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Bat Scoping Report and Preliminary Ecological Appraisal

362 Oxford Rd, Reading RG30 1AQ

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Report Summary

1. The Ecology Co-op was commissioned by The Keen Partnership to undertake a Bat Scoping Assessment and Preliminary Ecological Appraisal of the site at 362 Oxford Road. The purpose of this report is to present the findings of the appraisal and identify potential ecological constraints and opportunities in relation to a proposal to redevelop the site to accommodate new domestic dwellings.
2. An assessment of the site was carried out by Dr Ryan Walker MCIEEM, CEnv and Natural England Level 2 class bat licence holder on the 15th November 2021. This included a ground-based external inspection of the building and an internal inspection of the roof void of the building. An appraisal of the surrounding habitats, including trees, to evaluate the site for its potential to support bats and other statutory protected species was also undertaken. All bats are European Protected Species (Annex IV, 'Habitats Directive').
3. This site is situated within in an urban location, surrounded by shops and businesses, with no green open space. There are no designated protected areas within the zone of proposed influence from the site.
4. The building has been determined to have a negligible suitability for roosting bats. In accordance with current guidelines, no further surveys with regards to roosting bats are considered necessary. The site supports no potential to support any other protected species or species groups.
5. Ecological enhancements such as a native species planting scheme as part of any landscaping should be included within the proposed development. Integrated bird nesting features could be included within the fabric of the new building as part of the proposed development.



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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose of the Report

The Ecology Co-op has been commissioned to undertake a bat scoping assessment and Preliminary Ecological Appraisal of the site at 362 Oxford Road, by the Keen Partnership. This report presents the findings of a walkover survey and building inspection for roosting bats, undertaken by Dr Ryan Walker, MCIEEM, CEnv and Natural England Level 2 bat survey class licence holder [2015-16736-CLS-CLS] on 15th November 2021. Whilst this report has maintained a focus on assessing potential impacts upon roosting bats and bat activity within the proposal's zone of influence, it has also considered the potential for any other protected/notable species and/or habitats to be adversely affected. The proposal includes the redevelopment of the site for housing. Recommendations for further surveys that are likely to be required to inform a planning application and Ecological Impact Assessment are provided, if necessary. Where appropriate, measures to avoid, mitigate and/or compensate for significant adverse effects are outlined.

1.2 Background

The site is located at 362 Oxford Rd, Reading, RG30 1AQ. The central grid reference for the site is SU 69729 73633. The site comprises of a former Conservative Club, set within a heavily unurbanized setting. The building is fringed by Oxford Road to the south and other roads, carparks, other buildings and an area of confined hard standing and rough grassland on the remaining sides. There are no natural or semi natural habitats within the immediate surrounding landscape. The location of the site is based on images produced from Google Earth image detailed below (Figure 1).



Figure 1. Aerial image showing the location of the 362 Oxford Road, outlined in red, within the wider landscape. Image produced courtesy of Google maps (map data ©2021 Google).



1.3 Policy and Legislation

Legal protection applying to all bat species in the UK and any other species relevant to this appraisal, is outlined in Appendix 1 of this report.

The results of this survey will be used to determine the need for further surveys, impact avoidance measures and/or an appropriate mitigation/compensation strategy to ensure compliance with UK wildlife legislation, policy and best practice.

2 METHODOLOGY

The methodologies used for this survey are in accordance with the bat survey guidelines produced by the Bat Conservation Trust¹. Where there has been any deviation from the guidelines due to any site-specific constraints or other circumstances, reasoning and justification has been provided. This survey has also considered the Guidelines for Preliminary Ecological Appraisal produced by CIEEM², where the potential for impacts to species other than bats has been identified.

2.1 Desk Study

A search of on-line mapping resources has been undertaken to characterise the local context of the site with respect to semi-natural habitats and linear features of value to foraging and commuting bats.

The MAGIC website resource (www.magic.gov.uk) has been used to identify the location of designated sites for nature conservation within 2km and European Protected Species (EPS) licences granted within a 1km radius of the survey site. Priority habitats and ancient woodland, upon the site and within the proposal's zone of influence, have also been identified due to their ecological value and potential to act as important foraging resources for bats.

Priority habitats and ancient woodland are classified as habitats of principal importance. Habitats of principal importance are listed in Section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act, 2006³, which places a duty on Local Planning Authorities to have due regard to biodiversity.

2.2 Field Survey

2.2.1 Roosting Potential

Bats can use a wide range of features for roosting purposes including loft spaces, cavity walls, loose tiles, mortice joints and cracks/gaps in a variety of built structures. They can also be found in trees with holes, splits, cracks, cavities, ivy and loose bark.

¹ Collins, J.(ed.) (2016) *Bat Surveys for Professional Ecologists: Good Practice Guidelines* (3rd edn). The Bat Conservation Trust, London.

² CIEEM (2017) *Guidelines for Preliminary Ecological Appraisal*, 2nd edition. Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management, Winchester.

³ HM Government (2006). Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006. Available online at: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2006/16/section/41>.



A detailed building inspection was carried out, looking for potential access points and Potential Roosting Features (PRFs) that bats could use and any evidence indicating the presence of bats using the building, such as rub marks, feeding remains, staining or droppings. This included a ground-based external inspection around the building and internal inspection of the roof voids. A high-powered torch and binoculars were used for the external assessment.

The suitability of each feature, or group of features, to support roosting bats has been assessed as either negligible, low, moderate, or high, in accordance with best practice guidance¹ (see Table 1) Any evidence confirming the presence of bats was clearly recorded including photos and samples taken (e.g. droppings), where appropriate. Further surveys have been recommended in accordance with best practice guidance and the surveyor's professional judgement, where evidence of a bat roost or PRFs have been identified that would be adversely impacted by the proposal and where precautionary mitigation alone cannot ensure that bats would not be potentially disturbed or harmed.

Table 1. Guidelines for assessing suitability of structures (buildings and trees) to support bat roosts

Suitability	Description of roosting habitats
Negligible	A structure that does not support any features that could be used by roosting bats.
Low	A structure that has one or more potential roosting features that could support individual roosting bats opportunistically. These features however lack the space, shelter or appropriate conditions, to support larger numbers of bats (such as a maternity roost).
Moderate	A structure with one or more potential roost sites that could be used by bats due to their size, shelter and suitable conditions for roosting, but are unlikely to support a roost of high conservation significance.
High	A structure with one or more potential roost sites that are obviously suitable for use by larger numbers of bats on a more regular basis and potential for longer periods of time due to their size, shelter, protection and conditions.

2.2.2 Hibernation Potential

The structure and its associated features were assessed for their suitability to be used by hibernating bats. The assessment was carried out in accordance with guidelines produced by BatAbility⁴ and the bat survey guidelines produced by the Bat Conservation Trust¹. To determine the potential for features to support hibernating bats the following aspects were considered:

- The suitability of features to support roosting bats or to allow access for roosting bats;
- The temperature and humidity conditions likely to be present within the feature during the winter period and the suitability in this respect for it to be used by bats for hibernating;
- The surrounding habitat, in terms of its potential for use by bats outside of the hibernation period for commuting and/or foraging purposes; and
- The presence of known roosts within the structure, or adjacent structures, or surrounding area during the active season.

The potential for use by hibernating bats for each feature, or group of features was assessed as either negligible, low, moderate, or high, in accordance with best practice. Further surveys are recommended where appropriate, considering the feasibility of a hibernation survey for certain PRFs.

⁴ Middleton. N. (2019). *Assessing Sites for Hibernation Potential. A Practical Approach, including a Proposed Method & Supporting Notes. Version' Draft/V2.2019.* BatAbility.



2.2.3 Foraging and Commuting Potential

The habitats surrounding the site and wider landscape were broadly assessed for their potential to support foraging and commuting bats, and were categorised as negligible, low, moderate or high potential suitability in line with published guidance¹.

2.3 Other Protected and/or Notable Species

Any birds identified, or evidence of nesting birds discovered during the site visit, were recorded. Special attention was paid to notable species such as red-listed Birds of Conservation Concern⁵ and those species afforded special protection on Schedule 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981), such as barn owl *Tyto alba* and swallow *Hirundo rustica*.

Whilst this survey has focussed on bats and no specific searches were made with respect to other protected/notable species, any evidence of such species that was encountered during the site visit was also recorded.

3 RESULTS/OBSERVATIONS

3.1 Desk Study

There are no statutory protected areas recorded within 2km of the site (Figure 2). There are no areas of potentially suitable foraging habitat for bats, such as deciduous woodland, or large domestic gardens within close proximity to the vicinity of the site, which is situated in an urbanized location. Further, there are no European Protected Species (EPS) Mitigation licenses for bats identified within 1km of the site on MAGiC. The closest license is situated approximately 1.2km to the south of the site and concerns the destruction of a maternity roost supporting soprano pipistrelle bats *Pipistrellus pygmaeus*.

3.2 Site Context and Surrounding Habitats

This site is located within a heavily urbanised environment (Figure 1). The local landscape generally lacks any natural or semi natural habitats and supports extremely limited habitat that could potentially support foraging bats.

3.3 Inspection for Bats

3.3.1 Roost Potential

The building is constructed of brick, and divided roughly into three sections, with a central two story section, supporting a roof void (Photo 1), a single story, pitched roof section to the west (Photo 2) and a single story flat roof section to the north (Photo 8). The site supports a small hard standing parking area to the east (Photo 6). There are no trees within the site. The potential roosting features within the

⁵ Eaton et al. (2015). *Birds of Conservation Concern 4: the population status of birds in the UK, Channel Islands*



fabric of the building within the site are described in greater in Table 1 below and illustrated in the following photographs section.

Table 1. Assessment of Potential Roosting Features (PRFs)

Building section	Description of features	Assessment of suitability (Collins 2016)
Roof void	The building supports a substantial roof void that encompasses the footprint of the two story central section of the building, with a floor to apex height of approximately 3.5m. The void is traditional timber framed and lined in bitumen roofing felt (Photo 4). There is no evidence to suggest use by void roosting bats.	Negligible bat roosting suitability
Roof tiles	The building supports two sections of pitched slate tiled roofs and an area of bitumen flat roof (Photos 2, 5 & 8). These tiles are devoid of gaps that could be considered potentially suitable for crevice roosting bats such as the pipistrelle species. The section of bitumen lined roof is well fitting and devoid of gaps.	Negligible bat roost suitability
Soffits and other potential external roosting features.	The soffits fringing the roof of the building are constructed of what appears to be well-fitting PVC (Photo 7). All other external aspects of the building appear to be in good condition and devoid of potential roosting gaps (Photo 3).	Negligible bat roost suitability

Overall, the bat roost suitability of the building is considered to be negligible.

3.3.2 Hibernation Potential

The building lacks potential hibernation roosting habitat as no potential roost features have been identified.

3.4 Foraging and Commuting Potential

The site and the surrounding landscape support very low potential bat foraging habitat, owing to the urbanised location, likely high levels of light pollution and lack of green open spaces.

3.5 Other Protected and/or Notable Species

The site does not support any other habitat that could be considered potentially suitable for other protected species.

3.6 Survey Limitations

An initial site assessment such as this is only able to act like a 'snapshot' to record any flora or fauna that is present at the time of the survey. It is therefore possible that some species may not have been present during the survey, but may be evident at other times of the year. Bats will commonly roost in small inaccessible crevices, such as spaces underneath ridge tiles that are impossible to inspect during a scoping assessment. For this reason, habitats and features are assessed for their potential to support bats, even where no direct evidence (such as droppings) has been identified.



3.7 Photographs



Photograph 1. The south facing elevation of the 362 Oxford Road.



Photograph 2. The southwest facing elevation of one of the single story sections of the building.



Photograph 3. The eastern facing section of the building.



Photograph 4. The timber framed roof void within the central, two story section of the building.



Photograph 5. The tight-fitting slate roof tiles cladding all parts of the pitched roof at the site.



Photograph 6. Hard standing area to the east of the site.



Photograph 7. The well fitting PVC soffits fringing much of the roof.



Photograph 8. The flat roof section upon the single story area to the north of the building.

4 ECOLOGICAL CONSTRAINTS AND OPPORTUNITIES

4.1 Designated Sites

There are no statutory protected area within 2km of the site. The proposed works are unlikely to impact any protected sites due to the small-scale nature of the proposed development and the distances to any protected areas.

4.2 Bats

4.2.1 Roost Potential

In accordance with the Bat Conservation Trust guidelines, the overall suitability of the building to support roosting bats is rated as negligible, due to the lack of potential bat roosting features. Therefore, no further surveys in this instance are recommended.

4.2.2 Hibernation Potential

The building supports negligible potential to support hibernating bats, due to the lack of potentially suitable roosting features.

4.2.3 Foraging and Commuting Suitability

As the site is situated within a heavily urbanised environment, with significant light pollution from a multitude of artificial light sources, the wider landscape is likely to have a very low value for foraging bats. Therefore, mitigating artificial lighting that may impact bats and other nocturnal wildlife is not considered necessary in this instance.

4.3 Other Protected and/or Notable Species

The site does not include any habitat that could be considered potentially suitable for supporting other protected species.



4.4 Biodiversity Enhancement Opportunities

The proposed development represents an opportunity for habitat enhancement to benefit insects, birds, and bats. Any planting scheme should include native shrub species and flowering species known to encourage insect diversity. Green roofs are excellent techniques for enhancing an urban site for wildlife and should be considered in such settings. Such enhancement measures are in line with the recommendations of the NPPF and as such would be considered favourably when determining the planning application.

The developer is encouraged to consider including integral bird nesting opportunities into the proposed new building fabric. For example, four 9A Schwegler House Martin nests and five 1SP Schwegler Sparrow Terrace boxes could be integrated into the proposed new development, to improve the site for these species that often occur within more urban environments.

Should you need any further advice on the information provided above, please do not hesitate to contact The Ecology Co-op.



APPENDIX 1 – Wildlife Legislation and National Planning Policy

The following text is intended for general guidance only and does not constitute comprehensive professional legal advice. It provides a summary of the current legal protection afforded to bats.

All bat species in the UK are included in Schedule II of the Habitats Regulations 2017, which transpose Annex II of the Council Directive 92/43/EEC 1992 on the Conservation of Natural Habitats and of Wild Fauna and Flora ("The EC Habitats Directive"). As such all bat species in the UK are defined as 'European Protected Species (EPS).

Four species of bat (Bechstein's bat *Myotis bechsteinii*, Barbastelle bat *Barbastella barbastellus*, greater and lesser horseshoe bats, *Rhinolophus ferrumequinum* and *R. hipposideros*) are also listed on Annex IV of the EC Habitats Directive. This requires the designation of a series of sites which contain important populations of these species as Special Areas of Conservation (SACs).

All species of British bat are also fully protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981), as amended, through inclusion in Schedule V.

All species of bat are listed on Section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act (2006). Section 41 of the NERC Act lists the habitats and species of principle importance. This places a statutory duty on all public bodies, including planning authorities, under Section 40, to take, or promote the taking by others, steps to further the conservation of habitats and species of principal importance for the conservation of biodiversity in England (commonly referred to as the 'Biodiversity Duty'). This duty extends to all public bodies the biodiversity duty of Section 74 of the Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000, which placed a duty only on Government and Ministers.

Under the above legislation it is an offence to:

- kill, injure or take any individual bat of any species;
- possess any part of an individual bat, either alive or dead;
- intentionally or recklessly damage, destroy or obstruct access to any place or structure used by bats for shelter, rest, protection, or breeding;
- intentionally or recklessly disturb these species whilst using any place of shelter or protection;
- or
- deliberately disturb bats in such a way as to be likely to impair their ability to:
 - survive, to breed or reproduce, to rear or nurture their young; to hibernate or migrate;
 - or to affect significantly the local distribution or abundance of the species to which they belong;
- keep (possess), transport, sell or exchange, or offer for sale or exchange, any live or dead bat, or any part of, or anything derived from a bat.

It is also an offence to set and use articles capable of catching, injuring, or killing bats (for example a trap or poison), or knowingly cause or permit such an action. There is also protection under Schedule 6 of The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) relating specifically to trapping and direct pursuit of bats.

A European Protected Species Licence (EPSL) in relation to bats is required from Natural England for



any work that would result in an otherwise unlawful activity (e.g. damage to a bat roost). A license can only be issued to permit otherwise prohibited acts if Natural England are satisfied that all the following three tests are met:

- The proposal is for 'preserving public health or public safety, or other imperative reasons of overriding public interest including those of a social or economic nature and beneficial consequences of primary importance for the environment';
- There is no satisfactory alternative; and
- The action authorised by the license will not be detrimental to the maintenance of bat populations at a favourable conservation status in their natural range.

A bat roost is defined by the Bat Conservation Trust's Bat Surveys—Good Practice Guidelines 3rd Edition as "the resting place of a bat". In general, the word roost is interpreted as "any structure or place, which any wild bat uses for shelter or protection."

Bats tend to re-use the same roosts; therefore, legal opinion is guided by recent case law precedents, that a roost is protected, whether or not the bats are present at the time. This includes summer roosts used for resting during the day and/or breeding; or winter roosts, used for hibernating.

