

Rushton Methodist Church, Sugar Street, SWT

Comments

Application Reference: SMD/2025/0080

Location: Rushton Methodist Church, Sugar Street

Proposed Development: Change of use for former Rushton Chapel. Proposed plans to convert part of the chapel to commercial office space and part to be converted into a three bedroom property using the buildings existing natural interior partition and external doors.

Staffordshire Wildlife Trust has been asked to review 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.

Documents Viewed:

- Application form
- Bat and Bird Presence/Absence Survey Report, September 2024 by Evolution Ecology Ltd
- Site Plan

Summary: Having reviewed the information provided we have **no objection**.

Furthermore, the applicant should note the presence of a confirmed maternity/nursery bat roost, which means that a bat licence will be required from Natural England prior to any works taking place. We therefore recommend the application is determined as Prior Approval (or indeed as requiring a planning application if appropriate) with suitably worded conditions as follows:

- Bat licence to be obtained from Natural England prior to any works taking place
- Bat mitigation and enhancement measures, as detailed in the Evolution Ecology Report (September 2024) to be implemented; and
- A sensitive lighting scheme to avoid disturbance to roosting and foraging bats.

Further Information

Mitigation measures outlined in the Bat and Bird Presence/Absence Survey Report, September 2024 by Evolution Ecology Ltd, should be followed:

- Natural England Bat Licence: Following the building's conversion's planning approval, a Natural England Development licence will be needed to legally carry out the mitigation/compensation measures to disturb bats and their roosts (Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981). **The following ecological provisions should be carried out between November and March to prevent bat injury or killing, and the roost should also be reinstated within this period.** Please note: Bat surveys are valid for one to two years. Up-to-date bat activity surveys

are required for Natural England licence applications. The bat activity survey season is between May and August.

- Time-avoidance measures must be considered, as maternity bat roosts cannot be disturbed during the bat activity/breeding season from April to October. Therefore, the works impacting the bat roost must be carried out between November and March. Hibernating Bats - Bats use loft spaces during the summer months (April/May to September/October) as they require warm and dry roosts to provide shelter and/or give birth to their young (pups). However, during the winter months (October to March) they require cool and humid roosts to hibernate, which tend to be caves, cellars, and mature trees. Nevertheless, some individual bats have been known to hibernate within their summer roosts (roofs).
- Toolbox Talk: A licenced ecologist will undertake a toolbox talk and give it to all contractors who are to work on-site. This is a requirement as there is a bat roost within the building. The toolbox talk will provide contractors with the appropriate information regarding any procedures that must be followed should bats be discovered and accompany the contractors onto the roof to perform any soft demolition around the bat roost. However, an ecologist should be on-site where works are to impact the known bat roosts to monitor the works being undertaken and reposition any hibernating bats to a safe location within the original roost. All companies and individual workers are liable should any bats be disturbed, so this must be followed diligently.
- Ridge and verge tiles must be lifted individually, with each one checked (both directly under the tiles and the area where the tile sits) for the presence of any hibernating bats.
- If any hibernating bats are discovered, they will need to be repositioned to a safe area (pre-installed hibernation bat box in a nearby tree) by a licensed ecologist and/or the bat roost/roof reinstated as soon as possible, and the hibernating bat relocated back into the original roost site (Reasonable Avoidance Measures - RAMs). The hibernation bat box can be taken down once the roost has been reinstated.
- With consent from the ecologist on the site, tiles may be replaced and secured to mimic the original bat roosts. However, the bat roosts should be reinstated under the ridge tiles by creating a void (the ecologist will give further guidance during the soft demolition. However, this is a simple procedure to create the void/s using the existing materials).
- Bitumen Felt – If roofing felt is to be used, then in the section of the bat loft/roost, traditional bitumen felt (1F) will need to be installed from the ridge-board down each slope of the roof to 2m/ each purlin. Bats can get caught up in the new, modern, breathable fabric/felt.
- A more detailed assessment of proposed lighting and a sensitive lighting plan is required to maintain flight routes and dark/undisturbed areas (especially important for Brown Long-eared bats).