

3 Context - the Conservation Area and listed building

Gravesend Borough Council

Section 3: Context - the Conservation Area and listed building

3.1 Cobham Conservation Area

3.2 The existing buildings

3.1 Cobham Conservation Area

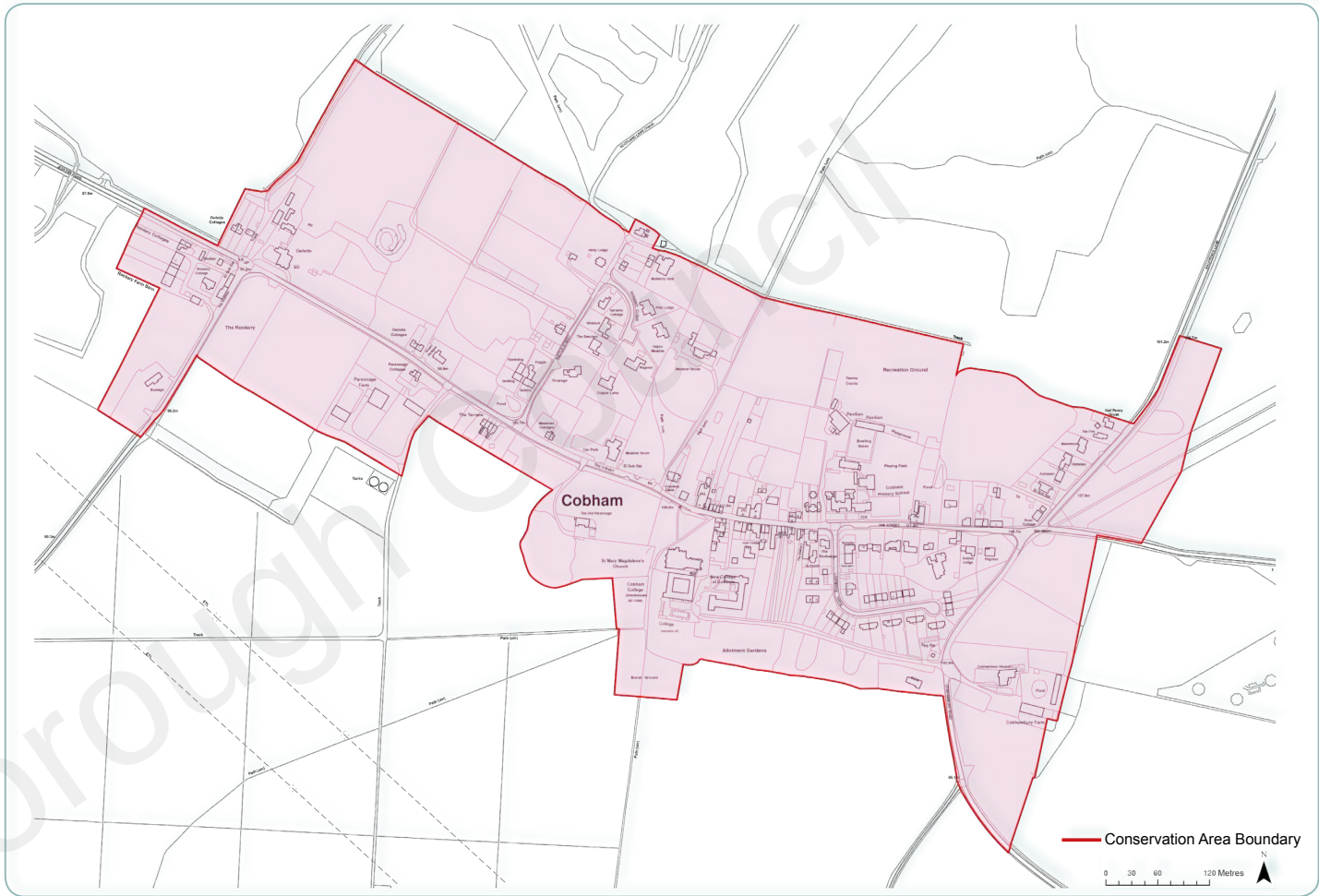
According to the Cobham Conservation Appraisal (CAA) SPD, adopted in February 2017, the Conservation Area lies on high ground in a rural chalk-land setting and spreads out along a main thoroughfare, The Street, which roughly runs east-west.

Its special interest lies in the three distinct zones of landscape/townscape:

- the high, open, eastern part of The Street with the War Memorial and its group of historic houses to the east, and its 'pinch point' hemmed in by historic back-of-footway development to the west;
- the hill top area at the village centre, with the medieval church, college, Stone House and the graveyard; and
- a lower western zone along The Street and Battle Street with sporadic historic development among small fields and open spaces, enclosed by trees.

The CAA notes that the outer zones of the village, comprised of distinctly different undeveloped spaces, with recreational, agricultural and wooded character contribute to the local setting and character of the village and almost completely conceal its historic core from outside view.

The CAA notes the survival (although in changed form and function) of the two historic farmsteads that marked the eastern and western ends of the village at Cobhambury and Owletts respectively. These are clearly evident on the 1819 OS map opposite. Both were associated with orchards (cherry and apple) but these have disappeared.



The Cobham Conservation Area boundary extends eastwards to include historic buildings in Cobhambury Farm but excludes the proposed development site. The Conservation Area review in 2017 did not recommend changing the boundaries of the Conservation Area.

The wider setting of the Conservation Area is formed by:

- modern orchards and woodland to the north
- the open parkland of Cobham Hall's west park to the east
- the open arable landscape falling away to the south-east and south climbing to distant wooded hillsides and valleys
- large scale modern orchards to the south-west on former arable land
- rolling arable land to the west, with a Country Park to the north-west

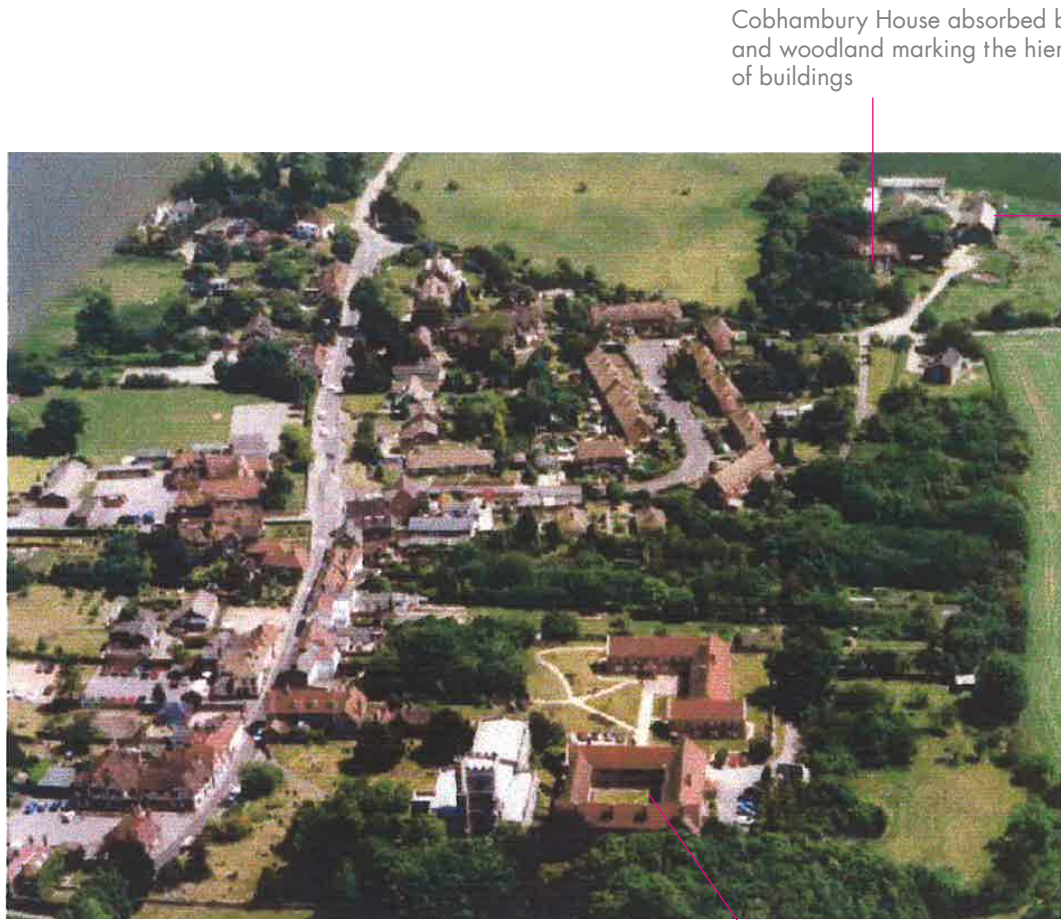


The wider setting of the Cobham Conservation Area: the land falls away to the south-east and south before climbing to distant wooded hillsides and valleys. Views across this landscape are possible as the eastern edge of the site has lost its field boundary vegetation.

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Cobhambury House absorbed by trees and woodland marking the hierarchy of buildings

2-storey Cobhambury Barn marks the outlier historic farmstead at the eastern end of the Cobham Conservation Area

Treebelts to north and west separate Cobhambury from the village. However the eastern boundary of the farm is now open, so that containment by landscape is now incomplete.

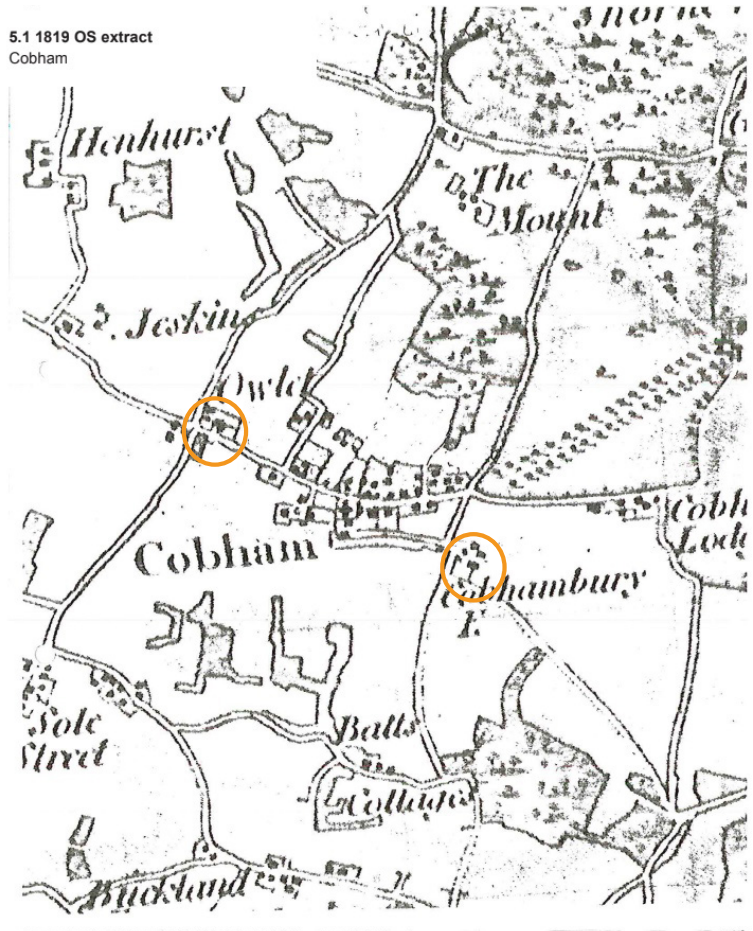
Tree cover is prominent in open spaces around the historic core of the village and produces enclosure so that buildings are absorbed into the landscape - a characteristic quality of the Conservation Area

courtyard buildings related to the historic Grade I listed Cobham College lying adjacent to the Church



Cobhambury Farm is separated from the village to the west by treebelts along its northern and western edges and a sunken lane bounds its southern edge

The interaction between buildings, the landscape (and the economic uses of the landscape) underpin the qualities of the Cobham Conservation Area. Farming practices and a 21st century economy are changing this interrelationship.



1819 OS Map of Cobham clearly shows the historic farmsteads of 'Owl' and Cobhambury forming the west and east 'markers' at the ends of the village.

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The farmstead historically consisted of a multi-courtyard form, still recognisable, despite loss of some key buildings and functional changes. The farmstead and immediate setting is well enclosed by trees and woodland apart from on its eastern edge.

Cobhambury farm, which comprises a cluster of buildings and associated land has changed significantly with the conversion of buildings to residential and other uses. Some historic buildings have been lost.

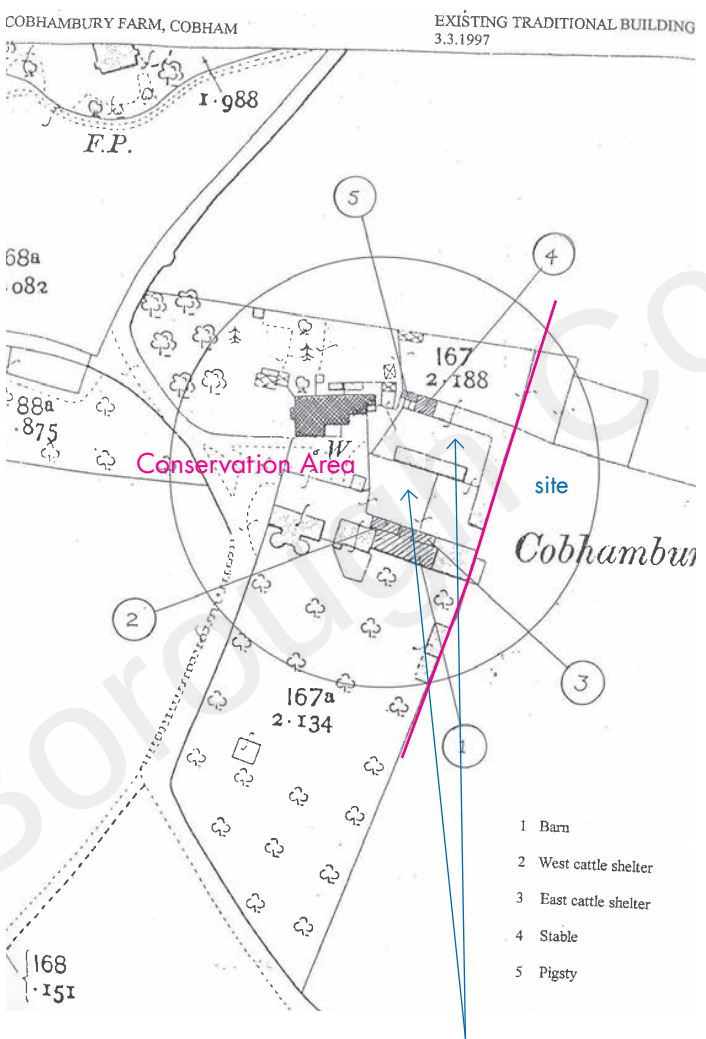
Cobhambury House, the original farmhouse survives and listed (Grade II) in 1970. It dates from the 18th and early 19th century. It is largely hidden from view from outside the site. Cobhambury Barn, converted to residential use some 20 years ago, probably stands on the site of an earlier barn. The two storey building is visible in some views from the south and Lodge Lane, to the north, due to breaks in field boundary vegetation. The Kent Historic Environment Record refers to the form of the farm as a regular multi-courtyard.

The two-roundel oasthouse and granary have disappeared whilst some of the single storey cattle sheds have been converted to office, residential and garaging uses. The pond now occupies the farmyard space.

The CAA notes that ‘the field immediately to the south of Cobhambury Farm, which is formerly orchard, now arable forms the setting of the building group of the barn and house’.

The CAA also noted the wider context including enclosure by woodland to the north, by high roadside hedges to the west and south and the sunken lane to the south.

Historic maps show the house and barn, the regular multi-courtyard farm buildings and the orchard to the south in the immediate setting of the farm.



Cobhambury House lies to the north-west of the pond which now occupies the former farmyard. It is enclosed by trees on all sides.



The hierarchy of buildings; farmhouse to the left, Cobhambury Barn to the right, and behind the trees, the single storey animal building now workshops, accommodation and offices. The oast which would have been in the foreground, completing the group, is now absent.



The late 19th century/early 20th century map shows that the main courtyard (part of the curtilage of Cobhambury House) was once two courtyards, created by animal housing. Some of this building has been removed, leaving a large single courtyard as shown left, and replaced by a pond. The form and scale of these, effectively two, courtyards will be replicated in the proposal.

Cobhambury Barn is a large 19th century timber barn which forms a part of what the Kent Historic Environment Record refers to as a regular multi-yard courtyard.



Cobhambury Barn, now residential, marks the eastern edge of the farm cluster whilst parking and storage occupies land to the east.

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There is a hierarchy of building materials used in the Conservation Area, all available locally as was typical until the arrival of the railways. Earth materials were used for more significant buildings such as Cobhambury House - brick, tile hanging, render (see previous page), and sometimes for the lower courses of animal and farm buildings. Timber, on an oak frame pre-19th century, softwood later, was used as a cladding. Slate roofing as here is a later innovation requiring imported materials, enabled by the railway system. Cobhambury House uses clay tiles.

Former farm sheds have been converted to garaging, residential and offices arranged around the pond.



The existing single storey barn contains a number of modern windows and doors, some of UPVC; these will be replaced by more appropriate materials and detailing as part of the development proposal.



4 Scheme progression

Gravesham Borough Council

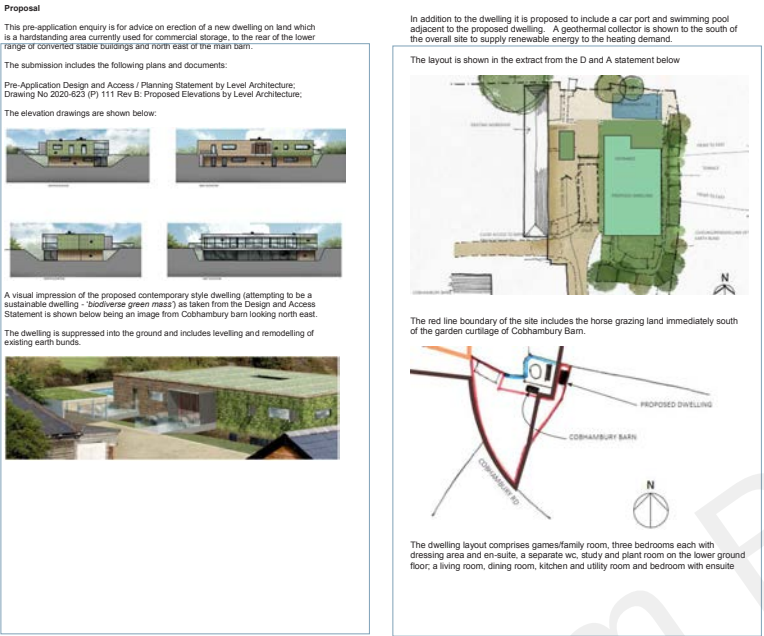
Section 4: Scheme progression

- 4.1 Originally proposed scheme
- 4.2 Response to the site
- 4.3 Design principles
- 4.4 Design progression

4.1 Originally proposed scheme

It is clear from the location adjacent to the Conservation Area, not far from a grade II listed building, and within the AONB, that the landscape context is important to any proposal here. The earlier scheme, below, by others, did not take this 'landscape-led' approach.

This proposal (extracts below), presented in 2020, was not in sympathy with the objectives set out here, and was criticised by Design South East.



This proposal was appraised by Design South East on 9th December 2022 who made some specific comments, although it was made clear that some necessary information was lacking. DSE recommended that the design should be landscape-led, because of its setting and that the context of the development on a farm at the edge of the Conservation Area was a key consideration meriting analysis to be taken into account in the design. Materials and form were considered to be out of character and there were concerns about light pollution and its effect on the AONB. A visual appraisal was recommended and clarity on the access road and parking arrangements were requested. DSE's opinion was that sustainability was an important consideration in the design of this building and that further thought should be given to the quality of residential space and planning. Further comments were made about the planning route to be used.

4.2 Response to the site

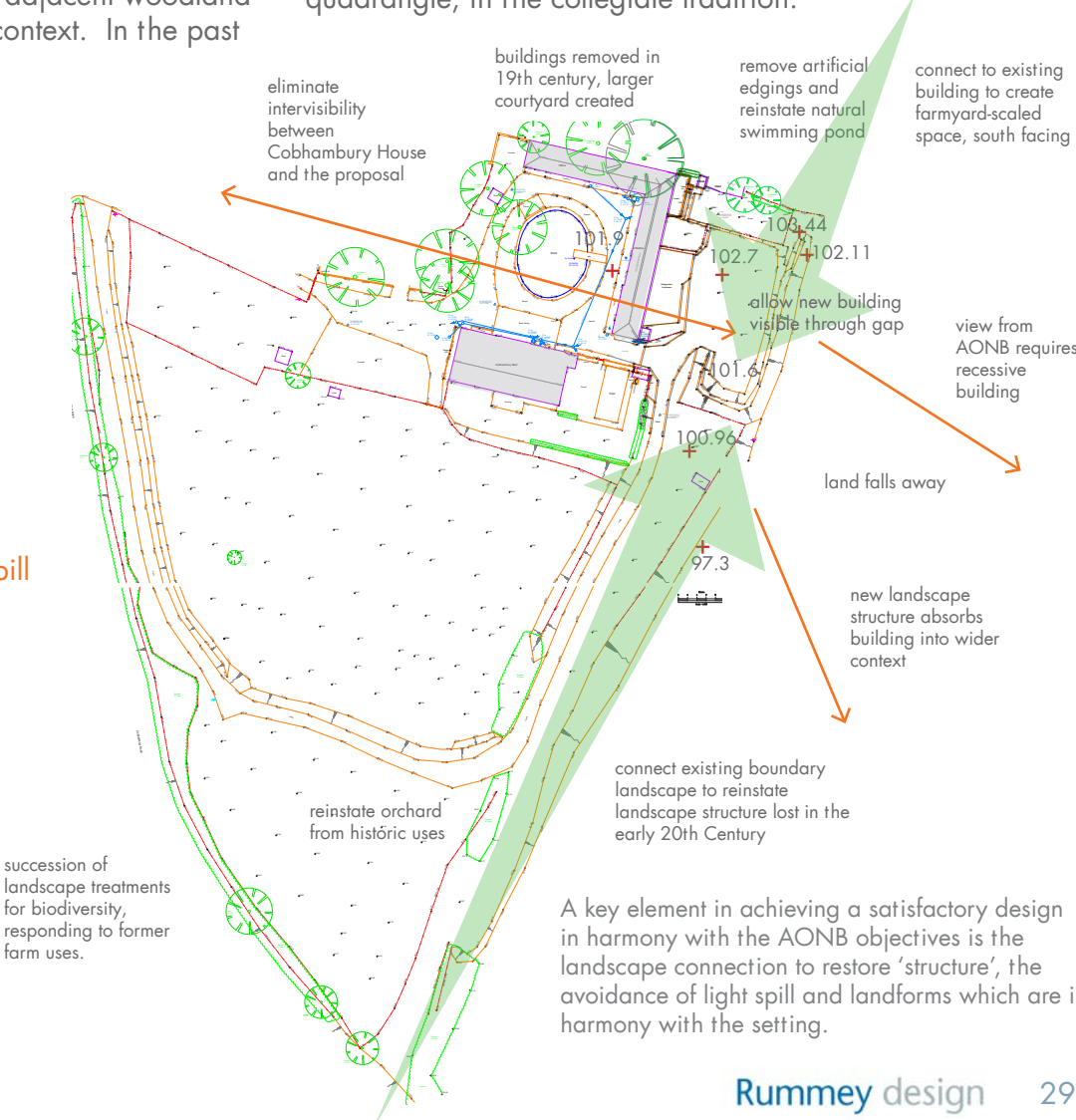
- Objectives:
- The sequence of design progression is concerned with;
- the proposal's relationship with the ANOB, and with traditional farm form;
 - it is concerned not to impinge on the curtilage of the listed Cobhambury House but to be sympathetic to the context in terms of visibility, scale, materiality, farm form and existing and future landscapes;
 - it aims, within its small scale, to repair the landscape and 'put something back' for the future.

The site sits as an outlier of Cobham Village on relatively high land with dramatic slopes away from the site, south east towards the Medway valley. The chalk uplands give the site and its context its rolling landscape character divided on its steeper slopes by shaws of woodland, often producing a 'closed' landscape with limited visibility of built development. As set out in the Conservation Area citation, it is often difficult to obtain views of Cobham because it 'nestles' into its enclosing landscape. This is still true of Cobhambury House where adjacent woodland and trees absorb the building into its context. In the past

this would also have been true of the main barn on the site because there were large orchards to the south of the site, now removed, and a stronger treebelt/hedgerow to the east along the boundary with adjacent agricultural fields. Vestiges of the eastern field boundary vegetation remain but to the east of the proposed house this has been largely lost.

An appropriate design response to this site would be for any development to be 'landscape-led' with new building absorbed into the existing landscape through earth form and vegetation cover. This has been the starting point of this proposal. A second design prompt comes from the form of agricultural buildings in the area which are often in the form of a tightly enclosed courtyard consisting of a main 'tithe' barn, with subsidiary animal houses and stables and with a farmhouse displaying its importance. That is precisely the form of Cobhambury Farm. Even though some buildings have been removed there is a hierarchy of buildings ranging from farmhouse, then the tithe barn, then the L-shaped single storey barn. It would be appropriate for any new development to learn from the hierarchy. This form of development was present in the 14th century Cobham College (see page 25) where almshouses are clustered in a quadrangle, in the collegiate tradition.

- Design prompts:
- landform
 - visibility
 - avoidance of light spill
 - enclosure by trees
 - building hierarchy
 - farmyard form



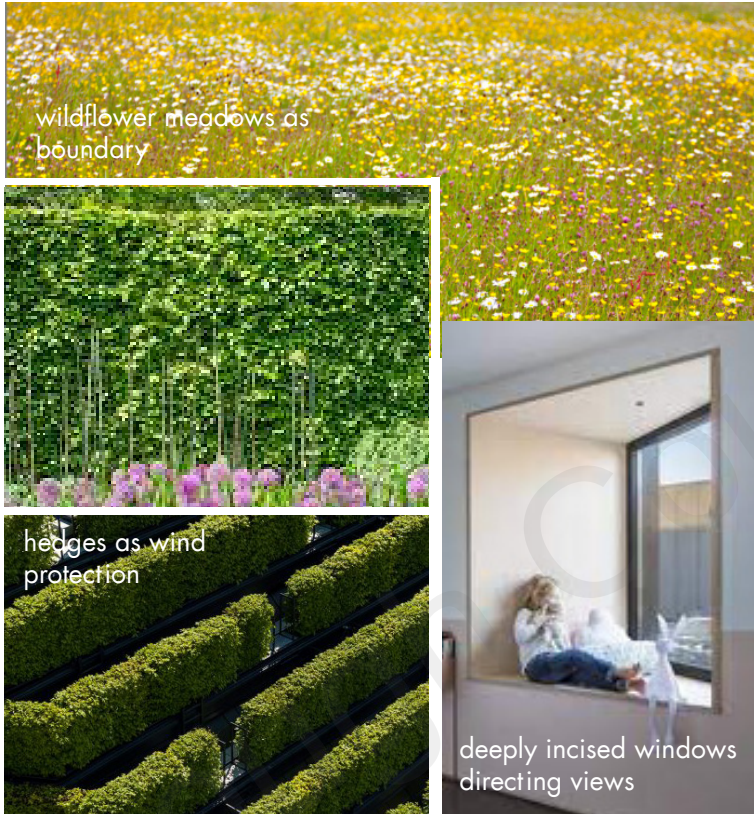
A key element in achieving a satisfactory design in harmony with the AONB objectives is the landscape connection to restore 'structure', the avoidance of light spill and landforms which are in harmony with the setting.

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4.3 Design principles

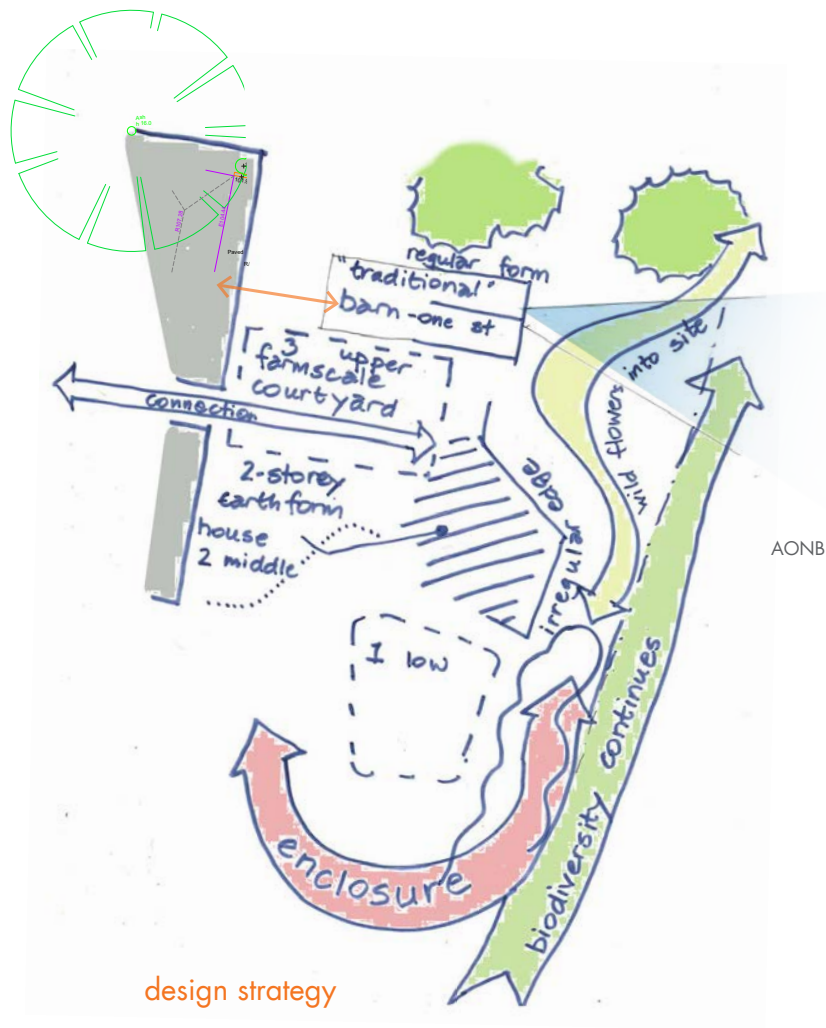
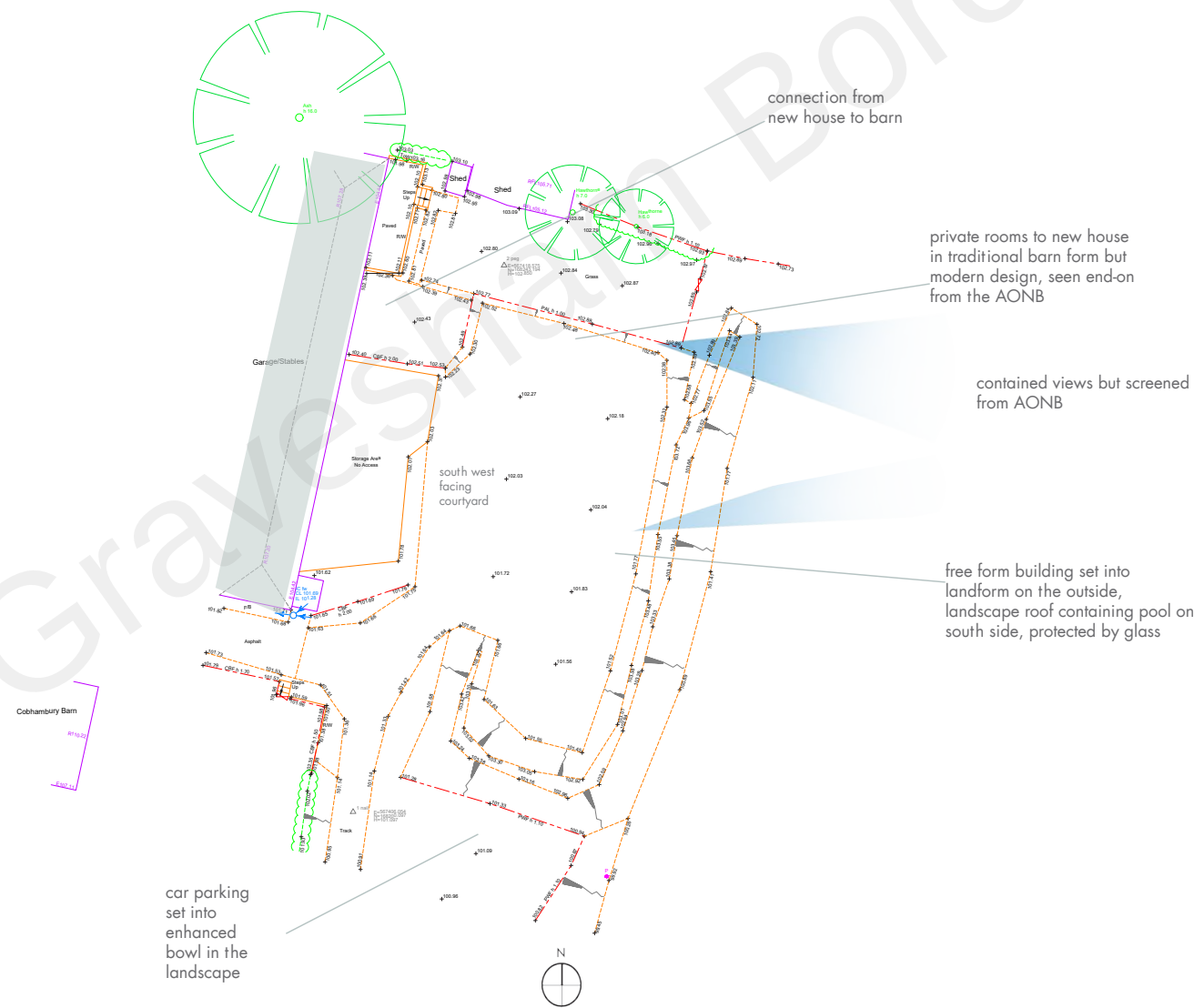
- traditional barn connects to and respects existing barn building
- siting of buildings allows a 'soft' edge to the site with the effect of the AONB extended into the site through wildflower meadows etc
- existing tree cover frames the view of the building
- enclosure is given to the southern edge for visual exclusion and wind protection
- the edge of the site is treated to be as biodiverse as possible
- the connection through the existing barns requires part of the workshop to be taken away but allows a visual connection between the pond jetty and the central part of the new house
- non-rectilinear geometry of landform building allows it to merge into landscape on open landscape side
- levels allow one storey in the ground minimising impact on AONB



The design principles start to suggest a design strategy;

- the building is 'fragmented' into two parts linked by a glazed cloister to break the mass as seen from the AONB and to enclose south-facing space without sacrificing the view
- the private part of the house is to the north connecting to Jessica's house in a single storey barn
- the public parts of the house are to the south close to the car park with contrived views over the AONB
- this produces an inside courtyard which faces south and gives the connection through the existing barn to the pond, and an outside which is a wildflower meadow as an extension of the biodiverse eastern boundary to be encouraged as part of the application

The long distance AONB view is important but so is the immediate foreground of new wildflower meadows which come right up to the eastern windows of the building. Dramatic views are available from deeply incised windows, eliminating any impact on the AONB. The pool and the courtyard are protected by glazed screens and hedges.



Section 4: Scheme progression

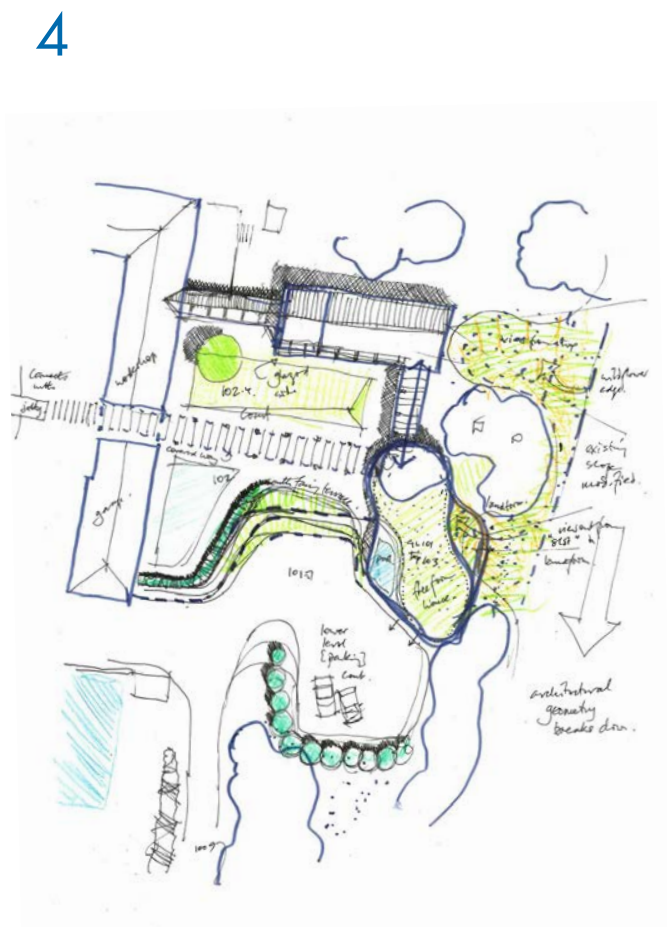
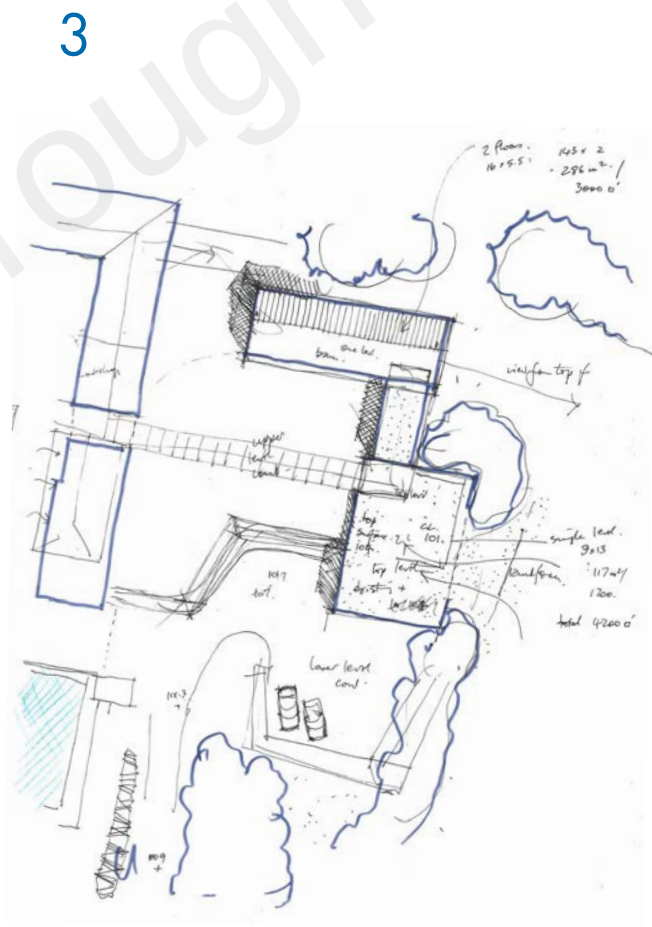
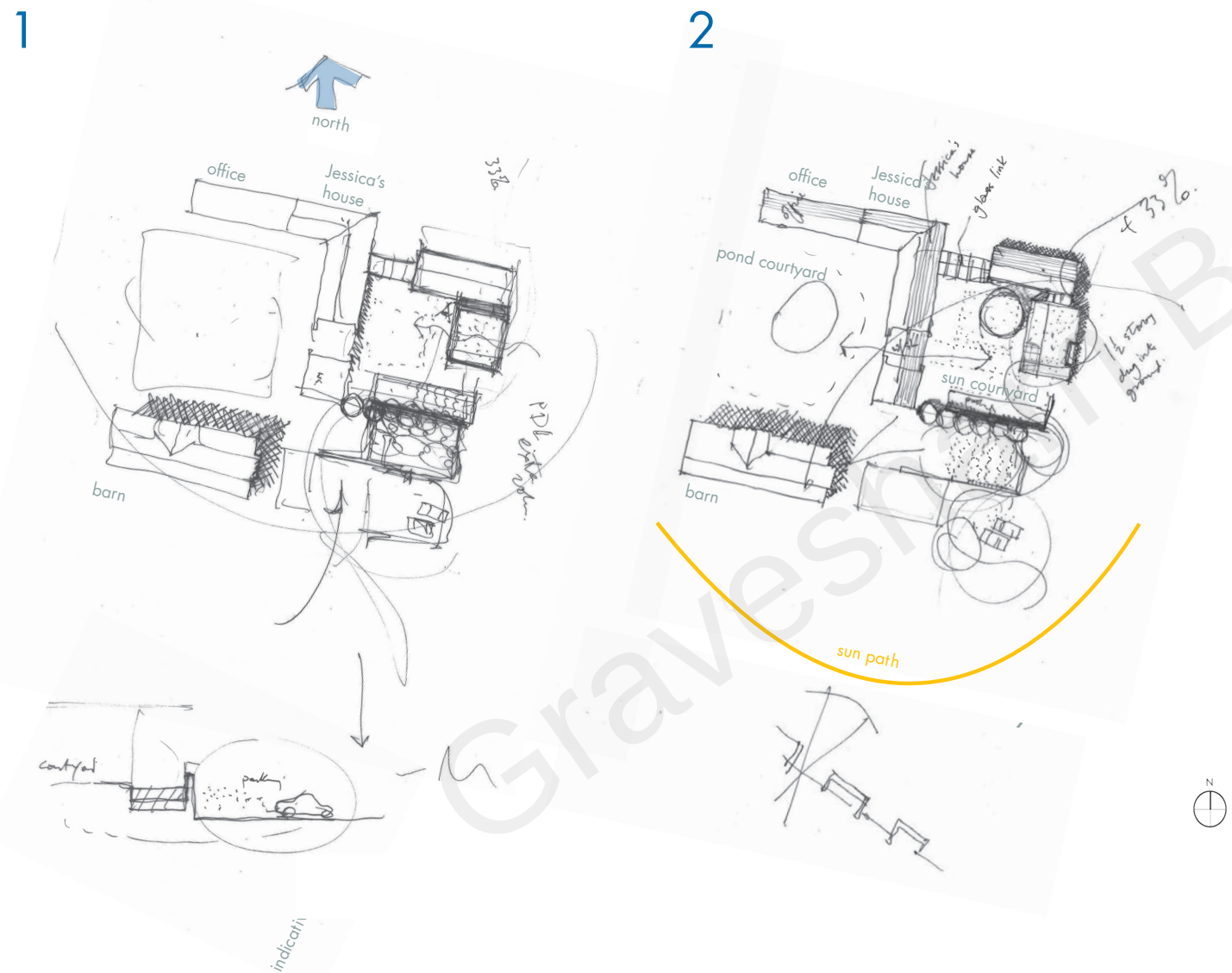
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4.4 Design progression

The scheme has progressed through many iterations balancing the medical needs of the family with conservation, architectural, landscape and AONB considerations.

The following progression shows the options considered.

The design is in two parts; abutting the Barn, a traditional form is adopted. The gable end of this is intended to be seen from the AONB. The southern part of the building is intended to integrate with the landscape and become part of the landscape. Car parking is set within a change of level entering the landscape building at the lowest level. The sketch on the right aims to break down the form of this building to make it integrate with existing land, on the edge of the AONB, better.



Section 4: Scheme progression

4.1 Originally proposed scheme

4.2 Response to the site

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4.4 Design progression

The Barn and landform buildings are reversed to give visual and wind protection from the south west. The diagram on the right reverts to the original arrangement but makes the landform building more practical, leading pedestrians from the carpark area into a central collection point which would be a double height space within the building. The Barn remains as a single storey building.

- non-rectilinear building dissolves into the landscape
- view windows set deep into landform
- landscape gives protection from south west wind
- to the east a sculpted landform allows creation of wildflower meadows as a setting for the non-rectilinear building
- on the inside of the courtyard a more manicured landscape is possible
- the northern barn provides private bedrooms, bathrooms etc
- the southern non-rectilinear building provides public rooms, arrival space etc

Note that this scheme was prepared before survey information was available for the eastern boundary.

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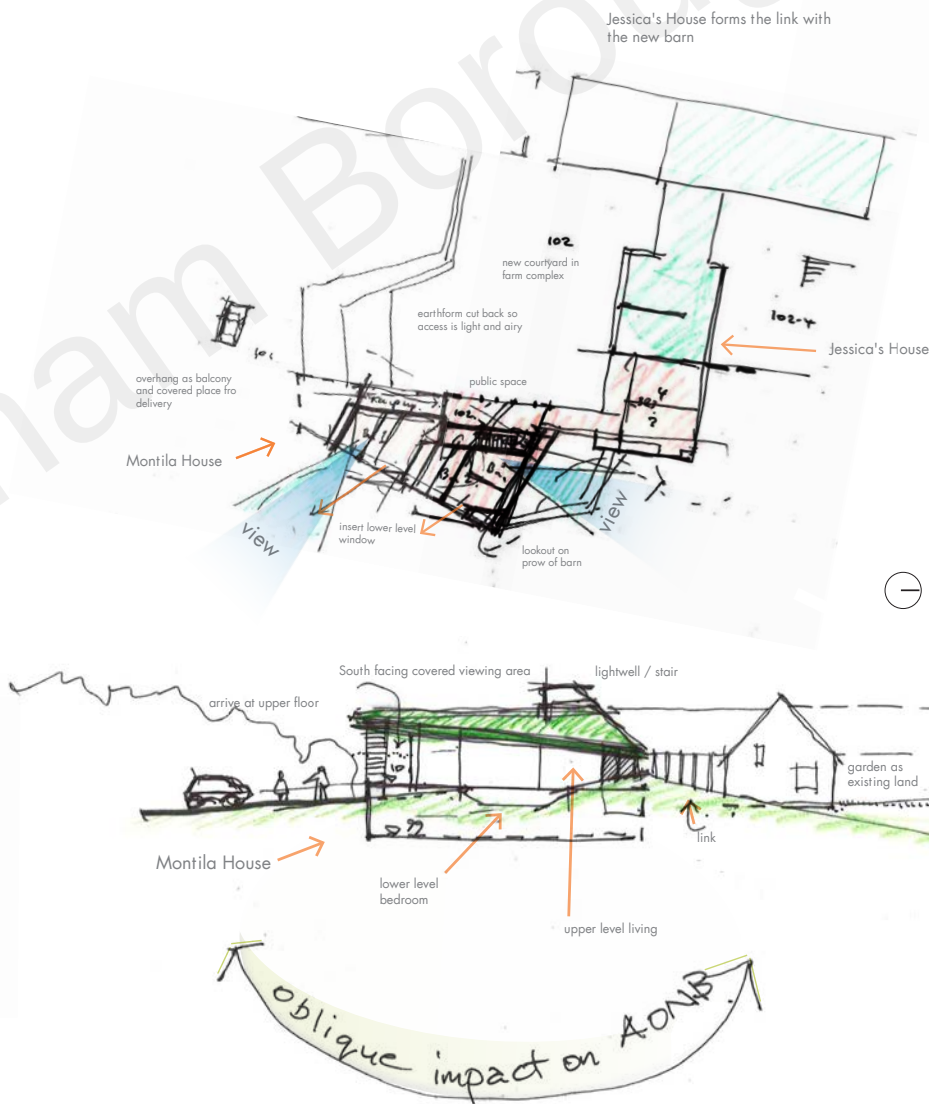
The roof level, 104m is approximately 2m higher than the agricultural land to the east, which falls away. The access to the upper level viewing platform looks over the new courtyard and connects the glass enclosure (which is actually a lightwell to the garden beneath) to the viewing platform which overlooks the AONB, but not in an intrusive way. The horizontal lines of the building are broken by the grass covered roof which has a strong form.

The new building is seen as an extension of the landscape to the east of the site. On the west facade of the building the effect would be of conventional enclosure creating the farmyard courtyard.

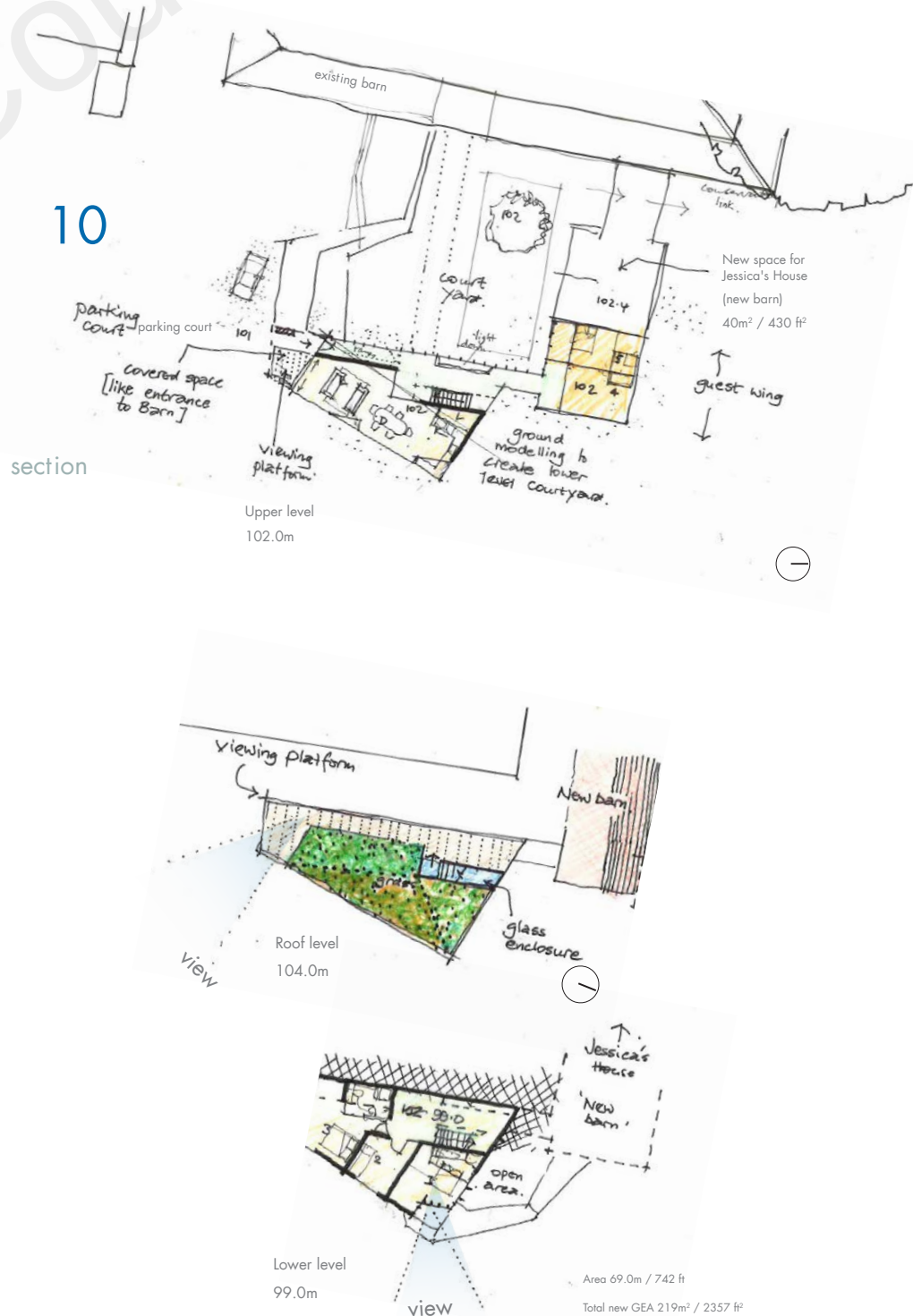
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Section 4: Scheme progression

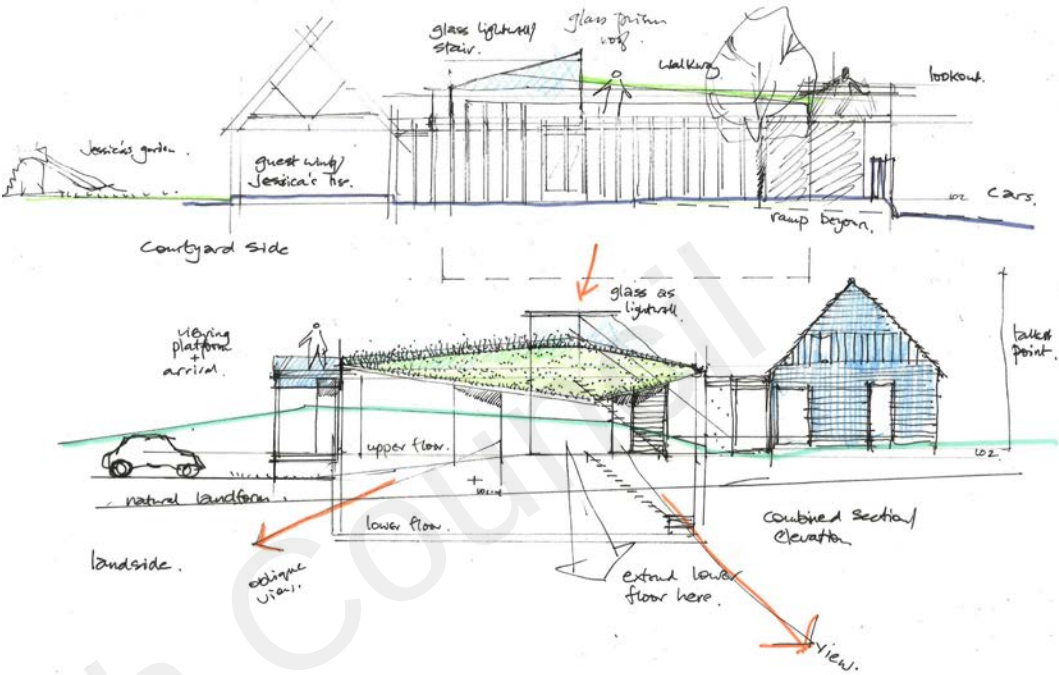
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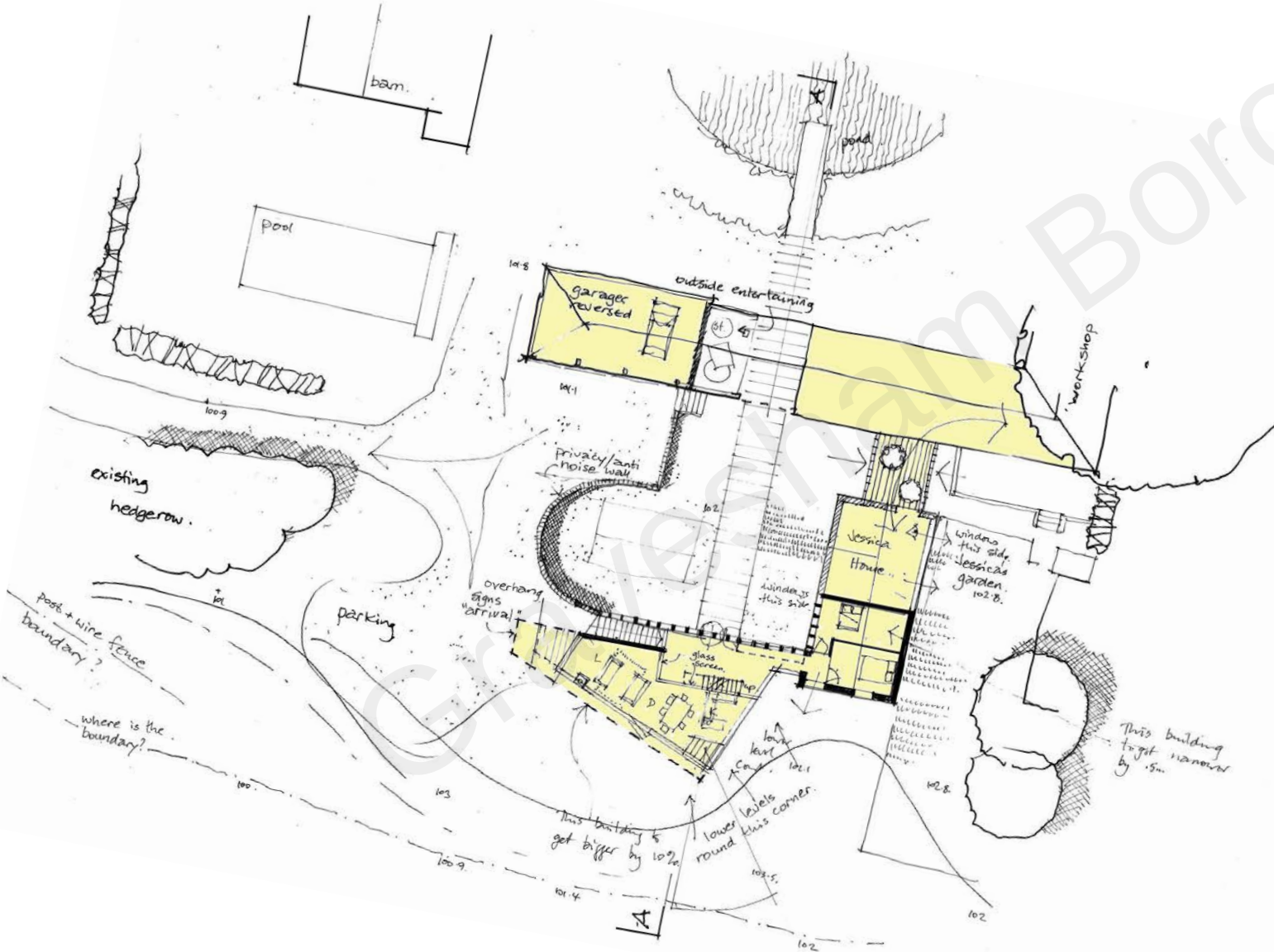
4.3 Design principles

4.4 Design progression

Iteration 11 takes account of the landscape edge within the AONB, the relative scales of buildings, the crucial connections within buildings (for medical/surveillance reasons), the sequence of spaces within the site including the creation of a second courtyard to mimic that lost earlier, and the contrasting treatment between the inside and the outside of the courtyard.



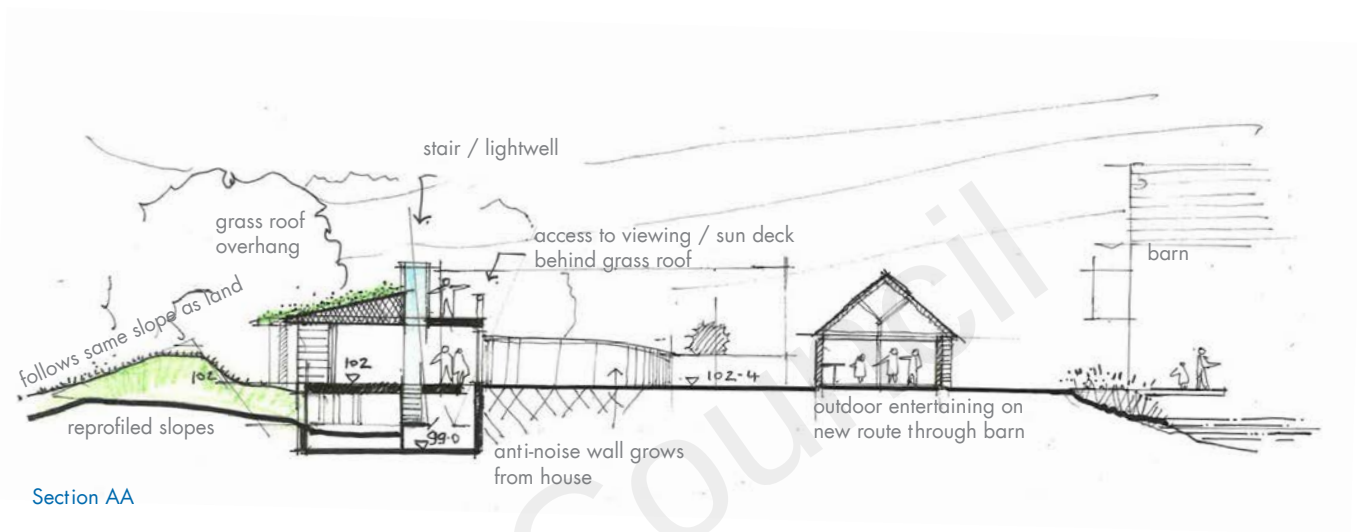
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Section 4: Scheme progression

- 4.1 Originally proposed scheme
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The photograph shows the height and scale of existing buildings which the new proposal responds to. it also shows the height of containers currently on site though sometimes these are double-stacked. The land is clearly rising northwards but reduces level away from the site, indicating that the storage area is largely on made-up ground. The intention is that any new buildings are no higher than the existing single storey barn, which means much lower than the existing Cobhambury Barn; the relationship with Cobhambury House beyond remains unchanged, with only the chimney visible. The proposed landscape treatment within the AONB will in any case remove much of this view making existing and proposed tree cover continuous.

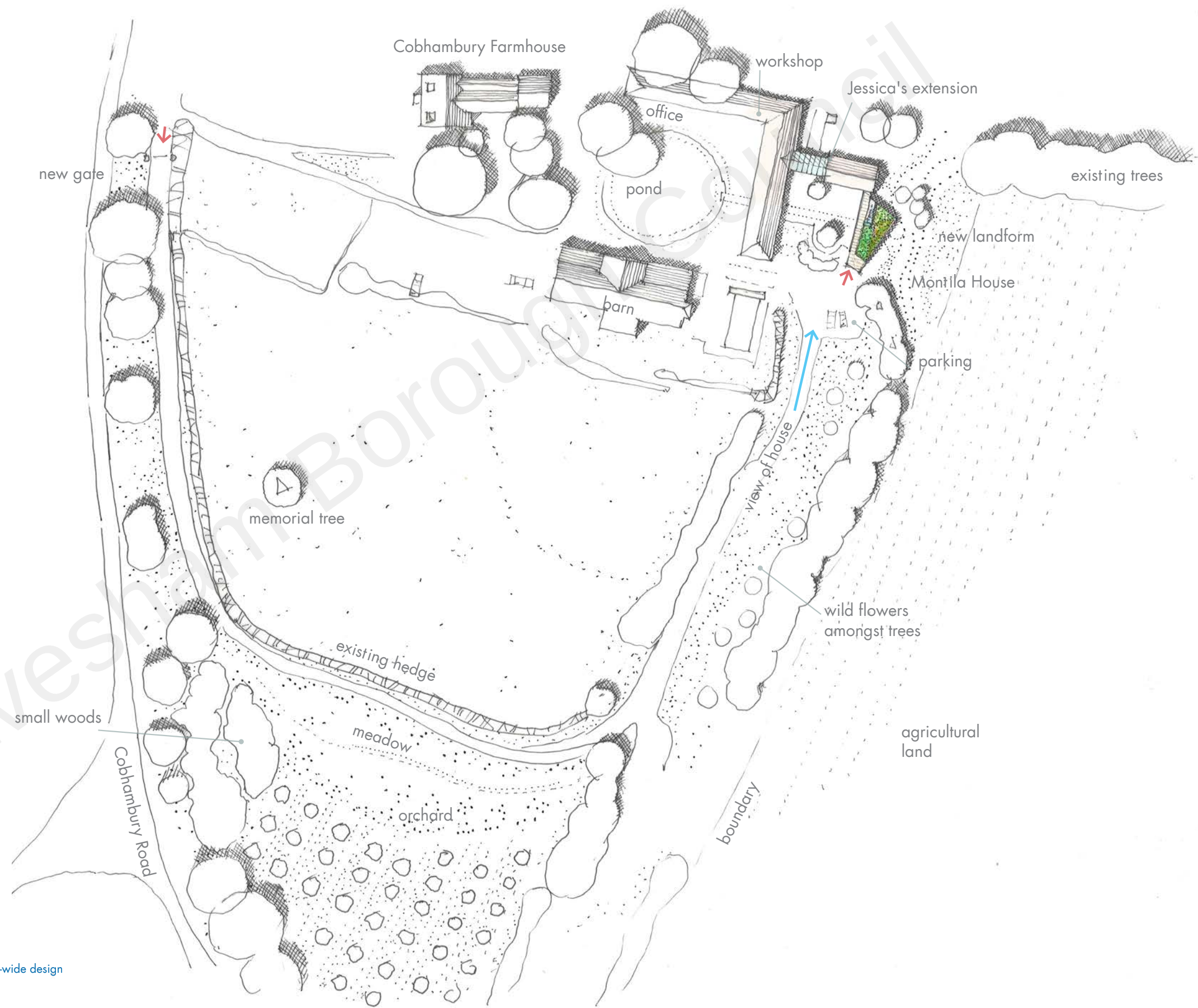


view from the farmland to the east

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Biodiversity, landscape structure, building form are all part of an integrated site-wide design to improve the site. This strategy is developed further in the final proposal.



site-wide design