



Bat Survey Report – Preliminary Roost Assessment

35 Balmore Drive, Caversham,
Reading, Berkshire RG4 8NL

December 2020

Report conditions

Project reference	20.1209		
Report title	Bat Survey Report - Preliminary Roost Assessment – 35 Balmore Drive, Caversham, Reading, Berkshire RG4 8NL		
Report status	Final		
Survey dates	Visual: December 22, 2020		
Written by	Adam Eggesfield	Date	December 22, 2020

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Summary

A preliminary bat roost assessment was carried out at 35 Balmore Drive, to assess the possible presence or likely absence of bats and bat roosts in order to support a planning application with Reading Borough Council for a proposed extension.

35 Balmore Drive is a traditionally built semi-detached house, dating from 1954, in the mature residential area of Caversham, Reading. It is of traditional brick construction, with a fully hipped roof of plain concrete tiles and concrete half-round ridge and hip ridge tiles.

The house is oriented with the main ridge running north-south, and it faces east on to Balmore Drive.

The surrounding landscape is found to present low to moderate quality commuting and foraging habitat for bat species more adapted to urban environments.

Visual bat survey work finds no evidence of recent or historic bat roosting activity.

Overall, the house is judged to present low roost suitability due to the presence of a small amount of roost potential to an area of hanging tiles, but the loft, soffits and all areas affected by the development proposals offer negligible roost suitability. The hanging tiles will not be affected.

It is confidently concluded that the development as currently proposed is unlikely to affect bats or bat roosts.

No further survey work is recommended.

In view of the survey findings, it can be concluded that the development is unlikely to result in a breach of the legislation that protected bats and is likely to accord with relevant planning policy with respect to biodiversity.

1. Introduction

Objectives

- 1.1. The purpose of this assessment is to provide information on the possible presence or likely absence of bats at 35 Balmore Drive, to support a planning application with Reading Borough Council. Where bat roosts are identified, or where their presence cannot be confidently ruled out, the report sets out an assessment of the impacts to these and where necessary makes recommendations for measures to avoid, mitigate or compensate for impacts to bats as necessary, dependent on the nature and scale of the impacts.

Site Description

- 1.2. 35 Balmore Drive is a traditionally-built semi-detached house in the mature residential area of Caversham, Reading, built in 1954. The house is of traditional brick construction, with a fully hipped roof of plain concrete tiles and concrete half-round ridge and hip ridge tiles.
- 1.3. The house is oriented with the main ridge running north-south, and it faces east on to Balmore Drive.
- 1.4. Internally, the loft has a layer of glass fibre insulation between the joists and is mostly boarded. The original bitumen paper roof under felt is present.
- 1.5. There is a rendered chimney breast to the partition wall with the adjoining property to the north.
- 1.6. There is a bay window to the front of the house, extending up to roof level. There is a small gable end to the top of the bay dormer with plan concrete hanging tiles to the gable apex face.
- 1.7. There is a mature garden to the rear, mainly laid to lawn and with typical domestic herbaceous borders and shrub planting. There are numerous mature trees in the immediate residential area.
- 1.8. Photos 1 and 2 in Appendix 1 show the front and rear elevations of the house.

Proposed works

- 1.9. The development proposal is for the removal of the existing conservatory and small single-storey rear extension and the construction of a new two-storey extension to the south-west corner (subservient to the existing roof), the construction a new single-storey bathroom to the side, and a new single-storey sunroom to the rear.
- 1.10. The plans in Appendix 2 show the existing and proposed site layout and proposed elevations.

Limitations

- 1.11. All external elevations of the house and garage were fully visible during the survey work. Internally, the house loft was fully accessible.
- 1.12. There are therefore no identified limitations to the survey work.

2. Methods

Desk study

- 2.1. A desk-based assessment was carried out on in December 2020. This used a variety of information. Online ecological data (MAGIC¹) was used to gain information on designated sites and priority habitats within 1km of the site. Aerial photos and Ordnance Survey mapping (again via MAGIC) were used to gain an understanding of the landscape context of the site. MAGIC was also used to identify if any licenses had been granted by Natural England for developments in the search area affecting European protected species (EPS).
- 2.2. A data request from the Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre (TVERC) or the Berkshire and South Bucks Bat Group (BSBBG) was not carried out at this time. Consideration of the value of seeking additional records on the context of the bat use of the site (if present) was taken after the site survey work.

Field survey

- 2.3. A visual bat survey was carried out on December 22, 2020 by Adam Egglesfield of AE Ecology, who holds a current licence to survey bat roosts. Survey methodology used during the work is guided by and consistent with that set out in the Bat Conservation Trust's *'Bat Surveys for Professional Ecologists: Good Practice Guidelines'* 3rd edition, (Collins, J. (ed) 2016).
- 2.4. The house was subject to a detailed internal and external search. The aims of this were to identify evidence of bat activity and/or identify the presence of any features that could potentially support roosting bats or features through which bats could gain access to possible roost locations. External areas were inspected to identify potential bat access points and roosting features. Such features typically include missing, slipped, broken or bowed roof tiles, gaps around fascias and soffits, gaps in brickwork (such as missing mortar or expansion gaps), lifted chimney, roof, or window flashing, and gaps around window and door casements.

¹ Multi-Agency Geographic Information for the Countryside - <http://magic.defra.gov.uk/>

- 2.5. The external inspection also aimed to identify any actual direct evidence of bat use such as droppings adhering to walls, floors or windowsills below gaps, or staining around possible access gaps.
- 2.6. Features were inspected using Opticron Discovery 10x42 close-focusing binoculars and where necessary and safely possible, a ladder. High-powered torches (Clulite Clubman CB2 and Lenser P7.2) were used to illuminate potential roost and roost access features.
- 2.7. Where present and safely accessible, any internal voids and similar spaces were inspected for evidence of bat presence such as live bats, corpses, droppings, feeding remains and staining. The building was subsequently assessed for its suitability to support roosting bats, from 'negligible' to 'high', in line with the survey guidelines.

Foraging and commuting habitat

- 2.8. An assessment was made of the suitability of the site and the surrounding landscape to support foraging and/or commuting bats. The assessment was based on the presence of key habitat features such as woodland, scrub, hedgerows, grassland, and open water and watercourses, which are highly attractive to bats as both a foraging resource and as commuting routes. The presence of such habitats, particularly in a mosaic or network with other suitable habitat, typically increases the potential for structures to be exploited by bats where suitable roost and access opportunities are present. The presence of unlit semi-natural vegetation and habitat linkages between the site and the surrounding landscape were also considered.

3. Results

Desk study

- 3.1. The map in Appendix 3 shows the location of the site and its surrounding relevant ecological interest features produced from MAGIC

Nationally and locally designated sites and notable habitats

- 3.2. There are no statutory designated sites such as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) within the search area.
- 3.3. The area around the application site is dominated by extensive mature residential development and associated traditional retail areas, with some areas of open space such as school playing fields and allotments.
- 3.4. The key ecological feature in the search area are small patches of urban woodland scattered through the urban matrix. There is a larger area of woodland and parkland habitat to the east of the search area at Caversham Park. The River Thames lies just outside the search area to the south.

Protected species

- 3.5. MAGIC holds three records of licences having been granted for works involving bats within the search area. These were for developments affecting small numbers of common pipistrelle *Pipistrellus pipistrellus*, soprano pipistrelle *P. pygmaeus*, and brown long-eared bats *Plecotus auritus*. These all lie towards the southern part of the search area between 750m and 950m from the site.

Preliminary roost assessment

Internals

- 3.6. Internally, the loft was readily accessible – see Photos 3 and 4 for general views of the loft conditions. The floor areas were found to be clear, with no evidence of bat roosting activity (Photo 5). The ridge beam, hip apex, and rafters were examined (Photos 6 and 7), and no recent or historic bat evidence was seen.
- 3.7. The area around the top of the chimney was closely inspected, as were the vertical faces of the chimney breast and partition wall, and the floor areas below these – see Photos 8 and 9. Although there was a fair degree of wind-

blown dust and debris in some areas, no evidence of bat roosting activity was seen in any of these areas.

- 3.8. Where possible, spot checks were carried out under the insulation, and no historic bat evidence seen (Photo 10).
- 3.9. The roof underfelt was in fair condition. There were several areas that had previously been damaged and had subsequently been repaired, and a small number of other areas of damage were noted where the underside of the tiles was visible (Photos 11 and 12). No bat evidence was seen in any of these areas, and no external light was visible through gaps between the tiles large enough to allow bat access.
- 3.10. No bat droppings or urine spotting was seen on any floor areas, domestic services, or stored household items.

Externals

- 3.11. Externally, the roof, ridge, and hip ridge tiles were in a good overall condition. A moderate level of moss growth was noted across the roof faces. No damaged, slipped, or missing tiles were noted, and the tiles appeared well-fitting with no gaps noted that were sufficiently large to allow bats to access – see Photos 13 to 15.
- 3.12. The bedding mortar to the ridge and hip ridge tiles were found to be in good condition with no apparent deterioration or damage (Photo 16).
- 3.13. The flashing around the chimney was in good condition with no lifting or damage noted (Photo 17).
- 3.14. The soffit boxes are understood to have been recently replaced. These were found to be in good condition, and tightly sealed against the external walls with mastic (Photos 18 and 19).
- 3.15. There is a small area of concrete hanging tile to the front bay gable. These were generally found to be in good condition, although some slight unevenness was noted – see Photo 20.

4. Discussion

Legislation and planning policy

- 4.1. Bats are legally protected under both domestic and international law (the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended)² and the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010 (as amended)³ respectively). All native bat species are European Protected Species (EPS). This legislation makes it an offence to kill, injure or disturb bats, or to destroy or damage their roosts, even when the bats are not present.
- 4.2. Paragraph 175 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (MHCLG, 2018) requires that when determining planning applications, if significant harm to biodiversity resulting from a development cannot be avoided (through locating on an alternative site with less harmful impacts), adequately mitigated, or, as a last resort, compensated for, then permission should be refused.
- 4.3. Policy CS36 'Biodiversity and Geology' of the Reading Borough Council Adopted Core Strategy (revised 2015) states that:

"Development should retain, protect and incorporate features of biodiversity or geological interest (including protected species and their habitats) found within the application site into their schemes."

- 4.4. The supporting text to the policy states that

"Protected species identified by the Species Action Plan of the Reading Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) and their habitats must also be protected from any direct or indirect harm resulting from development."

Interpretation of habitat context

- 4.5. The habitat around the site is dominated by mature residential development. Although this is not typically higher-quality bat foraging or commuting habitat, the network of larger mature gardens, street trees, and small patches of urban woodland do provide a reasonable habitat resource for bats more adapted to urban environments. Overall, it would be considered that the surrounding

² <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1981/69>

³ <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2010/490/contents/made>

area is of low to moderate quality as a bat foraging resource, although more suited to more widespread species such as pipistrelles, and less likely to be regularly exploited by rarer or more light-sensitive bat species.

Interpretation of roost suitability

- 4.6. The loft does provide a suitable roost location due to the construction and dimensions. However, there are no points that bats could exploit to gain access into the loft, and no evidence to suggest that bats have recently or historically roosted here. Externally, the roof tiles – including all areas of the rear corner of the roof affected by the development – are in good condition, as are the soffits. These areas do not exhibit any features that could be exploited by crevice-roosting bat species such as common or soprano pipistrelles.
- 4.7. The only area of possible roost suitability at the house is the small area of hanging tile to the front. This is largely unsuitable as the tiles are reasonably well fitting, but the slight general unevenness of the tiles has resulted in a small number of smaller gaps that could occasionally be exploited by crevice-roosting bats.
- 4.8. Overall, it is concluded that 35 Balmore Drive offers low bat roost suitability due to the small area of hanging tiles, but the loft and roof areas, including all areas affected by the development, offer negligible roost suitability.
- 4.9. It is confidently concluded therefore, that the development proposals at 35 Balmore Drive are unlikely to affect bats or bat roosts.

Recommendations

- 4.10. As it is concluded that the development is unlikely to affect bats, there is no recommendation for any further bat survey work.

5. Conclusions

- 5.1. Visual bat survey work at 35 Balmore Drive found no evidence of recent or historic bat roosting activity.
- 5.2. Overall, the house was judged to present low roost suitability due to the presence of a small amount of roost potential to the hanging tiles, but the loft, soffits and all areas affected by the development proposals offer negligible roost suitability. The hanging tiles will not be affected.
- 5.3. It is confidently concluded that the development as currently proposed is unlikely to affect bats or bat roosts.
- 5.4. No further survey work is recommended.
- 5.5. In view of the survey findings, it can be concluded that the development is unlikely to result in a breach of the legislation that protected bats and is likely to accord with relevant planning policy with respect to biodiversity.

References

- Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM). (2013), *Guidelines for Preliminary Ecological Appraisal*. CIEEM; Winchester.
- Collins, J. (ed.) (2016). *Bat Surveys for Professional Ecologists: Good Practice Guidelines (3rd edn)*. Bat Conservation Trust; London.
- MHCLG, (2018). *National Planning Policy Framework*. Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government; London.
- Mitchell-Jones, A. J. (2004). *Bat Mitigation Guidelines*. English Nature; Peterborough.

Appendix 1 – Photos



Photo 1 Front of house



Photo 2 Rear of house



Photo 3 General conditions in main loft (northern partition wall)



Photo 4 General conditions in main loft southern hip gable end)



Photo 5 Main floor area of loft

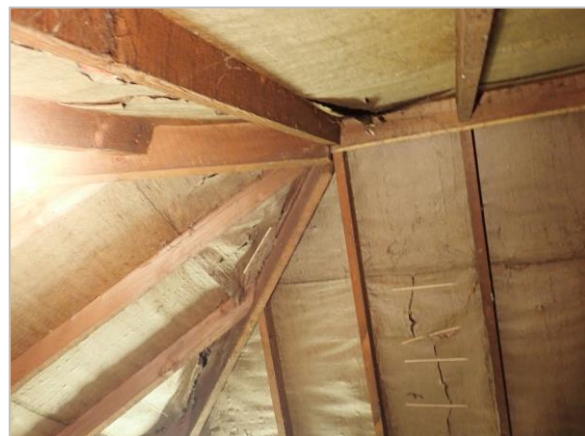


Photo 6 Ridge, rafters, and hip apex timbers



Photo 7 Ridge



Photo 8 Top of chimney breast



Photo 9 Chimney breast



Photo 10 Spot check beneath insulation



Photo 11 Repairs to underfelt



Photo 12 Damage to felt showing underside of tiles



Photo 13 Roof tiles to rear of house



Photo 14 Roof tiles to front of house



Photo 15 Roof tiles to small rear single storey extension



Photo 16 Hip ridge tiles in good condition



Photo 17 Chimney flashing



Photo 18 Soffit around south-west (rear) corner of house

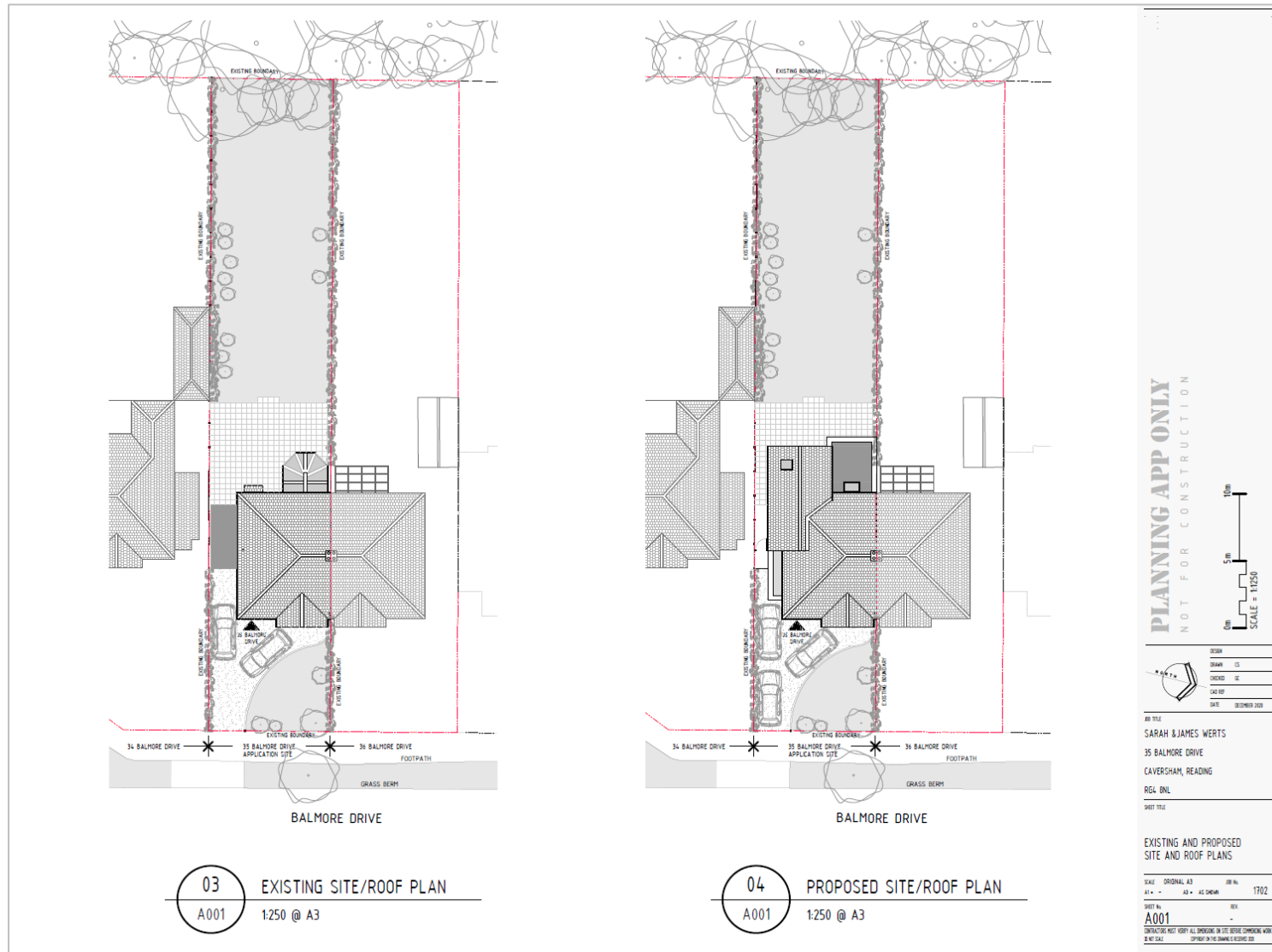


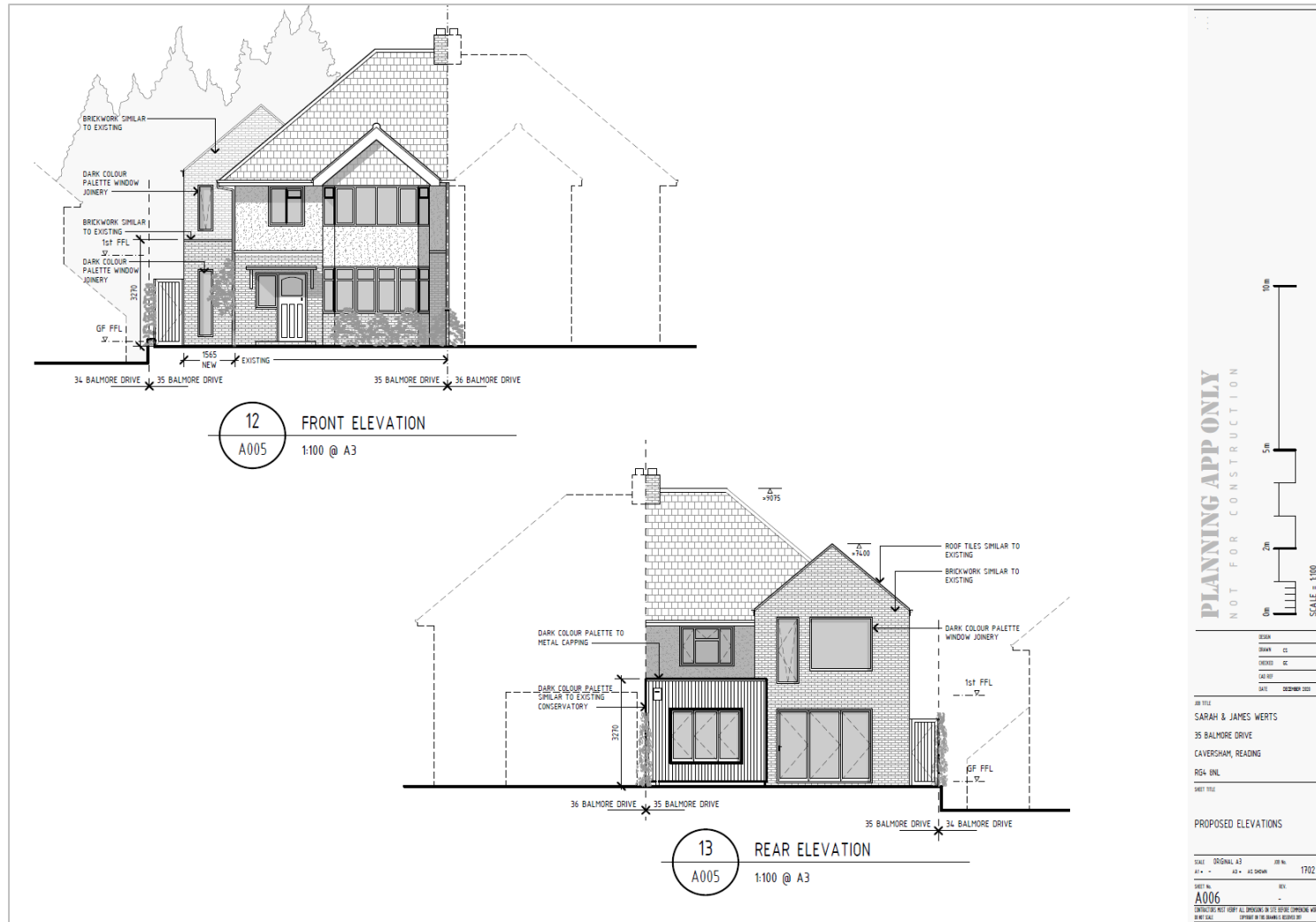
Photo 19 Soffit



Photo 20 Hanging tiles to front of house

Appendix 2 – Existing and proposed plans





Appendix 3 – MAGIC map

