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PROTECTED SPECIES SURVEY

SEION CHAPEL

BANK STREET, PONCIAU

WREXHAM, NORTH WALES

FOR

Mr James Wilson

7th October 2013

David Bennett MSc MCIEEM

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1. INTRODUCTION

A preliminary bat and bird survey was undertaken on the 4th October 2013. The survey was carried out by David Bennett, a licensed and experienced bat surveyor and ecologist (CCW & Natural England licenses) following a request by Mr James Wilson. The survey was requested to satisfy planning requirements in respect of any protected species issues for a former chapel located at Bank Street, Ponciau, Wrexham, North Wales. A planning consent is being sought to permit the conversion of the chapel (with demolition of the former school room) into residential accommodation.

2. BAT BIOLOGY

There are now 17 species of bat 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 converting the building.
3. To suggest mitigation measures as appropriate.

5. STUDY AREA

The site consists of a former chapel with an attached schoolroom and kitchen area/toilets at the rear. There are two main roof voids, the largest above the main chapel with a smaller void above the former school room. There is a small cellar area which houses the heating boiler and oil tanks.

The chapel is constructed in a traditional manner with brick walls supporting a pitched and timber framed roof covered with slate, underfelt is present which suggest the building has been re-roofed in the recent past. The schoolroom is of a similar construction but the roof has not been felted and the majority of the lime undercloak has fallen away exposing the tiles.

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 on the 4th October 2013, the weather conditions were mild, dry and clear. As much of the buildings 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 in the brickwork). 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 chapel

No evidence of bats was found anywhere inside or outside of the building. No droppings were apparent on the floor, roof and wall areas and there were no signs of feeding perches. The main roof void is covered with layers of dust and cobwebs. In this situation any droppings from past roosting or feeding bats would normally be clearly visible when there has been little or no disturbance.

The internal timbers within the roof all appear to be the original but they do not support any features which could be used by bats such as open peg holes or mortise joints. Externally there are no boxed soffits or other boxed cavities which can sometimes be used by crevice dwelling bats. The timber boards supporting the gutters are very close to the walls with no suitable gaps offering access to the wall plates. The roof tiles are all intact, tight and flat (including the ridge) with no obvious points of access.

There are two louvre ventilation panels on each side of the roof pitch. Internally it appears that birds used to gain access from these points because there is ancient evidence of swallows. However they have been sealed by tacking cut pieces of Tyvek around the timberwork, this has effectively sealed them and prevents any further access by bats or birds.

The cellar area was inspected and there was no sign or evidence of current or past use by bats. This area does house the boiler and also the oil tanks but the small doorway leading up to ground-level (external appears to be sealed and closed) so there is no obvious point of access.

Schoolroom

No evidence of bats was found anywhere within this building. The roof void is particularly dusty and covered in dense hanging cobwebs both on the sides but also along the ridge area. It would appear that there has been no movement or disturbance by bats or birds for a long time. The louvre roof ventilators (identical to the ones in the main hall) are actually open and accessible. However, nothing appears to have used them although free access is available. The more recent mechanical type ventilators still retain the mesh grill which prevents access.

8. CONCLUSIONS, IMPACTS AND MITIGATION FOR BATS

No evidence suggesting a bat roost has been found during this survey and for the reasons suggested is thought unlikely and no further survey work is required. It therefore appears that there are no apparent issues relating to the proposed conversion 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 conversion phase.

- **If the works are not started within 12 months from the date of this report it is recommended that the roof voids are re-inspected in case the situation has changed.**
- **All roof tiles should be removed by hand (in respect of the schoolroom demolition and any alterations around the roof of the main chapel) 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 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 torpid or hibernating bats are injured during the proposed works.**
- **In the event that bats were found during the conversion then all work should cease and Natural Resource Wales (Mold office) and/or a licensed bat worker should be contacted for further advice.**

The conversion of the chapel offers the opportunity to create and retain some bat friendly features. *Pipistrelle sp.* and other crevice dwellers such as *Myotis* bats will readily take to new and/or converted buildings as long as suitable access points and features are retained or created

To secure biodiversity enhancement in accordance with Welsh Assembly Government guidance TAN 5 the following features should be included to try and encourage bats to use the building.

Pictures of the examples are shown in Appendix 3.

- **No re-roofing of the main hall is proposed and the traditional bitumen roof felt will remain in place post conversion although the existing roof void will be converted.**
- **Four “Slateline” bat access tiles will be fitted to the roof of the main chapel, two on each side. Each slate will be positioned approximately in the existing location of the existing ventilation points which are due to be removed. These will provide access to the cavity between the roof tiles and the underfelt.**

- **If any timber treatment is proposed then it must be carried out using chemicals shown to be safe for bats. A certificate must be obtained from the contractor.**
- **Ensure any external lighting is low level and directional towards the ground.**

9. NESTING BIRDS

No recent evidence of nesting birds was found anywhere within or outside of the buildings. As discussed there are potential access points into the roof of the schoolroom.

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 August).

Care should be taken if undertaking any works during the bird nesting season to avoid any disturbance. If a nest was found (or in the course of being made) then all work should cease until the young have fledged.

10. REFERENCES

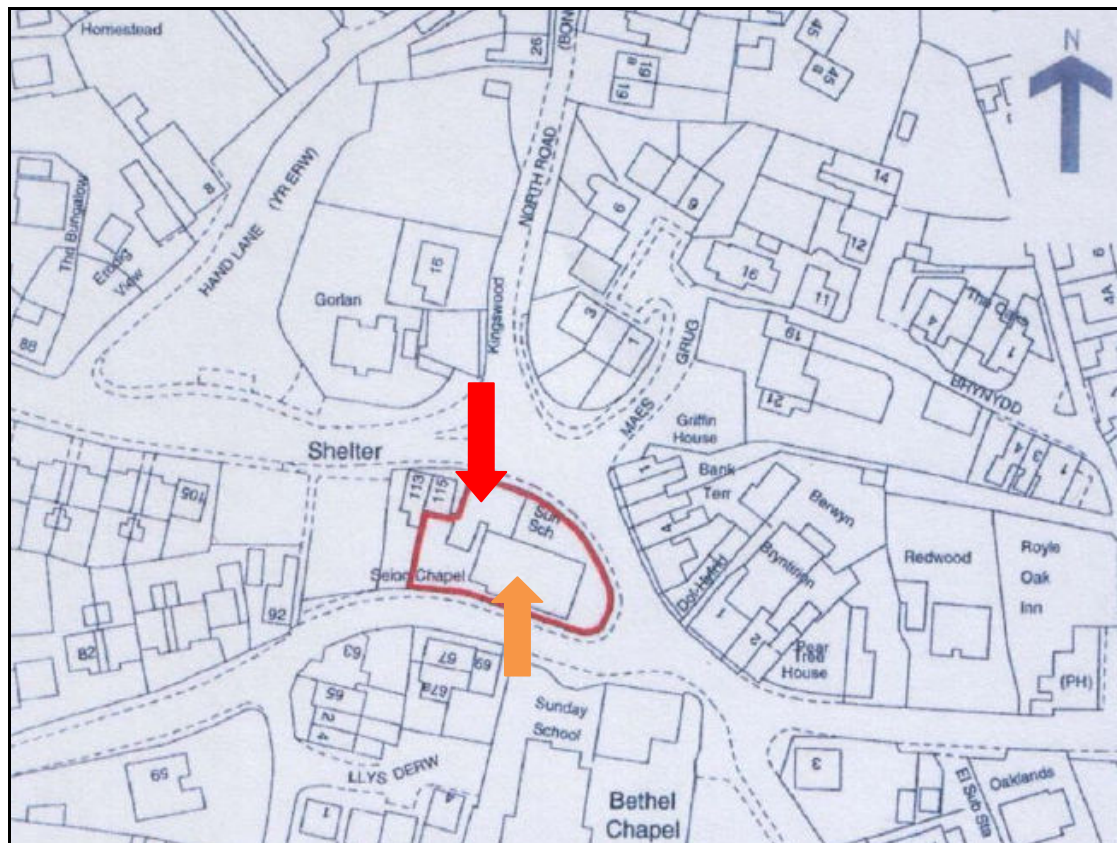
BCT 2007 *Bat Survey Guidelines* London UK

English Nature 2002 *Bats in roofs: a guide for surveyors* English Nature Peterborough UK

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 – School room red arrow, orange arrow main hall



Appendix 2 – Site Photos

1. Chapel front elevation



2. Chapel side elevation



3. Chapel rear elevation with flat roof sections



4. Chapel side elevation with roof ventilation points which will be removed and a Slateline bat access tile placed in the same location each side



5. Inside the main hall of the chapel



6. Ventilator in rear elevation of the schoolroom, standard grilled vents also shown



7. Side elevation of the schoolroom



8. Front elevation of the schoolroom



9. Timbers supporting gutters are tight to the walls



10. Roof vent on schoolroom

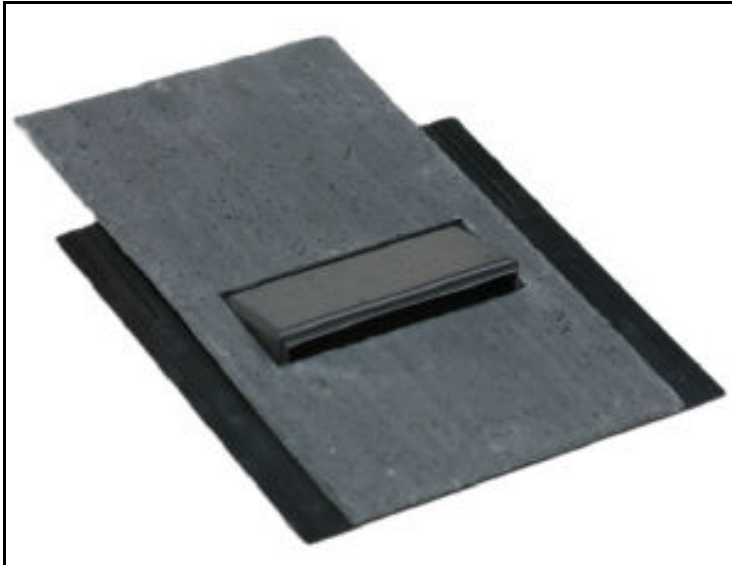


11. Inside the schoolroom



Appendix 3 – Bat mitigation

Summit bat slates



Underside of batslate

