Preliminary Bat Roost Assessment

Don Villa, West Boldon

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on behalf of Stephen Walker

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Summary

A1 Ecology Limited was commissioned to carry out a Preliminary Bat Roost Assessment at Don Villa, West Boldon, in support of a proposal to extend the property. The site is located adjacent to a green corridor along the River Don valley on the edge of the South Tyneside conurbation, and is therefore adjacent to good quality foraging habitat for bats. However the property itself is in generally excellent condition, with few obvious bat roost features.

No evidence of the presence of bats was observed anywhere within the property, but a potential roost feature is present in the form of occasional gaps behind a behind a fascia at the rear eaves of the building. This is in an area not directly affected by the development proposal, but could be subject to disturbance during works. Reasonable avoidance measures should therefore be taken to avoid a possible offence under the Wildlife & Countryside Act, and a working method statement is provided to facilitate this.

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1. Introduction

A1 Ecology Ltd was commissioned to carry out a Preliminary Bat Roost Assessment at Don Villa, Don Gardens, West Boldon NE36 0QE (OS Grid Reference NZ34836111) 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

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

oil. Surfaces of the pitched roof were also searched for bat signs. 10 x 42 binoculars were 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 40 m AOD on the SE side of the valley of the River Don, which approaches on a SW to NE course to within 200 m, and forms a green corridor between residential development to the SE, comprising mainly semi-detached housing with small gardens, and light industrial and retail development to the NW. To the south this gives way to open countryside forming the green belt between South Tyneside and Sunderland, which comprises mainly arable land with large fields and only occasional hedgerows and very few trees. However, some parkland is present along the Don valley, and shelter belts are present along the edge of the industrial/retail estate to the north, extending ca. ½ km to the west to the site of a large ornamental lake beside the junction of the A19 and A184.

The nearest statutory designated site is West Farm Meadow SSSI, ca. 1.5 km to the NW and designated for lowland hay meadow habitat, and the nearest recorded bat mitigation licence is for a non-breeding Common Pipistrelle roost, ca. 3 km to the SW.

3.2. Site visit

A site visit was carried out by Christopher Bell between 1400 and 1530 on 21/11/24. Weather conditions were fine and clear but cold, with a moderate westerly wind and an air temperature of 2-3˚C.

3.2.1. Description of the site

The building proposed for development is a detached two-storey dwelling with lawned front and rear gardens within a ca. 80 x 20 m plot. The original part of the structure has a gabled roof with NW and SE facing pitches, as does a side extension below the NE facing gable (Photo 1, Appendix A). There is also a two-storey asymmetric cross-gabled extension at the rear (Photos 2 & 3) and a pitch roofed vestibule at the front entrance. All these structures are externally rendered above the damp course, with smooth render on the front (SE)

aspect and roughcast render elsewhere. A flat roofed ground floor extension in exposed brick is present below the NW-facing cross gable, housing an open bar/lounge area, from which a canopy extends SW to the flat roof of a rear extension to a small pitch-roofed structure divided along the property boundary (Photos 4 & 5).

All roof pitches on the main building are finished with flat interlocking concrete tiles and continuous dry verge strips, except at the verge of the front vestibule which has PVC dry verge units. Verges and eaves are flush and steel guttering is attached directly to the wall.

Two bay windows are present either side of the vestibule on the front aspect, both with monopitched concrete tile roofs, one of which extends to form a canopy over the entrance to the side extension (Photo 6).

3.2.2. Condition of the buildings

The building shows signs of extensive recent renovation and is in generally excellent condition with few potential access points. Soffits, fascias and barge boards are generally flush with the wall render, except at the fascia of the rear eave of the main building, where some gaps are apparent (Photo 7). Flat roofs of the structures at the rear are finished with synthetic rubber (Photo 8). The interior of the side extension is used as a storage/workshop area, and the enclosed loft space is boarded and fitted with strip lighting, and the roof lined with breathable membrane (Photo 9).

The loft space of the main building is also partially boarded and is fitted with incandescent lighting. Glass fibre insulation is present and the roof is also lined by breathable membrane. The space contains three redundant brick chimney breasts, and shows the remains of removed polyurethane foam insulation on the supporting timbers, as well as some reinforcing rafter-work (Photo 10). New rafter-work is present in the roof space of the cross-gable, which is not boarded (Photo 11). None of the lofts spaces show any ingress by fauna or debris from the outside, and there is no penetration of light from the exterior.

A large gap is present at the corner of the detached brick structure (Photo 12), which contains sundry storage items. The slate roof is unlined (Photo 13) as is the monopitched OSB roof of the rear extension (Photo 14).

3.2.3. Systematic search

No evidence of the presence of bats or any other protected species was observed anywhere within or around the exterior of the property.

4. Evaluation of survey results

4.1. Suitability of the property for bats

Although situated on the edge of an urban area, the property is adjacent to some good quality foraging habitats for bats in the form of parkland along the River Don corridor and woodland and lake habitat associated with the business/retail park to the NW. However, the excellent condition of the property offers few roosting opportunities for bats, with the possible exception of gaps behind the fascia at the rear eave, though there is no indication that these provide access to the wall tops. Overall, therefore, the suitability of the property for roosting and/or hibernating bats is in the region of low to negligible.

4.2. Potential impact of the development

The development proposal involves the construction of a first floor above the current ground floor side extension, with a wall dormer at the front and a cross-gable at the rear. This involves demolition of the current side extension roof and of the verge at the NW facing gable end, neither of which show any obvious roost features, although the works may cause disturbance to any bats present in gaps at the rear eaves.

5. Policy and legislation

Local Authorities have a responsibility through the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)[2] 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".*

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

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.

6. Recommendations

The parts of the building directly impacted by the proposed works lack any obvious roost features, and therefore the risk that roosts may be damaged or destroyed can be regarded as negligible, though there is a low risk that bats may be present in adjacent part of the building, and therefore be subject to disturbance. The proposal therefore presents little or no risk to local conservation status of bats but may still trigger a disturbance offence under the Wildlife & Countryside Act, unless reasonable avoidance measures are taken. It would therefore be appropriate to implement the works under the method statement in Appendix B, to minimise the risk to any bats that happen to be present.

Appendix – Photos

Photo 1. Building viewed from the SE.



Photo 2. Building viewed from the NW



Photo 3. Building viewed from the NE.



Photo 4. Building and detached structure viewed from the NW.



Photo 5. Detached structure viewed from the SE.



Photo 6. Bay window and canopy over the entrance to the ground floor extension.



Photo 7. Gap behind fascia board at the rear eave.



Photo 8. Flat roof of the rear extension.



Photo 9. Side extension loft space.



Photo 10. Main loft interior



Photo 11. Rear cross-gable roof space.



Photo 12. Gap in the detached brick structure.



Photo 13. Interior of detached brick structure.



Photo 14. Interior of the rear extension to the detached brick structure.



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) 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.

(iv) 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.

(v) 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.