FAIRVIEW FARM, WHISTON, STAFFORDSHIRE

PRELIMINARY ROOST ASSESSMENT

Prepared for
Sara davenport

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CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION

2. SURVEY METHODOLOGY

2.1 Search of Existing Records
2.3 Survey Methodology
2.10 Constraints

3. FINDINGS & INTERPRETATION

3.1 Review of Existing Records
3.5 Survey Findings
3.14 Interpretation of Survey Findings

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

5. REFERENCES

PLATES

APPENDIX

I Legislation

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 This report has been prepared for Sara Davenport. It presents the results of a Preliminary Roost Assessment for bats of an outbuilding at Fairview Farm in Whiston, Staffordshire during March 2022.

1.2 The proposal is to convert the building as a holiday let. No plans showing the proposals were available at the time of preparing this report.

1.3 The building sits to the southeast of the farmhouse, adjacent to the A52. The village of Whiston is located approximately 1km to the southwest. The farm lies in an area of open farmland bordered by drystone walls and hedgerows. Woodlands of the Churnet Valley ad Cotton Dell lie to the west and south. The OS grid reference for the building is SK 0481 4790.

1.4 The report describes the methods used for the survey and any constraints encountered, along with the results of the survey, including a description of the building and any evidence of bats found. The findings are then assessed in light of the proposals and recommendations for further survey or action are given where appropriate.

1.5 The legislation relating to bats is given in Appendix I.

2. METHODOLOGY

Search of Existing Records

2.1 The local record centre, Staffordshire Ecological Records, was contacted for existing records of bats within 2km of the site.

2.2 The results of a record search can help to set a site into the context of its surroundings, as well as provide valuable information on the known presence of bats in the local area.

Survey Methodology

2.3 The Preliminary Roost Assessment was undertaken on the 5th of March 2022 by Helen Ball, an experienced ecologist. Helen holds Natural England bat survey licences (classes 3 and 4).

2.4 An assessment of the building was made in terms of its suitability to support roosting bats. Factors considered included internal conditions, presence of features suitable for use by crevice dwelling and free hanging bats, proximity to foraging habitats/cover and potential for disturbance.

2.5 A description of the building was made, and it was designated to one of the following categories according to its potential to support bats:

- **Bat roost** – evidence of use by bats present. Works affecting the roost would need to be undertaken under a statutory licence from Natural England, with precautionary and mitigation measures implemented as specified by the licence.

- **High Potential** – building exhibiting features very suitable for use by roosting bats (such as gaps between tiles and underfelt, gaps below ridge tiles, significant crevices within the walls) and offering optimal roosting opportunity. Often a number of suitable features will be present. Further survey (usually a minimum of three evening emergence and/or daw re-entry surveys) would normally be undertaken to establish use by bats and, if confirmed, the type of roost and number of bats present, etc. If no roost is identified, precautionary measures would need to be implemented during works to the building.

- **Moderate Potential** – building exhibiting features less suitable for roosting bats (such as superficial gaps within walls, gaps containing debris or cobwebs, limited areas of tiles or generally well-sealed tiling) and offering sub-optimal roosting opportunity. Suitable roosting opportunity may be limited to a single or small number of features. Further survey (usually a minimum of two evening emergence and/or daw re-entry surveys) would normally be undertaken to establish use by bats and, if confirmed, the type of roost and number of bats present, etc. If no roost is identified, precautionary measures would need to be implemented during works to the building.

- **Low/Negligible Potential** – building exhibiting features unlikely to be used for roosting or no features suitable for roosting. For low potential buildings, further

survey (usually a single evening emergence and/or dawn re-entry survey) would normally be undertaken to establish use by bats and, if confirmed, the type of roost and number of bats present, etc. Precautionary measures may need to be implemented during works to the building, although often no further action would be required.

2.6 A detailed visual inspection of the exterior and interior of the building (where accessible) was undertaken. The inspection followed standard methodologies set out in *Bat Surveys for Professional Ecologists – Good Practice Guidelines,* Bat Conservation Trust (Collins, 2016).

2.7 Externally, a visual inspection undertaken from ground level of features such as gaps in the fabric of the building was made for evidence of bat use. Evidence searched for included droppings and staining from fur-oil and urine. The survey was undertaken from the ground and aided using close-focusing binoculars and a high-powered torch where necessary.

2.8 The internal survey of the building followed a similar approach, with a search made for bat droppings, prey residues (such as fly or moth wings) and urine stains, as well as resident bats.

2.9 The weather conditions during the inspection survey were as follows: overcast, with a light breeze and temperature of 3°C.

Constraints

2.10 No constraints identified.

3. SURVEY FINDINGS & INTERPRETATION

Review of Existing Records

3.1 Staffordshire Ecological Record provided information on bats that have been recorded within 2km of the site.

3.2 Bats have been recorded on 65 occasions within the search area, with five species known to be present: brown long-eared *Plecotus auritus*, Daubenton's *Myotis daubentonii*, noctule *Nyctalus noctula*, common pipistrelle *Pipistrellus pipistrellus* and soprano pipistrelle *P. pygmaeus.*

3.3 The nearest roost is a maternity colony of common pipistrelles recorded between 1985 and 1994 in the village of Foxt, 1.3km to the northwest. A small roost of brown long-eared is also known from a building 1.3km away on Eaves Lane (recorded in 2018). The nearest records relate to common pipistrelle, noctule and Daubenton's recorded in flight at Whiston Golf Course 300m to the southwest. Soprano pipistrelle has been recorded once in flight at a location 1.6km to the south at Upper Cotton.

3.4 Given the suitable habitat in the local area, it is likely that bats are more widespread than the records indicate and probable that they are under recorded in the local area.

Survey Findings

3.5 The building consists of three distinct sections. For the purposes of reporting, these sections have been labelled S1-S3. The building is depicted in the Plates.

3.6 The main part of the building, **S1**, is single storey and built from brick. It has a pitched roof clad in corrugated sheeting. There are openings along the ridge for ventilation. Internally, the building is divided into four rooms each with an external door.

3.7 The roof is supported by a metal truss and purlins and the ridge is open and exposed from below. There are gaps at the wall verges of the gable end and dividing walls where mortar has fallen away. There is also the occasional gap at the top of the side walls at eaves level. The brickwork elsewhere is generally sound and, internally, the lower walls are concrete rendered. There is a barge board on the northwest wall. This is rotting and gaps are present behind it and lead into the brickwork beyond.

3.8 The windows have concrete lintels, with gaps present between these and the outer brick skin of the walls. The interior is accessible via open doorways and windows with broken or missing glass panes.

3.9 This section of the building is used for storage and the floor is generally covered with a layer of debris/hay/straw. **S1 holds moderate roosting potential.**

3.10 Section **S2** adjoins the southwest end of S1 and the northwest side of S3. It is also connected to another outbuilding to the northwest that is not part of the proposed conversion.

3.11 S2 is single story and in a dilapidated state of repair. It is built from metal and has a roof clad in corrugated sheets. There are gaps and holes in the roof. The interior is draughty and is used for storage. **It holds negligible roosting potential.**

3.12 Section **S3** is also single storey. It is built from breezeblocks and has a sloping roof clad in metal sheeting supported by wooden beams. Gaps between the tops of the walls and the roof have been filled with expanding foam. Windows are present along the southeast wall. These are glazed with Perspex sheets and have been partially blocked with breezeblocks. Large double doors are present in the northeast wall. The interior is relatively well lit and is used for storage. **It holds negligible roosting potential.**

3.13 No evidence of bats was found during the survey. Signs that birds may use the building for nesting were recorded as an incidental party of the survey. A house sparrow *Passer domesticus* was seen entering a gap at the ridge on S1.

Interpretation of Survey Findings

3.14 The building holds moderate potential for roosting by bats mainly associated with gaps in the walls and lintels of section S1.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 Given the building (section S1) holds moderate potential for use by roosting bats, follow on survey will be necessary. The survey would help to determine whether bats make use of the section of building for roosting and, if so, the extent of bat use; the species of bat present; the status of any roost/s; numbers of bats present; and roost and access points to be determined, thus enabling impacts to be assessed and appropriate compensation and mitigation to be designed where applicable to off-set impacts on bats. The recommendation for follow-on survey follows the advice on assessment of buildings contained within *Bat Surveys – Good Practice Guidelines* (Collins, 2016).

4.2 The follow-on survey would need to consist of two evening emergence (or dawn re-entry) surveys, with surveyors positioned externally, watching for bat emergence from/re-entry into, and activity associated with the building (section S1).

4.3 The survey would need to be undertaken during a time of year when bats are most active. Such surveys can be undertaken between May and September according to Bat Conservation Trust guidelines, with May to August being the optimal period (September is considered sub-optimal).

4.4 Should evidence of roosting be found, a further evening/dawn survey would likely be necessary to characterise the roost and provide confidence in the survey results, as per standard bat survey guidance.

4.5 Should the building be used by bats for roosting and in view of the legal protection afforded to bats (see Appendix I), a statutory European Protected Species (EPS) development licence would need to be sought from Natural England to enable works to take place that would affect bats or their roost sites. To issue a licence, Natural England require detailed, up-to-date information about the status of bat roosts and bat use of the building and a commitment to appropriate mitigation and compensation measures where applicable. In addition, planning permission (usually full) would have to have been granted for the development (again where applicable).

4.6 The presence of nesting birds can be avoided as a constraint to the proposals by timing works to avoid the bird nesting season. Should works need to be carried out during the bird nesting season then a watching brief for birds would need to be undertaken by an ecologist prior to any works commencing and during the works to check for the presence of nesting birds. The findings of the watching brief would be used to ascertain the best method to proceed to avoid impacting upon nesting birds, which would be set out via a method statement. The bird nesting season is generally deemed to run from March to August inclusive, although some bird species such as barn swallow can nest outside this period.

4.7 Conversion of the building would result in the loss of nesting habitat for house sparrow. It is therefore recommended that nest boxes suitable for use by this species be integrated into the building as part of the development. Boxes are better as integrated boxes installed into the walls of a building (rather than fixed to the exterior walls) to ensure longevity and sustainability. Woodcrete (or similar) boxes should be used (not wooden). Boxes are best installed at least 3m above ground on an aspect that does not face south.

5. REFERENCES

Collins, J. (ed). (2016). *Bat Surveys for Professional Ecologists – Good Practice Guidelines.* 3rd Edition. Bat Conservation Trust, London.

PLATES



1. Section S1 (northwest elevation)



2. Section S2 (southwest elevation)



3. Section S3 (southeast elevation)

APPENDIX I - LEGISLATION

The information below is intended only as guidance to the legislation relating to bats and birds and relates solely to England and does not purport to provide legal advice. It is recommended that the legislative documents be referred to for the full legal wording and the services of a relevant specialist sought where legal advice is required.

Bats

There are eighteen species of bat that breed in the UK; some are very rare whilst others are widespread. However, because the populations of most species have declined in past decades, all British bats have been protected by law.

Bats are protected in England under European Legislation via the Conservation (Natural Habitats and Wild Flora and Fauna (92/43/EEC)) or 'The Habitats Directive'. The Directive is transposed into UK law via the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (known as the Habitats Regulations). Due to their inclusion on Schedule 2 of the Habitats Regulations, bats are considered 'European Protected Species'.

In summary, this legislation makes it an offence to:

- deliberately capture, injure or kill a bat;
- deliberately disturb a bat;
- damage or destroy a breeding site or resting place of any bat;
- possess a bat (alive or dead) or any part of a bat.

Disturbance of bats includes in particular any disturbance which is likely:

(a) to impair their ability:

(i) to survive, to breed or reproduce, or to rear or nurture their young; or

(ii) to hibernate or migrate; or

(b) to affect the local distribution or abundance of the species to which they belong.

Bats are also protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended), which has also been amended by the Countryside and Rights of Way (CRoW) Act, 2000.

In summary, this legislation makes it an offence to:

- intentionally or recklessly disturb a bat while it is occupying a structure or place which it uses for shelter or protection;
- intentionally or recklessly obstruct access to any structure or place which any bat uses for shelter or protection.

Birds

All wild birds, their nests and eggs are protected by law under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). It is, therefore, an offence (subject to certain exceptions) to:

- kill, injure or take any wild bird;
- take, damage or destroy the nest of any wild bird whilst it is in use or being built;
- take or destroy the egg of any wild bird.

In addition to the above, in accordance to amendments of the Wildlife and Countryside Act by the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, it is an offence to:

- intentionally or recklessly disturb any species listed on Schedule 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act whilst building a nest, or whilst it is on, in or near a nest containing eggs or young; and
- disturb the dependant young of a Schedule 1 bird.

For example, barn owl is protected under Schedule 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act, protecting them from intentional or reckless disturbance during the breeding season (which is normally considered the time from when the female makes the first nest 'scrape' and lays the first egg until the time when the last dependent young stops returning to the nest (English Nature, 2002/3)).

NERC ACT AND BIODIVERSITY

A number of UK habitats and species are also included on the list of habitats and species which are of principal importance for the conservation of biodiversity in England as required under Section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act. The NERC Act came into force on 1st Oct 2006. Section 41 (S41) of the Act requires the Secretary of State to publish a list of habitats and species which are of principal importance for the conservation of biodiversity in England. The list has been drawn up in consultation with Natural England, as required by the Act.

The S41 list is used to guide decision-makers such as public bodies, including local and regional authorities, in implementing their duty under section 40 of NERC Act to have regard to the conservation of biodiversity in England, when carrying out their normal functions.

Fifty-six habitats of principal importance are included on the S41 list. These are all the habitats in England that were identified as requiring action in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan (UK BAP) and continue to be regarded as conservation priorities in the subsequent UK Post-2010 Biodiversity Framework. They include terrestrial habitats such as upland hay meadows to lowland mixed deciduous woodland, and freshwater and marine habitats such as ponds and subtidal sands and gravels.

There are 943 species of principal importance included on the S41 list. These are the species found in England which were identified as requiring action under the UK Biodiversity Action Plan and which continue to be regarded as conservation priorities under the UK Post-2010 Biodiversity Framework. In addition, the Hen Harrier has also been included on the list because without continued conservation action it is unlikely that the Hen Harrier population will increase from its current very low levels in England. In accordance with Section 41(4) the Secretary of State will, in consultation with Natural England, keep this list under review and will publish a revised list if necessary.

The impact that this legislation has on the Planning system is also outlined in ODPM 06/2005 Government Circular: Biodiversity and Geological Conservation – Statutory obligations and their Impact within the Planning System. This states:

The presence of a protected species is a material consideration when a planning authority is considering a development proposal that, if carried out, would be likely to result in harm to the species or its habitat. Local authorities should consult English Nature [now Natural England] before granting planning permission. They should consider attaching appropriate planning conditions or entering into planning obligations under which the developer would take steps to secure the long-term protection of the species. They should also advise developers that they must comply with any statutory species' protection provisions affecting the site concerned.