

Abbey Corner, Reading

Ecology survey report

Client	Harris Partnership (Tanya Trayner)
Site	Abbey Corner, Reading
Prepared by	Prof. Mark Whittingham MCIEEM, Partner
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1 Summary

Site	Abbey Corner, Reading
Report Commissioned by	Harris Partnership
Date of Survey	16 th November 2021

We were asked to assess the potential ecological impacts of the removal of a plant room structure on the roof of a building at Abbey Road, Reading. **Impacts on all ecological receptors were negligible except for those on bats.**

There were a few features of the plant room which indicated this building could potentially be used by bats (e.g. lifted tiles, gaps in the lining to the insulation layer) as a roost and the structure was dark within and mainly undisturbed. It was made of materials and of a construction which would offer relatively good thermal insulation and stable conditions, making it possible to be used by bats. It is in a very urbanized location, with limited foraging opportunities nearby but is within 70m of one river (Kennet) and just over 1km of another (Thames), which could offer commuting and foraging routes. Use of the structure would be limited to those bat species which can inhabit such urban environments, most likely common *Pipistrellus pipistrellus* or soprano pipistrelle *Pipistrellus pygmaeus*.

Overall the plant room structure was deemed to have **low** bat roost potential. Further bat **emergence surveys** are recommended (one dusk, one dawn) to understand the potential use of the building by bats. Even though bats might be absent over the winter they may return in the Spring/Summer. The earliest time the bat surveys could be undertaken is Spring 2022.

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2 Introduction

2.1 Background and scope

Whittingham Ecology was commissioned by the Harris Partnership to undertake an ecology survey (with a focus on bats) at Abbey Corner, Reading.

2.2 Site Location and Description

The site was located in the city centre of Reading at 2-4 King's Road.

2.3 Development Proposal

The client proposes to develop the upper part of the building and the plant room will be removed.

2.4 Objective

The objective of this survey was to assess impacts on ecology and the potential use of the plant room building by bats in accordance with relevant European and UK wildlife legislation (**Appendix 1**).

3 Methodology

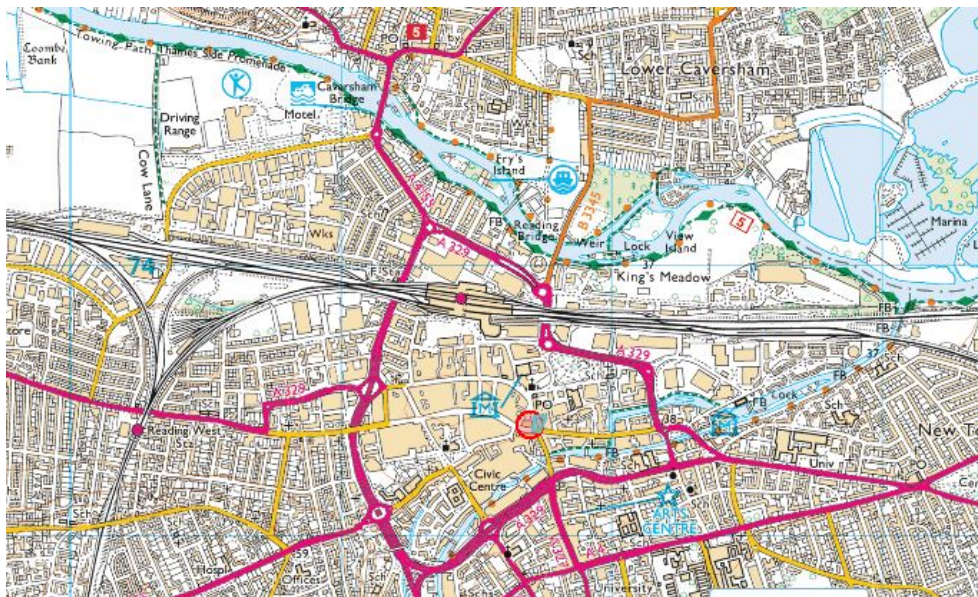
3.1 Surveyor

The site was surveyed by ecologist Rebecca Cattell on 16th November 2021. She is an experienced ecologist, has extensive experience of bat surveys and is a member graduate member of the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM) and subject to the CIEEM Professional Code of Conduct. She was accompanied on the survey by Tanya Traynor from the Harris Partnership.

3.2 Survey

The site is located in Reading close to the River Kennet (Figure 1) and the area to be surveyed is on the roof of an existing building (Figure 2). It was surveyed for ecological receptors and photographs taken, Survey was undertaken on 16th November (10C, overcast, dry, wind 2 (Beaufort Scale)). Potential for the development site to support roosting or breeding bats was assessed in line with the Bat Conservation Trust (BCT) *Bat Surveys for Professional Ecologists Good Practice Guidelines* (Collins, 2016).

Figure 1. Site location (red ringed) in Reading, showing the River Thames to the North/North East and the River Kennet to the South East.



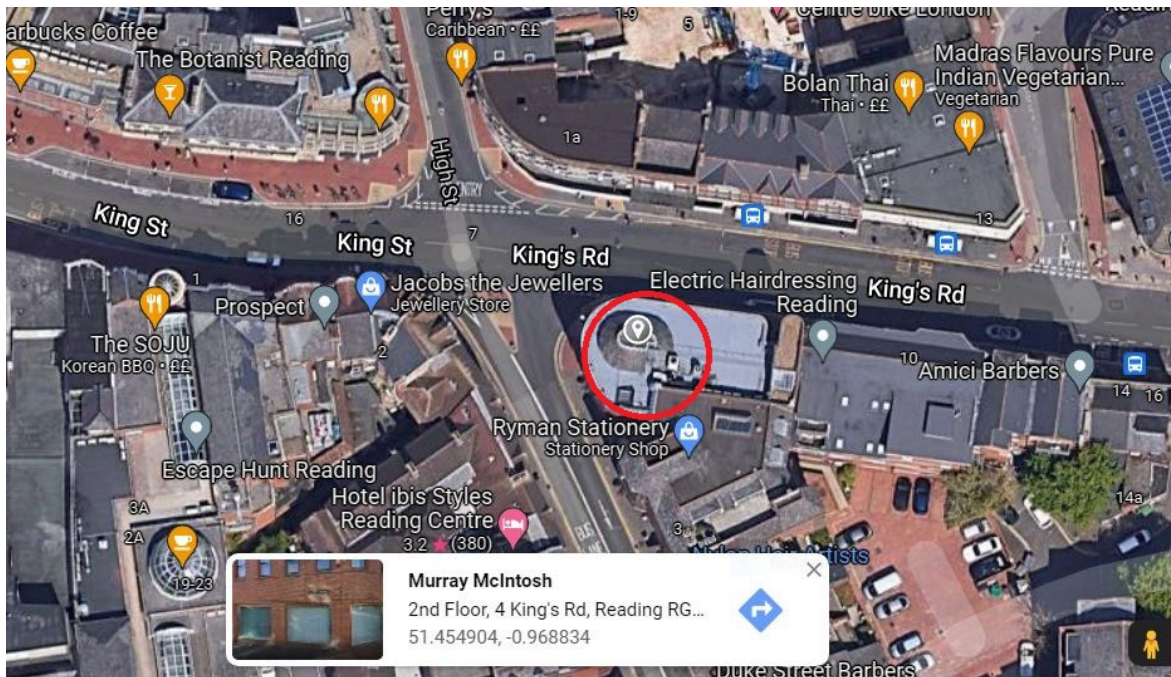


Figure 2. Site location (red ringed) – plant room in centre of red circle.

4 Results and Evaluation

The roof of the building held negligible ecological value (see Photo 1) as the entire roof that will be lost comprises artificial surfaces. However, the plant room (that will be demolished as part of the development) might be used by bats (see Photos 2-12 and below).

The plant room is on the roof of the building. It is a rounded structure comprised of internal steel beams, layered with timber cross pieces and fiberglass insulation with a layer of plastic, with an outer layer of (probably) asbestos tiles. The structure was in a generally good state of repair although there were a few raised tiles or pieces of lead flashing on the exterior which could potentially be used by bats as a roost. Through these gaps there was possibly access available to the insulation layer, although the lifted tile spaces would provide room enough to be used as a roost place.

Access was available into the interior of the building through the slated wooded door and the skylight. No evidence of bats (droppings, scratches etc) was found in the interior, although it looked to be swept relatively often. If bats were utilizing the external tiles and/or insulation layer only then droppings would be contained within, or weathered away on the exterior and so may not be found.

Although the site is in a city centre there are two features nearby which suggest potential foraging areas (see Figure 1). The River Thames runs approximately 1km to the North East of the site at it's closest point, with an area of marina and potential bat foraging habitat. The River Kennet runs approximately 70m to the South East of the site. The presence of these two riverine habitats is a supporting factor in the classification of the plant room as of potential bat use (albeit at a low level) (following Bat Conservation Trust guidelines 2016).

Use of the structure would be limited to those bat species which can inhabit such urban environments, most likely common *Pipistrellus pipistrellus* or soprano pipistrelle *Pipistrellus pygmaeus*.



Photo 1. The plant room structure



Photo 2. Lifted exterior tile



Photo 3. Lifted exterior tiles and lead flashing



Photo 4. Lifted tile



Photo 5. Lifted lead flashing and tiles



Photo 6. Lifted tiles



Photo 7. Slatted doors allowing possible bat access to the interior



Photo 8. Interior. Steel beams with a fiberglass insulation layer with timber batons and a plastic sheeting layer



Photo 9. Skylight allowing possible bat entry to the interior



Photo 10. Example of potential roost space between timber batons and insulation layer



Photo 11. Complexity of interior roof. Abundant crevices and spaces.



Photo 12. Complexity of interior roof. Abundant crevices and spaces.

5 Conclusion

The removal of the plant room and the existing roof held no ecological value expect for bats. To comply with current legislation (see Appendix 1) we recommend bat surveys are undertaken in Spring 2022 (following Bat Conservation Trust 2016). Two vists will be required, one at dusk and one at dawn.

6 References

Bat Surveys for Professional Ecologists Good Practice Guidelines, Bat Conservation Trust, 2016.

7 Appendix 1 - Legislation & Planning Policy

Legislation

Conservation of Habitat and Species Regulations (CHSR)

The *CHSR 2017* transpose Council Directive 92/43/EEC on the Conservation of Natural Habitats and Wild Flora and Fauna (Habitats Directive) into English law, making it an offence to deliberately capture, kill or disturb wild animals listed under Schedule 2 of the Regulations. It is also an offence to damage or destroy a breeding site or resting place of such an animal (even if the animal is not present at the time).

Wildlife & Countryside Act (WCA)

The *WCA 1981*, as amended by the *Countryside and Rights of Way Act (CROW) 2000* and the *Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act (NERC) 2006*, consolidates and amends existing national legislation to implement the Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats (Bern Convention) and Council Directive 79/409/EEC on the Conservation of Wild Birds (Birds Directive), making it an offence to:

- Intentionally kill, injure or take any wild bird or their eggs or nests (with certain exceptions) and disturb any bird species listed under Schedule 1 to the Act, or its dependent young while it is nesting;
- Intentionally kill, injure or take any wild animal listed under Schedule 5 to the Act; intentionally or recklessly damage, destroy or obstruct any place used for shelter or protection by any wild animal listed under Schedule 5 to the Act; intentionally or recklessly disturb certain Schedule 5 animal species while they occupy a place used for shelter or protection;
- Pick or uproot any wild plant listed under Schedule 8 of the Act.

Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) are designated under this Act.

Special Protection Areas (SPA) are strictly protected sites, designated under the Birds Directive, for rare and vulnerable birds and for regularly occurring migratory species.

Natural Environment & Rural Communities (NERC) Act

The *NERC Act 2006* amends the *CROW Act*, by further extending the requirement to have regard for biodiversity to all public authorities, which includes local authorities and local planning authorities and requires that the Secretary of State consults Natural England (NE) in the publication of the list of living organisms and habitat types deemed to be of principal importance in conserving biodiversity.

Relevant Protected Species Legislation

Species	Relevant Legislation	Level of Protection
Bats	European protected species under the <i>Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017</i>. Full protection under <i>Schedule 5</i> of the <i>Wildlife and Countryside Act, 1981 (as amended)</i>. Protected by the <i>Wild Mammals (Protection) Act 1996</i>.	It is an offence to: - intentionally kill, injure, or take any species of bat. - intentionally or recklessly disturb bats. - intentionally or recklessly damage destroy or obstruct access to bat roosts.

National Planning Policy

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

The NPPF sets out current government policy on biodiversity and nature conservation and places a duty on planners to make material consideration to the effect of a development on legally protected species when considering planning applications (DGLG, 2012). The NPPF also promotes sustainable development by ensuring that developments take account of the role and value of biodiversity and that it is conserved and enhanced within a development.

The NPPF works in conjunction with Government Circular 06/2005 '*Biodiversity and Geological Conservation - Statutory Obligations and Their Impact within the Planning System*.'

Regional and Local Planning Policy and Guidance

Local Structure Plans

County, District and Local Councils have Structure Plans and other policy documents that include targets and policies which aim to maintain and enhance biodiversity. These are used by Planning Authorities to inform planning decisions.

Biodiversity Action Plans

The UK Biodiversity Action Plan (UKBAP) was organised to fulfil the Rio Convention on Biological Diversity in 1992, to which the UK is a signatory. A 'UK Post-2010 Biodiversity Framework' was published in July 2012, and succeeded the UKBAP. Much of the work for the UK BAP is now focussed at a country level due to devolution and the creation of country-level biodiversity strategies.

The UKBAP lists of priority species and habitats are still valuable reference sources. Notably, they have been used to help draw up statutory lists of priority species and habitats as required under Section 41 of the NERC act.

UK Post-2010 Biodiversity Framework

The UK Post-2010 Biodiversity Framework (2012) was produced in response to a change in strategic thinking following the publication of the Convention of Biological Diversity's Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011–2020. The Strategic Plan consists of 20 new biodiversity targets for 2020, termed the 'Aichi biodiversity targets' and the launch of the new EU Biodiversity Strategy in May 2011.

The framework sets a structure for action across the UK between now and 2020, including a shared vision and priorities for UK-scale activities to help deliver the Aichi targets and the EU Biodiversity Strategy. A major commitment by Parties to the Convention of Biological Diversity is to produce a National Biodiversity Strategy and/or Action Plan (NBSAP).

Natural England Standing Advice

Natural England has adopted national standing advice for protected species. It provides a consistent level of basic advice which can be applied to any planning application that could affect protected species. It replaces some of the individual comments that Natural England has provided in the past to local authorities.