AB Wildlife Surveys

PRELIMINARY ROOST ASSESSMENT REPORT.





Garston House Farm (auxiliary buildings), Whiston, Staffordshire. ST10 2HX.

MARCH 2020

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Survey Type:
Preliminary Roost Assessment: Bats & Birds
Site name / address:
Garston House Farm (auxiliary buildings), Whiston, Staffordshire. ST10 2HX.
Client:
Mr. and Mrs. J. Keeling
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Author:
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This report has been prepared by AB Wildlife Surveys with all reasonable skill, care and diligence, within the terms of the contract with the client. Ecological assessment has been conducted by a qualified ecologist in accordance to the Code of Professional Conduct for the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (www.ieem.org.uk).

1. INTRODUCTION

1 A Preliminary Roost Appraisal (PRA) survey was undertaken on behalf of Mr. and Mrs. J. Keeling with regard to a proposed development at Garston House Farm, Whiston, Staffordshire ST10 2HX (NGR: SK051478).

- ***Proposed works***

2 The proposed development will affect two agricultural buildings under the existing curtilage of Garston House Farm, which are intended to be converted into Holiday cottages


ST10 2HX
Whiston
Kingsley Holt
Cotton
Upper Cotton
Caulon
Waterhouses
Black Heath
Ipstones
Town Head
Whiston Common
Kingsley & Froghall Sta
Lanehead
Windy Harbour
Moorside
Wrea Green
Threelows
Wrea Green
Ramshorn Common
Sycamore Fm
Lockwood Hall
Dustystiles
Monkstone
Blakeley Fm
Little Leaves Fm
Solars Farms
Cert Wood
Old Spar
Longshaw
Beelow
Caldon Low
Caulon Lower
Tenement Fm
Quarries
Cerny
Moorside
Lane Head
Shirley Fm
Old Shirley
Cloughhead
Blackbank Wood
Shaw Wall Fm
Parknook
Higher Parkhead
Cockshutt
Crowgutter
Swinehole Wood
Birch Head
Crowtrees
Broomyshaw
Workings
Ipstones Park
Hermitage
Leigh Hall
Banktop
Bankfoot
Lockwood Hall
Lees
Whiston
Cemy
Threelows
Wrea Green
Ramshorn Common
Sycamore Fm
Old Spar
Longshaw
Beelow
Cert Wood
Dustystiles
Monkstone
Blakeley Fm
Little Leaves Fm
Solars Farms
Kingsley & Froghall Sta
Lane Head
Windy Harbour
Moorside
Caldon Low
Caulon Lower
Tenement Fm
Quarries
Cerny

- ***Legislation***

5 Bats are a protected species under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended); the Countryside and Rights of Way Act, 2000; the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act (NERC, 2006); and the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations (2010).

6 Under the Habitat Regulations 2017 it is an offence to kill or injure a bat intentionally or recklessly damage, destroy or obstruct access to any place that a wild bat uses for shelter or protection, or intentionally or recklessly disturb any wild bat whilst it is occupying a structure or place that it uses for shelter or protection. Bats and breeding birds are also protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended).

7 All bat roosts are protected whether or not bats are present at the time of survey. A "bat roost" is generally described as any structure or place which a wild bat uses for protection or shelter. This can include buildings, other structures and trees.

8 If bats are present or use the building at any time protection/mitigation measures would need to be provided as an integral part of any development and if planning permission is granted a European Protected Species Licence from Natural England may be need to be obtained before works can begin.

Status	Description
Maternity / Nursery Roost	Used by breeding bats, where pups are born and raised to independence (Anecdotal evidence may support this prospect despite sub-optimal survey period).
Hibernation Site	Where bats may be found during the winter. (This is assessed within the context of this report).
Daytime Summer Roost	Used by males and/or non-breeding females (Seasonal limitations prevent robust analysis of this).
Night Roost	Where bats rest between feeding bouts during the night but are rarely present during the day.
Feeding Roost	Where bats temporarily utilize feeding perches and stations to eat an item of prey.
Transitional (or Swarming) Site	Where bats may be present during the spring or autumn (This cannot be assessed within the context of this report).

Table 1. Bat roost status definitions.

3. METHODOLOGY

9 All potential roost structures (i.e. buildings) onsite or within the Zone of Influence of the proposed development were assessed, based on standard methodologies set out by Natural England, the Bat Conservation Trust (BCT) and the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC).

10 All bat species resident in the UK have been recorded using trees, buildings and built structures, e.g. bridges, at some time during the year i.e. in cavities, under ridge tiles and underfelt, chimneys and gable ends.

11 Buildings were inspected externally and internally, where access was available, for evidence of roosting bats and nesting birds: presence, droppings, feeding remains, urine stains and grease marks. Equipment used to aid the survey included low and high-powered torches, ladders, binoculars and an endoscope.

12 In the absence of any evidence, structures were assigned a rating of suitability from negligible to high potential for supporting bats in accordance to Bat Conservation Trust guidelines, 2016 (see below):

Suitability	Description Roosting habitats	Commuting and foraging habitats
Negligible	Negligible habitat features on site likely to be used by roosting bats.	Negligible habitat features on site likely to be used by commuting or foraging bats.
Low	A structure with one or more potential roost sites that could be used by individual bats opportunistically. However, these potential roost sites do not provide enough space, shelter, protection, appropriate conditions[a] 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 or hibernation[b]). A tree of sufficient size and age to contain PRFs but with none seen from the ground or features seen with only very limited roosting potential.[c]	Habitat that could be used by small numbers of commuting bats such as a gappy hedgerow or unvegetated stream, but isolated, i.e. not very well connected to the surrounding landscape by other habitat. Suitable, but isolated habitat that could be used by small numbers of foraging bats such as a lone tree (not in a parkland situation) or a patch of scrub.
Moderate	A structure or tree with one or more potential roost sites that could be used by bats due to their size, shelter, protection, conditions[a] and surrounding habitat but unlikely to support a roost of high conservation status (with respect to roost type only – the assessments in this table are made irrespective of species conservation status, which is established after presence is confirmed).	Continuous habitat connected to the wider landscape that could be used by bats for commuting such as lines of trees and scrub or linked back gardens. Habitat that is connected to the wider landscape that could be used by bats for foraging such as trees, scrub, grassland or water.
High	A structure or tree 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[a] and surrounding habitat.	Continuous, high-quality habitat that is well connected to the wider landscape that is likely to be used regularly by commuting bats such as river valleys, streams, hedgerows, lines of trees and woodland edge. High-quality habitat that is well connected to the wider landscape that is likely to be used regularly by foraging bats such as broadleaved woodland, tree-lined watercourses and grazed parkland. Site is close to and connected to known roosts.

For example, in terms of temperature, humidity, height above ground level, light levels or levels of disturbance.
Evidence from the Netherlands shows mass swarming events of common pipistrelle bats in the autumn followed by mass hibernation in a diverse range of building types in urban environments (Korsten *et al.*, 2015). This phenomenon requires some research in the UK but ecologists should be aware of the potential for larger numbers of this species to be present during the autumn and winter in large buildings in highly urbanised environments.
This system of categorisation aligns with BS 8596:2015 Surveying for bats in trees and woodland (BSI, 2015).

Table 2. Roost assessment criteria (BCT, 2016).

4. RESULTS

- ***Desktop study***

13 Garston House Farm is a working farm and part holiday let, located in the rural hamlet of Garston, near to the village of Whiston in North Staffordshire (ST10 2HX / NGR: SK051478). The nearest towns are that of Cheadle (4miles) to the SE, Leek (9 miles) to the NW and Ashbourne (10 miles) to the East. Alton Towers also resides ca. 3miles to the SE. The site sits at height on a topography of dissected sandstone cloughs and valleys of Chatsworth Grit and Hurdlow Sandstones.

14 The site has excellent connectivity to the wider landscape from all sides of the application area, being encompassed by moorland habitats of rush-pasture and agricultural fields divided by hedgerows and dry-stone walls.

15 There are a number of water bodies including the River Churnet and Cotton Brook within a 1km radius. Subsequently the surrounding landscape is considered as providing a number of valuable resources for local bat and bird populations, albeit the site sits at elevation and is exposed to the environment.

- ***Pre-survey data***

16 National Biodiversity Network and Staffordshire Wildlife Trust (SWT) records show that 11 of the 17 resident UK bat species occur in the county with three UK BAP species being recorded within 2km of the proposed application area (highlighted in grey):

UKBAP	Common name	Species	County records 2km radius
☑	Brown long-eared bat	*Plecotus auritus*	☑
☑	Barbastelle bat	*Barbastella barbastellus*	☒
☑	Bechstein's bat	*Myotis bechsteinii*	☒
☑	Noctule	*Nyctalus noctula*	☑
☑	Greater horseshoe bat	*Rhinolophus ferrumequinum*	☒
☑	Lesser horseshoe bat	*Rhinolophus hipposideros*	☒
☑	Soprano pipistrelle	*Pipistrellus pygmaeus*	☑

Table 3. UKBAP Bat species recorded within Staffordshire.

17 A further four/five bat species that are not currently given UK BAP consideration are also recorded within 2 km of the proposed application site:

UKBAP	Common name	Species	Recorded < 2km of site
☒	Natterer's bat	*Myotis Nattereri*	☑
☒	Daubenton's bat	*Myotis daubentonii*	☑
☒	Whiskered/ brandt bat	*Myotis mystacinus/brandtii*	☑
☒	Common pipistrelle	*Pipistrellus pipistrellus*	☑

Table 4. Non-UKBAP Bat species recorded within Staffordshire.

- ***Birds***

18 Pre-survey data finds the following bird species are recorded within a 1-2km radius of the application area, all of which are classified according to their status on Red, Amber and Green listed Birds of Conservation Concern (BoCC) in the UK.

Falco columbarius	Merlin		*Pyrrhula pyrrhula*	Kingfisher	
Turdus iliacus	Redwing		*Fringilla montifringilla*	Brambling	
Turdus pilaris	Fieldfare		*Falco peregrinus*	Peregrine	
Tringa ochropus	Green Sandpiper		*Accipiter gentilis*	Goshawk	
Pandion haliaetus	Osprey		*Milvus milvus*	Red Kite	
Loxia curvirostra	Common Crossbill		*Falco subbuteo*	Eurasian Hobby	
Cygnus cygnus	Whooper Swan		*Tyto alba*	Barn owl	

Table 5. Birds of Conservation Concern (BoCC) recorded in 1km radius.

19 The immediate landscape within which Garston House Farm is located is recognized as Priority habitat for both Upland Breeding Bird Areas for CS (England), and Woodland Bird Assemblage (England)

20 The following BoCC listed bird species were observed or heard during the survey period:

Buteo buteo	Buzzard		*Corvus corax*	Raven	
Turdus merula	Blackbird		*Corvus monedula*	Jackdaw	
Parus major	Great tit		*Erithacus rubecula*	Robin	
Parus major	Great tit		*Aegithalos caudatus*	Long-tailed tit	

Table 6. Species recorded during survey period.

- ***Designated sites***

21 The proposed application does not fall under any Statutory or Non-statutory designated area. There are no statutory designated sites present within a 1km radius, whilst four SSSI designated sites are located within a 2km radius:

- Churnet Valley SSSI ca. 1.2km West
- Whiston Eaves SSSI ca. 2km SW
- Bath Pasture SSSI ca. 1.9km SE
- Swineholes Wood and Black Heath SSSI ca. 1.6km North

22 A number of habitats listed under the Priority Habitat inventory also occur within a 1km radius:

- Woodland Priority Habitat Network (England)
- Good quality semi-improved grassland (Non-Priority) (England)
- Lowland Dry Acid Grassland (England)
- Lowland Meadows (England)
- Ancient Woodland (England)
- Deciduous Woodland (England)
- Traditional Orchards (England)

23 The development is subsequently flanked by a number of surrounding BAP habitats and Ancient woodlands, comprising of floristically-rich semi-improved and unimproved acid grassland with both dry and wet communities.

24 Garston House Farm itself, is itself located at the end of a deeply incised valley of 'Cotton Dell', comprising of Ancient / semi-natural woodland and plantations. 160 acres of 'Cotton Dell' is owned and managed as freehold Local Nature Reserve (LNR) by Staffordshire Wildlife Trust.

- ***Building Inspection***



Figure 2. Buildings subject to development (red) in relation to Garston House Farm.

25 Both buildings subject to development are situated in the working farm yard area, adjacent to the stone walled garden of the main farmhouse on the south elevation. Both were found to be constructed of traditional red brick with pitched Staffordshire blue clay tiled roofs.

- ***Building B1***

26 The smallest of the two buildings (B1) comprises of a single-storey and two-storey section at 90 degrees to each other. Windows and doors were found to be relatively well sealed and intact.

27 A number of raised ridge tiles were recorded across roof pitches on B1, although the single-storey section was considered as having low potential for roosting bats overall, being subject to daily disturbance with no internal roof void present.

28 Conversely, the first-floor region in the two-storey section of B1 was found to be open to roof level. The roof sections were found to lack any roofing under-felt, with exposed timber purlins, truss-work and roof tiles evident. Ingression points were noted around the pitching hole door on the north gable end.

29 This first-floor region was found to be relatively well-sealed and of an aperture and volume conducive for pre-emergent flight behaviour of void-dwelling bat species - brown long-eared bat being considered most likely in this region of the County.

30 This section however is also subject to varying degrees of usage, visitation and disturbance; being also periodically illuminated by artificial lighting.

31 No evidence of roosting bats was recorded during the external and internal inspection of building B1. Evidence of nesting swallow was recorded in the first-floor region. No evidence of schedule 1 listed birds (incl. Barn Owl) was recorded.

PLATES: BUILDING B1 (Potential Ingression points highlighted in red).



Fig.3 NE elevation.



Fig.4 SE elevation.



Fig.5 NW elevation.



Fig.6 South elevation.



Fig.7 NW end of 1st-floor roof void.



Fig.8 1st-floor roof void showing timber truss-work.

- ***Building B2***

32 Building B2 comprises of a more conventional, rectangular shippon barn-building (ca. 19m x 4.6m), being lower in overall elevation than that of B1. Externally, windows and doors were found to be relatively well sealed and intact. Conversely a number of raised roof and ridge tiles were recorded across both roof pitches.

33 The ground-floor area of B2 is separated into three internal sub-compartments used for holding livestock and is subject to frequent disturbance on a daily basis. A continuous and enclosed roof void is present above all ground-floor sub-compartments. The roof sections were found to lack any roofing under-felt. Light ingression was noted around pitching hole doors and gaps between tiles.

34 During the time of survey, this roof void was found to be free of clutter and open to roof height, with exposed timber-trusses and purlins exposed, and considered highly conducive for void-dwelling bat species.

35 However, it is understood that this roof space has been stored up to the ridges throughout, with surplus haybales for an extended duration (1-2years), being surplus. Only until recently, has this roof void been cleared-out to enable an architectural building survey to be undertaken, in-order to support the planning proposal. If this being the case, then the volume and height would be significantly reduced (ca.600m air gap to apex), thus reducing overall potential for void-dwelling species.

36 No evidence of roosting bats was recorded during inspection, although any anecdotal evidence such as bat droppings would have occurred on top of bales that have been recently removed. The void is still nonetheless considered as having moderate high potential for roosting bats in small numbers.

37 Minor historic evidence of nesting swallow was recorded in the roof void region, and it is understood that there was a larger colony established in the curtilage of Garston house Farm in the past.

38 Garston House Farm has accrued a number of domestic farm cats onsite (ca.9-10) over-time, all of which use the farm buildings to shelter in, particularly building B2. This concentration of cats is considered significant to increase predation risk for both bats and birds, thus reducing overall roosting and nesting potential onsite.

PLATES: BUILDING B2 (Potential Ingression points highlighted in red).



Fig.9 South elevation.



Fig.10 North elevation.



Fig.11 notable gaps on north facing pitch.



Fig.12 Ground-floor livestock compartment.



Fig.13 Roof void looking NE.



Fig.14 Roof void looking SW.

5. IMPACT ASSESSMENT & MITIGATION

39 No survey constraints were encountered during the preliminary Roost Assessment.

- ***Designated sites***

40 Considered a small-scale development no impact to any Non-Statutory designated sites in the immediate landscape is predicted at this juncture.

- ***Building rating***

41 Based on overall structural features of the buildings in context with the surrounding landscape; building B1 was assessed as having low to medium potential for both crevice-dwelling and void-dwelling bat species, whilst building B2 was considered as having medium to high potential.

- ***Further survey***

42 In-order to fully establish the presence/absence of roosting bats onsite, it will be necessary to carry out Phase 2 bat activity surveys prior to any works commencing. The number of prescribed activity surveys are based on the overall building rating and suitability to support roosting bats, in accordance to recently revised BCT guidelines (2016):

Low roost suitability	Moderate roost suitability	High roost suitability
One survey visit. One dusk emergence or dawn re-entry survey[a] (structures). No further surveys required (trees).	Two separate survey visits. One dusk emergence and a separate dawn re-entry survey.[b]	Three separate survey visits. At least one dusk emergence and a separate dawn re-entry survey. The third visit could be either dusk or dawn.[b]

[a] Structures that have been categorised as low potential can be problematic and the number of surveys required should be judged on a case-by-case basis (see Section 5.2.9). If there is a possibility that quiet calling, late-emerging species are present then a dawn survey may be more appropriate, providing weather conditions are suitable. In some cases, more than one survey may be needed, particularly where there are several buildings in this category.

[b] Multiple survey visits should be spread out to sample as much of the recommended survey period (see Table 7.1) as possible; it is recommended that surveys are spaced at least two weeks apart, preferably more. A dawn survey immediately after a dusk one is considered only one visit.

Table 4. Survey effort in relation to roost suitability (BCT, 2016).

43 In-order that the development can proceed in a legal and ecologically sensitive manner; It is recommended that at minimum of two dusk emergence and one dawn re-entry bat activity survey is undertaken around both buildings during an optimal period (May to September).

44 Surveys should be carried out under optimal weather conditions (Dry / >8 degrees) with a minimum two-week interval between each survey date to account for any stochasticity over space and time.

- ***Bats***

45 Should evidence of roosting bats be found during extended surveys, then it may be necessary to apply for an EPS mitigation licence from Natural England before any works can proceed, should non-licensable mitigation measures not be possible.

46 Mitigation for bats should be proportionate, justifiable and avoid or minimize any harm whilst ensuring the Favourable Conservation Status of species is maintained / enhanced

  - Type and scale of works and predicted impacts on bats
  - Size, nature and complexity of the development site
  - Likelihood of bats being present or affected
  - Species and numbers of individuals concerned
  - Type of roost and/or habitat affected.

- ***Birds***

47 Mitigation for nesting European Swallow is currently considered at this juncture. Further evaluation regarding nesting birds should be considered during the extended activity surveys, and outlined in a supporting Phase 2 bat and bird activity survey report.

- ***Biodiversity enhancement***

48 In compliance to current legislation, sustainable developments should, where possible, aim to increase overall biodiversity and net gains onsite for nature (ODPM, 2005). Full evaluation of biodiversity enhancement recommendations will also need to be outlined in a Phase 2 bat and bird activity survey report upon completion of extended surveys.

- ***Post -development lighting***

49 At this juncture, early consideration should be made to any post-development lighting intended under the proposed scheme. Light-pollution can impede and severe the movement of both volant and terrestrial based animals.

50 The use of artificial lighting must follow the protocols outlined in the Institute for Lighting Engineers document "Guidance for the Reduction of Obtrusive Lighting" (2005) and Bat Conservation Trust's "Artificial Lighting and Wildlife Interim Guidance: Recommendations to Help Minimise the Impact of Artificial Lighting" (2014) to minimise disturbance and skyglow across the site.

6. REFERENCES

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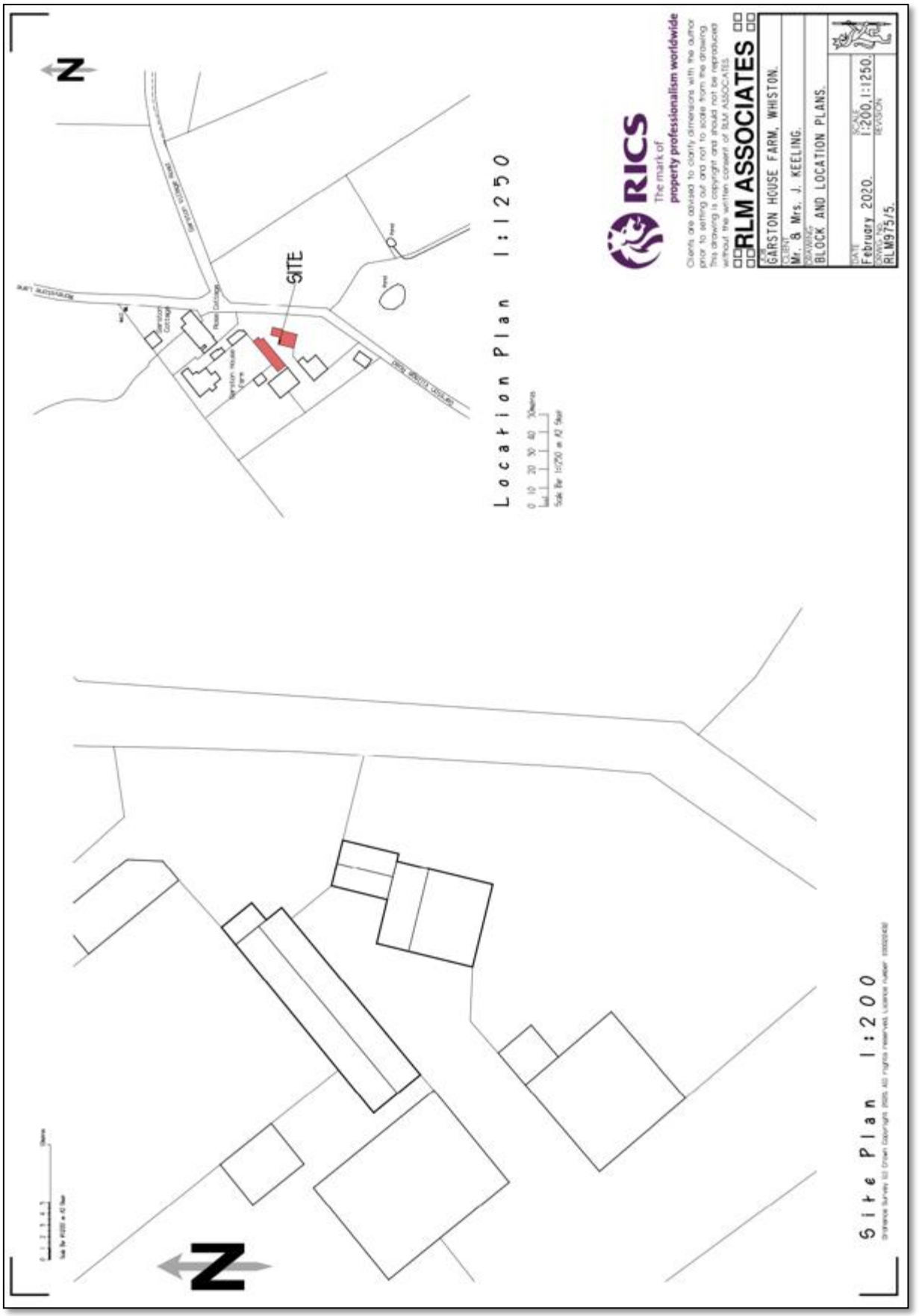
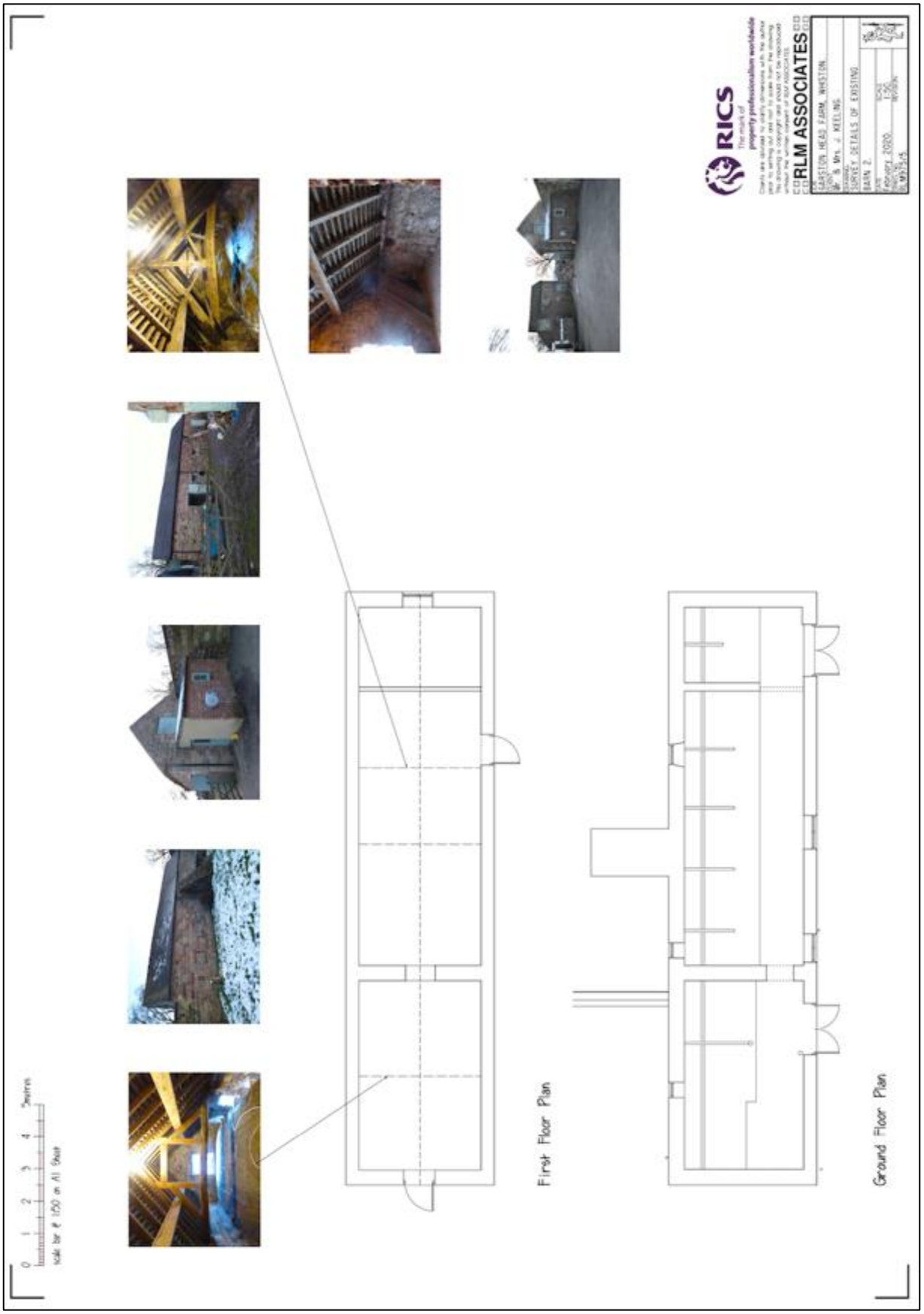
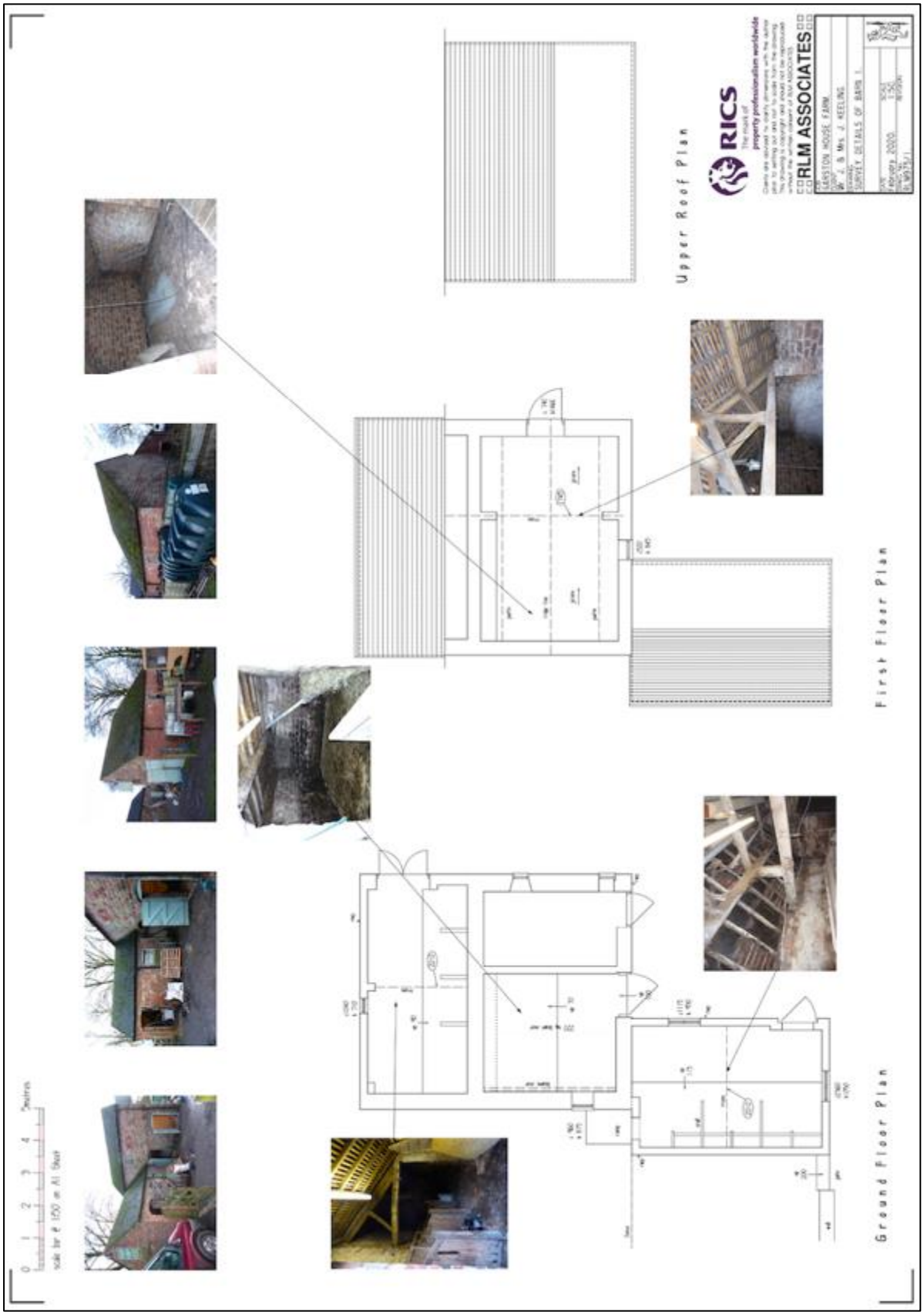
7. APPENDIX

- ***Maps & Plans***




RICS
RLM ASSOCIATES
First Floor Plan
Ground Floor Plan


RICS
RLM ASSOCIATES
Upper Roof Plan
First Floor Plan
Ground Floor Plan

Annual life cycle of temperate bat species

January **February** **March**



Jan: Bats spend most of the winter hibernating, a state of inactivity characterised by lower body temperature, slower breathing, and lower metabolic rate. **Feb:** Bats are still hibernating. They have little fat left to live off of now. They may leave the roost on warmer nights to find food and a drink of water. **March:** Bats may begin to emerge and signs of limited activity can be seen. There are small numbers feeding as it gets warmer. In bad weather, they may become torpid.

April **May** **June**



April: Bats have mainly come out of hibernation and are hungry and active, feeding on most nights. They may be moving between several roost sites. They may become torpid (cool and inactive) again when cold. **May:** Bats are fully active and feeding. Females start forming maternity colonies and looking for suitable nursery sites, such as buildings or trees. Males will roost on their own or in small groups. **June:** Female bats usually give birth to a single pup, which they feed on their milk. Young bats are very small (less than an inch) with thin, slightly grey fur. Adult bats will catch thousands of insects each in a night.

July **August** **September**



July: Mothers continue to suckle young. Some young are growing fast and almost full-size; others are still very small. At around three weeks old, young bats are sometimes found on the ground as they learn to fly. **Aug:** At six weeks old, the young bats begin to catch insects for themselves and no longer need their mothers' milk. The summer maternity colonies begin to disperse and bats may move to mating roosts. **Sept:** Mating season begins, with males of most species using special mating calls to attract females, which can include purrs, clicks, and buzzing. Bats are also concentrating on building up fat stores for the coming months.

October **November** **December**



Oct: More mating is taking place, and building up fat reserves is becoming crucial to survive the winter season. Bats are seeking suitable hibernation sites, and beginning periods of torpor. **Nov:** Periods of torpor are lasting longer. Some begin hibernation, to save energy over the colder months, when insects are harder to find. They are using stored fat as fuel. **Dec:** Bats are hibernating. They may roost on their own or in small groups, often in cool, quiet places like disused buildings, old trees or eaves, where they hopefully won't be disturbed. **(Source: Bat Conservation Trust).**

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