Preliminary Bat Roost Assessment

29 Whitburn Road, Cleadon

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on behalf of Ian Tufts

November 2024

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Summary

A1 Ecology Limited was commissioned to carry out a Preliminary Bat Roost Assessment in support of a proposal to develop the property at 29 Whitburn Road, Cleadon.

The property is a large dormer bungalow and the proposal involves addition of a 1st floor, which requires demolition of the current roof. The building is in generally excellent condition, but some bat roost potential is present, particularly around the dormer windows where there are gaps behind PVC cladding and lead flashing.

The surrounding area also has potential for foraging bats, featuring low-density residential development with large, well-vegetated gardens and a scattering of trees. However, the wider countryside surrounding Cleadon village is mainly arable with very little woodland or surface water. It is therefore likely that only Common Pipistrelles are present, and at low density.

The reduction in risk obtained from delaying the development so that emergence surveys can be carried out between May and August is therefore marginal compared to that derived from proceeding with the proposed works under a suitable working method. A method statement is therefore provided, requiring a soft strip of the area around the dormer windows where potential roost features are located.

Contents

1. Introduction

A1 Ecology Ltd was commissioned to carry out a Preliminary Bat Roost Assessment at 29 Whitburn Road, Cleadon SR6 7QP (OS Grid Reference NZ38386179) in support of a proposal to develop the property. The objective of the assessment was to determine the impact that the proposal might have on protected species, with particular reference to the risk that bats might be present. A desk study has been performed to provide contextual evidence of the ecological conditions in the immediate vicinity of the site, including connectivity to the wider landscape. A site inspection has also been carried out, involving a systematic search of the buildings for evidence of the presence of bats.

2. Methodology

2.1. Desk study

The habitat in the area around the site was examined using satellite imagery and 1:25000 OS maps to identify significant features in the landscape, and Natural England's MAGIC website (www.magic.gov.uk) was consulted to identify designated conservation sites in the vicinity. No bat record search was carried out in accordance with CIEEM guidelines for preliminary surveys relating to single dwellings[1].

2.2. Site Survey

An initial assessment was performed of the type and condition of the building to be developed, paying particular attention to features that might provide roosting opportunities for bats. This was followed by a search for signs of bats within and around the building, and an inspection of its immediate surroundings for evidence of the presence of protected species.

2.2.1. Search methodology

A systematic search was carried out for evidence of the presence of bats. Windows, window-sills and the base of exterior walls were searched for bat droppings and feeding remains, and exterior wall surfaces were searched for droppings or staining by urine or fur oil. Surfaces of the pitched roof were also searched for bat signs. 10 x 42 binoculars were

[1] CIEEM (2016) *UK Guidelines for Accessing and Using Biodiversity Data.* Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM).

used where close-up inspection of exterior surfaces was not possible. Enclosed loft areas were searched by torchlight for bat corpses, droppings and feeding remains, and cavities in the fabric of the building were searched using torchlight.

3. Results

3.1. Ecological Context

The site is located at 25 m AOD within a residential area in the large village of Cleadon, which is situated in a largely flat landscape 3 km to the west of the North Sea coast at Whitburn. The coastline at this point is subject to multiple statutory designations, including the Northumbria Coast Special Protection Area and Ramsar site, designated for breeding and wintering birds, and the Durham Coast Special Area of Conservation for coastal and cliff vegetation.

The immediate area of the site features mainly detached housing and large gardens with a scattering of semi-mature and mature trees. Farmland to the north and the east of Cleadon village, where the topography rises gently to over 80 m at the Cleadon Hills, is mainly arable with large fields bounded by hedgerows, but land to the south on Boldon Flats is dominated by permanent pasture. Woodland is scarce across the area as a whole, though there is some regenerating woodland at the southern edge of Cleadon village and at Cleadon Hills Local Nature Reserve and SSSI, ca. 1 km to the NE, which is designated for calcareous grassland. Boldon Pastures SSSI is located ca. 300 m to the SW of the site and is designated for neutral grassland and marsh habitats.

The type of development proposed triggers no requirement for consultation in relation to potential effects on SSSIs. The closest record for a bat mitigation licence is for a non-breeding Common Pipistrelle roost ca. ½ km to the NE at the east margin of Cleadon village.

3.2. Site visit

A site visit was carried out by Christopher Bell between 1000 and 1130 on 7/11/24. Weather conditions were overcast with light southerly winds and an air temperature of 10˚C.

3.2.1. Description of the site

The building proposed for development is a large, detached, brick cavity-wall dormer bungalow (Photos 1-4, Appendix A). The building has an L-shaped ground plan with east, west, north and south facing roof pitches. The steeply pitched and gabled roof is finished in concrete Roman tiling, and has uPVC boxing at the eaves. Three pitch-roofed dormers are present on the south-facing roof pitch (Photo 1) and two Velux windows on the east-facing pitch (Photo 2), both at the rear of the building. At the front of the building there is a single dormer on the west-facing pitch and three Velux windows on the north-facing pitch (Photo 3). A small ground floor annex with a shallow-pitched roof is present below the east-facing gable (Photo 2), and a flat roofed patio door unit is present on the south aspect, opening onto an area of PVC decking (Photo 1). Exterior walls are rendered except below the damp proof course.

Two further structures are present within the curtilage of the property. Immediately to the north is a double garage with a shallow-pitched roof of similar overall design to the main building (Photo 5). A large PVC shed is also present ca. 50 m to the south of the main building at the far end of an elongate lawned rear garden.

3.2.2. Condition of the buildings

The buildings on the site are in excellent condition overall. No displacement of roofing tiles is visible, and mortar bedding is intact at the verges with the exception of slight decay on the rear dormers. Soffits are sealed to the wall render throughout, and though gaps are present behind barge boards, these are wide and shallow (Photo 6).

PVC cladding is present above the ground-floor annex on the east-facing aspect, and on the dormers, where there is a suggestion of a gap at the bottom edge of the cladding in some cases (Photo 7). Lead flashing around the base of the dormers also shows gaps between the ridges of the Roman tiling (Photo 8). A gap is also present behind the fascia above the rear patio door unit (Photo 9).

The garage is newly constructed and in generally good condition, except for some displaced dry verge units (Photo 10) a fascia that is slightly dislodged at one end (Photo 11). No void is present within the garage, which has open truss rafters and is lined with breathable membrane (Photo 12).

A narrow void is present below the E-W oriented roof ridge, which is fully boarded and has a bitumen lining, and contains numerous storage items (Photo 13). This is torn in places, especially at the junction with the roof of the N-S wing of the building, where some light is visible from the exterior (Photo 14). Only slight cobwebbing is present at the roof ridge, but there is some penetration of plant debris from the exterior, especially near the roof junction.

3.2.3. Systematic search

No signs of bat or other protected species were observed anywhere within or around the exterior of the buildings on the site.

4. Evaluation of survey results

4.1. Suitability of the buildings for bats

The countryside surrounding Cleadon village comprises habitat that is generally low-quality for bats, with a preponderance of arable land and a lack of woodland. However, within Cleadon itself the housing is mostly low density with well-vegetated gardens featuring significant numbers of trees. Common Pipistrelles are therefore likely to be present, but the location is unpromising for other species including Soprano Pipistrelles, owing to the scarcity of surface water features and riverine woodland in the wider area.

Despite the excellent condition of the buildings overall, they are not completely lacking in potential bat roost features, featuring some lifted flashing and potential gaps behind cladding and fascia boards. None of these features seem likely to be suitable for high status roosts, in view of which it would be appropriate to assess the site as having low suitability for roosting bats (Table 1).

Table 1. Criteria for assessing potential suitability of structures for bats, derived from the Bat Survey Guidelines.[2]

Suitability	**Roosting habitat in structures**
None	No habitat features on site likely to be used by any roosting bats at any time of the year (i.e. a complete absence of crevices/suitable shelter at all ground/underground levels).
Negligible	No obvious habitat features on site likely to be used by roosting bats; however, a small element of uncertainty remains as bats can use small and apparently unsuitable features on occasion.
Low	A structure with one or more potential roost sites that could be used by individual bats opportunistically at any time of the year. However, these potential roost sites do not provide enough space, shelter, protection, appropriate conditions and/or suitable surrounding habitat to be used on a regular basis or by larger numbers of bats (i.e. unlikely to be suitable for maternity and not a classic cool/stable hibernation site, but could be used by individual hibernating bats").
Moderate	A structure with one or more potential roost sites that could be used by bats due to their size, shelter, protection, conditions and surrounding habitat but unlikely to support a roost of high conservation status (with respect to roost type only, such as maternity and hibernation - the categorisation described in this table is made irrespective of species conservation status, which is established after presence is confirmed).
High	A structure with one or more potential roost sites that are obviously suitable for use by larger numbers of bats on a more regular basis and potentially for longer periods of time due to their size, shelter, protection, conditions and surrounding habitat. These structures have the potential to support high conservation status roosts, e.g. maternity or classic cool/stable hibernation site.

4.2. Potential impacts of the development

The proposed development involves the addition of a first floor to the existing dormer bungalow building, which will involve demolition of the existing roof structure. Any bat roost present in the roof will, therefore be destroyed by the works. No works are proposed to any of the other structures on the site, but the proximity of the garage means that any roost present within in may be subject to disturbance as a result of works on the nearby dwelling-house.

[2] Collins, J. (ed.). 2023. Bat Surveys for Professional Ecologists: Good Practice Guidelines (4th edition). Bat Conservation Trust, London.

5. Policy and legislation

Local Authorities have a responsibility through the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)[3] to preserve and enhance biodiversity through the planning system. NPPF paragraph 186a states:

> *" if significant harm to biodiversity resulting from a development cannot be avoided (through locating on an alternative site with less harmful impacts), adequately mitigated, or, as a last resort, compensated for, then planning permission should be refused".*

Legal protection of wildlife is provided by the following:

- The Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981.

  Provides comprehensive protection for wild birds, and their nests and eggs, and also provides special protection for bird species listed in schedule 1, animals listed in schedule 5, including bats, and plants listed in schedule 8. Under section 9 it is an offence to intentionally or recklessly disturb a bat while it occupies a structure or place that it uses for shelter or protection, whether or not the disturbance is significant, or to obstruct access to any such structure or place. It is also an offence under Section 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 to damage or destroy the nest of any wild bird while it is in use or being built, and also to destroy the egg of any wild bird.

- The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (Habitat Regulations) provides special protection for 'European Protected Species" of animals listed under schedule 2, including bats, and of plants listed under schedule 5. Bats (Chiroptera) are afforded protection by regulation 43, under which it is an offence to deliberately capture, injure, or kill any bat, or to damage or destroy the breeding or resting site of a bat. It is also an offence to deliberately disturb bats in ways that impair their ability to survive, breed, reproduce and rear or nurture their young, migrate or hibernate, or in ways that are likely to significantly affect their local species distribution and abundance.

[3] National Planning Policy Framework, Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities. 2023.

6. Recommendations

A structure assessed as having low suitability for roosting bats would normally require a single emergence survey to be carried out between May and August to gain sufficient confidence that bats are absent to enable works to proceed without risk of protected species offences. However, survey work is also required to be proportionate to the magnitude of the risk. The Bat Survey Guidelines (ibid., section 5.2.44) state that "*if complete inspection is not possible then proportionality must be considered. A single survey during summer months may be adequate to ensure nothing obvious has been missed and/or precautionary measures could be applied during works*".

Although potential roost features are present, none appear likely to host a high status roost, and within the context of the location, there appears to be a low probability even of casual use by a small number of bats. Common Pipistrelle is the only species likely to occur the vicinity, probably at low density, and the form and spatial relationships of the features present are not typical of those most often used, being generally at low elevation with surrounding clutter and exposed potential access points.

Given the low risk of bat presence, and the even lower risk of significant impacts on conservation status, the decreased risk derived from an emergence survey is likely to be disproportionate to the cost imposed on the developer, in view of which it would be appropriate to proceed with the works under a working method designed to minimise the risk arising from the residual probability of bats being present (Appendix B).

Appendix A – Photos

Photo 1. Building viewed from the SE.

Photo 2. Building viewed from the NE

Photo 3. Building viewed from the NW.

Photo 4. Building viewed from the SW.

Photo 5. Garage viewed from the SW.

Photo 6. Wide/shallow gap behind barge board on west-facing gable.

Photo 7. Possible gap behind cladding.

Photo 8. Gaps below lead flashing.

Photo 9. Gap behind fascia above the rear patio door unit.

Photo 10. Displaced dry verge units on the garage.

Photo 11. Detached fascia on the garage.

Photo 12. Underside of the garage roof.

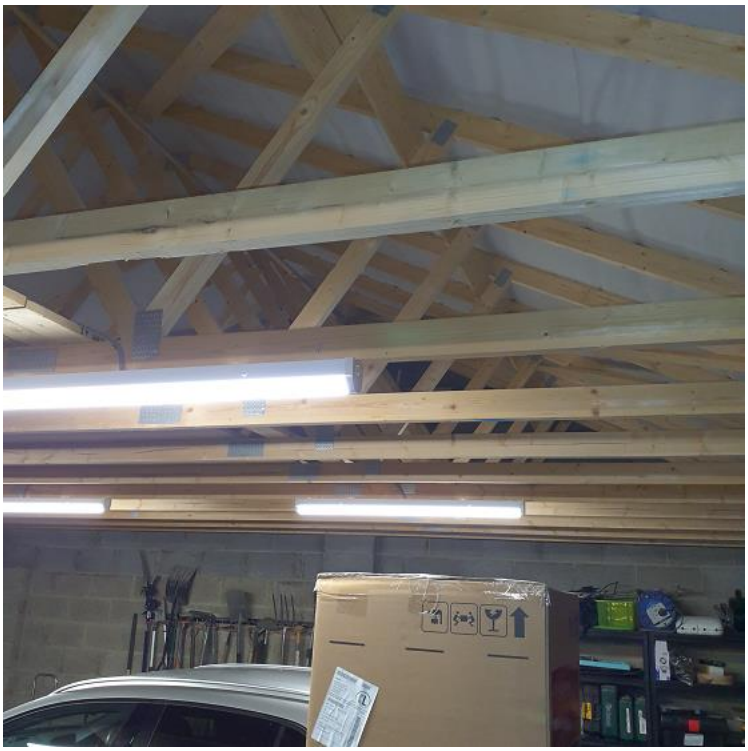

Photo 13. Main roof void.

Photo 14. Torn roof lining and light penetration.

Appendix B – Method statement

(i) Introduction

This method statement has been prepared to ensure that works associated with the development are carried out in a way that will minimize the risk to any protected species that may be present on or within the building. The developer should ensure that it is read and understood by all contractors working on the development, and a copy should be retained on site for reference at all times while the development is underway.

(ii) Risk of bat presence

Most bat species that roost in buildings occupy small spaces or crevices, rather than roosting and flying freely within loft spaces. Bats may, therefore, be present around the eaves of a building where they can gain access to the wall-tops, or behind lead flashing. They may also be present beneath roofing or ridge tiles, or within any crack or crevice within the fabric of a building.

Bats are afforded a high level of protection, such that it is an offence for any unlicenced party to capture, disturb, injure or kill any bat, or to obstruct, damage or destroy a roost. Contractors should be aware at all times that bats may be present and should remain alert to this possibility, taking care to avoid harming concealed bats. Contractors should be also be aware that in addition to being illegal, the handling of bats is potentially hazardous since they can bite, an on rare occasions have been found to carry a rabies-like virus that is potentially fatal to humans.

(iii) Avoiding harm and/or disturbance to bats

Although no evidence of roosting by bats has been discovered within or around the building, it should be assumed at all times that concealed bats may be present, and every attempt should be made to minimize the risk of harm and/or disturbance. A close visual inspection of all roofing materials should be made prior to stripping, and any loose roof tiles or cavities examined for the presence of bats or evidence of their presence. Roofing tiles should be carefully removed by hand and their underside inspected for the presence of bats before stacking. The space behind any loose lead flashing should be carefully inspected for the presence of bats. Particular care should be taken during any works that are undertaken near

the eaves of the building, and a careful inspection carried out of any gaps or crevices that could give access to the wall-tops or wall-plate prior to any intrusive operations relating to development works.

(iv) Specific risks

For the property under development, the greatest risk of bat presence occurs around the dormer windows. Prior to demolition, therefore, the cladding and lead flashing on and around the dormers should be carefully removed by hand, checking for the presence of bats on the underside or the covered surface.

(v) Avoiding harm to other protected species

If works are planned to proceed during the bird breeding season (March-August), they should only go ahead if there is confidence that no birds are nesting within or adjacent to the affected area of the building. If there is any suspicion that birds may be nesting, a suitably qualified ecologist should be engaged to determine the issue, and if this is found to be so the works should be delayed until it can be established that the birds have vacated the nest.

(vi) Procedure if bats are discovered

If bats are discovered at any time, work should cease until a licenced bat worker has attended the site to assess the situation and offer advice. Limited help and advice can also be obtained via the National Bat Helpline 0345 1300 228. Bats should not generally be handled, but if they are in immediate danger they may be removed to a safe place. Gloves should be worn and the bats placed in a lidded but well-ventilated box until a licenced bat worker attends.

(vii) Penalties

Failure to follow the procedures set out above may result in an offence being committed. The maximum penalty for such an offence following a successful prosecution is an unlimited fine or 6 months imprisonment with the option of confiscation of any equipment or machinery used in the course of committing the offence.