Greena Ecological Consultancy

PRELIMINARY ECOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT REPORT

Billhay Farm

Semley

Wiltshire

SP7 9BP

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Brief

A preliminary ecological assessment report was requested to support a planning application for change of use of an existing barn.

This ecological survey is intended to ascertain sufficient information to evaluate the situation adequately in preparation of the above-mentioned works. The information gathered will be necessary to comply with European regulations, which are connected with planning regulations and with The Wildlife and Countryside Directives and Habitat Regulations.

Consultation with the Local Planning Authority is required.

Summary

- Greena Ecological Consultancy was instructed by Dan Carter, to undertake the survey to support a planning application.
- The survey site comprised of an existing building.
- The site was inspected on the 14th of July 2023.
- There were signs of bats on site.
- There were multiple signs of birds on site.
- Presence of no other UK or European Protected Species were confirmed or likely.

1. Introduction

Background

Greena Ecological Consultancy was instructed by Dan Carter, the owner of the building.

The surrounding habitat offers high quality roosting and foraging opportunities for bats and birds.

1.1 Legislation

1.1.1 Bats

All UK bat species and their roosts are fully protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) through inclusion in Schedule 5, under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, and under Schedule 2 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended). The Regulations designate bats as European Protected Species (EPS).

Taken together, the Acts and Regulations protecting bats make it an offence to:

- Deliberately kill, injure, capture or take bats;
- Deliberately disturb bats. This particularly relates to disturbance that is likely to:
    - Impair their ability to survive, breed or reproduce, or to rear or nurture their young;
    - Impair their ability to hibernate or (for migratory species) migrate; and/or
    - Affect significantly the local distribution or abundance of the species to which they belong;
- Damage or destroy bat roosts;
- Possess or transport a bat or part of a bat, unless acquired legally; and
- Sell, offer for sale or exchange bats or parts of bats

A roost is any structure or place used for shelter or protection. Bats need to have access to a number of roosts because they use different roosts depending on the season, breeding status and prevailing weather conditions. For this reason, roosts are protected whether or not bats are present at the time.

As bats are designated EPS, development and building woks that are likely to result in the disturbance of bats, damage or destruction of their roosts, or require bats to be caught or translocated, usually require an EPS licence to be obtained from Natural England before any works begin. Obtaining a licence involves completing an Application pack, including a Method Statement that details mitigation appropriate to maintaining the ‘favourable conservation status’ of the local bat population. Three conditions must be met before a licence can be granted:

- There is no satisfactory alternative;
- The development will not be detrimental to the maintenance of local bat populations at a ‘favourable conservations status’ in their natural range; and
- The development must be for ‘imperative reasons of overriding public interest including those of a social or economic nature.

An EPS licence is required for all development activities if there is a reasonable likelihood that an offence against Conservation Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended), Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) or Environmental Damage Regulation 2009 (as amended) will be committed.

The following offence could potentially be committed by carrying out the proposed development if any bat species are present during the conversion works:

- Capturing or killing – a wild animal of an European Protected Species (EPS) could be deliberately captured, injured or killed (Reg 41(1)(a));
- Disturbing EPS – a wild animal of an EPS could be deliberately disturbed including in particular a disturbance which is likely to impair this / their ability to survive or hibernate (Reg 41(1)(b));
- Disturbing EPS while occupying a structure or place used for shelter or protection – includes intentional and reckless disturbance (s9(4)(b)WCA); and
- Damage of an EPS breeding site or resting place – (Reg 41(1)(d)) – strict liability

The above stated offences can be avoided where works are to take place when bats are not present and bat roost will be maintained unchanged. If roost is going to be available to bats at the time they usually occupy the structure, a continued ecological functionality of the site will be preserved. Suitable mitigation measures must be put in place prior, during and post works to ensure that continued ecological functionality will be maintained. In the case the above listed offences cannot be guaranteed to be avoided throughout the proposed development, an EPS licence to derogate must be sought.

The full EPS licence generally applies if the proposed development is to cause greater than low ecological impact. A simpler and faster way of carrying out development with low ecological impact has been implemented by Natural England under the Bat Mitigation Class Licence (BMCL). It involved BMCL Registered Consultants who can supervise the proposed low impact development under their personal class licence, the need for preparation and processing of an EPS licence is vastly reduced. The development is carried out under a site registration prepared for the works and under the licenced ecologist. BMCL only covers low impact development affecting low numbers of “common” bats and providing the site in question does not serve as a maternity or hibernation roost.

1.1.2 Birds

In the UK, with the exception of 13 ‘pest species’ of birds, which may be killed by authorised persons only, wild birds have general protection under The Wildlife and Countryside Act (1984). It is an offence to: kill, injure, capture or take a wild bird: take damage or destroy nests (in use or being built); and take or destroy eggs. Under Schedule I of the Act, some species (including the barn owl Tyto alba) are protected by special penalties at all times.

Birds receive additional protection under the European Communities Council Directives on the Conservation of Wild birds. This directive relates to the conservation of all species of birds naturally occurring in the world in European territory of the Member States, as well as their nests and habitats.

If any of the above resulted from a person being reckless, even if they had no intention of committing the offence, their action would still be considered an offence.

2. Aims and Objectives

The aim of the survey and supporting desk study was to satisfy the requirements of the National Planning Police Framework (NPPF), identify ecological features within or near the site that could potentially pose a constraint to the proposed development and opportunities for incorporating biodiversity enhancements into the development proposals. The following ecological features were relevant to the survey carried out by Greena Ecological Consultancy:

- Proximity of statutory and non-statutory designated wildlife ties;
- Proximity of Habitats and Species of principal Importance, or local Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) habitats and networks of these habitats.
- Legally protected wildlife species; and
- All other species of wildlife potentially affected by the proposed development

This report has been produced with reference to current guidelines for preliminary ecological appraisal (CIEEM, 2017).

3. Site Description

3.1 Surrounding area

The site is located of Tokes Lane near Semley at OS grid reference ST89432840 (see Figure 1). The building affected by the proposal is an old milk parlour. It is located within a working farm with beef cattle and has farm buildings to the south and west side of the building. To the north and east of the affected building is improved grassland, there is woodland and multiple waterways nearby the site. The nearest waterbody is River Sem which lies 27m north of the site. The site is located within Cranborne Chase and West Wiltshire Downs, AONB.

Figure 1: Site Location



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3.2 Description of the building

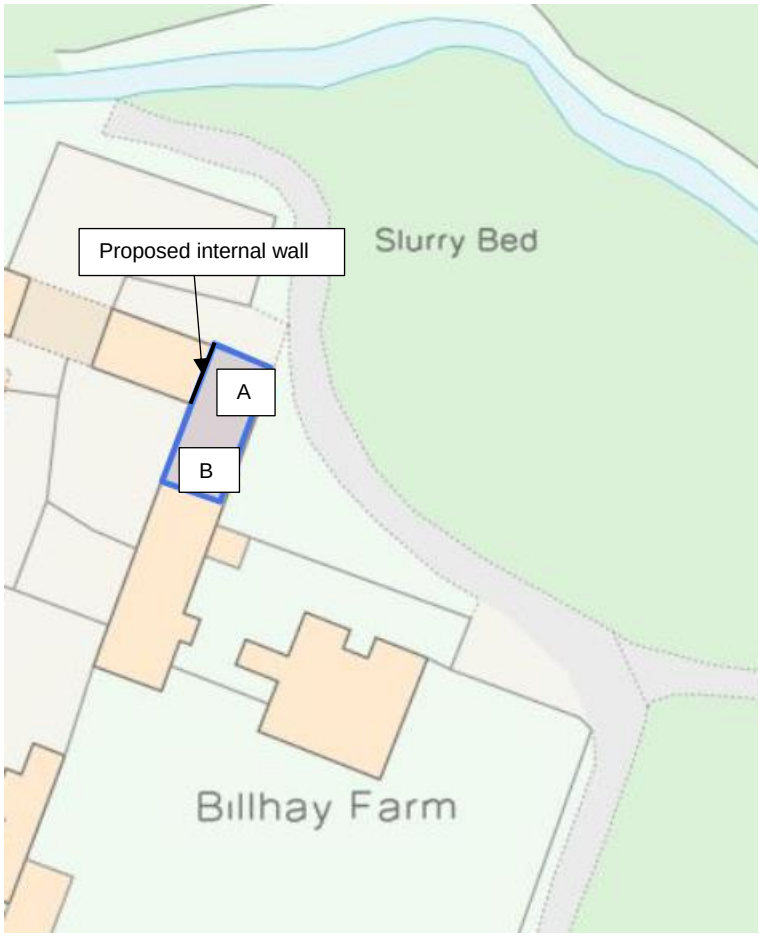
The site comprises of an existing building, the proposal is change of use from an old milk parlour to a similar structure but with an internal wall (see figure 2), putting glass in existing window frames and drylining the walls.

The building is a brick and stone building with a slate tile roof. Parts of the building has breathable felt whereas parts have exposed tiles. There is an attic over parts of the building, the ceiling in that area could in the future be raised which mean the attic would be removed. The roof in the rest of the building is staying as is and there are no plans to reroof the building. Table 1 explains the buildings structure and figure 2 explains the site. Pictures 1-9 shows the building and the attic.

Table 1: Building Structure

Building	Use	Roof	Underlining	Walls
A	Old milk parlour	Slate tiles	Partly felted type I	Brick and stone
B	Attic area	Slate tiles	Felt type I	Brick and stone

Figure 2: Site explained



Photograph 1 – West side of the building



Photograph 2 – East side of the building



Photograph 3: North side of the building



Photographs 4 - 7: Inside building, structure ceiling and proof of swallow nests



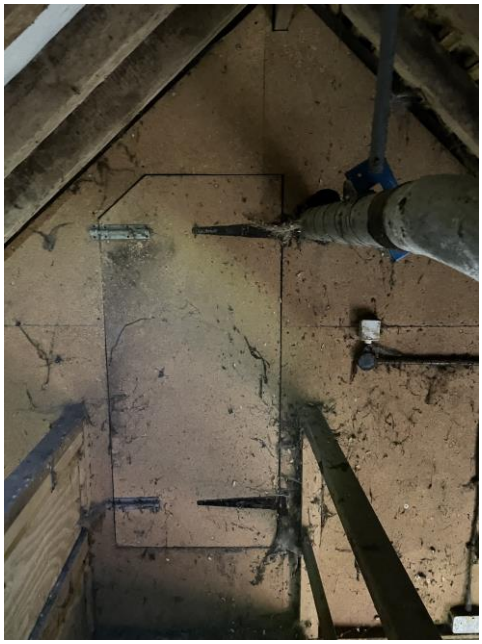








Photographs 8-9: Attic and bat droppings near entrance of attic (facing north)





4. Methods

Surveyor Line Andresen BSc (Hons), acting as an agent under Geoff Billington MCIEEM (Greena Ecological Consultancy, holder of Natural England class 3 and 4 bat survey licences), undertook a daytime inspection of the site on the 14th of July 2023.

No overall desktop search has been carried out for bat records because already 15 bat species, presented in table 2, have been recorded by Greena and other local researchers including the more common four annex II species, so these are taken to be the species occurring in the area.
Searches were made for the following:

- Past records in this actual site;
- Nearest designated site; and
- Nearest bat licence that has been issued

An overall desktop search has been carried out for local SSSI sites, important habitats and other nature worth preserving according to relevant legalisation.

Table 2: Bat Species Recorded in the Local Area

Bat species recorded in the local area	Myotis mystacinus
	Eptesicus serotinus
	Myotis nattereri
	Pipistrellus pipistrellus
	Plecotus austriacus
	Pipistrellus pygmaeus
	Plecotus auritus
	Rhinolophus hipposideros
	Rhinolophus ferrumequinum
	Nathusius pipistrelle
	Myotis daubentonii
	Myotis bechsteinii
	Myotis brandtii
	Barbastella barbastellus
	Nyctalus noctula

There are no known bat records on the affected site.

4.1 Bats

The building was surveyed using the following methodology:

a) Signs of residency by bat species. This consisted of a slow methodological search for roosting bats and their signs. Droppings on walls, windowsills and in roof space (where present) can be used to identify species and scratch marks and staining at roosts and exit holes shows the presence of bats. Similarly, the presence of spiderwebs at a potential roost entry can often indicate an absence of bats; and
b) An assessment of the potential of a building to provide a roost either in the summer (maternity) or winter (hibernation).

The overall habitat was assessed as very high potential for foraging and commuting bats.

4.2 Birds

The building was inspected during the daytime visit on the 14th of July 2023 for bird species, and to locate signs of use such as nests and/or droppings.

4.3 Other Protected Species
The building was inspected/ assessed for the signs of presence/ potential for other European and UK protected species.

Visual inspection was utilised as a method of search for other protected species.

5. Survey Constraints
The site area was mostly accessible when performing the daytime survey on the 14th of July 2023. As there is felt underlining on parts of the roof this could not be fully inspected during the survey.

6. Results
The visit was conducted by Greena Ecological Consultancy on the 14th of July 2023.

The surrounding of the site consists of other farm buildings, residential buildings and improved grassland.

The nearest deciduous woodland is located 80 metres east from the site, grid reference, ST89532864. The deciduous woodland is 1.5 ha. There is a biodiversity action plan priority habitat, wood pasture and parkland, located 240 metre east of the site.

6.1 Existing Records of Bats
As presented in table 2 there are 15 bat species recorded in the area.

The nearest ecological bat licence issued was 900 metres southeast and was granted in 2015 for destruction of a common pipistrelle, soprano pipistrelle, whiskers bat, greater horseshoe bat and brown long eared bats resting place as well as damage of breeding and resting place.
Another bat licence was granted in 2014, 2 km south of the site for destruction of a common pipistrelle resting place.

6.2 Site Survey Bats
There were signs of bats on site. Photograph 9 shows scattered bat droppings found in the attic, close to the north facing entrance of the attic. There were around 50 scattered droppings found. There are multiple crevices in both the brick and stone walls. The north side of the building has exposed roof tiles and deemed to have less bat roost potential, there are however cracks in the timber and potential gaps in the stone and brick wall. The ridge is well sealed along the whole length of the building.
The site is deemed to have moderate bat roost potential.

6.3 Existing records Birds
There is a CS targeting for lapwing located 560 metres east from the site, red listed corn buntings are found 1km northeast of the site and grey partridge is found 1.7km east of the site. The deciduous woodland and other surroundings of the site provides good habitat for birds.

6.4 Site Survey Birds
Multiple nests, example seen in picture 7, were found in the building and swallows were seen flying in the building at the site visit on the 14th of July.

7. Discussion and Recommendations

7.1 Bats

As there is clear evidence of bats on site with 50 scattered droppings found in the attic space suggesting individual bat(s) having roosted three, a stage 2 bat roost characterisation survey is required to complete assessment and determined if a license or other requirements are required. Two surveys are needed between May and September.

The roof is staying undisturbed as and there are no plans to reroof the building. The attic, where the bat droppings are found, might however be removed and the ceiling raised in the future.

7.2 Birds

Ensure no birds are nesting when the building work takes place. If there are, leave alone until fledged. There are 9 swallow nests found in the building and there were multiple swallows flying in and out if the building during the survey. The proposed plan will mean less accessibility for the swallows to use the building and it is therefore advised to install swallow cups. The cups need to be fitted beneath overhanging eaves and/or into a building with flight access such as a car port, bin store building or other outbuildings.

7.3 Other protected species

No further requirements.

7.4 Enhancements

Under the National Planning Policy Framework developments should aim to enhance biodiversity where possible. Where possible put in a couple of bat boxes (installed at least 4m above the ground) and a couple of bird boxes (installed 1.5-3m above the ground).

Where possible plant some native trees.

8. References

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