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BAT PRESENCE/ABSENCE SURVEYS (PAS)

COASTGUARD'S RETREAT, HUGH TOWN, ST MARY'S, ISLES OF SCILLY



Client: Duchy of Cornwall

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Executive Summary

Overview
<p>A total of two Presence/Absence Surveys (PAS) were undertaken on the residential property known as Coastguard's Retreat in Hugh Town, St Mary's, Isles of Scilly.</p> <p>The results of these PAS surveys are compiled in this report which should be read alongside the Preliminary Roost Assessment (PRA) report for this site.</p>
Results
<p>The surveys did not identify any bats emerging from the property.</p> <p>The surveys recorded high levels of common pipistrelle bats foraging in the garden of the property close after sunset indicating the likelihood of a nearby but offsite roost. No other bat species were recorded.</p>
Conclusion
<p>The survey evidence accords with the Best Practice Guidance requirements to conclude 'Probable Absence' of bats.</p> <p>No further surveys are required and there is no requirement for a European Protected Species Mitigation Licence (EPSML).</p>
Mitigation Strategy
<p>A precautionary method of working would represent good practice during construction and renovation works – outline recommendations are provided in this report.</p> <p>Recommendations to enhance the provision of roosting habitat for local bat populations are provided in this report.</p>
Planning Recommendations
<p>The PRA and PAS reports together provide an appropriate ecological baseline for the purposes of assessing the Planning Application. No further surveys would be required.</p>

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1. Introduction

1.1. Background to Surveys

The scope of the survey includes the property known as Coastguard's Retreat which is situated at the eastern end of Porthcressa Beach on the southern edge of Hugh Town in St Mary's, Isles of Scilly.

The proposed works include the installation of dormer extensions into the existing roof; and further external and internal renovation works.

A Preliminary Roost Assessment (PRA) of the site undertaken in July 2024 identified Moderate Potential for use by roosting bats.

The PRA report stated that further PAS surveys would be required to provide an evidence base sufficient to identify the status of the building with regards to bats, and inform any mitigation measures required to ensure legislative compliance. This PAS report provides the results of the recommended surveys. It should be read alongside the PRA report to provide a comprehensive assessment of the site with regards to ecological receptors.

1.2. Survey Objectives

In accordance with the Best Practice Guidance¹, the relevant aspects of the building were subject to two PAS surveys with two surveyors with Night Vision Aids (NVAs) positioned to observe those locations where potential access or roosting features were identified. An additional NVA was used to ensure full coverage of the western aspect of the property.

The overall objective is to provide a comprehensive baseline upon which to assess the potential impact of the proposed works on roosting bats.

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

2. Survey Methodology

2.1. Surveyor Details

The surveys were led by Darren Hart. Darren has undertaken Professional Bat Licence training and is a Level 2 Licenced Bat Worker with experience in undertaking emergence, re-entry and activity surveys.

Additional surveyors are experienced in undertaking emergence and re-entry surveys and worked under the supervision of the Licenced Bat Worker.

The NVA review, assessment and reporting were completed by James Faulconbridge, trading as IOS Ecology. James is a Level 2 Licenced Bat Worker with over 15 years' experience in undertaking ecological assessments to support Planning and Development.

2.2. Survey Methodology

The dusk emergence surveys were conducted following Best Practice methodology for bat surveys.

The two PAS surveys were carried out on the evenings of 26th August 2024 and 12th September 2024 – scheduled three weeks apart in accordance with Best Practice guidance.

The dusk emergence surveys commenced from approximately 15 minutes before sunset and continued until 90 minutes after sunset. The surveys were undertaken with regard for the appropriate weather conditions ($\geq 10^{\circ}\text{C}$ at sunset, no/light rain or wind).

Frequency division bat detectors were used to detect and record all bat passes. The surveyor recorded metadata including the time the pass occurred, the behaviour observed (foraging/commuting) and where possible, the species of bat observed. Results from the bat detector recordings were analysed using BatSound/Analog sonogram analysis computer software.

Night Vision Aids (NVAs) were used at each surveyor position and an additional location to ensure comprehensive coverage – these comprised three Nightfox Whisker infra-red cameras with additional infra-red torches. The footage from these NVAs was watched back to verify or amend the survey results confirmed in the field.

2.3. Survey Validity and Update

Bats are transient in their use of roosting habitats, and apparently minor changes in condition or use of the building can affect suitability. However in the absence of significant changes in condition or building use, the nature and character of the site suggest that the PAS survey can be considered valid for a period of 12 months after the survey was completed, until September 2025.

3. Results

3.1. Surveyor Positions

In order to ensure that the building received a survey effort in line with the Best Practice Guidance appropriate to its potential (as identified in the PRA survey) two surveyor positions and an additional NVA position were identified. These are identified in Map 01 below.



Map 01 – showing surveyor (S1 and S2) and the additional NVA positions (NVA3) around the property. See PRA report for details of building references and components of the structure which provide potential roosting or access features.

3.2. PAS Survey 1

3.2.1. Survey Conditions

The first dusk survey was undertaken on 26th August 2024. The survey commenced at 8:05pm, approximately 15 minutes before sunset at 8:20pm. It was completed at 9:50pm.

The temperature throughout the survey was 17°C. The evening was mild with a fresh breeze and a clear sky with 5% high cloud cover. There was no precipitation.

3.2.2. Survey Results

The survey did not identify any emergence activity.

3.2.3. Bat Activity Results

The majority of activity was recorded by the surveyor in position S1 to the east of the property. On this aspect, the land rises sharply at the end of the garden

and overhanging vegetation creates a sheltered microclimate which is likely to provide good quality foraging habitat. The first bat was recorded by the surveyor S1 at 8:44pm when it was observed flying into the site from the north. This foraging activity continued until the end of the survey.

Activity levels on the western aspect observed by surveyor S2 were much lower with the first bat recorded at 8:56pm and intermittent foraging observed until the end of the survey.

3.3. PAS Survey 2

3.3.1. Survey Conditions

The second dusk survey was undertaken on 16th September 2024. The survey commenced at 7:20pm, approximately 15 minutes before sunset at 7:35pm. It was completed at 9:05pm.

The temperature at the beginning of the survey was 16°C falling to 15°C by the end of the survey. The evening was dry with a clear sky and a very gentle easterly breeze.

3.3.2. Survey Results

The survey did not identify any emergence activity.

3.3.3. Bat Activity Results

The majority of activity was recorded by the surveyor in position S1 to the east of the property, consistent with the previous PAS 1. The first bat was recorded by the surveyor S1 at 7:53pm when it was observed flying into the site from the south. This activity continued intermittently with periods of more intensive foraging until the end of the survey.

Activity levels on the western aspect observed by surveyor S2 were lower, often observing the same bats as the surveyor in position S1 when the bats briefly appeared above the roofline in the course of foraging. Occasional additional foraging and commuting bats were also recorded throughout the survey.

3.4. Summary and Evaluation

3.4.1. Overview

The surveys did not identify any bats emerging from the building – this is sufficient to conclude ‘Likely Absence’ in accordance with the Best Practice Guidance.

The high levels of foraging activity relatively close to sunset on both survey occasions indicates the likelihood of a roost nearby offsite. The rear garden to the east of the property provides high quality foraging habitat.

3.4.2. Requirement for Further Surveys

No further surveys are required to provide an appropriate ecological baseline in accordance with the Best Practice Guidance.

3.5. Limitations and Constraints

3.5.1. Seasonal Timing

The surveys were undertaken within the main active season in 2024 and spaced more than three weeks apart – this conforms with the recommended survey timings within the Good Practice Guidelines.

3.5.2. Survey Conditions

The weather conditions were optimal with no precipitation or other adverse conditions which might be expected to affect bat behaviour.

3.5.3. Visibility and Coverage

The surveys were comprehensive with regards to surveyor visibility with the exception of a very minor section on the north-western corner of the property which was not directly visible to surveyor S2. This aspect was therefore the focus of the NVA3 camera and the footage from this unit was reviewed back carefully to rule out any emergence from this location.

3.5.4. NVA Footage

The NV camera Field of Vision (FOV) covered the areas under survey – see Appendix 2 for example screenshots from the footage.

4. Mitigation Strategy

4.1. EPSML Requirement

The project does not require a European Protected Species Mitigation Licence (EPSML) to proceed.

4.2. Precautionary Method of Works

As individual bats can be exploratory or make transient use of roosting opportunities, it is important that contractors undertaking the proposed works are aware of the low risk for bats to be encountered - works should therefore proceed with appropriate caution and vigilance.

A Precautionary Method of Works (PMW) is outlined in Appendix 1 of this document and should be followed by contractors undertaking works.

4.3. Timing of Works

4.3.1. Bats

The results of the PRA/PAS surveys do not indicate that there is a requirement for seasonal constraints on the timing of works with regards to bats.

4.3.2. Nesting Birds

Assessment of potential for nesting birds, and appropriate mitigation measures, are provided in the PRA report. These recommendations are not repeated here, for brevity.

4.4. Habitat Enhancement / Mitigation

The proposals would not directly affect any confirmed roosts, commuting routes or foraging habitat – therefore no habitat creation or enhancement is required.

If the applicant wished to provide enhancement measures, the installation of a bat box within the grounds of the property would have a high likelihood of occupation given the location in optimal habitat. The box should be positioned on a gable wall or tree facing the perimeter of the garden at a height of at least 3m. 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 and easy to construct from appropriate timber using the plans provided at: <http://www.kentbatgroup.org.uk/kent-bat-box.pdf>

Appendix 1 - Precautionary Method Statement with regards to Bats

The purpose of this Method Statement is to ensure that proposed works can proceed where presence of bats has been determined to be unlikely, but a precautionary approach is still advisable. It has been determined that direct harm to roosting bats during the proposed works would be highly unlikely.

Contractors should, however, 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**. The generic recommendations relating to each type of feature are outlined below – locations where these features occur are listed in the PRA report:

Fascias / Soffits

There are occasional gaps where the fascias or soffits meet the walls - where these are to be removed or impacted as part of the proposed works, they should be carefully removed and the gaps behind them exposed in such a way that, in the 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. Any cavities exposed by this action should also be carefully inspected and features dismantled by hand where necessary until absence of bats can be confidently confirmed.

Damaged/Lifted Tiles

There are locations where there are minor gaps beneath individual tiles or at the junction between two tiles.

Where these tiles are to be removed as part of the proposed works, the tiles around any lifted/damaged sections should be removed carefully and the undersides inspected in such a way that, in the unlikely event that bats are present, they are not injured or killed by the action. Extra care should be taken when removing the first run(s) of tiles around the gables and eaves.

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

If bats are identified or suspected, works should cease and the named ecologist 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 ecologist cannot be contacted for advice.

Appendix 2 – NVA Screenshots



NVA S1 – showing footage from the Nightfox Whisker at surveyor position S1.



NVA S2 – showing footage from the Nightfox Whisker at surveyor position S2.



NVA 3 – showing footage from the Nightfox Whisker at NVA 3 – the angled FOV was selected to maximise the coverage whilst taking into account the limitations of the available vantage points for the camera.