

Reference	177
Subject	Aubreys
Date	18/09/23 - revised 31/01/24
Circulation	Planning
Title	Design Statement for development of the farmstead
Site address	Aubreys Llanveynoe Longtown Herefordshire HR2 0NL



Opening statement

This document has been prepared by Rural Office in support of a planning application for the conversion, extension, and alteration of a ruined historic farmstead at Aubreys. We are an award-winning practice with a reputation for delivering considered architecture, strategic thinking and research.

It is our pleasure to present a scheme based upon exploring ideas within the rural landscape of the Olchon Valley, responding to the area’s surroundings by reinterpreting the familiar architectural language of the past.

Our approach to practice has always been collaborative, and we have worked meticulously with a wide range of specialists and consultants throughout the duration of this project in order to arrive at a design outcome grounded in local knowledge and creative expertise.

Heritage summary

None of the buildings within the application site are statutorily listed, however the house and remnant historic farm buildings are considered to be non-designated heritage assets. The farmhouse is most prominent, comprising an early-mid 19th century house with later rear lean-to. The barns, comprising ruined cow house and combination barn form a nucleated settlement of buildings.

The site is owned by Mr and Mrs Gardner, who intend to use the complex of barns personally as a single-family dwelling, with a new small ancillary building to facilitate their home working and site maintenance.

The following pages set out the ambitions for the site. Detailed explanation and evidence is offered for how the design has been approached and evolved within this historic context; due consideration is given also to environmental factors of contemporary development.

Key:

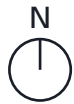
- Denotes land necessary for development (application site)
- Denotes land ownership



The site is situated at Aubreys, Llanveynoe, Longtown, Herefordshire HR2 0NL (SO 27352 33035). Located off the country road, a little over 4 miles away from Longtown.



The parish of Llanveynoe CP (outlined in green) is shown, which falls within the wider Longtown Parish Council.



Views to site

Offa's Dyke footpath itself, at the point it runs adjacent to Aubreys, is positioned much further over toward Wales, which effectively prevents immediate views down into the Olchon Valley.

Importantly, the farmstead is largely unseen from the roadside; on the approach from Longtown where key views up to the buildings do first occur (A), the original farmhouse and hay barn remain the only dominant features. Furthermore, only the farmhouse can be seen from the site entry gate (B), which marks the last point at which any part of the farmstead can be seen clearly from the road thereafter.

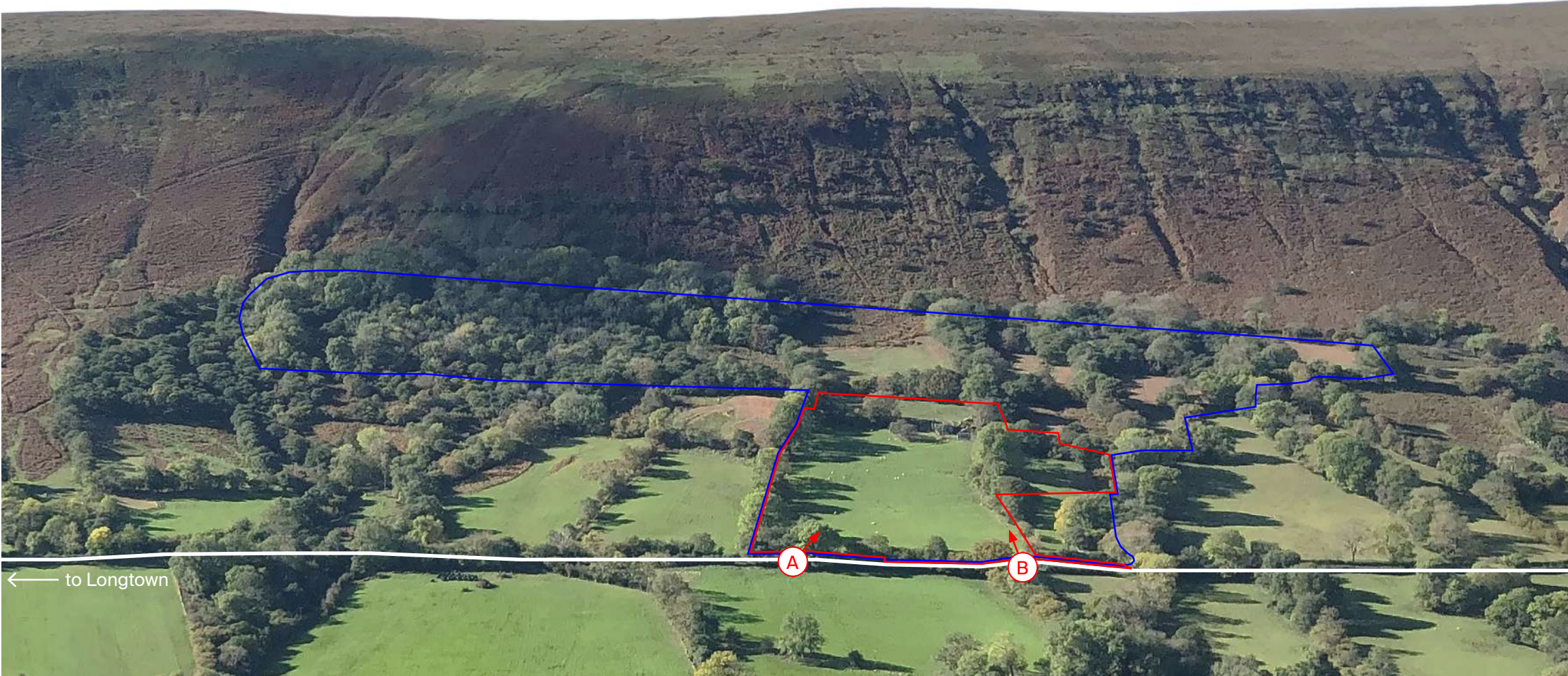
Lastly, and over 1km away on the opposite side of the valley, 'The Cat's Back' does offer a distant glimpse of Aubreys albeit often shielded by trees even from a high vantage point (C).

More detail is provided in the accompanying Landscape report.



A

B



C

Key:

- Denotes land necessary for development (application site)
- Denotes land ownership

Olchon Valley

The site is situated in the Olchon Valley in the foothills of the Black Mountains just under the ‘Cat’s Back’. The Olchon Valley runs northwest from Longtown for a distance of c. eight miles and forms the most eastern valley of the Black Mountains.

A mountain ridge of over 600m borders the whole valley on the west side with the Welsh border (part of the Offa’s Dyke footpath) running along the top.

To the east the valley is enclosed for about half its length by a ridge of similar height, called the Black Hill (known locally as ‘The Cat’s Back’). The Black Darren and Red Daren are land slips formed following glacial action are features on the face of the western ridge.

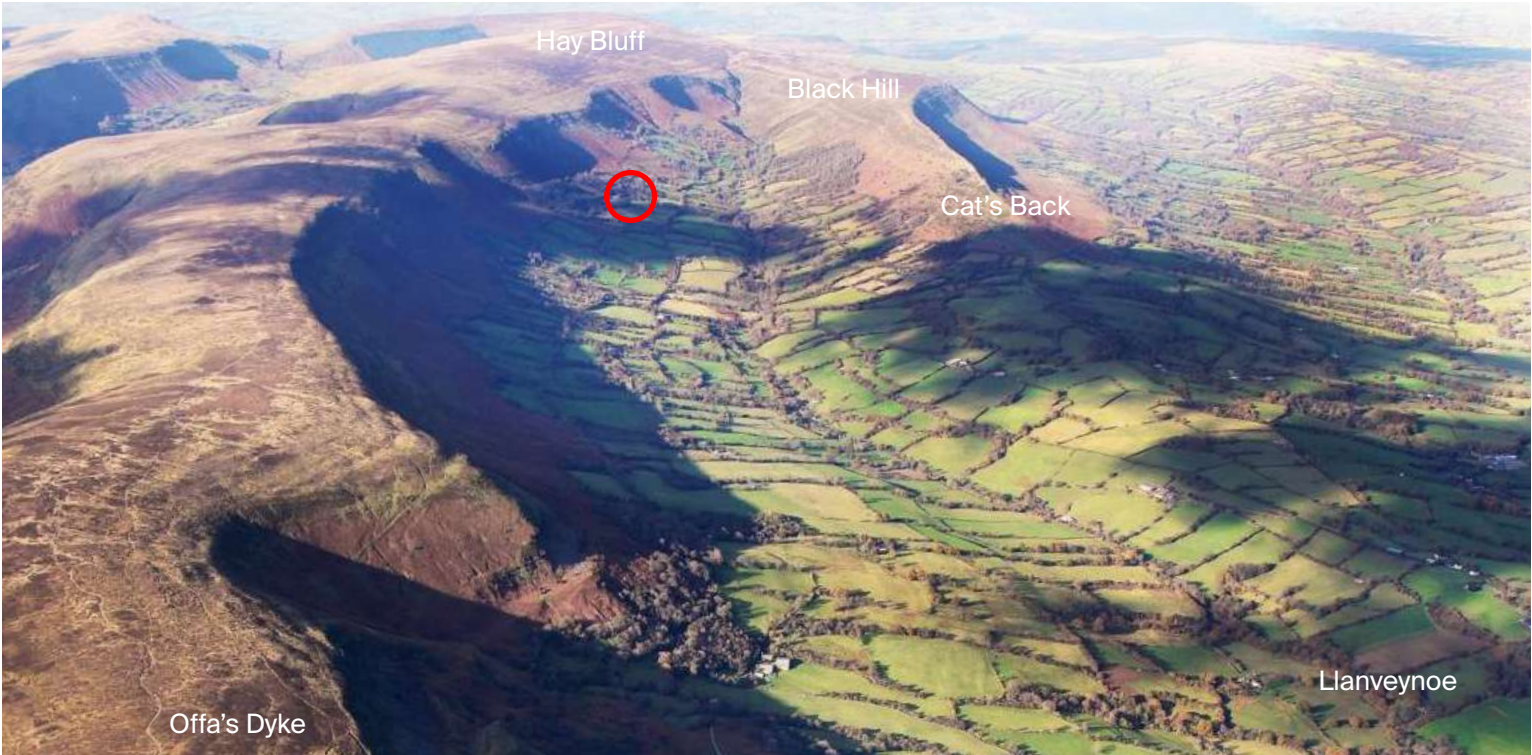
The underlying rock and solid geology of the area, combined with the presence of historic landslips and events of the previous Ice Ages, shape this unmistakable landscape.

Land Use

Ordnance Survey mapping carried out during World War II and published soon after 1945 is a good indication of how land had been developed through the 19th Century to become increasingly specialised.

Vegetation (right): the pink indicates that the site is located in an area of ‘Agrostis’ grass but was considered to be ‘poor with some rushes’. The orange areas indicate ‘Fescue Pastures’ and the Purple ‘Heather Moor’. Each of these classifications are observed either at Aubreys or in the immediate context of the site.

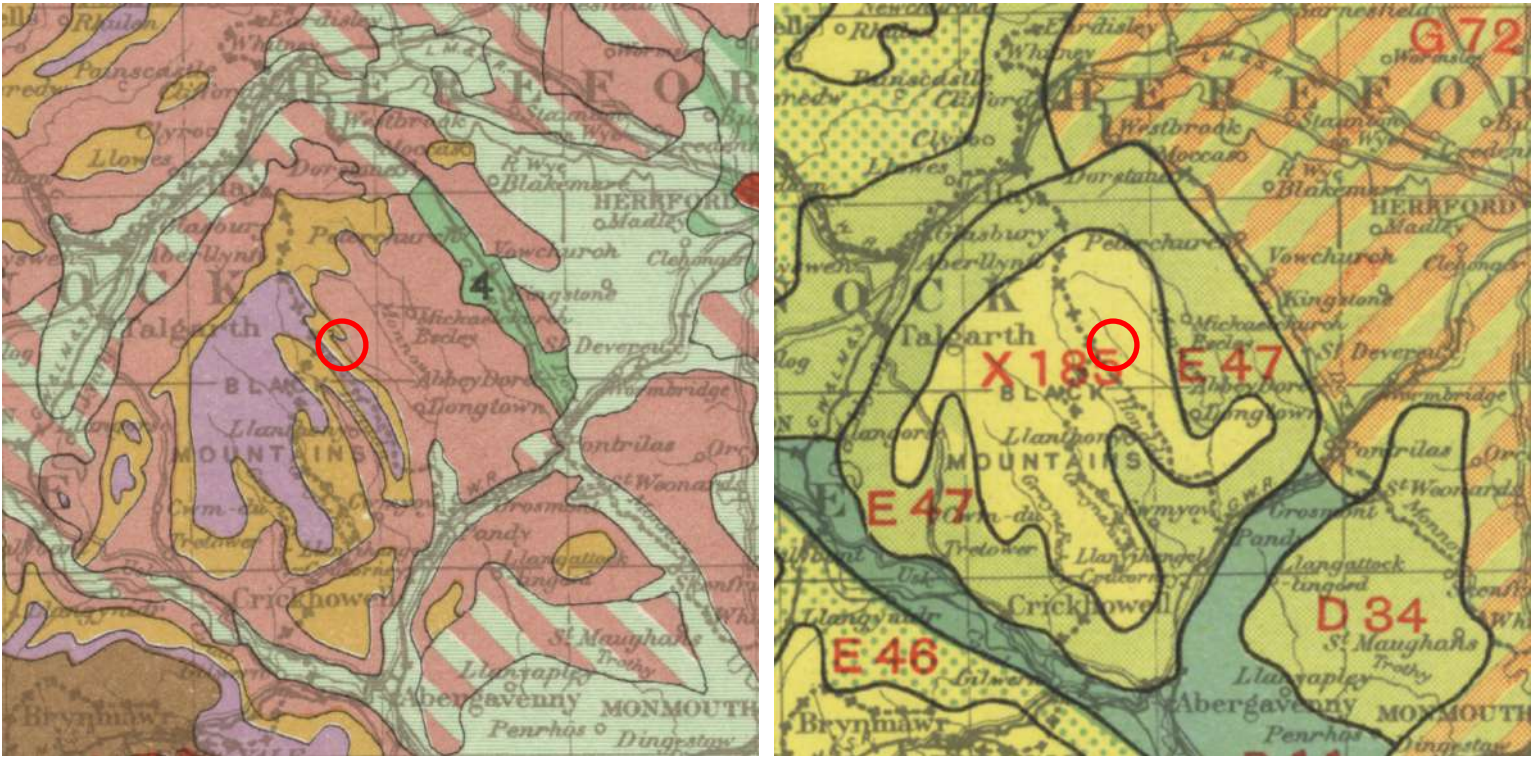
Farming (far right): the site is indicated within the zone X185 classed as ‘land of small agricultural value’, however the encompassing E47 zone denoting areas of ‘mainly rearing and sheep grazing’ is better attributed to the current use of the site. Closer towards Hereford the orange / green hatch denotes mixed farming with substantial rearing or feeding side. The darkest green indicates dairying up the Usk valley.



Landscape colourways

Jem Waygood of Waygood Colour advises councils, architects, developers, planners and conservation officers on how to use colour so that buildings sit sensitively within the landscape. Wilst being visually driven, his work is grounded in extensive scientific research.

“Whilst the study provides general guidance, it highlights how significant colour decisions can be in the success or otherwise of changes to a protected landscape.” - Jem Waygood.



Regional Farmsteads

Farming in Herefordshire has historically been known for its strong base of mixed farming and cattle rearing. In this particular area of Herefordshire, South-West of the River Dore, this has given way to more sheep grazing and less arable farming.

A distinction can be made between lower and upper farmstead layouts in the area whereby the former will often have more defined courtyard arrangements.

Hillside farms, such as Aubreys, will typically have a more varied roof typology and openings at different levels according to its setting along a gradient. Many isolated farmsteads were built after the abandonment of farming settlements from the 14th century.



Lowland



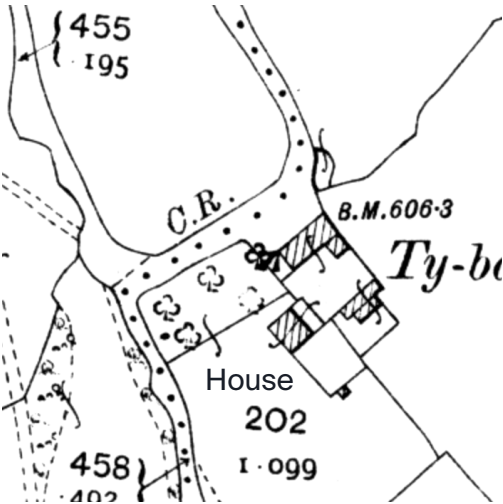
Upland

Historical layouts

The Black Mountains sees high rates of survival for small-scale farmsteads. At times, these are secluded amongst well-preserved ancient field patterns and are mostly characterised by loose courtyard plans (with working buildings to 1-2 sides of the yard), dispersed cluster plans and regular L-shaped plans - see adjacent examples all from the Olchon Valley area.

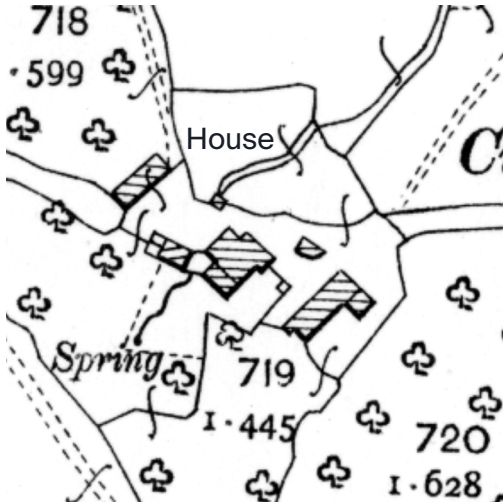
By comparison, the larger-scale farms, mostly courtyard steadings with working buildings set to 3 sides of yards of loose or regular form, have had higher levels of loss.

Larger agricultural sheds typify change in the modern agricultural industry and the displacement of agricultural use from the more specialised, earlier traditional buildings - Aubreys could have witnessed a similar evolution had it not fallen into dereliction.



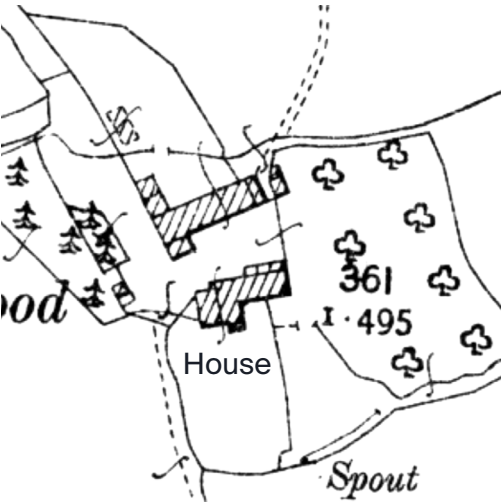
Loose Courtyard

Detached buildings arranged around a yard, often a product of piecemeal development. Typically openings only into yard.



Dispersed Cluster

Working buildings are set within the boundary of the steading, scale of detached structures are typically small and specific in use.



Regular L-Plan

Small-medium sized farmsteads, inward facing with some external openings. Planned and built as one whole building as opposed to loose, piecemeal development.

A commonality observed across all categories is that evidence may be found of additions made to anterior buildings throughout history (e.g. lean-to stores/ extensions). This sets a precedent and further highlights the evolutionary nature of farmstead settlements, inviting interpretation for how footprints have been expanded as per the particular requirements of the occupier.

Site Development Through Time

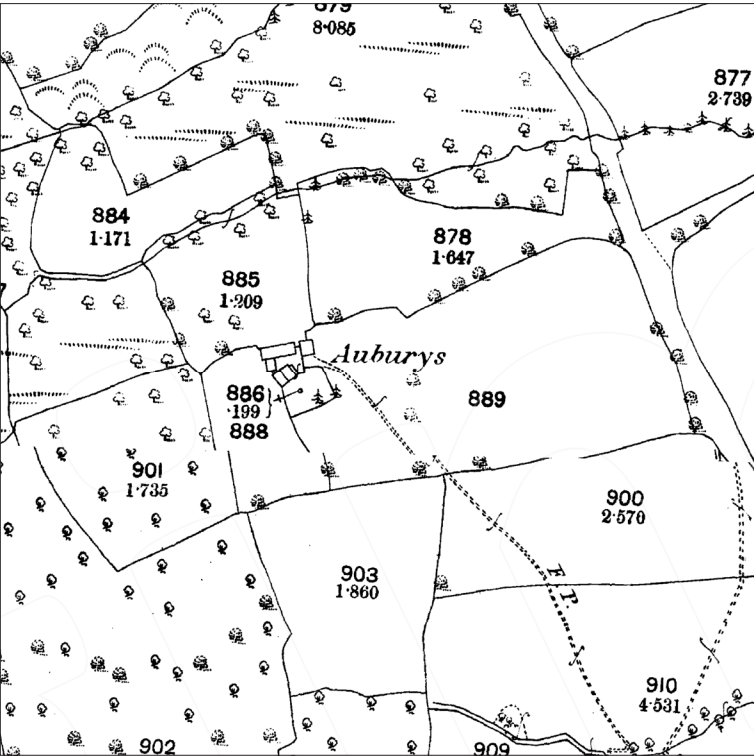
Aubreys sits in a medieval landscape, one that had probably largely emerged by the 14th century. The position of the holding would lend itself to the siting of a dwelling here from the 15th or 16th century, potentially in the form of a longhouse running east-west down the slope with the house at the top end and byre at the lower end.

The current barn and byre ranges have evolved over time and may pre-date the current house but are difficult to date given the architecture of these buildings remained largely unchanged from the 17th to the 19th century.



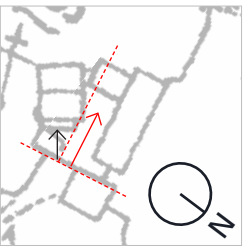
1840

The earliest known documentary record of a holding at Aubreys dates back to 1814. The above tithe map shows Aubreys (square plan- possibly depicting the house and rear lean-to) with two outbuildings and its six plots of land.

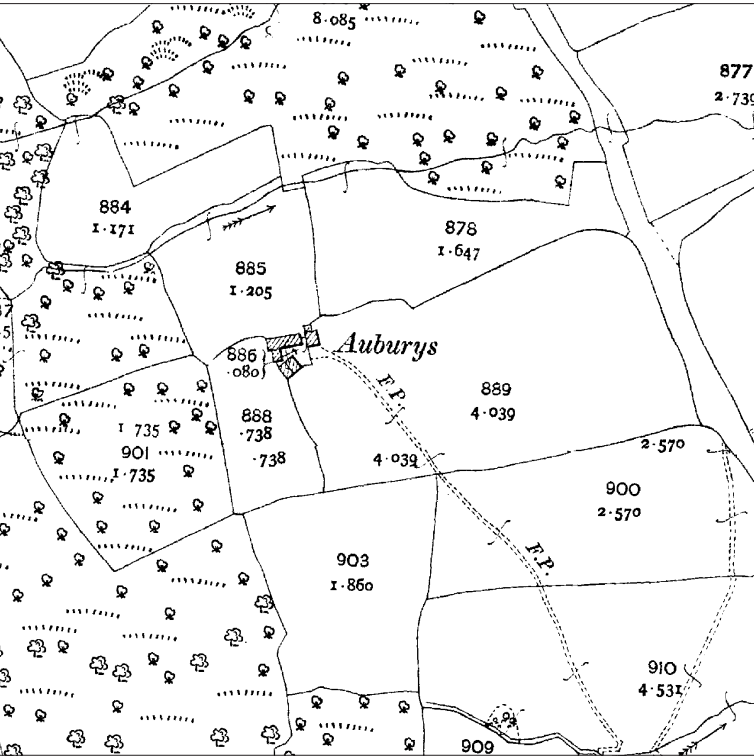


1888

A footpath leads south connecting to Pencelley Farm. The two outbuildings present on the 1840 tithe map are still in existence while the farmhouse and its rear lean-to are clearly identifiable.



It is noted that the threshing barn clearly shows a southern addition. This extends *up* to the perceived extents of the farmhouse when viewed parallel to its principal elevation (black arrow), and *beyond* when viewed parallel to the rest of the barns (red arrow).



1904

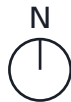
Little had changed from 1888 save for the addition of a small extension north on the square plan outbuilding east of the house - though its use cannot be confirmed (it perhaps most likely could be calves cots), it is evidence of further expansion of the farmstead.

A small parcel of land adjacent the south of the farmstead is also no longer defined, possibly suggesting a change in how the residential curtilage was viewed at the time.



Present day

Aubreys as found today. The site has changed little since 1904, with 20th century changes in agricultural practices and building requirements having almost no impact on the range at the site.



Existing site plan addressing practical aspects such as site access along with initial site objectives important to consider from the outset. The residential curtilage of the farmstead, is indicated by the green boundary.

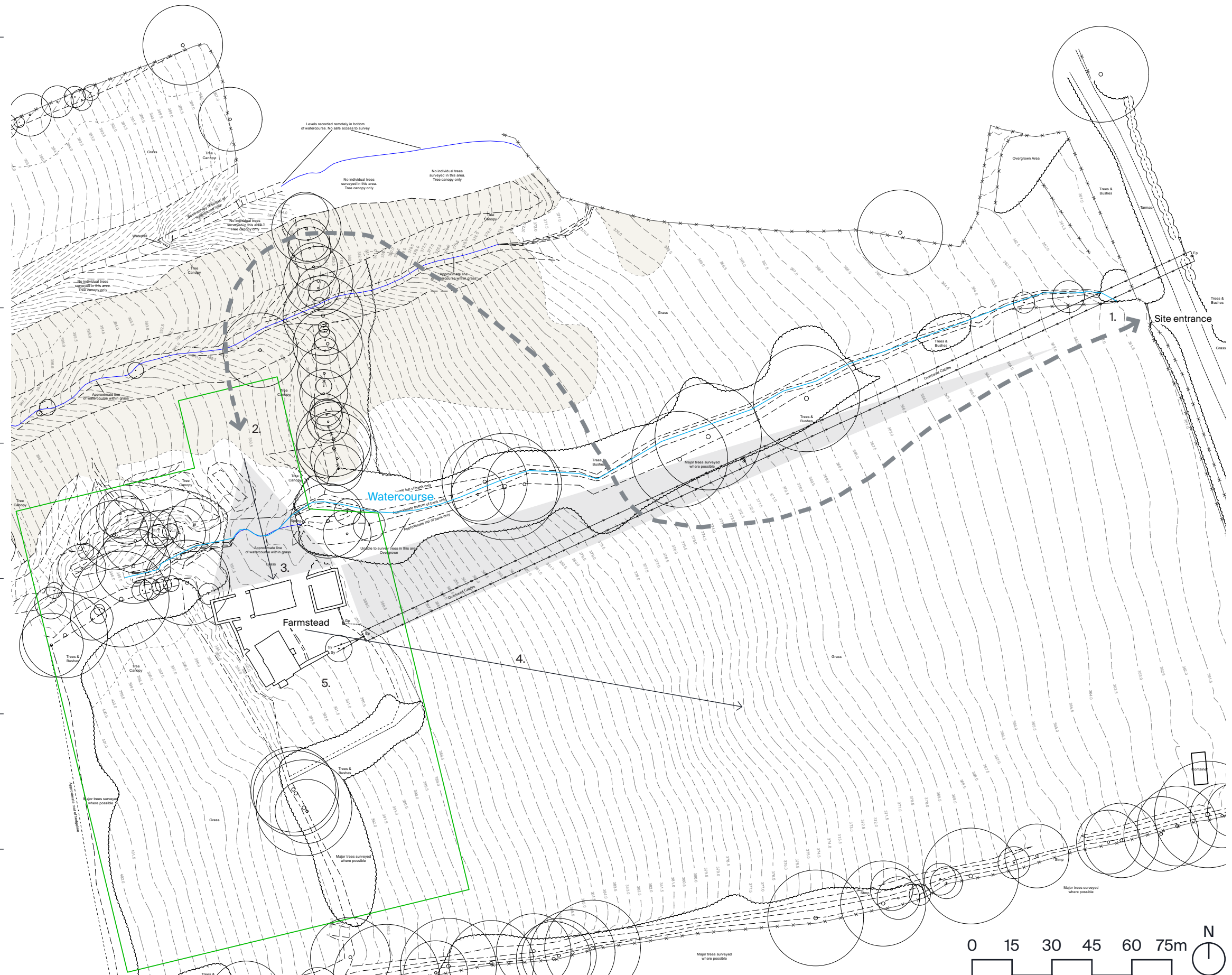
Route from entrance gate to compound, ~30m height gain over ~150m distance. To be positioned in careful accordance with natural gradients and areas of the northern field where bracken is most prevalent. Track is largely obscured from road and 'Cat's Back'.

Location of site levelling for a) open ground and hub during construction and b) separate arrival / parking / refuse area during the development's use.

Arrival places the farmstead in the foreground, nestled within the hillside and trees either side. Existing stonework is retained and celebrated where possible.

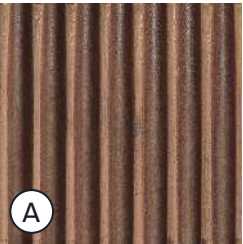
With the protection of ecological assets across the site's key areas for development, it is paramount that rolling views beyond the farmstead act as an unimpeded backdrop and retain its upland character.

Specialist consultants will be sought to advise on the most ecological and appropriate strategies for sourcing and/or disposal of utilities, to include heating, water and waste management of the farmstead.




Building typology

Disecting building materials and individual practical uses at Aubreys.



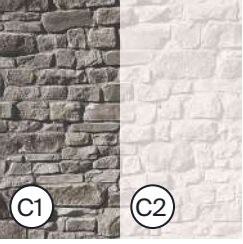
A

Corrugated profile metal cladding - weathered to compliment earthy tones of bracken




B

Stone tile roof of diminishing courses - sourced from local quarries




C1 C2


Stone masonry wall with tight jointing / whitewashed finish - found on rocky escarpments





D

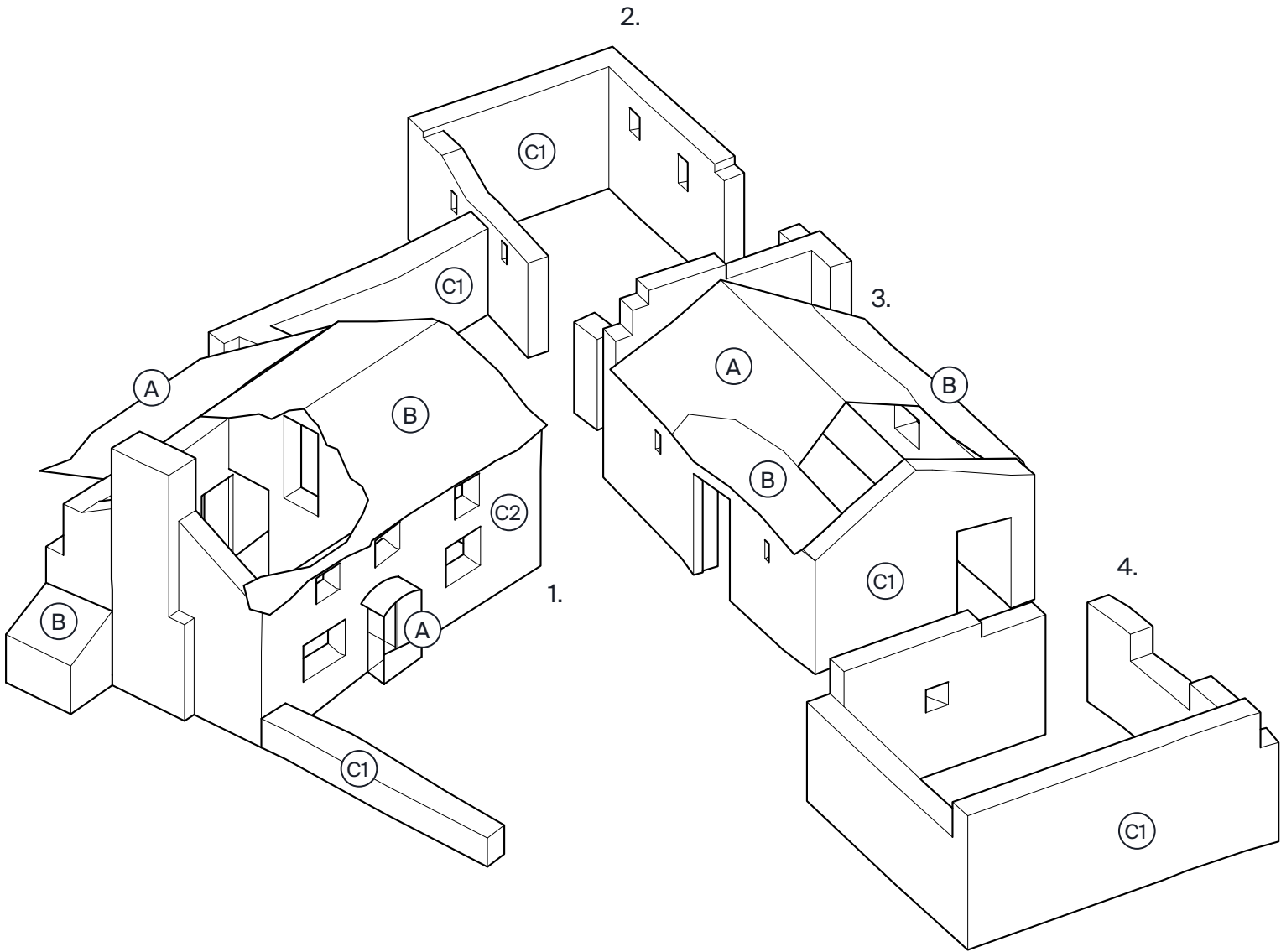
Pegged timber windows / timber plank doors - from a range of tree species on site











1. Farmhouse

The asymmetrical farmhouse, originally limewashed, its plan form is hall and parlour at ground floor with two rooms above accessed via a stair ladder. There is a rear lean-to which appears to have been used latterly as an animal shelter, it is uncertain if the wall abutting the retaining bank was part of a small store, a dog kennel, an outside toilet or calves cot, or just part of a boundary or dividing wall in the yard.

2. Threshing barn

The principal purpose of the barn was to store and process the harvested corn crop. After threshing, straw was stored before being distributed to yards and buildings for farm animals. Threshing barns contain one or more threshing floors and bays for storing the sheaves of unthreshed corn and often the straw after threshing.

3. Cow house

A building in which cattle are normally tethered in stalls, sometimes with a hay loft where cattle needed to be housed for a long time (May to Oct) over winter. Externally, lower and wider doorways than stables and more limited light and air flow in the form of ventilation slits. The east gable with lower doorway providing access into a lower level bay – potentially a calves cot.

Corrugated metal cladding is observed on portions of the roof both here and on the farmhouse lean-to - this has weathered naturally to read harmoniously with the hues of the widespread bracken and forms part of the broader area’s rural palette of colours.

4. Hay barn

The dwarf wall appears to terminate at half height with a flag stone capping. The gables that rise above have angle quoins suggesting the void was open. This could therefore have had an open timber frame in the form of a hay barn – perhaps lofted. Lofted hay barns often housed cattle underneath but in this instance, there is not enough height although sheep could conceivably walk under. A notable area of fallen stone lies at the base of the north elevation - the same side where 1904 mapping indicates an extended footprint.

Site infrastructure

Proposed site plan illustrates the latest access track as formulated by Rappor Consultants Ltd. The track route and positioning has been carefully analysed and coordinated to ensure minimal cut and fill according to site levels, while its gradient adheres to NHBC guidance for driveways as it does not exceed 1:6 gradient.

With respect to the northern field of higher ecological importance, the track seeks to pass through lesser value areas of bracken, as indicated by the shaded area.

In addition to details below, the existing overhead power lines will be removed and a new supply laid underground, to likely follow the route of the track.

The residential curtilage of the farmstead, is again indicated by the green boundary.

1. Access

Rocky entrance will likely require lowering at the gateway to achieve level grade to road junction. The first 10m of the track - before the first culvert - should be graduated (1:15 gradient) for vehicle safety.

2. Approach

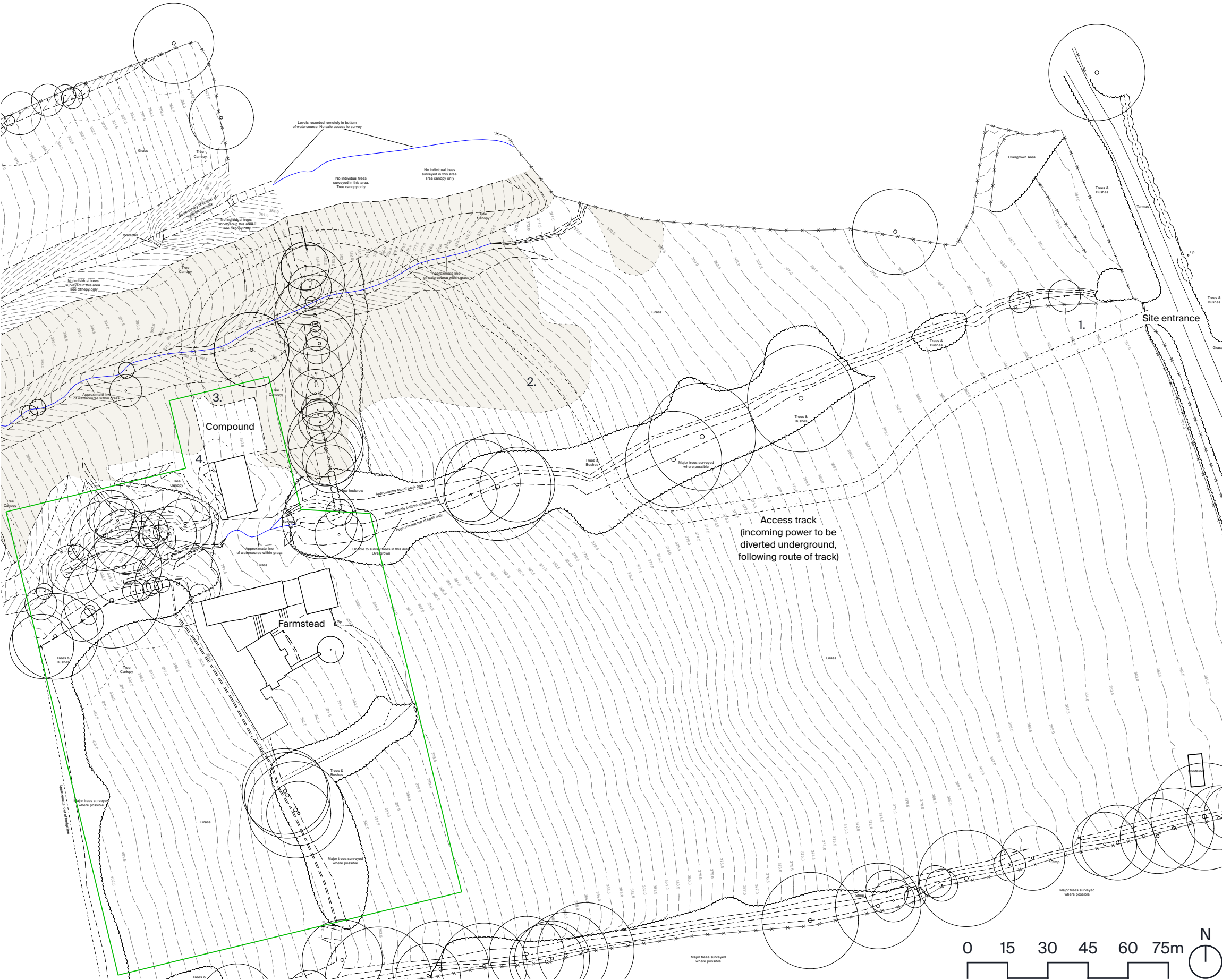
A ‘green’ track is desirable rather than a complete tarmacadam drive – replicating the aesthetic of a traditional stone farm track (e.g. gravel tyre tracks/ grass centreline), so not to be over-engineered.

3. Arrival

To tie the track in to the parking area, the compound will need to gradually fall away from the farmstead (approx. 1:20 gradient) while allowing sightlines directly to existing buildings beyond.

4. Other actions

Retaining works as part of compound and small barn phase of development, subsequent retaining walls to be made to rear of farmhouse. These will be designed in accordance with best practice and ensure provision of appropriate drainage solutions (e.g. land drains).



Physical model - revised

The master plan of the site has developed from an evolving dialogue between ourselves, the client, heritage and planning consultant and has responded to both initial pre-application advice and subsequent planning commentary from the case officer and other respective members of the planning department.

Various options have been drawn up and models produced in order to work out the best solution to establish the family home that the client requires within the opportunities and constraints that the historic environment creates. Through discussion, several options have been discounted that would have resulted in unacceptable loss or over development of the existing built heritage. Following best practice guidance and the process of analysis and understanding, a thoroughly researched scheme has been developed that acknowledges the site sensitivities, accepting change - and some loss - and embracing conservation and repair to create a proposal that combines sensitive adaptation with new additions.

The case officer, in her pre-application response, has expressed written support for the development of the farmstead buildings and their interconnection with supporting new ranges. We have taken on board all the discussions with the case officer, as well as direct input from the heritage and planning consultants.

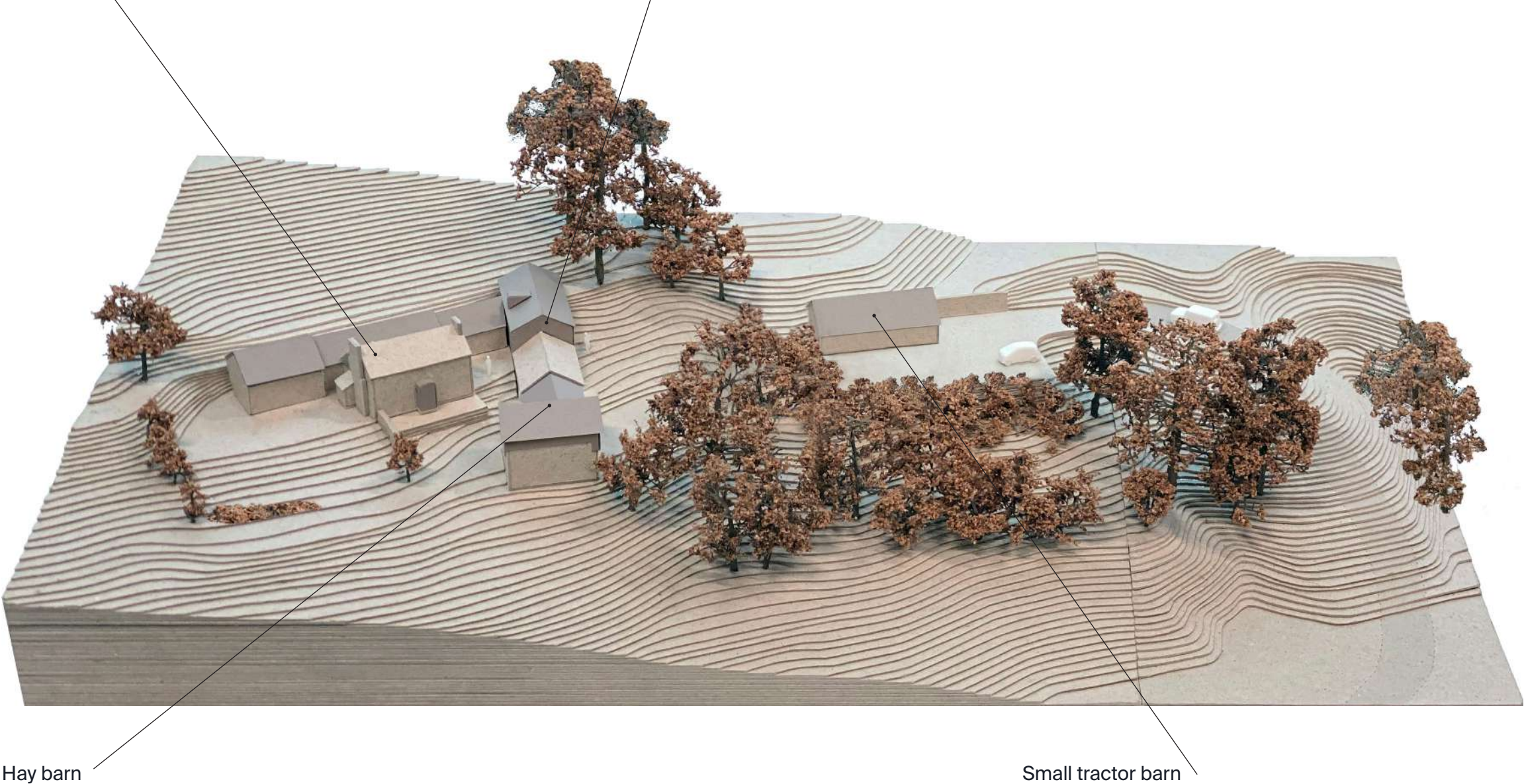
Postscript:
Further discussions with the officer during the application period has addressed concerns over the scale and massing of development, and these changes are reflected in this document.

Farmhouse

To address concerns over the visibility of the farmhouse - especially its south gable - the proposed extension housing the family room has been reduced in size, with its main window also shrinking. The overall intervention is set back into the hillside so that the entirety of the farmhouse gable with chimney and bread oven can be seen. The focus of the house remains views east, northeast with its back towards the hillside.

Threshing barn

There may or may not have been a lofted area at its higher end, though a square socket in one wall could indicate the position of a now lost carrier beam. The design draws on the precedent of lofts, retains an agricultural form and serves site levels for access; inevitably it must involve alterations to function as a usable first floor.



Hay barn

The south opening is the only indication of a former use as a type of linhay; it would have had a loft for the storage of hay and higher roofline to enable a man to stand within its centre. A necessity of building regs. determines its height, which has been reduced as far as is permitted, masonry additions will soften its form.

Small tractor barn

While the new building did not want to be a pastiche of a historic farm building design, potentially confusing the historic function and workings of the holding, the new addition did have to be sensitive to the neighbouring buildings as well as the important landscape in which it sits, hence its reduced scale.

Material composition



Roofs



Walls (masonry)



Roofs



Walls (masonry)



Roofs



Walls (timber)



Rendered elevation - north (arrival)



Rendered elevation - south (farmstead)



Rendered elevation - east (small tractor barn)

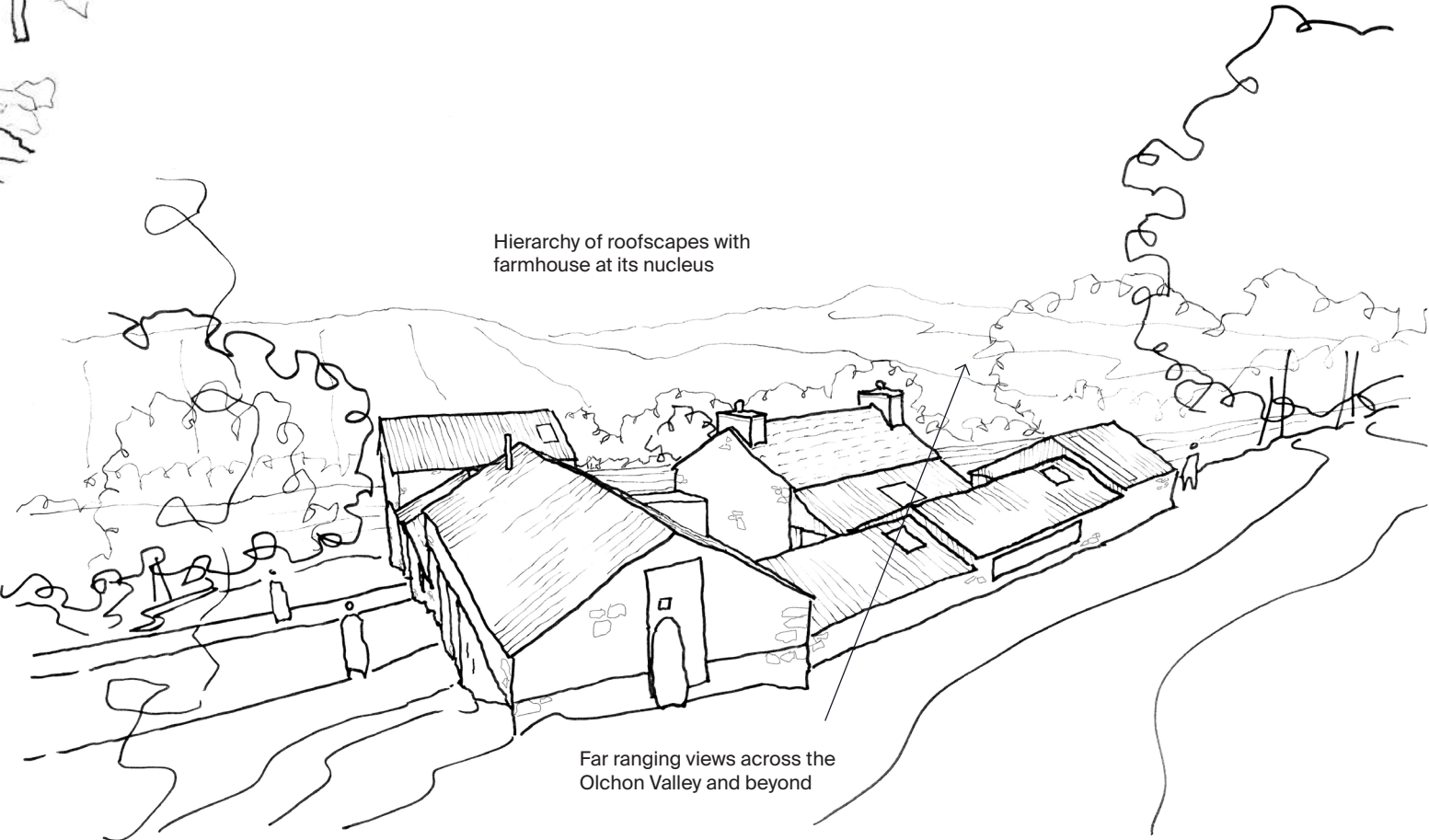
It is worthwhile to note that whilst this illustrates the barn and its background context, in reality the existing hedgerow and trees in the foreground would obscure such a view from the fields below and from the road.



Exterior sketch views - farmhouse prominence

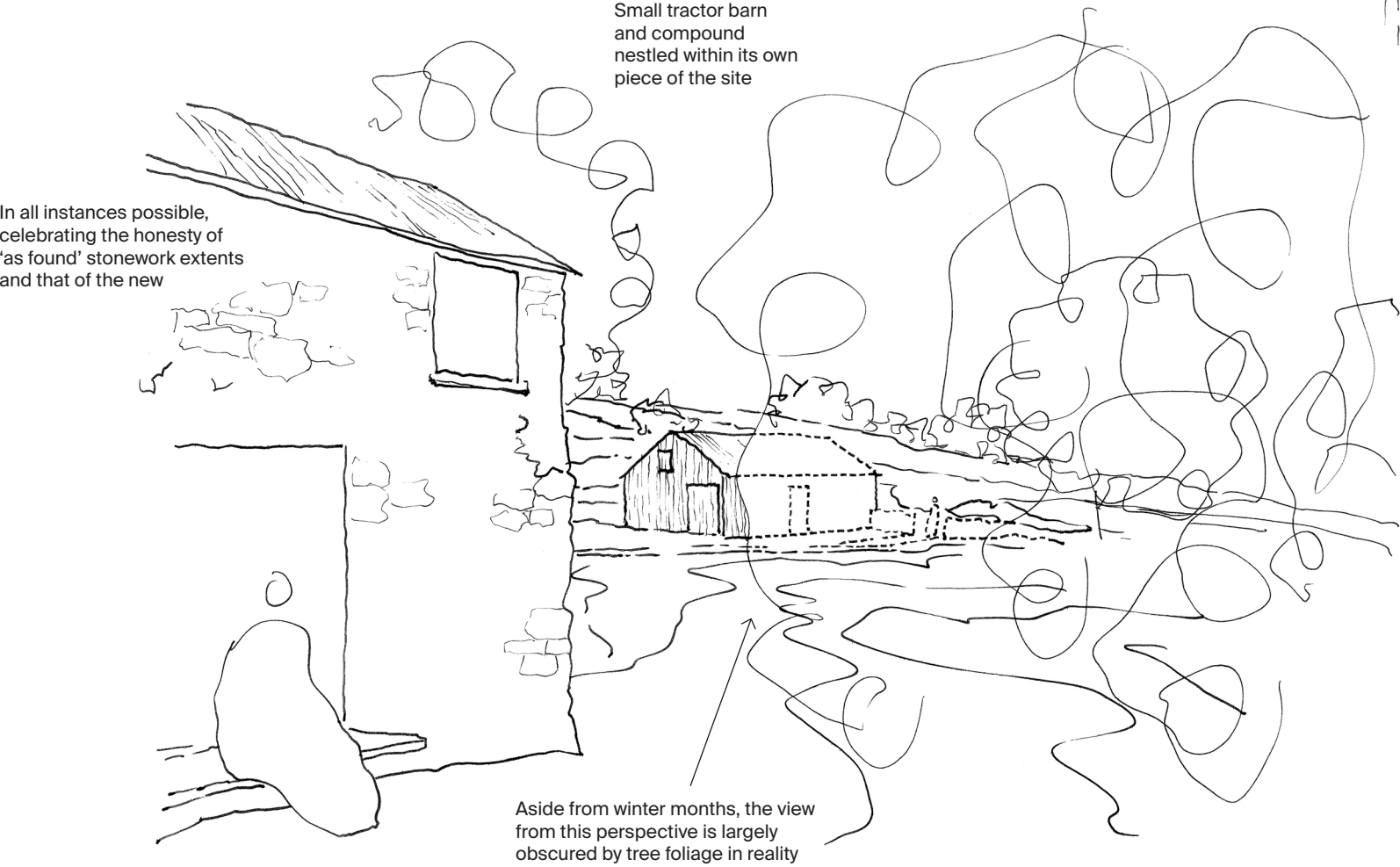


1. Principal elevation

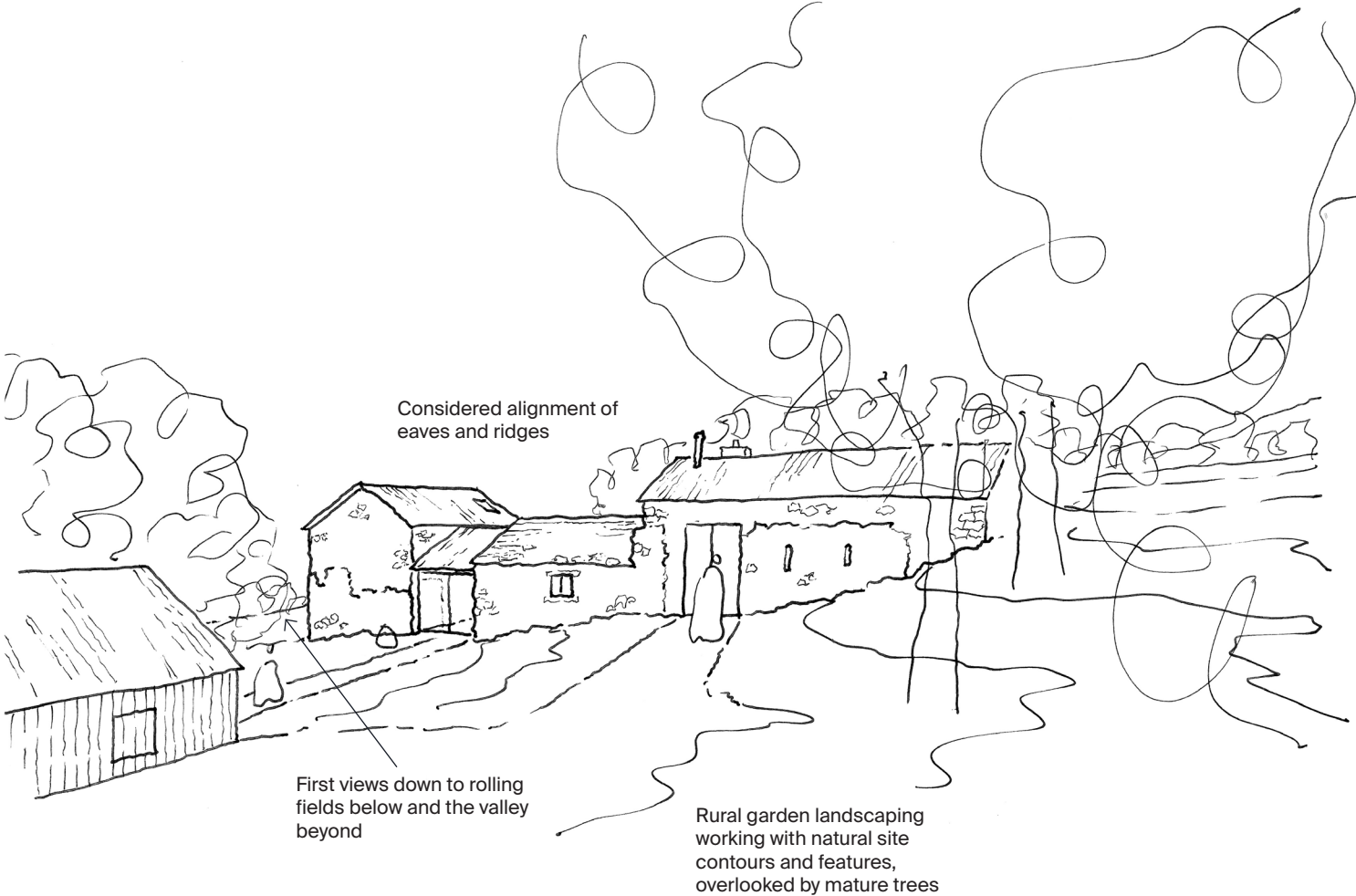


2. Roof typology

Exterior sketch views - beyond the farmstead



3. Hay barn and small tractor barn



4. Threshing barns and small tractor barn

<div>Sustainable development</div> <div>Rural Office have a proven track record of working with existing structures and ensuring that their character and value are retained and enhanced. We are an award-winning architectural practice with a portfolio of sensitively restored historic buildings and new sensitively designed rural dwellings.</div> <div>This proposal aims to establish good building performance by sensitively improving the thermal performance of the buildings and bringing it up to contemporary standards. Using breathable natural materials, the interior of the farmstead buildings will express the original character of the structure where possible, whilst providing air-tight thermally efficient spaces in which to live.</div>	<div>Water and drainage</div> <div>As there is no mains water supply in the valley, incoming water will be provided by a new private supply (borehole and filter system).</div> <div>Surface water runoff is to be managed by the methods detailed in the drainage plan document, these are summarised below:<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Rainwater harvesting is to be considered to reduce the amount of discharged water. It will also present further benefits for the environment and reduce water use as water can be used for non-potable needs within the dwelling, including w/c flushing, washing machines and irrigation;• The resulting run-off from the proposed roof area is to be discharged to either separate attenuation systems as noted in the report, or a single attenuation system of at least 15.12m3;• It is advised that this volume can be achieved by using underground wrapped attenuation crates or by excavating seasonal attenuation ponds;• The surface water runoff will be discharged via a flow management system - further consultancy will be sought in technical design;• The resulting run-off from the impermeable areas, of which there is limited scope, is to be discharged to the local watercourse as per recommendations;• Access track finish is to be permeable gravel with hardcore sub-base. A 'green' track is desirable to replicate the aesthetic of a traditional stone farm track (e.g. gravel tyre tracks/grass centreline), so as not to be over-engineered - any run-off should be reduced as will run-off pollution.</div> <div>Foul water is to be managed separately by the methods also outlined in the drainage plan document, and these are summarised below:<ul style="list-style-type: none">• After considering the site location and geology, the on-site testing has shown that the site is suitable for an off-mains foul drainage system;• The foul drainage will be kept separate to the surface water and roof water drainage system;• The foul drainage from the proposed dwelling will be laid to a single packaged sewage treatment plant (compliant with BSEN.12566-3);• The packaged sewage treatment plant will be located >7m from the proposed dwelling;• The packaged sewage treatment plant will be located <30m of a tanker access hardstanding;• A sample chamber will be installed immediately downstream of the sewage treatment plant;• The discharge point will be protected with a dry-stone headwall.</div>	<div>Power and heating</div> <div>The current provision for mains electrics on site has been via overhead power cables spanning from the road, up through the main field and to the farmhouse. The following considerations are made as part of the proposal:<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Incoming existing power lines are to be disconnected and new cables diverted underground to omit the need for unsightly lines and poles;• The underground lines will likely follow the route of the proposed access track, as a trench may be excavated during the initial programme of works to accommodate (as well as other services, as and if required);• Considerations are also being made for the implementation of either a ground or air source heat pump to facilitate the heating and hot water provision for the scheme. The former is not at all visible externally, so is well suited to potentially fit within the proposed plant room in the small tractor barn - further consultancy will be sought in technical design, but this aspect further demonstrates the viability of this new structure as such a system would be more difficult to install within the existing farmstead.</div>	<div>Other performance considerations</div> <div>Proposals will seek to integrate sustainable building materials and systems:<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Existing structures will be renovated following best-practice conservation and environmental methods, please refer to the heritage report for further details on how the existing buildings can be re-pointed and insulated.• Proposed structures and extensions/additions will offer a greater scope for utilising efficient construction methods and well-insulated build-ups;• U-values will be calculated for floors, walls and roofs respectively to demonstrate overall desired performance and will adhere to guidance and approved building regulations;• Similarly, intentions are for all glazing (windows and roof lights) to be specified as double-glazed at minimum.• Furthermore, the buildings will ensure appropriate means of ventilation, through the use of openable glazing and other means.</div>
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Design Team

Rural Office were appointed to develop proposals for the future redevelopment of the barns in order to complete the restoration of the farm settlement. The practice has won many awards since being established in 2008, including the RIBA House of the Year 2017 and a RIBA National Award for the ground-breaking carbon neutral estate, Caring Wood, in Kent.

A key contributor to our contextual judgment is Sam Hale, a historic building consultant who has worked in the field for 16 years. He co-authored the recent farmsteads characterisation project in the Bannau Brycheiniog N. Park and while completing a Masters Degree at the University of Bath in the Conservation of Historic Buildings he undertook a thesis on historic farm buildings in Herefordshire. Seven years at Ty-Mawr Lime Ltd. as the company’s heritage asset advisor, materials specialist and training co-ordinator equipped Sam with a vast knowledge of vernacular materials and construction techniques, where he continued to survey buildings across Wales.

The portfolio of Rural Office stretches from the rural wilds of West Wales to the North Norfolk countryside, each project sensitively responding to the vernacular context in which it is located.

- From top left, clockwise:
- 1. Carbon neutral estate near Maidstone, Kent
 - 2. Converted tithe barn and piggery, Norfolk
 - 3. Contemporary low energy home, Surrey
 - 4. Rural farmstead, Carmarthenshire
 - 5. Barn restoration and new build, Longtown

To elaborate on the latter project; this is a recently completed restoration and conversion of an historic Grade II listed complex of barns in Longtown, Herefordshire, into a family dwelling, photography studio and community space.

The new building is a contemporary addition, following the principles of Historic England guidance to provide sympathetic additions to settlements which respect the hierarchy and context of the historic fabric.

This project is of high relevance as specialist heritage and conservation advice was sought from the very beginning and it involved lead architects and designers across all stages. Sensitive redevelopment and conservation was key to its success where we worked closely with national heritage bodies, conservation officers and contractors.

