

Former Bethlehem Congregational Chapel, Coedpoeth, Smithy Road, Wrexham

Inspection & Assessment in Relation to Bats

THE TYRER PARTNERSHIP



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Issued: 20 June 2013

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1.0 Introduction & Reason for Survey

- 1.1 As part of a proposed Planning Application at a former Chapel at Smithy Road, Wrexham, an inspection and assessment was undertaken in relation to bats. The Congregational Federation Ltd, the site owners, commissioned the inspection and report. As part of the Local Authority's Planning Policies ecological surveys are generally required, particularly where a specially protected species is or may be present and could be affected by the proposals for which the Application seeks consent.
- 1.2 The aim of the inspection was to initially ascertain if the property is of value to bats; if potential was found to be moderate - high or the results of the survey were inconclusive then recommendations would indicate the requirement for dusk surveys to be undertaken at the site during the breeding season of bats. (May – August) Should evidence of bats be located then a scheme for the protection of them and their roosts would need to be implemented which could involve the requirement for a Welsh Assembly Protected Species Licence to be in place where bats or their roosts would be affected.
- 1.3 The optimum time to investigate buildings for evidence of a bat roost is May – August, however that is not to say they cannot be inspected and assessed outside of that time and frequently the results can be conclusive, which can save time and expense for Planning Applicants but it should be borne in mind that equally the inspection can be inconclusive.

2.0 Bats & Their Requirements

- 2.1 Guidance is contained in Planning Policy Wales Technical Advice Note: 5: Nature Conservation and Planning 2009 on the consideration that should be given to Protected Species where they may be affected by development. Furthermore TAN 5 PPS9 paragraph 3.4.2 states the Local planning authorities may adopt Supplementary Planning Guidance to provide more detailed, locally relevant guidance for:

Ways in which the planning system can deliver Local Biodiversity Action Plans objectives and the targets of Habitat and Species Action Plans.

- 2.2 All British bats and their **roosts are afforded protection under the 1981 Wildlife & Countryside Act (as amended) and are listed in Schedule 2 of the Conservation of Habitats & Species Regulations 2010 (as amended). When dealing with cases where a European Protected Species (all UK bats) may be affected, a planning authority is a competent authority within the meaning of the Regulation 7 of the 2010 Regulations and therefore has a statutory duty to have due regard to the provisions of the Regulations in the exercise of its functions.

2.3 Use of Buildings by Bats

- a) Summer breeding roost.
- b) Hibernation.
- c) Transitional or temporary roost.

Roost selection is often closely correlated to suitable foraging habitat within a reasonable commuting distance from the roost and different sites are used depending upon insect densities and abundance, climatic conditions can also affect their ability to successfully forage. All British bats are insectivorous.

** The term roost is generically referred to as a place that bat/s use for the any of the above reasons, however it should be noted that under the Conservation of Habitats & Species Regulations 2010 (Regulation 41) the term roost is not used but refers to “*a breeding site or resting place of such an animal*” which essentially is the same and is afforded legal protection. The roost, breeding site or resting place of bats, which ever terminology is used is legally protected whether or not bats are in occupation.

3.0 Bat Species in Wrexham

- 3.1 Up to nine bat species have been regularly recorded in the county of Wrexham, most of which use built structures, notably occupied residential properties, for roosting. The most frequently encountered species is the Pipistrelle bat (*Pipistrellus*) and its abundant status in Wrexham is reflected throughout the UK.

4.0 Survey Methodology

- 4.1 The survey was conducted on the 13th May 2013, by Mr S Irwin who is an experienced bat ecologist who holds a CCW bat licence (No 36412: OTH:CSAB:2012: all counties of Wales), when the former chapel was inspected for potential places that may be of value to bats and if evidence of use was present. A loft space/roof void is present but could not be accessed, therefore the inspection focussed on the internal elevations, features and floors, which were diligently searched for signs of bat use that mainly includes droppings, urine stains or remains of prey items. The external elevations were investigated from ground level, with the aid of close focussing binoculars, for places that are frequently used by bats as roosts or as access into roost chambers

- 4.2 The survey was conducted at a time when bats are within their breeding season, and occupying their summer maternity roosts, which is the optimum time to investigate buildings/structures for evidence of use; survey methodology includes the following:-

Knowledge of bat species relevant to the site location and geographical range
Nature of the immediate and surrounding habitat in relation to foraging opportunities
Condition of the building
Presence/absence of roost potential
Value of roost potential – if present

- 4.3 During the survey the surrounding habitat was evaluated in relation to bats as very often roost selection is closely correlated with the surrounding habitat.

5.0 Constraints

- 5.1 The survey was conducted within the breeding season of bats and a full appraisal and inspection of the building was achievable in relation to assessing the level of bat roost potential that may exist. Taking this into consideration it is considered that there were no survey constraints that would prevent the gathering of information on which to base conclusions and recommendations.

6.0 Results

- 6.1 The building, which is a former chapel; it stands within its own grounds on Smithy Road within the village of Coedpoeth amidst an urban environment in the district of Wrexham. The former chapel has a history dating back to 1800's but is now redundant from its original purpose, the immediate landscape consists mainly of occupied residential properties along with associated gardens and nearby open green spaces are also evident. Within 500 metres the extending habitat becomes more rural but is not directly connected to the site by linear features such as hedge, tree lines. However, some species such as Pipistrelle are not as dependant upon such features as other bat species. Taking into consideration the aforementioned landscapes there is a sufficient level of foraging habitat in the locality of the chapel to support Pipistrelle bats. Where such habitat is present close to buildings then the percentage use of those buildings, by bats, increases given that roost opportunities are available and vice versa.



Location of the former Chapel and immediate habitat

- 6.2 The chapel is a large dressed stone built structure with a slate roof and the ceiling is vaulted; a hatch is present in the ceiling but due to its height the loft or void could not be accessed. Although a loft or void is present the habitat is not entirely suited to loft dwelling bats; typically Brown Long Eared (*Plecotus auritus*) and as a result the potential for their presence, is significantly reduced, as this is a species that favours a more woodland environment close to their chosen roost site. Within the interior of the building no evidence of bats was located but evidence of crevice dwelling bats is not always evident, particularly where ceilings are well formed and are absent of gaps that allow bats to gain access into the interior of a building.
- 6.3 At the rear of the main building a single storey extension is present but no access into the loft or void exists; however for the previously mentioned reasons potential for true loft dwelling bats is considered to be low.

- 6.4 During the external inspection several areas were identified that hold potential for crevice dwelling bats, i.e. gaps at the roof verges where mortar pointing has perished, gaps at ridge tiles and slipped or missing slates. Although no obvious evidence of bat use was located the building is considered to be of moderate – high value in relation to bat roosting opportunities.
- 6.5 Whilst undertaking the bat related inspection the building and the land was also assessed in relation any other ecological factors, including nesting birds that show a high dependency upon built structures. On the day of the survey no nesting birds were noted and potential is generally low although there are opportunities for hole dwelling species; furthermore the land holds no habitats that are of ecological importance.

7.0 Conclusions

- 7.1 Although evidence of bat use was not located during the daytime investigation, roost potential and ingress opportunities for crevice dwelling bats has been identified within the structures, notably within the roof verges and ridge tiles. The presence of true loft dwelling bats is considered to be low – absent.
- 7.2 The bat roost potential for bats that has been identified at the buildings could be used for more than one roost purpose i.e. breeding, occasional/transitional use and over the hibernation season. The value of roost potential is considered as being moderate – high and the combination of suitable foraging habitat and the level of bat roost potential that is present will instigate recommendations for dusk and/or dawn surveys to be undertaken at the building prior to any work schedule being undertaken.

8.0 Recommendations & Implications

- 8.1 For the reasons outlined in the survey results, it is recommended that nocturnal emergence and/or dawn re-entry surveys are required prior to any work being undertaken. The surveys will need to be conducted during the main active season of bats i.e. between May – August and where bat roost potential is moderate – high then three dusk and/or dawn surveys are generally required as bats, particularly Pipistrelle, often alternate between roosts and do not necessarily occupy a single roost over the entire breeding season. (See Figure 1: Extract from Bat Conservation Bat Surveys: Good Practice Guidelines)

Table 8.5 Minimum number of presence/absence survey visits required to provide confidence in negative preliminary roost assessment results from buildings, built structures and trees in summer

High roost potential	Low to moderate roost potential	Low roost potential
3 dusk emergence and/or pre-dawn re-entry surveys during May to September Optimum period May – August	2 dusk emergence and/or pre-dawn re-entry surveys during May to September Optimum period May – August.	1 dusk emergence and/or pre-dawn re-entry survey during May to September Optimum period May – August.
If bats are discovered emerging from any of the buildings during surveys, the survey schedule should be appropriately adjusted to increase the survey effort so that sufficient information can be collected.		
Note: two surveys carried out within the same 24 hour period constitute 1 survey		

- 8.2 It should be noted that where bat/s or their roost/place of rest/shelter will be affected by developments, then the work at the site will be delayed until such time that a Welsh Assembly Development Licence is applied for and granted to allow the work to legally commence. Notwithstanding the granting of a licence works that would affect a roost cannot take place whilst a maternity colony is in occupation.

APPENDIX I Site Photographs



Exterior & Interior of Chapel



Gaps in extension roof void, slipped slates & roof verge on main building