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PROTECTED SPECIES SURVEY

ERBISTOCK VILLAGE HALL

ERBISTOCK

WREXHAM, NORTH WALES

FOR

The Church of Wales

15th November 2023

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1. INTRODUCTION

A preliminary protected species survey (bats and nesting birds) was undertaken in October 2023. The survey was carried out by David Bennett, a licensed and experienced bat surveyor and ecologist (Natural Resource Wales & Natural England licenses S091412) following a request by the Church of Wales. The survey was requested to satisfy planning requirements in respect of any protected species issues for Erbistock village hall, Erbistock, Wrexham, North Wales. A planning consent is being sought for a change of use and conversion to residential, the site was previously surveyed in 2018 as part of a previous application.

2. BAT BIOLOGY

There are now 17 species of bat (breeding) in the UK, many of which can be found within this part of Wales. Each bat gives birth just once a year, early in summer, the females tending to gather together in a communal roost to give birth and bring up their young. This is the time when they are most likely to use buildings. By the end of the summer the roosts are often vacated for other more suitable hibernation sites such as caves, mines or trees. Hibernation sites are usually characterised by stable temperatures with a high level of humidity. When temperatures fall and food becomes scarce they hibernate and live off body fat stored during the autumn. During mild winters bats can still often be seen on an evening flying and looking for food. Bats use a variety of different structures for the purposes of roosting, these can include mature trees, caves, mines, buildings (old and new), bridges and tunnels.

Bats will generally cause no harm to buildings or the people that occupy the buildings. They can be very discreet and are often not noticed because of their preference to occupy tiny spaces, cracks and crevices in roof voids. Some species such as the brown long eared bat will utilise open loft areas for flying and moving around in. They will roost on bare exposed timber beams, typically beneath the ridge beam. The droppings produced are harmless (largely made up of insect fragments) and do not carry any disease although a very large roost can sometimes produce large quantities of droppings.

3. LEGISLATION

All of our species of domestic bat are protected under both UK and European legislation. In the UK they are listed under Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) and Schedule 2 of the Conservation (Natural Habitats &c.) Regulations 1994. The Habitats Directive has been superseded by The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017.

To summarise it is illegal not only to intentionally kill, injure or take any bat but also too recklessly or intentionally damage, destroy or obstruct access to any place that a bat uses for shelter or protection, or to disturb a bat while it is occupying such a place. A roost is protected whether or not bats are present at the time. The reason for this is that bats tend to remain loyal to certain roost sites, often over a long period of time.

The presence of a species protected under European or UK legislation is a material consideration when a planning authority is considering a development proposal which, if carried out would be likely to result in disturbance or harm to the species or its habitat. The Environment (Wales) Act 2016 (Section 6) Biodiversity and resilience of ecosystems duty states that “A public authority must seek to maintain and enhance biodiversity in the exercise of functions in relation to Wales, and in so doing promote the resilience of ecosystems, so far as consistent with the proper exercise of those functions”

4. AIMS

The aims of the survey were:

1. To describe any evidence of protected species in the study area.
2. To assess the impact of carrying out the proposed works.
3. To suggest mitigation measures as appropriate.

5. STUDY AREA

The site consists of the former Erbistock village hall together with a small outbuilding at the rear and areas of hardstanding/parking. The site is situated in a rural location with a few other properties nearby. The River Dee Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) is located approximately 200 metres north-east of the site.

The main hall has been constructed in a traditional manner with brick walls supporting a pitched and timber framed roof covered with slate (no felt). There is a small wooden central ventilation shaft which has been capped externally. At each gable end there is a small ventilation window which has metal mesh covers although one end has a large hole and a small hole on the other end.

At the rear of the main hall there is a small brick building with a slate roof that has been used for storage. The roof and sides of the building are covered with a dense growth of ivy. The remainder of the site is car parking with areas of tarmac.

The site plan is shown in Appendix 1 and the photos are shown in Appendix 2.

6. METHODOLOGY

The buildings were subjected to an internal and external survey in October 2023, the weather conditions were sunny, dry and clear. As much of the buildings as possible was searched (health and safety and access permitting) using an LED rechargeable lamp, a Seesnake endoscope (paying particular attention to the roof sections, ledges and any gaps or cavities). A search was made for bat droppings, staining, odour, old skeletons and feeding signs (such as wing casings etc). Other evidence such as bird's nests and other signs of nesting birds was also looked for both internally and externally.

7. RESULTS

Main hall

Scaffold tower access was used to access the high ceiling point access hatch, this provided full access into the open roof void. Scattered bat droppings were found (more than last time and some were fairly recent), these all appeared to relate to the pipistrelle bat. There is some natural light due to the gable end mesh windows (one at each end) but it is still reasonably dark. There is a large gap in the mesh at one end and another small gap in the mesh at the other end both providing direct access into the internal roof space.

There is a small gap between the main roof and the join into the flat roof on both sides of the building as shown in the photos below. There is also a small gap in the brickwork just below the soffits on one side, also shown in the photos below.

Outbuilding

Internally, this building supports long hanging cobwebs from floor to ceiling the same as found on the previous visit. With the level of cobwebs nothing has accessed the internal area of this building for some time. Externally the slates are all intact and there do not appear to be any points of access around the eaves and gable ends.

8. CONCLUSIONS, IMPACTS AND MITIGATION FOR BATS

Some evidence of bats has been found within the roof void of the main hall and some of the droppings look fresh suggesting recent activity. No bats were observed at the time of the survey. There is also potential access either side of the flat roof and also the small brickwork cavity.

To assess the use of the main hall (and to assess species, numbers and access/exit points) it will be necessary to undertake at least one evening emergence/activity survey when bats are active between May and August. At least two experienced surveyors equipped with ultrasonic detectors will be required to ensure all elevations of the building can be covered. If nothing is found during the first visit then a second visit will be required due to presence of recent bat droppings.

The results of the survey will indicate if bats are still using the building, this will then direct any suitable mitigation. If bats are found to be roosting within the building then as well as a suitable mitigation scheme a license will also be required from Natural Resource Wales before works can begin.

As a general note, most buildings offer potential for over-wintering and seasonal occupancy for individual bats. This use can be sporadic during the season and actual presence through emergence surveys cannot be fully confirmed. It is therefore recommended that the following precautionary recommendations (which may change depending on the results of the additional survey) should be undertaken as good working practice during the construction phase.

- **The conversion/build works will need to take place between October and February inclusive to avoid roosting bats although works to the lower rooms (excluding any roof void works) may be possible at other times but these would need to be agreed within any license application.**
- **All roof slates (if required) should be carefully removed by hand to ensure that no roosting, torpid or hibernating bats are injured during the proposed works.**
- **Door and window frames should be removed with care to ensure that no roosting, torpid or hibernating bats are injured during the proposed works.**
- **Structural members, lintel bearings, purlins or wall plates should be removed with care to ensure that no roosting, torpid or hibernating bats are injured during the proposed works.**
- **In the event that bats were found during the construction process then all work should cease and Natural Resource Wales and/or a licensed bat worker should be contacted for further advice.**

9. NESTING BIRDS

House martins have been nesting under the eaves and gable ends with evidence of old nests and old nest markings, similar numbers/location to those found during the previous survey. Any works to the roof areas that may affect nesting birds would have to take place between October and February inclusive to avoid any potential disturbance.

All breeding birds are protected under Section 1(1) and 1(2) of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, as amended. This makes it an offence to damage, disturb, or obstruct access to nests during the bird breeding season (generally March to September).

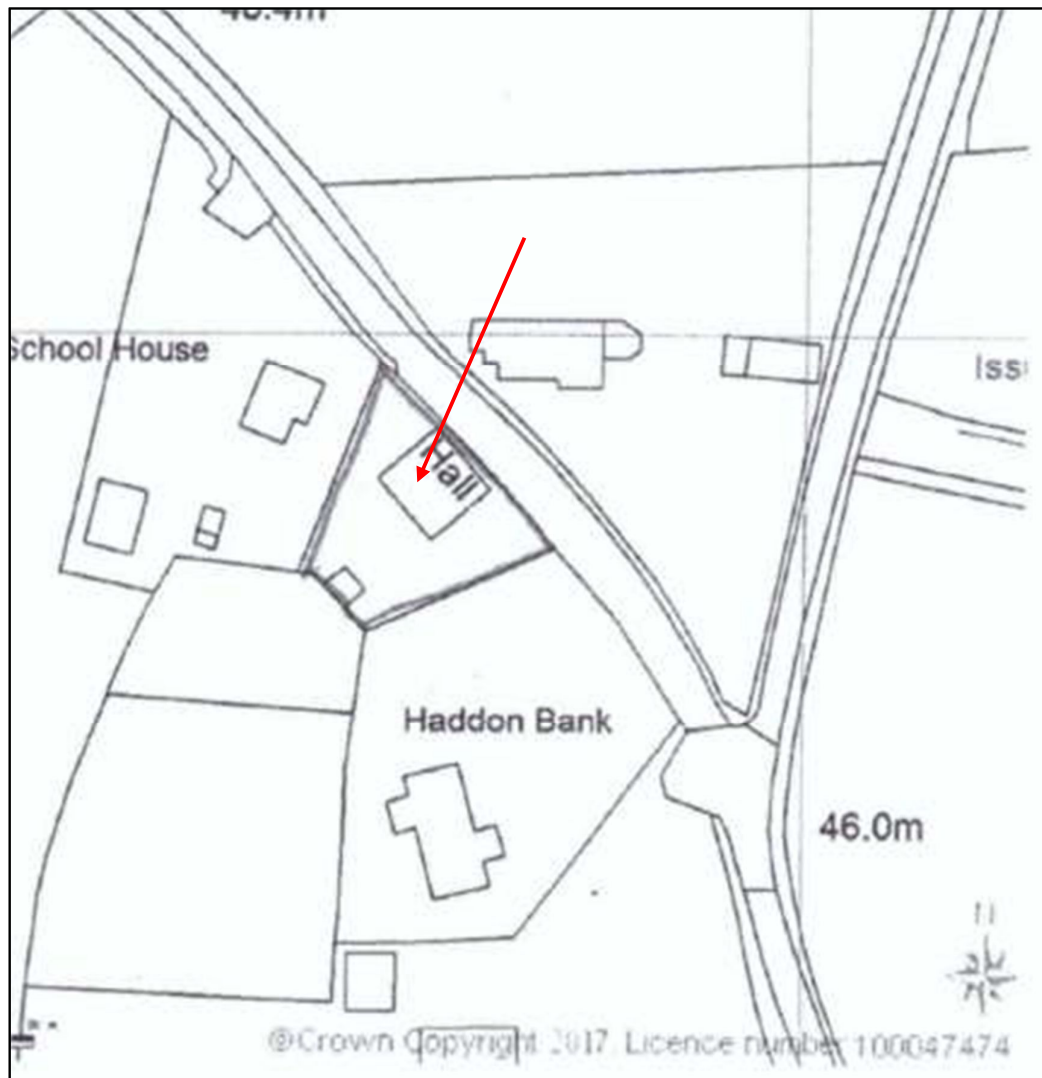
10. REFERENCES

BCT 2016 Good Practice Guidelines 2nd Edition 2016 BCT

Joint Nature Conservation Committee 2004 *Bat Workers Manual* JNCC Peterborough

Mitchell-Jones A J 2004 *Bat Mitigation Guidelines* English Nature Peterborough UK

Appendix 1 – Site plan



Appendix 2 – Site Photos

Front elevation with flat roof extension



Front elevation with gable access



Side elevation from the road



Rear elevation



Rear elevation



Gap between flat roof and slate, the same on the other side as well



House martin nests and old marks



As above



Timber soffits are intact



Slates are intact



Flat roof soffits are intact



As above



Intact flat roof soffits



As above



Second flat roof access point



Small brickwork gap



More house martin nests and marks



Gable access point



Brick outbuilding



Dense ivy cover



Gable areas are sealed



Dense hanging cobwebs internally



