



Urban Tree Experts

BS5837 – Tree Surveys – Ecological Consulting

PRELIMINARY ECOLOGICAL APPRAISAL (DBW) AT BROOK HOUSE, HOLLYBUSH RIDE FINCHAMPSTEAD



**Prepared for:
Mr C Hudson
Brook House
Hollybush Ride
Finchampstead
RG40 3QR**

21 December 2023

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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 C Hudson to conduct a preliminary ecological appraisal (daytime bat walkover [DBW] of Brook House, Hollybush Ride, Finchampstead RG40 3QR. This is to support a forthcoming planning application to Wokingham Borough Council.

The site visit was carried out on Tuesday 5 December 2023 at 10.30am, 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 six current European Protected Species Licences (EPSLs) for bats has been granted within 2km of the proposed development site. The surrounding habitat of woodland including Simons Wood and Finchampstead Ridges to the south 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 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 internally and externally. There are a small number of gaps within the corner hanging tiles on the front elevation to be affected by the proposed works and where the front dormer windows meet the roof which could provide potential roosting opportunities or access into the building for bats.

The buildings suitability to support roosting bats was assessed and potential roost features identified during the preliminary inspection. In addition, a small number of bat droppings were recorded within the loft space, they are of a similar size and consistency to those of pipistrelle *sp.* and/or brown long-eared bats, indicating that bats are or have been using the building for roosting.

In line with best practice guidelines¹, 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).



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1. Introduction

1.1 Instruction

Urban Tree Experts was instructed by Mr C Hudson to conduct a DBW of Brook House, Hollybush Ride, Finchampstead RG40 3QR 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 make alteration to the front porch.

1.4 Surveyor Background and Experience

The preliminary ecological appraisal for bats was completed by Emma Turnbull and the report was written by Simon Holmes MSc. CEnv. Emma holds a Class 2 Bat Licence (CLS-41628) and Possession Licence (SCI-44140). She has been surveying bats for 6 years and has received training in surveying techniques, bat detector use, echolocation analysis, bat biology and identification and netting and ringing and is a registered bat carer with the Bat Conservation Trust. 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.



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3. Site Location and Description

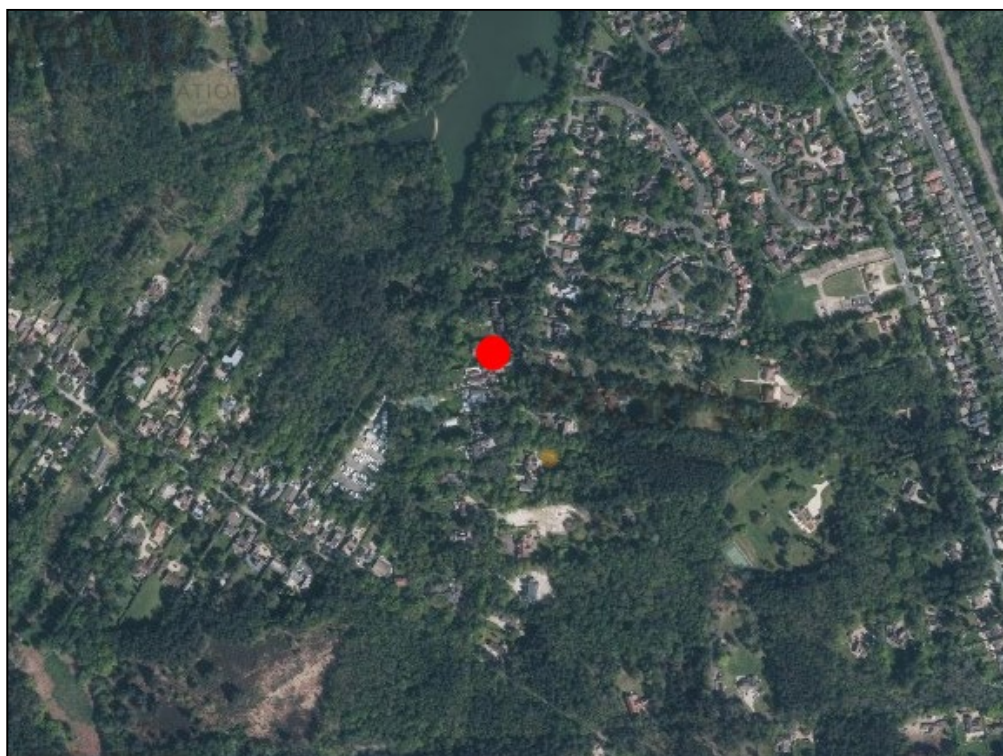
3.1 Site Location

The building is located at Grid Reference SU 8131 6456, see Figure 1 below. An overview of the immediate area is shown on Figure 2, courtesy of Bing Maps.

Figure 1. Brook House, Hollybush Ride, Finchampstead, highlighted.



Figure 2. Brook House, Hollybush Ride, Finchampstead, overview of the immediate area.





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3.2 Site Description

The application site comprises a detached, brick-built property with rear single storey extension and detached garage. The remainder of the site comprises a paved driveway/parking area with lawn, all surrounded by hedgerows and interspersed with mature trees. The rear garden contains a paved seating area and lawn surrounded by hedge/shrubs and backs onto woodland, see Figure 3 below. The site itself offers some foraging and commuting habitat for bats and there is direct ecological connectivity to the wider landscape that also provides good habitat for foraging and roosting bats.

Figure 3. Rear garden. Brook House, Hollybush Ride, Finchampstead. 05.12.23



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) 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.



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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 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 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 build environment. 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
2014-4594-EPS-MIT	01/2025	Soprano pipistrelle and brown long-eared
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

The DBW of Brook House, Hollybush Ride, Finchampstead RG40 3QR was carried out by Emma Turnbull on Tuesday 5 December 2023 at 10.30am. The weather conditions for the survey were overcast with rain showers and a temperature of 6 degrees. Equipment used included a high-powered torch, a digital camera 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 detached garage and the rear, single storey extension as they 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 large, detached brick-built building which is in a good condition externally. The multi-pitched roof of the property is covered in composite tiles and solar panels, all of which appear to be in a good condition, none of which are missing or broken, see Figure 4 on page 9. The ridge tiles are all tightly fitted with no gaps in which bats could utilise for roosting and the verges and bonnet tiles are all well sealed and have no missing mortar which roosting bats could exploit, see Figure 5 on page 9. The lead flashing around the chimney is in good condition and provides no access for roosting bats and the soffits and fascias are all in good condition and tight to the walls with no gaps, see Figure 6 on page 10.

There are hanging tiles over three elevations of the property, the majority of which are tightly fitted with no gaps (see Figure 7 on page 10) however, on the corner of the front elevation, adjacent to the proposed works, the corner tiles have gaps suitable for crevice dwelling bat species, and bat roosting at this location cannot be excluded, see Figure 8 on page 11.

There were dormer windows on both the front and rear elevations of the property. The rooves are covered in close fitted composite tiles and the fronts are covered in hanging tiles, which all overlap. There are, however, some gaps at the base of the dormer windows where they meet the roof tiles on the front elevation which could provide potential roosting opportunities for bats or provide access into the building for roosting bats, see Figure 9 on page 11.

The current front porch is constructed of wood with large leaded glass panel and a flat roof, all of which is in a good condition with no gaps, see Figure 10 on page 12.



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Figure 4. Example of roof and ridge tiles. Brook House, Hollybush Ride, Finchampstead. 05.12.23



Figure 5. Example of sealed bonnet tiles. Brook House, Hollybush Ride, Finchampstead. 05.12.23





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Figure 6. Example sealed soffits/fascias. Brook House, Hollybush Ride, Finchampstead. 05.12.23



Figure 7. Example of tight-fitting hanging tiles. Brook House, Hollybush Ride, Finchampstead. 05.12.23





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Figure 8. Front corner hanging tiles with gaps. Brook House, Hollybush Ride, Finchampstead. 05.12.23



Figure 9. Example dormer windows and gaps on front elevation. Brook House, Hollybush Ride, Finchampstead. 05.12.23





Figure 10. Front porch. Brook House, Hollybush Ride, Finchampstead. 05.12.23



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 was accessed via a ladder through a hatch and is in a good condition. The loft was not lit, partially boarded and insulated, see examples at Figure 11 below and on page 13. The roof tiles are lined with bitumen felt, all of which was in a good condition with no rips or tears. A small number of bat droppings, of a similar size and consistency to those of pipistrelle *sp.* and/or brown long-eared bats were recorded scattered throughout the loft space, indicating bats are or have been using the loft space for roosting, see Figure 12 on page 13.

It is recommended that a sample of the droppings are sent for DNA analysis.

Figure 11. Example of loft space. Brook House, Hollybush Ride, Finchampstead. 05.12.23





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Figure 11. Example of loft space. Brook House, Hollybush Ride, Finchampstead.
05.12.23



Figure 12. Example of bat droppings. Brook House, Hollybush Ride, Finchampstead.
05.12.23





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 internally and externally. There are a number of gaps in the hanging tiles at the corners on the front elevation to be affected by the proposed works and where the front dormer window meets the roof which provide crevice like features suitable for bats to roost and may provide access into the loft for bats. Low numbers of bat droppings are normally associated with low numbers or individual bats and there is no evidence of maternity roosting or hibernation use and the building has in our opinion, been used opportunistically as a day/summer roost by a low number of pipistrelle *sp.* and/or brown long eared bats.

Following the detailed external and internal inspection, we were unable to positively identify any obvious access or egress points for bats on the main roof and therefore bats may be accessing via the hanging tile gaps or via the gaps under the dormers. It is possible that during maintenance/repair works in the past, any access or egress points may have been inadvertently repaired/blocked up.



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Based on the Bat Workers Manual and the Bat Surveys Good Practice Guidelines, three dusk emergence surveys need to be undertaken on the property, between May and September, to assess the current status of roosting bats, in order to inform appropriate mitigation for the proposed works. The features identified will require two survey positions both equipped with bat detectors and night vision cameras in order to cover the potential bat roosting features.

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 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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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.