Urban Tree Experts

BS5837 – Tree Surveys – Ecological Consulting

PRELIMINARY ECOLOGICAL APPRAISAL (DBW)
AT
ARLINGTON
BASINGSTOKE ROAD, SPENCERS WOOD

Prepared for:
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RG30 2NE

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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 S Mehan of Rammurti Design Limited to conduct a preliminary ecological appraisal (daytime bat walkover [DBW]) of Arlington, Basingstoke Road, Spencers Wood, Reading, RG7 1AE. This is to support a forthcoming planning application to Wokingham Borough Council.

The site visit was carried out on Tuesday 10 December 2024 at 11.45am, during daylight hours. An internal and external inspection of the property and attached garage/utility took place to look for signs of bats.

The preliminary ecological appraisal consists of a desktop 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 search of the local planning authority online planning portal revealed a CLP number 242472, and the desktop search was conducted based upon a minimum 2km search radius and it revealed one statutory designated site is located within, and two current European Protected Species Licenses (EPSLs) for bats have been granted within 2km of the proposed development site. The surrounding habitat, with woodland, a freshwater lake and farmland provide rich and diverse habitats suitable for a wide range of bat species and there is ecological connectivity to these areas from the site.

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 various potential roost features identified during the preliminary inspection. The building is in a fair to poor condition internally and externally with a number of gaps in the roof/hanging tiles and verges which could provide potential roosting opportunities or access into the building for bats. The building was assessed as having moderate potential to support roosting bats.

In line with best practice guidelines[1], two separate dusk emergence surveys are required on the building 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.

[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.

1. Introduction

1.1 Instruction

Urban Tree Experts was instructed by Mr S Mehan of Rammurti Design Limited to conduct a DBW of Arlington, Basingstoke Road, Spencers Wood, Reading, RG7 1AE. 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 for the proposed loft conversion to create habitable accommodation along with the insertion of roof lights, erection of a rear dormer, internal alterations plus removal of 2no. existing rear chimneys. We are also informed that the application will include the construction of a first floor above the garage/utility.

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 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 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.

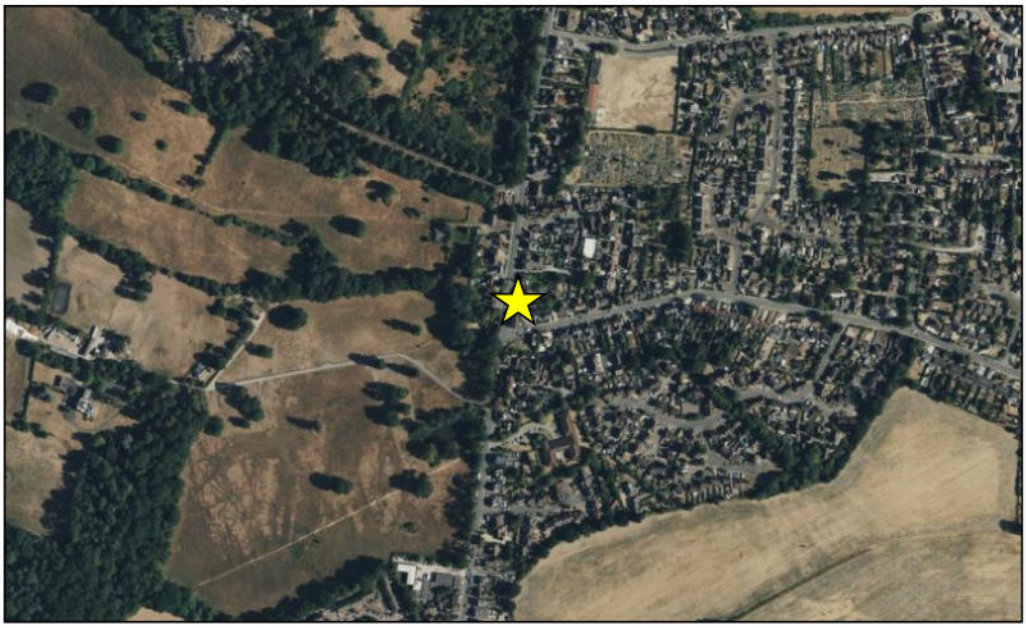
3. Site Location and Description

3.1 Site Location

The building is located at Grid Reference SU71516667, see Figure 1 below. An overview of the immediate area is shown on Figure 2, courtesy of Bing Maps.

Figure 1. Arlington, Basingstoke Road, Spencers Wood, highlighted.

Figure 2. Arlington, Basingstoke Road, Spencers Wood, overview of the immediate area.



3.2 Site Description

The application site comprises a vacant, semi-detached, brick-built property with attached garage/utility. The remainder of the site comprises a small front garden and parking/driveway, and an overgrown rear garden, see Figure 3 below. The site itself offers some foraging and commuting habitat for bats and there is good ecological connectivity to bat foraging and commuting habitat in the wider landscape.

Figure 3. Rear garden. Arlington, Basingstoke Road, Spencers Wood. 10.12.24

4. Survey Methodology

4.1 Pre-Survey Data Search

The client has advised that, to their knowledge, no previous bat surveys have been undertaken at 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 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 semi-rural area, on the eastern edge of the village of Spencers Wood, with properties and gardens of varying sizes and styles to the north and south. To the north are allotments that connect to the public open space of Spencers Wood recreation ground. To the front (west) are the agricultural fields and improved grassland of Stanbury Park. All of these areas are likely to provide good habitat for roosting, commuting and foraging bats and are connected to the site via ecological corridors. Further afield lies the River Loddon and areas of woodland, parkland and farmland, which provide good habitat for bats, some of which are connected to the site via tree and hedge rows.

Stanford End Mill and River Loddon Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) lies within 2km of the proposed development site and there is good ecological connectivity from the site to this SSSI. A search of the Magic interactive website revealed two 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
2016-25203-EPS-MIT	09/2026	Common pipistrelle and brown long-eared
2018-36705-EPS-MIT-1	10/2028	Common pipistrelle and brown long-eared

4.2 Daylight Survey

The DBW of Arlington, Basingstoke Road, Spencers Wood, Reading, RG7 1AE was carried out by Nick Powell on Tuesday 10 December 2024 at 11.45am. The weather conditions for the survey were overcast with a temperature of 4 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 attached garage/utility 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 client. There was minimal boarding in the loft which meant it was not possible to undertake a thorough inspection of all parts of the loft.

5. Survey Findings

5.1 External Inspection

The external features of the property and attached garage/utility 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 two-storey semi-detached brick-built building, which is in a fair condition externally. The cross pitched roof of the property is covered in tiles (see Figure 4 below), some of which are missing or broken, see Figure 5 on page 9. The ridge tiles on the main property are all tightly fitted and had no gaps in which roosting bats could exploit, and the verges are all well cemented with no gaps in which crevice dwelling bats could use for roosting, see Figure 6 on page 9. There are gaps in the tiles and lead flashing around both chimney stacks that could afford access into the building for bats, see Figure 7 on page 10. The soffits and fascias are tightly fitted to the walls and have no visible gaps in which bats could use for roosting, see Figure 8 on page 10. On the front elevation, at the top of the 2 storey bay window is an area of hanging tiles (see cover photo), and some of the tiles are lifted providing potential roosting opportunities for crevice dwelling bats, see Figure 9 on page 11. There is a single storey extension to the rear of the building (see Figure 10 on page 11), the part pitched/part 'lean-to' style roof of the extension are also covered in tiles, some of which are broken, see Figure 11 on page 12. The lead flashing affixing the extension to the main property is well sealed with no gaps, as are the ridge tiles, however there are gaps in the verges, see Figure 12 on page 12. However, this extension is not being affected by the proposed works. On the southern elevation is a brick built attached garage/utility, the roof of which is covered in well fitted tiles and the lead flashing affixing the garage/utility to the main property is sealed with no gaps, see Figure 13 on page 13. The wooden fascias are tight to the wall with no gaps that could be exploited by crevice dwelling bat species, see Figure 14 on page 13.

No bats or evidence of bats was recorded during the external inspection of the property or garage/utility although there were several gaps in the roof and hanging tiles and verges that could provide potential roosting opportunities or access into the building for roosting bats.

Figure 4. Example of roof tiles. Arlington, Basingstoke Road, Spencers Wood. 10.12.24

Figure 5. Missing roof/broken tiles. Arlington, Basingstoke Road, Spencers Wood. 10.12.24

Figure 6. Well cemented verge on main property. Arlington, Basingstoke Road, Spencers Wood. 10.12.24

Figure 7. Example gaps in tiles/lead flashing around chimney stacks. Arlington, Basingstoke Road, Spencers Wood. 10.12.24

Figure 8. Example sealed soffits/fascias. Arlington, Basingstoke Road, Spencers Wood. 10.12.24

Figure 9. Example of gaps in hanging tiles. Arlington, Basingstoke Road, Spencers Wood. 10.12.24

Figure 10. View of rear of building. Arlington, Basingstoke Road, Spencers Wood. 10.12.24

Figure 11. Broken roof tiles rear extension. Arlington, Basingstoke Road, Spencers Wood. 10.12.24

Figure 12. Gaps in verge of rear extension. Arlington, Basingstoke Road, Spencers Wood. 10.12.24

Figure 13. Example roof tiles on garage/utility and sealed flashing. Arlington, Basingstoke Road, Spencers Wood. 10.12.24

Figure 14. Example flush fascias and sealed verges on garage/utility. Arlington, Basingstoke Road, Spencers Wood. 10.12.24

5.2 Internal Inspection

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

The loft space in the property was accessed through a hatch via steps and is in a poor condition internally. The loft is uncluttered, not lit, partially boarded and partially insulated and the roof tiles are unlined, see Figure 15 below. Due to the lack of boarding a thorough inspection of the loft space could not be undertaken.

The garage/utility was also inspected internally. The roof in both these spaces is plaster boarded, see Figure 16 on page 15. There is no access to the void space above but given the good state of the garage/utility roof externally this was not thought to be a significant constraint to the survey.

No bats or evidence of bats was recorded during the internal inspection of the property or garage/utility however, due to the condition of the roof of the property and lack of lining beneath the roof tiles, bats could potentially access the building to roost.

Figure 15. Example of loft space and unlined roof tiles. Arlington, Basingstoke Road, Spencers Wood. 10.12.24

Figure 16. Internal view of garage. Arlington, Basingstoke Road, Spencers Wood. 10.12.24

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 the internal and external inspection of the property and garage/utility provides a high level of confidence in support of the opinions set out in this report. There are a small number of gaps in the roof and hanging tiles on the building which provide features suitable for bats to roost and may provide access into the building for roosting bats. 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 must be undertaken on the property, between May and August, 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 three survey positions equipped with bat detectors and night vision cameras in order to cover all 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.

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.

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.