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Bat Scoping Report

26-28 Southampton Street, Reading, Berkshire, RG1 2QL

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Report Summary

1. Hurst Grove Estates Ltd commissioned the Ecology Co-op to undertake a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal and bat scoping survey at 26-28 Southampton Street. The purpose of this report is to present the findings of the appraisal and identify potential ecological constraints to a proposal to re-roof this period building, currently used as an office block.
2. An assessment of the site was carried out by Dr Ryan Walker, CEnv, MCIEEM on the 28th May 2019. This included a ground-based external inspection of the building, internal inspection of enclosed loft spaces where possible and an appraisal of the surrounding habitats, 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 large, detached, period building, currently used as office space, set within a heavily urbanised environment within the centre of Reading.
4. The building was assessed as having a moderate bat roosting potential, between loose fitting, traditional, clay roof and hanging tiles upon all elevations.
5. In accordance with current guidelines, a two-visit emergence/re-entry survey is recommended to determine the potential use of the site by roosting bats. If bats are discovered, further mitigation measures may be required during the development.

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 26-28 Southampton Street by Hurst Grove Estates Ltd. 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 28th May 2019. 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 a proposal to re-roof the building. 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 26-28 Southampton Street, Reading, RG1 2QL. The central grid reference for the site is SU 71579 72967. The site comprises a large, detached, period building, made of traditional materials. The building is currently used as office space and set within the centre of Reading. The survey area is shown in Figure 1. The proposed development includes the reroofing of the building.



Figure 1. Site plan, showing the location of 26-28 Southampton Street within the wider landscape. Image produced courtesy of Google maps (Map data ©2019 Google).



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.

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 potential 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 and internal inspection of the enclosed roof voids.

The potential for roosting bats for each feature, or group of features was assessed as either negligible,

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

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



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.

3 RESULTS/OBSERVATIONS

3.1 Desk Study

There are no designated protected areas within 2km of the site. The closest designated site is Lodge Wood and Sandford Mill SSSI, approximately 6.3km to the east of the site.

There are 4 EPS licenses granted for mitigation projects concerning bats within 1km of the site shown on the Magic Maps website and summarised in table 1 below.

Distance from the site	Orientation from the site	Mitigation project and species
741m	Southwest	2017-32379-EPS-MIT mitigation for loss of a common pipistrelle bat roost in 2017.
863m	North	EPSM2013-6155 mitigation for the loss of common pipistrelle bat roost in 2013.
968m	North	2017-28045-EPS-MIT mitigation for the loss of a Daubenton's bat roost in 2017.
517m	East	2016-22301-EPS-MIT mitigation for the loss of common pipistrelle bat roost in 2016.

3.2 Site context and surrounding habitats

This is a two-storey building constructed of traditional brick, with a timber framed, pitched roof of varying heights, clad in traditional, handmade, clay roof tiles. The northern section of the roof is slightly elevated, with the resulting small gable ends clad in hanging tiles. The building is situated in a heavily urbanised



area, with limited potential foraging habitat, however, there are a number of small mature tree lines and isolated mature trees within 100m of the site that could be used as foraging habitat by some of the more light and noise tolerant species such as common pipistrelle bats.

3.3 Building inspection for bats

Table 3 below details the areas within the building that support potential bat roosting features. The roof void supports a negligible potential to support roosting bats (Photo. 3). There are no trees within the site that will be impacted by the proposed works. All of the moderate potential bat roosting features are confined to the external aspects of the building.

Table 3. Assessment of potential roost features

Building section	Description of features	Assessment of potential (Collins 2016)
Roof tiles	The roof of the building supports handmade, traditional, clay tiles. There are a number of areas upon all pitches of this roof that support areas of loose fitting or areas of tiles supporting gaps, creating potentially suitable roosting habitat for a number of the crevice roosting species of bats such as the pipistrelle species (Photo. 1,2, 4 & 5).	Moderate bat roost potential
Hanging tiles	The gable ends created through the raising of areas of the roof (Photo 2) are clad in traditional handmade hanging tiles. These areas of hanging tiles support a large number of loose-fitting tiles with gaps potentially suitable for supporting crevice roosting bats such as the pipistrelle species.	Moderate bat roost potential

Overall, the bat roost potential at this site is rated as moderate, considering the condition of the building, in particular the crevices created by the areas clad in handmade hanging and roof tiles. The surrounding habitat is not typically suitable as bat foraging habitat, however common pipistrelle bats can persist in heavily urbanised environments, as is demonstrated by three of the four EPS licenses for this species within 1km of this site.

3.4 Other protected and/or notable species

The gaps between the roof and hanging tiles have the potential to support species of birds typically associated with nesting within crevices of older buildings, such as house sparrow *Passer domesticus* and starling *Sturnus vulgaris*. These species will typically nest between March and August.

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 east facing elevation of building at 26-28 Southampton Street.



Photograph 2. The west facing elevation of the building at 26-28 Southampton Street.



Photograph 3. The internal aspects of the confined, timber framed roof void at 26-28 Southampton Street.



Photograph 4. Areas of looser fitting hanging tiles upon the southern roof gable house at 26-28 Southampton Street.



Photograph 5. Areas of loose-fitting roof tiles upon the west facing roof pitch of the building at 26-28 Southampton Street.

4 ECOLOGICAL CONSTRAINTS AND OPPORTUNITIES

4.1 Bats

In accordance with the Bat Conservation Trust guidelines, the overall potential for the roof of the building at 26-28 Southampton Street to support roosting bats is rated as moderate, and a two-visit bat emergence/re-entry survey is required to determine the potential importance of this building to roosting bats. Without further surveys the level of impact on bats cannot be fully assessed. To ensure adequate coverage of all potential roost features, it is estimated that two observers will be required for each survey visit.

These surveys can be undertaken between the 1st of May and 30th of September at dusk or at dawn to observe any bats emerging or re-entering roosts and use ultrasonic recording equipment to try and establish the species of bat present. If bats are discovered, further surveys to classify the nature of the roost (day/maternity/hibernation) may be required. The identification of a bat roost also means that during the development, careful timing of the development to avoid impacts on bats, a precautionary 'soft strip' of tiles supervised by a licensed and suitably qualified bat handler and provision of permanent bat roosting features into the development, may be required, depending on the nature of the roost.

A European Protected Species license would be required for any actions that would directly disturb,



modify or destroy a bat roost in the event that bat presence is identified. This would include measures to replace the existing roosting habitat such as designing integral bat roosting opportunities into the building fabric such as bat tiles and internal voids/access points for bats, depending on the scale of impact.

4.2 Other protected and/or notable species

Since the roof and hanging tiles within the building have the potential to support nesting birds, removal of these areas should be timed outside of the nesting bird season (1st March – 31st August). If this is not possible, the building should be subject to nesting bird checks by a suitably qualified ecologist as appropriate to the works. If an active nest is identified, a minimum exclusion zone for all works within 5 meters radius of the nest must be established to the nest to protect it from disturbance until the young have fledged.

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.