

PRELIMINARY ROOST ASSESSMENT (PRA)

DOLPHINS, OLD TOWN, ST MARY'S, ISLES OF SCILLY



Client: Mervyn Durham

Our reference: 23-5-5

Planning reference: Produced in advance of submission

Report date: 18th June 2023

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Executive Summary

Bats - Results and Findings

The preliminary roost assessment (PRA) survey of the structures directly impacted by the proposals concluded that there is **moderate potential** for use by bats.

Bats - Further Survey Requirements

The following recommendations are outlined in the report in order to provide a suitable baseline to inform Planning and to ensure that no Protected Species are negatively impacted as a result of the proposed works:

- **Two further PAS surveys** should be undertaken on the building to characterise and assess the use of the roof structures by bats to meet the standard of survey required by Best Practice Guidance to support a Planning Application.

Nesting Birds - Results and Findings

Sparrows were confirmed nesting in the gable end of the building and additional minor niches may occur elsewhere within the roof structure. Adjacent vegetation within the garden may also provide nesting habitat, and may be disturbed as a result of the proposed re-roofing works.

Nesting Birds - Recommendations

Works should take place with due regard to the presence of nesting birds – no further surveys are required to inform Planning but works should be timed to avoid the nesting season or include pre-commencement inspections.

Nesting opportunities could be retained or re-created in situ. Alternatively, nest boxes could be erected either on the dwelling or within the garden to replace nesting habitats impacted by the re-roofing works. Guidance on suitable specifications is provided.

Other Ecological Receptors

No further ecological impacts relevant to planning are identified.

Report Status

As the requirement for PAS surveys is identified in accordance with the Best Practice Guidance, this report **does not provide a comprehensive baseline to inform Planning** until these surveys have been completed and their results used to inform appropriate mitigation measures.

PRELIMINARY ROOST ASSESSMENT (PRA)

Planning Authority: Isles of Scilly	Location: SV 91385 10203	Planning Application ref: Report produced in support of application
Planning application address: Dolphins, Old Town, St Mary's, Isles of Scilly		
Proposed development: The proposed works were identified by the client and should accord with the documentation submitted in support of the application. These involve: 1) The replacement of the existing roof. The following assessment takes into account both the potential direct impacts to the structure (e.g. removal of the existing roof) and the indirect impacts (e.g. disturbance to offsite features which may support roosting bats).		
Building references: The building is identified in the plans provided in Appendix 1.		
Name and licence number of bat-workers carrying out survey: James Faulconbridge (2015-12724-CLS-CLS)		
Preliminary Roost Assessment date: The visual inspection was undertaken on 14 th June 2023 in accordance with relevant Best Practice methodology ¹ .		
Local and Landscape Setting: The property is situated on the western edge of the residential area of Old Town on St Mary's in the Isles of Scilly. The land use immediately surrounding the property to the north and east comprises residential development with gardens. The shoreline of Old Town Beach lies to the south and west – this is likely to provide a suitable foraging resource along the strandline. The immediate environs of the property therefore provide good quality foraging habitat for common pipistrelle as well as good connectivity to the wider landscape. The land use surrounding the settlement of Old Town to the north, east and west is dominated by agricultural land with field hedges providing connectivity within the landscape. A mosaic of small fields with evergreen wind breaks bound the site immediately to the west. Tree cover is sporadic with occasional shelter belts and individual trees. Approximately 260m to the north of the building is Lower Moors SSSI – a topogenous mire with areas of elm woodland and scrub as well as a series of pools and marshy grassland. Records from the Local Bat Group indicate that this is an important foraging resource for bats on the island. A number of bat roosts are confirmed in the local environs – the most significant of these is a roost which is believed to be a maternity roost for common pipistrelles situated approximately 450m to the north-east. Further roosts of unconfirmed status are situated 350m to the north-		

¹ Collins, J. (ed.) 2016 Bat Surveys for Professional Ecologists: Good Practice Guidelines (3rd edn). The Bat Conservation Trust, London.

east and 140m to the east, the latter is within Old Town itself. All of these roosts relate to common pipistrelle, though one roost is also identified as also supporting soprano pipistrelle.

Building Description(s):

The property is a semi-detached, two-storey house which is attached to the adjacent property on its southern aspect.

Building Overview

The building is constructed of granite blocks with pointing in good condition with no gaps noted. The windows and doors are predominantly uPVC and the frames are tightly fitted. There are hanging tiles on the south-eastern aspect where the building encloses a small courtyard – these are largely well-fitted but occasional gaps occur. A flat-roof single-storey extension is also present at this location. Lead flashing is present in the construction at locations where structural elements tie in – this appeared to be well-fitted and in good condition where noted. Chimneys also appear to be well-sealed and present no roosting opportunities.

These features are described for context, but it is understood that these would not be affected by the proposals.

Roof Structure

The main roof of the building is wet-laid slate with ridge tiles. The roof has two minor hipped elements at the north-eastern and south-western aspects, and is tied into the roofline of the adjacent properties at the southern end. Only this connecting section of the roof has underfelted – the main roof is not felted.

The loft space of the main roof is used for storage – it is built around a timber truss framework and is relatively low with a height-to-ridge of around 1.5m. Insulation is present between the joists only. The party wall to the adjacent property appeared to be tightly fitted with no apparent access for bats between the voids. The gable walls were a combination of granite and brick-built – the pointing was relatively good and no gaps suitable for use by bats were noted. Daylight is visible both at the eaves and occasionally between tiles where mortar is missing. A single dropping characteristic of common pipistrelle was confirmed – however the small size of the loft and the use for storage as well as water tanks etc. precluded comprehensive inspection of the void.

There is missing mortar between the tiles in places which would potentially allow access to cavities between the tiles suitable for use by roosting bats. Fascia boards run around the eaves and slate tiles hang at the gable – these are often lifted from the wall due to the irregular nature of the granite blocks and whilst these are clearly sealed in places, smaller gaps could both provide roosting opportunities in their own right and provide access to roosting opportunities either associated with the wall plate or between tiles. On the northern gable, sparrows were confirmed nesting in a gap providing access to the wall plate and confirming the potential for access to roosting opportunities for bats.

There is a small extension on the south-western aspect – there is a slight change in ridge height and the room within is built into the rafters with no void present. This section has dry-laid slate and provides lower potential for use by roosting bats due to the condition and structure.

Porch

A porch is present on the north-eastern aspect – this is open to the apex internally with no void present. Tiles appear to be well-sealed and the fascia boards appeared to be tight although minor gaps may occur in places.

Survey Limitations

The size of the loft space, and its use for storage, restricted comprehensive inspection of the void, especially towards the eaves. This is accounted for in the recommendations provided for further surveys.

Assessment of Potential for use by Roosting Bats

It is considered that the structural features to be affected by the re-roofing proposals offer **moderate potential for use by roosting bats**.

This is based on the following observations and conclusions:

- A single dropping characteristic of common pipistrelle was identified in the roof space – this may reflect opportunistic or exploratory bat activity and in itself is not evidence of a roost; however this indicates that bats have accessed and may be present in the structure;
- There are multiple locations where roosting bats, or evidence of their presence, could not be adequately assessed through an inspection due to the nature of the roosting opportunities. This includes gaps between individual tiles; features associated with the wall plate; and features around the gable including fascias. Bats could not be directly observed if present in these features, and the nature of the features would preclude droppings from being found during an inspection;
- The characteristics of the opportunities presented by the building, including the access gaps behind fascias and between wet-laid slate, correspond with known confirmed roosts on the islands.

This judgement was reached in accordance with the survey methodologies and evaluation criteria outlined in the Bat Surveys for Professional Ecologists: Good Practice Guidelines².

If roosts are present associated with these structures, uncontrolled works have the potential to destroy roosts and kill/injure bats occupying the roosts at the time of work.

Recommendations and Justification (Bats):

In accordance with the criteria outlined in the Best Practice Guidance, two further Presence/Absence Surveys (PAS) would be required to provide an appropriate evidence-base upon which to support a planning application.

The purpose of the PAS technique is to allow the building to be watched at dusk and/or dawn to observe bats emerging from, or returning to, concealed roosting locations. This uses the predictable emergence and re-entry behaviour of bats to allow their presence to be detected in roosting locations which cannot be directly visually inspected.

The PAS surveys should be led by Licenced Bat Worker(s) between May and September with at least one survey between May and August. The surveys would require two surveyors on each occasion in order to achieve a comprehensive view of the relevant features, and should be spaced at least two weeks apart.

These surveys should be completed and submitted in support of a Planning Application in accordance with the guidance provided by Circular 06/05 (ODPM, 2005) which states that *“it is essential that the presence or otherwise of protected species, and the extent that they may be affected by the proposed development, is established before the planning permission is granted, otherwise all relevant material considerations may not have been addressed in making the*

² Collins, J. (ed.) 2016 Bat Surveys for Professional Ecologists: Good Practice Guidelines (3rd edn). The Bat Conservation Trust, London.

decision".

For the avoidance of doubt, the current survey baseline is not sufficient to support a Planning Application with reference to the Circular 06/05.

The results of these surveys would be used to inform the development of mitigation or Reasonable Avoidance Measures (RAMS) which would be submitted in support of the Planning Application.

Assessment of Potential for use by Nesting Birds

House sparrows were confirmed nesting in features associated with the eastern gable of the property. Further minor opportunities may also be found elsewhere within the structure.

The property is set within a garden including mature shrubs – these may provide suitable nesting habitat for birds and could be disturbed during works, for example through the erection of scaffolding and the removal of tiles.

It is confirmed that the building and associated vegetation provides **suitable habitat** for use by nesting birds.

Recommendations and Justification (Birds):

In order to ensure legislative compliance, the contractors undertaking the works must ensure that nesting birds are not disturbed in accordance with requirements under the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981).

Timing of Works

Works affecting the roof should be undertaken outside of the breeding season which runs from March – September inclusive, where practicable. This would provide the most robust means of avoiding risk of impact to nesting birds.

Pre-commencement Inspection

If this is not possible, then contractors should visually inspect the work area internally and externally before they are affected by the works, in order to confirm that no nests are present. In the unlikely event that a bird nest is present, it must be left undisturbed until chicks have fledged the nest, at which point works can proceed.

Care must also be taken to ensure that the works do not cause disturbance or damage to proximate nesting areas through indirect impacts including vibration, noise or contractor presence. This includes adjacent parts of the building, as well as vegetation within the garden and boundary hedges.

Enhancement Opportunities

The proposed works are likely to involve the removal of nesting habitats for sparrows at the gable, in the absence of appropriate mitigation measures. It is recommended that retention in situ is designed into the scheme where practicable. Alternatively the installation of communal nest boxes supporting several pairs of birds could ensure continuity of nesting habitat. Consideration would need to be given to the location and aspect of these boxes to minimise disturbance and risk of predation, as well as avoid nuisance to guests in the holiday let accommodation.

If the applicant wished to provide biodiversity enhancement measures, this could be achieved through the erection of further bird boxes on the new structure or within shrubs/trees within the garden. Nest boxes suitable for hole-dwelling species such as blue tits, or open-fronted boxes for species such as blackbird and robin also have a high likelihood of occupation.

Boxes should be mounted on the wall if possible, at a height of at least 3m above the ground with an entrance clear of vegetation/other features which may put them at risk of predation

from cats.

Boxes can be sourced online, or can be constructed on site using methodology and specifications provided by the RSPB:

Swallow: <https://www.nestbox.co.uk/products/eco-swallow-nest>

Sparrows: <https://www.rspb.org.uk/get-involved/activities/give-nature-a-home-in-your-garden/garden-activities/createasparrowstreet/>

Other Species: <https://www.rspb.org.uk/fun-and-learning/for-families/family-wild-challenge/activities/build-a-birdbox/>

Signed by bat worker(s):

Date: 18th June 2023



APPENDIX 1

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LOCATION PLAN AND PHOTOGRAPHS



Map 01 – Illustrating the location of property within the local environs (red circle). Reproduced in accordance with Google’s Fair Use Policy.



Map 02 – Showing the main dwelling house (red wash) including the porch which extends to the north; and the flat-roof single-storey element which extends to the south. Reproduced in accordance with Google’s Fair Use Policy.



Photograph 1: Showing the property viewed from the northern corner



Photograph 2: Showing the porch on the northwestern aspect.



Photograph 3: Showing the extension on the western edge of the property – the second-storey room in this location is built into the rafters with no void present.



Photograph 4: Showing the courtyard on the south-eastern aspect with hanging tiles visible.



Photograph 5: Showing an example of the gaps on the north-eastern gable with confirmed nesting sparrows – these features would also allow access to potential roosting opportunities for bats.



Photograph 6: Showing an example of the occasional gaps in the pointing of the tiles which could provide access or roosting opportunities for bats.



Photograph 7: Showing the interior of the loft space built around a timber truss framework.. The use of the space for storage, restricting comprehensive inspection, can be seen.



Photograph 8: Showing an example of the gaps beneath the fascias which occur around the structure. These offer potential roosting opportunities for bats in their own right, as well as access to further opportunities associated with the wall plate and slate tiles.