



Urban Tree Experts

BS5837 – Tree Surveys – Ecological Consulting

PRELIMINARY ECOLOGICAL APPRAISAL (DBW) AT 23 STARMEAD DRIVE WOKINGHAM



Prepared for:
Mr D Simpson
23 Starmead Drive
Wokingham
RG40 2JA

30 June 2025

Ref: SPH/NP/PEA-25/17.06



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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 D Simpson to conduct a preliminary ecological appraisal (daytime bat walkover [DBW]), of 23 Starmead Drive, Wokingham RG40 2JA. This is to support a forthcoming planning application to Wokingham Borough Council.

The site visit was carried out on Tuesday 17 June 2025 at 11.30am, 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 one current European Protected Species Licence (EPSL) for bats has been granted within 2km of the proposed development site. The property backs onto sports fields associated with a local school which connects to a play field and, to the south, are areas of woodland and agricultural land/improved grassland and Emm Brook providing 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 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 two potential roost features were identified during the preliminary inspection. When combined with the data from the desk top study, this resulted in the property being characterised as having a low potential¹ to support roosting bats. However, due to the proximity of the neighbouring property and design of the property, it will not be possible to conduct an evening emergence survey and, therefore, a watching brief during the dormer extension works is recommended.

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.



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1. Introduction

1.1 Instruction

Urban Tree Experts was instructed by Mr D Simpson to conduct a DBW of 23 Starmead Drive, Wokingham RG40 2JA 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 buildings 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 that will seek to extend the dormer window.

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 holds a Class 2 Bat License (CLS-11742) and has been surveying bats for 3 years with various ecological consultancies and has received training in surveying techniques, bat detector use, bat biology, identification, acoustic monitoring, echolocation analysis and netting.

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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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 SU82066827, see Figure 1 below. An overview of the immediate area is shown on Figure 2, courtesy of Bing Maps.

Figure 1. 23 Starmead Drive, Wokingham, highlighted.



Figure 2. 23 Starmead Drive, Wokingham, overview of the immediate area.





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3.2 Site Description

The application site comprises a detached, brick-built property with part integrated garage. The remainder of the site comprises a small front garden with lawn, shrubs and a driveway/parking area, the rear garden that is laid mainly to lawn with seating area and mature trees and shrubs on the boundaries, see Figure 3 below. The site itself offers some foraging and commuting habitat for bats and there is good ecological connectivity to the wider landscape.

Figure 3. Rear garden. 23 Starmead Drive, Wokingham. 17.06.25



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 property. 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 just outside the centre of Wokingham with properties and gardens of differing sizes and styles to the north, south and west. To the east, the garden backs onto the playing field associated with a school and to the south there are large areas of farmland, both of which are likely to provide good habitat for bats and have ecological connectivity to the site via back gardens and tree and hedge lines. Recreational fields, meadows and areas of woodland lie in close proximity to the site, all of which provide good habitat for roosting, commuting and foraging bats and are connected to the site via the railway and tree and hedge lines.



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Holt Copse & Joel Park Local Nature Reserve (LNR) lies just within 2km of the site, although there is limited ecological connectivity from the site to this statutory designated site. A search of the Magic interactive website revealed that one 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
2020-48489-EPS.MIT	12/2027	Common and soprano pipistrelle and brown long-eared

4.2 Daylight Survey

The DBW of 23 Starmead Drive, Wokingham RG40 2JA was carried out by Nick Powell on Tuesday 17 June 2025 at 11.30am. The weather conditions for the survey were dry and bright with a temperature of 22 degrees. Equipment used included a high-powered torch, a digital camera on a telescopic pole, endoscope and a ladder.

During the DBW an external 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.

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 and there were no constraints to the survey.



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 brick-built, two storey building that is in a good condition externally. The main, pitched roof section is covered in close fitting composite tiles, none of which are missing or broken (see Figure 4 below), and the ridge tiles and verges were all tightly fitted with no gaps or missing mortar in which bats could roost (see Figure 5 on page 9) however, on the front single pitched section over the part integral garage (see Figure 6 on page 9), some tiles near the ridge have moved leaving gaps, see Figure 7 on page 10. The soffits and fascias are all tightly fitted to the walls and have no cracks or splits in which roosting bats could exploit, see Figure 8 on page 10. On the front elevation are hanging tiles and a section of wooden cladding, all of which are tightly fitted with no gaps, see Figure 9 on page 11. On the northern elevation is a dormer window, the rear section of which forms part of the rear wall of the property (see Figure 10 on page 11), the side and front sections are covered in wooden cladding which, on the front elevation has broken/slipped leaving gaps that could be exploited by crevice dwelling bat species, see Figure 11 on page 12. The flat roof of the dormer is covered in well fitted bitumen felt with no rips or tears that roosting bats could exploit, see Figure 12 on page 12.

No bats or evidence of bats was recorded during the external inspection of the property however there are two features externally that could afford roosting opportunities for crevice dwelling bat species.

Figure 4. Example of roof and ridge tiles. 23 Starmead Drive, Wokingham. 17.06.25





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Figure 5. Example of sealed verges. 23 Starmead Drive, Wokingham. 17.06.25



Figure 6. Front view of property and single storey pitched section of roof over part integral garage. 23 Starmead Drive, Wokingham. 17.06.25





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Figure 7. Example gaps in tiles on single storey front pitched roof. 23 Starmead Drive, Wokingham. 17.06.25



Figure 8. Example sealed soffits/fascias. 23 Starmead Drive, Wokingham. 17.06.25





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Figure 9. Close fitting hanging tiles and wooden cladding on front elevation. 23 Starmead Drive, Wokingham. 17.06.25



Figure 10. Rear view of dormer. 23 Starmead Drive, Wokingham. 17.06.25





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Figure 11. Broken/slipped wooden cladding on the front of the dormer. 23 Starmead Drive, Wokingham. 17.06.25



Figure 12. Bitumen covering on dormer roof. 23 Starmead Drive, Wokingham. 17.06.25





5.2 Internal Inspection

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

The main loft of the property was accessed via a loft ladder and was in a good condition internally. The loft is used for personal storage and was cluttered, but this did not hinder the inspection. The loft was lit, partially boarded and insulated, see Figure 13 below. The roof tiles are lined with bitumen felt, all of which appears to be in a good condition with no rips or tears which could be utilised by roosting bats, see Figure 13 below.

The loft space above the part integral garage was accessed through a door, again the loft is used for personal storage and was cluttered, but this did not hinder the inspection. The loft was lit, partially boarded and insulated, see Figure 14 below. The roof tiles are lined with bitumen felt, all of which appears to be in a good condition with no rips or tears which could be utilised by roosting bats, see Figure 14 below.

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

Figure 13. Example main loft space. 23 Starmead Drive, Wokingham. 17.06.25



Figure 14. Example bitumen lining to tiles. 23 Starmead Drive, Wokingham. 17.06.25



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 provides a high level of confidence in support of the opinions set out in this report.

The broken/slipped timber boarding on the front elevation of the dormer window and the raised roof tiles on the section of the roof over the garage provide potential roosting opportunities for crevice dwelling bats and the presence or absence of bats could not be determined. When combined, the crevice-like features and surrounding habitat that is suitable for foraging, commuting and roosting bats result in the property being classified as having a low potential to support roosting bats.

However, surveying the front section of the dormer window is not possible due to the presence of the neighbouring property and design of the property (protruding front section of the integral garage) therefore a watching brief must be undertaken during works to the dormer and roof, conditioned in any planning consent.



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If bats are found during the construction works, an EPSL will be required in order for the development to proceed legally.

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 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.