ASHCOMBE HALL

BAT METHOD STATEMENT

BASEMENT USEAGE & MAINTENANCE
(Updated August 2023)

The following Method Statement has been put together to guide future maintenance / access to the basement, to protect bats that are known to roost in the basement, minimise disturbance as far as possible, and to highlight circumstances in which further advice / on-site visits by a licensed ecologist may be needed.

It is now proposed that the basement is partly converted and used as entertainment space for guests staying in the hall. Part of the basement would be set aside for bats, and bats would be excluded from the areas proposed for use, subject to the granting of a European Protected Species (EPS) licence from Natural England.

Assuming that the EPS licence for these plans is granted, bats will be able to roost in a set aside, locked area of the basement which should receive no disturbance from staff or visitors.

The original Basement Future Use Working Method Statement was written to ensure any occasional visitors in the basement were aware of the potential presence of bats. This updated version, provides basic information on bats in the proposed set aside basement as well as the tunnels, ice house and outer basement, should a licence be granted to go ahead with the plans to convert the basement.

A copy of this document should be available to staff and visitors (e.g. maintenance contractors) who may use the basement areas from time to time.

Permanent signs will be created which will note the presence of protected bat roosts (tunnels, outer basement and new basement roost area).

For any questions or clarification required, please contact:

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General information on bats: www.bats.org.uk

Background

Ashcombe Hall is a very special site for bats, as it supports a variety of different bat roosts for at least four different species of bats throughout the year. Surveys undertaken in 2017 – 2018 found the basement to be used as a transitional (autumn) roost for brown long-eared bats, and the tunnels, outer basement and ice house were used as an autumn and winter hibernation roost for Natterer's bats. Bats were also found to be using the tunnels occasionally through the summer.

Updated surveys in summer 2021 and 2023 have confirmed brown long-eared bats and Natterer's bats still use the basement, tunnels and ice house, and pipistrelle, brown long-eared and *Myotis* species are currently using the roof space.

Legislation

All 18 British bat species and their roost sites are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act (WCA) 1981 as amended and are included in Schedule 2 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019. Combined, this legislation means that it is illegal to:

- Deliberately or intentionally kill, injure or take a bat.
- Deliberately, intentionally or recklessly damage, destroy or obstruct access to any place that a bat uses for shelter or protection (this is taken to mean all bat roosts **whether bats are present at the time or not**)
- Deliberately, intentionally or recklessly disturb a bat while it is occupying a structure or place that it uses for shelter or protection.

Proposed Use of Basement

The basement is extensive, with several different rooms which are connected to the inside space of Ashcombe Hall via a stairway up, and is connected to the outside courtyard and tunnels via two

doorways.

The new proposed use of the basement involves the conversion of the three largest rooms to a party room, bar and quiet room. These rooms will be accessed internally via the stairs down from the hall (rather than the external stairs from the courtyard). There are also proposed to be toilets which will be created at the base of the stairs, which will partially be built into the set aside bat roost room. The boiler / plant room will be closed off from these rooms and accessed mainly from the external plant room door.

Proposed Mitigation (Subject To Licensing)

To enable the proposals, bats would have to be excluded from two of the rooms they currently use for roosting (B2 & B3). These rooms are mainly used by Natterer's bats, but brown long-eared have been recorded occasionally using it as a night roost and transitional roost. A variety of different options were considered to try to retain the roosts in-situ, but it was not possible to create suitable access which bats were likely to use; the best option that is most likely to be accepted by bats are as follows:

- Setting aside the smaller basement rooms for bat use only (no lighting, no regular access for staff or customers, no storage etc). These rooms are already being explored by bats as droppings are present.
- Enhancing the set aside rooms for roosting bats. This will include creation of ceiling crevices, replicating the size and materials of the current roost crevices. This will encourage roosting in these rooms.
- Maintaining the current access point which is already used by bats (droppings present), ensuring no lighting around this access point
- Ensuring that the flight path to access the roost is kept dark and undisturbed (external basement corridor and tunnels)

Survey Findings to Date

Surveys in autumn 2017 found a brown long-eared bat roosting in the basement. Surveys in summer 2021 found a Natterer's roost in a ceiling cavity in one of the basement rooms. A static recorder in the basement showed that bats were mainly using the basement at night during the summer of 2021, but at least one long-eared bat may occasionally roost during the day with recordings at typical emergence time.

Monitoring in 2021 – 2022 found that 1 Natterer's bat started using the basement roost on 10 October 2021 and 4 bats were still roosting in the basement crevice on 8 November 2021. There were no bats present during the hibernation check on 13 January 2022 or 7 February 2022, or during visits in March 2022.

An updated inspection on 12 June 2023 found Natterer's droppings below crevices in two rooms in the basement, indicating that bats are likely to have also been present in the autumn on 2022, although no inspections were undertaken at that time. No bats were present in June 2023.

Potential Impacts of Basement Use on Roosting Bats

The impacts from the proposed works are as follows:

- Alteration of basement rooms B2, B3 and B6 to entertainment space including party room, games room, quiet room.
- Exclusion of bats from these rooms (destruction of transitional roosts); reduction in volume of roost space available to bats.
- Potential changes to environmental conditions including increase in noise, additional lighting in the area
- Potential for disturbance both in basement and adjacent habitats such as outer basement, tunnels and ice house

If the licence is approved, the above impacts will be mitigated for to ensure the bat populations and roost sites are maintained.

The following proposed actions are designed to minimise the potential for disturbance impacts to avoid any negative effects on bats roosting in the basement and surrounding areas, when there is an increase in human presence in this area.

Minimising Disturbance

All staff and customers must use the internal stairs as the main way to access the basement entertainment rooms. The plant room door into the external basement corridor will be as a fire exit / emergency use only, and for maintenance of the plant room.

The roost will be sound proofed to ensure there is no noise which will be heard from the adjacent rooms.

Lighting of the external steps down to the basement and outside the plant room door will be for

emergency use only and will be low level, on a motion timer of 1 minute or less. The lights must be set up to ensure they are not constantly triggered by people moving around in the courtyard, or by bats flying past.
The windows to the quiet room must have black out blinds / shutters used at night, to ensure there is no light spill in the external basement passageway.

The external basement corridor must remain completely dark for the majority of the time. The lights in the courtyard must be shielded to ensure this corridor does not receive light spill, as this is the main access route that bats will use to access their hibernation roost and their new transitional roost.

The sensitive lighting plan (V2) sets out proposal for lighting in and around the basement, any additional lighting needed in future in the basement or adjacent areas should be discussed with a licensed bat consultant first, to ensure bats are not affected.

The new basement roost along with the external basement room (hibernation roost), tunnels and ice house will have new lockable wrought iron gates with fly through bat access. The gates will have signs saying No admittance - protected bat roost. This will prevent accidental / inadvertent disturbance from customers and staff.

What To Do If A Bat Is Seen

As the new basement proposals exclude bats from the areas used by customers, and the retained bat roosts will not be accessible to customers or for regular use by staff, it is unlikely that bats will be encountered in the day to day running of the business.
Where regular roosts are present, occasionally bats can find their way into the living area (E.g. if a window or door is left open). If a bat is ever found 'grounded' or trapped in a living area, or appears to be injured, further advice should be sought from the Bat Conservation Trust (0345 1300 228) who will have a list of bat carer volunteers in the area. Grounded or injured bats can be carefully moved out of danger by wearing gloves and carefully placing it in a box with a small milk bottle sized plastic lid of water and a cloth to hide under.

Figure 1: New basement proposals (subject to licence approval)

