COYNE ENVIRONMENTAL

Oxleaze Farm

Greenhill

Royal Wootten Bassett

SN4 8EH



ECOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT

December 2023

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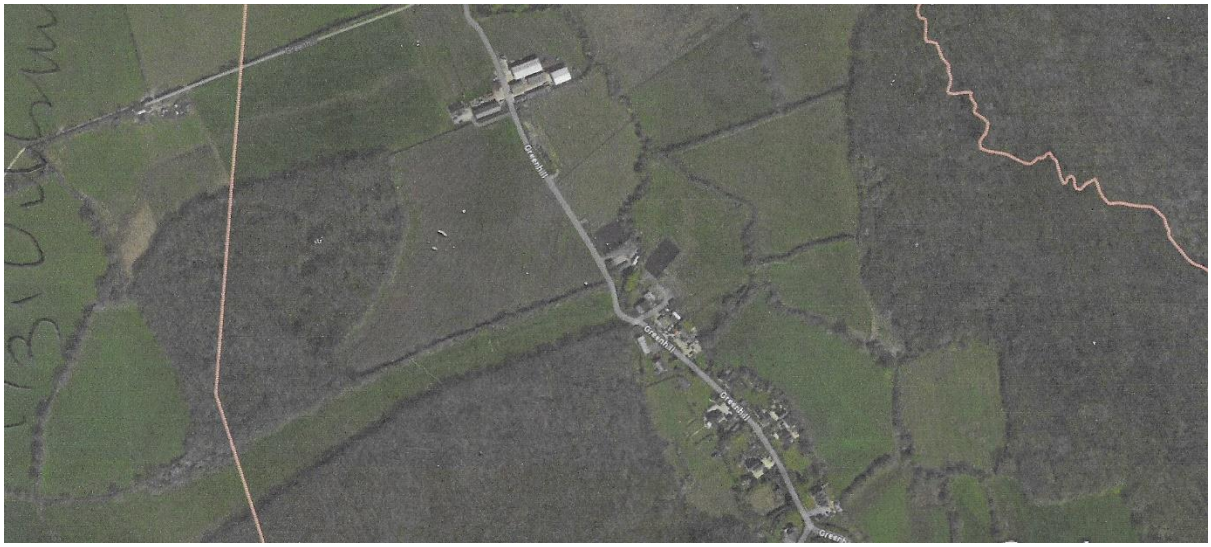
INTRODUCTION

Offgrid Architecture has instructed Coyne Environmental to carry out an Ecological Assessment of Oxleaze Farm, Greenhill, Wootten Bassett, SN4 8EH to establish the potential presence or absence of protected ecological features of significance. It is proposed to carry out a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA) survey and report on the findings. In 2018 the site was granted planning permission Application No. 18/04811/FUL for new stables, barn and other facilities. This application is for a new Machinery Barn, to replace an existing polytunnel at the rear of the stables

The completed PEA will enable the local planning authority (LPA) to consider the impact of the proposal on wildlife. The authority can then discharge its legal obligations under the 'Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations' (2018) and any `Outline Mitigation and Compensation Strategy' if required.



I am a qualified Ecologist, Associate of the Institute of Ecology & Environmental Management with over 35 years' experience in the environmental field. This includes being a licence bat worker (Bat Licence 2015-15943-CLS-CLS). The PEA survey was carried out on the 30th November 2023. This was conducted in the day time, (19 c) variable conditions, light winds, dry.

LOCATION

Wiltshire is a rural county of mainly chalk downland, with sheep, one of the main land uses. The two major rivers, both called Avon have influenced the topography of the land, Salisbury Plain being a prominent feature, much of it used for military exercises by the British Army. Stonehenge is a testimony to the ancient history of the land.

Royal Wootton Bassett, is a market town (pop. 11,700 -2011) and from 1447-1832 was a "rotten borough", electing two members of parliament. Appearing in Domesday its name derives from its location in Braydon Forest. In 2011 the town was granted

royal patronage by Queen Elizabeth 11 for services in organising funeral processions for returning fallen military hero`s.

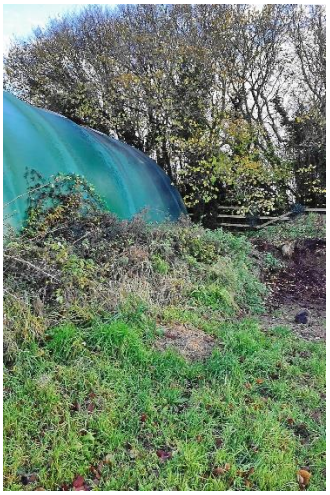
SITE

The hamlet of Greenhill is a strung-out ribbon of houses and farms in a rural landscape of arable crops and woodlands (remnants of the ancient royal hurting Forest of Braydon) with Ravensroost Wood a Nature Reserve. Oxleaze Farm is at the top of the access road (no through road) and now used by the current owner as an office, workshops, stables and grazing for ponies, as well as a programme to turning some of the land to a more natural habitat for wildlife.

The new farm buildings are used for storage (vintage cars) and stables for the livestock with an adjacent barn as the office. The front of the site is mainly for parking. At the rear of the buildings is informal storage, old machinery and an agricultural polytunnel. This is where it is proposed to site the new machinery workshop.

The existing polytunnel is intended as a temporary structure of a semi-circular metal tubular frame covered in horticultural polythene, currently used for storing hay and other farm materials. Around this is rough grass and scrub vegetation, mainly bramble with elder. At the rear of the structure is the site boundary of mature trees, forming a screen to the road. *An Arboricultural Tree Survey was undertaken for Application 18/04811/FUL with proposals for their protection when the new buildings were erected.*





Byond the buildings the land falls away as various grazed fields, down to a wooded area and a stream. This is the site boundary forming an extensive wetland habitat, with further farmland beyond. The site and property are retaining the rural character of the land, while restoring a large part of the farm to a more natural wildlife balance by improving overall biodiversity.

AREA DESIGNATIONS

Management and protection of biodiversity within the UK planning system is set out through European and UK legislation. The Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981) is the

main protection for wildlife. There is also legislation for specific species, Protection of Badgers Act 1992, Habitat Regulations 1994 Schedule 2 (European Protected Species), EU Habitats and Birds Directive and more general guidance, EU Biodiversity Strategy 2011-2020. These all are aimed at ensuring the environment of Wiltshire and its wildlife is adequately protected. This study and report have also taken into account BS 42020 (2013) Biodiversity -Code of practice for planning and development.

Wiltshire County Council has a number of polices in its Local Plan (LP) 2021 including a Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) 2008 with Landscape Biodiversity Areas and has a Local Nature Partnership (Link2Nature). Local initiatives include a National Dormouse Monitoring Programme (NDMP)and the Avon is a Special Area of Conservation (SAC).

Wiltshire Council is now a Unitary Authority which covers Royal Wootton Bassett. The second tier of local government is Royal Wootton Bassett Town Council which has a number of environmental policies in its Neighbourhood Plan (2017). Jubilee Lake, is designated a Local Nature Reserve (LNR) with nature trails and is one of the main green spaces in the town.

CONDITION

A full Phase 1 Habitat Survey was not deemed necessary, as this is a site that appears to be have few natural features. It is therefore proposed to carry out an ecological Walk Over Site Survey. However, if the survey identifies any wildlife of significance, measures will be taken as set out in the JNCC guidance Handbook for Phase 1 Habitat Surveys (2010) and CIEEM Guidelines (2017).

In the Application 18/04811/FUL a Design & Access Statement document by Ben Williams stated:

Ecology

An ecological report accompanies the application. A summery of the report is below.

A preliminary ecological appraisal, comprising an extended Phase 1 habitat survey and a protected species assessment was undertaken by appropriately licenced, qualified and experienced personal during July 2018 …… to assess the ecological value of the site ….The survey concluded that no further surveys are required .

Trees

Three trees are to be removed. The Italian Alder T11, the hedgerow field Maple T1 Hazel clumpT2

A new English oak tree is proposed to be planted close to the site access to replace the Italian Alder

All the retained trees on and adjacent to the site will be suitably protected in accordance with the guidance in BS 5837

No significant future tree removal or harmful tree pruning is expected to occur as a result of the proposed access and buildings.





The main stable building is a steel frame rural farm structure with concrete panels on the base and softwood infill plank walls. The pitched roof of corrugated metal panels has Perspex daylights. The end of the building has large doors set into the structure to give initial shelter, in poor weather. The floor is smooth concrete. The separate office is a single storey barn of similar wooden construction.

ECOLOGICAL EVALUATION

A survey of the site was conducted starting with the rear of the buildings. Bats being European Protected Species (EPS) were considered first. As the proposal will not affect the farm buildings, it was not considered necessary to inspect any of the structures. Therefore, in accordance with the Bat Conservation Trust (2012) Guidelines and having regard to the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017, I conclude that the proposal site will have no impact on roosting bats.

As most of the area of the proposal site is emergent vegetation, it would appear to be of minimal ecological value. The rough grassland habitat (mainly meadow grass, couch, rye grass) and a few ruderals (*Daucus carota, Linaria vulgaris, Persicaria maculosa, etc.*) is dominated by bramble (*Rubus fruticosa*) with nettle (*Urtica dioica*)

Around the entrance to the polytunnel the coarser grasses have gradually reduced due to passage by people entering the area. More pioneer herb species (*Trifolium spp. Resida lutea, Sisybrium officinale*, etc), appear between the bare patches. Therefore, it is a habitat which may attractive nectar seeking insects, bees, butterflies but little else. As there are no hedges in this part of the site, so there is no rich herb base layer, or potential linear eco-zones of tall herbs and shrubs where small mammals would use foraging for food and passing to other habitats.

There are taller shrubs and trees at the rear of the polytunnel and the site boundary. This will provide nesting, food sources (winter berries), and singing posts etc. for birds.

On the survey the only species seen were a few gulls and on the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) guidelines the proposal site is classed as low for Avifauna.

No runs were observed through the immediate vegetation, indicating that this part of the farm was not used as a transit to other habitats for wildlife, in general. As there is no area of water near the proposal area, protected species like Great Created Newts (GCN) would not be encountered. A GCN Suitability Index was therefore not considered necessary. Examination under stones and similar refugia sites found no evidence of amphibians, as well as the lack of suitable vegetation cover and water.

The survey and ecological evaluation have shown that the polytunnel and its immediate surroundings have minimal interest for wildlife. The rest of the farm site will have habitats of greater ecological value and biodiversity. However due to human activity, informal storage of disused equipment, the PEA survey has shown that the proposed development will have minimal impact on the environment.

Although the immediate area of the proposed machinery workshop will only affect a few species, as this is part of the wider ecology of the farm, animals may use the site as a commuting and transit route to other habitats. Therefore, on the precautionary principle I propose that a PWMS be set out to ensure that wildlife is not harmed by this proposal.

PRECAUTIONARY WORKING METHOD STATEMENT (PWMS)

1. There are trees on the site boundary which may be used for birds as nesting sites. The breeding season is between March -August and any required clearance should not be undertaken if birds are affected and particularly important for House Sparrows (*Passer domesticus*) which are in steep decline (Red Listed).
2. If this is necessary in the breeding season, the vegetation should be inspected to see if nest sites are present and active. If this is the case the ecologist should be contacted for advice.
3. As there is old/disused machinery and other discarded materials in the grounds, the possibility of wildlife using these for shelter and hibernating is possible. It is recommended if any of these are to be removed, they need to be carefully inspected to ensure no wildlife (hedgehogs) are using them for refugia / hibernacula
4. Specific area for materials needs to be secured, so that wildlife in general is excluded
5. It is also important to ensure that if clearance does involve wood fires these are inspected to ensure animals like hedgehogs have not temporally taken refuge here.
6. Although the likelihood of wildlife being present on this part of the site has not been found, as a precautionary measure, works to prepare the land should be timed to minimise the potential impact on possible wildlife.
7. Any vegetation clearance should ideally be removed in winter (Dec-Feb) to ensure that any possible foraging / migrating between areas are not affected.
8. Any soil stripping should ideally be undertaken during the active season, between Mar-Oct and in suitable weather conditions. Given that wildlife is

potentially likely to visit the site, simple precautions will be sufficient to ensure that they do not exploit more attractive or useful habitats created during the works by keeping the site tidy and storing materials off the ground.

9 Any soils stacking should be smoothed to prevent potential cavities and covered in tarpaulin.

10 If in the unlikely event that animals are found on site, they should be left to disperse of their own accord. Any that need assistance should be gently placed in a clean bucket and moved on to a safe location away from the development.

BIODIVERSITY NET GAIN

The Environment Act 2021 has a require for Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) on developments of a minimum of 10%. This will become mandatory for all buildings from next year. However, as many LPA are already requiring this for planning applications a BNG 4.0 Metric has also been undertaken from the results of this PEA study

This has produced a Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) of **16.31%** and therefore exceeds the requirement for a 10% net gain. To achieve this additional mitigation has been put forward of native hedge planting, a native wooded copse and native wildflower seeding. These are detailed in mitigation plans and will form part of the clients ongoing proposals to naturalise the farm. The BNG report and Excel 4.0 metric 4.0 should be consulted for further details

CONCLUSION

Offgrid Architecture has instructed the commissioning of an Ecological Assessment of details of the ecology of the site and any wildlife of significance to the proposed development. This Report details the findings of the survey which indicates that there is a low probability of the presence of significant wildlife on this part of the site and therefore this should not affect the development proceeding.

In order to ensure any wildlife that may venture onto the site a PWMS is proposed as the works proceed. The design of the proposed site layout, by including mitigation and enhancements from the results of the BNG exercise, will increase the biodiversity of the site, in line with the Environment Act 2021.

Therefore, in my professional opinion this survey, analysis and PEA Report, along with the results of the BNG study, should satisfy the requirements in respect of ecology and biodiversity enhancement for the LPA. I recommend that the application can be considered on this basis and that no further environmental surveys are necessary to determine the proposed application.



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EXG. SITE PLAN 1:500

1:500 0 5 10 15 25m

No.	Date	Revision Notes
A	28/08/2023	Updated with new stables

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Status

SURVEY

Project Title

EXTENSIONS & ALTERATIONS

Project Address

Oxleaze Farm, Greenhill, Royal Wootton Bassett, SN4 8EH

Drawing Title

EXG. SITE PLAN

Scale	Date	Drawn By	Project ID
1:500 @ A1	17/11/2022	TWR	2125 002A



PROP. SITE PLAN 1:500

0 5 10 15 20m

1:500

N

No.	Date	Revision Notes
C	01/11/2023	Muck heap removed
B	20/08/2023	Added new access point to site
A	01/07/2023	Reclassed proposed buildings with new one

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Status

DESIGN

Project Title

EXTENSIONS & ALTERATIONS

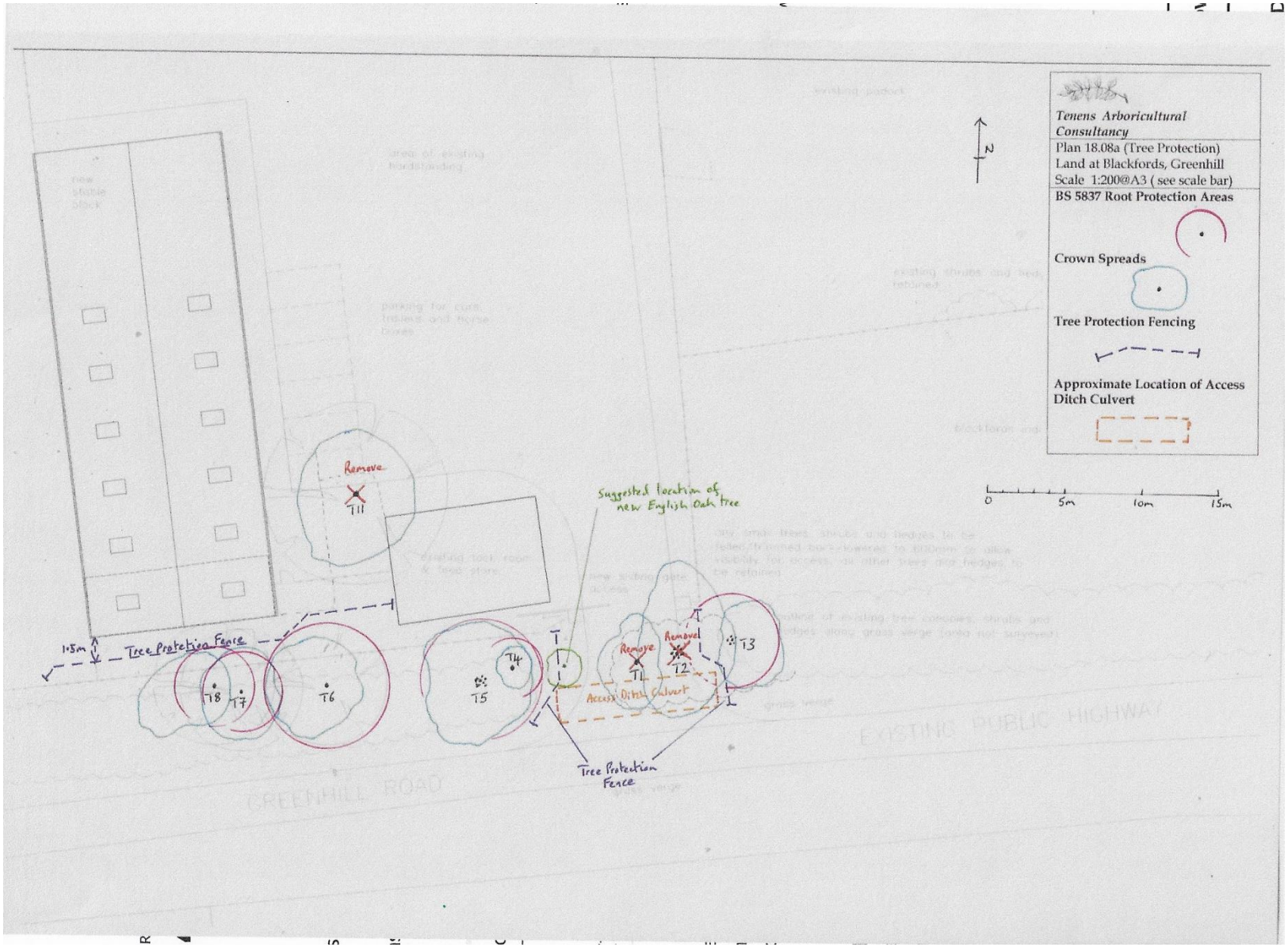
Project Address

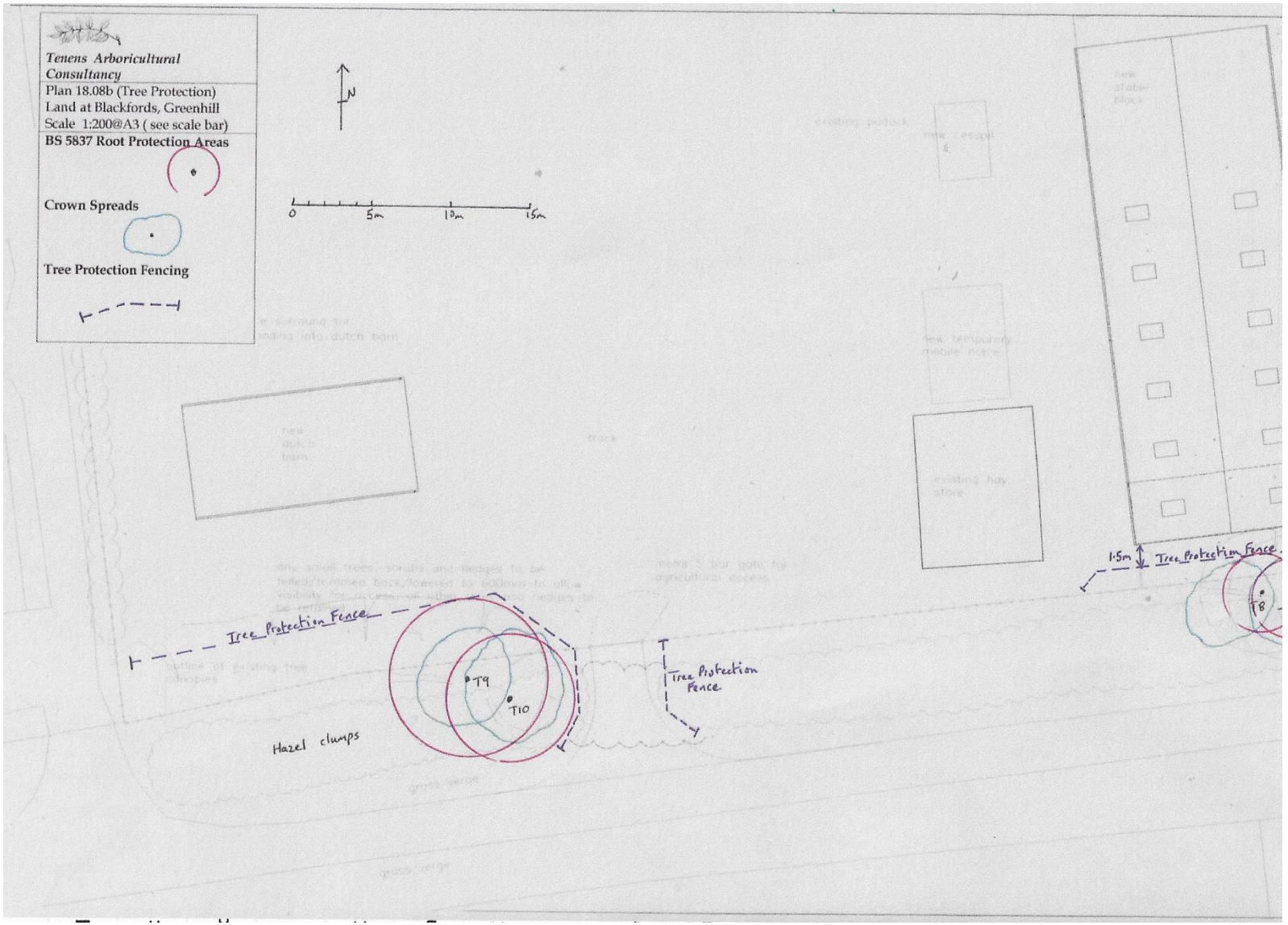
Ostleaze Farm, Greenhill, Royal Wootton Bassett, SN4 8EH

Drawn Title

PROP. SITE PLAN

Scale	Date	Drawn By	Project ID
1:500 @ A1	22/12/2022	TWR	2125 101C


Tenens Arboricultural Consultancy
Plan 18.08a (Tree Protection)
Land at Blackfords, Greenhill
Scale 1:200@A3 (see scale bar)
BS 5837 Root Protection Areas
Crown Spreads
Tree Protection Fencing
Approximate Location of Access Ditch Culvert
N
0
5m
10m
15m
Remove
T11
Suggested location of new English Oak tree
1.5m
Tree Protection Fence
T8
T7
T6
T5
T4
Remove
T1
Removal
T2
T3
Access Ditch Culvert
Tree Protection Fence
GREENHILL ROAD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Tree Protection Fencing
N
0
5m
10m
15m
Tree Protection Fence
T9
T10
Hazel clumps
T
Tree Protection Fence
1.5m
Tree Protection Fence
T8

RWB Neighbourhood Plan Area

