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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

Proposed Alterations at Sunnycroft, Borrass Commonwood, Wrexham
Inspection & Assessment in Relation to Bats & Breeding Birds

Prepared for:

Blueprint Architectural Services
Office 3K4
Redwither Business Tower
Abbey Road
Wrexham
LL13 9XT

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Summary

As part of the planning application process at Sunnycroft, Borrass Commonwood, Blueprint Architectural Services on behalf of the site owner commissioned the Tyrer Partnership (Ecological Consultants) to undertake an initial daytime survey to ascertain its value in relation to bat roost potential/nesting birds and if evidence of either species was present.

The survey was conducted on 28th August 2015 when the buildings that form part the application were inspected for potential places that may be of value to bats and if evidence of use was present. Upper floors do not exist and as a result the breeding potential for loft dwelling bats is absent. The exterior elevations were investigated from ground floor level, with the aid of close focussing binoculars, for places that are frequently used by bats as roosts or as access into roost chambers.

The daytime survey was conducted by Mr S. Irwin who is a highly experienced bat ecologist and holds a current NRW bat licence. During the internal and external inspection no evidence of recent or historic bat use was located. The localised habitat will provide valuable foraging and commuting opportunities for several bat species.

Evidence of use by crevice dwelling species was not observed, and typical places favoured by this species are absent.

No further surveys or recommendations are applicable in respect to bats.

There are no current implications in relation to nesting birds that would prevent the work taking place and the proposals would not result in the loss of a site that is used by notable species such as barn owls for breeding or roosting purposes.

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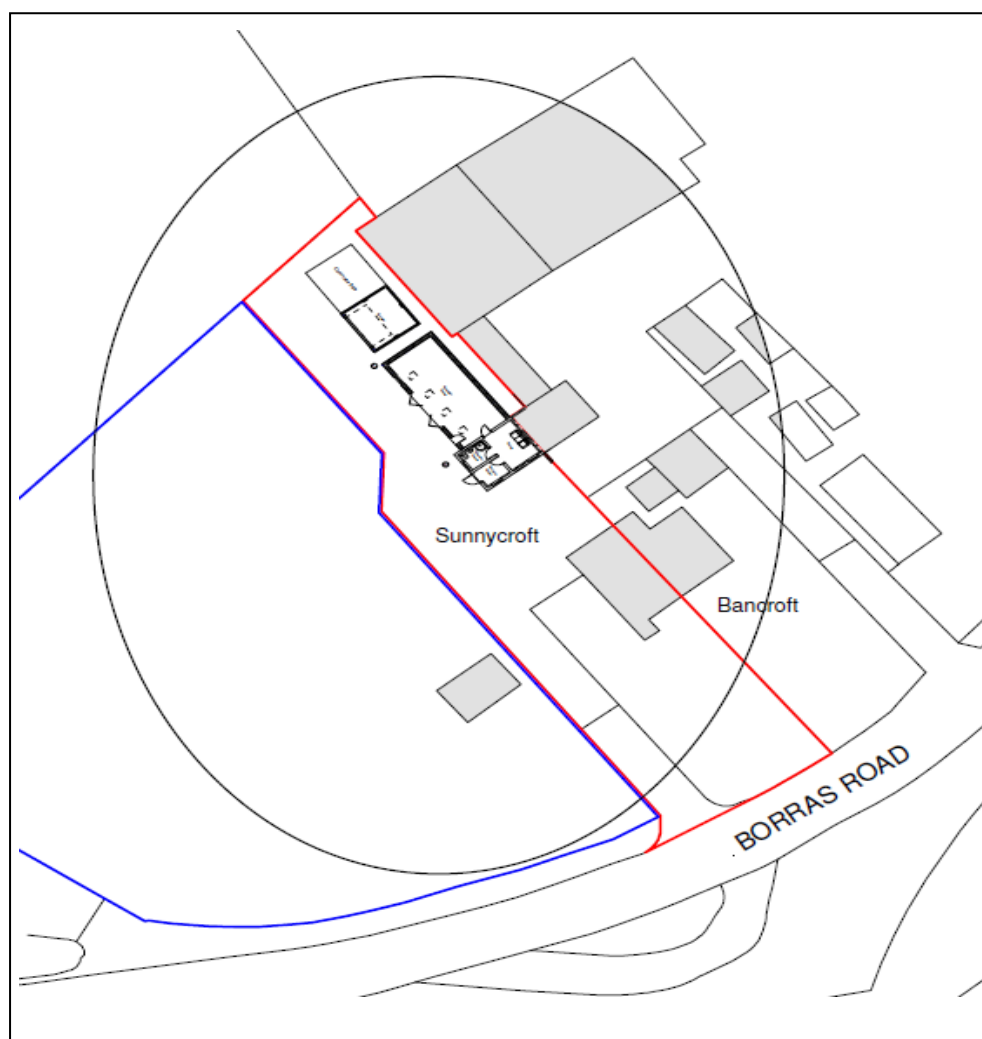
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1.0 Introduction & Reason for Survey

- 1.1 As part of a proposed planning application at Sunnycroft an inspection and assessment was undertaken in relation to bats and breeding birds. Blueprint Architectural Services commissioned the inspection and report on behalf of the site owner; it is understood that the proposals involve the alteration of the single storey building and demolition of the former pig sty. 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.



Proposed site plan at Sunnycroft

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- 1.2 The aim of the inspection was to initially ascertain if the buildings are of value to bats or breeding birds; if they were found to be suitable for bats, signs of use were located or the survey was 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 is subsequently affected by the work then a Welsh Assembly Development Licence would be required to 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. 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 Governments 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.

- 2.6 All wild birds (with only minor exceptions) and their nests whilst being built or containing eggs or dependant young are protected under the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). Birds listed on Schedule 1 e.g. barn owls are afforded a greater level of protection. Where nesting birds are present then work should be timed outside of the nesting season (March – August) so as to avoid disturbance.

3.0 Bat 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 is reflected throughout the UK.
- 3.2 Barn owls are regularly recorded within North Wales where an agricultural matrix that includes suitable bank sides of drainage ditches or rough pasture that will provide habitat for their main prey i.e. small mammals; however they are constantly under threat from loss of habitat and nest sites, which is a situation that is mirrored throughout most of the UK.

4.0 Survey Methodology

- 4.1 The daytime survey was conducted on 28th August 2015 when the buildings that are part of the planning application were inspected for potential places that may be of value to bats and if evidence of use was present. Upper floors are absent therefore the ground floor and internal walls were inspected with the aid of a high powered torch for evidence of use such as droppings or prey remains. The exterior elevations were investigated from ground floor 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 daytime survey was conducted by Mr S.Irwin a highly experienced surveyor, who holds a current NRW bat licence.

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- 4.3 The inspection for nesting birds, notably barn owls, was conducted in tandem with the investigation for bats when most generalised bird species will have completed their nesting cycle. External elevations and the interior of the buildings were inspected for signs of use which would include active or disused nests of general bird species or the presence of discarded barn owl pellets, feathers or typical splashes of white faeces on or around roosting places.
- 4.4 The results, conclusions and recommendations are based on a number of factors i.e.
- Practical experience of surveyor
 - Knowledge of species relevant to the site location and geographical distribution
 - Nature of the immediate and surrounding habitat in relation to foraging opportunities
 - Condition of the buildings
 - Presence/absence of a loft space
 - Presence/absence of roost/nesting potential
 - Value of roost/nesting potential – if present
- 4.5 During the survey the surrounding habitat was evaluated in relation to bats/barn owls as very often roost/nest selection is closely correlated with the surrounding habitat.

5.0 Constraints

- 5.1 The daytime survey was conducted towards the end of the main active period for bats when maternity colonies have generally dispersed into transitional roosts prior to the hibernation period. Most breeding birds are also at the end of their main breeding season; no access restrictions preventing assessment of all required building features arose. Consequently, a full appraisal and inspection of the building was achievable in relation to assessing the level of bat/bird roost/nesting potential that may exist.
- 5.2 Taking the above into consideration it is established that there were no survey constraints that would prevent the gathering of information on which to base conclusions and recommendations.

6.0 Daytime Results - Bats

- 6.1 The buildings for which the survey was undertaken are located within a rural setting environment approximately 4 kilometres north east of Wrexham town centre. The surveyed structures are located within the grounds of the main property by set back into the rear garden; the immediate habitat is represented by isolated residential dwellings and farms, tree/hedgerow, woodland, pasture and water bodies.
- 6.2 The aforementioned landscape is considered as being favourable for the species for which the survey was undertaken, i.e. bats and breeding birds. 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.
- 6.5 Building 1 (B1) for which the survey was undertaken is currently use for general storage purposes and accessed on a routine basis; it is of brick construction with a slate pitched roof and a loft space or upper floor is absent.

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- 6.6 Due to a lack of a loft the value of the building, relative to breeding potential for loft dwelling species such as Brown Long Eared (*Plecotus auritus*) is deemed absent as this is a species that favours a large, darkened and unrestricted area that allows free flight, with consistent warm and relatively stable temperatures. Despite some of the immediate and extending habitat being considered as offering some potential for the specific foraging requirements of this species no recent or historic evidence of use was observed during the investigation that would suggest use of B1 for any roost purpose. Similarly signs of use by other predominately loft dwelling species e.g. Lesser Horseshoe (*Rhinolophus Hipposideros*) was also absent.
- 6.7 During the inspection roof lining in the form of bitumen underfelt is evident; the presence of this material will increase the potential for crevice dwelling bats, typically Pipistrelle (*Pipistrellus*) as this is a species that is often found roosting between the two materials subject to external access being available. Despite the immediate and extending habitat meeting the needs of this species no evidence to suggest recent or historic use by these species was observed. However evidence of crevice dwelling bats is not always apparent due to the crevice dwelling nature.
- 6.8 The breeding roosts of Pipistrelle bats are proportionally higher in occupied residential dwellings were the warm, dry conditions favour the requirements of a maternity colony but structures such as the barn are also used, especially for hibernation or by male bats which do not need the same conditions as a maternity colony.
- 6.9 During the exterior inspection of B1 typical places often favoured by crevice dwelling bats such as roof slates / ridge tiles, soffit/fascia boards, are present but are of a tight fitting nature and the building is considered to be devoid of opportunities for bats.
- 6.10 The second structure (B2) is a former pig sty and holds no potential for either loft or crevice dwelling bat.
- 6.11 Although the some of the surrounding habitat is suitable for barn owls no recent or historic signs of use were observed in relation to breeding/roosting and the buildings are less than ideal as there are no cavities or secluded places to nest. Signs of other nesting birds that rely upon built structures, e.g. Swallows (*Hirundo rustica*), House martin (*Delichon urbica*) was, on the day of the survey, absent and potential is less than low.

7.0 Daytime Conclusions

- 7.1 Breeding opportunities for loft dwelling species are absent throughout both structures and no evidence was found to suggest their presence. Due to the absence of opportunities for this species and the unsuitability of the buildings it is considered the work will not impact upon loft dwelling bats.
- 7.2 As identified within the survey results no physical evidence has been identified which would suggest the presence of crevice dwelling bats. Furthermore, the interior and the exterior of the building is devoid of potential roost opportunities and the status of the building is categorised as being less than low relative to roost potential. Therefore the proposed works it is highly unlikely to the impact upon crevice dwelling bat species.

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- 7.3 There are no current implications in relation to barn owls or other nesting birds that would prevent the conversion of the building taking place and the proposals would not result in the loss of a site that is used by barn owls for breeding or roosting purposes.

8.0 Daytime Recommendations & Implications

- 8.1 Whilst there are no specific recommendations generic advice is provided in as much as if evidence of or actual bat/s is/are located (See Figure 1) at anytime during the course of the work then as a legal requirement all work should cease and a bat ecologist contacted for further advice.

Figure 1:



Plate 1: Pipistrelle droppings



Plate 2: Pipistrelle bat

**APPENDIX I –
Site Photographs**



B1

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B1

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B2