

**Rivermead Leisure Centre
Richfield Avenue
Reading
Berkshire
RG1 8EQ**

Preliminary Bat Roost Assessment

Ref: R2670/a

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

1.1.1 John Wenman Ecological Consultancy LLP was commissioned by Pellikaan Construction Limited to undertake a survey for the presence of bats within the buildings of the Rivermead Leisure Centre off Richfield Avenue in Reading, Berkshire.

1.1.2 The survey was commissioned in connection with a planning application to be lodged to Reading Borough Council (RBC) seeking consent for the construction of a replacement leisure centre following the demolition of the existing complex.

1.2 Legislative Background

1.2.1 All British bat species are fully protected by the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) and by the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 ('Habitat Regulations'). In summary, the legislation combined makes it an offence to:

- Damage or destroy a breeding site or resting place or intentionally or recklessly obstruct access to a structure or place used for shelter by a bat;
- Deliberately, 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; or to affect significantly the local distribution or abundance of the species;
- Deliberately kill, injure or take any bat.

1.2.2 The government's statutory conservation advisory organisation, Natural England, is responsible for issuing European Protected Species licences that would permit activities that would otherwise lead to an infringement of the Habitat Regulations. A licence can be issued if the following three tests have been met:

- **Regulation 55(9)(a)** - there is "no satisfactory alternative" to the derogation, and;

- **Regulation 55(9)(b)** - the derogation “will not be detrimental to the maintenance of the population of the species concerned at a favourable conservation status in their natural range” and;
- **Regulation 55(2)(e)** - the derogation is for the purposes of “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”.

- 1.2.3** Local authorities have a statutory duty under Regulation 7(3e) of the Habitat Regulations to have regard to requirements of the Habitats Directive in the exercise of their functions. The Council must therefore consider and determine whether these three tests are likely to be satisfied by applications where survey findings show that European Protected Species licensing is necessary before granting planning permission.
- 1.2.4** European Protected Species mitigation licence applications can be submitted once all necessary planning consents have been granted and Natural England aim to issue a licence decision within 30 working days.
- 1.2.5** Licensable projects affecting small numbers of seven commonly occurring species occupying roosts of low conservation importance may fall under the remit of the Bat Mitigation Class Licence (WML-CL21). The Class Licence permits ‘Registered Consultants’ or accredited agents appointed by them to carry out licensable operations on site on behalf of clients following the registration of sites with Natural England at least 15 working days before the work is due to start.
- 1.2.6** Survey data supporting EPS licence applications or the registration of the site under the Bat Mitigation Class Licence (WML-CL21) must be up to date i.e. have been conducted within the current or most recent optimal survey season i.e. May to August. Therefore, if surveys show bats are present and licensable work is delayed until during or after the next survey season, updated surveys will be required to support an application or site registration.

1.3 Site Location and Context

- 1.3.1** The Rivermead Leisure Centre is situated to the north of Richfield Avenue in Reading, Berkshire (OS grid reference: SU 70623 74534).
- 1.3.2** The Centre is located to the west of the Caversham Bridge on the south side of the River Thames. The surrounding landscape is heavily urbanised but the Centre marks the beginning of fields that follow the Thames Path west into open countryside. There are some established tree-lines and hedgerows in nearby fields; with the River Thames (approx. 200 metres north) forming an important wildlife corridor through Reading. Thus, suitable commuting and foraging habitat is available to bats adapted to this urbanised environment.

2 SURVEY METHOD

2.1 Building Inspection

2.1.1 A survey of the interior and exterior of Rivermead Leisure Centre was undertaken on the 18th November 2020 by an ecologist registered under Natural England Bat Survey Class Licence CL18 and an assistant ecologist.

2.1.2 The survey was undertaken with the aid of binoculars and a high power (1 million candle power) torch and looked for features that could offer potential roosting sites following standard survey guidelines (Collins 2016; Mitchell-Jones 2004; Mitchell-Jones & McLeish 2004).

2.1.3 The following may indicate the presence of a bat roost within a building:

- Bat droppings (these can be found externally, especially in sheltered areas such as window sills, underneath roost entrances or internally within a roof space);
- Piles of insect remains e.g. moth wings (these may be indicative of regular feeding sites used by species such as brown long-eared bat *Plecotus auritus*);
- Staining at roost entrances or within the roost (urine and oil from fur can leave stains on timbers when bats are gathered for long periods);
- Bats (live or dead).

2.1.4 Commercial buildings may offer potential roosting sites in a number of locations, favoured locations include:

- Gaps and cracks in brick or block work, which provide access to a wall cavity or sheltered crevice;
- At the eaves;
- Under any external cladding;
- Under roof coverings;
- Within an enclosed roof space – long-eared bats (*Plecotus* spp.) for example, will often cluster at the ridge beam.
- In underground areas that provide cool and moist conditions suitable for hibernating bats.

2.1.5 The building was also inspected for evidence of nesting birds and this comprised a search for nesting material, feathers, droppings, birds (dead and alive) and listening for the calls of young birds occupying nests.

2.2 Survey Constraints

- 2.2.1** Full access was available to the interior and exterior of the Centre and therefore there were no significant constraints to the survey.

3 SURVEY FINDINGS

3.1 Introduction

3.1.1 Photographs of Rivermead Leisure Centre are presented in **Appendix 1** and a plan of the external and internal survey findings with associated target notes is shown in **Appendix 2**. The survey findings from the exterior and interior of the Centre are described as follows:

3.2 External Survey

3.2.1 The Rivermead Leisure Centre was a complex of steel-framed buildings with large flat roofs (**Photograph 1**). The walls were of brick construction at ground floor level with metal cladding above (**Photograph 2**).

3.2.2 There was a crack in the gym's brickwork that was closely inspected and showed no signs of use by roosting bats (**Photograph 3; Target note 1**). OSB sheets had been used to seal the gym's windows (**Photograph 4; Target note 2**). There were two Schwegler 1SP Sparrow Terrace bird boxes fixed to the brickwork beneath the metal cladding; one had a bird dropping on its front and the other had been filled with newspaper (**Photograph 5; Target notes 3 & 4**). Bird droppings were observed in a Schwegler 1FQ Bat Roost box that was attached to the wall close to the ground (**Photograph 6; Target note 5**).

3.2.3 The metal cladding was tightly bolted to the building complex and lacked opportunities for roosting bats (**Photograph 7; Target note 6**). A section of cladding had been punctured and ceiling tiles were missing above a rear entrance to the sports hall, the features were low-level and showed no evidence of past or current use by roosting bats (**Photographs 8 & 9; Target notes 7 & 8**).

3.2.4 The water slide had been removed from its tower and the resulting holes had been proofed with polystyrene and timber boards (**Photograph 10; Target note 9**). The vent on the door of the electrical store was damaged and had been temporarily blocked with timber; the rest of the vents were lined with mesh (**Photograph 11; Target note 10**). The roof overhang along the old pool building was also lined with mesh, and fibreglass insulation was visible behind (**Photograph 12; Target note 11**).

- 3.2.5** No evidence of roosting bats was found on the exterior of the leisure complex at the time of the inspection.

3.3 Internal Survey

- 3.3.1** The main sections of the Rivermead Leisure Centre complex could be divided into a sports hall, gym, and former swimming pool (**Target notes 12, 13 & 14**). The sports hall was open up to a roof, which was constructed of steel trusses with six boxed air vents and a corrugated roofing material (**Photograph 13; Target note 15**). The higher sections of wall (corresponding to external metal cladding) were covered with timber panelling (**Photograph 14; Target note 16**). An indoor bowling green was contiguous with the sports hall to the south and had a smaller roof constructed of the same steel trusses (**Photograph 15; Target note 17**). Plastic sheeting and fabric were visible behind the panels on the walls of the indoor bowling green. A first-floor dance studio was positioned to the rear of the sports hall and false ceiling tiles (**Photograph 16; Target note 18**).
- 3.3.2** The gym had a shallow pitched roof that was hidden by false ceiling tiles (**Photograph 17; Target note 19**). The metal roof was visible in places where the ceiling tiles were missing (**Photograph 18**). Interconnecting parts of the complex, that included a kitchen, corridors, offices and storage, had false ceiling tiles beneath flat roofs (**Photographs 19 & 20; Target note 20**).
- 3.3.3** The former swimming pool section was open up to a corrugated metal roof with exposed steel trusses (**Photograph 21; Target note 21**). The waterslide tower had a pyramid roof of corrugated metal (**Photograph 22; Target note 22**).
- 3.3.4** No evidence of bats was found inside the leisure complex at the time of the survey.

4 DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 Assessment of Bat Roost Potential

- 4.1.1** No suitable roof voids or evidence of roosting bats were visible during the internal inspection and therefore primarily void-dwelling species such as long-eared bats (*Plecotus* spp.) are highly unlikely to be present.
- 4.1.2** Overall, the Rivermead Leisure Centre complex lacked external features suitable for use by crevice-dwelling bats such as pipistrelle (*Pipistrellus* spp.) and/or *Myotis* species; however, there were a few low-suitability features (i.e. a crack in brickwork, a bat box with bird droppings, a puncture in metal cladding and missing ceiling tiles) that after undergoing close inspection showed no signs of past or current use by roosting bats (i.e. droppings).

4.2 Impact of Proposals and Recommendations

- 4.2.1** In the absence of any evidence of bats, it is considered highly unlikely that a bat roost will be affected by the demolition; however, bats are highly mobile and it remains possible that they may utilise the low-suitability potential roost features in the future, and as such precautionary measures should be adopted as set out in **Section 4.3** below.

4.3 Precautionary Measures

- 4.3.1** In order to confirm the continued absence of bats, the low-suitability potential bat roost features identified will be re-inspected by a licensed ecologist before the building work begins. Demolition works will begin only once the licensed ecologist has confirmed there continues to be no signs of bats present.
- 4.3.2** The licensed ecologist will brief the contractors on bats, their roosting sites and the legislation protecting bats and their roosts, signs indicating the presence of bats, and what to do in the unlikely event that bats are found during the course of the work. Specifically, if bats are discovered, the contractors will be advised to stop work immediately, and a licensed ecologist will visit site, attend to any bats discovered, and provide further advice on how to proceed; work will continue only once further written advice has been received. At this point, a European Protected Species licence or confirmation of the site's registration under the Bat Mitigation Class Licence CL21 (if applicable) may be required to permit the work to continue lawfully.

4.4 Nesting Birds

- 4.4.1** The observation of bird droppings on the bat and sparrow terrace boxes indicates the presence of a bird nests. The Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) protects all wild birds and makes it an offence to kill, injure or take a wild bird or to damage or destroy the nest of a wild bird whilst in use or being built. In order to prevent the contravention of this legislation, the demolition should be completed outside of the peak bird nesting season (March to August inclusive), or if carried out within this period, should take place only once a survey confirming nesting birds are not present has taken place. If birds are found to be nesting, to allow the work to take place lawfully, it should be undertaken only once it can be confirmed that the young have fledged and left the nest.

5 REFERENCES

Collins, J. (ed.) (2016). *Bat Surveys for Professional Ecologists – Good Practice Guidelines* 3rd Edition. Bat Conservation Trust, London.

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

Mitchell-Jones, A. J. & McLeish, A. P. (2004). *Bat Workers' Manual* (3rd Edition). JNCC, Peterborough.

APPENDIX 1 - SITE PHOTOGRAPHS



1. Front of Rivermead Leisure Centre viewed from southeast.



2. Brick walls with metal cladding above on the gym (western elevation).



3. Crack in gym brickwork (northern elevation).



4. Gym windows sealed with OSB (northern elevation).



5. Sparrow bird box filled with newspaper (southern elevation).



6. Bat box with bird droppings (northern elevation).



7. Tightly bolted metal cladding (western elevation).



8. Puncture in metal cladding (northern elevation).



9. Missing ceiling panels above rear entrance to sports hall (northern elevation).



10. Water slide removed from tower (eastern elevation).



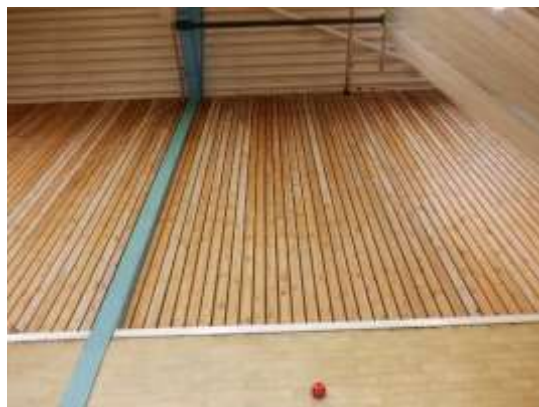
11. Broken vent on door to electrical store (eastern elevation).



12. Mesh and fibreglass under pool roof overhang (eastern elevation).



13. Sports hall.



14. Timber panelling in sports hall.



15. Indoor bowling green.



16. First-floor dance studio.



17. Gym.



18. Missing ceiling tile in gym.



19. False ceiling tiles in office.



20. False ceiling tiles in kitchen.

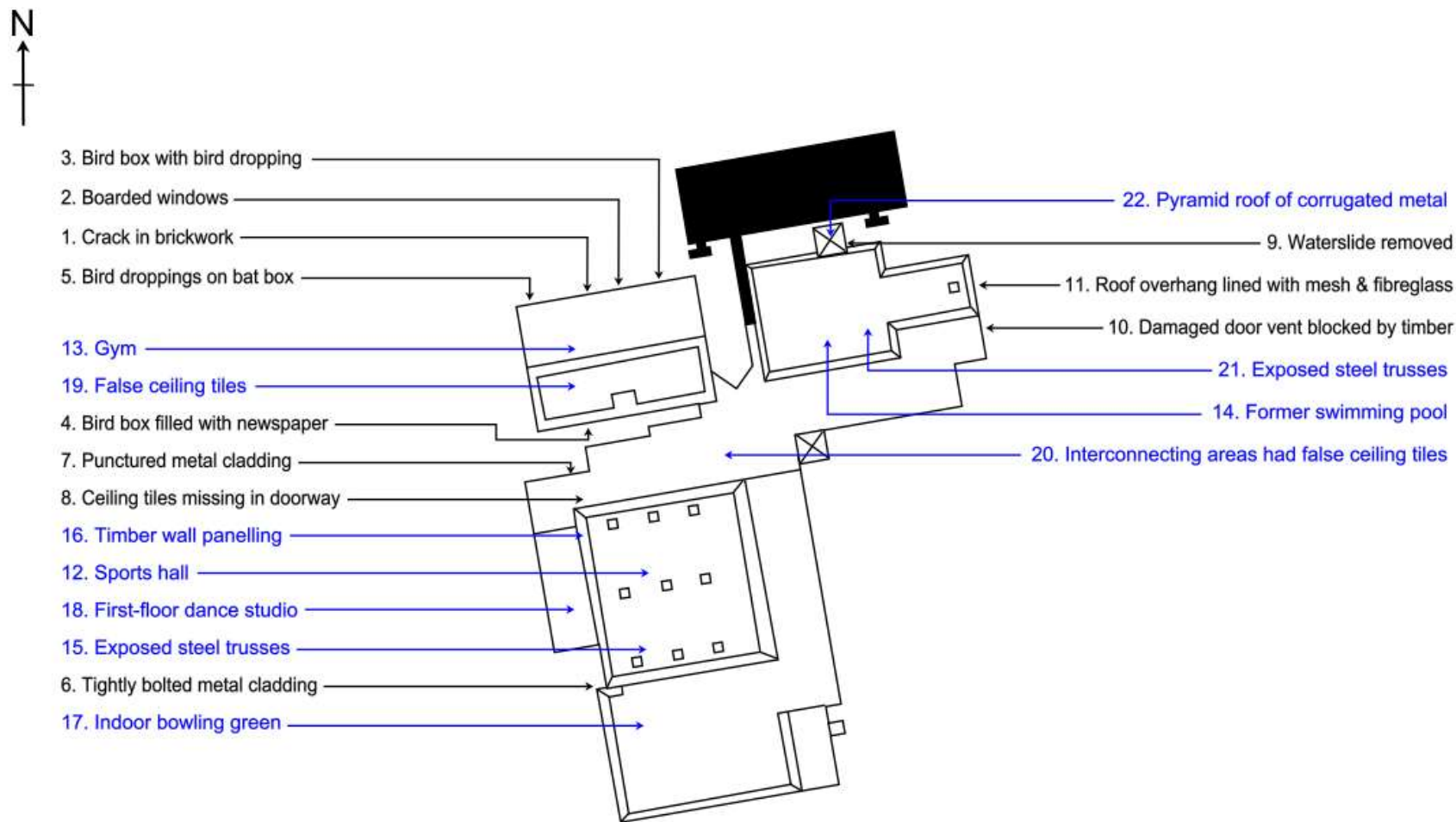


21. Former swimming pool.



22. Waterslide tower.

APPENDIX 2 – PRELIMINARY BAT ROOST ASSESSMENT FINDINGS



n. External target note **n.** Internal target note

Drawn by:	Date	Scale:	Rivermead Leisure Centre Reading	
CW	November 2020	Not to scale	Preliminary Bat Roost Assessment Findings	

APPENDIX 3 – PROPOSED SITE PLAN

