

PRELIMINARY ROOST ASSESSMENT (PRA)

ROCKY HILL COTTAGE, ST MARY'S, ISLES OF SCILLY



Client: Duchy of Cornwall

Our reference: 24-8-4

Planning reference: Report produced in advance of submission

Report date: 27th August 2024

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Executive Summary

Bats – Results and Findings

The preliminary roost assessment (PRA) survey of the property concluded that the property has **Low Potential** for use by roosting bats.

Bats – Further Survey Requirements

The following recommendation is provided in order to ensure a suitable baseline to inform a Planning Application, ensure legislative compliance and to avoid negative impacts to Protected Species:

- **One further Presence/Absence Survey (PAS)** should be undertaken to characterise and assess the potential use of the property by bats in order to meet the standard of survey required by Best Practice Guidance to support a Planning Application.

Nesting Birds – Results and Findings

The property itself may provide a small number of suitable nesting habitat for species such as house sparrow which will commonly utilise nesting opportunities behind fascias and similar structural features. Further potential nesting habitat is associated with the garden areas adjacent to the property.

Nesting Birds - Recommendations

Timing of works to avoid the breeding season is recommended as the optimal way to avoid impacts to nesting birds; alternatively pre-commencement inspections are recommended to ensure that nesting birds are not impacted by the proposed works.

Nest boxes could be erected either on the dwelling or within the garden area as a form of enhancement. Guidance on suitable specifications is provided.

Other Ecological Receptors

No further ecological impacts relevant to planning are identified.

Report Status

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

PRELIMINARY ROOST ASSESSMENT (PRA)

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| Planning Authority: Isles of Scilly | Location: SV 91282 11082 | Planning Application ref: Report produced in advance of application |
| Planning application address: Rocky Hill Cottage, Rocky Hill Lane, St Mary's, Isles of Scilly | | |
| Proposed development: The proposed works were identified by the client when instructing the PRA inspection and should accord with the proposals submitted for Planning including: 1) Replacement of the existing roof covering. | | |
| Building references: The property comprises a single detached dwelling which is identified in the maps 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 external visual inspection was undertaken on 26 th August 2024 in accordance with relevant Best Practice methodology ¹ . | | |
| Local and Landscape Setting: The property is situated within a small settlement of dwellings and agricultural buildings in Rocky Hill which lies to the north-east of Hugh Town in St Mary's, Isles of Scilly. The property is set within a mature garden with livestock and a range of lawns, herbaceous borders, vegetable patches and associated greenhouses and ancillary buildings. The land use to the east and west comprises two similarly arranged properties within large gardens. The wider land use to the north is dominated by small fields within high windbreak hedgerows which are under active cultivation for flower farming. The land to the south is similarly agricultural with a number of pasture fields in amongst the bulb fields. There are small copses and areas of semi-mature elm trees to the east of the property. The desk study did not reveal any records of bats recorded roosting within the building historically and there are no recorded bat roosts within 500m of the property. Five species of bat have been recorded on St Mary's. The species conclusively identified were common pipistrelle (<i>Pipistrellus pipistrellus</i>), soprano pipistrelle (<i>Pipistrellus pygmaeus</i>) and brown long-eared bat (<i>Plecotus auritus</i>). Leisler's bat (<i>Nyctalus leisleri</i>) and Nathusius pipistrelle (<i>Pipistrellus nathusii</i>) records were also returned though these species are not known to be resident on the island and are likely associated with vagrant or migratory individuals. | | |

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

Building Description

Rocky Hill Cottage is a detached granite-built dormer bungalow with a hipped slate roof.

The granite walls throughout the property are well-pointed with no gaps or crevices noted. Window and door frames throughout the property appear well-fitted in their apertures with no gaps or other potential roosting features noted.

The boxed soffits around the edge of the roof are generally very well-fitted with minor gaps noted around the front porch and adjacent to the rear extension on the north-east corner of the property.

The hipped nature of the roof structure precludes any true gable and so the boxed soffits are continuous around the perimeter of the roof with the exception of a small runs on the eastern aspect where the eaves of the north/south pitches protrude beyond the hipped junction. Here there are drop tiles for a small section between the boxed soffits. These drop tiles are generally in good condition though there is a missing tile on the south-eastern corner and potential for minor access gaps associated.

The roof is wet-laid scantle tiles which appear very well-fitted – no significant gaps or missing pointing were noted externally either associated with the roof slates or ridge tiles. Minor gaps must however be present in discreet locations as daylight could be seen between some tiles during the internal loft inspection – though it is not necessarily the case that such gaps would be of sufficient size or dimensions to permit access by bats. Guttering is present around the property and is tightly fitted below the eaves which would preclude a direct fly-in access at these locations.

Dormer windows are present on both the northern and southern pitches of the roof – these dormers themselves have hipped roofs and both the roof and sides are covered by slate tiles. These tiles are generally well-fitted although a lifted tile was noted on a northern dormer whilst a missing tile is present on a southern dormer.

There is a flat-roof extension on the northern aspect – this has a mono-pitched dry-laid slate-tiled roof which is in good condition. There are minor gaps between the soffits (on the gables) and fascia (at the eaves) of this structure – these are generally well-cobwebbed indicating no recent access by bats or other species at the time of survey.

A flat-roof porch is present on the southern aspect – this has a lead-lined roof which appears to be well-fitted with no gaps present. A bay window on the southern aspect has a similar roof structure.

There is dense ivy cladding on the south-western corner of the property – this has been cut back at the base and appears to be mostly dead but the stems remain clad to the walls. The size and structure of the stems would make it unlikely to provide a roosting opportunity in its own right in the current condition.

Internally, the property has a void above the tie-beam of the roof timbers and further boxed-in voids at the eaves. The hipped section which extends to the south-west of the property is not converted to accommodation and represents the largest of the voids present. Some of these voids are used for storage but the majority is largely un-finished though there is insulation between the joists and the floor is boarded in places. Roof-timbers appear to be well-fitted with no gaps noted at the junctions. A ridge board is present. The tiles are pegged directly above the battens with no underfelting or other membrane present between the tiles and the loft space beneath. There are a large number of old suspended cobwebs in the void indicating no recent or regular flight within the loft spaces. No droppings or other evidence of bats were noted; however both mouse and rat droppings were recorded. The voids were partially accessible for inspection but it was not possible to fully inspect the apex void (due to the small size) or portions of the eaves voids to the north of the property.

The voids above the dormer windows are sealed and inaccessible.

The following potential roosting opportunities were noted for bats:

- Minor gaps between the soffit and the wall at the location of the front porch;
- Minor gaps between the soffit/fascia and the wall around the rear-extension and adjacent north-eastern corner of the main dwelling;
- Missing or slipped tiles on two of the dormers potentially providing access behind;
- Minor gaps between scantle tiles in the main roof potentially providing access to roosting opportunities between tiles, or between tiles and mortar;
- Missing drop-tile on the south-eastern corner potentially providing access behind, though this appears to be largely superficial.

Survey Limitations

The following limitations on survey were noted:

- The internal unfinished voids at the eaves of the roof could not be fully inspected, though it was accessed and visually assessed where possible with regards to structure and condition;
- It was not possible to inspect at height features such as missing tiles around the dormers;
- There are locations within the building where evidence of bats, if present, would not have been apparent from a PRA survey, such as roosts which might be present between individual wet-laid scantle tiles.

These limitations are taken into account when concluding the assessment of building potential and are addressed by the recommendations for further surveys.

Assessment of Potential for use by Roosting Bats

The property is identified as providing **Low Potential** for use by roosting bats. The number of potential features identified are limited given the nature of the structure; however these features remain suitable for use by individual common pipistrelle bats which frequently make use of roosts behind soffits/fascias or between individual scantle tiles on other similar properties on the Isles of Scilly.

Recommendations and Justification (Bats):

In accordance with the criteria outlined in the Best Practice Guidance², the following surveys would be required to provide an appropriate evidence-base upon which to support a planning application or demonstrate legislative compliance when undertaking the re-roofing works:

- 1x Presence/Absence Survey (PAS) with 2x surveyors and 3x Night Vision Assistance (NVA) cameras

The purpose of the PAS technique is to allow the building to be watched at dusk to observe bats emerging from concealed roosting locations. This uses the predictable emergence behaviour of bats to allow the detection of roosting locations which cannot be directly visually inspected.

The PAS survey should be led by suitably qualified bat surveyor between mid-May and mid-September. The survey would require two surveyors in order to achieve a comprehensive view of the relevant features. Three NVA cameras would be required to cover the relevant features

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

and allow the results of the surveys to be reviewed and confirmed in accordance with the Best Practice Guidance.

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 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 the survey 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

The property itself may provide suitable nesting habitat for species such as house sparrow or wren which will commonly utilise nesting opportunities accessed via gaps behind fascias/soffits on the islands. There is also potential for use of the old ivy stems on the south-western corner of the property depending on condition over time.

No evidence of nesting birds utilising features associated with the building structure was recorded at the time of survey; however the timing of the survey in late-August is after the main nesting season.

Further potential nesting opportunities are associated with the garden including trees and shrubs which may be directly or indirectly impacted by the proposed work including during erection of scaffolding and contractor presence.

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

The proposed works could 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 the recommended timing of works 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 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 the vegetation associated with the garden areas.

Enhancement Opportunities

The proposals are not identified as impacting on any bird nesting habitat in the long term, with any impacts restricted to temporary disturbance of adjacent features for the duration of works.

If the applicant wishes to provide enhancement for nesting birds, bird nest boxes could be installed on one of the outbuildings or within shrubs/trees within the garden. The mature garden would offer a high chance of occupation by a range of common birds 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.

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

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

Signed by bat worker(s):

Date: 27th August 2024

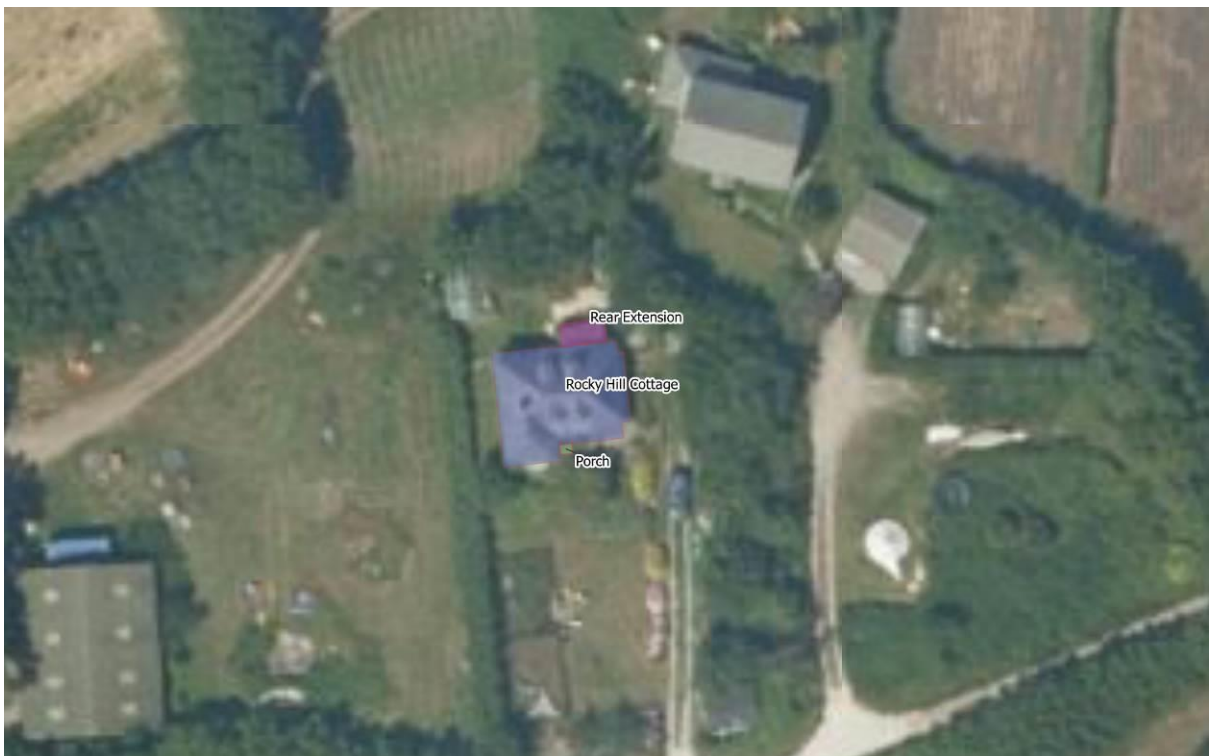


APPENDIX 1

LOCATION PLAN AND PHOTOGRAPHS



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



Map 02 – Showing the property within the local environs – the main property is shown (blue wash) with the rear extension (magenta wash) and front porch (green wash) also indicated. The bay window on the western edge of the southern aspect is not specifically identified but can be seen on the aerial image.



Photograph 1: Showing the property viewed from the south-western corner – the flat-roof bay window is visible.



Photograph 2: Showing the property viewed from the north-eastern corner.



Photograph 3: Showing an example of the minor gaps behind the soffit beside the front porch.



Photograph 4: Showing the missing drop tile – this may provide access to potential roosting features though the gaps appear largely superficial in this location.



Photograph 5: Showing an example of the gaps between the soffit and the wall on the north-eastern corner of the property



Photograph 6: Showing the missing tile on the dormer window of the southern aspect of the property



Photograph 7: Showing the lifted tile on the northern dormer of the property



Photograph 8: Showing an example of the interior loft space – this is in the hipped section which extends to the south-west of the property and represents the largest of the voids present.