintained short to prevent habitats improving for wildlife before works commence;

- During works waste materials should be removed off site immediately to prevent wildlife using the materials for shelter and being harmed by subsequent movement;
- Construction materials should be stored on hardstanding or on pallets to prevent wildlife from sheltering in the materials and being harmed by movement of the materials;
- No construction work at night when hedgehogs and amphibians are mostly active;
- Any excavations for the development should be covered at night or should have a roughly sawn plank placed in them to facilitate escape, the plank should not be placed at more than 30º and must be at least 30cm in width;
- If at any stage hedgehogs or amphibians are observed on the site, works should stop immediately, and the animal should be allowed to disperse of its own accord, or an ecologist should be contacted for advice.

Schedule 9 Invasive Plants

5.1.3 To prevent contractors accidentally disturbing and spreading the adjacent Japanese rose hedgerow (Schedule 9 Invasive plant), heras fencing should be erected between the site and the hedgerow, containing the construction zone and preventing materials, contractors or machinery getting too close to the Japanese rose.

5.2 Enhancements

5.2.1 Biodiversity enhancement is a requirement for all developments under the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF, 2023). To provide such enhancement the below will be undertaken.

5.2.2 The addition of bat boxes and bird boxes on the newly constructed building will increase the potential roosting and nesting sites for local bats and birds. Specifically, the following boxes should be used;

- 1 x Beaumaris Bat Box (or similar if out-of-stock).
- 1 x Vivara Pro Sparrow Terrace (or similar if out-of-stock).

5.2.3 The boxes should be installed high (just below the roof) and should be free from obstruction and light sources. The bat box should ideally be positioned facing a southerly aspect, while the bird box should be facing a northerly direction or otherwise be out of direct sunlight.

5.2.4 Wildlife boxes can be purchased on-line through suppliers such as The Wildlife Shop and NHBS.

5.2.5 Any new soft landscaping should include only native and/or wildlife attracting species. Prioritising fruit producing varieties is recommended. Further broad-leaved native trees could be added to the site boundary to increase the size and variety of species present.

6 CONCLUSION

6.1 At the time of survey, the site supported common and widespread habitats. No signs or evidence of protected, priority or rare species were identified. The risk of significant impact to notable wildlife was considered very low/negligible.

6.2 Further ecological surveys or mitigation were considered unnecessary. Recommendations for bats, hedgehogs and amphibians are provided and should be followed accordingly, along with recommendations to prevent the spread of Japanese rose.

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

6.4 With the biodiversity enhancements followed as described, the proposed development would be enhanced 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 of the site.

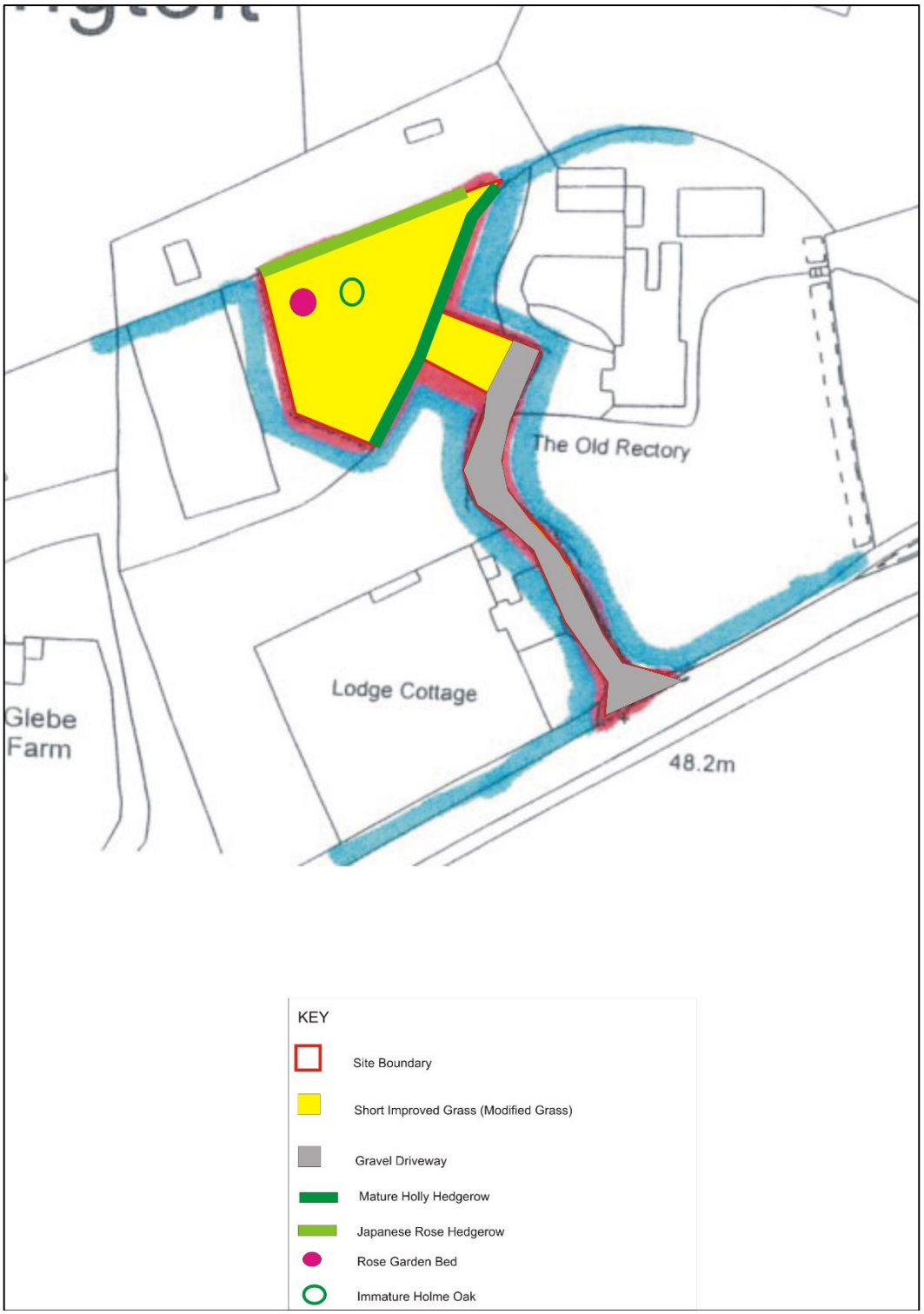
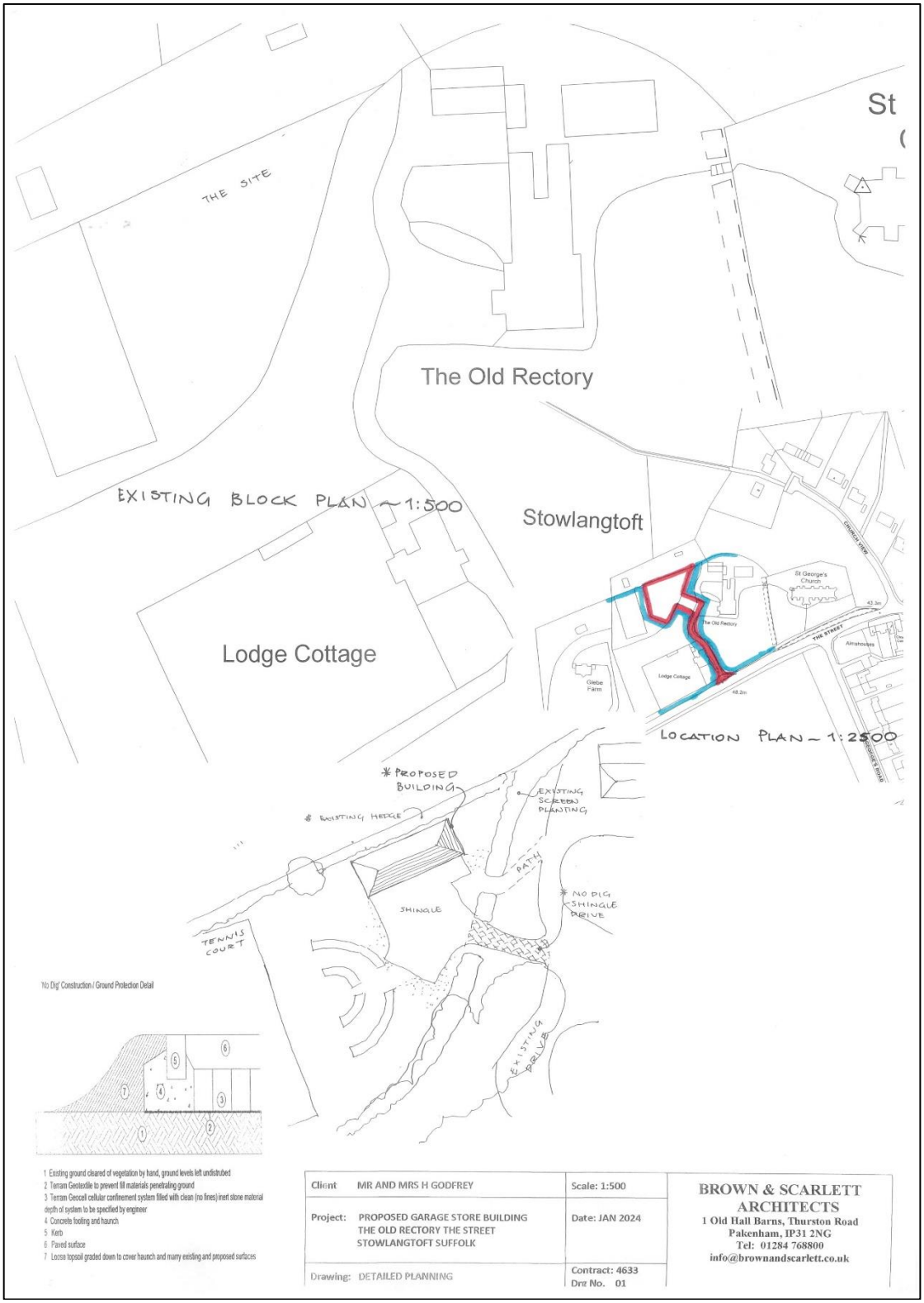


Figure 2 – Proposed development.



8.2 Appendix 2: Photographs

Photograph 1: Area proposed for driveway extension through holly hedgerow to reach the proposed new garage.

Photograph by Roger Spring 2024

Photograph 2: Holly hedgerow requiring gap for new vehicle access.

Photograph by Roger Spring 2024

Photograph 3: Main site area facing west.

Photograph by Roger Spring 2024

Photograph 4: Main site area facing north- note immature holme oak and 3 x rose bushes requiring relocation.

Photograph by Roger Spring 2024

Photograph 5: Main site area facing east toward the holly hedgerow requiring a new gap for vehicle access.

Photograph by Roger Spring 2024

Photograph 6: Boundary Japanese Rose hedge not proposed for impact.

Photograph by Roger Spring 2024