

FORMER DREWS BUILDING

**71 - 73 CAVERSHAM ROAD
READING
BERKSHIRE**

PRELIMINARY BAT ROOST ASSESSMENT



2019

CLIVE HERBERT

Amphibian, Reptile & Mammal Conservation Limited
Species protection and habitat conservation specialists

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 Amphibian, Reptile & Mammal Conservation Limited were contracted by S2 Caversham Limited, to undertake a standard Preliminary Roost Assessment (PRA) at the former Drews Building (see cover photograph) located at 71-73 Caversham Road, Reading, Berkshire RG1 8JA and situated at approximately National Grid Reference SU 712 740.
- 1.2 This Preliminary Bat Roost Assessment was completed in order to determine the potential for bats to occur in the building and to identify if any further bat survey work or mitigation / avoidance measures were required.
- 1.3 The assessment was commissioned in support of a forthcoming planning application for the demolition of the building and the redevelopment of the site for new residential usage.
- 1.4 There are, however, no historical records of any bats roosting within the building and this assessment was therefore undertaken as a precautionary measure to inform the future planning process.
- 1.5 A check for any breeding birds was also undertaken during the PRA survey visit. There is, however, no natural habitat present within the boundary of the proposed development footprint.

2. Methodology

- 2.1 The objective of the daytime Preliminary Roost Assessment was to view the existing site layout, to inspect the exterior and interior of the building in order to assess its suitability to act as a bat roost site(s) and to conduct a detailed internal and external search for any direct evidence of past or current bat occupancy, such as droppings, staining on walls, rafters, windows etc.
- 2.2 The assessment was completed on 27th June 2019 when there was full access to all parts of the proposed development footprint and standard 10 x 40 binoculars together with an endoscope were available, where appropriate, to inspect the exterior and interior of the structure.
- 2.3 This work was carried out under *Natural England* Class Survey Licence WML- CL18 (Bat Survey Level 2), registration number 2015-13348-CLS-CLS and completed by the report's author, a licensed bat ecologist with 30 years' experience working in and around the county.
- 2.4 The assessment was conducted according to the latest 'best practice' standards as published in the 'Bat Surveys for Professional Ecologists - Good Practice Guidelines' (Bat Conservation Trust, 3rd edition, 2016) and the Standing Advice to LPAs published by *Natural England* in September 2012.

- 2.5 The breeding bird survey utilised direct observation with binoculars, from ground level, to watch for any individuals making repeated visits to the roofs of the building.

3. Constraints

- 3.1 It is considered that there are no specific constraints operating on the Preliminary Roost Assessment for bats or the breeding bird survey results presented in section 4 below.
- 3.2 The absence of a bat roost in any one season can, however, never entirely prove the absence of a roost at another season, such as during the autumn mating period, as bats regularly move their roost locations in response to both environmental conditions and the time of the year.
- 3.3 All results presented in section 4 below remain valid for a period of twelve months from the date of the survey, after which time they should not be relied upon and further advice should be sought regarding updating the survey.

4. Results

4.1 Building Description

The site comprises a large two-storey, vacant light industrial building (see photographs 1 - 4 below) located in the urban part of central Reading close to the railway station. There are three roofs to the brick-built building, which dates from around the 1960s, all of which are at different levels.

The roof to the right, as viewed from the front elevation, has a pitched, slate covering that is in excellent condition. The central 50% of the ridge is covered with galvanised metal that appeared to be tight-fitting. The small middle roof is tiled and these also appeared to be in excellent condition. The last section of the roof, closest to the adjacent *Pure Gym* building, also has a tiled roof that has one or two damaged tiles present but nothing that could act as a potential ingress point for bats.

The roof spaces of these loft voids are unlined and un-insulated. The rafters are all modern-sawn timbers with no mortise joints typically utilised by bats as roosting locations and there is no large central ridge beam present (see photographs 5 - 6 below).

Two rear extensions, facing towards the car park area, are present. These have pitched asbestos roofs. The extension parallel with Northfield Road is supported by modern metal rafters and there is no ceiling present to form a void (see photograph 7 below). The extension parallel with the *Pure Gym* building has a false ceiling present to create the former office space (see photograph 8 below).

All of the voids have been undisturbed for an extensive period of time, thereby affording excellent survey conditions to record any past or current bat occupancy.

The soffits and fascias all appeared tight-fitting and no potential points of ingress were identified (see photograph 9 below).

There are no other features, such as hanging tiles, weatherboarding etc., associated with the building which could provide alternative roosting opportunities for bats away from the roofs. There are also no underground structures present that would be suitable as potential hibernation sites for bats in the winter.

As a result of the lack of potential access points into the structure, the building was assessed to have a '**negligible potential**' to act as a bat roost site.



Photographs 1 - 4: Front, rear and side elevations



Photographs 5 - 6: Internal roof spaces (fronting Cavendish Road)



Photographs 7 - 8: Internal roof spaces (two rear extensions)



Photograph 9: Close-fitting soffits / barge boards

4.2 Internal Inspection

Notwithstanding an intensive search of the interior of the building, no past or current evidence of bat occupancy was detected.

4.3 External Inspection

No evidence of any past or current bat occupancy was found during the detailed external inspection of all parts of the building.

4.4 Breeding Birds

Despite extensive observation of the building, no birds were recorded making repeat visits to the property or showing other behaviour that might indicate the presence of nesting.

A number of Common Swifts (*Apus apus*) were recorded flying occasionally over the rear car park but these all originated from the residential housing areas outside of the proposed development footprint.

5. Summary & Recommendations

5.1 The Preliminary Roost Assessment of the property categorised the building as having a '**negligible potential**' to support a bat roost due to its structure and the excellent condition of the roof coverings which afforded no opportunities for bat ingress.

5.2 The internal inspection of the building did not locate any evidence of current or past bat occupancy within the structure.

5.3 The external inspection of the building did not locate any evidence of current or past bat occupancy within the structure.

5.4 In accordance with nationally published guidance, it is therefore now **recommended** that no dusk emergence surveys are required to be completed during the bats' active season in order to confirm the presence / absence of a roost.

5.5 No evidence of any nesting birds was detected during the 2019 breeding season, although this will need to be reassessed annually.

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