

PRELIMINARY ROOST ASSESSMENT (PRA)

ROCK HOUSE & ROCK COTTAGE, HIGHER TOWN, ST MARTIN'S, ISLES OF SCILLY



Client: Neil & Nicky Godden

Our reference: 25-2-1

Planning reference: Produced in advance of submission

Report date: 20th February 2025

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Executive Summary

Bats – Results and Findings

The preliminary roost assessment (PRA) survey of Rock House and Rock Cottage concluded that the property has **Moderate 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:

- **Two further Presence/Absence Surveys (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.

Nesting Birds – Results and Findings

Sparrows are likely to find suitable nesting habitat associated with gaps behind the fascias, 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 further PAS surveys is identified in accordance with the Best Practice Guidance, this report **does not provide a comprehensive baseline to inform Planning or ensure legislative compliance during works** until this survey has been completed and the results used to inform appropriate mitigation measures.

PRELIMINARY ROOST ASSESSMENT (PRA)

Planning Authority: Isles of Scilly	Location: SV 92909 15484	Planning Application ref: Report produced in advance of application
Planning application address: Rock House & Rock Cottage, Higher Town, St Martin'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 taken forwards including: 1) Replacement of the existing roof covering; 2) Works to repair or replace chimneys.		
Building references: The property comprises the semi-detached dwellings known as Rock House and Rock Cottage which are 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 5 th February 2025 in accordance with relevant Best Practice methodology ¹ . An additional visit to inspect the roof space of Rock Cottage was conducted on 5 th March 2025.		
Local and Landscape Setting: The Application Site is situated within Higher Town – this is the eastern-most and largest settlement on the island of St Martin's in the Isles of Scilly. The settlement comprises a small number of detached and terraced houses along with chalets, small-scale agricultural buildings and outbuildings. There is no external street lighting within the settlement with night-time lighting arising from residential light spill e.g. through windows. The conurbation is structured around three roads linked in the centre by a triangular junction. The southern arm comprises a single terraced row of cottages and a farmhouse, known as Signal Row. The western arm of Higher Town comprises scattered detached houses and some terraced components running along a ridgeline with the land falling away to the south. Rock House lies relatively centrally within the north-western portion which is the most built-up area of the town. The land immediately surrounding the property includes further residential properties with associated gardens; and discreet pockets of shrubs and trees. Beyond Higher Town to the south-east is a contiguous landscape of small, hedgerow-bound fields with the shoreline of Par Beach beyond. To the south-west is the peninsula of Cruther's Hill which is dominated by gorse, bracken and heather.		

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

To the north-west of the property, the landscape is dominated by small, bounded fields under active cultivation for bulbs and flowers; whilst permanent pasture demarked into small fields by stone walls dominate to the north-east. The northern portion of the island which is not subject to agricultural management presents a mosaic of habitats dominated by heathland with grassland, dunes, beaches and the strandline as the coastline is reached.

Six records of common pipistrelle roosts are identified in relatively close proximity to the property – these relate to individual bats in two separate day-roosts associated with a building 100m to the east; and both day and maternity roosts associated with buildings in the vineyard approximately 350m to the south-east.

Building Descriptions

The following description will provide an overview of the construction and structural condition of the property with a focus on features which, by their design or condition, could provide suitable roosting opportunities for bats.

Main Property – Rock House and Rock Cottage

Rock House and Rock Cottage together comprise a two-storey semi-detached dwelling constructed of granite blocks.

The property in general is in good condition – minor gaps are noted in the pointing between the granite blocks but these appear predominantly superficial.

Timber window and door frames are generally well-fitted within their apertures though minor gaps were noted in places – these are largely superficial and relatively exposed without providing additional access to more suitable features for bats.

The roof covering comprises synthetic slate-style tiles. Across the main span of the roof, these appear to be well-fitted. Ridge tiles are generally well-pointed though occasional minor gaps occur.

Three chimneys are present within the span of the roof under consideration – one at each gable whilst the third is positioned at the intersection between the two semi-detached properties. The eastern-most two are brick-built and partially rendered whilst the western-most is fully rendered. The pointing and rendering appear to be in good condition with flashing at the intersection between the chimney and the main roof in good condition, with the exception of lifted flashing on the north-eastern aspect of the chimney on the gable which could potentially provide access or roosting opportunities.

The main external features which may be suitable for use by roosting bats, or providing access to further roosting opportunities, occur at the eaves and gable where the walls and roof meet. These include gaps between the timber fascia board and the irregular granite blockwork on both eaves; missing pointing providing the potential for access beneath the terminal tiles at the verge of the north-eastern gable (where there is no fascia); and gaps behind the fascia board on the south-western gable.

Internally, there is tar paper (Rock House) or underfelted (Rock Cottage) beneath the tiles which is mostly intact but tears in places could permit movement between the internal loft space and the space beneath the tiles.

The internal timbers are in good condition with insulation present between the joints. The granite gable and internal dividing walls are well-pointed though gaps occur above the apex stones. The upper rooms of the property are built above the eaves line at the edges which means that the eaves are not directly visible from the loft space. The potential for roosting or access associated with gaps around the fascias visible externally cannot therefore be assessed internally.

No evidence of bats was identified internally (such as droppings, urine splashing or fur

rubbing).

Porch

The single-storey porch is situated on the north-western aspect of the property. A rendered lower wall supports a glass and timber upper portion. A monopitch roof sloping away from the property is covered with a translucent sheet material.

No potential roosting features are identified associated with the structure of the porch itself, though there are minor gaps beneath the lead flashing where the porch adjoins the main property.

Water Tanks

A flat-roof structure with water tanks on top is present on the north-western aspect. There is a superficial crack in the stonework though this is not considered sufficient to support a roosting feature for bats in its current condition. No other potential roosting features were identified associated with this part of the structure.

Summary

The following potential roosting opportunities for bats are identified associated with the structures to be **directly impacted** by the proposals:

- Gaps behind the fascia on both eaves and on the south-western gable – these may provide roosting opportunities in their own right, or access to further roosting opportunities associated with gaps beneath the tiles or above the wall plate;
- Gaps in missing pointing on the north-eastern gable – these could provide roosting opportunities in their own right, or access to further roosting opportunities associated with the wall plate or terminal tiles;
- Gap in the flashing at the base of the chimney on the north-eastern gable which could provide a potential roosting opportunity;
- Minor gaps beneath missing pointing in the ridge.

The following potential roosting features which might be **impacted indirectly** by the proposed works eg. through presence of scaffolding include:

- Minor gaps between timber window frames and their apertures;
- Minor missing pointing in the granite stonework of the property;
- Minor gaps behind flashing where the porch and main property adjoin.

Survey Limitations

The following limitations on survey were noted:

- The eaves of the roof structure could not be inspected internally due to the construction of the upper rooms above the eaves line of the property;
- It was not possible to inspect at height features such as gaps behind fascias and missing pointing at the gables;
- 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 associated with the wall plate or beneath roof tiles.

These limitations are taken into account when concluding the assessments 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 **Moderate Potential** for use by roosting bats.

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 proposed works:

- 2x Presence/Absence Survey (PAS) with 2x surveyors and 2x 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. Two NVA cameras would be required to cover the relevant features 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

Species such as house sparrows are likely to find nesting opportunities associated with the fascia gaps at the eaves and 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 is likely to provide **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

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

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 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 residents.

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:

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

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 – Rock House is shown in the red wash with Rock Cottage show in the yellow wash. The attached water tanks (blue wash) and porch (green wash) would not be impacted by the proposals.



Photograph 1: Showing north-eastern gable and south-eastern aspect of the property



Photograph 2: Showing the north-western aspect of the property with the porch visible. The minor lifted flashing at the join is indicated.



Photograph 3: Showing the water tank on the flat-roof structure.



Photograph 4: Showing the north-eastern gable. Gaps beneath the chimney flashing and where pointing is missing at the verge are indicated.



Photograph 5: Showing the eaves on the north-eastern aspect with an example of the gap behind the fascias indicated.



Photograph 6: Showing a window on the south-western aspect with minor gaps around the timber frame indicated.



Photograph 7: Showing the south-western gable of Rock Cottage



Photograph 8: Showing the south-western gable of Rock Cottage with the gaps behind the fascia indicated.



Photograph 9: Showing the interior of the loft space with insulation visible above the joists



Photograph10: Showing an example of a tear in the tar paper which lies between the rafters and the battens/tiles above.