



Bat Survey Report – Preliminary Roost Assessment

107a St Michaels Road,
Tilehurst, RG30 4RY

January 2021

Report conditions

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Summary

A preliminary bat roost assessment was carried out at 107a St Michaels Road, 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 a loft conversion.

107a St Michaels Road is mid-century bungalow of traditional brick and block construction with a pitched timber framed roof of interlocking concrete pantiles.

It is set within an extensive mature residential area towards the west of Reading.

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 of the house finds no direct evidence of bat use, either internally or externally. The loft has windows into the gable ends and is of limited roost suitability due to the high light levels. 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 107a St Michaels Road, 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. 107a St Michaels Road is a mid-century bungalow of simple construction dating from the early 1960s. The house is oriented with the main ridge running north-west to south-east and it faces south-west onto St Michaels Road.
- 1.3. The house is of traditional brick and block construction with a pitched timber framed roof of interlocking concrete pantiles and concrete half round ridge tiles. The side elevations are full gable ends. There are two brick-built chimneys.
- 1.4. Photos 1 and 2 in Appendix 1 show the front and rear elevations of the house.

Proposed works

- 1.5. The development proposal is for the conversion of the loft into living accommodation, including the construction of dormer windows and rooflights.

Limitations

- 1.6. All external elevations of the house were fully visible during the survey work. Internally, the loft was fully accessible.
- 1.7. There are therefore no identified limitations to the survey work.

2. Methods

Desk study

- 2.1. A desk-based assessment was carried out on in December 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. 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

- 2.3. A visual bat survey was carried out on 12th December 2020 by Adam Eggesfield 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).
- 2.4. 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 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.

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

- 2.5. 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.
- 2.6. 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.
- 2.7. 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

- 2.8. 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. The map in 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.
- 3.3. There is a network of woodlands to the north-east of the site, with Blundell's Copse being within approximately 180m of the house, and Round Copse and Lousehill Copse lying on the edge of the 1km search area. All 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.
- 3.4. There is a large expanse of woodland and parkland approximately 550m to the south of the site at Calcot Golf Club and Prospect Park. There is a large area of woodland known as The Rookery at Prospect Park, which is also an area of designated Ancient Woodland – i.e. land that has been continuously wooded for more than 400 years.
- 3.5. Outside of these areas, the land within the search area is highly urbanised, with extensive residential development around the site.
- 3.6. Further afield, outside the search area and outside the urban area of Reading, 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. To the west lies a network of open farmland, woodland, and meadows, many of which are of high biodiversity value.

Protected species

- 3.7. There are two records of licenses being granted for developments affecting bats in the search area. These were for a development approximately 430m to the south-east that affected a roost for common pipistrelle *Pipistrellus pygmaeus* and brown long-eared bats *Plecotus auritus* and one approximately 900m to the east that affected common pipistrelle bats.

Preliminary roost assessment

Internals

- 3.8. Internally, the loft was fully inspected. 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 gable apexes at either end of the loft and joints in the timber work.
- 3.9. The loft is well boarded across the central section, and the north-western section is more formally boarded out on the floor and ceiling as can be seen in Photo 4. There are windows to each gable end and as a result the loft is very light internally.
- 3.10. No droppings were seen on the floor (Photo 5) or under any of the insulation during spot checks beneath this (Photo 6), on any stored items, or the internal timbers or brickwork. No droppings were seen on the windowsills (Photo 7)
- 3.11. The gable apexes were carefully inspected, as were the floor areas beneath these (Photos 8 and 9). No evidence of bat roosting activity was seen. The render around the chimneys was inspected and no evidence seen of any roosting activity, nor was there any sign of bat activity on the floor areas adjacent to the chimneys (Photos 10 and 11).
- 3.12. The roofing felt was in generally good condition (Photo 12).
- 3.13. No evidence of recent or historic bat roosting activity was seen in any areas.

Externals

- 3.14. Externally, the roof tiles to the front and rear were in good condition with no damaged, missing, or slipped tiles (see Photos 13 and 14). There were no significant areas of lifting or gaps; however, some slight gapping was noted on the left-hand side of the front elevation near the ridge (Photo 15). Examination of this area concluded that these gaps are too small to allow bat access.
- 3.15. The chimney flashing was in good condition with no areas of lifted leadwork or other damage (Photos 16 and 17). The gable ends were both carefully inspected – the verge bedding mortar on both side elevations was found to be in excellent condition with no deterioration or gaps (Photos 18 and 19).

- 3.16. The soffits and fascias are in good condition, tight to the external walls with no gaps that would allow bat access, see Photos 20 and 21.
- 3.17. No direct evidence of bat activity was noted to any of the external features.

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)² and the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended)³ 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.

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 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."

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

² <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1981/69>

³ As amended by the Conservation of Habitats and Species (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019
<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukdsi/2019/978011176573/contents>

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 main loft space presents limited roost suitability due to the high light levels from the gable end windows. No evidence of historic or recent bat use was seen in any areas of the loft. No potential access points were noted into 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 good condition and no potential roost access opportunities were identified in any areas across the main roof faces, ridge tiles, or soffits.
- 4.9. Overall, it is concluded that 107a St Michaels Road offers negligible bat roost suitability.

Recommendations

- 4.10. As 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 107a St Michaels Road 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

- Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM). (2013), *Guidelines for Preliminary Ecological Appraisal*. CIEEM; Winchester.
- Collins, J. (ed.) (2016). *Bat Surveys for Professional Ecologists: Good Practice Guidelines (3rd edn)*. Bat Conservation Trust; London.
- MHCLG, (2018). *National Planning Policy Framework*. Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government; London.
- Mitchell-Jones, A. J. (2004). *Bat Mitigation Guidelines*. English Nature; Peterborough.

Appendix 1 – Photos



Photo 1 Front of house



Photo 2 Rear of house



Photo 3 General conditions in loft



Photo 4 General conditions in loft



Photo 5 Loft floor boarding



Photo 6 Spot check under insulation



Photo 7 Windowsill



Photo 8 Internal gable apex



Photo 9 Floor at base of internal gable end wall



Photo 10 Top of chimney inside loft



Photo 11 Chimney inside loft



Photo 12 Ridge and roofing felt



Photo 13 Tiles to front of house



Photo 14 Tiles to rear of house



Photo 15 Slight gaps to tiles to left hand side of front elevation



Photo 16 Chimney flashing (rear)



Photo 17 Chimney flashing (front)

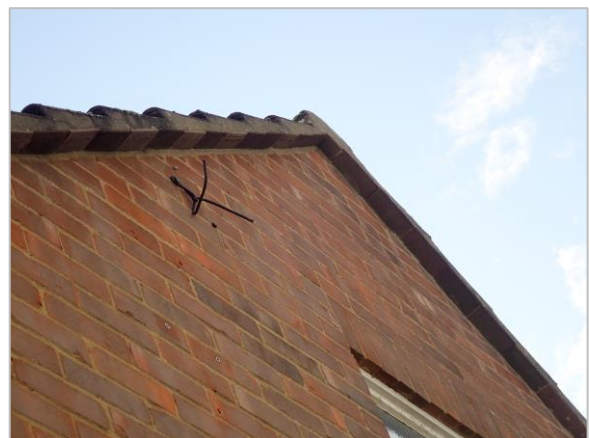


Photo 18 Gable end and verge mortar



Photo 19 Gable end and verge mortar



Photo 20 Soffit box



Photo 21 Soffit box

Appendix 2 – MAGIC map

