

Urban Tree Experts

BS5837 – Tree Surveys – Ecological Consulting

PRELIMINARY ECOLOGICAL APPRAISAL (BATS) AT FERNLEA SONNING



**Prepared for:
Mr & Mrs C Reimers
Fernlea
1 Garde Road
Sonning
RG4 6XJ**

23 December 2021

Ref: SPH/ET/PEA-21/16.12



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The validity of this report ceases at the prescribed time limit or after 12 months from the site inspection, or if the site conditions change due to unspecified works that affect the site whichever is the sooner.



Executive Summary

Urban Tree Experts was commissioned by Mr & Mrs C Reimers to conduct a preliminary ecological appraisal (bats) at Fernlea, 1 Garde Road, Sonning, Reading, RG4 6XJ. This is to support a forthcoming planning application to Wokingham Borough Council that will seek to raising the roof to create a first floor over the entire property.

The site visit was carried out on Thursday 16 December 2021 at 12 noon, during daylight hours. An internal and external inspection of the property took place, to look for signs of bats.

The preliminary ecological appraisal (bats) comprised a detailed search of the interior and exterior of the property and attached garage for bats, signs of bats and features suitable for use by roosting bats. This includes droppings, internally or externally, scratch marks, rubbing and staining at exit holes, live or dead bats and other features such as missing tiles, this list is not exhaustive.

A desk top study was conducted prior to the survey to review existing information about the site and its surroundings and to inform the design of subsequent bat surveys, if required. The desk top study was conducted based upon a 2km search radius and it revealed that two statutory designated sites are located within, and no current European Protected Species Licences (EPSLs) are located within the search radius of the proposed development site.

Internally and externally, there was no evidence of bats (current or historically) within the property. The building is in a good condition with no visible roosting opportunities or access points which could be utilised by bats.

Due to the absence of roosting potential and the lack of evidence of bats found during the detailed inspection, it is concluded that there is negligible potential for roosting bats to be present within the property. Based on the recommendations in the Bat Workers Manual and the Bat Surveys Good Practice Guidelines prior to works, no further survey effort is required.



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1. Introduction

1.1 Instruction

Urban Tree Experts was instructed by Mr & Mrs C Reimers to conduct a preliminary ecological appraisal of Fernlea, 1 Garde Road, Sonning, Reading, RG4 6XJ to support a forthcoming planning application to Wokingham Borough Council.

1.2 Aims and Objectives

The preliminary ecological appraisal (bats) is designed to:

- Identify the presence/likely absence of bats within the building.
- Provide information on the status of bats using the building (currently or previously).
- To add confidence where no bats are found, or to categorise the nature of a roost where evidence of bats are found.
- To establish whether further surveys, mitigation or an EPSL is required.

The preliminary ecological appraisal (bats) and report writing were carried out in accordance with Bat Surveys for Professional Ecologists: Good Practice Guidelines (3rd edition, Bat Conservation Trust, 2016).

1.3 Proposed Works

The survey was commissioned in connection with a forthcoming planning application to Wokingham Borough Council that will seek to c Wokingham Borough Council that will seek to raising the roof to create a first floor over the entire property.

1.4 Surveyor Background and Experience

The preliminary ecological appraisal for bats was completed by Emma Turnbull and the report was written by Simon Holmes CEnv. Emma holds a Class 2 Bat Licence (CLS-41628) and has been surveying bats for four years. She has received training in surveying techniques, bat detector use, echolocation analysis and bat biology and identification.

Simon holds Class 3 (CL19) and 4 Bat (CL20) Licenses (Nos. 17637 and 17638) and a Science and Education license (SCI29096). He has 31 years' experience of carrying out bat surveys and bat conservation work.

2. Legislation and Planning Policy

2.1 Legislative Background

All species of British bat are protected under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 and the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, as amended. Under this legislation it is an offence to kill or injure a bat or interfere with any roosting or resting site. A bat roost is interpreted as "*any structure or place used for shelter or protection*" whether or not bats are present at the time. A summary of the main legislation and planning considerations are included at Appendix 1.

Seven species of bat are also Species of Principal Importance for nature conservation in England under Section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006. This places a duty on all government departments to have regard for the conservation of these species and on the Secretary of State to further, or promote others to further, the conservation of these species.



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3. Site Location and Description

3.1 Site Location

The building is located at Grid Reference SU 7634 7510, see Figure 1 below. An overview of the immediate area is shown on Figure 2, courtesy of Bing Maps.

Figure 1. Fernlea, 1 Garde Road, Sonning, highlighted.

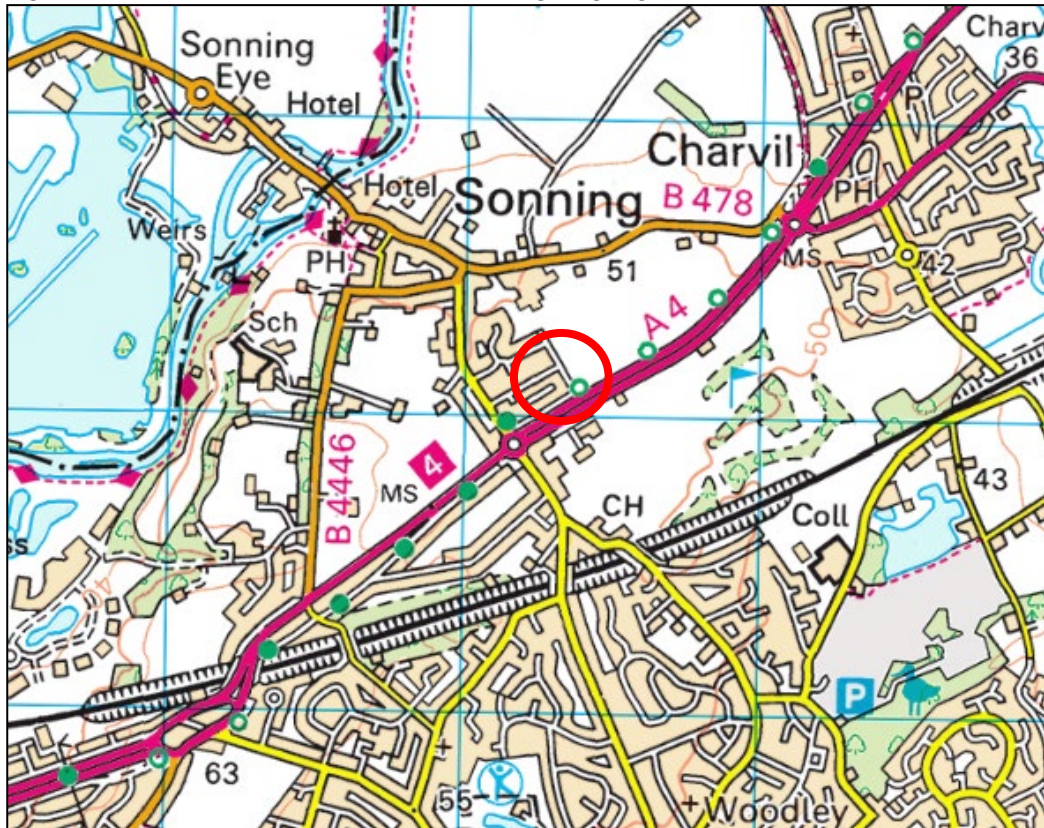
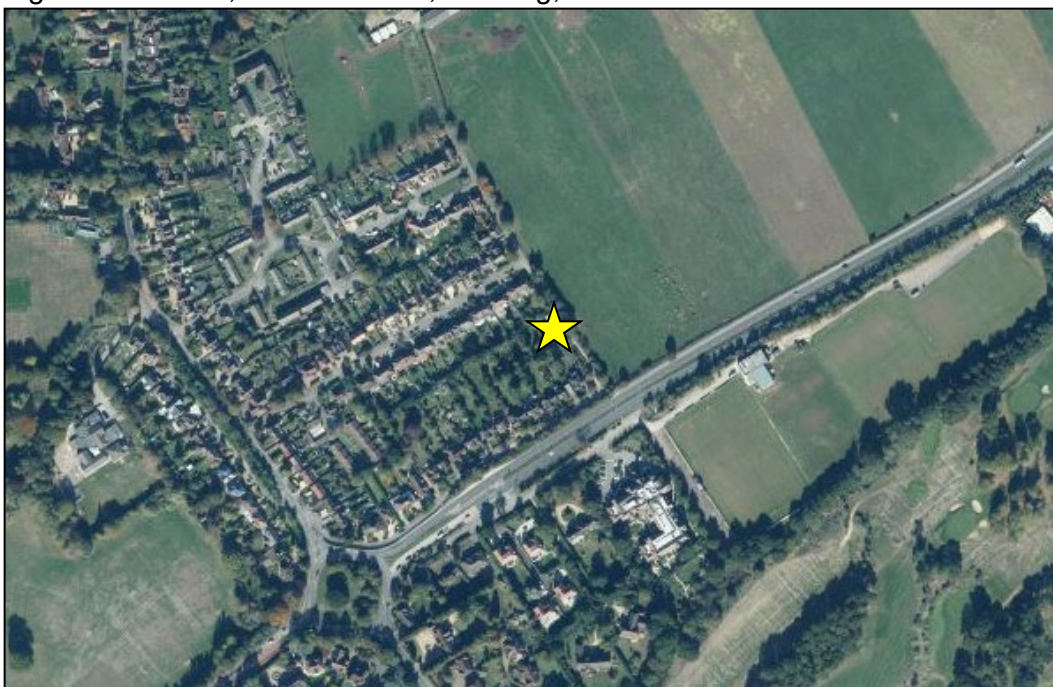


Figure 2. Fernlea, 1 Garde Road, Sonning, overview of the immediate area.





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3.2 Site Description

The application site comprises a detached, brick-built dwelling with attached garage. The remainder of the site comprises an in-out driveway to the front with, at the rear, a mature garden, the majority of which is laid to lawn, with mature shrubs, trees and hedgerows around the boundaries, see Figure 3 below. The site itself offers some foraging and commuting habitat for bats.

Figure 3. Rear garden. Fernlea, 1 Garde Road, Sonning. 16.12.21



4. Survey Methodology

4.1 Pre-Survey Data Search

Google Earth and MAGIC maps (magic.defra.gov.uk) websites were used prior to the survey to determine the suitability of the surrounding habitat to support roosting bats and to identify any statutory designated sites within 2km of the site. Due to the urbanised area, scale of the proposed development, and the very local impact that may occur, no data was sought from local records center at this time.

The property is situated on the edge of the village of Sonning and is adjacent to properties of varying sizes and styles. Immediately to the front (north east) is agricultural land/improved grassland and, almost immediately to the south is the main A4 trunk road and, 550 metres further south a railway line, which is tree and scrub lined providing good habitat for commuting and foraging bats. To the south and east lies Sonning Golf club and to the west is Reading Hockey club which comprises several playing fields. These areas are likely to provide some commuting habitat for bats and are within travelling distance for bats. The River Thames lies 1.3km to the west of the site and provides good foraging and roosting habitat for bats, and further north and east are areas of farmland, woodland and freshwater lakes although there is limited ecological connectivity to these areas from the proposed development site.



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Ali's Pond Local Nature Reserve (LNR), and Alder Moors LNR lie within 2km of the proposed development site, although there is limited ecological connectivity from the site to these statutory designated sites.

A search of the Magic interactive website revealed no current EPSLs for bats have been granted within 2km of the site however, there were 3 expired EPSLs.

4.2 Daylight Survey

The preliminary ecological appraisal (bats) of the property at Fernlea, 1 Garde Road, Sonning, Reading RG4 6XJ was carried out by Emma Turnbull on Thursday 16 December 2021 at 12 noon. The weather conditions for the survey were overcast with a temperature of 12 degrees. Equipment used included a high-powered torch, a digital camera on a telescopic pole and a ladder.

During the preliminary ecological appraisal (bats), an internal and external inspection of the property and garage was carried out to identify any signs of occupation by bats and features that could offer potential roosting sites following standard survey guidelines. Features investigated included:

- Construction of the building – soffits, loft space, tiles/slates, lead flashings etc.
- Building condition – structure of roof and walls.
- Internal conditions – microclimate stability, draughts etc.
- Access points – potential entry and exit points for bats.
- Roosting points – cracks and crevices, between underlay and roofing tiles/slates.

Field signs that would indicate the presence of bats were searched for. These included:

- Bat droppings on the floor and walls of the building.
- Feeding remains (particularly butterfly and moth wings).
- Evidence of urine and/or oily staining around possible roost entrances.
- Presence of areas cleared of cobwebs.
- Where a breathable roofing membrane has been fitted staining on the membrane may suggest use by bats.
- Odour can sometimes suggest the present of bats.
- Squeaking and chattering can reveal bats roosting between the tiles and roofing underlay.

Buildings or structures that were not to be affected by the current proposals or with no bat roosting potential were not inspected.

4.3 Constraints

Full access to the site during the visit was made possible by the occupant. Part of the under eaves storage spaces could not be accessed and therefore these areas could not be fully inspected. However, given the good condition of the roof externally, this was not thought to be a significant constraint.



5. Survey Findings

5.1 External Inspection

The external features of the property and garage were examined for signs described in section 4.2. Exposed features around the windows, fascias and walls were inspected for any evidence of bat droppings or staining.

The property is of brick construction, with cavity walls and is in a good condition externally. The multi pitched roof of the building is covered in close fitting tiles, none of which are missing or broken, see Figure 4 below. The ridge and hip tiles are all closely fitted with no gaps, as are the verges, see Figure 5 on page 9. There is a flat roofed rear section that is covered in bitumen felt (see Figure 6 on page 9), all of which was also in a good condition with no rips or tears in which roosting bats could exploit, see Figure 7 on page 10. The uPVC soffits and fascias around the property are all in a good condition with no cracks or splits in which bats could access to roost, see Figure 8 on page 10. There are several dormer windows within the roof that have sections of hanging tiles all of which are tightly fitted with no gaps or access for roosting bats, see Figure 9 on page 11.

There is an attached garage to the side of the property, see Figure 10 on page 11. The roof of the garage is sloping and is covered in bitumen felt, all of which is tightly fitted with no gaps in which bats could utilise for roosting, see Figure 11 on page 12.

No bats or evidence of bats was recorded during the external inspection of the property or garage and externally there are no obvious visible features on the buildings which could be utilised by roosting bats.

Figure 4. Example of roof tiles. Fernlea, 1 Garde Road, Sonning. 16.12.21





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Figure 5. Example of ridge/hip tiles and sealed verges. Fernlea, 1 Garde Road, Sonning. 16.12.21



Figure 6. View of rear of property showing flat roof section. Fernlea, 1 Garde Road, Sonning. 16.12.21





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Figure 7. Roof covering on rear flat roof section. Fernlea, 1 Garde Road, Sonning. 16.12.21



Figure 8. Example soffits/fascias. Fernlea, 1 Garde Road, Sonning. 16.12.21





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Figure 9. Example hanging tiles on dormers. Fernlea, 1 Garde Road, Sonning. 16.12.21



Figure 10. The attached garage. Fernlea, 1 Garde Road, Sonning. 16.12.21





Figure 11. Bitumen covering garage roof. Fernlea, 1 Garde Road, Sonning. 16.12.21



5.2 Internal Inspection

An internal inspection of the property and garage was undertaken, and they were examined for any signs of bats (as described in section 4.2).

There was only one accessible eaves storage area in the property. The under eaves area contained plumbing and electrical service runs and is fully insulated and partially boarded, see examples at Figure 12 on page 13. The tiles were lined with bitumen felt, all of which was in a good condition with no rips or tears, see Figure 12 on page 13.

The garage had no loft space, and the roof was lined with timber sarking, see at Figure 13 on page 13.

No bats or evidence of bats was recorded during the internal inspection of the property or garage and internally there appeared to be no roosting opportunities for bats.



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Figure 12. Examples of loft spaces. Fernlea, 1 Garde Road, Sonning. 16.12.21



Figure 12. Internal view of garage and roof. Fernlea, 1 Garde Road, Sonning. 16.12.21





6. Evaluation

The bat roost potential of the features within the site have been assessed with reference to the criteria laid out in the Bat Mitigation Guidelines (Mitchell-Jones, 2004). These criteria are listed on pages 13 and 14 with the features **highlighted in bold**.

The likelihood of bat roosts being present will be higher where structures:

- are of a pre-20th Century construction;
- are in a lowland rural setting;
- **have woodland, mature trees, species-rich grassland and water nearby;**
- have large dimension roof timbers with cracks, joints and holes;
- have numerous crevices in stonework and structures;
- have an uneven roof covering with gaps, though not too draughty;
- have hanging tiles or roof cladding, especially on south-facing walls;
- **have a roof warmed by the sun;**
- are disused or little used; largely undisturbed;
- provide appropriate hibernation conditions, such as abandoned mines, tunnels, kilns, or fortifications; or
- Recent and **historical records of bat roosts in the general area.**

The likelihood of bat roosts being present will be lower where structures:

- are in an urban setting with little green space;
- are subject to heavy disturbance (constant movement due to draughts and noise, also unstable microclimate);
- **have a small, cluttered roof void (particularly for brown long-eared);**
- **are of a modern construction with few gaps or crevices that bats can fly or crawl through (though pipistrelle bats may still be present);**
- are comprised of prefabricated steel or sheet materials; (some sections);
- are active industrial premises.

Please note that the above list provides generic screening criteria only and there are exceptions to consider.

7. Conclusions

7.1 Interpretation

The combined evidence from the internal and external inspection at the property and garage provides a high level of confidence in support of the opinions as set out in this report. The lack of visible features externally in which bats could roost or access the property to roost and the lack of evidence internally indicating that bats have not roosted, combined with the features highlighted in Section 6 lead me to conclude that the building has a negligible potential to support roosting bats. Based on recommendations in the Bat Workers Manual and the Bat Surveys Good Practice Guidelines, no further survey effort is required.

7.2 Contingency Plan

In the unlikely event that bats are found during the proposed works, all work must stop, and advice sought from Urban Tree Experts or another licensed bat ecologist.

If, for whatever reason, there is a time delay of greater than 12 months between this survey and the commencement of work, then the survey should be repeated as the condition of the building may have changed and bats may start roosting at the site.



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8. References

Collins, J (2016). Bat Surveys for Professional Ecologists: Good Practice Guidelines (3rd Edition). Bat Conservation Trust (BCT), London.
HM Government (2017) Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations.
HM Government (1981) The Wildlife and Countryside Act.
HM Government (2006) Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act.
Mitchell-Jones, A.J. & McLeish, A.P. (1999). Bat Workers' Manual (2nd Edition). Joint Nature Conservancy Committee, Peterborough.

9. Queries

Any queries regarding this report should be addressed, in the first instance, to Urban Tree Experts:

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APPENDIX 1

In summary, the legislation combined makes it an offence to:

- Intentionally or recklessly damage, destroy or obstruct access to a structure or place used for shelter by a bat.
- Intentionally or recklessly disturb bats; in particular any disturbance which is likely to impair the ability of bats to survive, breed or reproduce or nurture their young; or in the case of hibernating or migrating bats, to hibernate or migrate.
- Intentionally or deliberately kill, injure or take any bat.

Planning Considerations:

Government guidance to Local Planning Authorities stipulates the need to consider biodiversity and protected species during the consideration of planning applications. The NPPF makes clear that the planning system should help minimise the impacts that development can have on biodiversity and provide net gains in biodiversity where possible. In addition, the ODPM Circular 04/2005 states *“It is essential that the presence or otherwise of protected species, and the extent that they may be affected by the proposed development, is established before the planning permission is granted, otherwise all relevant material considerations may not have been addressed in making the decision”*.

Policy CP7 of the Wokingham Borough Core Strategy (planning policy relating to the site) states *“Development which may harm habitats or, species of principle importance in England for nature conservation, veteran trees or features of the landscape that are of major importance for wild flora and fauna (including wildlife and river corridors), whether directly or indirectly will be only permitted if it has been clearly demonstrated that the need for the proposal outweighs the need to safeguard the nature conservation importance, that no alternative site that would result in less or no harm is available which will meet the need, and*

- i) Mitigation measures can be put in place to prevent damaging impacts; or*
- ii) Appropriate compensation measures to offset the scale and kind of losses are provided”*.

Developments that compromise the protection afforded to bats or roosts under the provisions of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 and the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 will require a European Protected Species (EPS) licence from Natural England (NE).

NE, the government’s statutory conservation advisory organisation, is responsible for issuing EPS licences that would permit activities that would otherwise lead to an infringement of the Habitat Regulations.

Three tests must be satisfied before this licence (to permit otherwise prohibited acts) can be issued:

- Reg 44(2)(e) – the derogation is “in the interests of public health and public safety, or for other imperative reasons of overriding public interest, including those of a social or economic nature and beneficial consequences of primary importance for the environment”.
- Reg 44(3)(a) – there is “no satisfactory alternative” to the derogation.
- Reg 44(3)(b) –the derogation is “not detrimental to the maintenance of the populations of the species concerned at a favourable conservation status in their natural range”.

Tests (a) and (e) can be met with the issue of planning permission for the proposed works. Test (b) is determined by NE’s ecology department that requires the development of a suitable mitigation strategy that would ensure that any bats present on site, are retained at the same population level or better.