

Agenda Item	6.5
Report No	PLN/044/26

HIGHLAND COUNCIL

Committee: North Planning Applications Committee

Date: 5th August 2026

Report Title: 25/04685/FUL: Mrs Grethe Walton
Land 155M SW of The Gables, 206 Polbain, Achiltibuie

Report By: Ross Mcateer (Planning (South))

Purpose/Executive Summary

Description: Erection of house

Ward: 05 - Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh

Development category: Housing Local

Reason referred to Committee: Referred by Local Members

All relevant matters have been taken into account when appraising this application. It is considered that the proposal does not accord with the principles and policies contained within the Development Plan and is unacceptable in terms of applicable material considerations.

Recommendation

Members are asked to agree the recommendation to **REFUSE** the application as set out in section 11 of the report.

1. PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

- 1.1 The proposal is in detail for the erection of a house.
- 1.2 The site is accessed via the U3386 which is the main road through the settlement of Polbain. There are water treatment works nearby that could service the development and private foul drainage is proposed.
- 1.3 Pre-Application Consultation: The applicant had previously sought pre-application advice in 2013. Advice was provided at the time that the proposal would be contrary to the Development Plan policy; and that the policy seeks to encourage development that does not interrupt coastal views over open water and is in line with the established settlement pattern which is characterised by linear crofts with houses positioned close to the road.
- 1.4 Supporting Information: Design Statement
- 1.5 Variations: None

2. SITE DESCRIPTION

- 2.1 The site is located on land 140m southwest of the house, 'The Gables', within the settlement of Polbain, Achiltibuie. The proposal is sited on a ruin of what appears to be a croft building, approximately 220m from the public road. The site is an active croft. The landform slopes southwest toward the coast. The site would partly share its access with 'The Gables', which is sited closer to the public road. The ground is covered in poor quality grazing.

3. PLANNING HISTORY

- 3.1 03.03.2014 13/04126/PREAPP – Erection of house

4. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

- 4.1 Advertised: Unknown Neighbour Advert
Date Advertised: 16.01.2026
Representation deadline: 13.02.2026
- 4.2 Timeous representations: 1
- 4.3 Late representations: None
- 4.4 Material considerations raised are summarised as follows:
 - a) Inappropriate siting
Planning comment - This forms part of the reasons for refusal and will be addressed in detail as a material consideration in section 8 of the report
 - b) Deviation from established building line and outside of settlement area
Planning comment - This forms part of the reasons for refusal and will be addressed in detail as a material consideration in section 8 of the report
 - c) Unauthorised formation of track

Planning comment -: There is no record of any prior notification for the track. This could be investigated separately as an enforcement case, but publicly available satellite imagery suggests that it was formed some time ago.

d) Impact on Assynt Coigach National Scenic Area (NSA)

Planning comment - This forms part of the reasons for refusal. It is considered that the proposal would have a negative impact on the NSA in the proposed location and this is addressed in under Siting and Design in section 8 of the report

e) Landscape character impacts

Planning comment - This forms part of the reasons for refusal and will be addressed in detail in section 8 of the report.

f) Impacts on croft-land

Planning comment -: This is addressed in detail in section 8 of the report.

g) Compliance with Development Plan, referring to policies for protection of open views over water, and of locally important croftland. Proposed site runs contrary to both of these policies, in particular since it sits in the middle of a thin strip of croft land. The development would also be highly detrimental to open views towards the mountains to the east, and southeast, when looked at from the road entering Polbain from the west, and from all points along this road, and from the Dornie Shop Road.

Planning comment - This is addressed in detail in section 8 of the report.

h) Submitted Design Statement suggest that the ruin, where the proposed development is to take place, "is not visible from the road".

Planning comment - This is addressed in detail in section 8 of the report.

i) Local Place Plan - site was included within an enlarged Settlement Area for Polbain in the first draft of the Local Place Plan 2025, which was based on individual expressions of intent and preferences. LPP contains a map "Community Suggested Croft Creation Prospects", including some for Polbain, which indicates that croft land is still regarded by the wider community as a valuable resource, which ought to be preserved, just as stated in Policy 4.8 of the Local Plan 2006.

Planning comment - This is addressed in detail in section 8 of the report.

- 4.5 All letters of representation are available for inspection via the Council's eplanning portal which can be accessed through the internet <https://www.highland.gov.uk/planning/view-comment-planning-applications>.

5. CONSULTATIONS

- 5.1 **Historic Environment Team (Archaeology):** The ruin was a building of local historic importance. Recommend a condition for detailed photographic recording of the building prior to any works commencing showing the current condition and setting.

- 5.2 **Scottish Water:** No objection

- 5.3 **SEPA:** Refer to the SEPA flood risk standing advice

6. DEVELOPMENT PLAN POLICY

- 6.1 The following policies are relevant to the assessment of the application

National Planning Framework 4 (2023) (NPF4)

- 6.2 Policy 1 - Tackling the Climate and Nature Crises
- Policy 2 - Climate Mitigation and Adaptation
- Policy 3 - Biodiversity
- Policy 4 - Natural Places
- Policy 5 - Soils
- Policy 7 - Historic Assets and Places
- Policy 10 - Coastal Development
- Policy 14 - Design Quality and Place
- Policy 15 - Local Living and 20 Minute Neighbourhoods
- Policy 17 - Rural Homes
- Policy 29 - Rural Development

Highland Wide Local Development Plan 2012 (HwLDP)

- 6.3 28 - Sustainable Design
- 29 - Design Quality & Place-making
- 36 - Development in the Wider Countryside
- 47 - Safeguarding Inbye/Appportioned Croftland
- 49 - Coastal Development
- 55 - Peat and Soils
- 57 - Natural, Built & Cultural Heritage
- 65 - Waste Water Treatment
- 66 - Surface Water Drainage

- 6.4 **West Highland and Islands Local Development Plan (2019) (WestPlan)**
No specific policies apply.

6.5 General policies

Access to Single Houses and Small Housing Developments (May 2011)
Developer Contributions (March 2013)
Housing in the Countryside and Siting and Design (March 2013)
Managing Waste in New Developments (March 2013)
Rural Housing (December 2021)
Standards for Archaeological Work (March 2012)
Sustainable Design Guide (Jan 2013)

7. OTHER MATERIAL POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

- 7.1 **Scottish Government Planning Policy and Guidance**
Creating Places

8. PLANNING APPRAISAL

- 8.1 Section 25 of the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 requires planning applications to be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

Determining Issues

- 8.2 This means that the application requires to be assessed against all policies of the Development Plan relevant to the application, all national and local policy guidance and all other material considerations relevant to the application.

Planning Considerations

- 8.3 The key considerations in this case are:
- a) compliance with the development plan and other planning policy
 - b) siting and design
 - c) impact on infrastructure and services
 - d) any other material considerations

Development plan/other planning policy

- 8.4 NPF4 Policies 1-3 apply to all development proposals nationwide. When considering all development proposals, significant weight will be given to the global climate and nature crises. Development proposals will be sited and designed to minimise lifecycle greenhouse gas emissions as far as possible. Development proposals will contribute to the enhancement of biodiversity, including where relevant, restoring degraded habitats, and building and strengthening nature networks and the connections between them. Proposals should also integrate nature-based solutions where possible.
- 8.5 NPF4 Policy 14 (Design, Quality and Place) states that development proposals will be designed to improve the quality of an area whether in urban or rural locations and regardless of scale and proposal will be supported where they meet the six qualities of successful places: Healthy, Pleasant, Connected, Distinctive, Sustainable and Adaptable. Proposals which are poorly designed, detrimental to the amenity of the surrounding area or inconsistent with the six qualities of successful places will not be supported.
- 8.6 NPF4 Policy 17 (Rural Homes) states that development proposals for new homes in remote rural areas will be supported where the proposal: supports and sustains existing fragile communities, supports identified local housing outcomes and is suitable in terms of location, access and environmental impact.
- 8.7 Polbain can be classed as a fragile community, and the addition of a further house would undoubtedly help support and sustain it. The Council's Local Housing Strategy 2023–28 identifies local housing outcomes, which include providing housing options and creating resilient communities and places. An additional house would potentially increase housing options, and additional residents would help create a resilient community. The application therefore stands to be assessed as to whether it is suitable in terms of location, design, access and environmental impact which is set out below.

- 8.8 NPF4 Policy 7 (Historic Assets and Places) states that non-designated historic environment assets, places and their setting should be protected and preserved in situ wherever feasible.
- 8.9 NPF4 Policy 4 (Natural Places) states that development proposals that will affect a National Scenic Area (NSA) will only be supported where the objectives of the designation and the overall integrity of the area will not be compromised.
- 8.10 The application site is within the Coigach-Assynt NSA, which is of national importance, defined in Policy 57 (Natural, Built and Cultural Heritage). This states that only developments which can be shown not to compromise the natural environment, amenity and heritage resource can be supported, unless a clear social or economic benefit of national importance can be demonstrated.
- 8.11 HwLDP Policy 47 (Safeguarding Inbye/Appportioned Croftland) states that development proposals are expected to minimise the loss of croft land. Proposals for single houses should accord with the Council's Housing in the Countryside Siting and Design Supplementary Guidance. Proposals should also avoid; siting on the agriculturally valuable part of the croft and, impeding use of the remaining croft by virtue of its location. The croft extends from the road to the coast and is used primarily for grazing.
- 8.12 HwLDP Policy 49 (Coastal Development) states that development proposals should not have an unacceptable impact on the natural, built or cultural heritage and amenity value of the area. The Council also promotes development on the landward side of the road when development on the coastal side would otherwise interrupt scenic views over open water; unless a coastal position is necessary or if the effect would be a conflict with the existing settlement pattern.
- 8.13 The proposal is for the erection of a house, on the site of a ruined croft building, on the seaward side and approximately 220m southwest of the single-track township road running through Polbain. Subject to ensuring that the development can adequately address any potential impact on siting ; impact on infrastructure and services; flood risk; access and parking; biodiversity; then the proposal would be considered to comply with the Development Plan.

Siting and design

- 8.13 The house is proposed to be on a ruin of a croft building within the crofting community of Polbain. The established settlement pattern is characterised by linear crofts with houses set near to the road forgoing long access tracks leaving the remainder of the plots unimpeded. In contrast, the house would develop on land, which is close to the coast, particularly for this area and would include a long access track disrupting the coherent land use of the plot. The proposed site is approximately 140m southwest from The Gables, which is the nearest property, the resultant house would be a significant deviation from the established building pattern. It should be noted that The Gables itself also deviates from the settlement pattern and is set back approximately 90m from the road; however, this is already an exception to the generally established building pattern within Polbain

Access to the site would be taken from the existing private access track from the public road serving The Gables. A new access track has already been constructed towards the application site west/southwest from the existing private track serving The Gables and the applicant's croft, without the benefit of planning permission or notification to the Planning Authority. It is not considered that this new track has been sensitively sited on the croftland, presenting as a long, linear and visually prominent scarring feature, which is particularly evident from the public road near 'Gate House'.

- 8.14 The landform is challenging, with the site close to the coastal margin, between the road and the sea, with the road and surrounding housing sitting above the site. The rigs fall from the road towards the water, and the landform at the site is on the 'roll' of the rig. There is a considerable undulation on the site, and it is not flat. The site can be seen from the public road.
- 8.15 Development of the site would result in significant disruption to the landform. It is very unfortunate that the application has not included any as-existing, or as-proposed sectional plans, showing the siting of the proposed house, and therefore it is unclear how much land may require to be subject to significant cut and fill to provide for a level building site. Without this, there is significant potential for a platform to be developed, and land to be cut into. This presents both a potentially significant and unquantified financial risk and costing for a developer, which of course would be at their own risk, but also could lead to a significant and detrimental visual impact on the landform, and wider community amenity, particularly regarding open coastal views.
- 8.16 Such an incursion into the landscape is not considered to be appropriate and would negatively impact the landscape character of this part of the Assynt Coigach NSA. The location of the proposal is therefore not considered to demonstrate compliance with NPF4 policy 4 (Natural Places) and NPF4 policy 17 (Rural Homes). Furthermore, the proposed siting would not safeguard the inbye/apportioned croftland as identified by HwLDP policy 47.
- 8.17 The design of buildings in the community at Polbain generally presents as relatively narrow rectangular plan form, with steep pitch roofs of at least 40°. Many of these have been modernised, altered and extended, some with converted roof spaces with dormers, or raised roofs, providing 1½ and 1¾ storey designs. Modern deeper plan form houses with lower roof pitches are the exception in the community.
- 8.18 This proposed design has a T-plan form, with a developed roof space. The footprint has a maximum length and breadth of 17.7m x 9.9m, with secondary length and breadth of 12.4m x 8.6m. The building height is 4.7m. The roof has variable low pitches of 32°-35°. The southwestern elevation facing the sea has 3 large patio doors from the principal public rooms and bedroom 4. The external finishes are identified as a white render, with grey roof tiles. A covered decked area to the southwestern elevation would have a metal roof.

- 8.19 The house is clearly a modern design form. However, the design language does not, unfortunately, relate well to established design of the housing in Polbain. The broad-plan form with low pitch roof starkly contrasting to the generally narrow traditional plan form with steep roof pitch.
- 8.22 The proposed design, combined with the proposed siting, are therefore not considered to respond appropriately to the site and do not accord with the Council's Rural Housing Supplementary Guidance (2021), as it does not
- enhance the setting of Polbain
 - respect the local character, scenic quality and wider landscape characteristics of the area;
 - sensitively address site constraints including topography
 - protect views over open water and
 - is not compatible with the existing pattern of development, and adjacent land uses
- 8.23 Applications have to be assessed on their individual merits. While alternative sites cannot be formally assessed within this application, it is recognised that there may be potential for an alternative site in the northwestern portion of the indicated landownership which would better relate to the wider established settlement pattern at Polbain. Such a site would still require an appropriate design solution accompanied by relevant topographical sections demonstrating the existing landform and how a house may be designed to sensitively and successfully fit within it, without requiring significant and extensive groundworks.

Impact on infrastructure and services

- 8.24 A treatment plant to land soakaway for foul drainage is proposed in the western corner of the site. Based on the submitted site plan, it is noted that this currently would not meet the required standards for obtaining a Building Warrant and would therefore require adjustment on the Planning Application submission.
- 8.26 The developer has indicated their intention to connect to the public water supply, and this would be for them to secure from Scottish Water.
- 8.27 The proposal states there is room for 2 cars to park and turn within the curtilage of the site and this is in line with Highland Council guidance, however these are not dimensioned on the site layout plan, therefore it has not been adequately demonstrated, and further information would be required before this element of the proposal could be agreed.

Other material considerations

- 8.28 Representations refer to a Local Place Plan for the area, however this has not been received by the Planning Authority.

Non-material considerations

- 8.29 Representations refer to the 2006 Local Plan. This has now been replaced by NPF4, HwLDP (2012), and WestPlan (2019) which together form the Development Plan.

Furthermore, any comments allegedly made at public meetings in the area in relation to the preparation of a Local Place Plan – which has not been received by the Council – are not material matters in the consideration of the proposal.

Matters to be secured by Legal Agreement / Upfront Payment

8.30 None

9. Conclusion

9.1 The proposal is in detail for the erection of a house on croft land at Polbain. Work has already commenced on site with the construction of a linear access track from the existing house, The Gables, across the croft.

9.2 The site is located in a visually prominent location between the road and sea and would deviate significantly to the established settlement pattern of most of the houses at Polbain which are located close to the public road, foregoing lengthy private access tracks.

9.3 The proposed site location is considered to be inappropriate relative to this existing pattern of development in the community and would be detrimental to its setting.

9.4 Furthermore, the building placement on the site is poorly considered; the submission does not clearly demonstrate exactly how the building would sit on, or within, the land as existing, or what extent of groundworks may be required to successfully achieve appropriate integration to the existing landform.

9.5 The building design is a suburban form, with a wide and deep T-plan, and resultant low roof pitch. This is not considered to relate well to the established buildings in this rural community within the Assynt-Coigach NSA.

9.6 Accordingly, it is considered that the proposed siting and design is inappropriate and does not accord with the relevant Development Plan policies and supplementary guidance.

9.7 All relevant matters have been taken into account when appraising this application. It is considered that the proposal does not accord with the principles and policies contained within the Development Plan and is unacceptable in terms of applicable material considerations.

10. IMPLICATIONS

10.1 Resource: Not applicable

10.2 Legal: Not applicable

10.3 Community (Equality, Poverty and Rural): Not applicable

10.4 Climate Change/Carbon Clever: Not applicable

10.5 Risk: Not applicable

10.6 Gaelic: Not applicable

11. RECOMMENDATION

Action required before decision issued N

Notification to Scottish Ministers N

Conclusion of Section 75 Obligation N

Revocation of previous permission N

Recommended to **REFUSE** the application for the following reasons:

1. The proposal fails to demonstrate that the siting of a house and associated infrastructure is appropriate within the rural landscape.

The building placement on the site is poorly considered; the submission does not clearly demonstrate exactly how the building would sit on, or within, the land as existing, or what extent of groundworks may be required to successfully achieve appropriate integration to the existing landform.

The position of the house, access track and parking arrangements would result in an intrusive and poorly located form of development that would fragment the site and erode its coherent land use. The location of the house would deviate significantly from the established settlement pattern at Polbain. The proposed siting is therefore considered to poorly relate to its surroundings and fails to integrate with the existing landform.

Accordingly, the proposal is contrary to NPF4 Policy 17(c) (Rural Homes) and HwLDP Policy 36 (Development in the Wider Countryside).

2. The building design is a suburban form, with a wide and deep T-plan, and resultant low roof pitch which is considered to be incompatible with its surroundings and does not contribute positively to the local area, and. is not considered to relate well to the established buildings in this rural community within the Assynt-Coigach National Scenic Area.

The proposal is not considered to demonstrate a satisfactory standard of design and layout, with its scale, form and overall arrangement, along with its associated infrastructure introducing an intrusive and incongruous element into the rural landscape, with insufficient regard having been given to the design's relationship to the established landscape character, settlement pattern and functional characteristics of the crofting environment.

Accordingly, the development is contrary to NPF4 Policy 14 (Design Quality and Place) and HwLDP Policy 36 (Development in the Wider Countryside).

3. The proposed development fails to conserve or enhance the special landscape qualities of the Assynt-Coigach National Scenic Area by virtue of its siting, scale and form, which would appear intrusive and poorly integrated within the landscape.

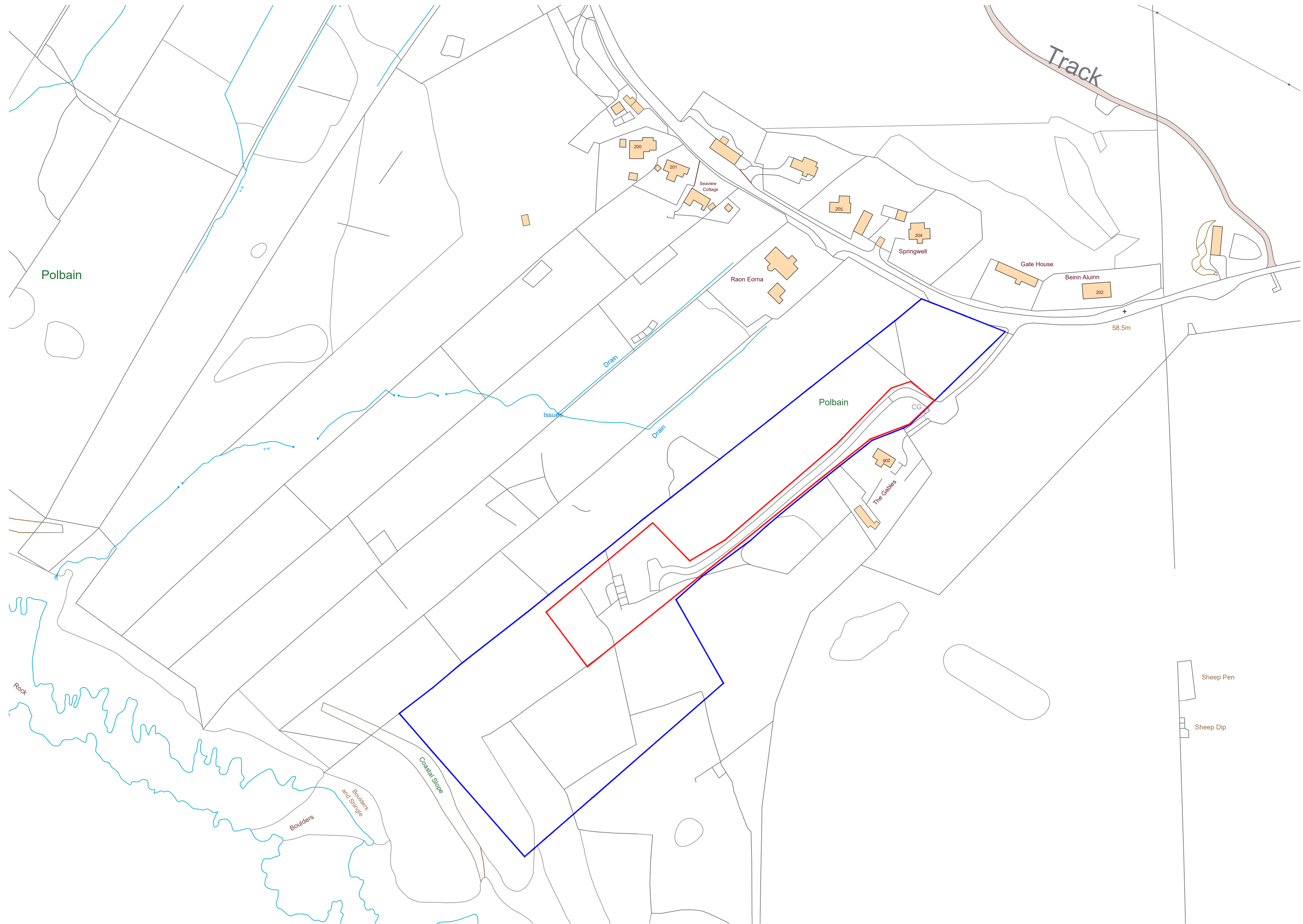
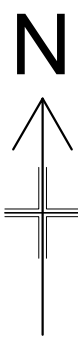
The proposal does not demonstrate that the design has been informed by, or responds appropriately to, the key landscape characteristics and special qualities of the area, including its openness, simplicity and strong relationship between landform and crofting pattern. The development would therefore detract from the scenic integrity of the Assynt-Coigach National Scenic Area.

Therefore, the proposal is contrary to NPF4 Policy 4 (Natural Places).

REASON FOR DECISION

All relevant matters have been taken into account when appraising this application. It is considered that the proposal does not accord with the principles and policies contained within the Development Plan and is unacceptable in terms of applicable material considerations.

Signature:	Bob Robertson
Designation:	pp. Area Planning Manager North
Author:	Ross Mcateer
Background Papers:	Documents referred to in report and in case file.
Relevant Plans:	Plan 1 DGW01-01 - Location Plan Plan 2 DGW01-02 - Site Layout Plan Plan 3 DGW01-05 - Ground Floor Plan Plan 4 DGW01-06 -First Floor Plan Plan 5 DGW01-07 – Elevation Plan



LOCATION PLAN

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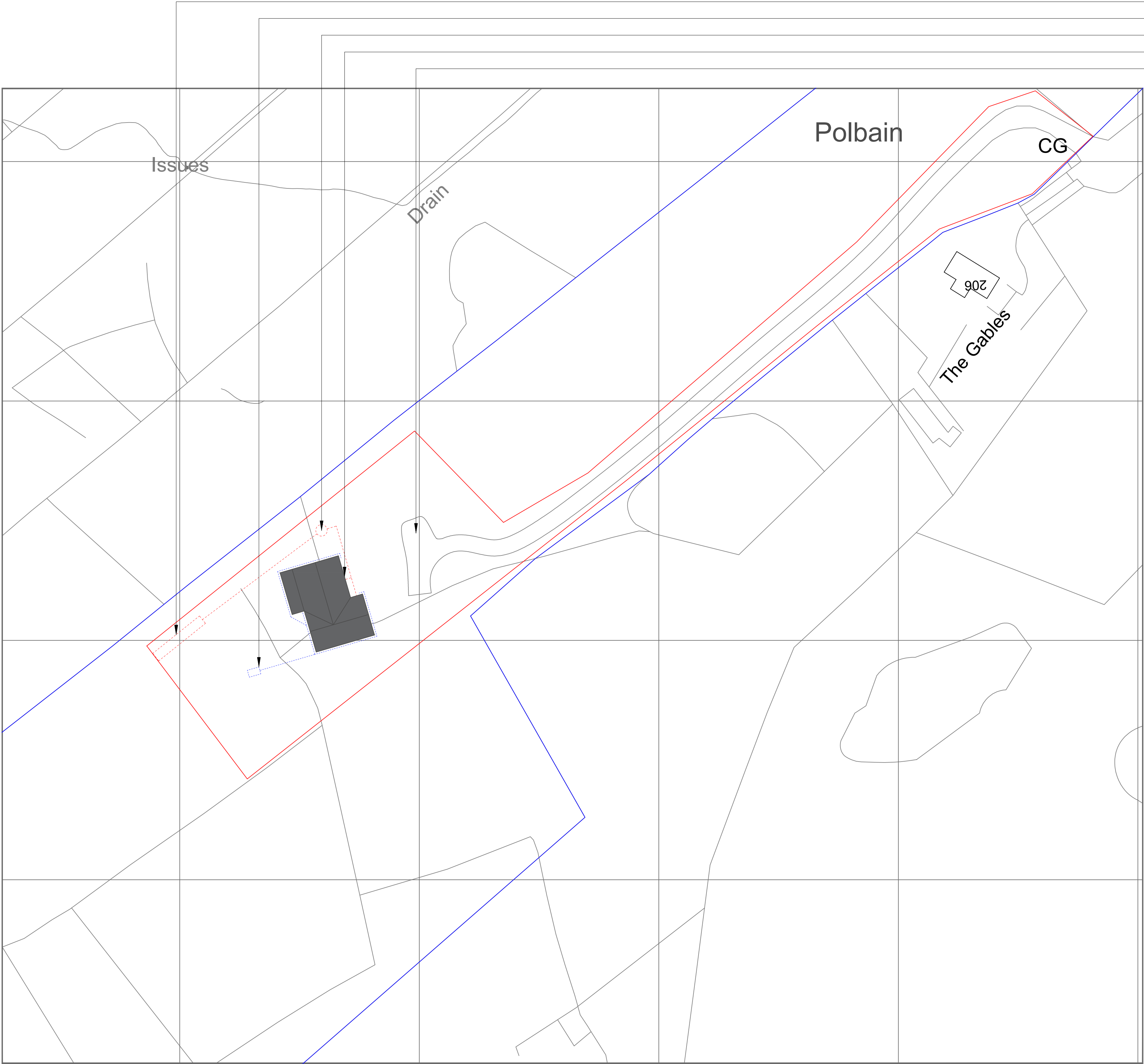
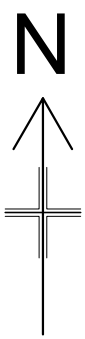


Notes:

1. ALL DIMENSIONS ARE APPROXIMATE.
2. THIS DRAWING IS TO BE READ IN CONJUNCTION WITH ALL RELEVANT ARCHITECTS, SERVICE ENGINEER'S DRAWINGS AND SPECIFICATIONS.

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STATUS: FOR COMMENT			

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SITE: NEW HOUSE AT POLBAIN			
TITLE: LOCATION PLAN			
SCALE AT A1: 1:1250	DATE: 29.10.25	DRAWN: RM	CHECKED: TBC
PROJECT NO: DGW01	DRAWING NO: DGW01-01	REVISION: /	



- Proposed Foul Soakaway
- Proposed Surface Water Soakaway
- Proposed Package Treatment Plant
- Proposed New House
- Existing Access Road with Parking and Turning for 2 Vehicles and De-sludging Tanker

SITE PLAN

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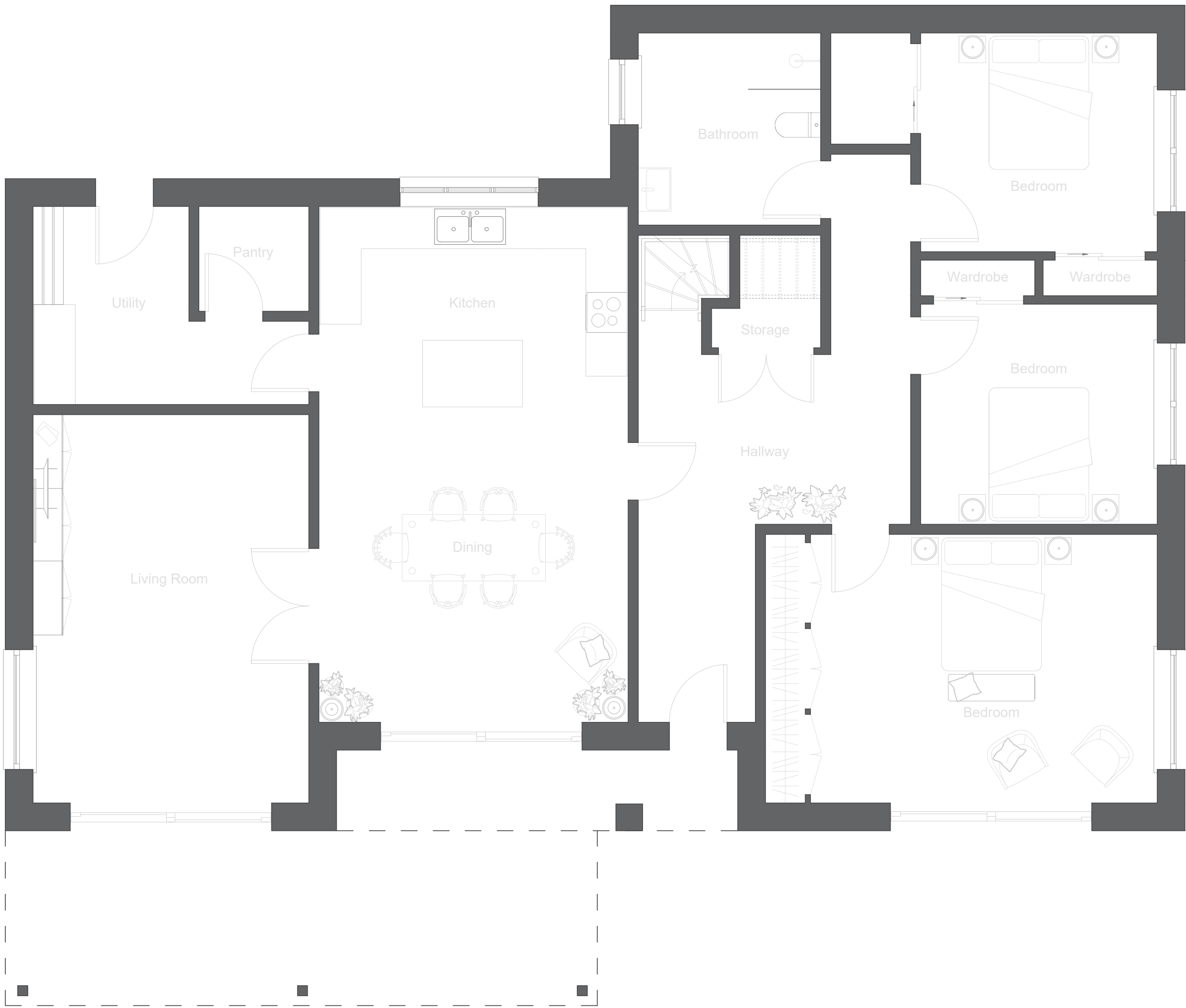
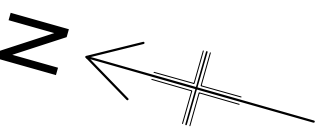


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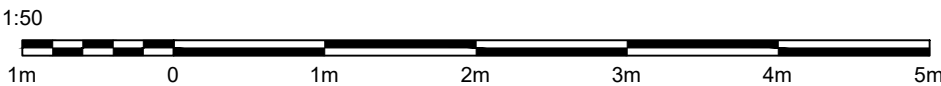
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TITLE: SITE PLAN			
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GROUND FLOOR PLAN

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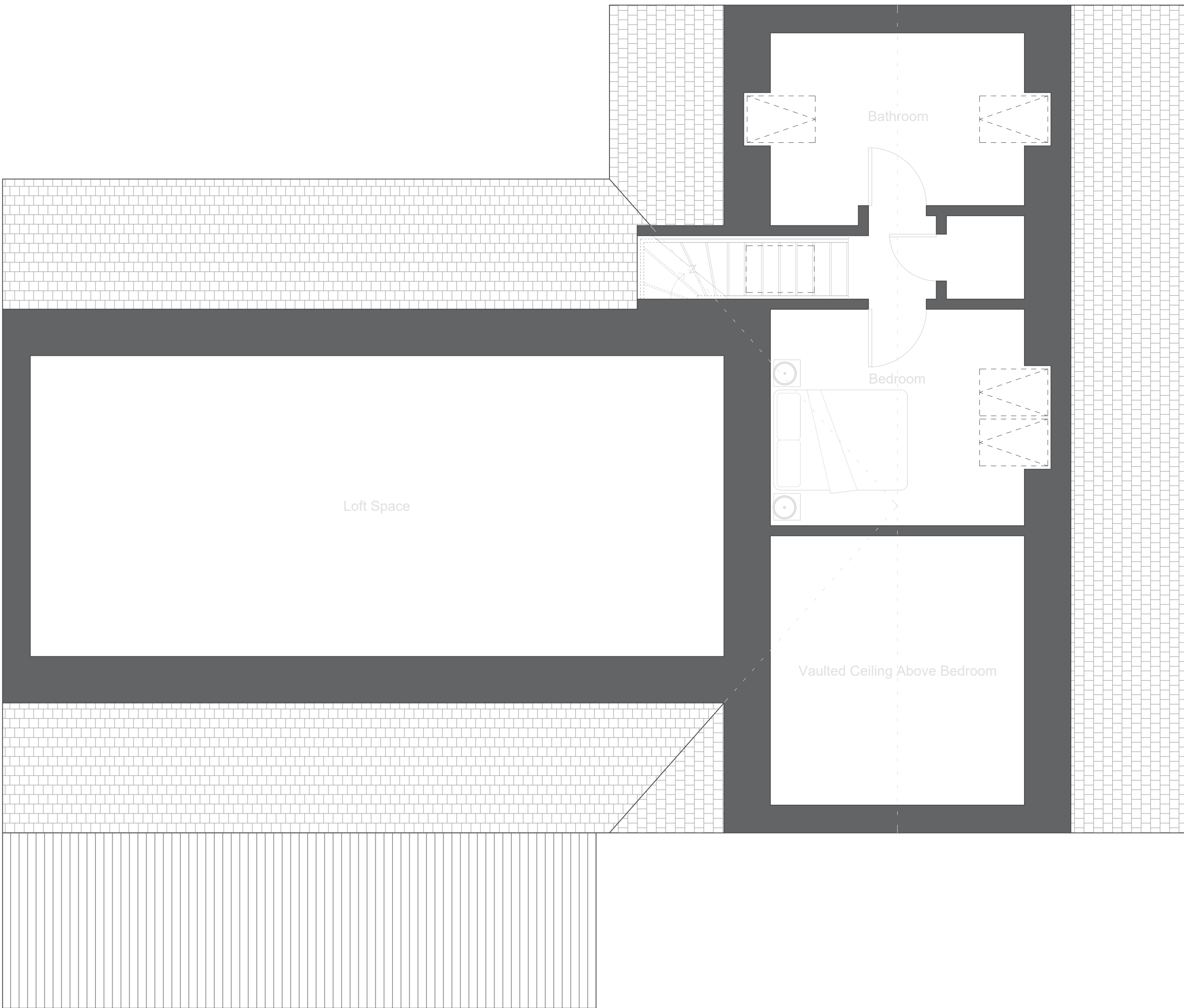
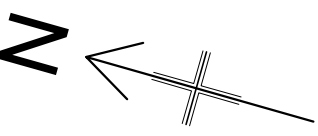


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FIRST FLOOR PLAN

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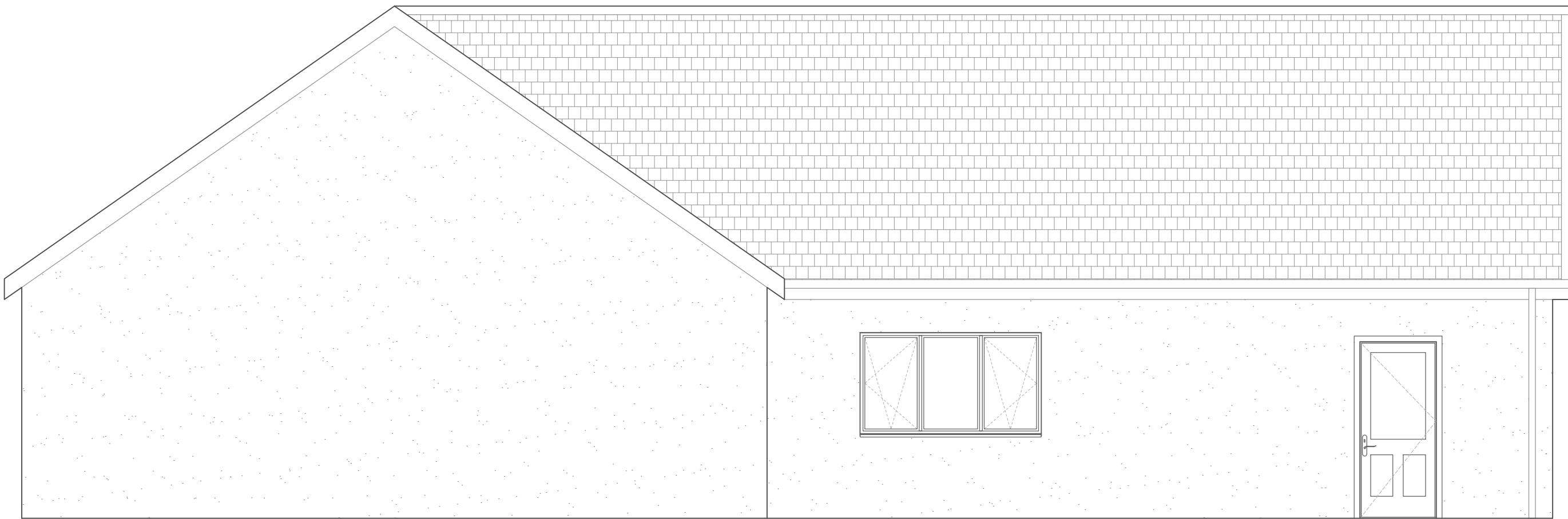


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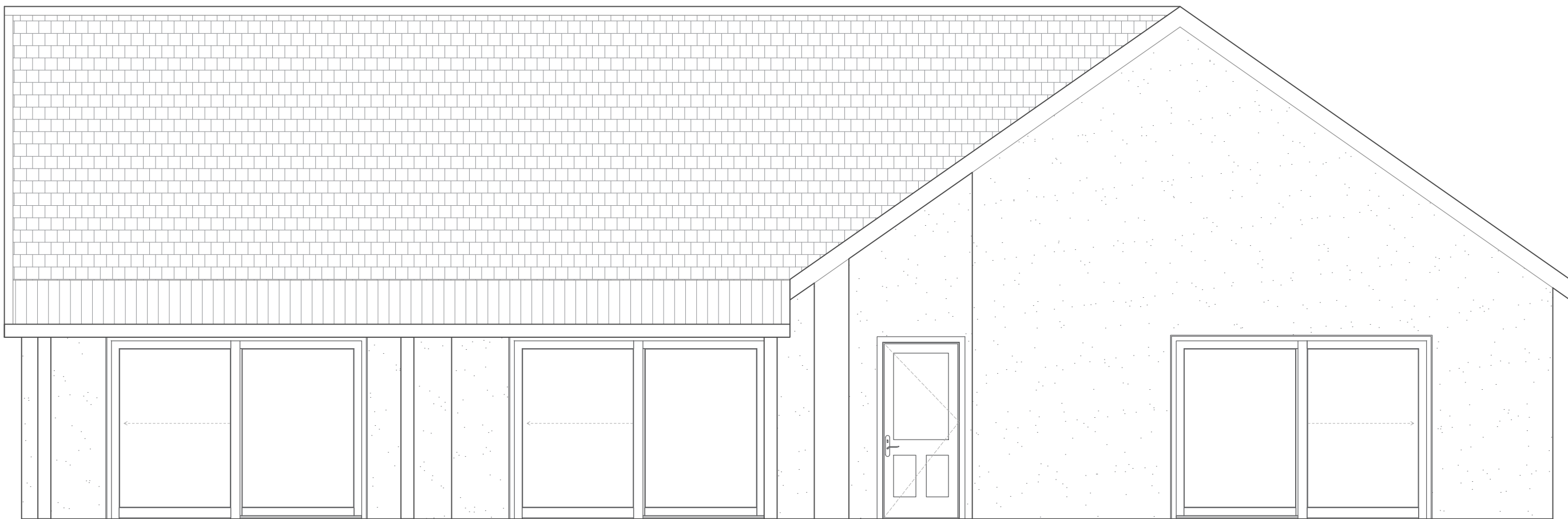
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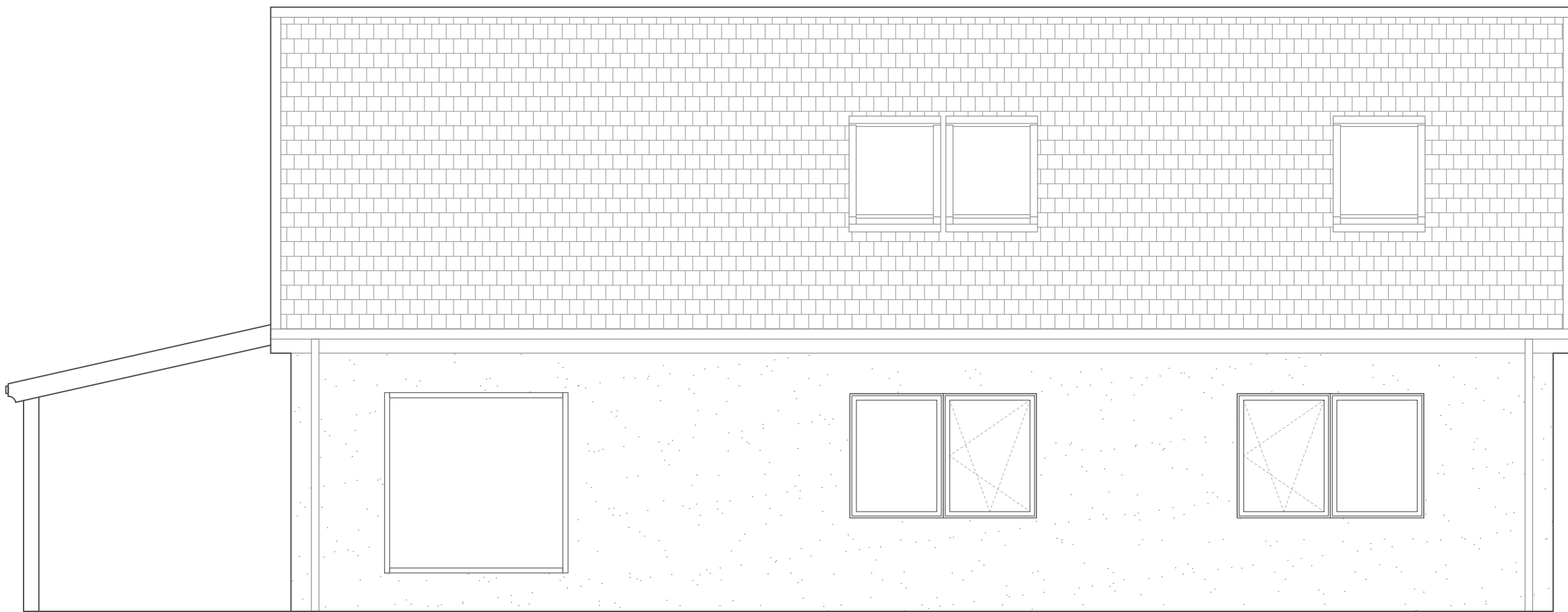
EAST ELEVATION

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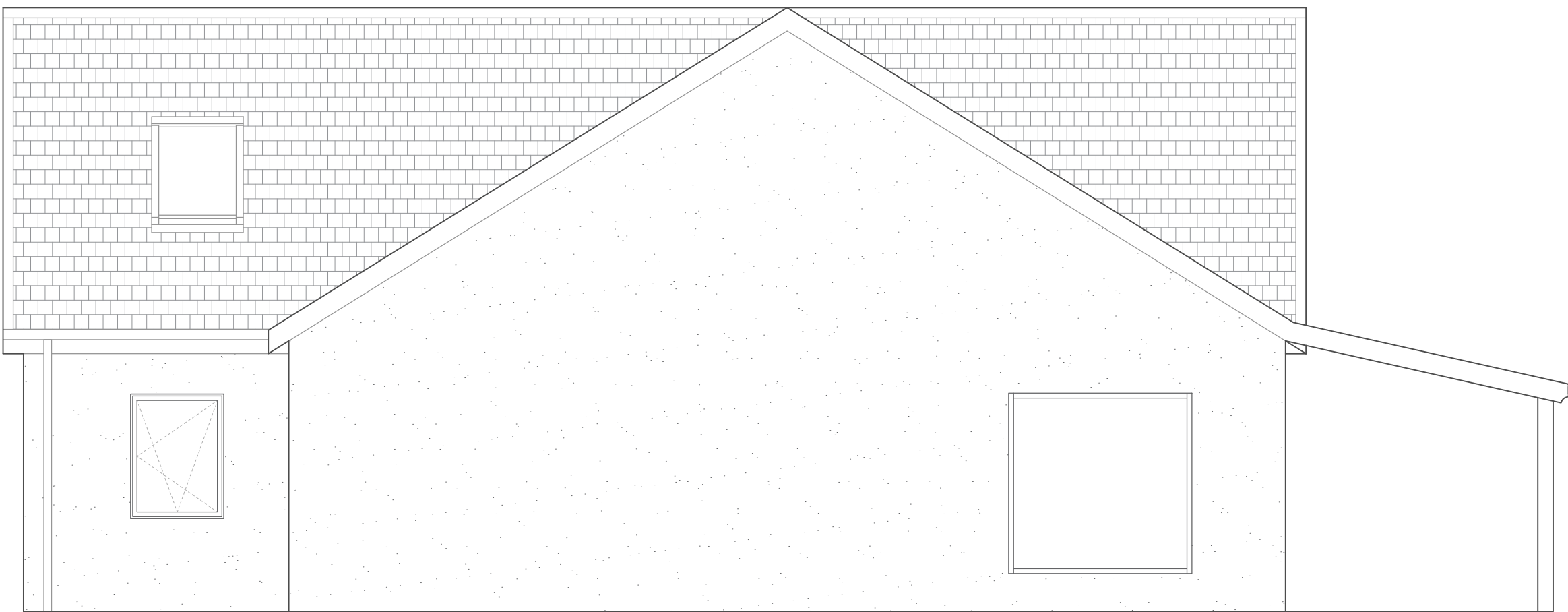
WEST ELEVATION

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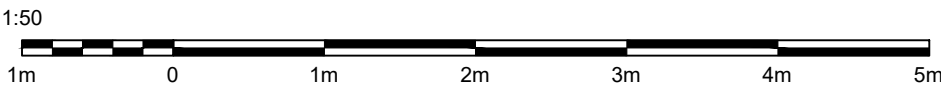
WEST ELEVATION

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NORTH ELEVATION

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TITLE: NEW HOUSE ELEVATIONS			
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PROJECT NO: DGW01	DRAWING NO: DGW01-07	REVISION: /	