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## PRELIMINARY ROOST ASSESSMENT (PRA)

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### GARAGE ASSOCIATED WITH SYLINA, MCFARLANDS DOWN, ST MARY'S, ISLES OF SCILLY



*Client: NHB Architects*

*Our reference: 23-11-3*

*Planning reference: Produced in advance of submission*

*Report date: 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2023*

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# Executive Summary

## Bats - Results and Findings

The preliminary roost assessment (PRA) survey concluded that there was **negligible potential** for use of the garage by bats.

This judgement was reached in accordance with the survey methodologies and evaluation criteria outlined in the Bat Surveys for Professional Ecologists: Good Practice Guidelines 4<sup>th</sup> edition<sup>1</sup>

## Bats - Further Survey Requirements

No further surveys are recommended – the PRA conclusion does not require further survey information with regards to bats in order to inform a planning application.

## Bats - Recommendations

Standard good practice and vigilance should be observed by the contractors undertaking the works in acknowledgement that bats are transient in their use of roosting opportunities and may explore potential locations, especially if the condition of structural features were to change. A summary of standard Good Practice to be observed by contractors is provided in Appendix 1.

It is not recommended that any Planning Conditions are required with regards to bats in order to ensure legislative compliance during conversion works.

In order to provide biodiversity enhancement, a bat box could be erected on the western aspect of the converted building. Guidance on suitable specifications is provided.

## Nesting Birds - Results and Findings

The building provides suitable nesting habitat for breeding birds, with historic nests identified.

The more mature vegetation within the garden is likely to support suitable nesting habitat for breeding birds.

## Nesting Birds - Recommendations

Recommended measures to ensure legislative compliance and Good Practice with regards to nesting birds is outlined in the report. This includes methodologies for pre-emptive exclusion in specific locations; timing of works to avoid impacts; or as a last resort, a pre-commencement nesting bird survey.

Nest boxes could be erected either on the converted building or within the garden. Guidance on suitable specifications is provided.

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<sup>1</sup> Collins, J. (ed.) (2023) Bat Surveys for Professional Ecologists: Good Practice Guidelines (4th edition).  
The Bat Conservation Trust, London

## PRELIMINARY ROOST ASSESSMENT (PRA)

<b>Planning Authority:</b> Isles of Scilly	<b>Location:</b> SV 91237 12238	<b>Planning Application ref:</b> Report produced in support of application
<b>Planning application address:</b> Sylina, MacFarland's Down, St Mary's, Isles of Scilly		
<b>Proposed development:</b> The proposed works were identified by the client and should accord with the documentation submitted in support of the application. These involve:  1) Conversion of the existing garage into a residential dwelling. This would involve both internal and external works but would not include replacement of the existing roof.		
<b>Building references:</b> The garage is identified in the plans provided in Appendix 2.		
<b>Name and licence number of bat-workers carrying out survey:</b> James Faulconbridge (2015-12724-CLS-CLS)		
<b>Preliminary Roost Assessment date:</b> The visual inspection was undertaken on 30 <sup>th</sup> November 2023 in accordance with relevant Best Practice methodology <sup>2</sup> .		
<b>Local and Landscape Setting:</b>  The Site is set at the southern end of a small linear development of detached dwellings at MacFarland's Down. Each of the properties are set within their own mature gardens consisting of a mixture of lawn and flower borders which are bounded by hedgerows that contain the occasional mature tree.  The land immediately to the west is a dwelling in the process of construction, beyond which is a large, open field of semi-natural grassland broken up by small blocks of scrub which is seasonally grazed by cattle. This field backs onto open headlands, consisting of a mosaic of coastal grassland, heathland and scrub which are grazed for conservation purposes.  Immediately to the west is a small block of cultivated fields used for growing flowers which are linked to a small shelterbelt by mature hedgerows of Pittosporum. This shelterbelt forms part of the north-eastern boundary of the local golf course, a large, exposed expanse of very short grassland and heathland with minimal trees or shrubs to provide cover.  Due south and to the south-east of the proposed development the landscape is dominated by a mosaic of small, enclosed fields used for growing flowers. This contiguous patchwork of small fields, hedgerows and linear shelterbelts extends for at least 2km, reaching as far south as both wetland SSSIs.  Immediately east of the site is a lane bounded on both sides by mature hedgerows which leads to a small shelterbelt to the north and to further cultivated fields bounded by hedgerows. This habitat extends 660m north-eastwards to the large pine shelterbelt at Trenoweth. To the east		

<sup>2</sup> Collins, J. (ed.) (2023) Bat Surveys for Professional Ecologists: Good Practice Guidelines (4th edition).  
The Bat Conservation Trust, London

the small fields and lanes are bounded by hedgerows or mature trees. This habitat continues south-eastwards for at least 2km.

A common pipistrelle roost was recorded within McFarland's Down in 2014 in a garage approximately 60m to the east of the site, with further transient/day roosts recorded associated with properties over 500m away to the east.

### **Building Description(s):**

This assessment is restricted to the garage set within the grounds of Sylina – it does not include the existing dwelling house or any other aspects of the property. The garage under assessment in this report is identified in the map provided in Appendix 2.

The garage is a single-storey structure built around a timber frame atop a breeze block base. The exterior is rendered and in good condition throughout. The window and door frames are tightly fitted with no gaps noted.

The pitched roof is covered by flat-slate with ridge tiles – the roof is in good condition with no gaps or other roosting opportunities noted. The roof verge is well sealed on the gables with no gaps noted.

There are boxed soffits running along the eaves with guttering attached – this guttering would obstruct any potential access to features beneath the flat tiles, if present. The soffits themselves are in relatively poor condition with gaps between the timbers – these are not sufficiently wide to provide access for roosting bats in their current condition but this could develop in time with ongoing deterioration in condition. A minor gap in the soffit at the north-eastern gable has debris indicating historic nesting – an inspection with a video endoscope revealed that this debris blocks the cavity and therefore precludes access for bats.

Internally, the building is used for routine storage and historically for housing rescued racing pigeons. The timber studwork walls are exposed internally and are tightly fitted to ply on the exterior providing no gaps or other roosting opportunities. The concrete floor was relatively clean and a full inspection of interior surfaces did not reveal any evidence of droppings or urine staining. The timber roof frame does not have a ridge beam. The underlay membrane is in good condition throughout preventing access between the interior of the garage and cavities beneath the tiles.

The windows and doors are in good condition – the main access includes double-doors on one side, and a further opening sealed with wire mesh allowing air flow but precluding fly-in access by bats.

### **Survey Limitations**

There were no significant limitations to access or survey inspection which might affect the evidence base for subsequent conclusions of this survey.

### **Assessment of Potential for use by Roosting Bats**

No evidence of current or historic use by bats was identified during the survey and an overall **negligible potential** was determined with regards to the garage.

### **Recommendations and Justification (Bats):**

No further surveys are recommended – the conclusion of **negligible potential** does not require any further information with regards to bats in order to inform a planning application.

Standard good practice and vigilance should be observed by the contractors undertaking the works in acknowledgement that bats are transient in their use of roosting opportunities and may explore potential locations, especially if the condition of structural features were to change.

A summary of standard Good Practice to be observed by contractors is provided in Appendix 1.

It is not recommended that any Planning Conditions are required with regards to bats in order to ensure legislative compliance during conversion.

In order to provide biodiversity enhancement, a bat box could be installed post-conversion. The box should be positioned facing west at a height of at least 3m from the ground to minimise the risk of predation – ideally below the gable apex. An open-based box design would ensure that it would not require cleaning. The location and aspect would be optimal for bats such as common pipistrelle which is the dominant species present on the island and the most likely species to use the environs for foraging and roosting.

A suitable box could be purchased or constructed following freely available plans. Kent Bat Box style boxes are slim easy to construct from appropriate timber using the plans provided at:

<http://www.kentbatgroup.org.uk/kent-bat-box.pdf>

### **Assessment of Potential for use by Nesting Birds**

Swallow nests were identified in the garage itself. From a conversation with the owner, it is understood that these occurred in previous years when the garage was left open and, once the nests had established, the birds were allowed to maintain the nest and fledge the young. However in more recent years, the doors have been closed to prevent this use which means that conversion works would not affect the availability of this nesting resource in the future.

The historic nest present in the north-eastern corner of the soffit represents a feature associated with deterioration in the condition of the structure – similarly, routine repairs might be expected to remove this feature regardless of conversion works.

The more mature vegetation within the garden would provide suitable nesting habitat for birds although it is not clear that removal of woody vegetation would be required to facilitate the development of the site.

### **Recommendations and Justification (Birds):**

There are three approaches which can be taken to ensure that the proposed conversion works do not impact on nesting birds. These are:

- pre-emptive exclusion outside of the breeding season;
- avoidance of impacts through timing of works; and
- pre-commencement inspection.

A combination of approaches can be applied depending on the schedule of works.

#### *Pre-emptive exclusion*

Access to the interior of the garage by birds including swallows can be prevented by keeping doors and windows closed during the breeding season.

If all access features are sealed before the end of February, this would ensure that breeding birds do not have opportunity to establish nests. Utmost care must be taken to ensure that no birds are present in the garage at the time that the access features are sealed to prevent birds from being trapped. This would require a careful walkover of the garage. Upon completion of this inspection, windows and doors should be closed and sealed.

Excluding access to the soffit could also be undertaken with care outside of the breeding season. The old nest should be carefully removed by hand and confirmed not to be in active use before the feature is sealed. The presence of the dense nesting material and lack of access to further voids within the soffits would currently prevent use of these features by bats.

### *Timing of Works*

Works affecting all structures can be undertaken without constraint if completed outside of the breeding season which runs from March – September inclusive. This is also the recommended approach to any minor clearance works related to shrubs and small trees within the grounds of the property.

### *Pre-commencement Inspection*

If the recommended timing of works is not practicable, and if pre-emptive exclusion measures have not been undertaken, then a nesting bird survey would need to be carried out by a suitably qualified person prior to the commencement of works.

Careful observation would be required to ensure that the parent birds are not constructing a nest or provisioning the young. Nests are only protected if they are active (i.e. being used to rear young) or in the process of being built.

- Where active nests are identified, works affecting these must be delayed until the chicks have fledged the nest.
- Once it is confirmed that nests are absent or no longer active, the relevant features should be dismantled carefully and by hand as a precaution and works can continue.

### *Enhancement Measures*

It is recommended that enhancement measures are designed into the project to provide replacement nesting habitat for breeding birds. This could be achieved through the erection of bird boxes on the converted building or within the garden.

- The mature garden would offer a high chance of occupation by a range of birds including woodland edge species. Nest boxes could include those suitable for hole-dwelling species such as blue tits, or open-fronted boxes for species such as blackbird and robin. Boxes should be mounted on a wall or tree 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.
- Externally-mounted nest box(es) for swallow should be provided. These should be situated on the western aspect of the building where there is a good fly-in access for this species and where disturbance would be minimal.

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

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

**Signed by bat worker(s):**



**Date:** 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2023

# APPENDIX 1

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## BEST PRACTICE WITH REGARDS TO BATS

The purpose of this Method Statement is to ensure that contractors undertaking conversion works are aware of their legal duties with regards to bats, and aware of the appropriate action to be taken in the highly unlikely event of bats being encountered.

Contractors should be aware of **their own legal responsibility with respect to bats:**

### **Relevant Legislation regarding Bats**

The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017, or the 'Habitat Regulations 2017', transposes European Directives into English and Welsh legislation. Under these regulations, bats are classed as a European Protected Species and it is, therefore, an offence to:

- *Deliberately kill, injure or capture bats;*
- *Deliberately damage or destroy bat roosts.*

A bat roost is commonly defined as being any structure or place that is used as a breeding site or resting place, and since it may be in use only occasionally or at specific times of year, a roost retains such a designation even if bats are not present.

Bats are also protected from disturbance under Regulation 43. Disturbance of bats includes in particular any disturbance which is likely:

- (a) *To impair their ability -*
- *to survive, to breed or reproduce, or to rear or nurture their young; or*
  - *in the case of animals of a hibernating or migratory species, to hibernate or migrate; or*
- (b) *To affect significantly the local distribution or abundance of the species to which they belong.*

Bats also have limited protection under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) and the Countryside Rights of Way Act 2000 (as amended). It is, therefore, an offence to:

- *Intentionally or recklessly destroy, damage or obstruct any structure or place which a bat uses for shelter or protection.*
- *Intentionally or recklessly disturb bats whilst occupying any structure or place used for shelter or protection.*



Contractors should be aware of **where bats are most likely to be found in respect to the existing building:**

#### **Soffits**

There are occasional gaps between timbers of the boxed soffits. Where these are to be removed or impacted as part of the proposed works, the soffits should be carefully removed and the void behind them exposed in such a way that, in the highly unlikely event that bats are present, they are not injured or killed by the action.

Once these areas are fully exposed, they can be visually inspected by contractors. If any bats are present, or suspected, works should pause and a Licenced Bat Worker contacted to review the situation. If no bats are present, the remaining materials can be removed and works can continue.

Contractors should be aware of **the process to follow in the highly unlikely event of finding bats** or evidence indicating that bats are likely to be present:

If bats are identified, works should cease and the Licenced Bat Worker contacted immediately for advice.

If the bat is in a safe situation, or a situation which can be made safe, they should remain undisturbed.

Only if the bat is in immediate risk of harm can the bat be moved with care and using a gloved hand. This is a last resort and should only be undertaken for humane reasons if the bat is at immediate risk of harm **and** if the Licenced Bat Worker cannot be contacted for advice.



## APPENDIX 2

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## LOCATION PLAN AND PHOTOGRAPHS



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



**Map 02** – Showing the garage with a red wash. The residential property Sylina is present to the north-east of the garage. The property shown to the south-east has been demolished and a new dwelling is being constructed on the site at the time of writing.



**Photograph 1:** Showing the northern and western (gable) aspects of the garage.



**Photograph 2:** Showing the front of the garage facing east – the mesh-sealed opening can be seen to the right of the double doors.



**Photograph 3:** Showing an example of the well-sealed window frames.



**Photograph 4:** Showing the soffits on the northern aspect – the minor gap between timbers is indicated.



**Photograph 5:** Showing the minor cavity at the north-eastern corner of the building where a historic nest is present.



**Photograph 6:** Showing the interior of the property - the exposed studwork walls and well-sealed membrane above the rafters can be seen.