

LEIGHTON PARK SCHOOL, READING

PROPOSED CAR PARK

BAT SURVEY REPORT

02 July 2017



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1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. Soltys Brewster Ecology were commissioned by Leighton Park School to undertake a series of bat surveys on two trees that are proposed for removal as part of works associated with construction of a new car park within the school grounds (see Proposed Site Plan in Appendix I).
- 1.2 The area associated with the proposed car park (i.e. the application site) is centred at grid reference SU 7306 7161 within the northwest corner of the school campus. An ecological appraisal undertaken at the site in February 2017 (Soltys Brewster Ecology, 2017) identified three trees within the site as being of moderate potential to support roosting bats (Target Notes 2, 4 & 5 in Appendix II). These trees supported potential roost features such as woodpecker holes, rot holes and upwards facing cavities (Plate 1). The tree located at Target Note 5 is to be retained as part of the proposed works. However the trees located at Target Notes 2 and 4 would likely require removal as part of site clearance associated with the proposed car park. As such further survey was required to establish likely presence/ absence of roosting bats at Trees 2 & 4 and inform mitigation/ licensing requirements (if any).
- 1.3 This report provides a summary of the bat surveys undertaken in May and June 2017 and includes recommendations on any ecological constraints/ opportunities associated with the proposed works.

2.0 METHODOLOGY

- 2.1. Based on best practice guidelines (BCT, 2016) trees of moderate bat potential require two separate survey visits at least two weeks apart. The optimum season for bat surveys is May to August. The trees at Target Note 2 and 4 in Appendix II were surveyed on the 30th May (dusk survey) and 16th June 2017 (dawn survey) by a team of two surveyors. Surveyors were positioned to ensure maximum visual coverage of the potential roost features the trees support. Weather conditions were considered no constraint to the survey effort, with no rain, light winds and maximum temperatures of 14°C and minimum of 10°C recorded during the surveys.
- 2.2. The scope of work was based on best practice guidelines (Bat Conservation Trust, 2016). Dusk surveys commenced observation 15 minutes before sunset and ran for 90-120 minutes after sunset with dawn surveys commencing 120-90 minutes prior to sunrise and ending 15 minutes after sunrise. Surveys were conducted using Pettersson D-240x or Bat Box Duet ultrasound detectors and suitable recording equipment (Transcend MP3 recording device). All calls were recorded and identified on computer-based sonogram analysis software (Wavesurfer).

Plate 1. Woodpecker holes and deadwood in tree of moderate bat roost potential (Target Note 2)



3.0 RESULTS

Dusk Emergence Survey - 30th May 2017

- 3.1 During the evening emergence survey on the 4th May 2016 no bats were seen to emerge from either of the trees surveyed. Moderate levels of bat activity recorded during the survey with a total of twenty seven separate bat passes recorded by the two surveyors. From both in-field and sonogram analysis it was determined that the majority of bat calls were made by foraging and commuting Common Pipistrelle *Pipistrellus pipistrellus* and Soprano Pipistrelle *Pipistrellus pygmaeus*, with a four Noctule *Nyctalus noctula* also recorded. The first bat recorded consisted of a Soprano Pipistrelle at 2103h approximately 3 minutes prior to sunset (2106h) foraging under the trees in the western area of the site. Bat activity during the survey was primarily associated with the woodland in the western area of the site.

Dawn Re-entry Survey - 16th June 2017

- 3.2 During the dawn re-entry survey on the 16th June 2017 no bats were seen to re-enter either tree with low levels of bat activity recorded during the survey. Fifteen separate bat observations were recorded in total with all bat calls made by foraging and commuting Common Pipistrelle and Soprano Pipistrelle. The last bat recorded consisted of a single Soprano Pipistrelle at 0416h approximately 30 minutes prior to sunrise (0446h), foraging within the woodland along the northern boundary of the site.

4.0 LEGISLATION, POLICIES & PLANS

- 4.1 The following international, national and local legislation and planning policies pertaining to bats, nature conservation and biodiversity are considered of some relevance to the proposed tree felling works.

Legislation Pertaining to the Protection of Bats

- 4.2 Under Annex II of the *Council Directive 92/43/EEC 1992 on the Conservation of Natural Habitats and of Wild Fauna and Flora* (EC Habitats Directive) some bat species are listed as of Community Interest, the conservation of which requires designation of Special Areas of Conservation (SACs); Under Annex IV of the EC Habitats Directive all bat species are listed as of Community Interest, in need of strict protection. In England and Wales, the EC Habitats Directive has been transposed into law in 1994 and, following recent amendments is set out in the *Conservation of Habitats & Species Regulation 2010* to give bats, their breeding sites and resting places a high level of strict protection making it an offence (subject to certain specific exceptions) to deliberately capture or kill/injure a bat, to damage or destroy a place used for shelter or protection or to deliberately disturb a bat in such a place.
- 4.3 Bats are also afforded protection within England and Wales under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended); Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000; Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006.
- 4.4 Recent Case Law has placed an onus on local planning authorities to satisfy 'three tests' under the Habitats Directive when determining applications that could affect European Protected Species. Essentially, these three tests are: i) that there is no satisfactory alternative; ii) that the proposed development is in the over-riding public interest (including those of a social or economic nature) and iii) the proposed development would not adversely affect the Favourable Conservation Status of the species locally

Legislation Pertaining to Birds

- 4.5 Under the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) all wild birds are protected against killing or injury and their nests against damage or destruction whilst they are being built or contain eggs/dependent young.

5.0 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- 5.1 The dusk emergence and dawn re-entry surveys undertaken in May and June 2017 by two surveyors identified no evidence of bats roosting within either of the trees identified as of moderate bat roost potential (Appendix II, Target Notes 2 & 4) which are likely to require felling during site clearance associated with construction of the proposed car park (Appendix I). The negative result of the surveys coupled with the generally low levels of bat activity associated the site are considered to offer robust evidence to support the conclusion of likely absence of roosting bats within the trees. As such no specific mitigation or licensing considerations relating to roosting bats would be associated with felling of these trees.
- 5.2 However the absence of bats is very difficult to prove and many bat species are itinerant in nature and will often make use of multiple roosts during the course of the active months (typically April to October) and as such the occasional use of the trees as day roosting habitat during the active months could not be precluded. Therefore on a precautionary basis, it is recommended that any potential roost features (rot holes, woodpecker holes etc.) be section felled and lowered to the ground via rope and left in situ for 24hrs prior to removal from site. Section felling between November and March would be recommended in order to avoid the period when bats would be most likely to be present. In the unlikely event a bat were discovered during works all works should immediately cease and the project ecologist or Natural England contacted for advice on how to proceed.
- 5.3 The tree identified at Target Note 5 was also classified as being of moderate potential to support roosting bats. This tree is scheduled for retention as part of the current works. In the event this tree were to require removal further survey would be required to identify likely presence/ absence of bats prior to felling. The optimum season for bat surveys is May to August and best practice guidelines (BCT, 2016) identify that trees of moderate potential require a dusk emergence and dawn re-entry survey spaced a minimum of two weeks apart to provide sufficient confidence as to the likely presence/ absence of roosting bats.
- 5.4 Although there would be some tree loss associated with the proposed works, the proposed site plan (Appendix I) indicates trees around the site boundary would be retained. On this basis a significant adverse impact on foraging bats is considered unlikely due to the retention of larger areas of trees and woodland within the wider school site. The retention of boundary vegetation would also help to ensure ecological connectivity for bats and other species is retained across the site. To further minimise impacts

it is recommended that the development seeks to minimise impacts on species using retained habitats through sensitive design of site lighting to minimise light spill onto such habitats.

- 5.5 An additional consideration for the felling/ vegetation clearance works relates to the potential of the site to support nesting birds. All nesting birds are protected under the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). Felling/ vegetation clearance should be undertaken outside the nesting season where possible (i.e. felling between September and February inclusive). In the event any felling works/ vegetation clearance is undertaken during the bird nesting period (March to August inclusive) this should be preceded by a thorough check for the presence of active nests.

REFERENCES

Bat Conservation Trust (2016) *Bat Surveys for Professional Ecologists– Good Practice Guidelines*. Bat Conservation Trust, London. Third Edition.

Soltys Brewster Ecology (2017) *Leighton Park School, Proposed Car Park - Ecological Appraisal Report*. Ref: E1565502/Doc 01 – 02 May 2017.

APPENDIX I PROPOSED SITE PLAN

APPENDIX II PHASE 1 HABITAT PLAN