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PROTECTED SPECIES SURVEY

FORMER THEATRE

SALOP ROAD

WREXHAM, NORTH WALES

FOR

WWHA

28th March 2016

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1. INTRODUCTION

A preliminary protected species survey (bat and bird) was undertaken on the 23rd March 2016. The survey was carried out by David Bennett, a licensed and experienced bat surveyor and ecologist (Natural Resource Wales & Natural England licenses) following a request by WWAHA. The survey was requested to satisfy planning requirements in respect of any protected species issues for a former theatre building located at Salop Road, Wrexham, North Wales. A planning consent is being sought to permit the demolition of the building as part of a site redevelopment.

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 recently been superseded by The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010 which came into force on the 1st April 2010

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 have a tendency 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. Section 74 (2) of the CroW Act 2000 (now updated by Section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act (NERC) 2006 requires the publication of lists of habitats and species that are of principal importance for the purpose of conserving biological diversity. The list is regularly changed and updated and many bat species appear on it. NERC consolidates the requirements of the CroW Act in placing duties upon government agencies, including local authorities, to ensure the conservation of Biodiversity.

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 demolishing the building.
3. To suggest mitigation measures as appropriate.

5. STUDY AREA

The site consists of the former musical theatre building with a car-park area at the side. The property is set within the centre of the town with flats at the rear and other commercial buildings/housing nearby. A river runs along the lower level at the rear of the building between the flats and the theatre. Japanese knotweed is present along the river bank.

The original section of the theatre is constructed from brick with a metal framed roof covered with slate. The new extension is constructed from block and brick with metal panel walls and roof areas.

At the time of the survey a small section at the rear had just been demolished to permit scaffold to the rear of the building by the river. Sections of the roof at the front had recently been removed exposing the inner areas of the theatre as shown in the photos below.

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

6. METHODOLOGY

The building was subjected to an internal and external survey on the 23rd March 2016, the weather conditions were dry and clear. As much of the building as possible was searched (health and safety and access permitting) using a Cluson 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

No visual evidence of bats was found anywhere inside or outside of the building within the areas which could be accessed. The whole of the original slate roof and sides of the building could be inspected using the scaffold sections.

The building has apparently only just been partially opened up and exposed to enable the scaffolding and asbestos surveys. Looking at how the building would originally have been the main roof areas and walls all appear to be fairly well sealed with little opportunity for bats. There are some small gaps at the tile ends as shown in the photo below but these now lead into an exposed and revealed area of the roof.

The brick walls all appear to be intact and no gaps, missing sections of mortar or wide cracks were evident. Some of the rear wall is obscured by the growth of ivy but this was inspected using the scaffold area. The potential for the building to support bats is thought to be low (based upon an intact building). The situation could change if the building is left exposed during the period when bats become active.

8. CONCLUSIONS, IMPACTS AND MITIGATION FOR BATS

No evidence of bats or use by bats was found anywhere within the structure of the building and no further survey work is thought to be required assuming that the building is demolished imminently. Opening up the roof and other areas of the building may now permit bats to find roosting/hibernation space or they may use it for feeding.

It therefore appears that there are no apparent issues to the proposed demolition in respect of bats at the present time. As outlined above it is often difficult to inspect every crevice or hidden section in a building (due to access or health and safety issues). In addition bats tend to be nomadic, which reduces the chances of finding bats on one or even several visits. This situation arises frequently when carrying out this type of survey. However, the survey has been completed to a good standard and it is not anticipated that any problems will occur. Carrying out the survey also puts in place demonstrable safeguards regarding the avoidance of illegal activities.

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 should be undertaken as good working practice during the demolition phase.

- **All roof slates should be carefully removed by hand to ensure that no roosting, torpid or hibernating bats are injured during the proposed works.**
- **The upper sections of the brick/block walls should be removed by hand, particularly any sections which have a cavity area.**

- **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 then all work should cease and Natural Resource Wales (Buckley office) and/or a licensed bat worker should be contacted for further advice.**

9. NESTING BIRDS

Birds were observed using the dense ivy at the lower level (below the proposed demolition line) at the rear of the building by the river. Grey wagtails were present in and around the lower section of the wall (below demolition level) and they were feeding along the river.

The building is now very exposed with various points of access ideally suited for a variety of bird species. It is also possible that gulls may nest within the remaining upper roof valleys, they were inspecting the building at the time of the survey. Other bird species could enter the building and nest at any time now because it is exposed and relatively undisturbed.

Ideally the building should be demolished between October and February to avoid the nesting season. However, due to the condition of the building within a town location it would be preferable to demolish it now. Advice provided at the time of the survey was to try and net all the exposed areas within the next few days following survey. In addition the building will require inspection immediately prior to any demolition works taking place. This may require more than one visit because the upper section will be removed by hand and the rate of demolition will be delayed. The ivy on the rear wall will need to be carefully removed in sections in case birds are found to be using it for nesting.

If any birds were found to be nesting (or in the process of constructing a nest) then work in that area would have to stop. It would still be possible to proceed with care in other areas of the building until the young have fledged and left the nest.

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 2012 Good Practice Guidelines 2nd Edition 2016 BCT

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

Appendix 1 – Site location plan



Appendix 2 – Site Photos

1. Front and side elevation



2. Front elevation



3. Large sections of the upper roof have just been removed



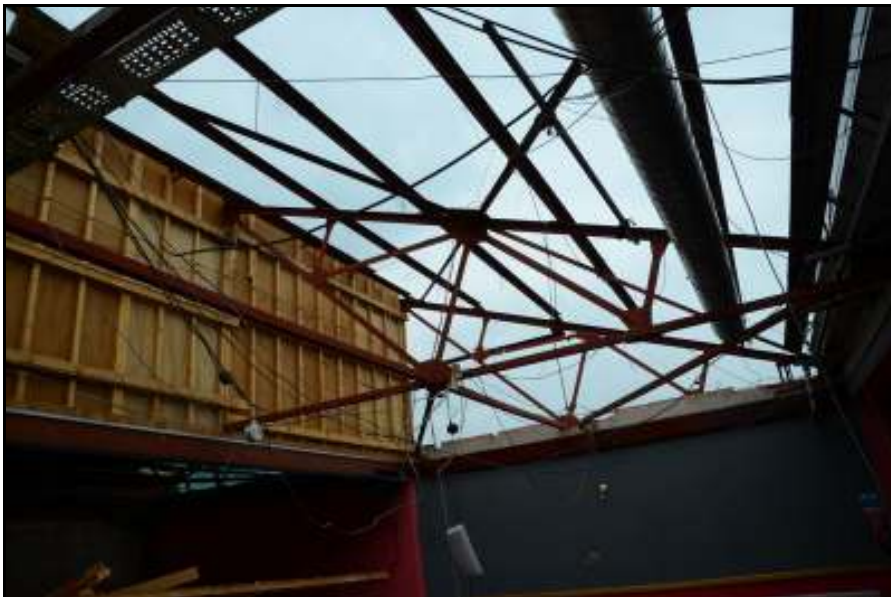
4. Small section removed to enable scaffold access – this is all now open



5. Open area where the corner has been demolished



6. Looking from the inside



7. Interior is open and light



8. Interior area



9. Gaps on the tile end are sometimes used by crevice dwelling bats



10. Rear elevation overlooking the river



11. Side elevation



12. Roof viewed from the upper scaffold tower



13. Open roof section with insulated gap – birds could nest in here



14. Cavity wall is now exposed

