



Bat Survey Report – Preliminary Roost Assessment

126 Tilehurst Road, Reading RG30 2LX

July 2020

Report conditions

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Summary

A preliminary bat roost assessment was carried out at 126 Tilehurst Road, Reading, to assess the possible presence or likely absence of bats and bat roosts in order to support a planning application with Reading Borough Council for the demolition of the existing property and erection of a six new flats and associated parking.

126 Tilehurst Road is a detached two-storey house with further accommodation at second-floor level within the roof. The house is believed to date from the late 1800s or early 1900s. It is set within an extensive mature residential area towards the west of Reading.

The house is of traditional brick construction. It has a timber-framed and pitched, hipped roof of plain machine-pressed clay tiles and decorative inverted-v ridge tiles, and clay hip bonnets.

The habitat in the immediate area is found to offer generally low-quality bat foraging habitat, although there are areas of higher-quality habitat further afield.

Visual bat survey work at the site finds no direct evidence of bat use, either internally or externally. External inspection identifies no suitable bat access points.

Overall, the house is judged to present negligible roost suitability, and bats are considered likely absent from the site. No further survey work is recommended.

In view of the survey findings, it can be concluded that the development is unlikely to result in a breach of the legislation that protected bats and is likely to accord with relevant planning policy with respect to biodiversity.

1. Introduction

Objectives

- 1.1. The purpose of this assessment is to provide information on the possible presence or likely absence of bats at 126 Tilehurst Road, Reading, to support a planning application with Reading Borough Council. Where bat roosts are identified, or where their presence cannot be confidently ruled out, the report sets out an assessment of the impacts to these and where necessary makes recommendations for measures to avoid, mitigate or compensate for impacts to bats as necessary, dependent on the nature and scale of the impacts.

Site Description

- 1.2. 126 Tilehurst Road is a detached two-storey house with further accommodation at second-floor level within the roof. It is set within an extensive mature residential area towards the west of Reading, on the north-facing slope of the valley of the River Thames. The house faces south onto Tilehurst Road.
- 1.3. The house is of traditional brick construction and is believed to date from the late 1800s or early 1900s. It has a timber-framed and pitched, hipped roof of plain machine-pressed clay tiles and decorative inverted-v ridge tiles, and clay hip bonnets. The short ridge runs north-south between the front and rear hip apexes.
- 1.4. There is a gabled bay to the front elevation and subservient hipped two-storey extension to the rear. There is a small modern flat-roofed extension to the side.
- 1.5. Internally, there is no large loft void as the living accommodation extends up into much of the roof space, with a modern window to the gable of the front bay, and modern rooflights on the roof faces. There is however a small void over the rear two-storey section, which is accessed from the landing. The roof within the void is believed to be unlined (e.g. with bitumen underfelt between the tiles and rafters), although there is modern plastic sheeting tacked onto the underside of the rafters as a measure to avoid ingress of windblown dust and debris into the void.

- 1.6. There are exposed eaves with timber sarking, and no soffit boxes. Windows are modern white uPVC and rainwater goods are modern black plastic.
- 1.7. There is a small garden laid largely to lawn to the rear of the property.
- 1.8. Photos 1 and 2 in Appendix 1 show the front and rear elevations of the house.

Proposed works

- 1.9. The development is for the demolition of the existing property and the construction of six new flats with associated undercroft parking.

Limitations

- 1.10. All external elevations of the house were fully visible during the survey work. Internally, the small loft was not fully accessible due to its cramped dimensions. However, sufficient access could be gained from the loft hatch to enable a thorough assessment.
- 1.11. There are therefore no identified significant limitations to the survey work.

2. Methods

Desk study

- 2.1. A desk-based assessment was carried out on 29th June 2020. This used a variety of information. Online ecological data (MAGIC¹) was used to gain information on designated sites and priority habitats within 1km of the site. Aerial photos and Ordnance Survey mapping (again via MAGIC) were used to gain an understanding of the landscape context of the site. MAGIC was also used to identify if any licenses had been granted by Natural England for developments in the search area affecting European protected species (EPS).
- 2.2. The Reading Borough Council Proposals Map² was reviewed to identify any locally-important biodiversity areas.
- 2.3. A data request from the Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre (TVERC) or the Berkshire and South Bucks Bat Group (BSBBG) was not carried out at this time. Consideration of the value of seeking additional records on the context of the bat use of the site (if present) was taken after the site survey work.

Field survey

- 2.4. A visual bat survey was carried out on 8th July 2020 by Adam Egglesfield of AE Ecology, who holds a current licence to survey bat roosts. Survey methodology used during the work is guided by and consistent with that set out in the Bat Conservation Trust's *'Bat Surveys for Professional Ecologists: Good Practice Guidelines'* 3rd edition, (Collins, J. (ed) 2016).
- 2.5. The house was subject to a detailed internal and external search. The aims of this were to identify evidence of bat activity and/or identify the presence of any features that could potentially support roosting bats or features through which bats could gain access to possible roost locations. External areas were inspected to identify potential bat access points and roosting features. Such features typically include missing, slipped, broken or bowed roof tiles, gaps

¹ Multi-Agency Geographic Information for the Countryside - <http://magic.defra.gov.uk/>

² <http://reading.addresssafe.com/app/exploreit/default.aspx>

around fascias and soffits, gaps in brickwork (such as missing mortar or expansion gaps), lifted chimney, roof, or window flashing, and gaps around window and door casements.

- 2.6. The external inspection also aimed to identify any actual direct evidence of bat use such as droppings adhering to walls, floors or windowsills below gaps, or staining around possible access gaps.
- 2.7. Features were inspected using Opticron Discovery 10x42 close-focusing binoculars and where necessary and safely possible, a ladder. High-powered torches (Clulite Clubman CB2 and Lenser P7.2) were used to illuminate potential roost and roost access features.
- 2.8. Where present and safely accessible, any internal voids and similar spaces were inspected for evidence of bat presence such as live bats, corpses, droppings, feeding remains and staining. The building was subsequently assessed for its suitability to support roosting bats, from 'negligible' to 'high', in line with the survey guidelines.

Foraging and commuting habitat

- 2.9. An assessment was made of the suitability of the site and the surrounding landscape to support foraging and/or commuting bats. The assessment was based on the presence of key habitat features such as woodland, scrub, hedgerows, grassland, and open water and watercourses, which are highly attractive to bats as both a foraging resource and as commuting routes. The presence of such habitats, particularly in a mosaic or network with other suitable habitat, typically increases the potential for structures to be exploited by bats where suitable roost and access opportunities are present. The presence of unlit semi-natural vegetation and habitat linkages between the site and the surrounding landscape were also considered.

3. Results

Desk study

- 3.1. Appendix 2 shows the location of the site and its surrounding relevant ecological interest features produced from MAGIC.

Nationally and locally designated sites and notable habitats

- 3.2. There are no statutory designated sites such as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) in the search area. The most notable area of habitat in the search area is the area of woodland and parkland to the west of the site, at Prospect Park, where there is a large area of woodland known as The Rookery. Woodland continues westwards from here along Lousehill Copse. Both these woodlands are locally-designated as Local Wildlife Sites, in recognition of their local value to biodiversity. These form part of a broader Biodiversity Opportunity Area.
- 3.3. Further afield, to the south, lies the broad swathe of floodplain grazing marsh Priority Habitat along the valley of the River Kennet to the south of Reading, which is also a Local Wildlife Site.
- 3.4. Outside of these areas, the land is highly urbanised, with residential development around the site, and commercial development towards the town centre to the east and along the Oxford Road to the north. There are several major roads and railways in the search area. The railway embankments are wooded along part of their route, and these sections will have some biodiversity value.

Protected species

- 3.5. There is one record of a licence being granted for a development affecting bats in the search area. This was for a development approximately 650m to the south that affected a maternity roost for soprano pipistrelle *Pipistrellus pygmaeus* bats.

Preliminary roost assessment

Internals

- 3.6. Internally, the small loft was inspected from the loft hatch. Photos 3 and 4 show the conditions in the loft. Examination of all surfaces, including internal timbers, floor, walls, and domestic services was carried out. Particular attention was paid to features such as the ridge apex at either end of the loft and joints in the timber work.
- 3.7. No droppings were seen on the floor (Photo 5) or the internal timbers or brickwork (Photo 6). The plastic sheeting around the underside of the rafters was seen to be tightly fitting and with no gaps around it or areas of damage.
- 3.8. No evidence of recent or historic bat roosting activity was seen in any areas.

Externals

- 3.9. Externally, the roof tiles are of flat machine-pressed clay and were generally found to be well-fitting over the majority of the roof (see Photos 7 and 8). Some areas of slight slippage were noted where the tiles had started to come loose, but these areas had not resulted in gaps between the tiles due to the flat construction of the tiles unlike the bowed nature of more traditional clay tiles.
- 3.10. The ridge tiles and hip bonnets were undamaged, and the bedding mortar was in place with no apparent significant areas of deterioration that resulted in gaps suitable for allowing bat access (Photos 9 and 10).
- 3.11. The front bay gable verge mortar was sound with no gaps between the tiles and the front fascia (Photo 10).
- 3.12. The eaves were closely examined with binoculars and a torch. There is timber sarking to the underside of the roof tiles around the exposed eaves, and the sarking is generally tight to the external brickwork with no apparent gaps for bats to access the tops of the external walls – see Photos 11 to 13. Initially it appears that there is a gap between the timber sarking and the wall; however, as can be seen in Photo 12, this is due to the white paintwork not extending up to the brickwork along the edge.

- 3.13. There is a small area of hanging tile around the front bay, between ground and first-floor level. These were inspected and although (as with the roof tiles) there was some minor slippage, there were no gaps between the overlapping tiles sufficient to allow bats access (Photos 14 and 15).
- 3.14. There is a timber fascia around the edge of the single-storey flat-roofed extension. There is no gap between this and the external wall sufficient to allow bats to access (Photo 16).

4. Discussion

Legislation and planning policy

- 4.1. Bats are legally protected under both domestic and international law (the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended)³ and the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010 (as amended)⁴ respectively). All native bat species are European Protected Species (EPS). This legislation makes it an offence to kill, injure or disturb bats, or to destroy or damage their roosts, even when the bats are not present. In view of the findings of the survey work at 76 Hurst Road, it is concluded that the development is unlikely to result in a breach of the Habitats Regulations.
- 4.2. Paragraph 175 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (MHCLG, 2018) requires that when determining planning applications, if significant harm to biodiversity resulting from a development cannot be avoided (through locating on an alternative site with less harmful impacts), adequately mitigated, or, as a last resort, compensated for, then planning permission should be refused.
- 4.3. Policy CS36 'Biodiversity and Geology' of the Reading Borough Council Adopted Core Strategy (revised 2015) states that:
- "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."*
- 4.4. The supporting text to the policy states that
- "Protected species identified by the Species Action Plan of the Reading Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) and their habitats must also be protected from any direct or indirect harm resulting from development."*

³ <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1981/69>

⁴ <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2010/490/contents/made>

Interpretation of habitat context

- 4.5. The immediate surroundings are characterised by denser residential development, with some larger areas of higher-quality bat foraging habitat further afield. The value of the surrounding habitat to bats is reduced by the denser urban development and higher degree of streetlighting, although there is likely to be an established localised population of species such as common and soprano pipistrelle bats that are more adapted to urban environments.

Interpretation of roost suitability

- 4.6. Internally, the small loft space does not present a suitable roosting location due to extensive sheer plastic sheeting fixed to the rafters. There are also no apparent points that would allow bats to gain access into the loft. No evidence of historic or recent bat use was seen in any areas of the loft.
- 4.7. It is confidently concluded that the loft does not support roosting bats, nor is there evidence to suggest that there have historically been bats roosting within the loft.
- 4.8. All external features were found to be in fair condition, but the areas of minor deterioration had not resulted in features that would be considered likely to support roosting bats.
- 4.9. The highly urban nature of the surrounding habitat together with the streetlighting close to the front of the property, reduces the likelihood of the house supporting bats.
- 4.10. Overall, in view of the lack of bat evidence, condition of the roof and associated elements, and nature of the surrounding habitat, it is concluded that 126 Tilehurst Road offers negligible bat roost suitability.

Recommendations

- 4.11. Bats are considered likely absent from the site. Therefore, it is concluded that the development is unlikely to affect bats, there is no recommendation for any further bat survey work.

5. Conclusions

- 5.1. Visual bat survey work at the site found no direct evidence of bat use, either internally or externally. External inspection identified no suitable bat access points.
- 5.2. Overall, the house was judged to present negligible roost suitability, and bats are considered likely absent from the site. No further survey work is recommended.
- 5.3. In view of the survey findings, it can be concluded that the development is unlikely to result in a breach of the legislation that protected bats and is likely to accord with relevant planning policy with respect to biodiversity.

References

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Mitchell-Jones, A. J. (2004). *Bat Mitigation Guidelines*. English Nature; Peterborough.

Appendix 1 – Photos



Photo 1 Front (south) elevation



Photo 2 Rear (north) elevation



Photo 3 General conditions in loft



Photo 4 Ridge and internal plastic sheeting



Photo 5 Loft floor



Photo 6 Internal brickwork and timbers



Photo 7 Roof tiles



Photo 8 Roof tiles



Photo 9 Hip bonnets



Photo 10 Ridge and bay gable verge



Photo 11 Exposed eaves



Photo 12 Exposed eaves



Photo 13 Exposed eaves



Photo 14 Hanging tiles to front bay



Photo 15 Hanging tiles



Photo 16 Fascia around flat roofed extension

Appendix 2 – MAGIC Map

