Ecological Land Co-operative

DESIGN & ACCESS STATEMENT

Field to the south of Copyhold Cottages, formerly part of Wilbees Farm, Arlington, Hailsham, BN26 6RU

JANUARY 2017
(amended March 2017)

Ecological Land Co-operative
Unit B04, The Brighton Eco-centre,
Brighton, BN1 3PB

Tel: 01273 766 672
Web: www.ecologicalland.coop

For a Living, Working Countryside

This statement has been prepared by the Ecological Land Co-operative. It is written to be read in conjunction with the planning application, plans and other documents accompanying the application.



Photos from Greenham Reach smallholdings. The ELC's first project has won wide-spread support including being featured as as CPRE case study as a way of delivering diversity, sustainability and resiliance.

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SUMMARY

1.1 This design and access statement forms part of a planning application seeking a temporary consent for three new affordable and low-impact smallholdings for new entrants to ecological agriculture. The application is being made by the Ecological Land Co-operative (**ELC**), a community benefit society and social enterprise.

1.2 Details on the ELC and its model to deliver affordable smallholdings for new entrants to ecological agriculture are found in the accompanying Planning Statement (Section 2) and Business Plan (Appendix 9).

1.3 This document provides details of the proposed change of use and agricultural development which would enable the incoming smallholders to operate a 'low-impact' and ecological smallholding, namely:

a. A change of use to allow the siting of three temporary agricultural workers' dwellings;
b. a shared timber barn;
c. a photo-voltaic array, mounted on the barn roof;
d. rainwater collection from the barn roof with adjacent storage;
e. waste water treatment for grey water;
f. composting toilets; and
g. a new, safer, highway access on to The Street, and a porous hardstanding area.

1.4 This statement outlines the site context, the proposed approach to construction, landscaping, and measures to minimise the visual impact of the proposed Scheme. It also details the public consultation and pre-application meetings held with Wealden District Council (WDC) and Arlington Parish Council (APC) thus far.

1.5 As detailed in the Planning Statement, should this application be allowed, smallholders would be required to manage their holdings in strict accordance

with principles of low-impact living and ecological land management set out in the proposed Management Plan (Appendix 4).

INTRODUCTION

2.1 The intention of this Scheme is to provide rural employment and business opportunities in ecological horticultural production and small-scale mixed farming.

2.2 In order to achieve this ambition, consent is being sought for:

a. the erection of a shared agricultural barn with photovoltaic solar panels and rainwater storage;
b. an area of 0.29 hectares (2,940m^2) hardstanding surrounding the barn;
c. creation of a new highway access; and
d. a change of use to site three temporary dwellings.

2.3 The ELC has to date established one project, Greenham Reach, a cluster of three affordable smallholdings in Mid Devon district on an 8.85 hectare site. Greenham Reach is now occupied by three families each operating a small farm business from their holding. The 8.85 site provides five full-time jobs in agriculture, and organic, local produce to shops and restaurants and directly to customers. As of November 2016, the smallholders at Greenham Reach had between them hosted 4 school visits and 14 educational, open and work days, reaching some 390 participants. There has been over £130,000 of investment into the farm businesses, 9,000 kwh of renewable energy generated and site wide improvements in soil health. The accompanying Planning Statement provides more information on the ELC's Greenham Reach scheme.

2.4 As at Greenham Reach, the ELC are offering to be bound to a Management Plan by way of a Section 106 Agreement (**S106**), and the requirements of the Management Plan would be binding for smallholders by way of their farm business tenancy. Their progress would be monitored and reported on annually by the ELC.

SITE CONTEXT

3.1 The property is an 18.4 acre (7.5 hectare) field south of Copyhold Cottages, adjacent to The Street, within the parish of Arlington, East Sussex. Postcode: BN26 6RU, Map Ref: TQ 541(95) 070(38). The site is in Arlington, East Sussex and falls within the jurisdiction of Wealden District Council (**WDC**) as the local planning authority.

3.2 The application site falls **outside** the following statutory designations nearby[1]:

a. South Downs National Park (nearest point is 2 km to the south);

b. Arlington Village Conservation Area (nearest point 275m to the north);

c. Arlington Reservoir SSSI, and Local Nature Reserve (nearest point is outside of the boundary of the site, to the west of The Street); and

d. The Ashdown Forest Protection Zones.

3.3 Following a review of historic maps of the area, it appears that this field at Arlington has been in continuous agricultural use for many decades, and most recently under intensive arable cultivation for over ten years. The historic maps indicate that the field has, in earlier times, been sub-divided into smaller units. The Tithe Map Award (1843) and List of Apportionments show the land at that time being in 3 sections, forming part of “Wilbees and Cobbs Farm” and the field names include Copyhold Meadow (pasture), and South Field (arable).

3.4 A search of the East Sussex Archaeological Notification Area (ANA) tool indicates that whilst there are features of archaeological interest in the vicinity, none of these overlay the application site (Figure 1).

[1] Information from MAgic.gov.uk

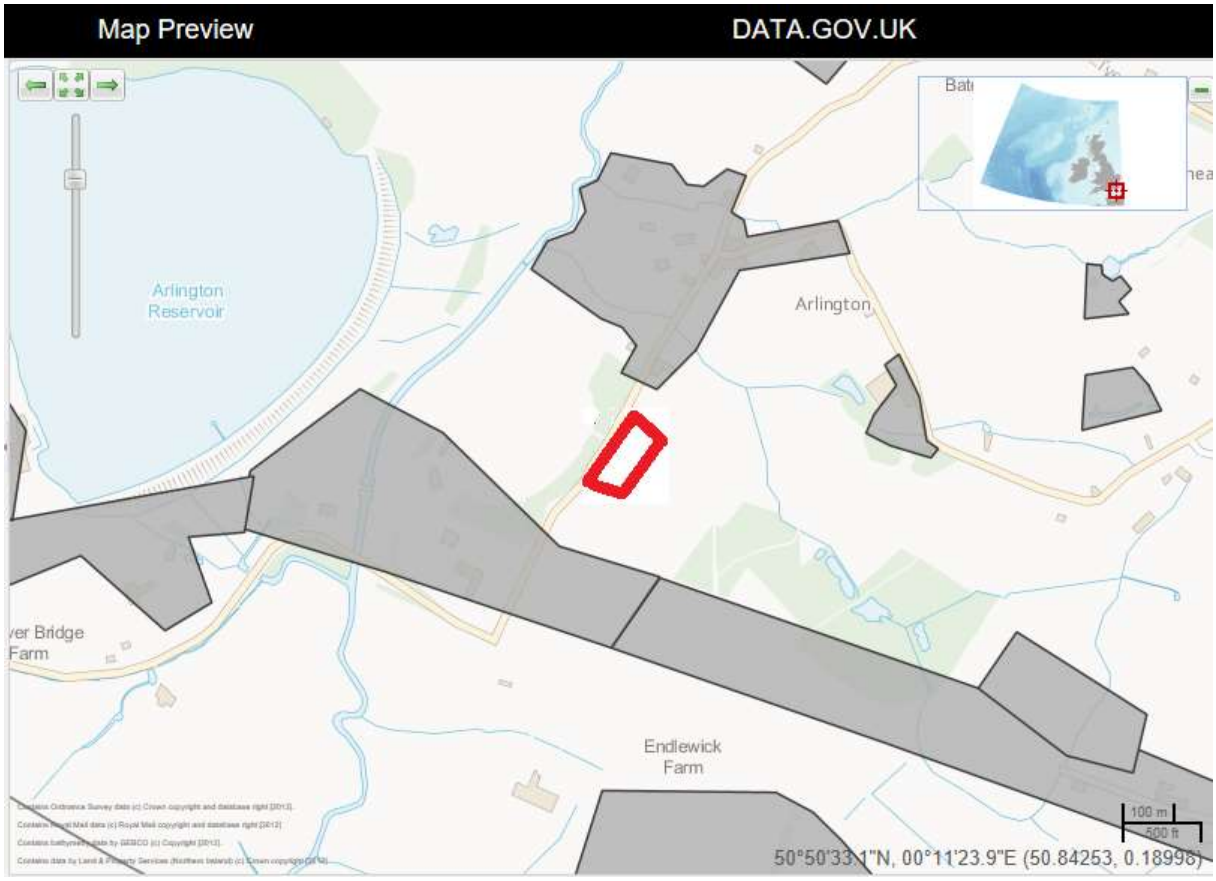


Figure 1: Extract from East Sussex Archaeological Notification Area showing that the application site, centred, falls outside of areas of archaeological interest.

3.5 The application site falls within the south-eastern corner of the National Character Area 121 – Low Weald. This landscape is characterised by predominantly agricultural land use, supporting mainly pastoral farming owing to heavy clay soils, with horticulture and some arable on lighter soils in the east (which includes the parish of Arlington), and has many densely-wooded areas with a high proportion of ancient woodland. Arlington falls outside of the designated landscapes of the High Weald (NC122) to the north, and the South Downs National Park (NC 125) to the south. The Low Weald is not in itself a designated landscape.

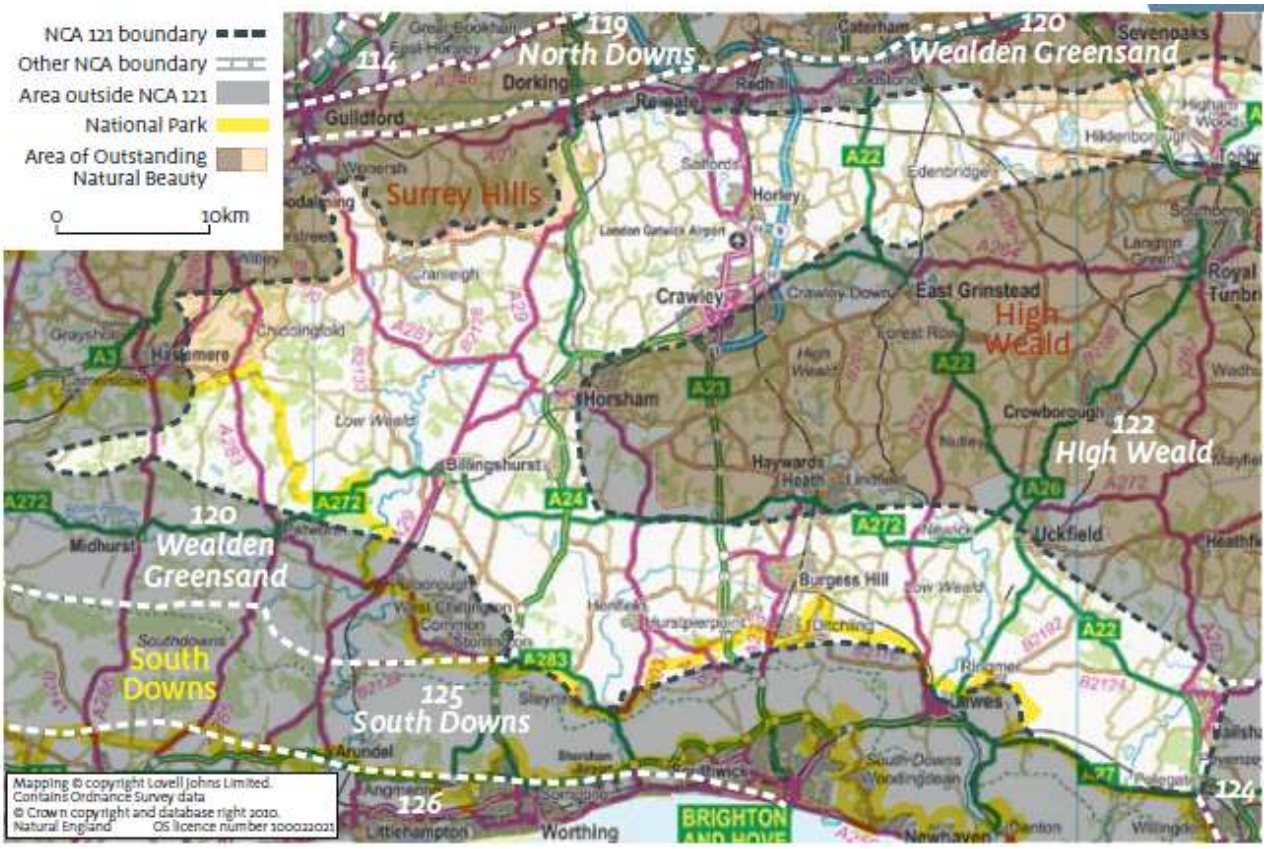


Figure 2: Low Weald National Character Area 121

3.6 Statements of Environmental Opportunity relating to the Low Weald, NCA[2] to be supported by the proposed Scheme include:

> ***SEO 1:*** *Protect, manage and significantly enhance the area's intricate and characteristic mix of semi-natural ancient woodlands, gill woodland, shaws, small field copses, hedgerows and individual trees to reduce habitat fragmentation and benefit biodiversity,* while *seeking to improve and encourage access for health and well-being and reinforce sense of local identity.*
>
> ***SEO 4:*** *Maintain the sustainable but productive pastoral landscape of the Low Weald, while expanding and connecting semi-natural habitats to benefit biodiversity, regulating soil and water quality by promoting good agricultural practice, and maintaining the extent and quality of unimproved permanent grassland and meadows. Restore degraded neutral grasslands to buffer sites*

[2] National Character Area Profile: Low Weald, Natural England, 2013

and encourage pollinators and predators for pest regulation.

3.7 The application site is generally low-lying (altitude between 13 and 17m AOD) with a gently sloping land-form. Drainage falls to a tributary of the Cuckmere River to the north-east. The site is bounded to west, south and east by well-established mixed species hedges.

Immediate Context and Adjacent Land Uses (Separate Ownerships)

3.8 To the south there is a new solar park, sited on a neighbouring field with an established hedge with large standard trees forming much of the boundary.

3.9 To north there is a stream and an arable field. Copyhold Cottages, the only residential properties in the immediate vicinity, lie some 100m away from the proposed Scheme. The cottages both have plots behind their houses, and these are separated from the application site by stock fencing.

3.10 To the east there are established hedges and recently created native woodland.

3.11 To the west there is an established and dense mature hedge along the highway frontage, providing screening of the field from road users (Figure 3). On the west of the public road is Arlington Reservoir and surrounding wet woodland habitat. This site is designated as an SSSI and Local Nature Reserve, and notified primarily for its ornithological interest, mainly for the large numbers of wintering bird populations that visit the reservoir.



Figure 3: Mixed species hedgerow forming the western boundary to the property providing a dense visual screen from The Street.

3.12 Proposals are being developed by South East Water to expand Arlington reservoir but, according to the South-East Water Resources Management Plan (2014), the extension and ancillary work would not be implemented until 2035, and according to the current design, would not impact on the application site.

Site Views



Figure 4: The view from the east is from the public footpath.



Figure 5: The view from the south is restricted and only visible from the solar park (private land).



Figure 6: The southern boundary of Copyhold Cottages garden is 150m from the proposed barn and residential area, and the cottages themselves are 200m away.



Figure 7: Because of the thick hedge running the length of the western boundary with The Street, there are limited views of the site from this direction.



Figure 8: The view of the site from the north is from the public footpath. The next nearest long view is from the Wilbees Farm is some 500m away to the north-east.

Existing Biodiversity

3.13 The application site is on agricultural land (Grade 3a / 3b). This recently cultivated field has been under continuous arable cultivation for over a decade. As a result, according to the Ecological Appraisal, there is no inherent biodiversity, other than the temporary habitats created by short-term cropping, and associated limited soil fauna and flora. A recently-dug drainage basin has been installed in the south west corner of the field, but this was only completed in summer of 2016 and has not yet collected water, so doesn't currently provide any habitat value for birds, reptiles or invertebrates.



Figure 9: Drainage basin installed to serve the solar park

3.14 Submitted with this application is a comprehensive Ecological Appraisal which includes a search of the Sussex Biodiversity Record Centre. These identify some important wildlife habitats within a 2-km radius, but detailed investigation

on the application site indicates low biodiversity within the field itself.

3.15 The Ecological Appraisal highlights the opportunities that this diversification from an arable monoculture to a wider range of habitats found under small-scale mixed farming and horticultural systems would offer to improve biodiversity, natural capital and the provision of wider ecosystem services. These include improved soil structure and carbon storage, a greater range of nectaring and food plants and improved biodiversity connectivity through new wildlife corridors.

Flood Risk

3.16 The field falls within Flood Risk Zones 2 and 3, but the areas subject to flooding are restricted to the northern fringes of the field (Figure 10).

3.17 Pre-planning advice confirmed that as the area in which the temporary dwellings are to sited falls outside the flood risk area, a flood risk assessment is not required for this application.

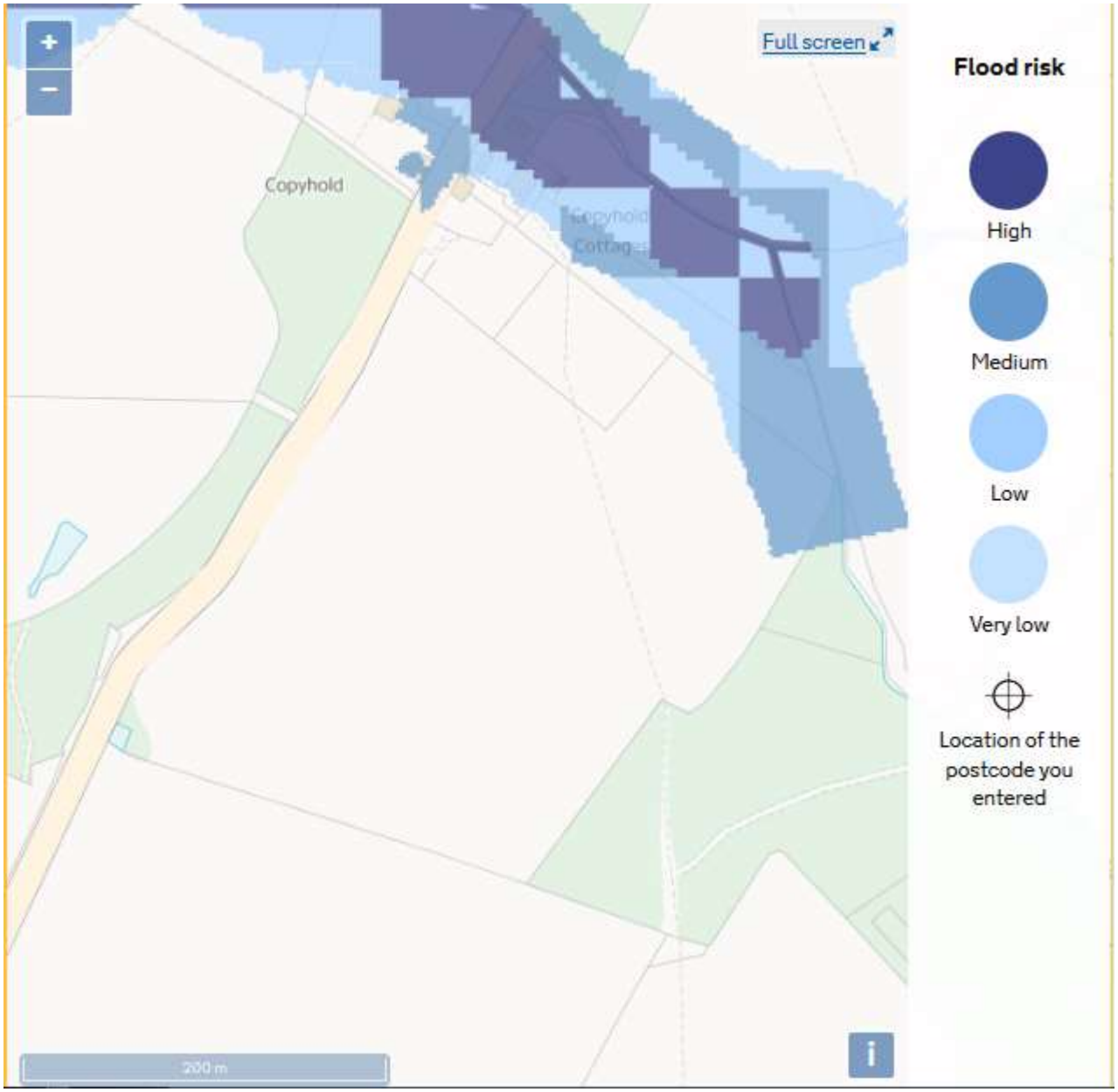


Figure 10: Areas Prone to Flood Risk, extract from Environment Agency on-line map

Existing Site Access

3.18 The field is on the southern fringes of Arlington village, with the crossroads at the pub some 450m to the north-east. The proposed entrance to the site is within walking distance from Arlington village centre.

3.19 There is a network of public paths in the vicinity, including a Public Right of Way (PROW) - a footpath, #41A Wilmington, crossing the field from north-west to south-east. This public footpath would be maintained to allow uninterrupted

pedestrian access, and this requirement is to be included in smallholder leases.

3.20 The Street at Arlington forms part of SUSTRANS National Cycle Route 2 (Dover to St Austell).

3.21 Public transport nearby is:

a. Berwick Station 2.4 km, with hourly connections to Eastbourne / Hastings and London, via Lewes;
b. Cuckmere Buses, operating an infrequent service (Route 41) through Arlington on its way to and from Hailsham.

PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT

The planning policy context, including how this application conforms with the development plan and the National Planning Policy Framework, is set out in detail in the **Planning Statement**.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT CONTEXT

Social Context

4.1 The field is close to the village of Arlington. The proposed entrance is just 400m from the centre of the village which includes a community hall, St. Pancras Church and the Yew Tree pub. An active arts group meets in the community hall which also provides a venue for regular social activities. Food can be purchased locally from the Bates Green Farm shop and roadside farm produce stalls.

4.2 Other Services (schools, library, GP surgery, supermarket, leisure facilities) are to be found in Dicker (4.5. miles) or Hailsham, the nearest large town (5.5 miles away by road). Hailsham also holds a weekly Farmers' Market which, along with Lewes (10 miles), is a convenient and expanding outlet for locally-produced food.

Economic Context

4.3 There are several active farms in the parish of Arlington (arable, livestock and dairy) some of which trade through farm shops and supply local markets, such as Hailsham and Lewes. There is a burgeoning of local food growers supplying farmers' markets, vegetable boxes and demand for locally-produced produce is growing, outstripping supply. It is into this context new smallholder business would develop to meet this growing demand.

Environmental Context

4.4 The application site is currently in arable use and has little intrinsic value for wildlife over much of the 18 acres (see **Ecological Appraisal**). The site periphery, however, provides some useful habitat for birds, insects and mammals, and the connections between these hedge features would be strengthened as part of the proposed Scheme by hedge and tree planting. By practising small-scale horticulture and mixed farming, with a wide range of crops including tree crops, there are opportunities to create a more diverse habitat than that which it replaces by incorporating wild flower fringes, fruiting trees and shrubs. These changes would provide new nectaring, sheltering and foraging habitats.

PUBLIC CONSULTATIONS AND PRE-APPLICATION DIALOGUE

5.1 Two open consultation meetings have been held with local residents and members of the Parish Council. These were held in the Arlington Village Hall on 26th September 2016 and on 21st November 2016.

5.2 Some local residents have expressed their support for the proposed Scheme, and naturally others have also expressed their objections. Local concerns are principally regarding the visual impact of the residents' temporary dwellings.

5.3 As a result of the public consultations a number of changes were made to the proposed Scheme, including placing constraints on the use of seasonal agricultural workers' dwellings and the number of domestic structures (see

Appendix 4 Draft Management Plan for New Smallholdings at Arlington). The other measures to minimise adverse visual impact are set out in Section 6 below.

5.4 ELC provided Arlington Parish Council (**APC**) with a copy of the proposed Management Plan and S106. APC prepared a list of matters that the ELC has responded to and, where able, the ELC has amended the proposed Management Plan and S106 to incorporate APC's comments/feedback. These amendments have been developed in consultation with APC. ELC director Zoe Wangler has attended, at APC's invitation, one of their monthly meetings.

5.5 Contact has been made with local property owners, farming landowners, and smallholders in the area, as well as with local organisations supporting the local food sector such as Action in Rural Sussex and Common Cause.

5.6 A pre-application meeting was applied for 5th August 2016 and a meeting with a planning officer offered for 16th November. The officer's resulting advice can be found in his letter dated 12th December 2016[3]. The planning officer wrote that he 'would not invite an application' and did not invite further pre-application discussions.

5.7 A presentation was made to the Head of Planning and an officer from WDC's Community and Regeneration Team on 18th January 2017. Regrettably this also did not lead to dialogue between the ELC and WDC; the subsequent advice was that the planning department would be minded to recommend refusal.

5.8 Finally, following the submission of the application there was email and telephone communication with the South Team Leader, March 7th 2017. The South Team Leader offered the opportunity to withdraw the application, advising that all applications would be refused unless they proved they would not increase traffic in the Ashdown Forest SAC. As a result of this advice the document 'Effect of the Proposed Scheme on the Ashdown Forest SAC' was written and added to the planning documentation.

[3] Ref: PE/2106/0615/E

PROPOSED SCHEME

Master Plan

6.1 The overall Scheme to convert an existing arable field into three horticultural / mixed farming units would involve allocation of a small area of the site to provide the necessary infrastructure to enable this diversification of land use.

6.2 The field is 7.5 hectares in total and the proposed area allocated for location of the barn, hardstanding and temporary dwellings comprises 0.49 hectares or 6.5% of the site.

6.3 The location proposed for the barn and temporary dwellings has been sited close to the western boundary of the field in order to restrict sprawl, and to minimise any potential visual intrusion in the open landscape (see Figure 11 below).

6.4 The opportunity has been taken to maximise efficiency by offering shared assets: barn, rainwater storage, drainage infrastructure, highway access and hardstanding / parking. This approach allows for the siting of three temporary dwellings (one for each of the smallholdings) close together, to the north and west of the crop growing areas on the remainder of the field.

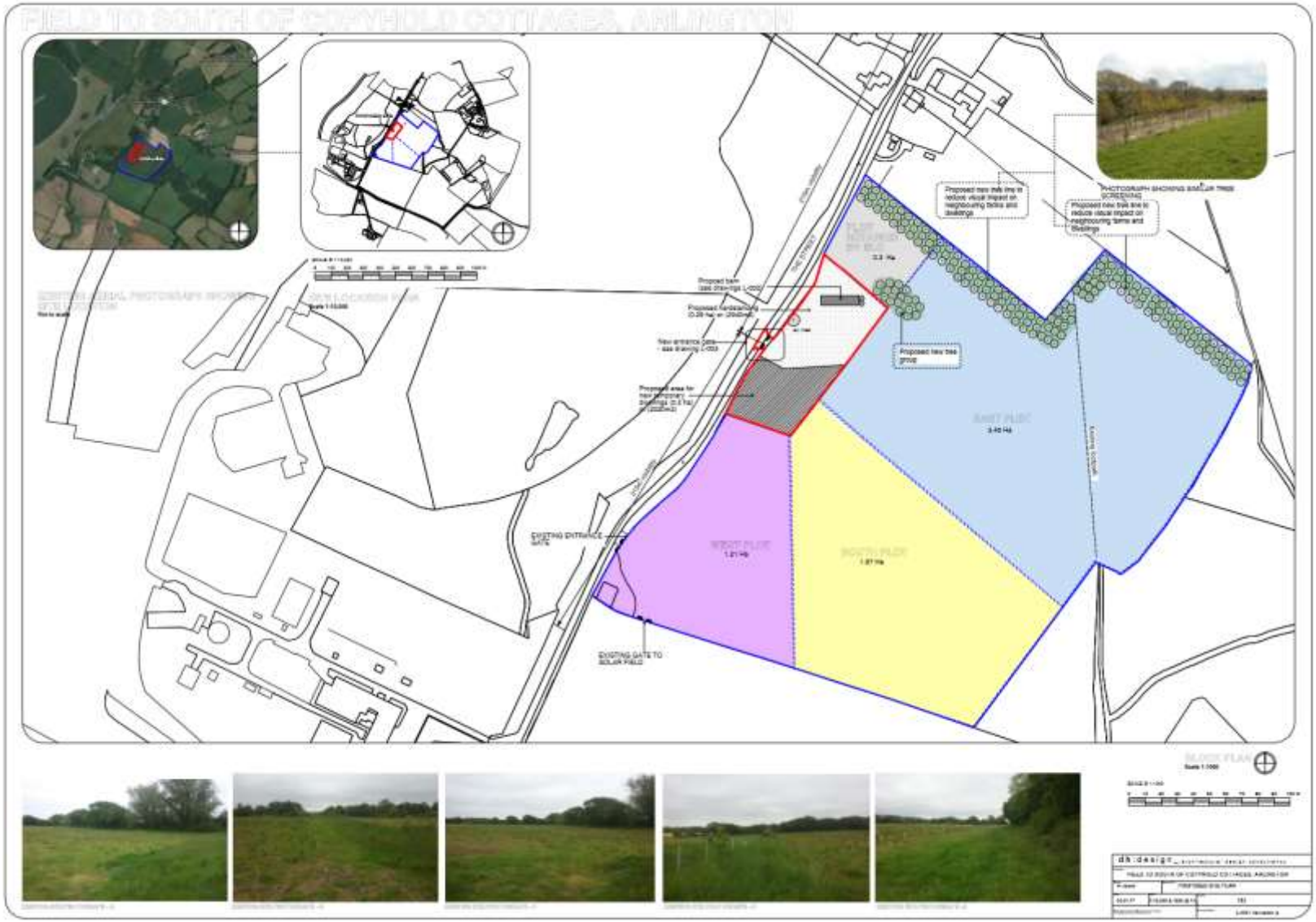


Figure 11: Proposed Block Plan (Drawing ref: L_001)

Visual Impact, Landscaping and Screening

6.5 The proposed 'residential area' has been chosen due to its proximity to the western boundary hedge to minimise visual intrusion and clustered, as far as possible, to allow for the strategic screening planting to have maximum effect. Smallholders would not be allowed to site any residential infrastructure outside of the proposed residential area.

6.6 The area proposed to site the temporary dwellings and barn is not directly overlooked from Copyhold Cottages (the nearest neighbours to the north), but the site can be seen from their gardens that abut the northern boundary of the field.

6.7 The proposed Scheme includes plans to plant a wide hedge, interspersed with trees, along the length (290m) of the northern field boundary to create a physical and visual barrier as well as a productive and bio-diverse feature to screen the temporary dwellings from residences to the north. This screen would be further reinforced by additional tree planting close to the north and eastern corner of the barn to break up the form of buildings in the landscape. The detail of the hedge screen and tree planting design is in Appendix 7: Tree and Hedge Planting Proposal.

6.8 The proposed Management Plan (Appendix 4) requires smallholders to observe a number of requirements with regard to visual impact, including to limit vehicle numbers and seasonal worker dwellings, and to remove redundant vehicles and structures within 15 and 40 days respectively. It requires that smallholders locate agricultural structures sensitively and screen their temporary dwelling. Screens are to be of natural colour or material and in keeping with existing vegetation.

6.9 The proposed Management Plan also requires that any constructed structures, i.e. the barn and compost toilets, be built using natural materials, in keeping with the local aesthetic and able to be removed at the end of the temporary period. Figure 12 is an example of the compost toilet that was built

at Greenham Reach.



Figure 12: Compost toilet at Greenham Reach

Low Impact Development

6.10 The intention is to follow low impact development principles to minimise environmental impact, both local and beyond:

a. In construction, the use of renewable and recyclable materials, including locally-grown and processed timber for the barn's structure and cladding;

b. For the proposed barn, minimal foundations, and restricted use of concrete by using micro- screw piles to support a lightweight timber frame structure;

c. Rainwater harvesting and storage;

d. Composting toilets and grey water treatment through a soakaway;

e. Permeable surfaces for hard standing;

f. Off-grid energy production through the use of solar PV panels and a

biomass heating;

g. Low or no-input agriculture; and

h. Limits on the use of vehicles.

New Barn

6.11 The new agricultural barn is to be constructed to provide a communal storage / processing area for small holders and to minimise the need for additional ancillary structures for each farm business. The barn follows the design of that installed for smallholders in Devon, but is larger, with a footprint 22.8m long and 4.9m wide arranged over 6 bays, and height to ridge of 5.6m.



Figure 13: Photos of barn at Greenham Reach in construction and directly following completion

6.12 The proposed construction method is a round pole / sawn timber frame utilising, where possible, timber sourced from nearby woodlands. Using this approach enables the use of screw pile foundations where ground impact would be minimal, and enable the structure to be dis-mountable, and

removable should need ever arise.

6.13 The external elevations would use horizontal timber boarding and the pitched roof would use standard agricultural-grade coloured metal profile sheeting, and solar PV panels would be installed on part of the south-facing roof slope. Rainwater collection from the roof guttering would be captured and stored in two 10,000 litre black plastic storage tanks.

6.14 The scale and dimensions of the barn have been developed to meet agricultural / horticultural requirements, and the visual appearance and scale would be in keeping with similar functional agricultural buildings elsewhere in the locality.

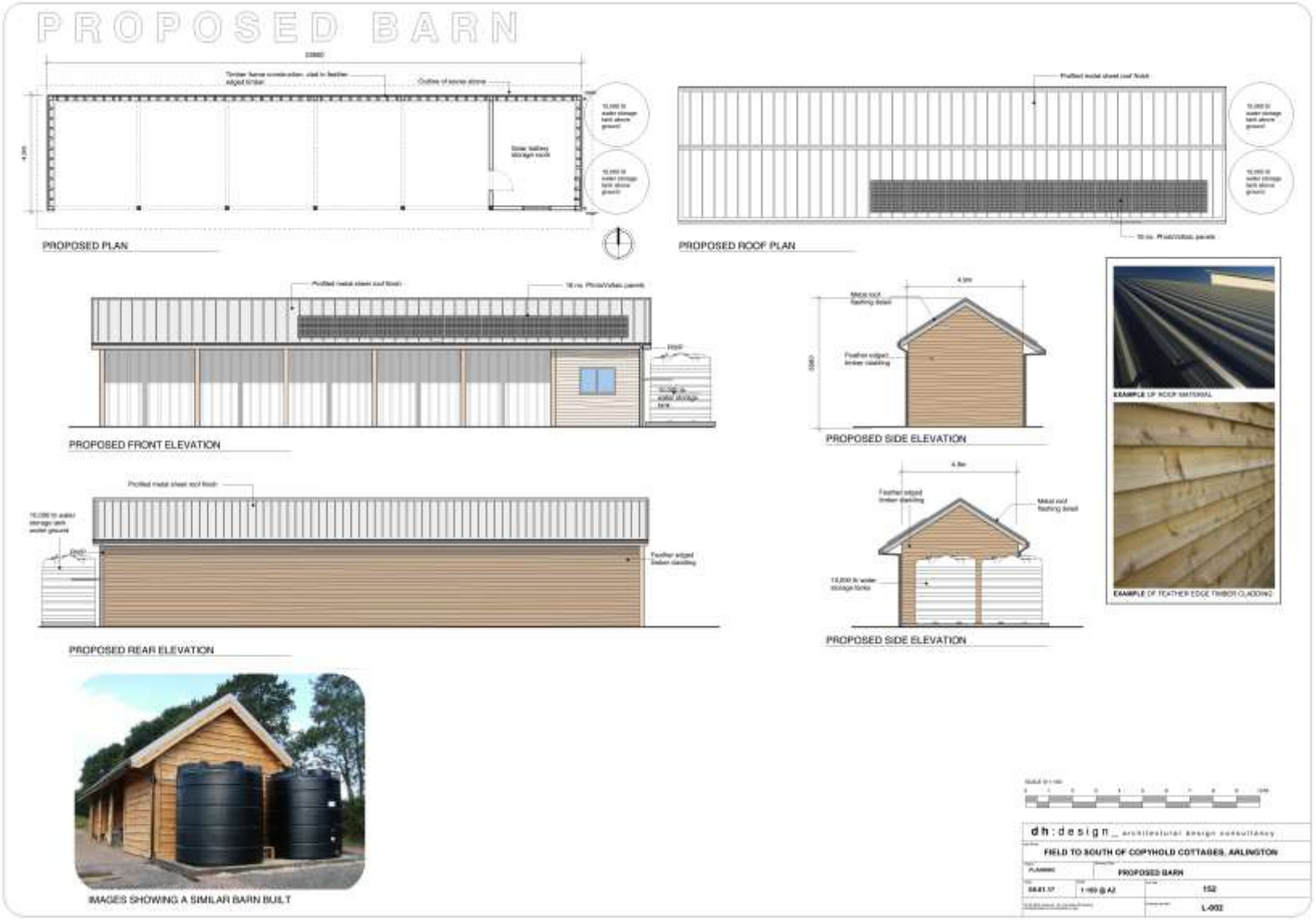


Figure 14: Proposed Barn (Drawing ref: L_002)

Temporary Agricultural Workers' Dwellings

6.15 ELC's smallholders choose their own temporary dwelling according to their family size and budget. As set out in the Planning Statement (para 4.3), the ELC does not feel that smallholders can responsibly be recruited until planning consent has been obtained. It follows that the details of the temporary dwellings would not yet be available. Following discussion, WDC have kindly agreed that details of the temporary dwellings can be submitted for approval by way of planning condition. Of note is that such a condition was used for Greenham Reach (Appendix 1, page 12).

6.16 The proposed location of the temporary dwellings is known, and is shown in the Block Plan (Figure 11): the hatched area indicates the 'residential area' within which the temporary dwellings must be contained.

6.17 It would not be permissible for any of the three temporary dwellings to be larger than that permitted by the Caravan Sites Act 1968.

6.18 As an indication of the visual impact of the proposed temporary dwellings, below are images of those used at the ELC site in Devon, Greenham Reach.









Figure 15: Photographs of the temporary dwellings currently at use at Greenham Reach which has a temporary consent until April 2018. Clockwise from top left: Steepholding's timber cabin (Plot C); Elder Farm's caravan (Plot A); and Wild Geese Acres' (Plot B) caravan unclad, and later clad in timber to reduce visual impact.

Provisions for Vehicular Access to the Site

6.19 The existing entrance to the field is at the south-western corner, which has historically been used for access for agricultural machinery. The visibility onto The Street, especially to the south, from this point is substandard for additional vehicle use to serve the proposed smallholdings, and a new, safer access is proposed some 150m to the north, where better sight-lines can be achieved.



Figure 16: Existing access to / from The Street

6.20 Following consultation with ESCC Highways, a suitable location has been identified that provides improved visibility both to the north and south. The speed limit at this point is 60mph, and without access to traffic speed data, sight-lines of 215m are assumed. A location has been found where this can be achieved, subject to hedge management (trimming and coppicing) of vegetation along the western edge of the property boundary. The trimming and coppicing would not have a significant impact on the screening that the hedge currently provides from the Street.

6.21 From this new location, the visibility to both the north and south can be achieved with trimming of the hedge on land owned by the applicant. Any vegetation management to achieve and maintain visibility requirements can be achieved without requiring any other landowner consents.

6.22 A gateway with bell-mouth splay has been designed (Figure 17) to meet highway access requirements, and this would require removal of a 20m section of hedge, but is positioned to avoid the need to remove any large hedgerow trees in the vicinity of the new access point. A new 290m section of native species hedgerow is to be planted on the site as mitigation, and this would extend the connectivity with

nearby semi-natural habitats. The value of this additional hedge has been highlighted in the accompanying Ecological Appraisal.

6.23 Removal of hedgerow to create the proposed access would reduce visual screening from The Street itself, but not from any properties. New hedge would be planted to on the south side of the proposed entrance so as to minimise the view of passing motorists of the temporary dwellings.

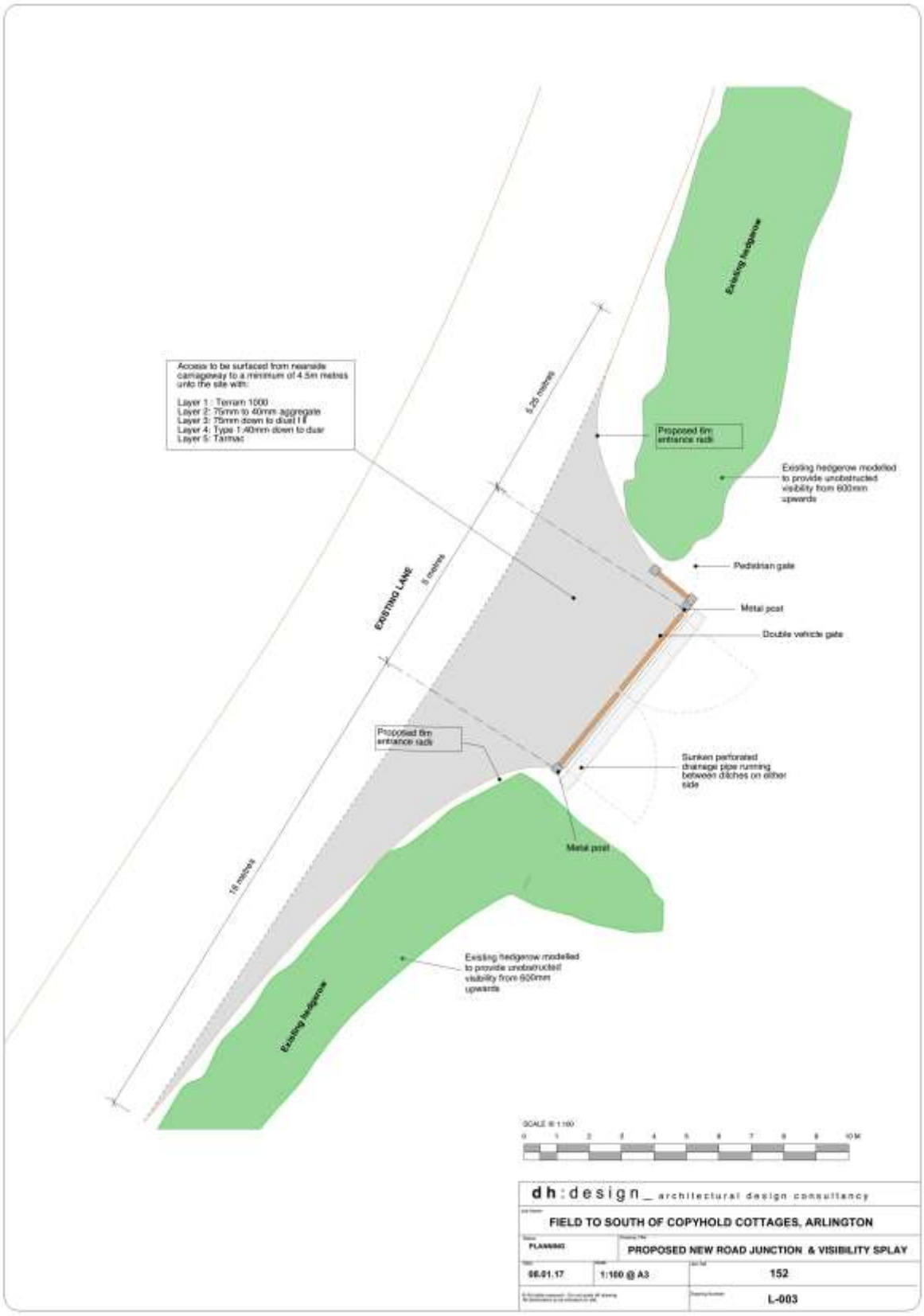


Figure 17: Proposed visibility splay (drawing ref: L_003)

New Gateway

6.24 The proposed new gateway would be 5 metres in width and 1.5 metres in height (overall height of 1.7 metres), a timber double leaf agricultural gate. A buried perforated drainage pipe would run between the ditches on either side. A similar gate is pictured below.



Figure 18: The gate would be a similar timber, double leaf agricultural gate (drawing ref: L_003)

Vehicle Access, Parking and Traffic Generation

6.25 A new vehicle access has been designed to serve the smallholdings and details of the bellmouth and visibility sightlines are provided in drawing ref: L_003.

6.26 A multi-purpose hard standing area is to be provided to serve the smallholdings, linking the highway access with the agricultural barn, and the curtilage of the proposed 'residential' area (where temporary dwellings would be sited). This area has been designed to be suitable for agricultural traffic, allow for safe turning and loading / unloading of vehicles visiting the site. The hard standing would be made from porous stone laid over geotextile to enable free drainage and avoid run-off. This area is sufficient for parking and general agricultural activities.

6.27 Traffic movements are anticipated to be less than 12 movements on / off the site per day. This has been derived from actual measurements taken at the similar sized ELC smallholdings in Devon. Restrictions on parking, limiting overnight

parking to two vehicles per dwelling, and restrictions on traffic generation form part of the Management Plan.

Water Supply and Drainage

6.28 The site would be supplied with rainwater through rainwater harvesting from the barn roof, and collection in two 10,000 litre above-ground storage tanks. Should additional horticultural need require a supplementary supply over that which can be provided from rainwater, a connection to mains water supply would be implemented.

6.29 The generation of waste water from the site would be minimised through the use of composting toilets by the residential smallholders, and grey water from washing would be initially dealt with through soakaways.