Urban Tree Experts

BS5837 – Tree Surveys – Ecological Consulting

PRELIMINARY ECOLOGICAL APPRAISAL (DBW)
AT
58 REDHATCH DRIVE
EARLEY

Prepared for:
Mr & Mrs Polnik
c/o 58 Redhatch Drive
Earley
Wokingham
RG6 5QR

2 September 2024

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Appendix 1

This report is valid for 12 months from the site inspection. The lifespan of this report may be subject to change if the site conditions change due to unspecified works that affect the site.

Executive Summary

Urban Tree Experts was commissioned by Mr & Mrs Polnik to conduct a preliminary ecological appraisal (daytime bat walkover [DBW]), of 58 Redhatch Drive, Earley, Wokingham RG6 5QR. This is to support a forthcoming planning application to Wokingham Borough Council.

This site visit was carried out on Tuesday 20 August 2024 at 10.30am, during daylight hours. An external and internal inspection of the property and attached garage took place to look for signs of bats.

The preliminary ecological appraisal consists of a desk top study 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 minimum 2km search radius and it revealed that three statutory designed sites are situated within, and no current European Protected Species Licences (EPSLs) for bats have been granted within 2km of the proposed development site. The rear garden of the property backs onto Redhatch Copse, an area that is likely to provide good foraging and roosting opportunities for bats however to the north, east and west the dense urban environment does not provide suitable habitat for roosting, commuting or foraging bats.

The DBW comprised a detailed search of the interior and exterior of the building for bats, signs of bats and features suitable for use by roosting bats. This includes droppings, scratch marks, rubbing and staining at exit holes, live or dead bats and other features such as missing tiles, this list is not exhaustive.

The buildings suitability to support roosting bats was assessed and no potential roost features were identified during the preliminary inspection. When combined with the data from the desk top study, this resulted in the building being characterised as having a negligible potential[1] to support roosting bats.

In line with best practice guidelines[2], no further survey effort is required.

[1] Table 4.1 Guidelines for assessing the potential suitability of proposed development sites for bats. Bat Surveys for Professional Ecologists Good Practice Guidelines 4th Edition.
[2] Collins, J. (ed) (2023) Bat Surveys for Professional Ecologists Good Practice Guidelines (4th Edition).

1. Introduction

1.1 Instruction

Urban Tree Experts was instructed by Mr & Mrs Polnik to conduct a DBW of 58 Redhatch Drive, Earley, Wokingham RG6 5QR to support a forthcoming planning application to Wokingham Borough Council.

1.2 Aims and Objectives

The DBW is designed to:

- Identify the presence/likely absence of bats within the building.
- Provide information on previous bat ecological surveys/reports.
- 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 4th edition.

1.3 Proposed Works

The survey was commissioned in connection with a forthcoming planning application to Wokingham Borough Council the full details of which are unknown, however we have been informed that the application will seek the demolition and rebuilding of the attached garage and construction of a single storey side extension.

1.4 Surveyor Background and Experience

The preliminary ecological appraisal for bats was completed by Nick Powell and the report was written by Simon Holmes MSc CEnv.

Nick Powell. Nick commenced surveying bats in 2022 and holds a Class 2 Bat License (CLS-11742) and has received training in bat ecology and surveying, bat detector use, acoustic monitoring/sonogram analysis, architectural terms for bat workers, bats and development, H & S awareness for bat workers, legislation for bat workers, British bats their ecology and conservation, surveying trees for bats, Bat ID and handling, bat biology. Simon holds Class 3 (CL19) and 4 Bat (CL20) Licenses (Nos. 17637 and 17638) and a Science and Education license (SCI64844). He has 35 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.

3. Site Location and Description

3.1 Site Location

The building is located at Grid Reference SU 7415 7087, see Figure 1 below. An overview of the immediate area is shown on Figure 2, courtesy of Bing Maps.

Figure 1. 58 Redhatch Drive, Earley, highlighted.

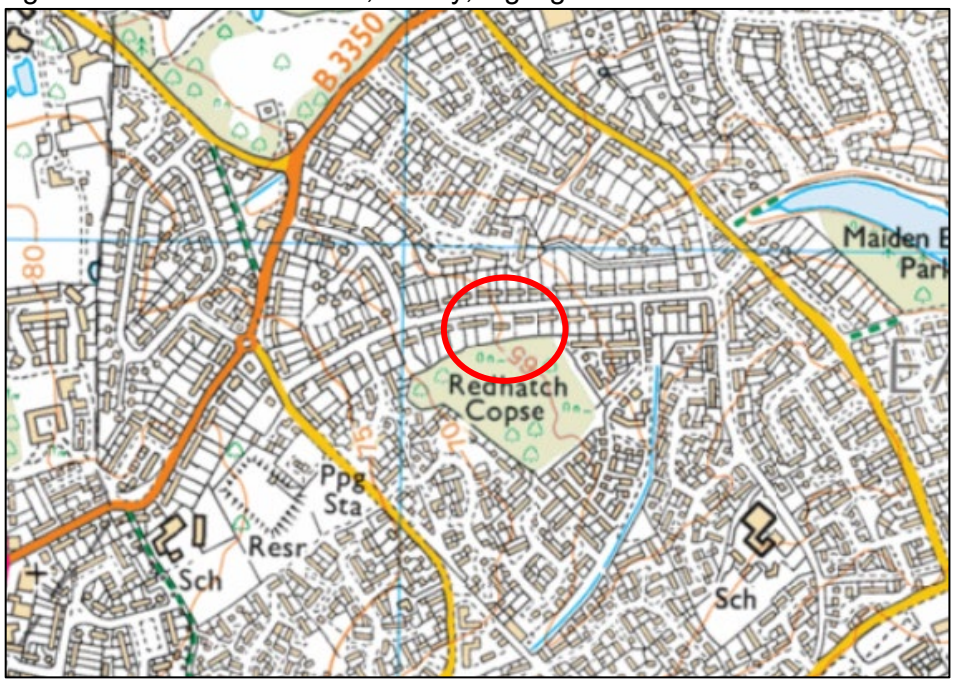
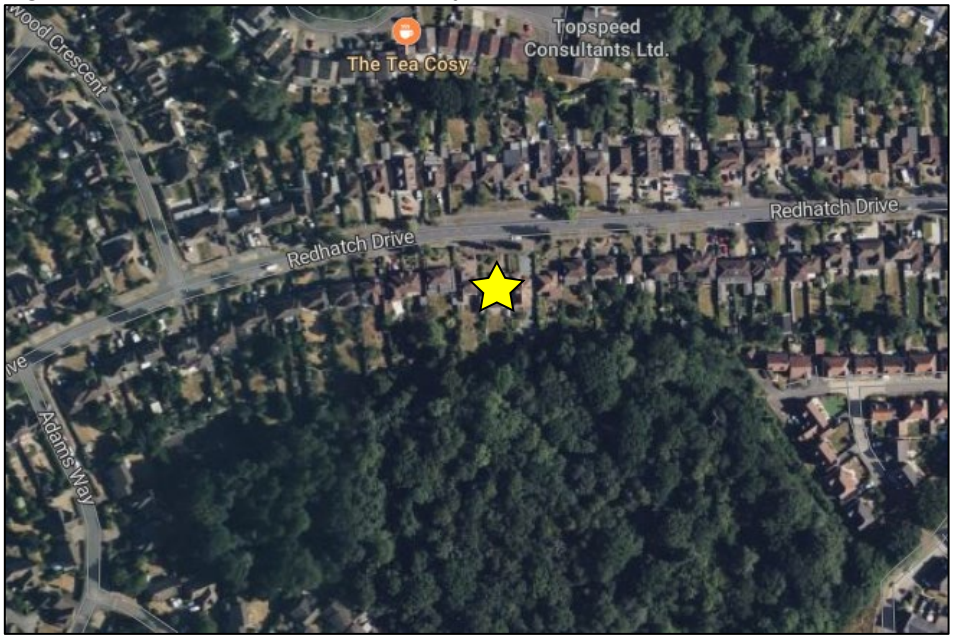


Figure 2. 58 Redhatch Drive, Earley, overview of the immediate area.



3.2 Site Description

The application site comprises a detached, brick-built bungalow with a rear extension and attached garage. The remainder of the site comprises a paved driveway/parking area and lawn with mature shrubs, see cover photograph. To the rear the garden is mainly laid to lawn with shrubs and mature trees on the boundaries, see Figure 3 below. The site itself offers some foraging and commuting habitat for bats and, via the back garden, there is direct ecological connectivity to the Redhatch Copse.

Figure 3. Rear garden. 58 Redhatch Drive, Earley. 20.08.24

4. Survey Methodology

4.1 Pre-Survey Data Search

The client has advised that, to their knowledge, no previous bat surveys have been undertaken on this site. 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 or EPSLs within 2km of the site. Due to the urban area, scale of the proposed development, and the very local impact that may occur, no data was sought from the local records centre at this time.

The site is situated in a residential area with properties and gardens of similar sizes and styles to the north, east and west. Immediately to the south lies Redhatch Copse, which is a small area of woodland that is likely to provide good habitat for roosting bats and is directly connected to the rear garden. Maiden Erlegh Local Nature Reserve (LNR) and Laurel Park lie to the east of the site, both of which are known to provide good habitat to support roosting, commuting and foraging bats and are within travelling distance for bats. Further afield lie areas of farmland, wetland and woodland, all of which are likely to provide good habitat for bats although main roads and housing developments separate these areas from the proposed development site.

Maiden Erlegh LNR, Highwood LNR and Pearman's Copse LNR lie within 2km of the site and there is ecological connectivity to Maiden Erlegh LNR. A search of the Magic interactive website revealed no current EPSLs for bats have been granted within 2km of the site, although six historical EPSLs for bats have been granted within the search area.

4.2 Daylight Survey

The DBW of 58 Redhatch Drive, Earley, Wokingham RG6 5QR was carried out by Nick Powell on Tuesday 20 August 2024 at 10.30am. The weather conditions for the survey were sunny and a temperature of 20 degrees. Equipment used included a high-powered torch, a digital camera on a telescopic pole, endoscope and a ladder.

During the DBW 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. This includes the glass covered area to the rear of the garage as, due to the poor thermal properties, construction materials and high levels of natural light ingress, it does not provide suitable roosting opportunities.

4.3 Constraints

Full access to the site during the visit was made possible by the client and there were no constraints to the survey.

5. Survey Findings

5.1 External Inspection

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

The property is a detached, brick-built bungalow with attached garage and rear extension, all of which are in a good condition. The cross hipped roof is covered in composite tiles, all which are in a good condition and offer no roosting opportunities, see Figure 4 on page 8. There is no missing mortar from the ridge and hip tiles or verges, and they have no gaps which roosting bats could exploit, see Figure 5 on page 8. The flat roof of the rear extension is covered in well fitted bitumen felt with no rips or tears (see Figure 6 on page 9), and the bitumen felt covering the flat roof of the garage is in a similar good condition, see Figure 7 on page 9.

The uPVC fascias and soffits are tightly fitted to the wall with no gaps (see Figure 8 on page 10), and the led flashing around the chimney is also tightly fitted with no gaps that could be exploited by crevice dwelling bat species, see Figure 9 on page 10.

No bats or evidence of bats was recorded during the external inspection of the property or garage and there were no visible roosting opportunities for bats or access into the building for roosting bats.

Figure 4. Example roof and ridge tiles. 58 Redhatch Drive, Earley. 20.08.24

Figure 5. Example of sealed hip tiles. 58 Redhatch Drive, Earley. 20.08.24

Figure 6. Example sealed bitumen felt on rear extension. 58 Redhatch Drive, Earley. 20.08.24

Figure 7. Example sealed bitumen felt on garage. 58 Redhatch Drive, Earley. 20.08.24

Figure 8. Example sealed soffits and fascias. 58 Redhatch Drive, Earley. 20.08.24

Figure 9. Example lead flashing on chimney stack. 58 Redhatch Drive, Earley. 20.08.24

5.2 Internal Inspection

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

The loft of the property was accessed via a loft ladder and was in a fair condition internally. The loft was partially lit, partially boarded and insulated, see Figure 10 below. The roof tiles are lined with tar paper, some of which was ripped/torn but given the good state of the roof tiles externally the tar paper is unlikely to be a constraint, see Figure 11 on page 12.

The garage did not have a loft but was inspected internally. The ceiling is boarded, all of which is in a good condition, see Figure 12 on page 12.

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

Figure 10. Example loft space. 58 Redhatch Drive, Earley. 20.08.24

Figure 11. Example torn tar paper lining to roof tiles. 58 Redhatch Drive, Earley. 20.08.24

Figure 12. Example boarded garage ceiling. 58 Redhatch Drive, Earley. 20.08.24

6. Evaluation

The bat roost potential of the features within the site have been assessed with reference to the following criteria and include seasonal variation where increased or decreased probability may arise. Where features are present, they are **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/**or **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 desktop study and internal and external inspection of the property and garage provides a high level of confidence in support of the opinions set out in this report. There were no bats or evidence to indicate bats have roosted at the property or garage and no visible features externally or internally on the building in which bats could access the building to roost.

Informed by the results of the survey and the factors highlighted in Section 6, it is concluded that there is negligible potential for roosting bats within the property or garage. 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 buildings may change and bats may start roosting at the site.

8. References

Collins, J (ed.) (2023). Bat Surveys for Professional Ecologists: Good Practice Guidelines (4th Edition). The Bat Conservation Trust, London.
HM Government (2017) Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations as (amended).
HM Government (1981) The Wildlife and Countryside Act (as amended).
HM Government (2006) Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act.
Mitchell-Jones, A.J. & McLeish, A.P. (2004). Bat Workers' Manual (3rd Edition). Joint Nature Conservation Committee.

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.