



# **Urban Tree Experts**

BS5837 – Tree Surveys – Ecological Consulting

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## **PRELIMINARY ECOLOGICAL APPRAISAL (DBW) AT BROOK HOUSE SONNING**



**Prepared for:  
Mr P Benton  
Brook House  
High Street  
Sonning  
RG4 6UP**

**18 July 2024**

**Ref: SPH/NP/PEA-24/25.06**



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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 P Benton to conduct a preliminary ecological appraisal (daytime bat walkover [DBW]) of Brook House, High Street, Sonning, RG4 6UP. This is to support a forthcoming planning application to the Wokingham Borough Council.

The site visit was carried out on Tuesday 25 June 2024 at 10.20am, during daylight hours. An internal and external inspection of the property 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 one statutory designated site is located within, and four current European Protected Species Licences (EPSLs) for bats have been granted within 2km of the proposed development site. The surrounding habitat of wooded agricultural land together with the River Thames provide rich and diverse habitats suitable for a wide range of bat species and they are connected to the site by ecological corridors such as tree lines and hedgerows.

The DBW comprised a detailed search of the interior and exterior of the property 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 properties suitability to support roosting bats was assessed and potential roost features identified during the preliminary inspection. The property is in a fair condition internally and externally however, the majority of the clay roof tiles are spalling/delaminated, there is missing mortar from hip tiles and a split flat eave which could provide potential roosting opportunities or access into the building for bats, and the presence or absence of bats could not be determined. In line with best practice guidelines the building was assessed as having moderate potential<sup>1</sup> to support roosting bats.

In line with best practice protocol<sup>2</sup>, two separate dusk emergence surveys are required on the property in order to establish the presence or absence of roosting bats. If bats are recorded emerging from the building during the surveys, one further activity survey and an EPSL will be required in order for the development to proceed legally.

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<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> Collins, J. (ed) (2023) Bat Surveys for Professional Ecologists Good Practice Guidelines (4th Edition).



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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Instruction

Urban Tree Experts was instructed by Mr P Benton to conduct a DBW of Brook House, High Street, Sonning, RG4 6UP. This is 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 4<sup>th</sup> 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, but we are informed that the application will seek to replace the roof across the whole of the 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 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.



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## 3. Site Location and Description

### 3.1 Site Location

The building is located at Grid Reference SU 7573 7551, see Figure 1 below. An overview of the immediate area is shown on Figure 2, courtesy of Bing Maps.

Figure 1. Brook House, High Street, Sonning, highlighted.

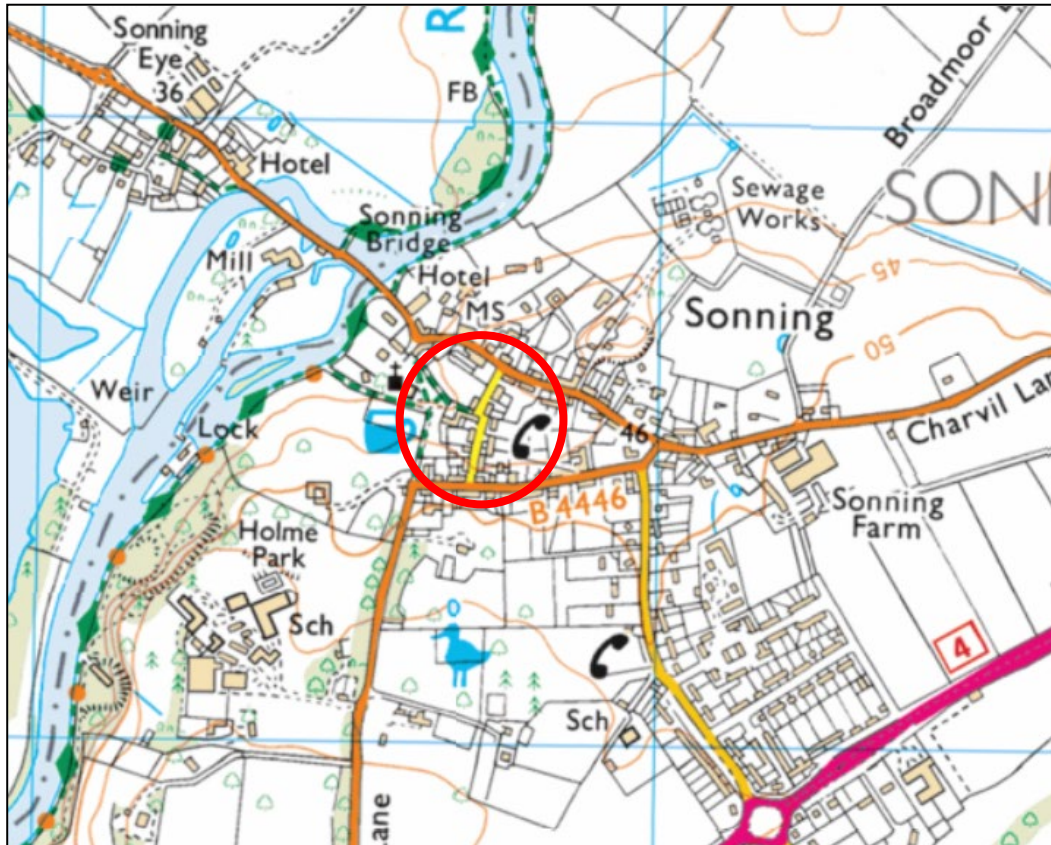


Figure 2. Brook House, High Street, Sonning, overview of the immediate area.





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## 3.2 Site Description

The application site comprises 18<sup>th</sup> century grade II listed, two storey, brick built and painted property with service wing on the northern elevation. The remainder of the site comprises a front parking area with shrubs and a well-maintained large rear garden that is mainly laid to lawn with paved area and trees and shrubs throughout, see Figure 3 below. The site itself offers good foraging and commuting habitat for bats and there is good ecological connectivity to the wider landscape that also provides good habitat for foraging and roosting bats.

Figure 3. Front and rear gardens. Brook House, Hight Street, Sonning. 25.06.24





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## 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](https://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 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 on the High Street, in the village of Sonning and is surrounded by other residential properties and gardens of varying sizes and styles. Almost immediately to the west lie large areas of gardens with mature trees which connect directly to the tree lined River Thames and Sonning Marina, these areas are known to provide good habitat for bats and are connected to the site. Further afield lie large areas of woodland, farmland and wetland, all of which are likely to provide habitat for bats and have some ecological connectivity to the site.

Ali's Pond Local Nature Reserve (LNR) lies within 2km of the site, and there is good ecological connectivity from the site to this LNR. A search of the Magic interactive website revealed six current EPSLs 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                                           |
|--------------------|------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------|
| 2020-48694-EPS-MIT | 12/2025          | Common and soprano pipistrelle                               |
| 2019-43241-EPS-MIT | 04/2025          | Common pipistrelle, soprano pipistrelle and brown long-eared |
| 2020-48093-EPS-MIT | 02/2026          | Common pipistrelle, soprano pipistrelle and brown long-eared |
| 2020-48353-EPS-MIT | 02/2026          | Soprano pipistrelle                                          |

### 4.2 Daylight Survey

The DBW of Brook House, High Street, Sonning, RG4 6UP was carried out by Nick Powell on Tuesday 25 June 2024 at 10.20am. The weather conditions for the survey were bright and sunny with a temperature of 24 degrees. Equipment used included a high-powered torch, a digital camera on a telescopic pole and a ladder.

During the DBW an external and internal inspection of the property 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.



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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 single storey outbuilding.

## 4.3 Constraints

Access to the site during the visit was made possible by the client. There are no loft spaces or access to any loft space below the double pitched rooves on the side (northern) elevation of the property and therefore an internal inspection could not be undertaken.

## 5. Survey Findings

### 5.1 External Inspection

The external features of the property 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, two-storey, brick-built building with a double pitched subservient section on the northern elevation, see cover photograph. The hipped roof over the main property is covered in weathered clay tiles the majority of which are spalling/delaminating affording roosting opportunities for crevice dwelling bat species, see examples at Figure 4 on page 9. The double pitched rooves on the service wing are also mainly covered in weathered clay tiles that are also spalling/delaminating (see Figure 5 on page 10), although one elevation is covered in slate tiles, which all appear to be tightly fitted with no gaps, see Figure 6 on page 10. Across all rooves there is missing mortar from hip tiles, see Figure 7 on page 11. The lead flashing around the chimney stacks is well fitted with no gaps that could be exploited, see Figure 8 on page 11. The majority of the wooden, flat eaves on widely spaced cut brackets are in good condition, tight to the wall with no gaps (see Figure 9 on page 12) however, on the rear elevation, one section has split leaving a gap that could be exploited by bats, see Figure 10 on page 12.

No bats or evidence of bats was recorded during the external inspection of the property although there are various features that provide potential crevice roosting opportunities for bats.



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Figure 4. Examples of spalling/delaminated roof tiles. Brook House, Hight Street, Sonning. 25.06.24





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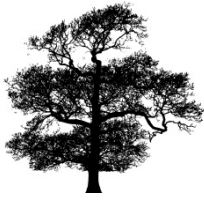
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Figure 5. Example roof tiles on double pitched sections. Brook House, Hight Street, Sonning. 25.06.24



Figure 6. Section of slate roof. Brook House, Hight Street, Sonning. 25.06.24





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Figure 7. Example missing mortar from hip tiles. Brook House, Hight Street, Sonning. 25.06.24



Figure 8. Example sealed lead flashing. Brook House, Hight Street, Sonning. 25.06.24





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Figure 9. Example sealed flat eaves and brackets. Brook House, Hight Street, Sonning. 25.06.24



Figure 10. Split section of flat eaves on rear elevation. Brook House, Hight Street, Sonning. 25.06.24





### 5.2 Internal Inspection

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

The loft space above the main property was accessed via a loft ladder through a hatch and was in a good condition. The loft was not lit, partially boarded and insulated, see Figure 11 below. The roof tiles were lined with timber sarking, some of which had warped leaving gaps in which roosting bats could exploit internally, see Figure 12 below.

No bats or evidence of bats was recorded during the internal inspection of the main loft of the property however the warped timber sarking provides access opportunities into the building for bats.

Figure 11. Example loft space. Brook House, Hight Street, Sonning. 25.06.24



Figure 12. Example warped timber sarking. Brook House, Hight Street, Sonning. 25.06.24





## 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-20<sup>th</sup> 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 list above provides generic screening criteria only and there are exceptions to consider.

## 7. Conclusions

### 7.1 Interpretation

The property is in a fair condition internally and externally. The spalling/delaminated roof tiles, and missing mortar from the hip tiles and a split flat eave all provide crevice like features suitable for bats to roost. The building was assessed as having moderate potential to support roosting bats.

Based on the Bat Workers Manual and the Bat Surveys Good Practice Guidelines, two dusk emergence surveys need to be undertaken on the property, between May and September, to establish the presence or absence of roosting bats and in order to inform appropriate mitigation for the proposed works if necessary. The features identified will require four survey positions equipped with bat detectors and night vision cameras in order to cover the potential bat roosting features. If bats are recorded emerging from the building during the surveys, one further activity survey and an EPSL will be required in order for the development to proceed legally.



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Due to the acute angles formed between the property and the boundaries along the front and sides of the site, accessing these areas to survey will not be possible from within the garden. Therefore, we recommend that a static night vision camera and bat detector be installed in the main loft space at the start of the survey period as an alternative to an external observer and collected following the final activity survey.

The double pitched subservient section on the northern elevation has potential bat roost features that cannot be examined internally or monitored externally therefore an ecological watching brief (EWB) must be prepared following the activity surveys. The EWB will ensure that a suitably qualified bat ecologist is appointed to provide a watching brief for operatives on site where there is a risk to ecological receptors. The watching brief will reduce the potential risk to protected species (bats) that might be roosting on site and collect data and records for auditing purposes.

## 7.2 Contingency Plan

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 change and the site may become more suitable to support roosting bats.

## 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 (3<sup>rd</sup> 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.