



Urban Tree Experts

BS5837 – Tree Surveys – Ecological Consulting

PRELIMINARY ECOLOGICAL APPRAISAL (BATS) AT WESTDENE, BASINGSTOKE ROAD READING



**Prepared for:
Ms A Howett
Westdene
Basingstoke Road
Reading
RG7 1AP**

9 May 2023

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Bramley House
Newnham Bridge
Tenbury Wells
Worcestershire
WR15 8NX
Tel: 0118 976 2902
Email: info@batsurveys-uk.com

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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 Ms A Howett to conduct a preliminary ecological appraisal (bats) at Westdene, Basingstoke Road, Reading, RG7 1AP. This is to support a forthcoming planning application to Wokingham Borough Council.

The site visit was carried out on Tuesday 25 April 2023 at 1.20pm, during daylight hours. An internal and external inspection of the single storey side/rear extension and conservatory took place to look for signs of bats.

The preliminary ecological appraisal (bats) comprised a detailed search of the exterior and interior of the rear extension and conservatory 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 one statutory designated site is located within, and two current European Protected Species Licences (EPSLs) for bats have been granted within 2km of the proposed development site.

Internally and externally, there was no evidence of bats (current or historically) within the side/rear extension or conservatory. These parts of the building are in a good condition and offered no roosting opportunities or access into these sections of the building for bats to roost.

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 areas of the property inspected (side/rear extension and conservatory) that are to be affected by the proposed works. 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.

If the proposed works are to change and the main roof of the property is to be affected, further survey effort will be required in order to establish the presence or absence of roosting bats within the building.



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1. Introduction

1.1 Instruction

Urban Tree Experts was instructed by Ms A Howlett to conduct a preliminary ecological appraisal (bats) at Westdene, Basingstoke Road, Reading, RG7 1AP to support a future 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 demolish the existing rear conservatory, construct a flat roofed, single storey extension in its footprint, and construct a second storey above the existing single storey extension that will be subservient to the roof of the main property.

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 commenced surveying bats last year and has received training in surveying techniques, bat detector use, bat biology, bat identification, acoustic monitoring and echolocation analysis. Simon holds Class 3 (CL19) and 4 Bat (CL20) Licenses (Nos. 17637 and 17638) and a Science and Education license (SCI29096). He has 34 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 7160 6720, see Figure 1 below. An overview of the immediate area is shown on Figure 2, courtesy of Bing Maps.

Figure 1. Westdene, Basingstoke Road, Reading, highlighted.

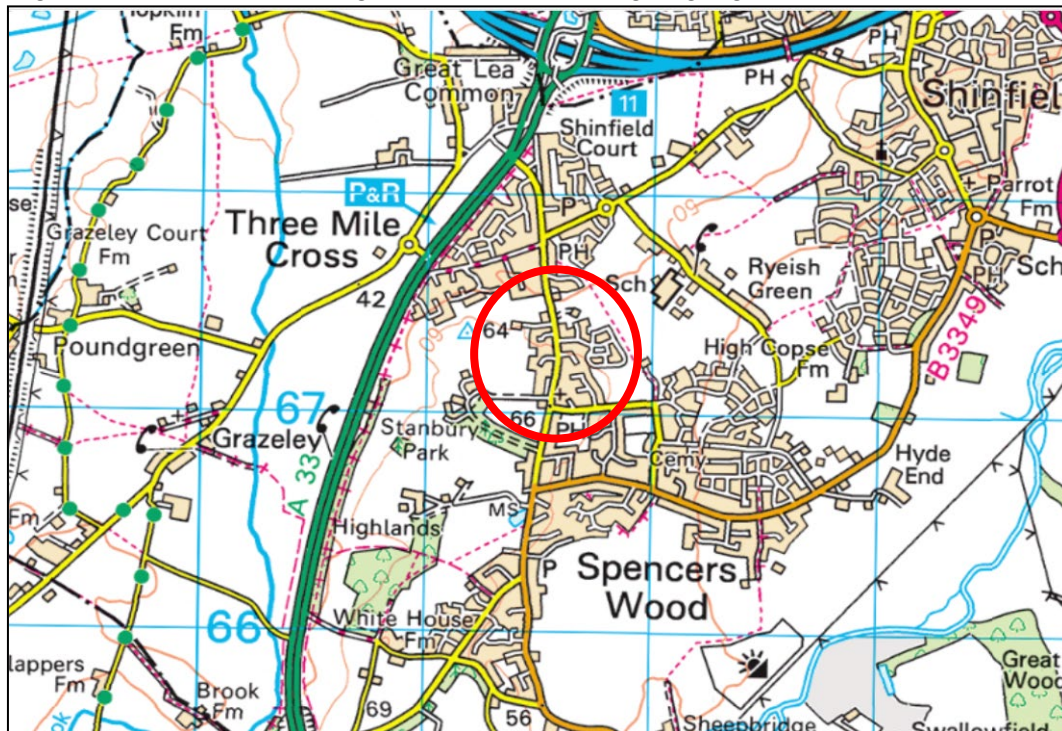


Figure 2. Westdene, Basingstoke Road, Reading, overview of the immediate area.





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3.2 Site Description

The application site comprises a detached, brick-built property. The remainder of the site comprises a gravel driveway and a rear garden which is mainly laid to lawn, with a number of trees and shrubs throughout and hedgerows around the boundaries, see Figure 3 below. The site itself offers good foraging and commuting habitat for bats.

Figure 3. Rear garden. Westdene, Basingstoke Road, Reading. 25.04.23



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 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 the village of Spencers Wood to the south of the town of Reading and is surrounded by other residential properties and gardens of differing sizes and styles. To the north lie main roads and housing developments, which do not provide good habitat for bats. To the east and west lie areas of parkland and to the south recreational grounds, all of which are likely to provide good habitat to support roosting, commuting and foraging bats and are within travelling distance for bats. Other areas of parkland as well as farmland and woodland lie in close proximity to the proposed development site and there is some ecological connectivity from the site to these areas. Further afield lie areas of woodland, farmland, parkland and waterbodies, all of which are likely to provide good habitat for bats although these areas are not connected to the site by ecological corridors.



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Stanford End Mill and River Loddon Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) lies within 2km of the proposed development site, although there is no ecological connectivity from the site to this area. A search of the Magic interactive website revealed that two current EPSL for bats have been granted within 2km of the site, the details of which are provided in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Current EPSLs for bats within 2km of the site

EPSL reference	Licence end date	Species on licence
2016-25203-EPS-MIT	2026	Common pipistrelle and brown long-eared
2018-36705-EPS-MIT-1	2028	Common pipistrelle and brown long-eared

4.2 Daylight Survey

The preliminary ecological appraisal (bats) of Westdene, Basingstoke Road, Reading, RG7 1AP was carried out by Nick Powell on Tuesday 25 April 2023 at 1.20pm. The weather conditions for the survey were sunny with a temperature of 15 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 external and internal inspection of the conservatory and single storey side/rear extension 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. The main property, roof and loft are not to be affected by the proposed development and therefore an inspection of these sections of the building was not undertaken.



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 rear extension and conservatory were examined for signs described in section 4.2. Windowsills, exposed features around the windows, fascia's and walls were inspected for any evidence of bat droppings or staining.

The single storey rear extension is brick built and in a good condition externally, see Figure 4 on page 9. The roof of the extension is pitched and covered in close fitting tiles, none of which are missing or broken, see Figure 5 on page 9. The ridge tiles on the extension are in a very good condition, tightly fitted and had no gaps which could be utilised by roosting bats (see Figure 6 on page 10) and the verges were all well cemented, with no cracks or splits in which roosting bats could exploit, see Figure 7 on page 10. The Velux window is tightly fitted to the roof tiles and had no gaps in which crevice dwelling bats could roost or access this part of the building to roost (see Figure 8 on page 11) and the soffits and fascia's are all tightly fitted to the walls and had no cracks or splits which could be utilised by roosting bats, see Figure 9 on page 11.

The conservatory was also inspected externally. The conservatory is partially brick built at the base, but the majority of the walls and roof comprise glazed panels, which are all in a good condition, with no gaps which could be utilised by roosting bats, see Figure 10 on page 12.

No bats or evidence of bats was recorded during the external inspection of the extension or conservatory and externally there are no obvious visible features on these parts of the building which could be utilised by roosting bats.



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Figure 4. Example of rear extension. Westdene, Basingstoke Road, Reading. 25.04.23



Figure 5. Example of roof tiles of extension. Westdene, Basingstoke Road, Reading. 25.04.23





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Figure 6. Example of ridge tiles. Westdene, Basingstoke Road, Reading. 25.04.23



Figure 7. Example of verges. Westdene, Basingstoke Road, Reading. 25.04.23





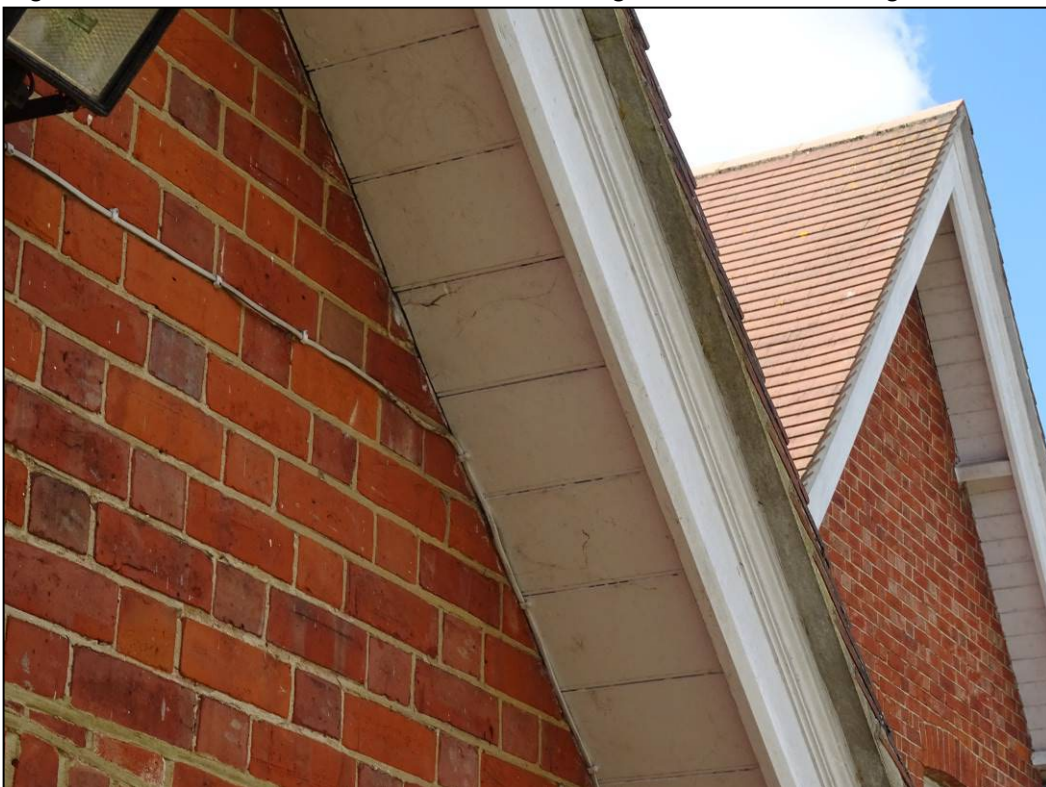
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Figure 8. Velux window. Westdene, Basingstoke Road, Reading. 25.04.23



Figure 9. Soffits and fascia's. Westdene, Basingstoke Road, Reading. 25.04.23





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Figure 10. Conservatory. Westdene, Basingstoke Road, Reading. 25.04.23



5.2 Internal Inspection

An internal inspection of the side/rear extension was undertaken and was examined for any signs of bats (as described in section 4.2).

There was no loft space in the single storey extension, but the internal space was inspected. No bats or evidence was recorded within this area of the building and, as the ceiling is plaster boarded, offered no roosting opportunities for bats, see Figure 11 on page 13.



Figure 11. Interior ceiling of rear extension. Westdene, Basingstoke Road, Reading.
25.04.23



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 page 22 of the guidelines 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/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.**



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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 of the side/rear extension and conservatory provides a high level of confidence in support of the opinions set out in this report. There are no visible features externally on the parts of the building surveyed in which bats could roost or access the building to roost and there are no roosting opportunities internally for bats. 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 extension or conservatory. 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 licenced 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.

If development plans change and the main property, roof or loft space will be affected by the proposals, further survey will be required in order to determine the potential of the rest of the building to support bats.

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.



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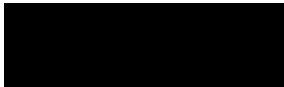
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9. Queries

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

Telephone: 01189 762902
Email: info@batsurveys-uk.com

Urban Tree Experts
Bramley House
Newnham Bridge
Tenbury Wells
Worcestershire WR15 8NX



Simon Holmes CEnv
Consultant, Urban Tree Experts
Natural England Licence CLS-CLS-17637, CLS-CLS-17638



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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.