

Dear Rebecca Bowers

SMD/2023/0630

**Conversion of former agricultural building to form 1no. dwellinghouse and associated works
Catswall Farm, Huntley Road, Denford, Leek, Staffordshire, ST13 7JX**

0.105 hectares

Staffordshire Wildlife Trust has been asked to review further information provided for the above application as part of a service level agreement with Staffordshire Moorlands District Council to provide ecology advice regarding planning and development management functions.

The application is a Full – Minor application for the conversion of a single traditional Grade II listed agricultural building (Barn A) into a single dwelling.

We have viewed the following additional document:

- Bat Activity Survey report - dated November 2023

SUMMARY – a **Holding objection** to the proposals is recommended due to a request for further details on the proposed bat roost mitigation/compensation design and barn owl/swallow nesting features.

Required prior to determination:

1. An assessment of the bat hibernation potential of the building is required, comprising a statement as to whether hibernation potential can be ruled in or out of this building, and;
2. Further detail in respect of mitigation/compensation for bats and their roosts is requested, including for hibernation potential if required.

Conditions are also recommended for other ecology items.

BATS

A detailed bat survey has been undertaken. The report is suitably recent (dated 2023) and the survey methods and approach is comprehensive, however an assessment of the potential of the building for hibernating bats is not included. In summary, the results of the survey are:

- The site has previously been confirmed as a day roost for a single common pipistrelle bat (2016), but this usage was not re-confirmed during these recent surveys.
- No bats were recorded as emerging from or re-entering into the building during the surveys in August/September 2023.
- Two brown long-eared bats were recorded day roosting within the structure during the building inspection in October 2023 (photographic evidence provided).
- The report concludes that the building supports a transitional roost for brown long-eared bats.
- A recommendation is made to provide new roost provision in the form of:
 - A bat loft measuring a minimum of 2m (h) x 5m (w) x 5.5m (l) on site incorporating specific features to encourage roosting brown long-eared bats.
 - A bat box installed on the exterior of the building suitable for crevice dwelling bat species.
 - Guidance on points to consider in relation to bat mitigation, including the need for a Natural England development licence in relation to bats and their roosts prior to the development commencing.

The recommendation for inclusion of roosting provision targeted at the bat species recorded at the site is to be welcomed and the outline design of the bat loft is appropriate, as is the proposed bat box

design. The inclusion of 'bat friendly' planting is also to be welcomed and ideally should be included in any formal landscape plan to be approved.

However, the design plans (previously reviewed, letter dated 26th April 2024) suggest that a proposed bat loft is not included within the dwellinghouse design, therefore, information on its location should be provided. The bat loft location plan should be accompanied by a specification taken from the more general advice provided within the Bat Survey Report. There should also be a suitable assessment of the proposed location to ensure it is a feasible option and to identify any potential impacts on ecology of the installation/construction of the bat loft elsewhere on site.

As such, a holding objection is recommended until a suitable location plan and specification of the bat loft is provided along with a suitable assessment of the impact of the installation of this feature if installed elsewhere on site, along with an assessment of the potential of the site for hibernating bats (with compensation/mitigation information if needed).

Further detail is required on a suitable lighting scheme to ensure any new bat roost features (bat loft and bat boxes) will not be adversely affected by any new lighting scheme and this could be secured by planning condition.

NESTING BIRDS

The Bat Survey Report identified evidence of nesting birds on site, as follows.

- Confirmation of a nesting barn owl inside the building;
- Confirmation of at least one nesting swallow inside the barn, and;
- A recommendation is made to provide the following:
 - An internal barn owl nest box fitted within the interior of a barn OR an external barn owl nest box installed on the wider site.
 - Eight swallow nest boxes (grouped appropriately) under overhanging eaves or within easily accessible loft spaces.
 - Two integrated swift bricks (enhancement).
 - One sparrow terrace nest box (enhancement).

Nesting barn owl are specially protected under Schedule 1 of the Wildlife & Countryside Act, 1981 (as amended). Given the sensitivity around relocating a nesting pair of barn owl from the building to a new nesting location, and the very specific nature of barn owl and swallow nesting requirements, further information should be provided. Further information should include a suitable plan showing specification, location, height and orientation of the nest boxes and a suitable method statement for barn owl. This could be secured by planning condition.

The inclusion of additional swift and sparrow nestboxes as enhancement in the proposal is welcomed. Ideally, the locations of these enhancement nest boxes should also be provided.

A precautionary approach to avoiding harm to all nesting birds is also recommended and could be secured by planning condition.

Regards,

Dated 2nd May 2024