



PRELIMINARY BAT ROOST ASSESSMENT

47A HEMDEAN ROAD, CAVERSHAM, READING RG4 7SY

FINAL REPORT

November 2019

Report conditions

<i>Report title</i>	Preliminary Bat Roost Assessment – 47A Hemdean Road, Caversham		
<i>Client</i>	Mr J Hulait		
<i>Report status</i>	Final		
<i>Survey date</i>	28 th October 2019		
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Executive Summary

- This preliminary roost assessment report has been prepared in order to support a planning application for the proposed conversion of the existing storage building to a new dwelling at 47A Hemdean Road, Caversham, Reading RG4 7SY.
- A preliminary roost assessment survey was undertaken on the 28th October 2019.
- Whilst superficially suitable roosting features were recorded from the building in the form of gaps through lifted weather boarding on the northern gable end, further investigation found these features to be too shallow and too open to provide suitable roosting opportunities. While these and other features provide opportunities for bats to access/egress the internal areas of the storage building, no evidence of bat activity was recorded internally. Given that the building is constructed from single-skinned materials which enables all areas of the building to be inspected, the presence of stored items which have been left undisturbed for a number of years, heavy cobwebbing and the absence of any evidence of bat activity, it is concluded that bats have not utilised the structure for roosting.
- As a result, there is considered to be no reasonable likelihood that bats will be present and affected by the proposed conversion works.
- Nevertheless, given that bats are understood to have been recorded within close proximity of the site, a precautionary approach to the proposed conversion works comprising the hand removal of the exterior cladding materials is recommended. If a bat or evidence of bat activity is encountered during the works, all work must stop and a suitably qualified ecologist must be contacted.
- Provided the recommendations set out in section 5 are followed, the planning authority can be confident that the development would accord with relevant planning policy, legislation and caselaw.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Report purpose

This report presents the findings of the preliminary bat roost assessment undertaken of the storage building at 47A Hemdean Road, Caversham.

1.2 Description of proposal

The current proposal is for the conversion of the existing storage building to a two-bed dwelling. The existing storage unit will be extended with a taller roof and updated with the introduction of new materials.

1.3 Report context

James Sopp Architectural Design have prepared a planning application on behalf of Mr J Hulait (the Applicant) for the conversion of the storage building at 47A Hemdean Road, Caversham. The planning authority, Reading Borough Council, has highlighted the presence of nearby bat records and requested that the planning application is accompanied by a bat survey. Phillips Ecology have been instructed by the Applicant to undertake this assessment.

1.4 Survey area

The survey area comprised the existing storage building at 47A Hemdean Road and its immediate surrounds.

1.5 Limitations

No limitations were encountered during the course of the survey.

1.6 Relevant documents

The relevant proposal plan used to inform this assessment is presented in Appendix 1.

2. Survey Methodology

2.1 Surveyor/s

The survey was carried out by Izabel Phillips a level 2 licenced bat surveyor (licence ref: 2015-11750-CLS-CLS).

2.2 Survey area

The survey area comprised the storage building at 47A Hemdean Road and its immediate surrounds which will be modified by the proposed redevelopment. The survey area extended to all areas of the storage building that will be modified by the proposed works in such a way that bats or their roosts could be impacted (directly or indirectly). Therefore, the survey included the entirety of the structure.

2.3 Survey date

The survey was carried out during the daytime on the 28th October 2019.

2.4 Survey description

The survey did not depart from the Bat Conservation Trust's (BCT) Bat Surveys for Professional Ecologists: Good Practice Guidelines (3rd edition) which states that "A preliminary roost inspection survey is a detailed inspection of the exterior and interior of a structure to look for features that bats could use for entry/exit and roosting and to search for signs of bats".

The external features of the structure which will be modified by the proposed works in such a way that bats or their roosts could be impacted (directly or indirectly) if present, were systematically inspected in detail to compile information on potential and actual bat access points and roosting places such as lifted or broken roof materials, loose brickwork and open eaves. This included a thorough search for evidence of bat activity such as bat droppings, urine splashes and fur staining.

The interiors of the building was inspected in order to identify potential or actual access points and roosting places and to record any evidence of bat activity or bats themselves.

2.5 Survey equipment

Survey equipment comprised:

- High-powered torch
- Camera
- Ladders
- Endoscope

2.6 Weather conditions

Weather during the survey can be described as: dry, overcast, still and 11°C. The weather conditions did not hinder the ecologist's ability to carry out the survey effectively.

2.7 Assessment methodology

The suitability of the building for supporting bat roosts will be assessed against the guidelines within Table 1 which have been adapted from the BCT Good Practice Guidelines.

Table 1 Suitability assessment guidelines

Suitability Description of Roosting Habitats

<i>Negligible</i>	Structure has no reasonable likelihood of supporting roosting bats i.e. no suitable roosting features present.
<i>Low</i>	A structure which could be used opportunistically by individual bats i.e. one or more potential roost sites which do not provide sufficient space, shelter, protection, appropriate conditions (e.g. temperature, light, humidity) and/or suitable surrounding habitat to be used on a regular basis or by larger numbers of bats.
<i>Moderate</i>	A structure which could be used by bats but is not likely to support a roost of high conservation status (e.g. maternity roost). This structure would support features which exhibit suitable size, shelter, protection, conditions and surrounding habitat for roosting bats.
<i>High</i>	A structure which is obviously suitable for supporting larger numbers of bats, on a regular basis and for longer periods of time.

3. Survey results

3.1 Building description relevant to bats and their roosts

The application site supports a single structure: the storage building. The storage building comprises a brick built two-storey structure which rises to a pitched and gable end roof clad with slate roof tiles and cement ridge tiles. The ground floor walls are constructed from brickwork while the first-floor walls are constructed from a timber frame clad with a single layer of corrugated tin sheets (Figures 1 and 2). The north facing gable end is clad with wooden tight-fitting weather boarding.



Figures 1 and 2 - northern and western elevations

Internally, the structure supports a ground floor and a first floor which are connected by timber stairs at the southern end of the structure (Figure 3). The structure does not support a roof void and the first floor is open to the ridge line (Figure 4). All of the wall and roof materials are single skin and the undersides of the wooden weather boarding and the corrugated tin sheets are visible (Figure 5). Stored materials are located throughout the structure and these have remained undisturbed for a long period of time. Heavy dust and cobwebbing are present throughout the structure (Figure 6).



Figure 3 – ground floor



Figure 4 – underside of slates and corrugated tin



Figure 5 – internal view of weather boarding



Figure 6 – undisturbed surfaces

Overall, a number of suitable access/egress features were recorded on the building's exterior, however, whilst these features provide opportunities for bats to access the building, they do not support suitable characteristics for roosting. All features which were considered to support suitability for access/egress and/or roosting bats are described in Table 2, below.

Table 2 - Recorded features and activity

Suitability	Evidence
Exterior The following suitable access/egress and roosting features were recorded externally: - Gaps between lifted corrugated sheets provide access to the interior of the building. - Gaps between several bowed weatherboards on the northern elevation provide access to the interior of the building. - Gaps around damaged slates provide access to the interior of the building. - A gap above the access door on the northern elevation provides access to the interior of the building. - No suitable roost features were recorded on the external elevations of the building.	No evidence of roosting activity was recorded on the external elevation of the building during the survey.
Interior Though a number of features provide opportunities for bats to access the structure, the interior of the building supports limited opportunities for roosting bats. The following suitable access/egress and roosting features were recorded internally:	Despite the single skinned construction of the structure enabling a detailed search for evidence of roosting activity and a large number of undisturbed items upon which bat droppings or urine staining would be highly visible, no evidence of roosting activity was recorded internally during the survey.

Suitability**Evidence**

-
- Crevices either side of the ridge board support suitable conditions for roosting bats.
 - The timber structure is tight fitting and does not support any suitable roosting crevices.
 - Bats could opportunistically roost between stored materials.

3.2 **Site grounds description relevant to bats**

The site is located within the urban area of Caversham, therefore, its immediate surrounds comprise residential properties with associated gardens, commercial development and services. However, these areas are interspersed by large green spaces such as Balmore Park to the north and those associated with local educational establishments. These features are either directly connected by residential gardens or tree avenues, or if not, by steppingstones within the landscape. Together, these features provide a network of suitable foraging and commuting habitat for bats. Therefore, in this context, the built habitats within the footprint of the development are considered unexceptional for foraging and commuting bats, however, given their location within a network of suitable commuting and foraging habitat, it is highly likely that bats will commute and forage through or past the site.

3.3 **Other protected species**

The following bird species were recorded within or close to the application site during the course of the survey: house sparrow *Passer domesticus*. The storage building is considered to support nesting opportunities for house sparrow.

4. Discussion and Assessment of Impacts

4.1 Preliminary assessment of suitability and potential impacts

The storage building is considered to support negligible roost suitability i.e. a structure which has no reasonable likelihood of supporting roosting bats.

Though opportunities for bats to access/egress the building were recorded in abundance due to the dilapidated condition of the building and its design, suitable roosting features were limited to the exposed internal areas of the building. No external or internal crevice roosting features were recorded. Given that the building is constructed from single-skinned materials and contained stored items which had been left undisturbed for a number of years, any evidence of roosting activity would have been apparent during the detailed investigation. In addition, extensive cobwebbing was recorded in the building. For these reasons, it was concluded that bats have not utilised it for roosting.

On the basis that the building is considered to support negligible suitability for roosting bats, there is considered to be no reasonable likelihood of impacts on bats associated with the proposed conversion works.

Though the site itself is considered to support low suitability for foraging and commuting bats, its immediate surrounds do support suitable features. Therefore, increasing light spill on boundary habitats could impact foraging and commuting bats.

4.2 Relevant legislation and policy

Circular 06/2005 identifies that applicants should not be required to provide information on protected species unless there is a reasonable likelihood that they will be present and affected by the proposed development. The site is considered to support habitats with suitability and potential for protected species and these may be affected by the proposed development. Therefore, the proposal triggers 'reasonable likelihood' under the Circular.

The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) and the Habitats Directive, which is transposed into UK law by the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (commonly referred to as the Habitats Regulations) may apply should protected species be confirmed on site.

In the case that a European protected species is found to be present and impacted by the proposal, the local planning authority will be required to engage with the Habitat Regulations. Permission will be granted unless:

- a) the development is likely to result in a breach of the EU Directive, and
- b) is unlikely to be granted an EPS licence from Natural England to allow the development to proceed under a derogation from the law (under licence).

When considering whether Natural England would not be unlikely to grant a licence for the identified impact, the local planning authority must consider the three tests which are set out in the Habitat Regulations:

1. the consented operation must be 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'; (Regulation 53(2)(e))
2. there must be 'no satisfactory alternative' (Regulation 53(9)(a)); and
3. the action authorised 'will not be detrimental to the maintenance of the population of the species concerned at a favourable conservation status in their natural range' (Regulation 53(9)(b)).

Case-law (Morge vs. Hampshire County Council) has clarified that planning authorities are able to grant permission for developments that would cause a breach of the Regulations is likely (i.e. in the case of this proposal, destruction of a bat roost), provided that sufficient information is provided to give the planning authority assurance that the relevant EPSM licence is not unlikely to be granted - i.e. planning authorities also have a duty to assess planning applications against these tests.

5. Recommendations

5.1 Requirement for further surveys

Where there is a reasonable likelihood that a protected species will be present and impacted by the proposed development, planning authorities require further surveys to properly assess development proposals against relevant planning policy. An assessment into the requirement for further surveys is presented below, however in summary, no further surveys are considered necessary.

5.1.1 *Bats*

Given that the building is considered to support negligible suitability for roosting bats, no further survey work in respect of bats is considered necessary.

5.1.2 *Breeding birds*

Subject to the precautionary mitigation measures set out in Section 5.2.2, no further surveys are considered necessary.

5.2 Mitigation strategy

5.2.1 *Bats*

Though there is considered to be no reasonable likelihood of impacts on bats associated with the proposed works, it is recommended that a precautionary approach to the removal of roof and wall materials is taken. The removal of any roof and wall materials will be carried out by hand. If bats are unexpectedly encountered at any point during the roof and wall removal, all work shall stop immediately, the feature should be carefully replaced and advice sought from a professional ecologist.

5.2.2 *Breeding birds*

Care should be taken that the development does not disturb breeding birds. The bird nesting season is taken to be March to August inclusive. Any removal of suitable nest habitat (the building) will either need to be undertaken outside of this period or else checked by an experienced ecologist to ensure that no nesting birds are present. If occupied nests are present then the nest must not be removed, and works around the nest can only recommence once the nest becomes unoccupied of its own accord.

5.3 Enhancements

The delivery of biodiversity enhancement on development sites is promoted by the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) and Section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006.

Where opportunities exist it is best practice to provide enhancement features which encourage greater biodiversity within development sites in accordance with the NPPF and Local Planning Authority's responsibilities under the NERC Act.

Opportunities for enhancement which are proportionate to the scale of the development include:

- the provision of new bird nesting opportunities in the form of a house sparrow nest box terrace. This could be provided as an external box under the eaves on the east elevation of the proposed dwelling.

6. Conclusion

The preliminary roost assessment has recorded features with suitability for enabling bat access/egress to the building within the application site. However, given that the building is constructed from single-skinned materials, contained stored items which had been left undisturbed for a number of years and no evidence of activity was recorded, it was concluded that bats have not utilised it for roosting. As such, no adverse impacts on bats or their roosts are anticipated. Nevertheless, a precautionary approach comprising the hand removal of roof and wall materials has been recommended. The site supports suitability for breeding birds, therefore, a precautionary approach to the removal of the building's materials has been proposed. Opportunities for ecological enhancement in the form of a bird box have been suggested for the site.

7. References

- **Altringham J D, 2003**, British Bats, Collins New Naturalist
- **Bat Conservation Trust, 2016**, BCT Bat Survey Guidelines Third edition
- **Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management, 2017**, *Guidelines for Preliminary Ecological Appraisal*. CIEEM, Winchester
- **ILP and BCT, 2018** *Bats and Artificial Lighting in the UK: Guidance Note 08/18*. ILP, Warwickshire.
- **MHCLG, 2018**. *National Planning Policy Framework*. Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government; London.
- **Mitchell Jones AJ, 2004**, *Bat Mitigation guidelines*, English Nature
- **Mitchell Jones AJ and McLeish A P, The Bat Workers Manual**, JNCC
- **Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006**, Ch 3, s. 40
- **Natural England, 2011** Frequently asked wildlife questions: Bats. Natural England

Appendix 1 – Rendered Image (James Sopp Architectural Design)





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