Urban Tree Experts

BS5837 – Tree Surveys – Ecological Consulting

PRELIMINARY ECOLOGICAL APPRAISAL (DBW) AT WYCHWOOD HOUSE FINCHAMPSTEAD

Prepared for:
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his 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 A Cowdell of KRT Property & Steel Ltd to conduct a second preliminary ecological appraisal (daytime bat walkover [DBW]) of Wychwood House, Hollybush Ride, Finchampstead, RG40 3QP. This is to support a forthcoming planning application to Wokingham Borough Council.

This site visit was carried out on the Tuesday 20 May 2025 at 6pm, the initial site visit was carried out on Tuesday 11 June 2024 at 10.30am, both during daylight hours. During both visits 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 that one statutory designated site is located within, and five current European Protected Species Licence (EPSLs) for bats has been issued within 2km of the proposed development site. The surrounding habitat includes large areas of woodland and freshwater lakes that provide rich and diverse habitats suitable for a wide range of bat species and are directly connected to the site.

Both DBWs 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 property is in a good condition externally however there are features suitable for crevice dwelling bats, for example gaps within the soffits and missing mortar. These features could provide potential roosting opportunities or access into the building for bats.

The properties suitability to support roosting bats was assessed and potential roost features identified during both preliminary inspections. In addition, during the 2024 survey, a number of bat droppings were recorded within both loft spaces of the property, indicating that bats are or have been using the building for roosting. DNA analysis of the droppings confirmed them to be those of the brown long-eared (BLE) bat, see Appendix 1. Activity surveys were recommended in line with best practice however they were not conducted in 2024 due to a language barrier and the homeowner not being resident in the UK.

In line with best practice guidelines[1], three separate dusk emergence surveys are required on the property in order to assess the status of the roost currently and to inform appropriate mitigation for the proposed works.

[1] 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 A Cowdell of KRT Property & Steel Ltd to conduct a preliminary ecological appraisal DBW of Wychwood House, Hollybush Ride, Finchampstead, RG40 3QP. 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 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 at the time of writing this report but is likely to include the construction of a first-floor extension.

1.4 Surveyor Background and Experience

This preliminary ecological appraisal for bats was completed by Nick Powell and report 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 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 2.

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.

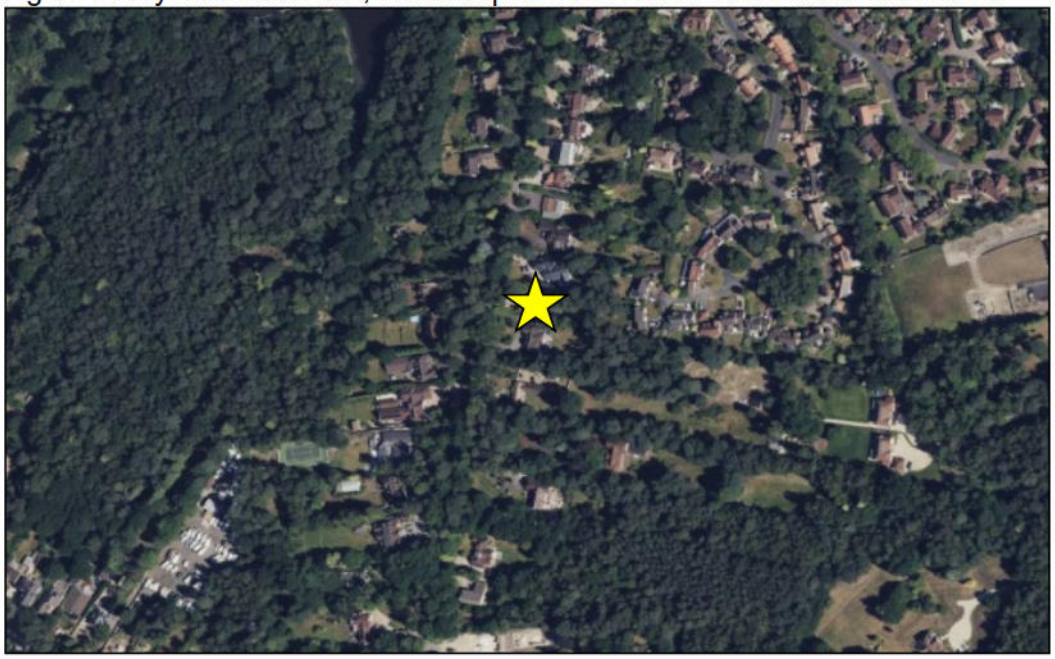
3. Site Location and Description

3.1 Site Location

The building is located at Grid Reference SU 8139 6461, see Figure 1 below. An overview of the immediate area is shown on Figure 2, courtesy of Bing Maps.

Figure 1. Wychwood House, Finchampstead highlighted.

Figure 2. Wychwood House, Finchampstead overview of the immediate area.



3.2 Site Description

The application site comprises a detached, two storey brick-built property with detached garage. The remainder of the site comprises a paved parking area/driveway to the front with lawn surrounded by hedgerows and a rear garden that is mainly laid to lawn, with patio area and mature trees/shrubs/hedgerows throughout, see Figure 3 below. The site itself offers suitable foraging and commuting habitat for bats and there is excellent ecological connectivity to the wider landscape which provides further foraging, commuting and roosting opportunities for a wide range of bat species.

Figure 3. Rear garden. Wychwood House, Finchampstead. 20.05.25

4. Survey Methodology

4.1 Pre-Survey Data Search

Aside from the preliminary survey conducted by us in June 2024, the client's agent has advised that, to their knowledge, no previous bat surveys have been conducted on the 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 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 to the north-east of the village of Finchampstead and is adjacent to properties and gardens of differing sizes and styles. Surrounding the site in all directions are areas of trees and woodland, which provide good habitat for roosting, commuting and foraging bats and are directly connected to the site. East Berkshire golf club lies to the east, Bramshill Forest to the north, Finchampstead Ridges and Ambarrow Hill to the south and large areas of woodland and farmland lie to the west, all of which provide good habitat for bats, have known bat populations and have ecological connectivity to the site via tree lines and hedgerows. Further afield lie large areas of wetland, woodland and farmland, all of which provide good habitat for bats and some of the areas are connected to the site via ecological corridors.

Heath Lake Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and Local Nature Reserve (LNR) lies to the northeast, just within 2km of the proposed development site and there is limited ecological connectivity due to the intervening built environment. A search of the Magic interactive website revealed five 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
2020-45340-EPS-MIT	09/2025	Brown long-eared
2020-48238-EPS-MIT	07/2026	Common pipistrelle and brown long-eared
2017-31639-EPS-MIT	10/2027	Common pipistrelle
2018-37292-EPS-MIT	10/2028	Common pipistrelle, soprano pipistrelle and brown long-eared
2019-39174-EPS-MIT	03/2029	Common pipistrelle, soprano pipistrelle and brown long-eared

4.2 Daylight Survey

This DBW of Wychwood House, Hollybush Ride, Finchampstead RG40 3QP was carried out by Nick Powell on Tuesday 20 May 2025 at 6pm. 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, binoculars 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.

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 in building voids for example 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 detached garage as it will not be affected by the proposed works.

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 a detached, brick-built two-storey building that is in a good condition externally. The cross-pitched roof is covered in interlocking tiles, all of which are well fitted, see Figure 4 below. The majority of the ridge tiles are well sealed however there is missing mortar from a small section by the chimney stack, see Figure 5 on page 9. The verges are well sealed with no missing mortar (see Figure 6 on page 9) as is the lead flashing around the chimney stack. There are gaps within the soffits and missing mortar on the right front gable end (see examples at Figure 7 on page 10) which could be used by crevice dwelling bat species or afford access into the building for bats. At the side of the property is a single storey section of the property with pitched roof to the front and flat roof behind, the roof and ridge tiles are all close fitted with no gaps (see Figure 8 on page 11) however, on the rear elevation, the gaps where a brick had been removed has been temporarily sealed, see Figure 9 on page 11. The bitumen felt covering the flat roof section is well fitted with no rip or tears and the soffits and fascias are tight to the wall with no gaps.

No bats or evidence of bats was recorded externally on the property although there were gaps within the soffits/mortar and in the wall on the property which could provide potential roosting opportunities for bats externally or provide access into the building for roosting bats.

Figure 4. Example close fitted roof tiles. Wychwood House, Finchampstead. 20.05.25

Figure 5. Missing mortar from ridge. Wychwood House, Finchampstead. 20.05.25

Figure 6. Example sealed verges. Wychwood House, Finchampstead. 20.05.25

Figure 7. Gaps with soffit and mortar on property. Wychwood House, Finchampstead. 20.05.25

Figure 8. Example sealed roof and ridge tiles on single storey section of the property. Wychwood House, Finchampstead. 20.05.25

Figure 9. Temporary sealing of removed window and gap where the missing brick was and rear flat roof section. Wychwood House, Finchampstead. 20.05.25

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).

Following the survey conducted in June 2024 internal works to the loft space of the property ceased as requested with the main loft space being left partially boarded and insulated, see Figure 10 below. The tiles are lined with bitumen felt and what could be seen appeared to be in a good condition, see Figure 10 below. No bat droppings were observed in the loft space.

The loft space above the single storey section of the property had been temporarily sealed as requested in 2024 and was no longer accessible.

Figure 10. Example of main loft space. Wychwood House, Finchampstead. 11.06.24

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-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 property is in a good condition externally and internally. There are gaps within the soffits, missing mortar and a missing brick and these features could be utilised by crevice dwelling bats species or allow access into the building for bats. The droppings (confirmed by DNA analysis to be those of the BLE bat) were recorded within both lofts of the property, indicating that BLE bats are or have been using the building to roost. Recent works including the boarding of both loft spaces may have inadvertently covered any further droppings and the number of bats using the lofts spaces or status of the roosts cannot be determined without further survey effort.

Based on the Bat Workers Manual and the Bat Surveys Good Practice Guidelines, three dusk emergence surveys need to be undertaken on the property. Two of the surveys must be completed between May and August and a minimum of 21 days must be left between each survey. The surveys are required to assess the current status of roosting bats, in order to inform appropriate mitigation for the proposed works.

The features identified will require 4 survey positions, 3 equipped with bat detectors and all 4 with night vision cameras in order to cover all the potential bat roosting features.

Until the activity surveys have been conducted and the findings are known, no further work must be undertaken to the loft/roof.

7.2 Contingency Plan

If, for whatever reason, there is a 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 different species or larger number of 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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Natural England Licence CLS-CLS-17637, CLS-CLS-17638

APPENDIX 1

Folio No: 2098-2024
Purchase Order: KH202405
Contact: Urban Tree Experts
Issue Date: 25.06.2024

Biological Report

Technical Report

SureScreen Scientifics

Folio No: 2098-2024
Purchase Order: KH202405
Contact: Urban Tree Experts
Issue Date: 25.06.2024

SureScreen Scientifics

Biological Sample Analysis

Summary

Most biological materials (tissue, feces, hair, blood, etc.) contain small amounts of DNA from the organism of which it originated. Using molecular methods such as PCR (polymerase chain reaction) and DNA sequencing, SureScreen Scientifics are able to analyze an unknown sample to determine which species the sample originates from our methods are optimized for the detection of species including bats (over 92% of bat species worldwide can be identified including all 18 UK bat species), mammals; bees, wasps & hornets; birds; fish; plants (from roots, leaves, stem and even dried wood) and many more species.

Results

Lab ID	Site Name	OS Reference	Sample Type	Species Name	Match(%)
B3378	Wychwood House - Main Loft		Bat Dropping	Brown long-eared bat (Plecotus auritus)	98.45
	Genetic Sequence CGGAGGCTTCGGGACTGATTGGTGCCACTAATAATTGGAGCCCCTGATATAGCTTTTCCCCGAATAAATAACATAAGCTTCTGACTGCTTCCCCCATCTTTTCTACTACTTTTAGCTTCGTCTGCAGTAGAGGCTGGAGCAGGTACCGGTTGAACAGTCTATCCTCCTTTAGCGGGAAACCTATGCACATGCTGGAGA				
B3379	Wychwood House - Small Loft		Bat Dropping	Brown long-eared bat (Plecotus auritus)	98.39
	Genetic Sequence AATCGGGAGGCTTCGGGAACTGATTGGTGCCACTAATAATTGGGAGCCCCTGATATAGCTTTTCCCCGAATAAATAACATAAGCTTCCTGACTGCTTCCCCCATCTTTTCTACTACTTTTAGCTTCGTCTGCAGTAGAGGCTGGAGCAGGTACCGGTTGAACAGTCTATCCTCCTTTAGCGGGAAATCTAGCTCACGCAGGAGAG				

Matters affecting result: none
Reported by: Lauryn Jewkes

Approved by: Lauryn Jewkes

SureScreen Scientifics

SureScreen Scientifics

Methodology

Once samples have arrived in the laboratory, the DNA is isolated using a commercial DNA extraction kit. Using PCR, DNA (if present within the sample) is amplified using universal molecular markers designed to amplify a short fragment of the DNA of the target species group (i.e. mammal, fish, arthropod, reptile, plant etc.). If amplification is successful, the resulting DNA sequence is revealed using a process known as Sanger Sequencing in order to obtain the genetic sequence of the mitochondrial gene within the sample. The sequence results are aligned against a library of known reference sequences using bioinformatics software, which enables us to determine which species the DNA sequence from the sample matches with, informing the species identity and sequence similarity (match %).

If the initial analysis is unsuccessful, the entire process is repeated up to two additional times with a fresh reserve sample (if available) in order to obtain a species identification. If no DNA is detected after three attempts, then we can be confident that any further analysis of the sample will likely also fail to result in species identification.

Interpretation of Results

Sample Type:

The sample you send to us can come from a variety of sources. Fecal, dropping, urine, hair, blood, carcass (skin, flesh, bone), gamete, plant matter or unknown biological material all contain DNA that we can test for in order to identify the species of origin.

Genetic Sequence:

The unique DNA sequence obtained from the sample.

Match (%):

How closely matched the DNA sequence from your sample is to the sequences within our reference database. This can be interpreted as a score of result accuracy, with the maximum score of 100% indicating an exact match of the sample to the indicated species' reference sequence. Lower scores (80-99%) indicate some variation between the sample and reference sequence, likely due to natural variation between individual genetic sequences and/or systematic variations generated through the sequencing process. Scores below 80% similarity should be interpreted with care and can indicate part degraded or part contaminated samples.

Inconclusive Result:

Degraded sample:

DNA is degraded and we are unable to determine species identification due to degradation of sample DNA. This can happen either before sample collection (old samples, exposure to UV etc.) or after sample collection if stored for long periods before analysis or not handled correctly.

Inhibited/contaminated sample:

We are unable to determine species identity due to contamination or the suspected presence of large quantities of PCR inhibitors. Contamination sources can originate from other species which could have come into contact with the samples, or human contamination during sample collection.

Alternative Result:

Sometimes, for targets such as bat dropping analysis, other mammalian species such as rodents are detected. We find this to be a common occurrence as some bat droppings can be similar in appearance to rodent droppings. Although sometimes unexpected, repeat analyses in these cases would likely return the same results.

APPENDIX 2

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.