

ST JOHNS FARM – ARBORICULTURAL RESPONSE

16/07/2026

Site Address: St Johns Farm, Trout Lane, Brooks Green

Application Reference: DC-26-0703

Proposed Development: Demolition of existing buildings and erection of 4 no dwelling houses with associated parking and landscaping

Overview

The Tree Officer has raised some general comments relating to the proximity of the proposed development and the adjacent Ancient Woodland, Madgeland Wood.

However, it is important that any assessment of this development take into full account the existing impoverished conditions of the site due to the extent of the established built form, in order to understand how the arboriculturally-led design approach that has informed the scheme will ultimately improve and enhance the setting of St. Johns Farn and adjacent Madgeland Wood.

St Johns Farm is an agricultural site with some industrial use which has resulted in storage, vehicle movement, areas of hard landscaping, compacted ground, soil disturbance, and other forms of degradation around the periphery of the site. The existing buildings were constructed up to the Ancient Woodland edge, so much of the buffer zone includes barns, industrial and agricultural buildings, and extensive hard landscaping with no ecological value.

To avoid any undue harm on the ancient woodland, the residential design has been designed around the Arboricultural constraints of the site. The proposed residential development does not require any new development within the Ancient Woodland or Ancient Woodland Buffer Zone as it currently exists. Instead, development is reduced in scale with residential buildings set within the footprint of the original buildings. Furthermore new dwellings have been pulled back away from the woodland edge to create a gap between the build form and the woodland edge.

The proposed scheme results in a highly sensitive low-density residential redevelopment of an existing farmstead, which is sympathetic to the surrounding woodland and provides numerous areas whereby the woodland edge will be improved with the removal of hard landscaping and storage and replaced with a more natural looking woodland edge. By this means the development will greatly improve the current relationship between the site and the woodland edge.

Existing Site Condition and Baseline

The existing condition of parts of the woodland edge and buffer area is not one of an undisturbed natural transition. The site has been subject to previous activity associated with the farm / industrial use, including storage, vehicle movement, areas of hard landscaping, compacted ground, soil disturbance, and other forms of degradation. The proposal should therefore be assessed against the existing condition of the site rather than an assumption of an unaffected woodland buffer.

The relevant consideration is whether the proposed development would result in harm to the Ancient Woodland or deterioration of its ecological function. In this case, the proposal greatly enhances the existing buffer through the expansion of soft landscaped areas, removal of large areas of hard landscaping surfaces and reducing the volume of buildings within the site.

Arboriculturally-Led Design Approach

The constraints posed by trees and the Ancient Woodland have been a fundamental factor in determining the form and arrangement of the development. The residential layout has been guided and amended in response to Arboricultural feedback throughout the design process to ensure that:

- New dwellings are sat within the footprint of the existing buildings and pulled back away from the woodland where possible,
- New residential gardens are also within the footprint of the existing buildings and / or existing areas of hard landscaping
- Buildings along the northeast and northwest boundaries have been pulled into the site away from the woodland edge to create a gap to the edge of the woodland and to provide reasonable clearance between tree canopies and the proposed residential dwellings;
- The scheme is based around the identified arboricultural constraints of the site with no new development within the root protection areas of retained trees.
- Firm garden boundaries will protect the woodland edge to avoid encroachment on completion of the residential development.

This approach ensures that the proposal represents a sensitive redevelopment of an already developed site rather than an encroachment into previously unaffected land.

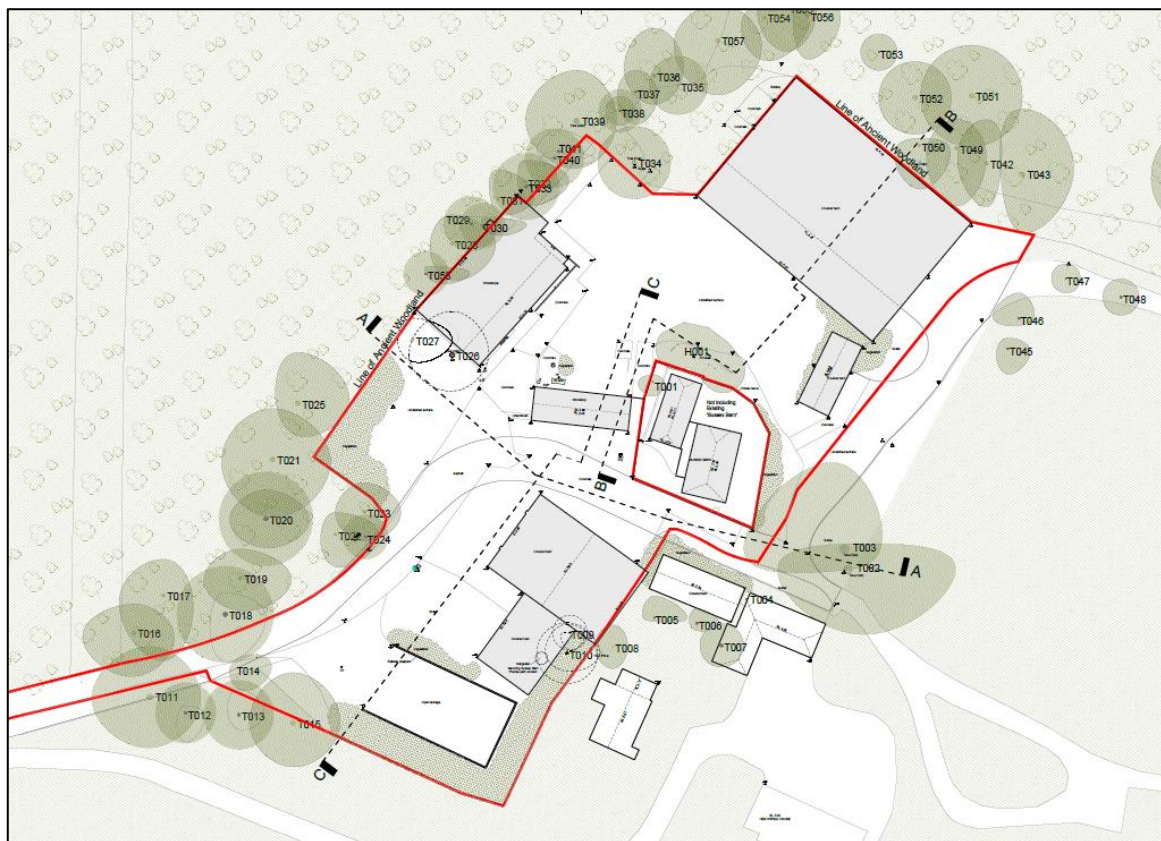


Figure 1 - Existing Site Plan

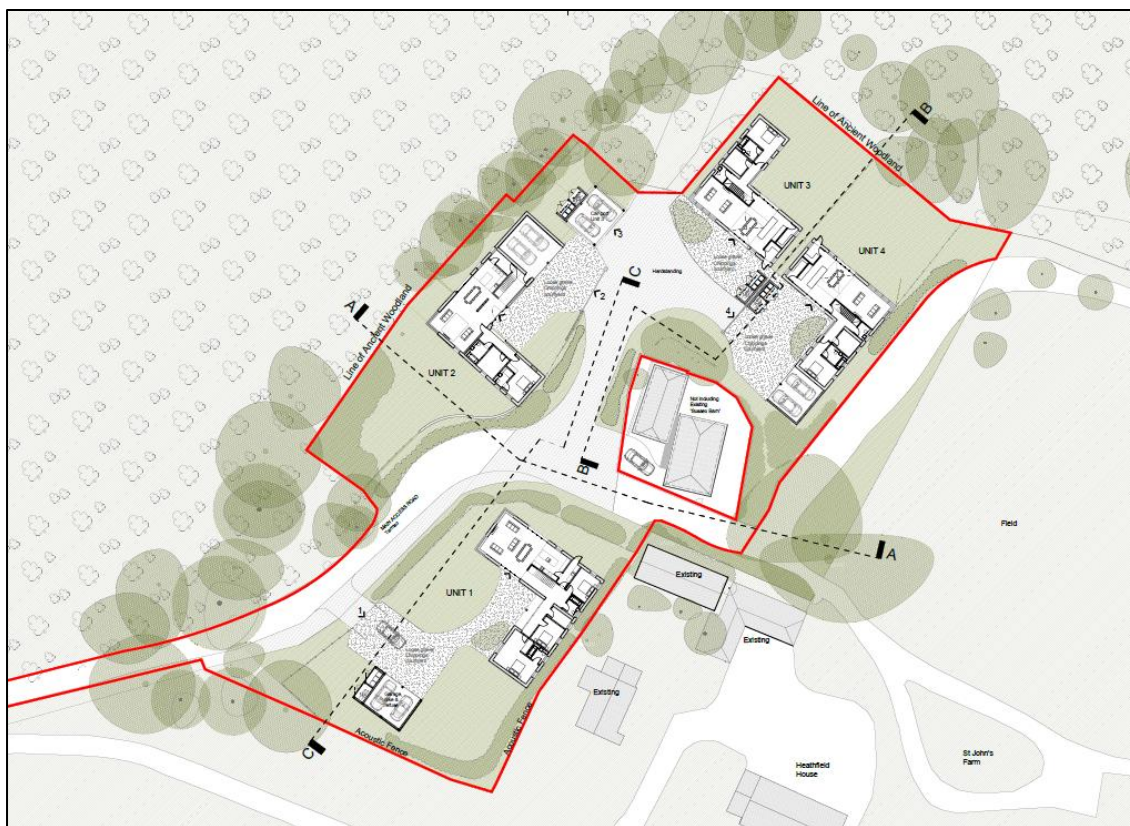


Figure 2 - Proposed Site Plan showing areas of outbuildings and hard landscaping returned to soft landscaping

Improvement of the Buffer Zone

An important benefit of the proposal is the change in the character of land within parts of the existing buffer area. Areas currently occupied by buildings and hard landscaping will be removed and replaced with soft landscaping. This represents a substantial reduction in built form and impermeable surfaces within the buffer zone which will benefit the adjacent trees and woodland.

The replacement of hardstanding and disturbed areas with permeable landscaped areas also provides the opportunity for:

- Improved soil conditions;
- Greater water infiltration;
- Additional planting opportunities; and
- A more appropriate transition between the residential edge and the woodland.

The proposal therefore provides a managed and improved woodland edge compared with the existing situation, where parts of the buffer are characterised by historic disturbance and hard surfaces.

Residential Use and Woodland Management

The Council has raised concerns that residential occupation could place additional pressure on the Ancient Woodland. However, the proposed development would introduce a defined and managed relationship between the site and the woodland edge.

The current site already contains development and activity immediately adjacent to the woodland. The proposal replaces this existing arrangement with a controlled residential edge where appropriate measures can be secured, including:

- Sensitive boundary treatments;
- Appropriate landscape management;
- Control of external lighting; and
- Protection of retained trees and vegetation.

Through these measures, the relationship between the development and the woodland can be appropriately managed in the long term.

Tree Protection

The submitted Arboricultural Impact Assessment and Method Statement demonstrate that retained trees can be protected in accordance with BS5837:2012 and that construction impacts can be appropriately managed with tree protection fencing.

Conclusion

The proposal should be considered in the context of the existing developed and disturbed nature of the site. In this context, it is evident that the current scheme is an extremely sensitive and well considered residential scheme which has been designed with arboricultural considerations from the outset.

The residential layout removes large areas of hardstanding and the scale of development within the Ancient Woodland buffer zone. New buildings within the Ancient Woodland Buffer Zone are located within the footprints of the much larger buildings which it replaces.

Furthermore, the new gardens associated with the residential properties are also fully within the footprint of existing buildings and / or areas of hard landscaping. These areas can then be soft landscaped, planted up with native plants in keeping with the setting so as to enhance the amenity and ecology of the Ancient Woodland Buffer Zone.

I am therefore satisfied therefore that the proposal does not result in the loss or deterioration to Madgeland Wood nor is it detrimental to the setting of the Ancient Woodland. Instead, this scheme provides an opportunity to improve and enhance the current impoverished and damaged condition of the existing woodland edge.

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