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Formby Business Centre, 42 Duke Street, Formby, Merseyside, L37 4AT

Tel: 01704 875781 Mobile: 07719 108429

Email address: stan@tyrer-ecologicalconsultants.co.uk
kylee@tyrer-ecologicalconsultants.co.uk

**New Gate Farm and Braeside, Whitchurch Road, Bangor on Dee, LL13 0BL
Inspection & Assessment in Relation to Bats**

Prepared for:

Blueprint Architectural Services
Office 3k4, Redwither Tower
Abbey Road
Wrexham Industrial Estate
Wrexham
LL13 9XR

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Summary

A planning application regarding the semi detached properties referred to as Newgate Farm and Braeside, proposes the significant renovation and extension of the existing dwellings to bring them up to modern energy efficient standards. The Tyrer Partnership was therefore commissioned to undertake a daytime assessment of the properties in relation to bats which was conducted during January 2016.

The internal inspection revealed that the buildings feature loft spaces, however, as a consequence of their extremely limited nature they are considered as being highly unfavourable for utilisation by void dwelling bats such as the Lesser Horseshoe (*Rhinolophus hipposideros*) or Brown long-eared bat (*Plecotus auritus*), which are species that favour large, undisturbed and sufficiently dark loft spaces that allow free flight – particularly in terms of a maternity roost; furthermore, no evidence of use was found by these bat species during the inspection.

Underfelt was found to be absent beneath the roof slates; the presence of such insulating materials – most often underfelt beneath roof slates/tiles can provide opportunity for crevice dwelling species, whereby they often roost between tiles/slates and roof lining materials, provided external access exists. However, during the external assessment it was noted that the building is largely devoid of ingress opportunity for crevice dwelling bats.

Externally, minor areas were identified at the hip tiles which appear to be superficial and one localised area to the southerly roof verge of one of the properties whereby mortar is absent; bats can use such features for ingress and refuge.

In conclusion Newgate Farm / Braeside can be categorised as offering less than low potential for bats; consequentially, further survey work in the form of dusk emergence surveys will not be recommended. Notwithstanding this, purely as a precautionary measure and due to the limited gaps identified, it is recommended that said features are carefully dismantled under the supervision of a licensed bat ecologist. If during the supervision works or at any other time anytime bat/s is/are or evidence of use encountered then as a legal requirement work should immediately cease and advice sought from the bat ecologist.

Based upon the results of the survey a data search of localised bat records was not considered necessary or justified.

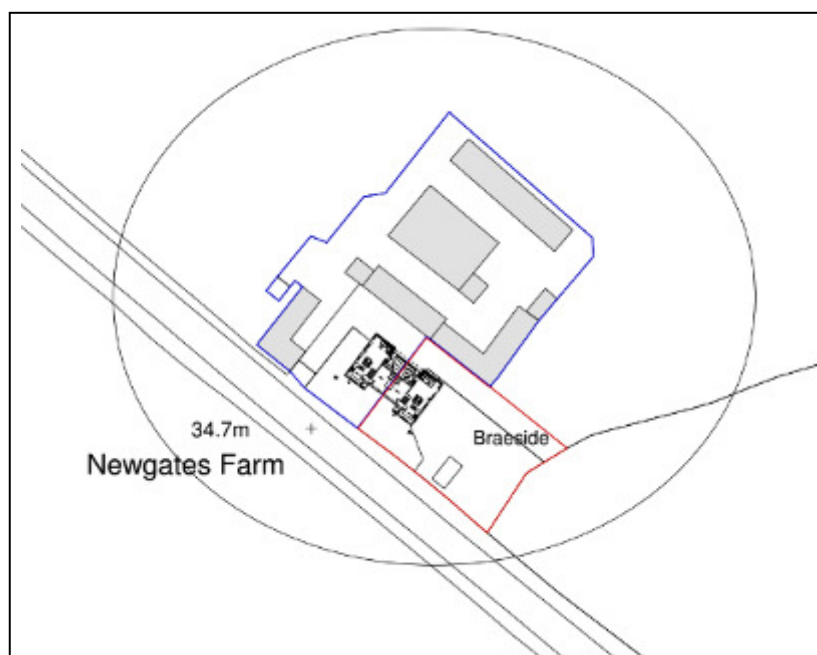
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1.0 Introduction & Reason for Survey

- 1.1 As part of a proposed planning application regarding two semi detached properties referred to as Newgates Farm and Braeside, Whitchurch Road, Bangor on Dee, an inspection and assessment was undertaken in relation to bats. Blueprint Architectural Services commissioned the inspection and report on behalf of the site owner. It is understood that the proposals involve the remodelling of the north elevation to facilitate the proposed extension followed by extensive renovation work to the existing buildings to bring them inline with modern energy efficient standards. 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.



Site plan with proposed alterations to Newgate Farm/Braeside

- 1.2 The aim of the inspection was to initially ascertain if Newgates Farm and Braeside are of value to bats; if they were found to be suitable for bats, signs of use were located or the results of the survey were inconclusive then more detailed surveys would be recommended i.e. dusk/dawn emergence/re-entry surveys during the main active season of bats which is May – August. If bat/s or their roost/place of rest/shelter will be subsequently affected by the work then a Natural Resources Wales Development Licence would be required to legally proceed with the development.
- 1.3 The optimum time to investigate any structure 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 Protected Species

- 2.1 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.
- 2.2 *Planning Policy Wales* (PPW) (2002) sets out the land use planning policies of the Welsh Government (WG). It is supplemented by a series of Technical Advice Notes (TANs). Procedural advice is given in National Assembly for Wales / Welsh Office circulars. PPW, Ministerial Interim Planning Policy Statements (MIPPS), the TANs and circulars together comprise national planning policy to which local planning authorities in Wales must have regard in the preparation of development plans.
- 2.3 Detailed advice on the preparation of unitary development plans (UDPs) is contained in *Unitary Development Plans Wales*, 2001. Detailed advice on the preparation of Local Development Plans (LDPs) under the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 is given in *Local Development Plans Wales*, 2005.
- 2.4 Technical Advice Note (TAN 5 2009) provides advice about how the land use planning system should contribute to protecting and enhancing biodiversity and geological conservation.
This guidance note should be read in conjunction with *Planning Policy Wales* (2002), in particular with Chapter 5 *Conserving and Improving the Natural Heritage and Coast* which sets out the Assembly Government's objectives for the natural heritage and the land use planning policies which support these.

When determining planning applications, local planning authorities should aim to conserve and enhance biodiversity by applying the following principles:-

If significant harm resulting from a development cannot be avoided (through locating on an alternative site with less harmful impacts), adequately mitigated, or, as a last resort, compensated for, then planning permission should be refused

2.5 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” 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 Protected Species in North Wales

- 3.1 Up to eleven bat species have been recorded in North Wales, 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 North Wales reflected throughout the UK.

4.0 Survey Methodology

- 4.1 BCT Survey Good Practice Survey Guidelines state:

The guidance should be interpreted and adapted on a case-by-case basis, according to the expert judgement of those involved. There is no substitute for knowledge and experience in survey planning, methodology and interpretation of findings, and these guidelines are intended to support these. Where examples are given they are descriptive rather than prescriptive.

- 4.2 The daytime survey was conducted on the 26th January 2017 when Newgate Farm / Braeside were inspected for potential places that may be of value to bats and if evidence of use was present. The external elevations were investigated from ground floor level with close focussing binoculars for places that are frequently used by bats as roosts or ingress points providing access into roost chambers. The dwellings feature limited loft spaces which were inspected from access hatch using a high powered torch.

- 4.2 The survey was conducted by Ms K. Swift MSc Conservation Management, an experienced ecologist and bat surveyor, who holds a Class 2 Natural England Bat Licence (22801-CLS) but more relevant the site is an accredited agent on the NRW bat licence held by Mr S Irwin. The results, conclusions, and recommendations have been assessed by Mr Irwin who is director of The Tyrer Partnership and his assessment concurs with that of Ms Swift.

- 4.3 The results, conclusions and recommendations are based on a number of factors i.e.

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

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

- 4.5 Based upon the results of the survey a data search of localised bat records was not considered necessary or justified.

5.0 Constraints

- 5.1 The daytime survey was conducted outside of the active period and breeding season, when bats are within their period of hibernation. This is a time when summer roosts such as maternity colonies have dispersed and bats only occasionally emerge from torpor for vital replenishment. Due to this seasonal timing evidence of use by bats on the exterior of buildings is often absent, having been removed by weather elements.
- 5.2 Two Loft spaces were present within the structures, however both of which could not be accessed due to their restrictive in height, however, features and attributes in relation to bats could be recorded via the view attained from the access hatch.
- 5.3 All external features at the building could be assessed and consequently, an appraisal was achievable in relation to assessing the level of bat roost potential that may exist.

6.0 Results

- 6.1 The sizeable building comprises of two semi detached properties referred to as Newgates Farm and Braeside; they are located adjacent to the busy rural Whitchurch Road, a thoroughfare linking Bangor on Dee to Whitchurch. The dwellings are located in a predominantly rural setting just over 3.5 kilometres south east of Bangor on Dee and are one of several similar rural properties and enterprises sparsely interspersed within rural farmland within the vicinity. Despite fronting the roadside, the immediate rural landscape is highly modified under the influence of modern agriculture but retains a favourable level of semi-natural cover which comprises broadleaved woodland, hedgerow, linear / scattered mature tree, and freshwater bodies incorporating ponds of varying size in relatively close proximity and rivers with associated riparian habitats. The aforementioned semi-natural environs form a long-established local ecological network which is highly likely to provide a valuable resource by offering suitable habitat and access to the further landscape.
- 6.2 The habitat as described can be considered to be of high value for the species for which the survey was undertaken i.e. bats. Where such habitat is present close to built structures then the percentage use of those structures, by bats increases, given that roost opportunities are available and vice versa.



Location of Newgates Farm/ Braeside amid the surrounding landscape

- 6.3 Newgates Farm / Braeside comprises a two storey detached structure divided internally into two independent dwellings; it is of brick construction with partial render finish and slate covered hipped roof. The properties have been unoccupied for some time and prior to this have not had any form of integrated heating system. Internally, two small loft spaces are present and found to be identical in their dimensions and current attributes; they were found to be to estimated dimensions of 8 metres long x 2 metres wide x 0.5 metres high and are centrally partitioned. As a consequence of the extremely limited nature of these areas combined with dense Rockwool insulation it is considered as being highly unfavourable for utilisation by void dwelling bats such as the Lesser Horseshoe Bat (*Rhinolophus hipposideros*) and Brown long-eared (*Plecotus auritus*), which are species' that favour large, undisturbed and sufficiently dark loft spaces that allow free flight – particularly in terms of a maternity roost; furthermore, no evidence of use was found by these bat species during the inspection.
- 6.4 Throughout the inspection it was noted that underfelt is absent beneath the slate roof; the presence of such insulating materials beneath a primary roof covering can provide opportunities for crevice dwelling species, whereby they often roost between tiles/slates and roof lining materials, provided external access exists. The breeding roosts of Pipistrelle bats are proportionally higher in occupied residential dwellings where the warm, dry conditions favour the requirements of a maternity colony but other structures are also used, especially for hibernation or by male bats which do not need the same conditions as a maternity colony. During the investigation historic or recent evidence that would suggest the presence of this or any other crevice dwelling species was not located, however, this can often be the case due to their preference for crevice situations.

- 6.5 During the external assessment it was noted that the building is largely devoid of ingress opportunity for bat species or roosting opportunities with roof slates and hip tiles noted to be largely tight fitting. Notwithstanding this, a minor gap is present where mortar is absent to the south verge of the property referred to as New Gate Farm. Furthermore, the corner hip tiles to both roof pitches appear raised and the depth of any gap present could not be ascertained from ground level. Other typical external facets favoured by crevice dwelling bats that would include soffit/fascia/boards are absent and the eaves tight fitting, as a result will deny bat access.

7.0 Conclusions

- 7.1 From the survey results it can be concluded that the buildings would not meet the typical requirements of loft dwelling species despite some of the immediate / surrounding habitat being considered as favourable for these species specific foraging requirements and no recent or historic evidence of use was identified.
- 7.2 Minor and very limited potential appears to be present beneath the hip tiles and a single section of the south roof verge at New Gate Farm; the status of the building is categorised as offering less than low bat roost potential and dusk/dawn surveys will not be recommended. In the context of bat roost potential, the proposed works are unlikely to impact upon crevice dwelling bat species; however, purely as a precautionary measure supervision work will be recommended prior to any work commencing that will affect the areas outlined with section 6.5.

8.0 Daytime Survey Recommendations

- 8.1 Due to the limited bat roost potential, and purely as a precautionary measure, it is recommended that prior to the commencement of the proposed work at the buildings taking place, a licensed bat ecologist should further inspect the identified areas at the roof and supervise the careful and controlled removal of the identified hip tiles as identified at 6.5 and the area surrounding the gap identified on the south facing verge following a strict methodology. A safe means of access will be required to fulfil the investigations. If, in the event that bat/s and/or evidence of use is/are found during those procedures the area/s will need to be made good to its/their original condition and the bat/s if present left in situ. Dusk/dawn surveys will then be required and undertaken during the main active season of bats i.e. May- August
- 8.2 It should be noted that where bat/s or their roost/place of rest/shelter will be affected by the proposed works, then to allow work at the site to legally continue, an application for a Natural Resources Wales Development Licence will be required. As part of the licence procedure additional information would be required to establish species and status of the roost by undertaking dusk or/and dawn surveys over the breeding season of bats i.e. May - August. Notwithstanding the granting of a licence works that would affect a roost cannot take place if a maternity colony is in occupation. It should also be noted that before a licence can be applied for all Planning issues including Consent and any pre-commencement Planning Conditions relative to bats should be resolved.

- 8.3 As part of Wrexham Councils biodiversity strategy provisions and in line with Technical Advice Note (TAN 5 2009) which provides advice about how the land use planning system should contribute to protecting and enhancing biodiversity and geological conservation. Provision for the crevice dwelling Pipistrelle bat could be incorporated into the new development as enhancement; subject to elevation drawings being made available suggestions for this purpose can be provided by the ecologist.

APPENDIX I –

Site Photographs



Front elevation of Braeside



Front elevation of Newgate Farm with gap at verge visible



Rear elevation of Newgate Farm and Braeside



Loft spaces at Newgate Farm / Braeside



Absence of any lining visible



Slightly raised hip tiles