



Urban Tree Experts

BS5837 – Tree Surveys – Ecological Consulting

PRELIMINARY ECOLOGICAL APPRAISAL (BATS) AT 31 & 33 HILLTOP ROAD CAVERSHAM



**Prepared for:
Mr & Mrs Wiggins
31 Hilltop Road
Caversham
Reading
RG4 7HR**

**and
Mr Waterhouse & Ms Sharples
33 Hilltop Road
Caversham
Reading
RG4 7HR**

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The validity of this report ceases at the prescribed time limit or after 12 months from the site inspection, or if the site conditions change due to unspecified works that affect the site whichever is the sooner.



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Executive Summary

Urban Tree Experts was commissioned by Mr & Mrs Wiggins and Mr Waterhouse & Ms Staples to conduct a preliminary ecological appraisal (bats) of 31 & 33 Hilltop Road, Caversham, Reading RG4 7HR. This is to support a current planning application to Reading Borough Council (number 210656).

The site visit was carried out on Monday 28 June 2021 at 14:00, during daylight hours. An internal and external inspection of the properties took place, to look for signs of bats.

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

A desk top study was conducted 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 2km search radius, it revealed no statutory designated sites are located within, and two current European Protected Species Licences (EPSLs) for bats have been granted within the search radius.

Externally, there was no evidence of bats (current or historically) in either property. The buildings are in a good condition externally with no visible cracks or crevices which could provide potential roosting opportunities or access into the properties for bats. Internally, there was no evidence of bats and no droppings.

Due to the absence of roosting potential and the lack of evidence of bats found during the detailed inspection, it is concluded that there is negligible potential for roosting bats to be present within the properties. Based on the recommendations in the Bat Workers Manual and the Bat Surveys Good Practice Guidelines prior to works, no further survey effort is required.



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1. Introduction

1.1 Instruction

Urban Tree Experts was instructed by Mr & Mrs Wiggins and Mr Waterhouse & Ms Staples to conduct a preliminary ecological appraisal (bats) of 31 & 33 Hilltop Road, Caversham, Reading RG4 7HR, to support a current joint planning application (210656) to Reading Borough Council.

1.2 Aims and Objectives

The preliminary ecological appraisal (bats) is designed to:

- Identify the presence/likely absence of bats within the buildings.
- Provide information on the status of bats using the buildings (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 preliminary ecological appraisal (bats) and report writing were carried out in accordance with Bat Surveys for Professional Ecologists: Good Practice Guidelines (3rd edition, Bat Conservation Trust, 2016).

1.3 Proposed Works

The survey was commissioned in connection with a current joint planning application to Reading Borough Council (210656) that seeks to add a single storey first floor rear extension to no.31 and a single storey front extension and two storey rear and side extension to no.33.

1.4 Surveyor Background and Experience

The preliminary ecological appraisal for bats and report was completed by Bridget Parslow. She holds a Class 2 (CL18) Survey License (No. 2015-10391-CLS-CLS) and a Science and Education license (2015-10324-CLS-CLS). She has 31 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 1.

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.



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3. Site Location and Description

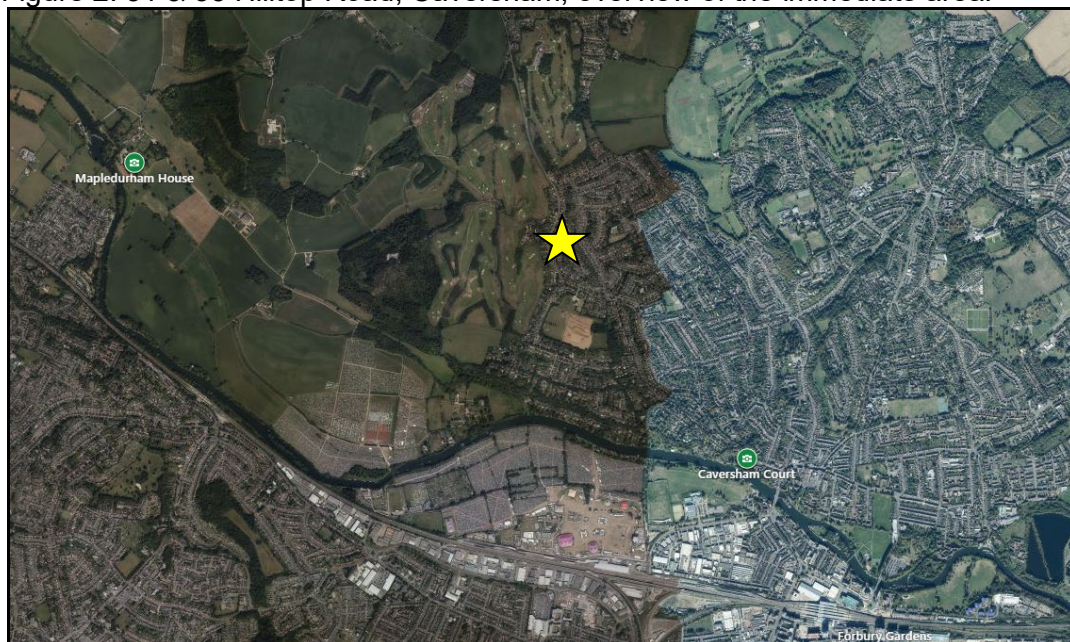
3.1 Site Location

The building is located at Grid Reference SU 7004 7643, see Figure 1 below. An overview of the immediate area is shown on Figure 2, courtesy of Bing Maps.

Figure 1. 31 & 33 Hilltop Road, Caversham, highlighted.



Figure 2. 31 & 33 Hilltop Road, Caversham, overview of the immediate area.





3.2 Site Description

The application site comprises a pair of semi-detached houses with concrete parking in the front of number 31 and gravelled parking in the front of number 33. The rear gardens of both houses have a small, paved patio and a lawn with mature trees and shrubs all around, see Figure 3 and 4 below. The site itself offers limited foraging habitat for bats.

Figure 3. Rear garden. 31 Hilltop Road, Caversham. 28.06.21



Figure 4. Rear garden. 33 Hilltop Road, Caversham. 28.06.21





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 within 2km of the site. Due to the urbanised area, scale of the proposed development, and the very local impact that may occur, no data was sought from local records center at this time.

The properties are situated in the suburb of Caversham, to the north west of Reading town centre. Some 500 metres to the north is an area of agricultural land with Reading Golf Club (Caversham) to the west with agricultural/improved grassland thereafter. There is limited connectivity between these areas and the site due to housing estates and roads.

A search of the Magic interactive website revealed two current EPSLs 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
2017-29064-EPS-MIT	2027	Soprano pipistrelle
2017-28760-EPS-MIT	2022	Brown Long eared and common pipistrelle

4.2 Daylight Survey

The preliminary ecological appraisal (bats) of 31 & 33 Hilltop Road, Caversham, Reading RG4 7HR was carried out by Bridget Parslow on Monday 28 June 2021 at 14:00. The weather conditions for the survey were cloudy with sunny spells and with a temperature of 17 degrees. Equipment used included a high-powered torch, a digital camera on a telescopic pole and a ladder.

During the preliminary ecological appraisal (bats), an internal and external inspection of the property and garages 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 buildings – 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 buildings.
- 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.



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Buildings or structures with no bat roosting potential and that were unsuitable for roosting bats were not inspected in detail.

4.3 Constraints

Full access to the site during the visit was made possible by the occupants and there were no constraints to the survey.

5. Survey Findings

5.1 External Inspection

The external features of the properties 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 properties are a pair of semi-detached, brick-built houses that are in a good condition externally. The pitched rooves are covered in composite tiles that are all in a good condition with no broken or missing tiles, and the ridge tiles are well cemented in, see Figure 5 below. The uPVC windows and doors throughout the properties are all well sealed with no gaps, as are the fascias and soffits (see Figure 6 on page 9). There are no gaps in the verges at the gable ends, see Figure 7 on page 10. The lead flashing around the chimney is well sealed and provides no opportunity for bats to access the building, see Figure 8 on page 10.

No bats or evidence of bats was recorded during the external inspection of the properties and externally there are no obvious visible features on the buildings which could be utilised by roosting bats.

Figure 5. Example of rooves. 31 & 33 Hilltop Road, Caversham. 28.06.21





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Figure 6. Sealed soffits and fascias. 31 & 33 Hilltop Road, Caversham. 28.06.21





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Figure 7. Verges at gable ends. 31 & 33 Hilltop Road, Caversham. 28.06.21



31



33

Figure 8. Flashing around shared chimney. 31 & 33 Hilltop Road, Caversham. 28.06.21





5.2 Internal Inspection

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

The loft space of the number 31 was accessed from the first floor, via my ladder. The loft is unlit, insulated and not boarded, see Figure 9 below. The roof tiles were lined with breathable membrane, which is in a good condition, see Figure 10 on page 12.

The loft space of number 33 was accessed by a fixed loft ladder. This loft was insulated and not boarded, there was a loft light, but the bulb had blown. The tiles are lined with tar paper, which was in a warn condition, see Figure 11 on page 12. The floor of the loft was fully visible, with the stored items being on shelves above, see Figure 12 on page 13.

No bats or evidence of bats was recorded during the internal inspection of either loft space and internally there appeared to be no roosting opportunities for bats.

Figure 9. Loft space. 31 Hilltop Road, Caversham. 28.06.21





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Figure 10. Membrane in the loft. 31 Hilltop Road, Caversham. 28.06.21



Figure 11. Membrane in loft space. 33 Hilltop Road, Caversham. 28.06.21





Figure 12. Floor of loft. 33 Hilltop Road, Caversham. 28.06.21



6. Evaluation

The bat roost potential of the features within the site has been assessed with reference to the criteria laid out in the Bat Mitigation Guidelines (Mitchell-Jones, 2004). These criteria are listed below with the features **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 or historical records of bats on the site, or bat roosts in the general area.



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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 above list provides generic screening criteria only and there are exceptions to consider.

7. Conclusions

7.1 Interpretation

The combined evidence from the internal and external inspection of the properties provides a high level of confidence in support of the opinions as set out in this report. There are no visible features on the buildings in which bats could roost or access the buildings to roost. Informed by the results of the survey and the factors highlighted in Section 6, it is concluded that there is negligible potential for roosting bats within the properties. Based on recommendations in the Bat Workers Manual and the Bat Surveys Good Practice Guidelines, no further survey effort is required.

7.2 Contingency Plan

In the unlikely event that bats are found during the proposed works, all work must stop, and advice sought from Urban Tree Experts or another licenced bat ecologist. 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 have changed and bats may start roosting at the site.

8. References

Collins, J (2016). Bat Surveys for Professional Ecologists: Good Practice Guidelines (3rd Edition). Bat Conservation Trust (BCT), London.
HM Government (2017) Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations.
HM Government (1981) The Wildlife and Countryside Act.
HM Government (2006) Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act.
Mitchell-Jones, A.J. & McLeish, A.P. (1999). Bat Workers' Manual (2nd Edition). Joint Nature Conservancy Committee, Peterborough.

9. Queries

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

Telephone: 01189 762902
Email: info@batsurveys-uk.com

Urban Tree Experts
Bramley House
Newnham Bridge
Tenbury Wells WR15 8NX

Simon Holmes CEnv pp Bridge Parlous
Consultant, Urban Tree Experts
Natural England Licence CLS-CLS-17637, CLS-CLS-17638



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APPENDIX 1

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 CS36 of the Reading Borough Core Strategy states *“Development should retain, protect and incorporate features of biodiversity or geological interest (including protected species and their habitats) found within the application site into their schemes. On sites with recognised biodiversity or geological value, development will not be permitted where there would be a direct or indirect adverse impact on the site, unless it can be clearly demonstrated that: -*

- i. The need for development clearly outweighs the need to protect the value of the site; and*
- ii. Appropriate compensation, impact minimisation, mitigation and compensation 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.