



**LEONARD'S FARM,
BIDDULPH MOOR, STAFFORDSHIRE**

PRELIMINARY ROOST ASSESSMENT

**Prepared for
C. Gibson**

April 2025

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1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This report has been prepared for Mr. C. Gibson. It presents the results of a Preliminary Roost Assessment at Leonard's Farm in Biddulph Moor, Staffordshire during September 2024.
- 1.2 The proposal is to demolish the existing farmhouse and attached shippon and outbuilding/store, along with a detached outbuilding to the immediate north-west of the farmhouse. The location of the buildings is shown within the red line development boundary on the *Existing Block Plan* prepared by Tom Ford Architecture (drawing 002, dated 10th May 2024).
- 1.3 The farmhouse and shippon are built from stone and have tiled and pitched roofs. The outbuildings are built from a mix of materials.
- 1.4 Leonard's Farm is located in a rural area 650m to the northeast of Biddulph Moor. It is surrounded by meadows and pastures bounded by dry-stone walls and hedgerows. Nearby woodlands include the steep-sided cloughs near Heath Hay 350m to the northwest and Spring Wood 1km to the west. The OS grid reference for the farmhouse is SJ 9130 5887.
- 1.5 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 buildings 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.
- 1.6 The legislation is given in Appendix I.

2. METHODOLOGY

Search of Existing Records

- 2.1 The local record centre, Staffordshire Ecological Record (SER), was contacted for existing records of bats and other protected species 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 protected species in the local area.

Survey Methodology

- 2.3 A Preliminary Roost Assessment was undertaken on the 10th September 2024 by Max Robinson and Helen Ball. Max and Helen each hold 25 years' experience working in the ecology sector and are licensed by Natural England to survey for bats (Max holds a class 2 licence; Helen holds classes 3 and 4 licences)
- 2.4 An assessment of the buildings was made in terms of their 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 each building was made, and any potential roost features catalogued. The buildings were assigned to one of the following categories according to the potential to support bats:
 - Bat roost – evidence of use by bats present. Further survey (usually a minimum of three evening emergence surveys) would normally be undertaken to confirm the type of roost and number of bats present, etc. Additional surveys are sometimes needed to help characterise the roost. 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, including for maternity roosting. Often several suitable features will be present. Further survey (usually a minimum of three evening emergence 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 and offering less suitable roosting opportunity. Suitable roosting opportunity may be limited to a smaller number of features. Further survey (usually a minimum of two evening emergence 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 very unlikely to be used for roosting or no features suitable for roosting. For low potential buildings, further survey (usually a single evening emergence 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 buildings of low potential, although sometimes no further action would be required.
- 2.6 A detailed visual inspection of the exteriors and interiors of the buildings was undertaken. The inspection followed standard methodologies set out in the *Bat Surveys for Professional Ecologists – Good Practice Guidelines*, Bat Conservation Trust (Collins, 2023).
- 2.7 Externally, a visual inspection of features such as gaps in the fabric of the buildings was made for evidence of bat use from ground level. 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 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 survey were as follows: rain showers and overcast, with a moderate breeze (Beaufort Scale 3) and a temperature of 9°C.
- 2.10 A brief ecological scoping survey of the land surrounding the buildings within the red line boundary to identify any potential ecological issues such as the presence of other protected species or an invasive plant etc., was also carried out.

Constraints

- 2.11 No constraints were encountered.

3. SURVEY FINDINGS & INTERPRETATION

Review of Existing Records

- 3.1 SER provided information on protected species that have been recorded within 2km of the site.
- 3.2 Bats have been recorded on 469 occasions within the search area, with eight species known to be present: common pipistrelle *Pipistrellus pipistrellus*, soprano pipistrelle *P. pygmaeus*, noctule *Nyctalus noctule*, brown long-eared *Plecotus auritus*, Natterer's *Myotis nattereri*, Daubenton's *M. daubentonii*, Brandt's *M. brandtii* and whiskered *M. mystacinus*. Several of the records are not identified to species level.
- 3.3 The majority of the records (over 85%) are bats recorded in flight during static detector surveys at Hurst Quarry located 1.2km to the northwest. A roost used by Natterer's and brown long-eared for hibernating is located 1.5km to the northwest. Day roosts of common pipistrelle have been recorded at Biddulph Grange 1.9km to the west and day roosts of brown long-eared from two sites c. 1.7km to the northwest.
- 3.4 No records of great crested newts *Triturus cristatus* have been highlighted by the record search. A search has been carried out to determine the presence of nearby ponds using OS Explorer map and MAGIC map. The search revealed that there are two ponds within 250m of the site – one 210m to the northwest near Lower Fold Farm and one 245m to the southwest by Stanways Lane.
- 3.5 Badgers *Meles meles* have been recorded in the local area on various occasions. Due to restrictions with use of the data, in particular making them public, reference to individual records is not made in this report. The search results have revealed that badgers are known to inhabit the local area, with badgers recorded from sites nearby.
- 3.6 Birds have been widely recorded in the search area. Species relevant to the site include barn owl *Tyto alba*, house sparrow *Passer domesticus*, tree sparrow *Passer montanus*, bullfinch *Pyrrhula pyrrhula*, house martin *Delichon urbicum*, starling *Sturnus vulgaris*, stock dove *Columba oenas*, mistle thrush *Turdus viscivorus* and song thrush *T. philomelos*. These birds are 'red' or 'amber' listed species of conservation concern whose populations have declined significantly in recent years (Stanbury et. al, 2021).

Survey Findings

- 3.7 The buildings and site are depicted in the Photographs.
- 3.8 The farmhouse and shippon are built from stone. The farmhouse is two-storey and the shippon, which is attached to the southern end of the farmhouse, is single-storey. The roofs are pitched and clad in Staffordshire blue tiles. The farmhouse has been unoccupied for c. 30 years. There is a small glazed porch on the eastern side.

- 3.9 The roof of the farmhouse contains large holes by both chimneys and several ridge and common tiles are missing or have gaps below suitable for roosting by bats. Several of the windowpanes are also missing, which provide a means of flight access into the interior by both bats and birds.
- 3.10 Internally, the upstairs ceilings are lath and plaster with no loft hatch present. There are large gaps in the ceilings. The roof tiles are unlined below.
- 3.11 The shippon contains a single room with a single doorway that opens into a large, adjoining outbuilding (this large outbuilding is off site and outside the redline boundary). The shippon is built from stone and contains occasional gaps in the internal walls. The room is open to the roof apex. Traditional roofing felt has been pinned to the rafters. There are gaps below the roof tiles.
- 3.12 No evidence of bats was found associated with the farmhouse and shippon, although they hold moderate potential to be used by bats for roosting. Several disused nests of blackbird *Turdus merula* and song thrush were located in the lower rooms of the farmhouse, along with nests of wren *Troglodytes troglodytes* and barn swallow *Hirundo rustica*.
- 3.13 A small outbuilding/store adjoins the shippon to the west. This is built from brick and has a roof clad in corrugated sheeting. This holds negligible potential for bats to use for roosting.
- 3.14 A detached outbuilding is located c. 10m northwest of the farmhouse and shippon. It has concrete lower walls and the remainder is built from corrugated metal sheeting and metal beams. It is open fronted to the east and housed a pair of goats at the time of the survey. This building holds negligible potential for bats to use for roosting.
- 3.15 The land within the redline boundary consists of a mix of bare ground, hard standing, species-poor grassland and tall ruderal. Species include perennial ryegrass *Lolium perenne*, creeping bent *Agrostis stolonifera*, annual meadow-grass *Poa annua*, white clover *Trifolium repens*, broad-leaved and ribwort plantains *Plantago major* and *P. lanceolata*, toad rush *Juncus bufonius*, pineappleweed *Matricaria discoidea*, knotgrass *Polygonum aviculare*, broad-leaved dock *Rumex obtusifolius*, common nettle *Urtica dioica* and great willowherb *Epilobium hirsutum*. There are extensive stands of the invasive Himalayan balsam *Impatiens glandulifera*. Garden shrubs such as lilac *Syringa vulgaris* grow close to the farmhouse.

Interpretation of Survey Findings

- 3.16 The farmhouse and shippon hold moderate suitability for use by roosting bats. The outbuilding/store and detached outbuilding hold negligible potential suitability for roosting.
- 3.17 Bird species recorded incidentally during the survey include wren *Troglodytes troglodytes*, robin *Erithacus rubecula* and dunnoek *Prunella modularis*. Birds make extensive use of the farmhouse for nesting as shown by the large number of

disused nests inside the building. The other buildings and habitats on site may also be used by birds for nesting.

- 3.18 No signs of badger were observed during the survey. Suitable habitat for this species on site is very limited.
- 3.19 Great crested newts have not been recorded from the search area, although there are two ponds located 210m and 245m away. Natural England's 'rapid risk assessment' tool has been used to assess potential impacts on great crested newt in relation to the approximate size of the site withing the red line boundary. The tool shows the risk of an offence as 'unlikely'. The result is given below. In light of this, further consideration of great crested newts as part of the proposals is not considered necessary.

Component	Likely effect (select one for each component; select the most harmful option if more than one is likely; lists are in order of harm, top to bottom)	Notional offence probability score
Great crested newt breeding pond(s)	No effect	0
Land within 100m of any breeding pond(s)	No effect	0
Land 100-250m from any breeding pond(s)	0.01 - 0.1 ha lost or damaged	0.01
Land >250m from any breeding pond(s)	No effect	0
Individual great crested newts	No effect	0
Maximum:		0.01
Rapid risk assessment result:	GREEN: OFFENCE HIGHLY UNLIKELY	

- 3.20 There are no Habitats of Principle Importance (Priority Habitat) on site. The habitats have low ecological value and support a limited range of species, most of which are typical of disturbed or nutrient rich conditions.
- 3.21 Himalayan balsam, a non-native plant, is present on site. This species is highly invasive and can form extensive, dense stands in wetland, damp, watercourse and woodland environments that shade out and smother native ground flora. It spreads by seed.
- 3.22 The species is listed under Schedule 9 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). The legislation provides the primary controls on the release and spread of non-native species into the wild making it an offence to 'plant or otherwise cause to grow in the wild' any plant listed in Schedule 9 (Part II)¹. Invasive plant species pose a serious threat to nature conservation interests, being highly invasive, damaging and potentially expensive to manage and eradicate. There is a potential risk present with Himalayan balsam being spread around the site and onto neighbouring land as a result of the proposals.

¹ Section 14 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act, 1981 (as amended) prohibits the introduction into the wild of any animal of a kind which is not ordinarily resident and is not a regular visitor to Great Britain in a wild state or any species of animal or plant listed in Schedule 9. An introduction can be through release or escape and can be planting or causing to grow in the wild (this can include inappropriate disposal of garden waste, not controlling the plant in a garden situation whereby it spreads into the wild etc.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

Bats

- 4.1 As the farmhouse and shippon hold moderate potential for roosting, follow-on bat surveys would be necessary. The surveys would determine whether bats make use of the buildings for roosting and, if present, the extent of bat use; the species of bat present; the status of any roost/s; numbers of bats present; and locations of roost and access points, 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, 2023).
- 4.2 The follow-on surveys would need to consist of evening emergence surveys, with surveyors positioned externally and internally (where relevant), watching for bat emergence from, and activity associated with, the buildings. For buildings holding moderate roosting potential, at least two evening surveys would be necessary.
- 4.3 Surveys need to be undertaken during the time of year when bats are most active. 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). Surveys need to be spaced by a minimum of three weeks and, where maternity roosts could be present, timed to cover both the pre-partition and post parturition (i.e., the periods before and after bats give birth).
- 4.4 The small outbuilding/store and detached outbuilding hold negligible roosting potential and no further recommendations in relation to bats are necessary. In the unlikely event bats were found, works would need to be suspended, and the ecologist contacted for advice on the best way to proceed.

Birds

- 4.5 Works to the buildings and removal of vegetation (such as shrubs and dense vegetation) would need to take account of the presence of nesting birds. The presence of nesting birds can be avoided as a constraint to the proposals by timing relevant works to avoid the bird nesting season. Should the works need to be carried out during the bird nesting season then a watching brief would need to be carried out during 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. The bird nesting season is generally deemed to run from March to July/August inclusive, although some species can nest outside this period, particularly in years with a warm and early Spring.
- 4.6 It is recommended that at minimum of six integrated nest boxes be installed into the new dwelling. A range of box designs should be used to cater for a mix of species. It is not recommended externally mounted boxes (fixed to the walls of building) be used, to ensure longevity and sustainability. Woodcrete (or similar) boxes should be used (not wooden). Boxes are best installed at least 3m above

ground, close to eaves or apexes, and on aspects that do not face south, avoiding areas above doors, windows and balconies.

Himalayan Balsam

- 4.7 The presence of Himalayan balsam and likely seedbank in the soils on site pose a constraint to works that would result in disturbance and/or transport of plant material around the site and potentially off site. This includes disturbance and movement of soils.
- 4.8 The Wildlife and Countryside Act, 1981 provides the primary controls on the release and spread of non-native species into the wild. It is an offence under the Act to cause this species to spread (see previous chapter). It is not illegal to have invasive plant species present on land, but it is illegal to cause them to spread off site. It is, therefore, important that any works proposed on site consider the presence of Himalayan balsam and work within the law.
- 4.9 A method statement would need to be prepared that details the biological control methods that will be put in place to ensure the management, treatment and disposal of invasive plant material follows best practice advice and any legal requirements.

5. REFERENCES

Collins, J. (ed). (2023). *Bat Surveys for Professional Ecologists – Good Practice Guidelines*. 4th Edition. Bat Conservation Trust, London.

PHOTOGRAPHS



1. Farmhouse – northern and eastern elevations. With stands of Himalayan balsam.



2. Farmhouse with attached shippin and small brick outbuilding/store (to right of farmhouse) – eastern elevation. Himalayan balsam growing in foreground.



3. Farmhouse with attached small, brick outbuilding/store.



4. Outbuilding to northwest of farmhouse and shippon within redline site boundary.
Bounded by stands of Himalayan balsam.



5. Upper room of farmhouse showing lath and plaster ceiling



6. Area of the site to north of farmhouse.

APPENDIX I – LEGISLATION

The information below is intended only as guidance to the legislation relating to the species given below and relates solely to England. It 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 different species of bat 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)).

Badger

The information below is intended only as guidance to the legislation relating to badgers and relates solely to England. It is recommended that the legislative documents be referred to for the full legal wording.

Badgers and their setts are protected under the Protection of Badgers Act 1992, which makes it illegal for any person to kill, injure or take a badger. It is also an offence to destroy, damage or obstruct a badger sett, or to disturb animals whilst within a sett. Any operation likely to affect badgers by direct disturbance to the animals or damage, destruction or obstruction of their setts is required under the Act to be licensed by the appropriate authority. In the case of proposals for developments requiring planning permission, Natural England is the statutory licensing authority.

The Protection of Badgers Act 1992 defines a sett as 'any structure or place, which displays signs indicating current use by a badger.' This is applied to the tunnels and chambers of the sett and the areas immediately outside the entrances, or to other structures used by badgers for shelter and refuge, such as crevices amongst rocks and boulders; spaces under garden sheds, raised buildings or other structures; and above-ground 'nests' or 'couches' – often tucked under a hedge or bush, but sometimes amongst hay bales in farm buildings. (See *Guidance on 'Current Use' in the Definition of a Badger Sett*, Natural England, June 2009).

Great Crested Newt

Great crested newts 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, great crested newts are considered 'European Protected Species'.

In summary, this legislation makes it an offence to:

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

Disturbance of great crested newts 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.

Great crested newts 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 great crested newt 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 great crested newt uses for shelter or protection.

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