

Urban Tree Experts

BS5837 – Tree Surveys – Ecological Consulting

PRELIMINARY ECOLOGICAL APPRAISAL (BATS) AT 66 CHAPEL HILL TILEHURST



**Prepared for:
Mr R Longmate
28 Cockney Hill
Tilehurst
Reading
RG30 4EU**

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The validity of this report ceases at the prescribed time limit or after 12 months from the site inspection, or if the site conditions change due to unspecified works that affect the site whichever is the sooner.



Executive Summary

Urban Tree Experts was commissioned by Mr R Longmate to conduct a preliminary ecological appraisal (bats) of 66 Chapel Hill, Tilehurst, Reading, RG31 5DQ. This is to support a current planning application to Reading Borough Council.

The site visit was carried out on Tuesday 26th March 2019 at 12.45pm, during daylight hours. An internal and external inspection of the property took place, to look for signs of bats.

The preliminary ecological appraisal (bats) comprised a detailed search of the interior and exterior of the property and outhouse for bats, signs of bats and features suitable for use by roosting bats. This includes droppings, internally or externally, scratch marks, rubbing and staining at exit holes, live or dead bats and other features such as missing tiles, this list is not exhaustive.

The desk top study revealed six European Protected Species Licenses (EPSLs) within a 2km search radius, three of which are still current.

Internally and externally, there was no evidence of bats (current or historically) within the property or outbuilding. Externally the property and outbuilding are in a fair condition with no roosting opportunities or access points which could be utilised by bats.

Due to the absence of roosting potential and lack of evidence of bats found during the detailed external and internal inspection, it is concluded that there is no potential for roosting bats at the property. Based on the recommendations in the Bat Workers Manual and the Bat Surveys Good Practice Guidelines, no further surveys are required and the planned works should proceed.



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1. Introduction

1.1 Instruction

Urban Tree Experts was instructed by Mr R Longmate to conduct a preliminary ecological appraisal (bats) of 66 Chapel Hill, Tilehurst, Reading, RG31 5DQ to support a current planning application to Reading Borough Council.

1.2 Aims and Objectives

The preliminary ecological appraisal (bats) is designed to:

- Identify the presence/likely absence of bats within the buildings.
- Provide information on the status of bats using the buildings (currently or previously).
- To add confidence where no bats are found, or to categorise the nature of a roost where evidence of bats are found.
- To establish whether further surveys, mitigation or an EPSL is required.

The preliminary ecological appraisal (bats) and report writing were carried out in accordance with Bat Surveys for Professional Ecologists: Good Practice Guidelines (3rd edition, Bat Conservation Trust, 2016).

1.3 Proposed Works

The survey was commissioned in connection with a current planning application (number 182169) to Reading Borough Council for the demolition of existing detached house and outbuildings and the construction of a pair of semi-detached houses.

1.4 Surveyor Background and Experience

The preliminary ecological appraisal for bats and report was completed by Simon Holmes CEnv. He holds Class 3 (CL19) and 4 Bat (CL20) Licenses (Nos. 17637 and 17638) and a Science and Education license (SCI29096). He has 27 years' experience of carrying out bat surveys and bat conservation work.

2. Legislation and Planning Policy

2.1 Legislative Background

All species of British bat are protected under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 and the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, as amended. Under this legislation it is an offence to kill or injure a bat or interfere with any roosting or resting site. A bat roost is interpreted as "*any structure or place used for shelter or protection*" whether or not bats are present at the time. A summary of the main legislation and planning considerations are included at Appendix 1.

Seven species of bat are also Species of Principal Importance for nature conservation in England under Section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006. This places a duty on all government departments to have regard for the conservation of these species and on the Secretary of State to further, or promote others to further, the conservation of these species.



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3. Site Location and Description

3.1 Site Location

The property is located at Grid Reference SU 66285 73835, see Figure 1 below. An overview of the immediate area is shown on Figure 2, courtesy of Google Maps.

Figure 1. 66 Chapel Hill, Tilehurst, highlighted.

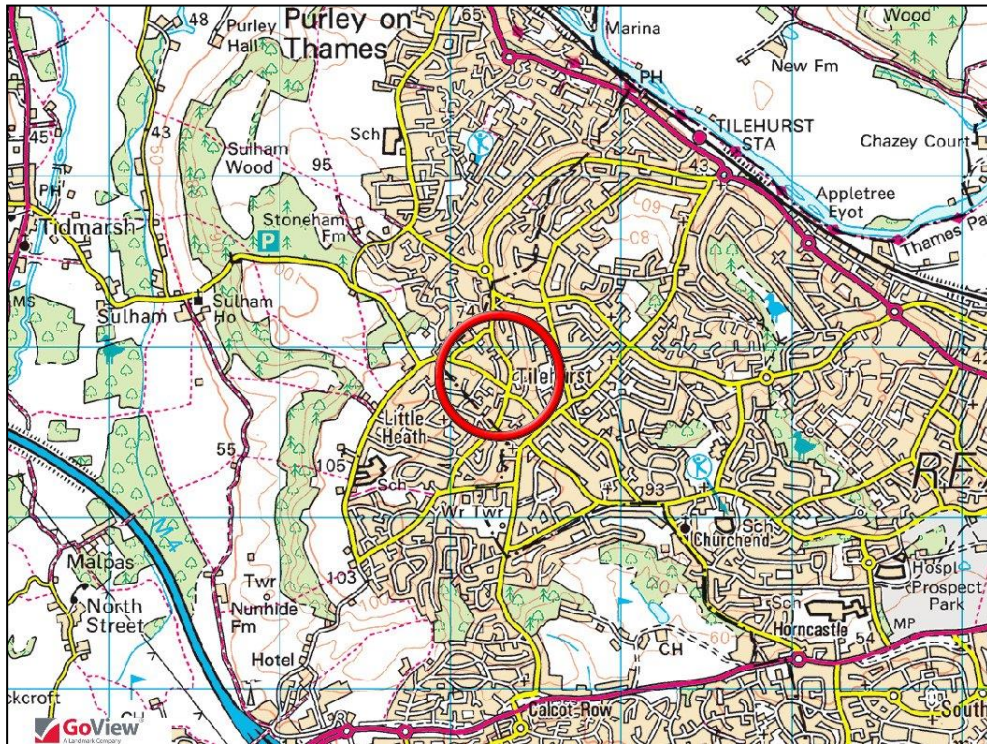
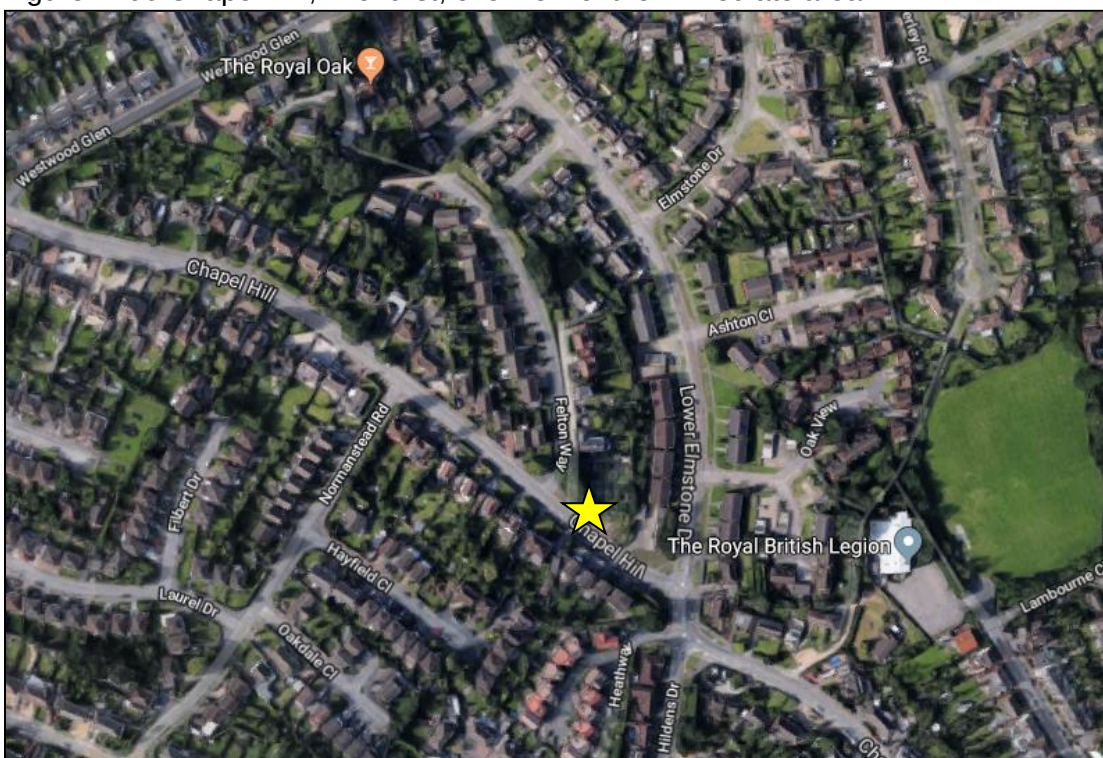


Figure 2. 66 Chapel Hill, Tilehurst, overview of the immediate area.





3.2 Site Description

The application site, which is located to the east of Reading town centre, comprises a detached, brick-built and rendered property that has a single storey ground floor extension, two lean to extensions and a brick built outbuilding. The west facing (gable end) of the property abuts an unadopted section of Chapel Hill, and the north (rear) of the property abuts a public right of way. The garden, see Figure 3 below, is situated on the south and east sides of the property and consists of hard standing with sections of lawn, mature ornamental trees and occasional shrubs. The site itself offers limited foraging or commuting habitat for bats.

Figure 3. Garden, 66 Chapel Hill, Tilehurst. 26.03.19



4. Survey Methodology

4.1 Pre-Survey Data Search

Google Earth and MAGIC maps (magic.defra.gov.uk) website were used prior to the survey to determine the suitability of the surrounding habitat to support roosting bats and to identify any statutory designated sites within 2km of the site.

Although the property is set in an urban conurbation and is surrounded by houses of varying styles and sizes, there is improved pasture/agricultural land nearby with Clay Copse and Sulham Woods 480 metres to the west. 180 metres to the east is a public open space (POS). Whilst these areas provide good foraging and commuting habitat for bats and are within foraging distance of the site there is limited connectivity to them from the site.

The property is situated in an area of outstanding natural beauty, the North Wessex Downs and there are four local nature reserves (LNRs), Blundells Copse, Lousehill Copse, Round Copse and McIlroy Park within 2km of the site (Magic Maps 2019). A search of the Magic interactive website revealed six EPSLs for bats have been granted within 2km of the proposed development site, the details of the current EPSLs are provided in Table 1 on page 7.



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Table 1. EPSLs for bats within 2km of the site

EPSL reference	Licence end date	Species on licence
2015-18545-EPS-MIT	2021	Brown long-eared, common and soprano pipistrelle bat
2015-18545-EPS-MIT-1	2021	Brown long-eared, common and soprano pipistrelle bat
2015-18545-EPS-MIT-2	2021	Brown long-eared, common and soprano pipistrelle bat

4.2 Daylight Survey

A preliminary ecological appraisal (bats) of 66 Chapel Hill, Tilehurst, Reading RG31 5DQ was carried out by Simon Holmes on Tuesday 26th March 2019 at 12.45pm. The weather conditions for the survey were sunny with a temperature of 13 degrees. Equipment used included a high-powered torch, a pole and digital camera and a ladder.

During the preliminary ecological appraisal (bats), an internal and external inspection of the property were carried out to identify any signs of occupation by bats and features that could offer potential roosting sites following standard survey guidelines. Features investigated included:

- Construction of the buildings – soffits, loft space, tiles/slates, lead flashings etc.
- Building condition – structure of roof and walls.
- Internal conditions – microclimate stability, draughts etc.
- Access points – potential entry and exit points for bats.
- Roosting points – cracks and crevices, between underlay and roofing tiles/slates.

Field signs that would indicate the presence of bats were searched for. These included:

- Bat droppings on the floor and walls of the buildings.
- Feeding remains (particularly butterfly and moth wings).
- Evidence of urine and/or oily staining around possible roost entrances.
- Presence of areas cleared of cobwebs.
- Where a breathable roofing membrane has been fitted staining on the membrane may suggest use by bats.
- Odour can sometimes suggest the present of bats.
- Squeaking and chattering can reveal bats roosting between the tiles and roofing underlay.

Buildings or structures with no bat roosting potential and that were unsuitable for roosting bats were not inspected in detail and included the small lean to at the rear of the house.

4.3 Constraints

Full access to the site during the visit was made possible by the client and the only constraint was the low ceiling to ridge loft height.



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5. Survey Findings

5.1 External Inspection

The external features of the buildings were examined for signs described in section 4.2. Windowsills, exposed features around the windows, fascias and walls were inspected for any evidence of bat droppings or staining.

The property is a detached, brick-built and rendered house with no cavity walls. It is in a fair condition internally and externally. The pitched roof is covered in close fitting slate tiles, none of which are missing or broken, see Figure 4 below. The roof tiles are well sealed to the chimney breasts, see Figure 5 on page 9. The verges are well sealed, see Figure 6 on page 9, and the fascias/soffits have no gaps, see Figure 7 on page 10. The windows are well sealed with no gaps that could be exploited by bat species.

Figure 4. Main roof covering, 66 Chapel Hill, Tilehurst. 26.03.19





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Figure 5. Close fitting tiles to chimney breasts, 66 Chapel Hill, Tilehurst. 26.03.19



Figure 6. Example of sealed verges/fascia, 66 Chapel Hill, Tilehurst. 26.03.19





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Figure 7. Sealed fascias/soffits. 66 Chapel Hill, Tilehurst. 26.03.19



On the west side of the property is a large single storey element that is covered in close fitting slate tiles and the lead flashing is fully sealed (see Figure 8 below) and, on the east side are two further small lean to extensions, both of which are covered in corrugated roofing, all of which is close fitting to the wall, see examples at Figure 9 on page 11.

Figure 8. West side element with close fitting slate tiles and lead flashing. 66 Chapel Hill, Tilehurst. 26.03.19





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Figure 9. East side lean to extension. 66 Chapel Hill, Tilehurst. 26.03.19



In the garden is a detached, brick build single storey outbuilding with attached lean to, see Figure 10 on page 12. The outbuilding roof is covered in close fitting composite tiles, the ridge tiles are fully sealed, see Figure 11 on page 12 and the verges are sealed with no gaps that could be exploited by bat species, see Figure 12 on page 13. The lean to is constructed of corrugated panels with a tarpaulin curtain at the front, see Figure 10 and Figure 13 on page 13. Due to the light levels and open nature, the lean to offers no bat roosting potential so a detailed internal inspection was not carried out.

No bats or evidence of bats was recorded during the external inspection of the property, lean to extensions or outbuilding.



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Figure 10. Brick built outhouse. 66 Chapel Hill, Tilehurst. 26.03.19



Figure 11. Close fitting composite roof tiles. 66 Chapel Hill, Tilehurst. 26.03.19





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Figure 12. Corrugated constructed lean to. 66 Chapel Hill, Tilehurst. 26.03.19



Figure 13. Tarpaulin curtain. 66 Chapel Hill, Tilehurst. 26.03.19





5.2 Internal Inspection

An internal inspection of the property and outbuilding was undertaken and examined for any signs of bats (as described in section 4.2).

The loft over the property was accessed from the first floor, via a ladder. The loft was illuminated and insulated but not boarded, see Figure 14 below. Whilst there was a low ceiling to ridge height, this did not hinder the inspection.

No bats or evidence of bats was recorded during the internal inspection of the property.

Figure 14. Example of loft space, 66 Chapel Hill, Tilehurst. 26.03.19



The roof was bitumen lined and is in good condition, see Figure 15 on page 15. There was no light spilling into the loft when the loft light and torch were turned off.

The outbuilding is used for storage, see Figure 16 on page 15. Only part of the building had a roof void. The void was not insulated or boarded and is used for personal storage, but this did not hinder the inspection, see Figure 17 on page 16. The roof was bitumen lined and is in good condition, see Figure 17 on page 16. No bats or evidence of bats was recorded during the internal inspection of the outbuilding.



Figure 15. Example of bitumen lining, loft at 66 Chapel Hill, Tilehurst. 26.03.19



Figure 16. Internal view of outbuilding at 66 Chapel Hill, Tilehurst. 26.03.19





Figure 17. Internal void above outbuilding, 66 Chapel Hill, Tilehurst. 26.03.19



6. Evaluation

The bat roost potential of the features within the site has been assessed with reference to the criteria laid out in the Bat Mitigation Guidelines (Mitchell-Jones, 2004). These criteria are listed on page 15 and 16 with the features **highlighted in bold**.

The likelihood of bat roosts being present will be higher where structures:

- are of a pre-20th Century construction;
- are in a lowland rural setting;
- **have woodland, mature trees, species-rich grassland and/or water nearby;**
- have large dimension roof timbers with cracks, joints and holes;
- have numerous crevices in stonework and structures;
- have an uneven roof covering with gaps, though not too draughty;
- have hanging tiles or roof cladding, especially on south-facing walls;
- **have a roof warmed by the sun;**
- are disused or little used; largely undisturbed;
- provide appropriate hibernation conditions, such as abandoned mines, tunnels, kilns, or fortifications; or
- **Recent or historical records of bats on the site, or bat roosts in the general area.**



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The likelihood of bat roosts being present will be lower where structures:

- **are in an urban setting with little green space;**
- are subject to heavy disturbance (constant movement due to draughts and noise, also unstable microclimate);
- **have a small, cluttered roof void (particularly for brown long-eared);**
- **are of a modern construction with few gaps or crevices that bats can fly or crawl through (though pipistrelle bats may still be present);**
- are comprised of prefabricated steel or sheet materials; (some sections);
- are active industrial premises.

Please note that the above list provides generic screening criteria only and there are exceptions to consider.

7. Conclusions

7.1 The combined evidence from the internal and external inspection provides a high level of confidence in support of the opinions as set out in this report. There are no bats and no evidence of bats and the condition of the buildings provided no visible features in which bats could roost or access the buildings to roost. Informed by the results of the survey and the factors highlighted in Section 6, it is concluded that there is no potential for roosting bats at this site. Based on recommendations in the Bat Workers Manual and the Bat Surveys Good Practice Guidelines, no further survey effort is required.

7.2 Contingency Plan

In the unlikely event that bats are found during the proposed works, all work must stop and advice sought from Urban Tree Experts or another licenced bat ecologist.

If, for whatever reason, there is a time delay of greater than 12 months between this survey and the commencement of work then the survey should be re-done.

8. References

Collins, J (2016). Bat Surveys for Professional Ecologists: Good Practice Guidelines (3rd Edition). Bat Conservation Trust (BCT), London.
HM Government (2017) Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations.
HM Government (1981) The Wildlife and Countryside Act.
HM Government (2006) Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act.
Mitchell-Jones, A.J. & McLeish, A.P. (1999). Bat Workers' Manual (2nd Edition). Joint Nature Conservancy Committee, Peterborough.

9. Queries

Any queries regarding this report should be addressed, in the first instance, to Urban Tree Experts:

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APPENDIX 1

In summary, the legislation combined makes it an offence to:

- Intentionally or recklessly damage, destroy or obstruct access to a structure or place used for shelter by a bat.
- 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.
- Intentionally or deliberately kill, injure or take any bat.

Planning Considerations:

Government guidance to Local Planning Authorities stipulates the need to consider biodiversity and protected species during the consideration of planning applications. The NPPF makes clear that the planning system should help minimise the impacts that development can have on biodiversity and provide net gains in biodiversity where possible. In addition, the ODPM Circular 04/2005 states *“It is essential that the presence or otherwise of protected species, and the extent that they may be affected by the proposed development, is established before the planning permission is granted, otherwise all relevant material considerations may not have been addressed in making the decision”*.

Policy CS36 of the Reading Borough Core Strategy states *“Development should retain, protect and incorporate features of biodiversity or geological interest (including protected species and their habitats) found within the application site into their schemes. On sites with recognised biodiversity or geological value, development will not be permitted where there would be a direct or indirect adverse impact on the site, unless it can be clearly demonstrated that: -*

- i. The need for development clearly outweighs the need to protect the value of the site; and*
- ii. Appropriate compensation, impact minimisation, mitigation and compensation are provided”*.

Developments that compromise the protection afforded to bats or roosts under the provisions of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 and the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 will require a European Protected Species (EPS) licence from Natural England (NE).

NE, the government’s statutory conservation advisory organisation, is responsible for issuing EPS licences that would permit activities that would otherwise lead to an infringement of the Habitat Regulations.

Three tests must be satisfied before this licence (to permit otherwise prohibited acts) can be issued:

- Reg 44(2)(e) – the derogation is “in the interests of public health and public safety, or for other imperative reasons of overriding public interest, including those of a social or economic nature and beneficial consequences of primary importance for the environment”.
- Reg 44(3)(a) – there is “no satisfactory alternative” to the derogation.
- Reg 44(3)(b) –the derogation is “not detrimental to the maintenance of the populations of the species concerned at a favourable conservation status in their natural range”.

Tests (a) and (e) can be met with the issue of planning permission for the proposed works. Test (b) is determined by NE’s ecology department that requires the development of a suitable mitigation strategy that would ensure that any bats present on site, are retained at the same population level or better.