



Urban Tree Experts

BS5837 – Tree Surveys – Ecological Consulting

PRELIMINARY ECOLOGICAL APPRAISAL (DBW) AT COOMBE HILL BARKHAM



**Prepared for:
Mr L Smart
Coombe Hill
Hayes Lane
Barkham
RG41 4TA**

12 May 2025

Ref: SPH/NP/PEA-25/29.04



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This report is valid for 12 months from the site inspection. The lifespan of this report may be subject to change if the site conditions change due to unspecified works that affect the site.



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Executive Summary

Urban Tree Experts was commissioned by Mr L Smart to conduct a preliminary ecological appraisal (daytime bat walkover [DBW]) of Coombe Hill, Hayes Lane, Barkham, Wokingham RG41 4TA. This is to support a forthcoming planning application to Wokingham Borough Council.

The site visit was carried out on Tuesday 29 April 2025 at 10.15am, during daylight hours. An internal and external inspection of the property took place to look for signs of bats.

The DBW consists of a desk top study prior to the survey to review existing information about the site and its surroundings and to inform the design of subsequent bat surveys, if required. The desk top study was conducted based upon a minimum 2km search radius and it revealed that no statutory designated sites are located within, and one current European Protected Species Licences (EPSLs) for bats has been granted within 2km of the proposed development site. The immediate surrounding habitat provides suitable habitat for roosting, commuting and foraging bats with tree and hedge lined agricultural fields, woodland and a large freshwater lake, all of which provide rich and diverse habitats suitable for a wide range of bat species.

The DBW comprised a detailed search of the interior and exterior of the property for bats, signs of bats and features suitable for use by roosting bats. This includes droppings, scratch marks, rubbing and staining at exit holes, live or dead bats and other features such as missing tiles, this list is not exhaustive.

The properties suitability to support roosting bats was assessed and potential roost features identified during the preliminary inspection. The property is in a good condition internally and externally however, there are raised roof tiles and missing mortar in a verge which could provide potential roosting opportunities for bats or provide access into the building for bats, and the presence or absence of bats could not be determined. In line with best practice guidelines, the building was assessed as having low potential¹ to support roosting bats.

In line with best practice guidelines², one separate dusk emergence survey is required on the property in order to establish the presence or absence of roosting bats. If bats are recorded emerging from the building during the survey, two further activity surveys and an EPSL will be required in order for the development to proceed legally.

¹ Table 4.1 Guidelines for assessing the potential suitability of proposed development sites for bats. Bat Surveys for Professional Ecologists Good Practice Guidelines 4th Edition.

² Collins, J. (ed) (2023) Bat Surveys for Professional Ecologists Good Practice Guidelines (4th Edition).



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1. Introduction

1.1 Instruction

Urban Tree Experts was instructed by Mr L Smart to conduct a DBW of Coombe Hill, Hayes Lane, Barkham, Wokingham RG41 4TA. This is to support a forthcoming planning application to Wokingham Borough Council.

1.2 Aims and Objectives

The DBW is designed to:

- Identify the presence/likely absence of bats within the building.
- Provide information on previous bat ecological surveys/reports.
- Provide information on the status of bats using the building currently or previously.
- To add confidence where no bats are found, or to categorise the nature of a roost where evidence of bats are found.
- To establish whether further surveys, mitigation or an EPSL is required.

The DBW and report writing were carried out in accordance with Bat Surveys for Professional Ecologists Good Practice Guidelines 4th edition.

1.3 Proposed Works

The survey was commissioned in connection with a forthcoming planning application to Wokingham Borough Council that will seek to construct a two-storey side extension and single storey rear extension and carry out roof alterations, see plans at Appendix 1.

1.4 Surveyor Background and Experience

The preliminary ecological appraisal for bats was completed by Nick Powell and the report was written by Simon Holmes MSc CEnv.

Nick Powell. Nick commenced surveying bats in 2022 and holds a Class 2 Bat License (CLS-11742) and has received training in bat ecology and surveying, bat detector use, acoustic monitoring/sonogram analysis, architectural terms for bat workers, bats and development, H & S awareness for bat workers, legislation for bat workers, British bats their ecology and conservation, surveying trees for bats, Bat ID and handling, bat biology.

Simon holds Class 3 (CL19) and 4 Bat (CL20) Licenses (Nos. 17637 and 17638) and a Science and Education license (SCI64844). He has 35 years' experience of carrying out bat surveys and bat conservation work.

2. Legislation and Planning Policy

2.1 Legislative Background

All species of British bat are protected under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 and the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, as amended. Under this legislation it is an offence to kill or injure a bat or interfere with any roosting or resting site. A bat roost is interpreted as “*any structure or place used for shelter or protection*” whether or not bats are present at the time. A summary of the main legislation and planning considerations are included at Appendix 2.



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Seven species of bat are also Species of Principal Importance for nature conservation in England under Section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006. This places a duty on all government departments to have regard for the conservation of these species and on the Secretary of State to further, or promote others to further, the conservation of these species.

3. Site Location and Description

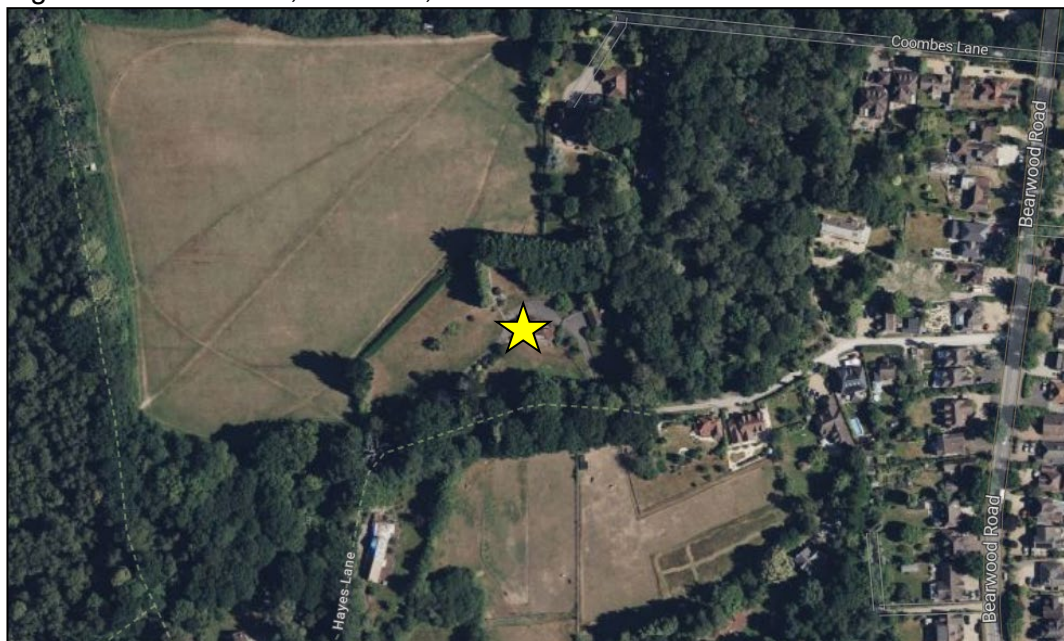
3.1 Site Location

The building is located at Grid Reference SU78076768, see Figure 1 below. An overview of the immediate area is shown on Figure 2, courtesy of Bing Maps.

Figure 1. Coombe Hill, Barkham, highlighted.



Figure 2. Coombe Hill, Barkham, overview of the immediate area.





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3.2 Site Description

The application site comprises a detached two-storey, brick-built property with side conservatory and various outbuildings all set within extensive grounds that are laid mainly to lawn with tarmacked driveway/parking area, see Figure 3 below. The site itself offers good foraging and commuting habitat for bats and there is direct ecological connectivity to the wider landscape that also provides good habitat for foraging and roosting bats.

Figure 3. Gardens. Coombe Hill, Barkham. 29.04.25



4. Survey Methodology

4.1 Pre-Survey Data Search

Google Earth and MAGIC maps (magic.defra.gov.uk) websites were used prior to the survey to determine the suitability of the surrounding habitat to support roosting bats and to identify any statutory designated sites or EPSLs within 2km of the site. Due to the scale of the proposed development, and the very local impact that may occur, no data was sought from the local records centre at this time.

The property is situated on the northwest edge of Barkham village, on the outskirts of Wokingham, and is set within its own extensive grounds. Immediately to the north and east is woodland and to the west, The Coomes wood, further afield to the north is Bearwood Lakes golf course and associated large freshwater lakes, all of which are known to support roosting, foraging and commuting habitat for bats and are connected to the site via ecological corridors such as tree and hedge lines. Further afield lie more areas of woodland, wetland and farmland, all of which provide good conditions to support bats and have good ecological connectivity to the site.



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No statutory designated sites are located within 2km of the site. A search of the Magic interactive website revealed one current EPSL for bats has been granted within 2km of the site, the details of which are provided in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Current EPSLs for bats within 2km of the site

EPSL reference	Licence end date	Species on licence
2020-49490-EPS-MIT	11/2025	Soprano pipistrelle

4.2 Daylight Survey

The DBW of Coombe Hill, Hayes Lane, Barkham, Wokingham, RG41 4TA was carried out by Nick Powell on Tuesday 29 April 2025 at 10.15am. The weather conditions for the survey were dry and bright with a temperature of 19 degrees. Equipment used included a high-powered torch, a digital camera on a telescopic pole and a ladder.

During the DBW an external and internal inspection of the property was carried out to identify any signs of occupation by bats and features that could offer potential roosting sites following standard survey guidelines. Features investigated included:

- Construction of the building – soffits, loft space, tiles/slates, lead flashings etc.
- Building condition – structure of roof and walls.
- Internal conditions – microclimate stability, draughts etc.
- Access points – potential entry and exit points for bats.
- Roosting points – cracks and crevices, between underlay and roofing tiles/slates.

Field signs that would indicate the presence of bats were searched for. These included:

- Bat droppings on the floor and walls of the building.
- Feeding remains (particularly butterfly and moth wings).
- Evidence of urine and/or oily staining around possible roost entrances.
- Presence of areas cleared of cobwebs.
- Where a breathable roofing membrane has been fitted staining on the membrane may suggest use by bats.
- Odour can sometimes suggest the present of bats.
- Squeaking and chattering can reveal bats roosting between the tiles and roofing underlay.

Buildings or structures that were not to be affected by the current proposals or with no bat roosting potential were not inspected. This includes the various outbuildings as they will not be affected by the proposed works.

4.3 Constraints

Access to the site during the visit was made possible by the client and there were no constraints to the survey.



5. Survey Findings

5.1 External Inspection

The external features of the property were examined for signs described in section 4.2. Windowsills, exposed features around the windows, fascias and walls were inspected for any evidence of bat droppings or staining.

The property is a detached, two-storey, brick-built building with single storey side conservatory. The multi pitched roof with catslide section is covered in tiles (see Figure 4 below), some of which, under the chimney stacks, have raised leaving gaps and provide roosting opportunities and could afford access into the loft for bats, see Figure 5 on page 9. There is cracked and missing mortar from some of the bonnet tiles (see Figure 9 on page 9), and there is missing mortar from a verge on the section of the roof to be affected by the proposed works, see Figure 7 on page 10. The soffits and fascias are tight to the wall with no gaps that could be exploited by crevice dwelling bat species, see Figure 8 on page 10. There are dormer windows on the front, rear and west elevations (see cover photo and Figure 9 on page 11), the rooves of which are covered in well fitted lead and the sides are covered in close fitted hanging tiles, there is no missing mortar from the verges, and they do not offer any roosting opportunities, see Figure 10 on page 11. On the west elevation is the conservatory (see Figure 11 on page 12), the roof of which is covered in close fitted composite tiles with no gaps for roosting, see Figure 12 on page 12.

No bats or evidence of bats were recorded during the external inspection of the property although there are various features on the property that provide potential crevice roosting opportunities for bats.

Figure 4. Examples roof tiles. Coombe Hill, Barkham. 29.04.25





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Figure 5. Example raised tiles near chimney stacks. Coombe Hill, Barkham. 29.04.25



Figure 6. Example missing mortar in bonnet tiles. Coombe Hill, Barkham. 29.04.25





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Figure 7. Example missing mortar in verge. Coombe Hill, Barkham. 29.04.25



Figure 8. Example sealed soffits and fascias. Coombe Hill, Barkham. 29.04.25





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Figure 9. Dormers. Coombe Hill, Barkham. 29.04.25



Figure 10. Example sealed verges and hanging tiles on dormer windows. Coombe Hill, Barkham. 29.04.25



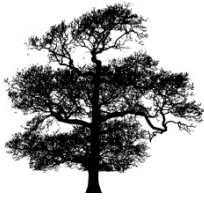


Figure 11. Conservatory. Coombe Hill, Barkham. 29.04.25



Figure 12. Roof of conservatory. Coombe Hill, Barkham. 29.04.25





5.2 Internal Inspection

An internal inspection of the property was undertaken and were examined for any signs of bats (as described in section 4.2).

The loft space was accessed via a loft ladder and is in a good condition. The loft space is uncluttered, lit, partially boarded and insulated, see Figure 13 below. The roof tiles are lined with insulating foil, see Figure 13 below. There are also two eaves cupboards either side of the dormer window on the west elevation, these spaces are used for storage and are boarded, see Figure 14 on page 14. There is no loft space in the conservatory, the roof being boarded, plastered and painted, see Figure 15 on page 14.

No bats or evidence of bats was recorded during the internal inspection of the property however there are feature externally which could allow bats access into the space.

Figure 13. Example loft spaces. Coombe Hill, Barkham. 29.04.25





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Figure 14. Example eaves cupboard. Coombe Hill, Barkham. 29.04.25

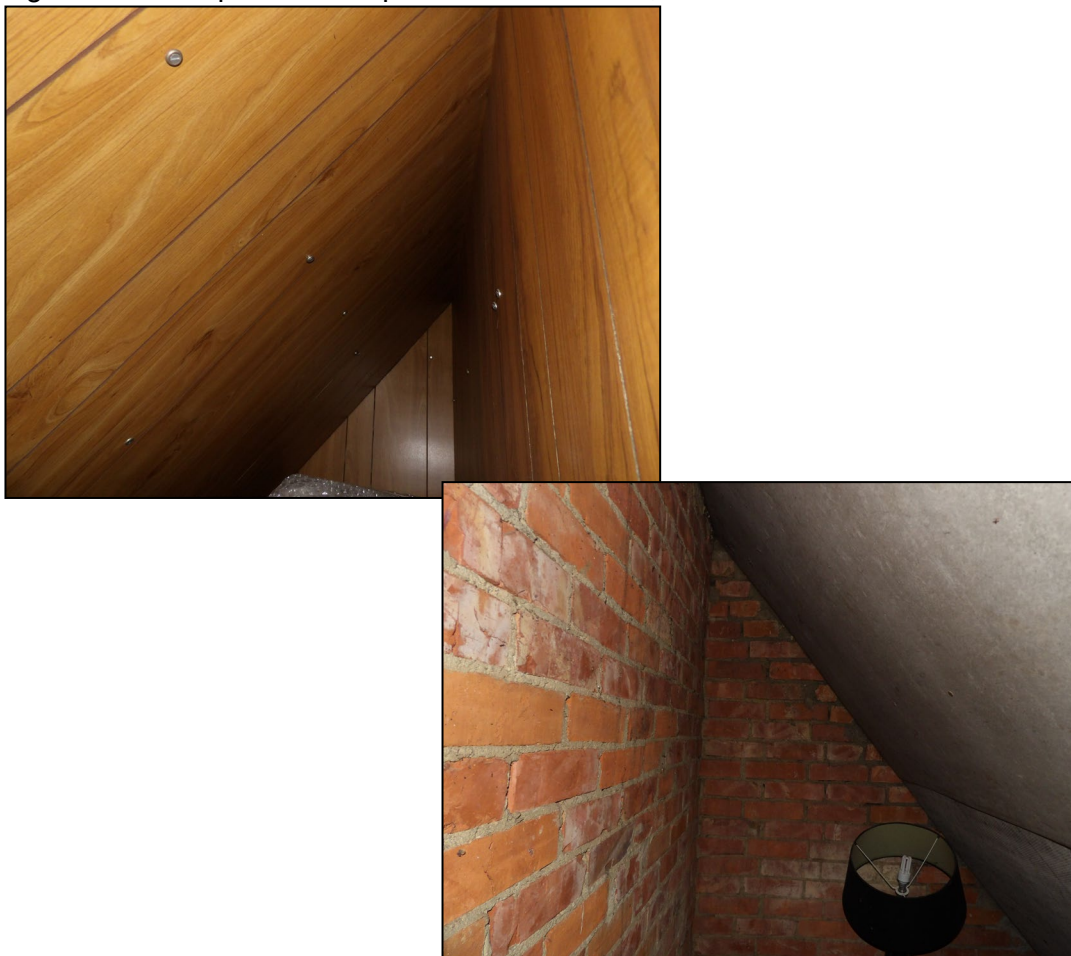


Figure 15. Internal view of conservatory. Coombe Hill, Barkham. 29.04.25





6. Evaluation

The bat roost potential of the features within the site have been assessed with reference to the following criteria and include seasonal variation where increased or decreased probability may arise. Where features are present, they are **highlighted in bold**.

The likelihood of bat roosts being present will be higher where structures:

- are of a pre-20th Century construction;
- are in a lowland rural setting;
- **have woodland, mature trees, species-rich grassland and/or water nearby;**
- have large dimension roof timbers with cracks, joints and holes;
- have numerous crevices in stonework and structures;
- **have an uneven roof covering with gaps, though not too draughty;**
- **have hanging tiles** or roof cladding, **especially on south-facing walls;**
- **have a roof warmed by the sun;**
- are disused or little used; largely undisturbed;
- provide appropriate hibernation conditions, such as abandoned mines, tunnels, kilns, or fortifications; or
- **Recent and historical records of bat roosts in the general area.**

The likelihood of bat roosts being present will be lower where structures:

- are in an urban setting with little green space;
- are subject to heavy disturbance (constant movement due to draughts and noise, also unstable microclimate);
- have a small, cluttered roof void (particularly for brown long-eared);
- **are of a modern construction with few gaps or crevices that bats can fly or crawl through (though pipistrelle bats may still be present);**
- are comprised of prefabricated steel or sheet materials; (some sections);
- are active industrial premises.

Please note that the list above provides generic screening criteria only and there are exceptions to consider.

7. Conclusions

7.1 Interpretation

The property is in a good condition internally and externally. The raised roof tiles and missing mortar in a verge provide crevice-like features suitable for bats to roost and may also provide access into the loft space and we are unable to determine the presence or absence of bats in the building without further survey effort. When the findings are combined with the desk top study the property was assessed as having a low potential to support roosting bats.

Based on the Bat Workers Manual and the Bat Surveys Good Practice Guidelines, one dusk emergence survey need to be undertaken on the property, between May and August, to establish the presence or absence of roosting bats and in order to inform appropriate mitigation for the proposed works if necessary. The features identified will require five survey positions, three equipped with bat detectors and all four with night vision cameras in order to cover the potential bat roosting features. If bats are recorded emerging from the building during the survey, two further activity surveys and an EPSL will be required in order for the development to proceed legally.



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7.2 Contingency Plan

If, for whatever reason, there is a time delay of greater than 12 months between this survey and the commencement of work, then the survey should be repeated as the condition of the building may change and the site may become more suitable to support roosting bats.

8. References

Collins, J (ed.) (2023). Bat Surveys for Professional Ecologists: Good Practice Guidelines (4th Edition). The Bat Conservation Trust, London.

HM Government (2017) Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations as (amended).

HM Government (1981) The Wildlife and Countryside Act (as amended).

HM Government (2006) Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act.

Mitchell-Jones, A.J. & McLeish, A.P. (2004). Bat Workers' Manual (3rd Edition). Joint Nature Conservation Committee.

9. Queries

Any queries regarding this report should be addressed, in the first instance, to Urban Tree Experts:

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Email: info@batsurveys-uk.com

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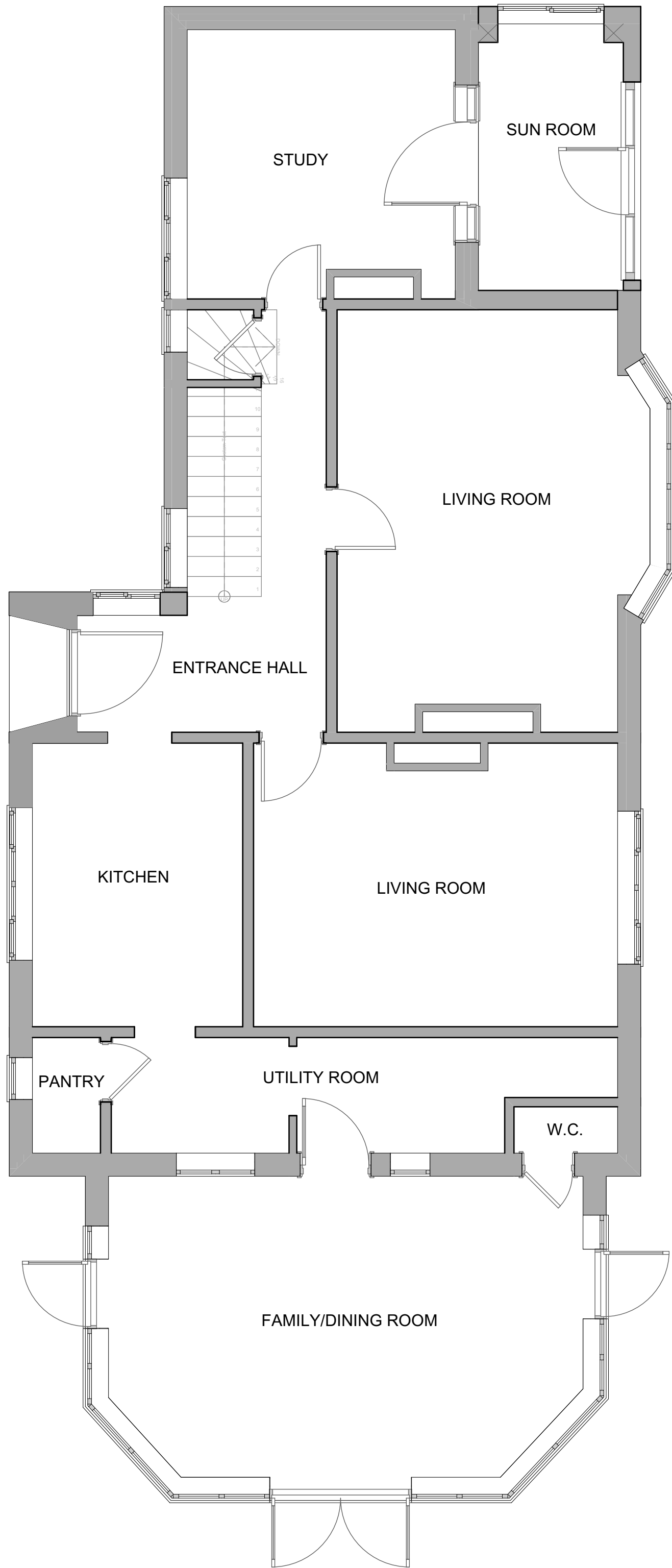
Simon Holmes MSc. CEnv.
Consultant, Urban Tree Experts
Natural England Licence CLS-CLS-17637, CLS-CLS-17638



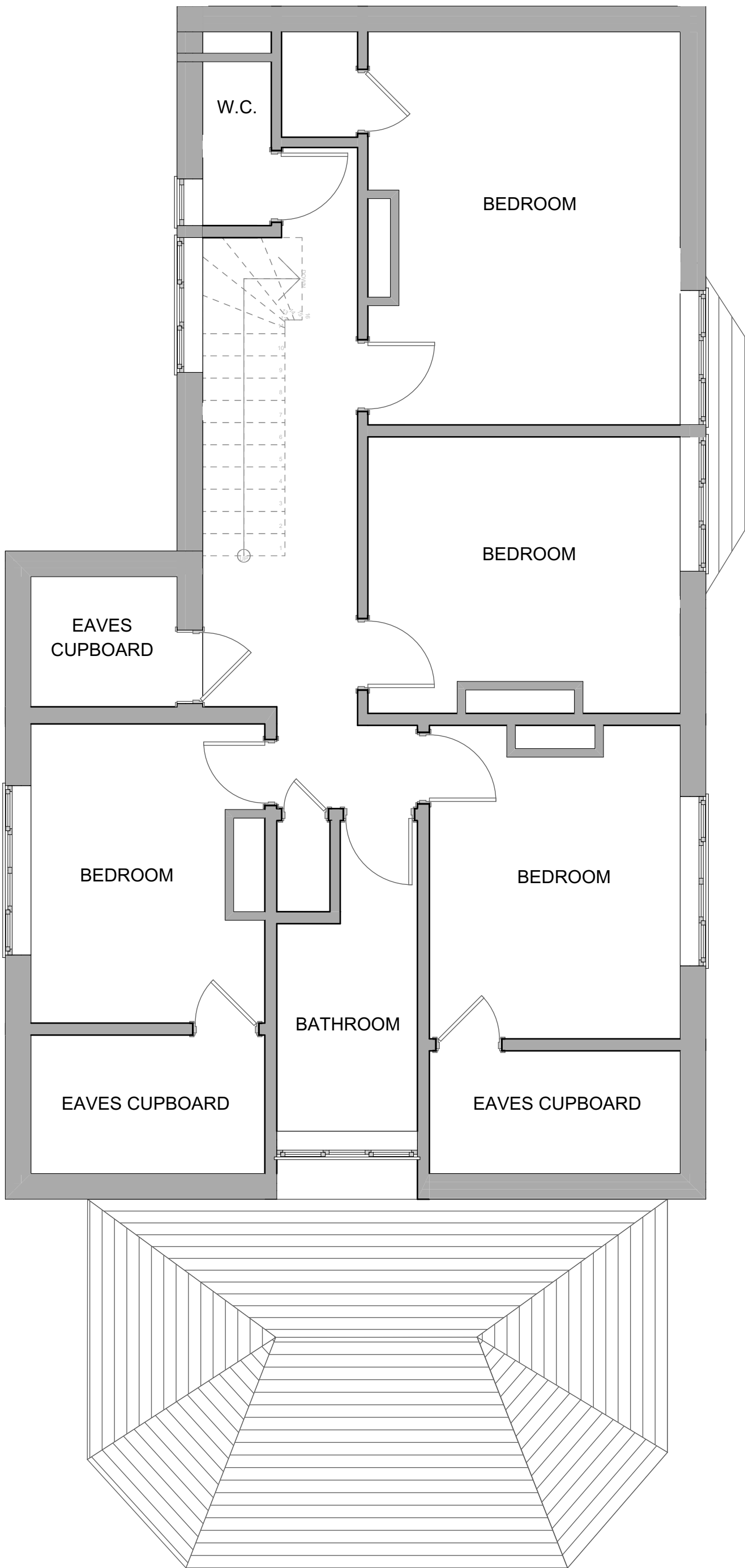
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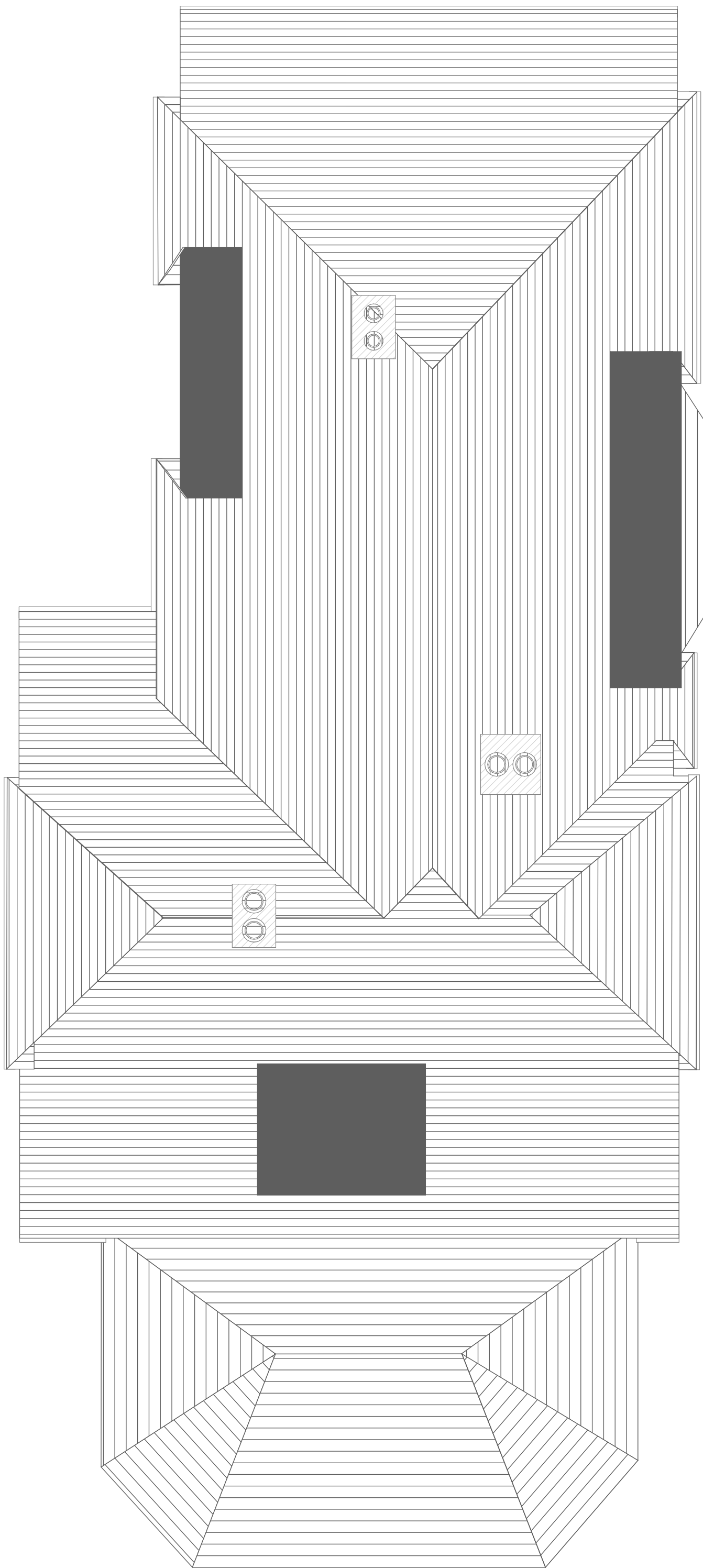
APPENDIX 1



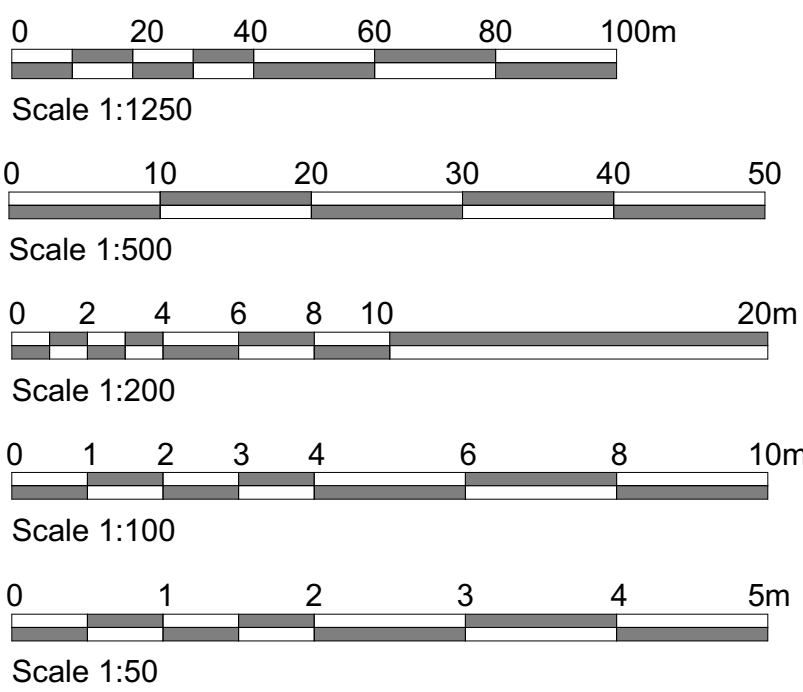
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1. First Floor 1:50



2. Roof 1:50



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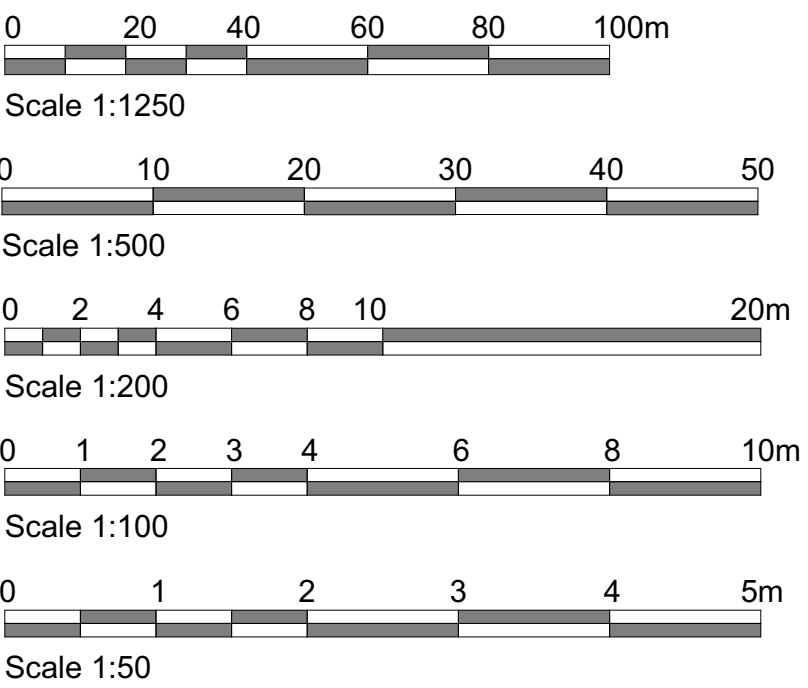
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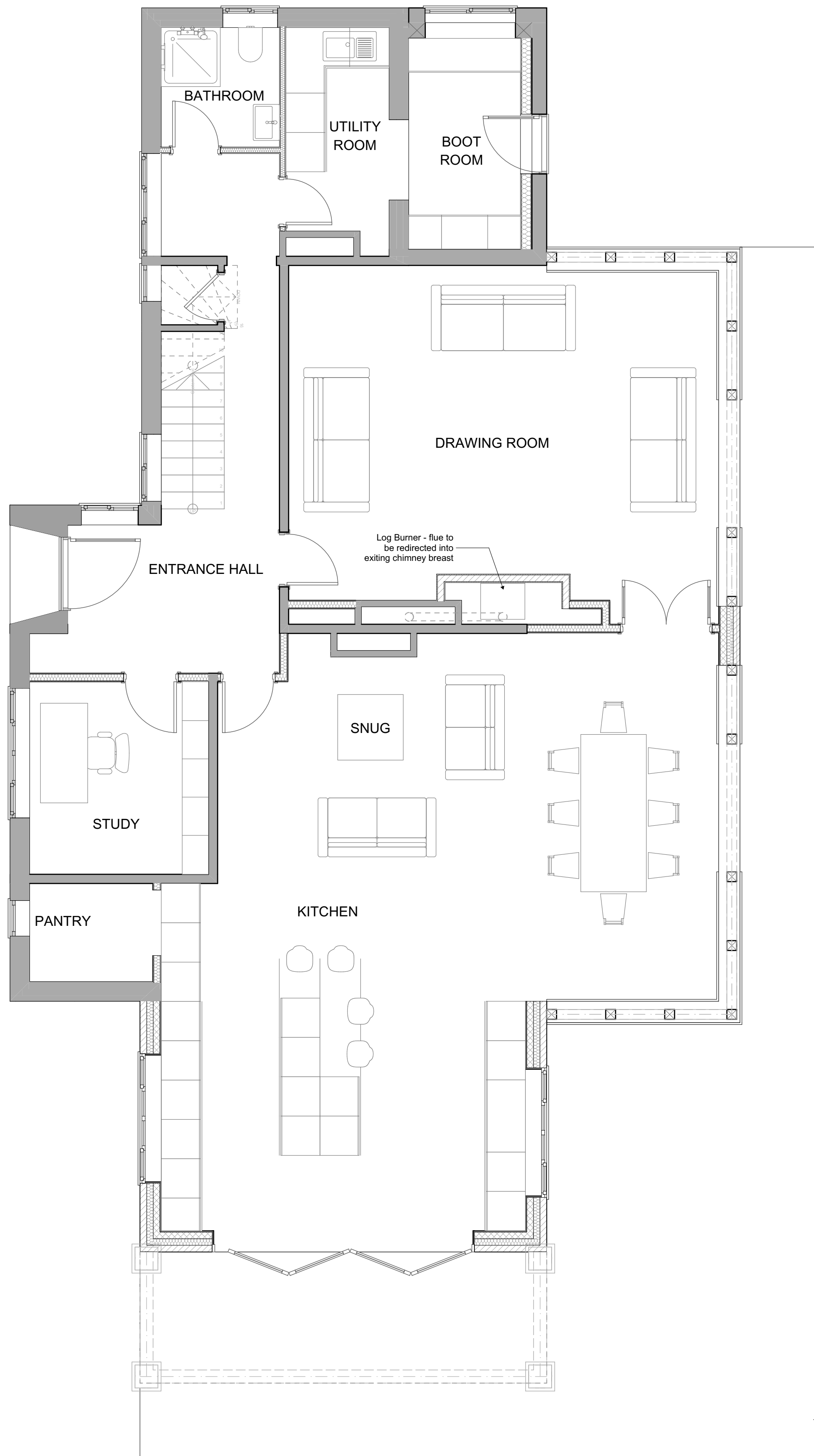
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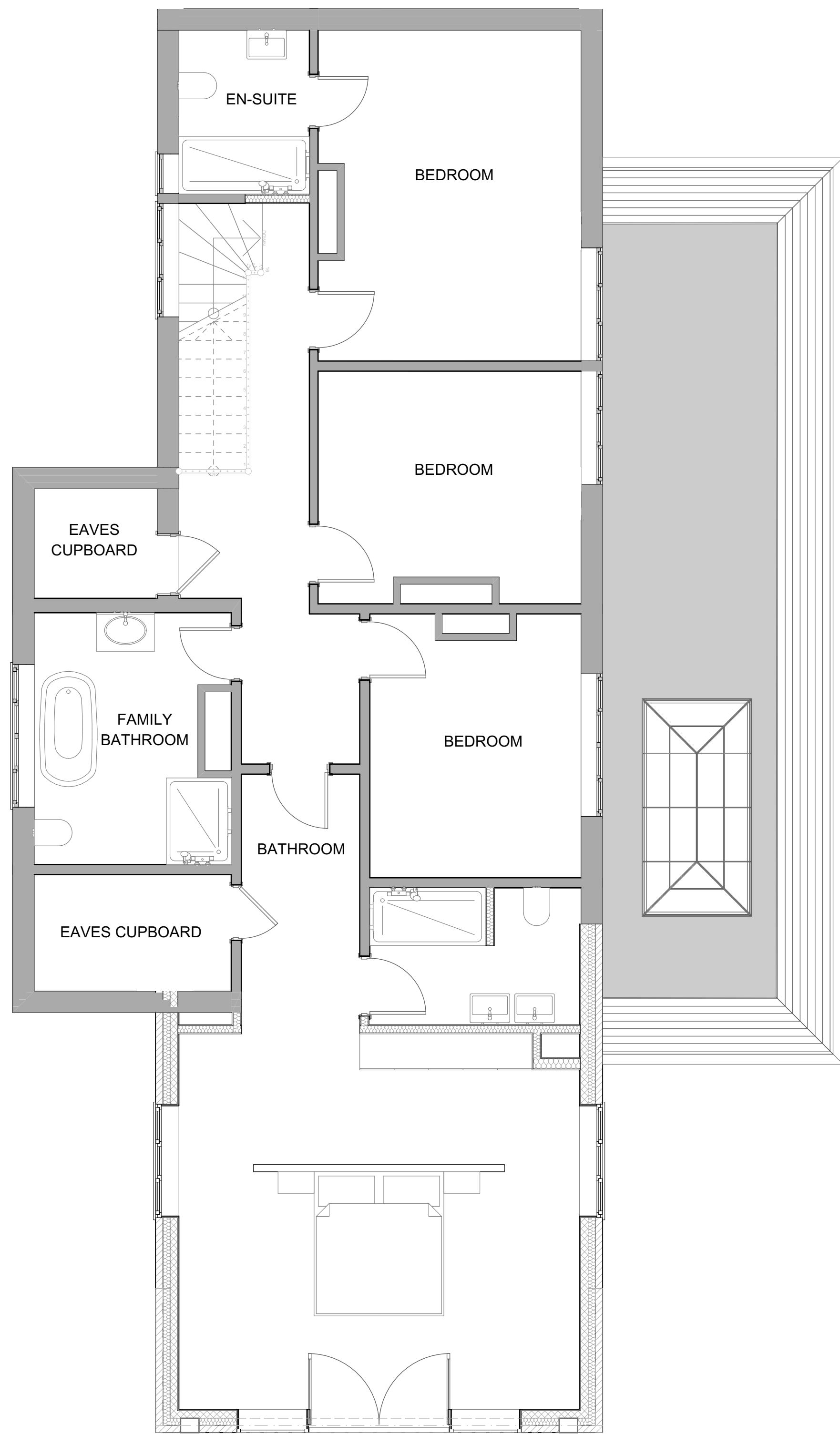
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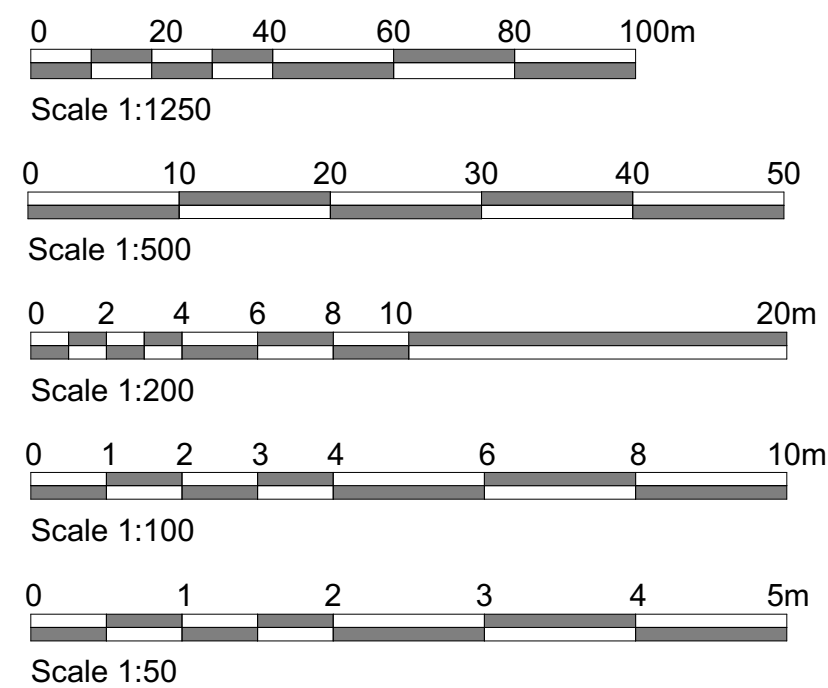
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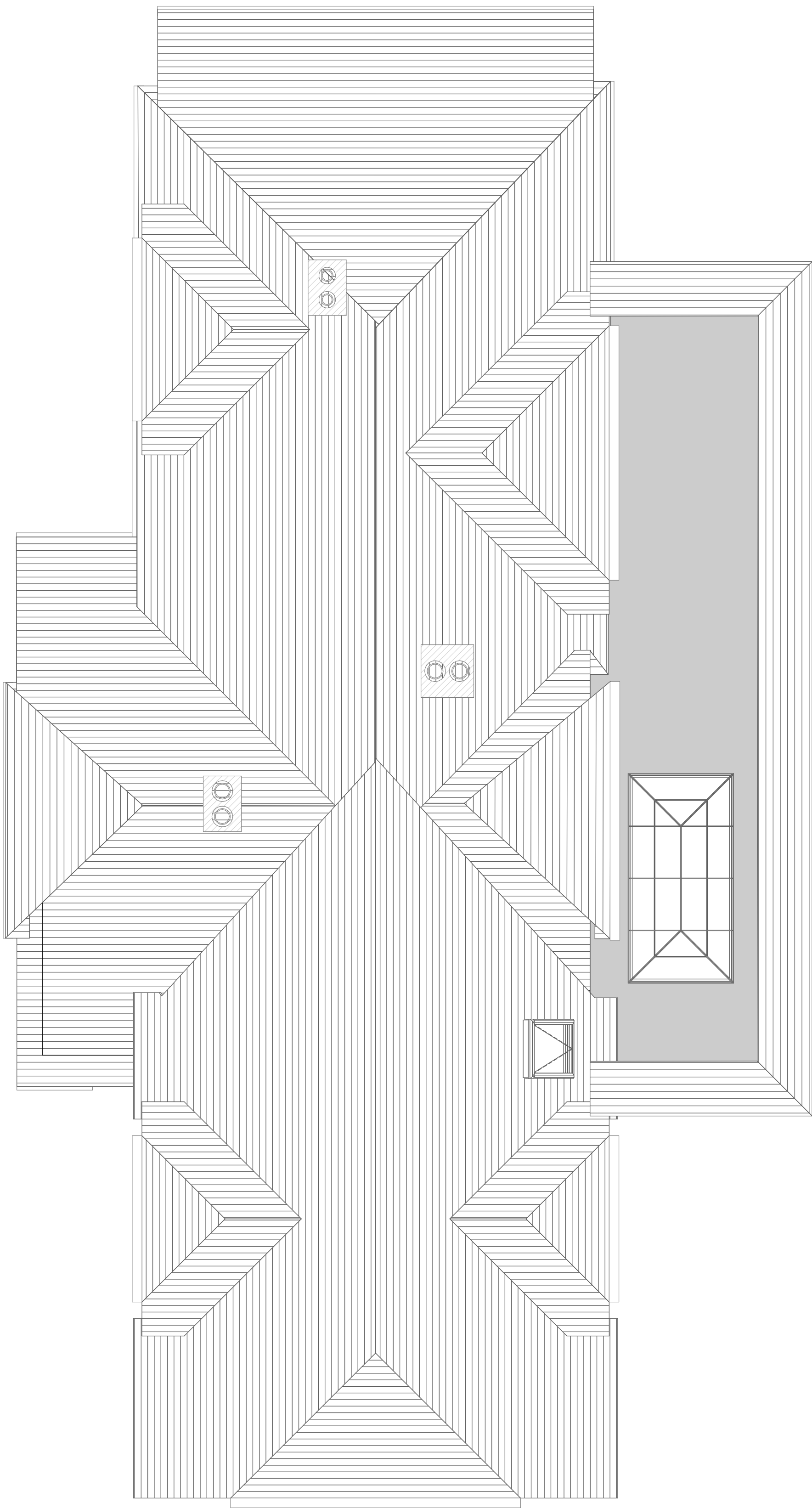
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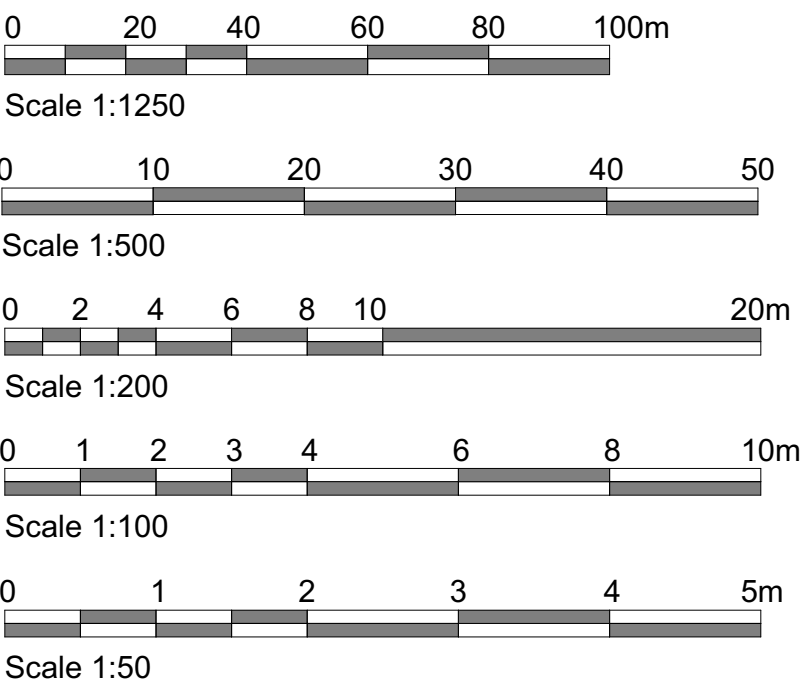
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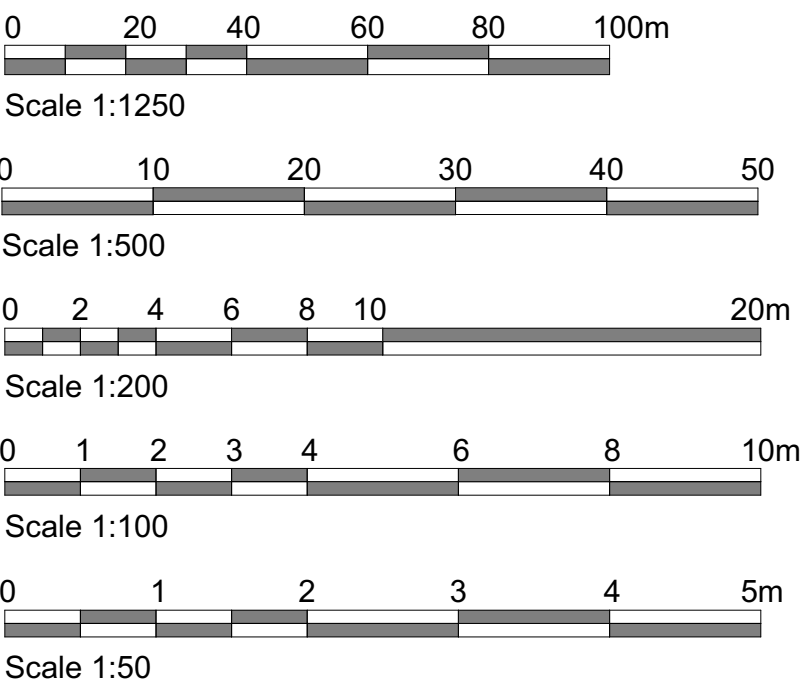
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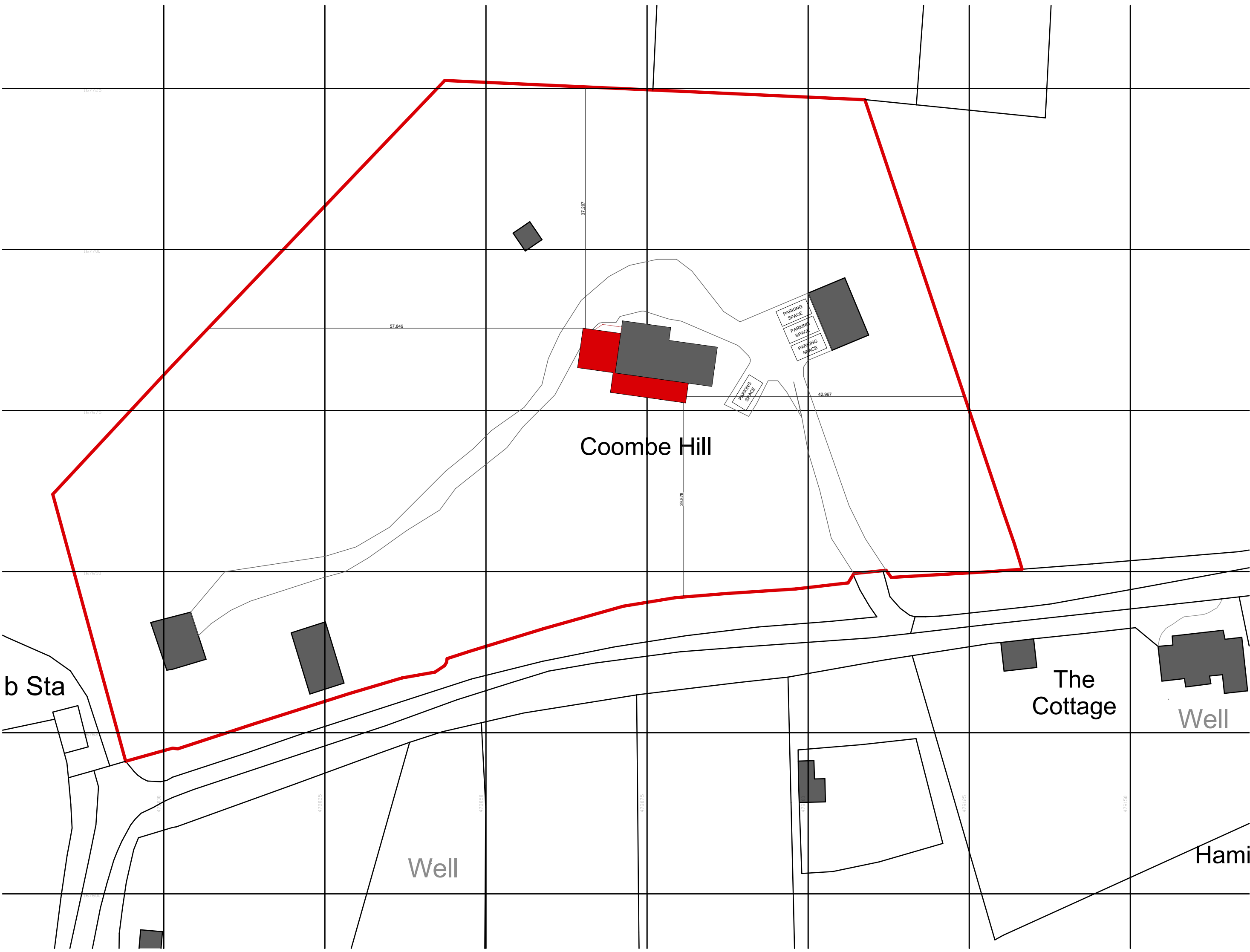
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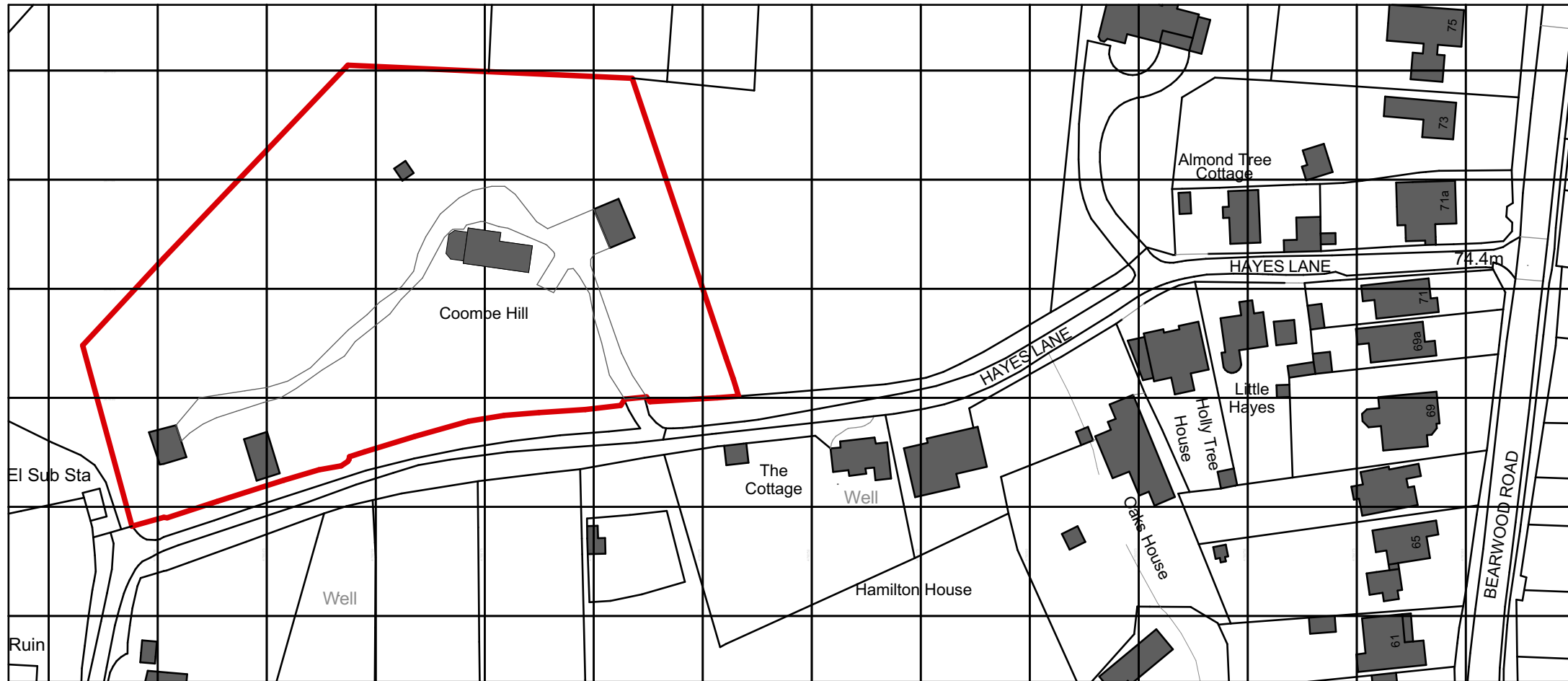
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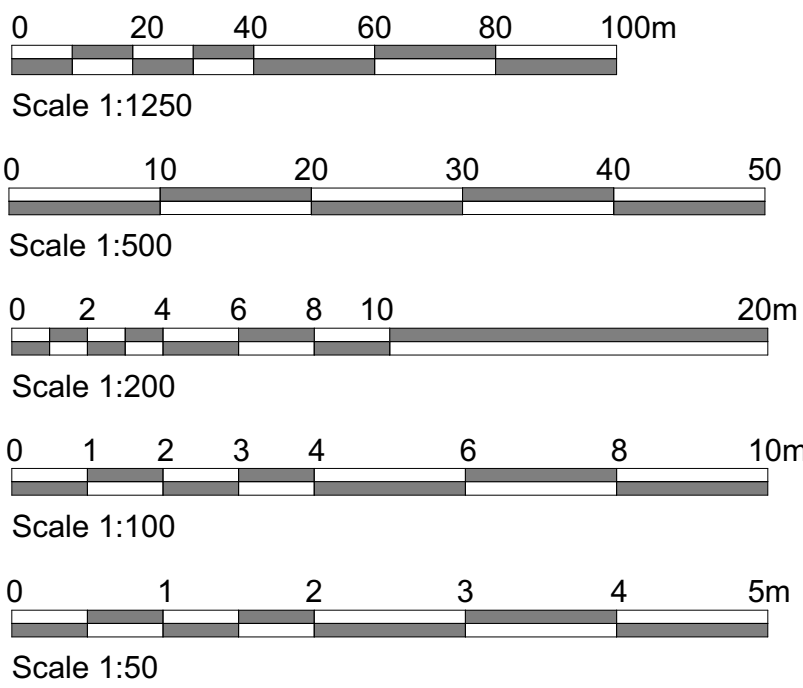
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0. BLOCK PLAN 1:500



0. LOCATION PLAN 1:1250



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APPENDIX 2

In summary, the legislation combined makes it an offence to:

- Intentionally or recklessly damage, destroy or obstruct access to a structure or place used for shelter by a bat.
- Intentionally or recklessly disturb bats; in particular any disturbance which is likely to impair the ability of bats to survive, breed or reproduce or nurture their young; or in the case of hibernating or migrating bats, to hibernate or migrate.
- Intentionally or deliberately kill, injure or take any bat.

Planning Considerations:

Government guidance to Local Planning Authorities stipulates the need to consider biodiversity and protected species during the consideration of planning applications. The NPPF makes clear that the planning system should help minimise the impacts that development can have on biodiversity and provide net gains in biodiversity where possible. In addition, the ODPM Circular 04/2005 states *"It is essential that the presence or otherwise of protected species, and the extent that they may be affected by the proposed development, is established before the planning permission is granted, otherwise all relevant material considerations may not have been addressed in making the decision"*.

Policy CP7 of the Wokingham Borough Core Strategy (planning policy relating to the site) states *"Development which may harm habitats or, species of principle importance in England for nature conservation, veteran trees or features of the landscape that are of major importance for wild flora and fauna (including wildlife and river corridors), whether directly or indirectly will be only permitted if it has been clearly demonstrated that the need for the proposal outweighs the need to safeguard the nature conservation importance, that no alternative site that would result in less or no harm is available which will meet the need, and*

- i) Mitigation measures can be put in place to prevent damaging impacts; or*
- ii) Appropriate compensation measures to offset the scale and kind of losses are provided"*.

Developments that compromise the protection afforded to bats or roosts under the provisions of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 and the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 will require a European Protected Species (EPS) licence from Natural England (NE).

NE, the government's statutory conservation advisory organisation, is responsible for issuing EPS licences that would permit activities that would otherwise lead to an infringement of the Habitat Regulations.

Three tests must be satisfied before this licence (to permit otherwise prohibited acts) can be issued:

- Reg 44(2)(e) – the derogation is "in the interests of public health and public safety, or for other imperative reasons of overriding public interest, including those of a social or economic nature and beneficial consequences of primary importance for the environment".
- Reg 44(3)(a) – there is "no satisfactory alternative" to the derogation.
- Reg 44(3)(b) – the derogation is "not detrimental to the maintenance of the populations of the species concerned at a favourable conservation status in their natural range".

Tests (a) and (e) can be met with the issue of planning permission for the proposed works. Test (b) is determined by NE's ecology department that requires the development of a suitable mitigation strategy that would ensure that any bats present on site, are retained at the same population level or better.