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Bat Scoping Report

77-79 Kings Road, Reading, RG1 3DD

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Report Summary

1. The Keen Partnership commissioned the Ecology Co-op to undertake a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal and bat scoping survey at 77-79 Kings Road, Reading. The purpose of this report is to present the findings of the appraisal and identify potential ecological constraints to a proposal to convert an existing business premises and associated accommodation to residential use.
2. An assessment of the site was carried out by Dr Ryan Walker, CEnv, MCIEEM on the 9th June 2019. This included a ground-based external inspection of the building and site, to evaluate the site for its potential to support roosting bats. All bat species are European Protected Species (Annex IV, 'Habitats Directive').
3. The site comprises of a semi-detached restaurant, with accommodation above, within a small footprint, surrounded by hardstanding and other buildings, within the centre of Reading in a heavily urbanised environment.
4. The building was assessed as having a negligible bat roosting potential. There is no green space or associated vegetation within the site that might support other protected species, or species of conservation concern. The local landscape provides very limited potential habitat for foraging bats.
5. In accordance with current Bat Conservation Trust guidelines, no further surveying or mitigation in relation to roosting bats is considered necessary.

This report has been prepared by The Ecology Co-operation Ltd, with all reasonable skill, care and diligence within the terms of the Contract with the client. This report only becomes the property of the client once payment for it has been received in full.

We disclaim responsibility to the client and others in respect of any matters outside the scope of the above.

This report is confidential to the client and we accept no responsibility of whatsoever nature to third parties to whom this report, or any part thereof, is made known. Any such party relies on the report at their own risk.



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1 INTRODUCTION

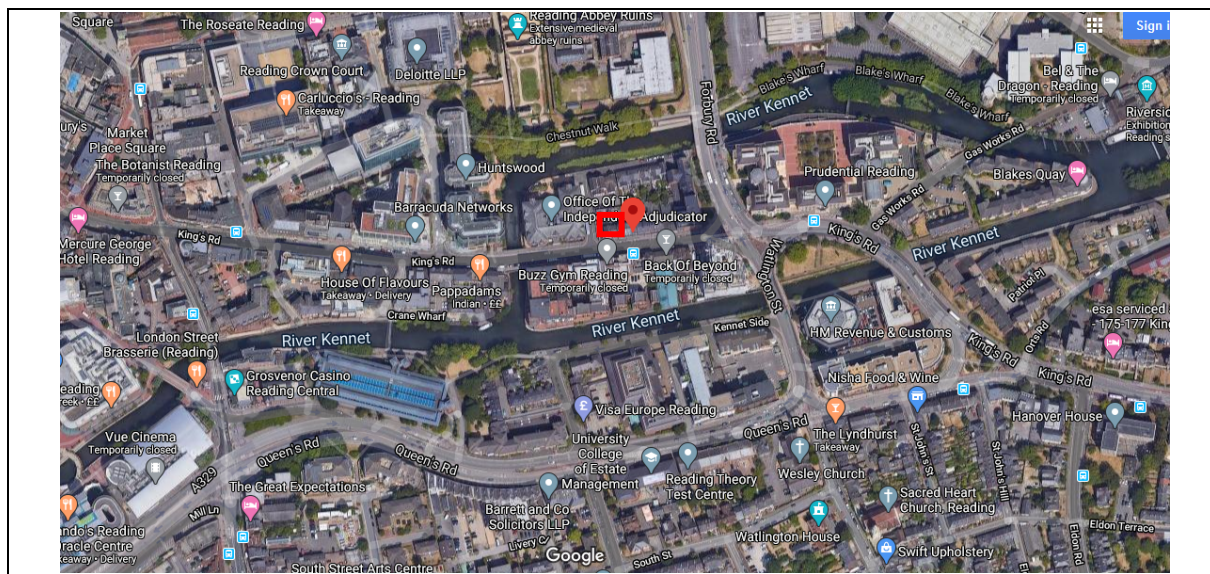
1.1 Purpose of the Report

The Ecology Co-op has been commissioned to undertake a bat scoping assessment of 77-79 Kings Road, Reading by The Keen Partnership. This report presents the findings of a walkover survey and building inspection for roosting bats, undertaken by Dr Ryan Walker CEnv MCIEEM [Natural England Level 2 bat survey licence 2015-16736-CLS-CLS] on the 9th June 2020. It provides details of the potential for any protected species and/or habitats to be present at the site and an assessment of the potential ecological constraints to the proposed redevelopment of the site. Recommendations for further surveys that are likely to be required to inform a planning application are provided, if necessary. Where appropriate, measures to avoid, mitigate and/or compensate for impacts are outlined.

1.2 Background

The site is located at 77-79 Kings Road, Reading, RG1 3DD. The central grid reference for the site is SU720734. The site comprises a business premises and associated accommodation, all set within hard standing.

The survey area is based on the site plan provided by The Keen Partnership, which shows the boundary to the development site and is reproduced in Figure 1. Figure 1 shows the location of the site within the centre of Reading and the existing site layout. The proposed development includes the redevelopment of the site for domestic housing.



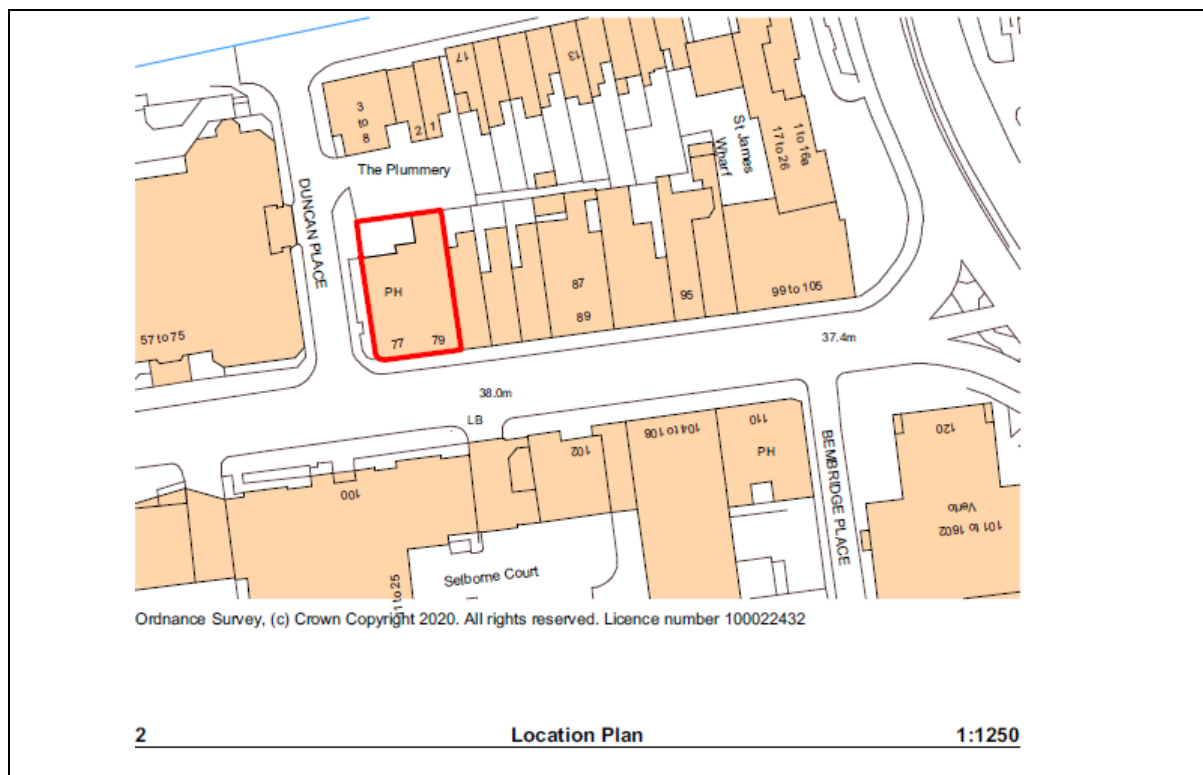


Figure 1. location within Reading town centre (above) existing layout, (below). Images produced courtesy of Google Maps and The Keen Partnership.

1.3 Policy and Legislation

Legal protection applying to all bat species in the UK is outlined in Appendix 1 of this report.

The results of this survey will be used to determine the need for further surveys, impact avoidance measures and/or an appropriate mitigation strategy to ensure compliance with UK and EU wildlife legislation.

2 METHODOLOGY

The methodology used for this survey are in accordance with the bat survey guidelines produced by the Bat Conservation Trust¹.

2.1 Desk Study

A search of on-line mapping resources was undertaken to characterise the local context of the site with respect to semi-natural habitats and linear features of value to foraging and commuting bats.

¹ Collins, J.(ed.) (2016) *Bat Surveys for Professional Ecologists: Good Practice Guidelines* (3rd edn). The Bat Conservation Trust, London.



The MAGIC website resource (www.magic.gov.uk) was used to identify the location of designated sites for nature conservation within 2km and EPS licences granted within a 1km radius of the survey site. Priority habitats and ancient woodland sites upon or adjacent to the site have also been identified, due to their ecological value and potential to act as important foraging resources for bats.

Priority habitats and ancient woodland are classified as habitats of principal importance. Habitats of principal importance are listed in Section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act, 2006², which places a duty on Local Planning Authorities to have due regard to biodiversity.

2.2 Field Survey

Bats can use a wide range of features including loft spaces, cavity walls, loose tiles, mortice joints and cracks/gaps in a variety of built structures. They can also be found in trees with holes, splits, cracks, cavities, ivy, and loose bark.

A detailed building inspection was carried out, looking for potential access points and roosting features that bats could use and any evidence indicating the presence of bats using the building, such as rub marks, staining or droppings. This included a ground-based external inspection around the building, using binoculars. The building does not support any enclosed roof voids.

The potential for roosting bats for each feature, or group of features was assessed as either negligible, low, moderate, or high, in accordance with best practice. Any evidence confirming the presence of bats that was found was clearly recorded including photos and samples taken (e.g. droppings) where appropriate.

The habitats surrounding the site and wider landscape were broadly assessed for their potential to support foraging and commuting bats.

2.3 Other protected and/or notable species

Any birds identified, or evidence of nesting birds discovered during the site visit were recorded. Special attention was paid to notable species such as red-listed Birds of Conservation Concern (Eaton et al. 2015) and those species afforded special protection on Schedule 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981).

Whilst this survey focussed on bats and no specific searches were made with respect to other protected species, any evidence of other protected species that was encountered during the site visit was also recorded.

² HM Government (2006). Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006. Available online at: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2006/16/section/41>.



3 RESULTS/OBSERVATIONS

3.1 Desk Study

There are no designated sites within 2km of the site. There are a number of very small pockets of woodland within a 2km radius of the site, however much of the surrounding landscape is heavily urbanized (Figure 2).

There are three EPS licenses granted within 2km of the site; a license for Daubenton's bats *Myotis daubentonii* to the north of the site close to the river Kennet and two for common pipistrelle bats *Pipistrellus pipistrellus*.

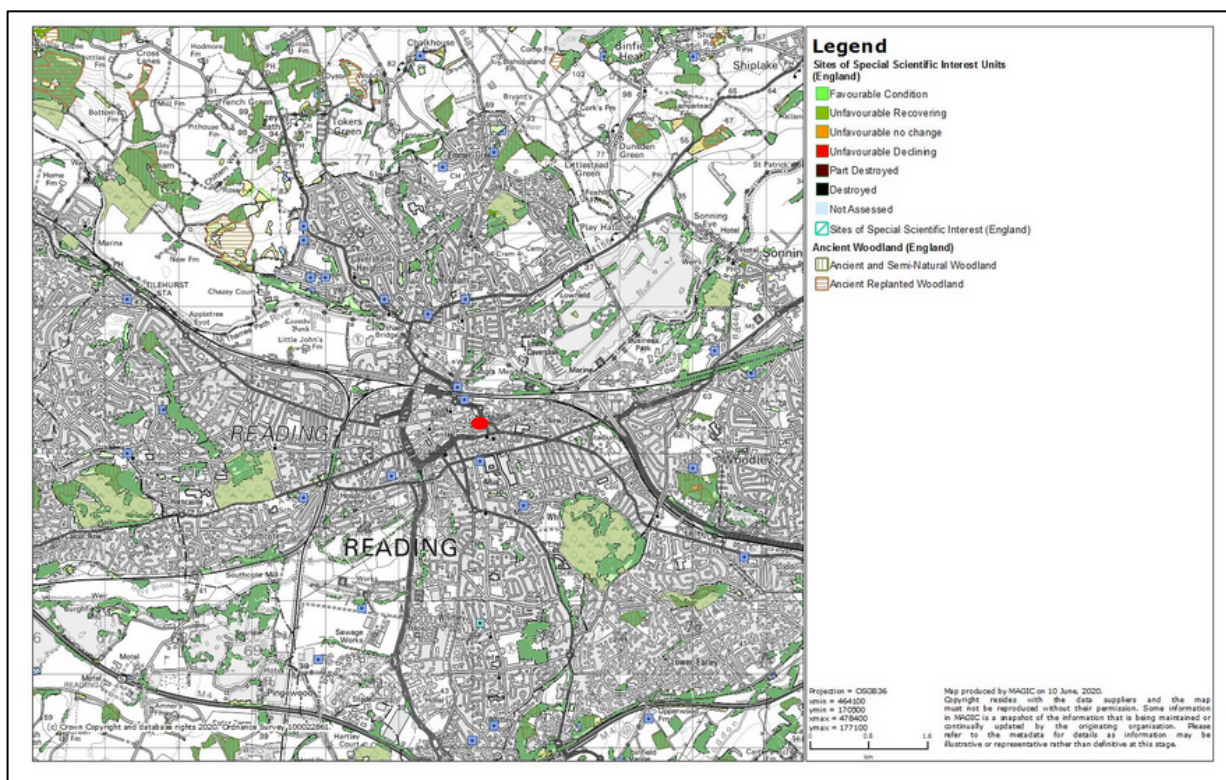


Figure 2. Location of the site (red dot) in relation to surrounding broadleaved woodland (dark green) and recorded EPS licenses for bat mitigation projects (blue square).

3.2 Site context and surrounding habitats

This is a three-storey, semi-detached business premises, with accommodation on the second and third floor. The building is constructed of a brick with a multi pitched, well-fitting slate tiled roof. The building is situated within the centre of Reading, with very limited amounts of green open space or other habitat that could be considered of notable value for foraging bats. The building is surrounded on all sides by hard standing, busy roads or other buildings.



3.3 Building and tree inspection for bats

The building is constructed of brick and is in generally very good condition, with no discernible gaps or crevices within the fabric of the building (Photos 1-4). There are no visible gaps around the eaves of the roof, with the soffit boxing sitting tight against the external walls (Photo 2). The roof is clad in well-fitting slates, with no slipped or damaged tiles and no gaps were identified (Photos 1-4). There are no external features within the fabric of the building that could be considered potentially suitable for supporting crevice roosting bats, such as the pipistrelle species. All external features upon the building have a negligible potential to support roosting bats. As the building was understood not to support any roof voids, an internal inspection was not undertaken and the potential for void dwelling species of bats to be present, such as the brown long-eared bat *Plecotus auratus*, is considered negligible.

Overall, the bat roost potential at this site is rated as negligible, considering the good condition of the building, lack of potential roosting features and the heavily urbanised environment that this building is located in, with high levels of noise and artificial light.

3.4 Other protected and/or notable species

This building has very limited opportunities for nesting birds due to the lack of gaps within the external fabric of the building. It is very unlikely that any other protected species will be using the site, largely on account of its location and lack of any natural habitats as illustrated within the photographs presented in section 3.6.

3.5 Survey Limitations

An initial site assessment such as this is only able to act like a 'snapshot' to record any flora or fauna that is present at the time of the survey. It is therefore possible that some species may not have been present during the survey, but may be evident at other times of the year. For this reason, habitats are assessed for their potential to support bats, even where no direct evidence (such as droppings) has been found.



3.6 Photographs



Photograph 1. The south facing elevation of the building at 77-79 Kings Road, Reading.



Photograph 2. The northwest facing elevation of the building at 77-79 Kings Road, Reading.



Photograph 3. The west elevation of the building at 77-79 Kings Road, Reading.



Photograph 4. The south facing elevation of the building at 77-79 Kings Road, Reading.



4 ECOLOGICAL CONSTRAINTS AND OPPORTUNITIES

4.1 Bats

In accordance with the Bat Conservation Trust guidelines, the overall potential for the building at 77-79 Kings Road to support roosting bats is rated as negligible. The local landscape provides poor potential habitat for foraging bats. Therefore, no further surveys or mitigation in relation to roosting bats is considered necessary.

4.2 Other protected and/or notable species

This site is unlikely to support populations of any other statutory protected species.

If any protected species are found during the proposed work, work should be stopped immediately, and an ecologist must be contacted immediately for advice.

Should you need any further advice on the information provided above, please do not hesitate to contact The Ecology Co-op.



APPENDIX 1 –Wildlife Legislation and National Planning Policy

The following text is intended for general guidance only and does not constitute comprehensive professional legal advice. It provides a summary of the current legal protection afforded to bats.

All bat species in the UK are included in Schedule II of the Habitats Regulations 2017, which transpose Annex II of the Council Directive 92/43/EEC 1992 on the Conservation of Natural Habitats and of Wild Fauna and Flora ("The EC Habitats Directive"). As such all bat species in the UK are defined as 'European Protected Species (EPS).

Four species of bat (Bechstein's bat *Myotis bechsteinii*, Barbastelle bat *Barbastella barbastellus*, greater and lesser horseshoe bats, *Rhinolophus ferrumequinum* and *R. hipposideros*) are also listed on Annex IV of the EC Habitats Directive. This requires the designation of a series of sites which contain important populations of these species as Special Areas of Conservation (SACs).

All species of British bat are also fully protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981), as amended, through inclusion in Schedule V.

All species of bat are listed on Section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act (2006). Section 41 of the NERC Act lists the habitats and species of principle importance. This places a statutory duty on all public bodies, including planning authorities, under Section 40, to take, or promote the taking by others, steps to further the conservation of habitats and species of principal importance for the conservation of biodiversity in England (commonly referred to as the 'Biodiversity Duty'). This duty extends to all public bodies the biodiversity duty of Section 74 of the Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000, which placed a duty only on Government and Ministers.

Under the above legislation it is an offence to:

- Kill, injure or take any individual bat of any species;
- possess any part of an individual bat, either alive or dead;
- intentionally or recklessly damage, destroy or obstruct access to any place or structure used by bats for shelter, rest, protection, or breeding;
- intentionally or recklessly disturb these species whilst using any place of shelter or protection; or
- deliberately disturb bats in such a way as to be likely to impair their ability to:
 - survive, to breed or reproduce, to rear or nurture their young; to hibernate or migrate; or to affect significantly the local distribution or abundance of the species to which they belong;
- keep (possess), transport, sell or exchange, or offer for sale or exchange, any live or dead bat, or any part of, or anything derived from a bat.

It is also an offence to set and use articles capable of catching, injuring, or killing bats (for example a trap or poison), or knowingly cause or permit such an action. There is also protection under Schedule 6 of The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) relating specifically to trapping and direct pursuit of bats.

A European Protected Species License (EPSL) in relation to bats is required from Natural England for any work that would result in an otherwise unlawful activity (e.g. damage to a bat roost). A license can



only be issued to permit otherwise prohibited acts if Natural England are satisfied that all the following three tests are met:

- The proposal is for ‘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’;
- There is no satisfactory alternative; and
- The action authorised by the license will not be detrimental to the maintenance of bat populations at a favourable conservation status in their natural range.

A bat roost is defined by the Bat Conservation Trust’s Bat Surveys—Good Practice Guidelines 3rd Edition as “the resting place of a bat”. In general, the word roost is interpreted as “any structure or place, which any wild bat uses for shelter or protection.”

Bats tend to re-use the same roosts; therefore, legal opinion is guided by recent case law precedents, that a roost is protected, whether or not the bats are present at the time. This includes summer roosts used for resting during the day and/or breeding; or winter roosts, used for hibernating.