BUILDING AT CLOSE FARM, MARSTON, WILTSHIRE

PROTECTED SPECIES SURVEY

On behalf of

MR C PEARCE

Final Report

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Prepared by

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1 Introduction

The client is seeking planning permission from Wiltshire Council to convert a storage outbuilding for residential use, with the building situated at Close Farm, Marston, Wiltshire (National Grid Reference ST 96737 57182), see below. The building conversion will not alter the current building footprint.



The building is situated within a small farm courtyard being surrounded by hard-standing, improved grass/ruderal vegetation with two newly constructed buildings to the north. The site is surrounded by improved pasture and other residential properties. The garden to the immediate south contains a pond.

Malford Environmental Consulting was commissioned to undertake a protected species survey, which included a Phase 1 bat (building) roost inspection. The survey was undertaken by Dr Stephen Dangerfield (NE Class Licence Level 1 WLM-CL17, Licence No. 2015-11600-CLS-CLS) and Anton Kattan (Natural England bat survey licence Level 2 Class CL18, Licence No. 2015-12201-CLS-CLS), who have a combined 50 years' professional experience and are both full members of the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM).

The survey concentrated on identifying the presence of roosting bats and other protected species inhabiting or using the building. This report sets out the findings of the survey, and where necessary makes recommendations for actions to ensure the proposed development complies with nature conservation legislation and meets the requirements of planning policy.

Section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 (NERC Act) requires all public bodies to have regard to biodiversity conservation when carrying out their functions. Under the NERC Act the local planning authority should not determine a planning application if there are any surveys outstanding for European protected species. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), July 2021, requires the planning system should conserve and enhance the natural environment (Section 15) by, *inter alia*, 'protecting and enhancing sites of biodiversity value' and 'minimising impacts and providing net gains for biodiversity' (para 174) and 'protection and recovery of priority species' (para 179). This is reflected in Wiltshire Council Core Policy 50.

2 Scope of Work and Methodology

A phase 1 (preliminary) bat roost and protected species survey of the building was undertaken on 23rd May 2023. The survey included an assessment of the actual presence or potential for the building to support roosting bats undertaken by a licensed bat surveyor in accordance with Bat Conservation Trust guidelines[1]. The survey included an internal and external inspection of the building. A ladder, high-powered torch, binoculars and endoscope were all available and were used where necessary to examine roof space and other small spaces potentially suitable for roosting bats to occupy.

Evidence of bats, considered during the search included:

- Droppings.
- Urine staining.
- Feeding remains (such as moth wings).
- Smudge marks and scratches around potential bat roost holes.
- Live roosting bats, bat skeletal remains or dead bats.

Conditions indicating an absence of bats can include the presence of spider webs, bird nesting material and wasp nest material blocking access holes or possible roosting gaps, sheltering live butterflies/moths, cluster flies and other insects, or presence of potential predators such as cats and rats.

Bat roost potential was established using the following scale:

1. *Negligible potential/not a roost*: no suitable features

2. *Low potential*: one or more suitable features that could be used by individual bats opportunistically

3. *Moderate potential*: one or more suitable features that could be used by bats, but unlikely to support a roost of high conservation status

4. *High potential*: one or more suitable features that are suitable for use by larger numbers of bats on a regular basis

5. *Confirmed roost*: evidence of current/recent bat occupation

The survey also assessed the building, and immediate surrounding land, for the presence of nesting birds and other protected animals.

[1] Collins, J. (ed.) (2016). *Bat Surveys for Professional Ecologists: Good Practice Guidelines (3rd edn*). The Bat Conservation Trust, London

3 Baseline Conditions

Photographs of the building exterior/interior and immediate surrounding land are presented in Appendix A.

3.1 Designations

The development site is not covered by any European or national nature conservation designations.

There are no Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) or other nationally designated sites within 4km of the development site.

The development site is within a SSSI Impact Risk Zone (Salisbury Plain) for residential development, but strategic solutions for recreational impacts are in place as described below.

The development site falls within the Salisbury Plain Special Protection Area (SPA) 6.4km recreation buffer (the area within which 75% of visitors to Salisbury Plain live). The SPA is designated for breeding stone curlew (*Burhinus oedicnemus*), quail (*Coturnix coturnix*) and hobby (*Falco subbuteo*), and over-wintering hen harrier (*Circus cyaneus*).

The Council's housing plans are mitigated through a project funded by the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) which works with farm managers to maximise breeding success. The project provides an effective, timely and reliable means of mitigating any additional effects arising from new residential development. This strategy appears to be adequate to support housing numbers up until 2026 even if these are above figures in the Wiltshire Core Strategy and Housing Site Allocations Plan. It can therefore be concluded beyond reasonable doubt, that new development proposed under this application would not lead to adverse effects on the integrity of the Salisbury Plain SPA.

The development site is not located within a Special Area of Conservation Bat Consultation Zone.

3.2 Building description

The building is a single-storey structure, which is 11m by 12m. External walls are painted concrete blockwork, which are completely sealed.

The building has a pitched roof, which is clad in clay pan tiles and clay ridge tiles. All roof tiles are intact, close-fitting and end tiles are sealed with mortar leaving no gaps. At the southern end of the building the end ridge tile is missing, and the adjacent ridge tile has slipped forward. There are no suitable gaps associated with the slipped tile which is open at both ends and along a leading edge making it very light and draughty. The ridge tiles sit on blobs of mortar and therefore entrance into the remaining intact ridge tiles is blocked, and these are all intact and sealed with mortar.

The building has timber soffit boxes running around the entire roof line. These are all tightly fixed to the walls. The side soffits support guttering blocking gaps under end tiles. The west-facing soffit had one very small hole in its base – this gap was visually inspected using an endoscope.

All doors and windows are close-fitting and sealed providing no access into the interior that wildlife could exploit.

The building interior, which is a single space open to the roof structure, has blockwork walls that are sealed leaving no gaps. The floor is concrete. The roof structure comprises modern, softwood timber trusses, rafters and battens, and there is no ridge board. The roof is lined with close-fitting bituminous roofing felt affixed tightly above the roof timbers. The interior of the building is sealed.

The building is used for general storage, is routinely disturbed and there is electric lighting both inside and on the exterior of the building (linked to motion sensors).

3.3 Bats

The gap under the west-facing timber barge board was visually inspected using an endoscope. The gap was found to be sub-optimal for roosting bats having no associated landing surface, partially blocked with a timber batten and in near-constant shade. There was no evidence of bat use/occupation associated with this gap; no bat droppings, scratch marks or fur oil stains, and the hole was heavily webbed. This gap is therefore screened out being of negligible value for bats.

No evidence of bat use/occupation was found within or on the outside of the building; no bat droppings found, no urine droplets and no insect feeding remains. The entire roof structure / space contained or was spanned by established spider webbing showing nothing has flown through this space.

The building is therefore classed as Category 1 (not a roost) and is concluded to have negligible bat roosting potential in the future given the physical construction of the building. No further bat survey is considered necessary for this project.

The habitat directly affected by the proposals comprises the completely sealed building, adjoining concrete/hard-standing and a very small area to the sides and rear supporting common grasses and ruderal species. These habitats do not provide a significant resource of invertebrate prey items and are therefore of negligible value for foraging bats.

3.4 Other protected species

There is no evidence of nesting birds on the outside or within the building.

Located about 20m south of the building is a garden pond. Being on private land access to the pond was not possible, but from the public track it could be seen that this is a formal, lined pond with bare edges and an absence of marginal plants, which is set within a close-mown lawn. It is likely that the pond also supports waterfowl and/or fish, and the pond is isolated. It is therefore considered to be sub-optimal for supporting breeding great crested newt. The building and immediate surrounding land provides negligible opportunities for amphibians in their terrestrial phase. Timber boards lying in the storage yard were inspected underneath and no great crested newt, other amphibians or reptiles were found.

There are no other protected species associated with this building or the immediate surrounding land, e.g. no badger sett.

4 Conclusion

There is no evidence that the building is being used or has ever been used by bats for roosting or as a place of rest, and the building is considered to provide negligible potential to support roosting bats given the physical conditions of the building. It is therefore concluded that the conversion of the building does not require a Natural England licence under the provisions of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017. No mitigation for the protection of bats is necessary.

The building and immediate surrounding land does not support any other protected species

The proposed development does not require any mitigation.

Features that could be included to provide an enhancement for wildlife are described in Section 5.

5 Ecological Enhancement

5.1 New bird nesting boxes

To provide an enhancement for nesting birds, a pair of swift nesting boxes should be incorporated into the northeast-facing gable elevation, which provides shelter from direct sunlight. Integrated nest-boxes, which fit into the fabric of an external wall, should be installed, and the swift boxes should be installed as high as possible under the roof line. The nest chamber should be installed and then faced leaving an entrance hole, which could include using a specialist entrance brick (see below).

The provision of swift boxes recognises the fact that swifts are in decline, and swift nesting boxes are also readily used by a range of other small passerine birds such as house sparrow (*Passer domesticus*) and are therefore seen as a 'universal bird box' for new development.

A range of alternative bird boxes are available, and a Vivara Pro Cambridge swift box (chamber and entrance brick) is shown here. This or equivalent should be used.

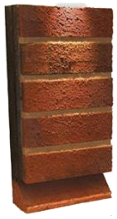




5.2 New bat roosting box

To provide an enhancement for roosting bats, one integrated bat roosting box (installed within the fabric of a cavity wall) should be installed as close to the roof apex on the southwest-facing gable elevation. A clear line of flight to the bat roost box entrance should be maintained at all times.

A range of bat boxes are available, with a 'Habibat' and an 'Ibstock' integrated bat box shown here. These or equivalent should be used.







5.3 Sensitive external lighting

External lighting on the renovated building should be kept to a minimum (in terms of coverage, use and type/luminosity). The new building should restrict the location of external lighting, for example to just over doorways to maintain security and safety.

The lighting will be designed in compliance with guidelines on Bats and Lighting in the UK[2], which would include the following elements:

- Use of low powered soft white LED lighting to minimise/avoid ultraviolet and infrared emissions and which have a sharp cut-off;
- Avoiding upward light spill and minimising outward light spill through the correct positioning of downward pointing luminaires and use of shields/hoods etc.; and
- Preferably lighting operating on a motion sensor so as to be used as and when required, thereby ensuring a long period of complete darkness during each night.

[2] Bat Conservation Trust and Institution of Lighting Professionals (2018). *Bats and artificial lighting in the UK (Guidance Note 08/18)*. Bats and the built environment series

Appendix A Site Photographs



Building showing front and storage yard (left) and northeast side and northwest rear elevations (right)



Missing and slipped ridge tiles at southern end of roof ridge (left) and small hole in base of northwest-facing soffit box (right)



Interior of building (left) and roof structure (right)




Adjacent garden pond that is lined and lacking marginal plants, and likely to support fish and/or waterfowl