

Land off Snell Street, Manchester Ecology Survey

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1 Introduction

1.1 Background

- 1.1.1 Dunelm Ecology Ltd was commissioned to undertake an ecology survey of a site located off Snell Street, Manchester. The survey was undertaken in support of a planning application to build nine new dwellings with associated access and landscaping. This would result in the demolition of a disused building and clearance of small discrete areas of semi-natural vegetation, although some vegetation on the north east site boundary would be retained.
- 1.1.2 The main objective of the survey was to identify if bats are using the building and trees as roost sites, and if so, to establish the species and numbers of bats present, and type of roost. Other protected species and habitats were however also considered as part of the assessment. This report provides a brief overview of the legal protection afforded to bats in the UK. It includes a detailed description of the survey methods used and the results of the study. The implications of the survey findings are discussed; with an assessment of potential impacts provided and recommendations given as to what further measures are considered necessary.

1.2 Legislative Context

- 1.2.1 A range of legislation has been established in the UK to protect important nature conservation sites and species. This includes the Wildlife and Countryside Act (WCA) (1981) (as amended), Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act 2000 and the Conservation of Habitats and Species (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2019. Section 14 of the WCA 1981 also makes it an offence to spread or release into the wild certain plants and animals which may cause ecological, environmental, or socio-economic harm. These are listed under Schedule 9 of the Act.
- 1.2.2 The Hedgerows Regulations (1997) regulate hedgerow removal and affords increased protection to those meeting certain ecological, landscape, cultural or archaeological criteria.
- 1.2.3 The Protection of Badgers Act (1992) protects badgers and their setts from persecution. The purpose of this Act was, therefore, animal welfare as opposed to concern over the conservation status of this mammal, which is common and widespread across much of rural Britain. However, the Act also contains restrictions that apply more widely, and have relevance to developers.
- 1.2.4 The UK Post-2010 Biodiversity Framework published in 2012 and updated in 2018, is the government's response to the Convention on Biological Diversity (1992). It describes the UK's biological resources, commits a detailed plan for the protection of these resources within the UK's devolved framework across England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. The document identifies future priorities for nature conservation and adopts a more strategic approach, including ecosystem services and sustainability alongside biodiversity. Despite administrative changes following devolution, there is still an underlying objective of protecting and enhancing a range of priority species and habitats, often still based on the objectives and classifications of the original UK Biodiversity Action

Plan. Biodiversity 2020 is England's national biodiversity strategy. Building on the Natural Environment White Paper published in 2011, this provides a means of delivering the international and EU commitments to biodiversity. Under Biodiversity 2020, Priority Species and Habitats referred to are those of 'Principal Importance' for the conservation of biodiversity in England listed on Section 41 (England) of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006.

- 1.2.5 Finally, the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) provides guidance for local authorities on the content of the Local Plans and is a material consideration in determining planning applications. Briefly, with an overall focus on sustainable development, the NPPF states that developments should aim to engender positive outcomes for biodiversity, with a particular focus on the maintenance and creation of ecological networks. Furthermore, the NPPF also states that any planning proposals for which significant negative impacts on biodiversity cannot be avoided, mitigated or compensated should be refused.
- 1.2.6 The NPPF states that the planning system should contribute to and enhance the natural environment through a range of actions, including:
- Protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, geological interests and soils;
 - Recognising the wider benefits of ecosystem services; and
- 1.2.7 Minimising impacts on biodiversity and providing net gains in biodiversity, contributing to the Government's commitment to halt the overall decline in biodiversity, including by establishing coherent ecological networks that are more resilient to current and future pressures.

2 Methods and Approach

2.1 Field Survey

Daytime Inspection Survey

- 2.1.1 A preliminary inspection of the building was carried out during daylight hours on 22 March 2021 following the methodology outlined in the *Bat Mitigation Guidelines* (Mitchell-Jones 2004) and *Bat Surveys Good Practice Guidelines* (Collins 2016). The survey involved systematically searching the interior and exterior of the building for bats and their field signs with the aid of close-focusing binoculars (Opticron Countryman BGA 8x42) and a powerful torch (Clulite 1M candle-power). Such signs may include insect remains, droppings, grease marks, urine stains and smoothing or lack of cobwebs.
- 2.1.2 Additionally, an initial ground level roost assessment of trees within the site was undertaken. This involved an inspection of the exterior of trees from the ground to look for potential roost features (PRFs). Buildings and trees were assigned to a roost potential category, based on their suitability for supporting roosting bats (Collins 2016) (see Table 1).
- 2.1.3 Evidence of other protected species such as nesting birds was noted during the bat survey, while semi-natural habitats (including non-native species were recorded).

Table 1 Roost Assessment Criteria

Roost Potential Category	Description of Roosting Habitats
Negligible	Negligible habitat features on site likely to be used by roosting bats.
Low	A structure or tree with one or more potential roost sites that could be used by individual bats opportunistically. However, these potential roost sites do not provide enough space, shelter, protection, appropriate conditions and/or suitable surrounding habitat to be used on a regular basis or by larger numbers of bats (i.e. unlikely to be suitable for maternity or hibernation).
Moderate	A structure or tree with one or more potential roost sites that could be used by bats due to their size, shelter, protection, conditions and surrounding habitat but unlikely to support a roost of high conservation status (with respect to roost type only – the assessments in this table are made irrespective of species conservation status, which is established after presence is confirmed).
High	A structure or tree with one or more potential roost sites that are obviously suitable for use by larger numbers of bats on a more regular basis and potentially for longer periods of time due to their size, shelter, protection, conditions and surrounding habitat.

2.2 Personnel

- 2.2.1 The survey was carried out by Jon Guarnaccio MCIEEM who has 18 years experience as a professional ecologist and has held a Natural England bat survey licence since 2005 (2015-15066-CLS-CLS).

2.3 Survey Constraints

- 2.3.1 The survey was carried out at an appropriate time of year (Mitchell-Jones 2004) and full access was possible to all parts of the site. It should be noted that animals are unpredictable and may not conform to standard patterns recorded in scientific literature. Therefore, this report cannot predict with absolute certainty that species will occur in apparently suitable locations or habitats, or that they will not occur in locations or habitats that appear unsuitable.

3 Results

3.1 Daytime Inspection

- 3.1.1 The results of the daytime inspection survey are shown in Table 2 below. In summary no evidence of bats was recorded but the building (B1) was assessed as having moderate potential to support bats owing to the presence of gaps behind weatherboarding at gable ends. Two trees (T1 and T2) were identified as having low bat roost potential owing to dense ivy growth. The site is located on the eastern edge of the city centre in the New Islington area. Although the area is predominantly urban, Ashton Canal is located 190 m to the north while the wooded River Medlock valley is located 275 m to the south. As such, bat roosts are likely to be present in the locality.
- 3.1.2 Semi-natural vegetation in the form of scrub and scattered trees provide suitable nesting habitat for common garden birds although no nests were observed. The most significant area of vegetation occurs on the north east side of the building and comprises a 7 m wide strip of hazel, hawthorn, elder and ivy with several mature silver birch trees. This extends along the north east site boundary as a thin strip of vegetation mainly consisting of blackthorn, elder and bramble. Silver birch, willow spp., blackthorn and ivy also occur along the site's boundary with Snell Street. Ivy and Spanish/hybrid bluebells represent the main ground flora species within these areas. No Schedule 9 plant species were identified during the survey.

Table 2 Daytime Inspection Survey Results

Feature	Description	Roosting Opportunities & Signs of Bat Use	Roost Potential
B1	Former industrial premises dating from the mid/late 20 th century. Constructed from rendered solid brick walls set under a pitched corrugated asbestos roof with plastic rooflights. Metal and timber fascia boards are present on the exterior of the building.	No evidence of bats was recorded but several potential roosting features were identified including: i) a gap between peeling rendering and brickwork at north west gable end; and ii) gaps behind fascia boards at north west and south east gable ends. Some gaps are also present along the south west elevation of the building behind weatherboarding, but these are very superficial.	Moderate
T1	Mature silver birch tree	No evidence of bats but tree wrapped in dense ivy growth	Low
T2	Mature silver birch tree	No evidence of bats but tree wrapped in dense ivy growth	Low

4 Discussion

4.1 Assessment and Recommendations

- 4.1.1 Two trees were identified as having low bat roost potential but no further survey is required and no adverse impacts on bats are predicted if these trees are sectionally felled and allowed to rest on the ground before being removed from site. Nonetheless, the trees should ideally be retained given their age. There is no evidence that the building is used by roosting bats. However, gaps at the gable ends provide suitable roosting habitat meaning the possibility of a summer non-breeding roost (low conservation value) occasionally used by solitary or low numbers of bats should therefore not be discounted. However, it is considered unlikely that the building is used as a maternity roost (high conservation value) owing to the urban location of the site.
- 4.1.2 Further survey effort in the form of dusk emergence and/or return to roost surveys is therefore recommended to give confidence in these initial conclusions/negative survey result and if bats are found to be present, to fully assess the impacts of the planning proposals and to specify appropriate mitigation measures. Such surveys can only be undertaken between May and August during suitable weather conditions i.e. warm ($>8^{\circ}\text{C}$), calm and dry while survey data is valid for approximately 18 months. However, as long as suitable precautions are taken, the planning proposals are unlikely to have an adverse impact on the local bat population or individual bats as long as roosting features are incorporated within the scheme.
- 4.1.3 Woody vegetation growth provides nesting habitat for breeding birds. As such, vegetation clearance should preferably take place outside the breeding bird season which lasts from March to August inclusive. If this is not possible, breeding bird checks should be undertaken no more than 48 hours prior to works to confirm if active nests are present or not. In the event of breeding being confirmed, works would need to be postponed within 5 m of the nest(s) until chicks had fledged the nest.
- 4.1.4 The biodiversity value of the development should be maximised in accordance with the NPPF. This can be achieved through incorporating integral bat roosting and bird nesting features within the external walls of the new dwellings (one such feature per a dwelling). Additionally, retained vegetation along the north east site boundary should be enhanced to compensate for the loss of scrub habitat within the site. For instance, the existing strip of vegetation should be enriched through introducing native species of shrub including hazel, dog rose, guelder rose, holly, hawthorn, elder and honeysuckle. Where new trees are proposed these should comprise fruit trees and rowan. Moreover, the proposed properties will support green roofs supporting native vegetation while climbing plants such as honeysuckle and clematis will be grown on driveway and back garden walls. Such habitats are likely to attract insects and provide a source of food for bats and birds.

5 References

Collins J (2016). *Bat Surveys Good Practice Guidelines*. Third Edition. BCT, London.

Mitchell-Jones AJ (2004). *Bat Mitigation Guidelines*. English Nature, Peterborough.



Plate 1 Gaps exist behind fascia boards at gable end

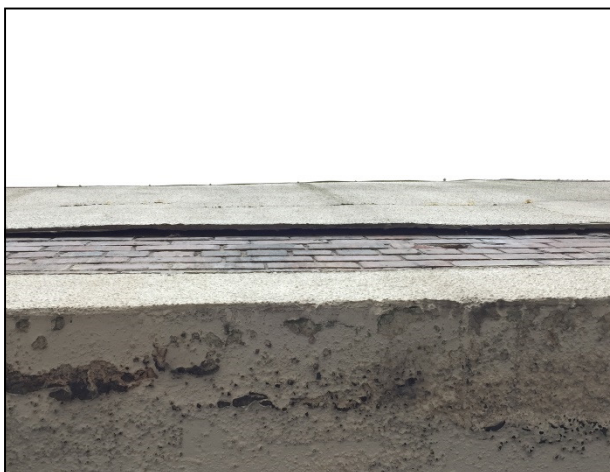


Plate 2 Gaps between rendering and brickwork



Plate 3 Trees T1 and T2



Plate 4 Scrub on north east side of building



Plate 5 Scrub on north east site boundary



Plate 6 Interior of building