

West Stowell House – Outbuilding

Preliminary Roost Assessment & Emergence Survey Report

Planning authority	Wiltshire Council
Site	West Stowell House, West Stowell, Marlborough, SN8 4JU
Client	Hester Aba
Date	22.07.26
Version	FINAL

Quality Assurance

Prepared by	Ben Mitchell BSc (Hons) MCIEEM
On behalf of	Hester Aba
Date	22.07.26
Version	FINAL
Client approval	Hester Aba

This report has been prepared in accordance with the CIEEM Guidelines on Ecological Report Writing (2017) and the CIEEM Code of Professional Conduct. The author declares compliance with relevant codes of professional practice. Survey methodologies follow Bat Surveys for Professional Ecologists: Good Practice Guidelines 4th Edition (BCT, 2024).

NON-TECHNICAL SUMMARY

This Preliminary Roost Assessment (PRA) and Emergence Survey report has been prepared by Ben Mitchell BSc (Hons) MCIEEM of Apt Ecology to inform a planning application to re-roof an outbuilding (Building 1) at West Stowell House, West Stowell, Marlborough, Wiltshire. The PRA site survey was undertaken on 13th June 2026, with a single emergence survey conducted on 14th July 2026.

The site comprises an outbuilding (Building 1) with a thatched roof, set within a mature garden and grounds forming part of a wider landscape of hedgerows, mature trees, and pastoral farmland connected to the Kennet & Avon Canal corridor to the south. No bat SSSI or SAC lies within 5km of the site.

A dormer window on the east elevation of Building 1 has two small holes either side, identified as potential roost features (PRF) providing possible access into the roof void. Brown long-eared bat droppings were found within a cupboard in the upper floor living space, but no access route, roosting feature, or carcass could be identified within the room itself, and the ceiling void above was found to be tightly sealed with no means for droppings to have fallen from it. Building 1 is therefore assessed as of low suitability for roosting bats, and a single precautionary emergence survey was undertaken to establish whether the dormer PRF are in current use.

No bats were recorded emerging from, or re-entering, Building 1 during the emergence survey. No active roost has been confirmed, and no European Protected Species (EPS) Mitigation Licence is considered necessary for the proposed works on current evidence.

No further bat surveys or mitigation measures are required prior to works, in line with the precautionary approach applied given the unresolved origin of the droppings record. A bat box suitable for brown long-eared bat is recommended for enhancement purposes, together with bird nesting features for house sparrow, starling and swift, incorporated into the building fabric where practicable.

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Summary of Proposals

1. Proposals include re-roofing of the building to replace the thatch with a slate roof.
2. The site is located at SU 13731 62404 and is shown in Figure 1.

1.2 Competency Statement

3. Ben Mitchell BSc(Hons) MCIEEM has been a full member of the Chartered Institute of Ecologists and Environmental Managers since 2013 and has worked as a professional consultant ecologist since 2012. Prior to becoming self-employed, he was a principal ecologist at an award winning, multi-disciplinary consultancy. He holds bat, great crested newt and Schedule 1 bird survey licences in England, Wales and Scotland since 2015 (Scotland 2010) and has acted in the capacity of named ecologist on 14 Natural England Bat Mitigation licences. He also presented at the National Bat Conference in 2019 on Bats and the planning system.

1.3 Purpose of this Report

4. This PRA report provides an assessment of the potential effects of the scheme on bats associated with the Site, as defined by the information set out in this report.
5. This report provides a description of the ecological baseline, considers the potential impacts of the scheme, and makes recommendations for mitigation and enhancement measures where appropriate.

1.4 Legislation and Planning Policy – Summary

6. This report has been prepared in line with current UK wildlife legislation and planning policy. The law protects many species and habitats that could be present on or near the site, including bats, nesting birds, reptiles and badgers. Some species and their breeding sites or shelters are protected all year round, even when not in use.
7. Planning policy requires that new developments avoid harm to wildlife, mitigate impacts where they cannot be avoided, and compensate for any remaining effects.
8. National policy (NPPF) and local policy both require that planning decisions protect and enhance biodiversity, follow the mitigation hierarchy, and seek opportunities to improve habitats and ecological networks.
9. For further information on the relevant legislation and planning policies please see Section 5 — Legislation & Planning Policy.

2 METHODOLOGY

2.1 Desk Study

10. A review was conducted of all relevant existing information within the zone of influence of the Site to enable a full assessment of the relationship between the Sites and any records of species or habitats of conservation interest and connective habitats in a landscape context. The following sources were accessed for this purpose:
 - MAGIC website (<https://magic.defra.gov.uk/MagicMap.aspx>)
 - Google Earth (<https://earth.google.com/web/>)
 - Wildlife Assessment Check Tool (<https://www.biodiversityinplanning.org/wildlife-assessment-check/>)

2.2 Preliminary Roost Assessment Survey

11. A PRA survey of the Site was undertaken on 13th June 2026 by Ben Mitchell MCIEEM. The weather was dry and warm and considered ideal for both visits.
12. This survey was completed in accordance with Bat Surveys for Professional Ecologists: Good Practice Guidelines 4th Edition (BCT, 2024), Guidelines for Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (CIEEM, 2017) and BS 42020:2013 Biodiversity — Code of practice for planning and development (British Standards Institute, 2013).

2.3 Emergence Surveys

13. Surveys were designed and executed in accordance with Bat Surveys for Professional Ecologists: Good Practice Guidelines (4th edition; Collins, 2023) and Bat Emergence Surveys with Night Vision Aids: A Technical Guide for Professional Ecologists (1st edition; BCT, 2026). The pre-survey walkover initiated exactly one hour prior to local sunset to verify potential roost features (PRFs), map predicted emergence trajectories, and deploy the static equipment array under optimal daylight conditions. Active visual and acoustic data collection initiated 30 minutes before sunset and concluded a minimum of two hours after sunset.

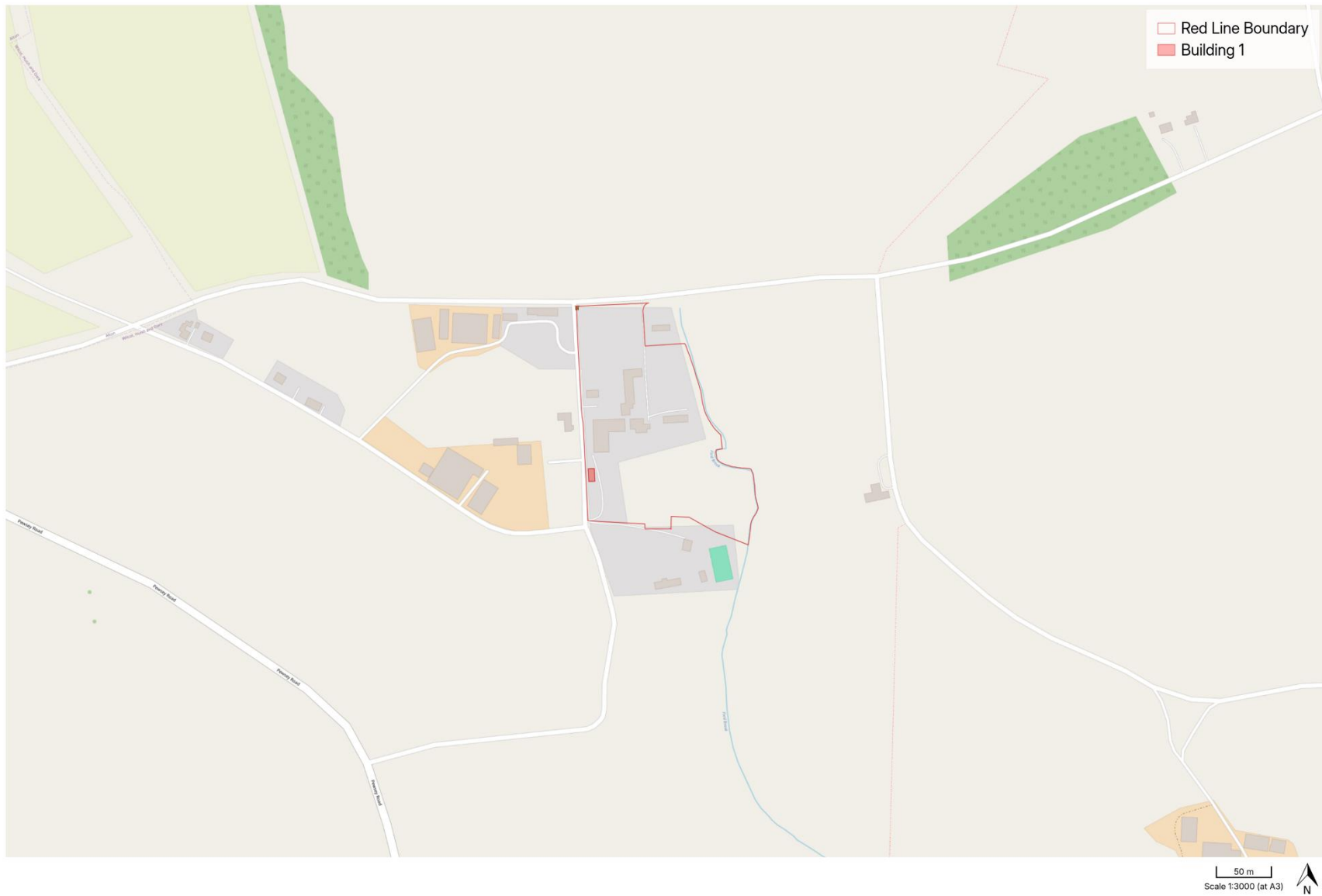


Figure 1 Site Location plan

2.3.1 Survey timing and weather conditions

Date	Surveyor(s)	Timing Window (Sunset)	Equipment Array	Weather Conditions (Start / End)
14.07.26	Ben Mitchell	20:45– 23:30 (21:20)	1x WA Minibat2, 2x Nightfox Whisker IR and 2 Nightfox IR Flood Lamps	28°C, 1/8 Okta, B2, Dry / 21°C, 1/8 Okta, B2, Dry

Location	Camera	Detector	Setup
A & B	Nightfox Whisker IR + Nightfox IR Flood Lamp	Song meter Minibat2	

Location	Camera	Detector	Still at darkest point	
A	Nightfox Whisker IR + Nightfox IR Flood Lamp	Audiomoth		
B	Nightfox Whisker IR + Nightfox IR Flood Lamp	Audiomoth		

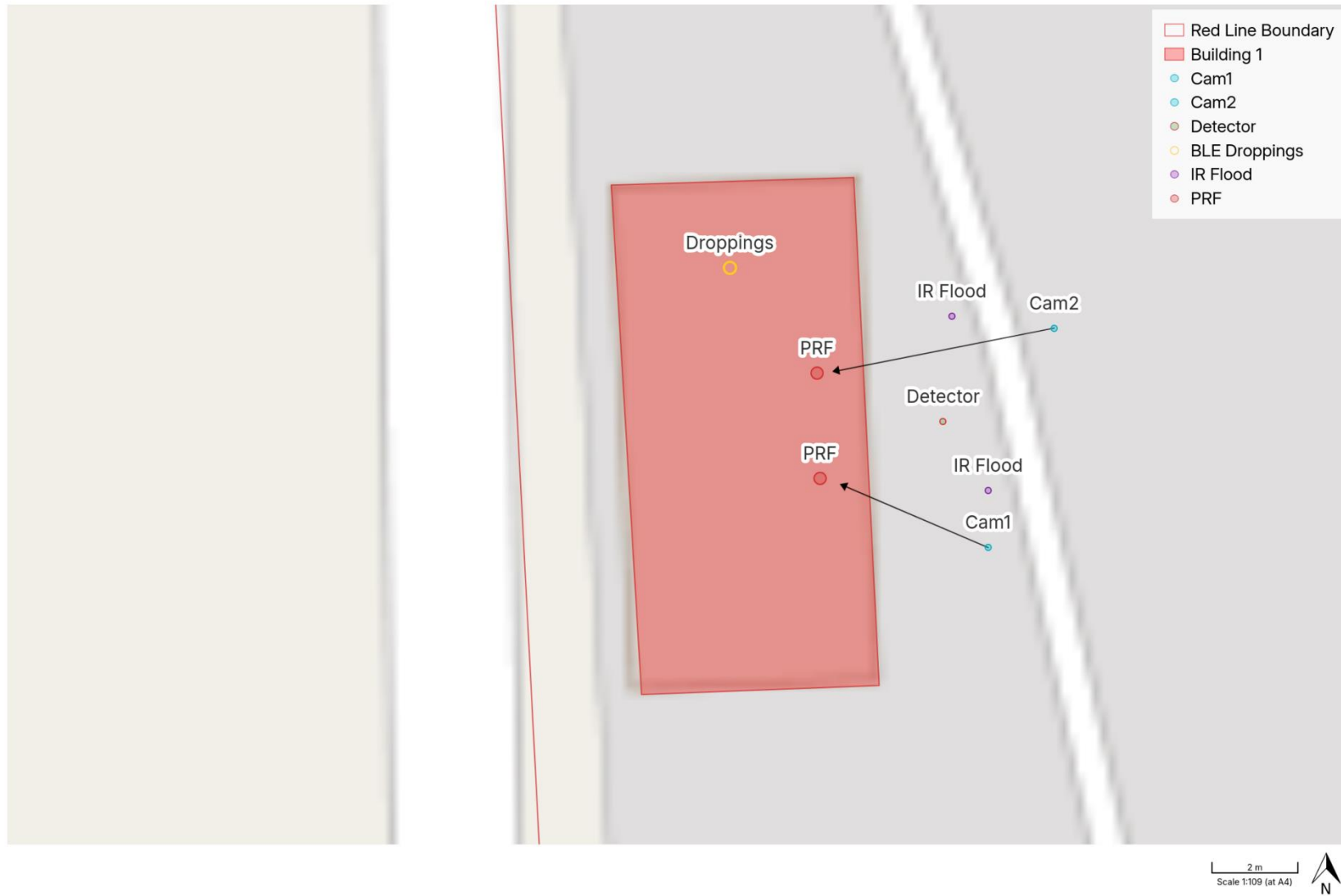


Figure 2 Bat Survey Methodology

2.3.2 Survey Personnel and Quality Assurance

14. All field survey work, equipment deployment, and post-survey media analysis were undertaken by Ben Mitchell BSc(Hons) MCIEEM. Ben has 20 years of professional ecological experience with particular expertise in bat survey, acoustic analysis, and sonogram interpretation. He holds a current Class Survey Licence issued by Natural England. The surveyor arrived at the site exactly one hour prior to local sunset to conduct a comprehensive pre-survey walkover. This was used to verify potential roost features (PRFs) and predicted emergence trajectories identified during the Preliminary Roost Assessment (PRA) and to deploy the static equipment array under optimal daylight conditions.

2.3.3 Night Vision Aids (NVA)

15. Surveys were conducted in accordance with Bat Surveys for Professional Ecologists: Good Practice Guidelines (4th edition; Collins, 2023) and Bat Emergence Surveys with Night Vision Aids: A Technical Guide for Professional Ecologists (1st edition; BCT, 2026).
16. The surveyor arrived on site one hour before sunset to undertake a pre-survey walkover, confirming potential roost features (PRFs) and likely emergence points identified during the Preliminary Roost Assessment, and to position and check all equipment. The active survey period commenced 30 minutes before sunset and concluded a minimum of two hours after sunset. Where the site assessment indicated a higher likelihood of late-emerging species, including brown long-eared bat (*Plecotus auritus*) and Natterer's bat (*Myotis nattereri*), the survey period was extended accordingly.
17. Nightfox Whisker near-infrared (NIR) cameras were deployed on tripods to cover all identified PRFs and associated flight areas. Cameras were framed to provide clear visibility of each target feature and sufficient surrounding context to support emergence counts and flight line interpretation.
18. Primary illumination was provided by Nightfox Arc 20W infrared flood lamps operating at 850 nm, positioned independently of the cameras at offset angles to provide contrast and depth across the target features. Ground-mounted or tripod-mounted positions were used as site conditions required. IR spot torches and camera-mounted on-board IR supplemented illumination where coverage gaps were identified. Cameras were operated in IR mode from survey commencement to maintain consistent image quality through the twilight transition period.
19. At approximately ten-minute intervals, all cameras were checked for focus, battery status, storage capacity, framing stability, and lighting coverage, with adjustments made as required. Still images were captured from each camera at the darkest point of the survey to document field of view and illumination conditions. Photographs of the equipment setup were taken at survey commencement. All NVA footage was reviewed in full following the survey, cross-referenced with time-synchronised acoustic recordings.

2.3.4 Acoustic Monitoring

20. Wildlife Acoustics Song Meter Mini Bat 2 Ultrasonic Bat Recorders were deployed on tripods, positioned approximately 5 m from the building. This separation optimises microphone sensitivity for quieter, low-amplitude species including lesser horseshoe bat (*Rhinolophus hipposideros*) and brown long-eared bat (*Plecotus auritus*). Detectors were configured for full-spectrum uncompressed recording at 384 kHz with a five-second recording period. GPS was enabled on each unit, with internal clocks synchronised to a mobile phone prior to deployment. Cameras were time-synchronised by the same method, providing a common timestamp reference across all acoustic and visual data.

2.3.5 Roving Acoustic Monitoring

21. To maintain real-time situational awareness and intercept unexpected bat transitions outside the fixed fields of view of the static gear, the surveyor carried an Echo Meter Touch Pro handheld detector throughout all pre-survey walkovers and subsequent 10-minute automated hardware checks. The handheld unit was run continuously in auto-tuning heterodyne mode. This mobile coverage provided an immediate acoustic warning system across the local survey area, enabling the surveyor to track localized flight patterns and spot social chatter prior to any bat emergences during equipment check rotations.

2.3.6 Media Data Analysis Protocols

22. Every acoustic wav data file collected was downloaded and archived in raw, uncompressed .WAV full-spectrum format to establish a transparent, judicially auditable record. Emergence recordings and a sample of cryptic species calls were scrutinized manually using professional sonogram analysis suites, including BatExplorer and AudioMoth Play. Visual call parameters—including start/end frequencies, characteristic knee points, pulse interval rhythms, and energy distribution—were evaluated to verify species classification where possible.
23. The BTO acoustic pipeline was also used to process the recordings to process that anecdotal bat activity recorded during the survey as context.
24. Manual Video Analysis and VLC Adjustments: Post-survey, all recorded near-infrared video footage was subjected to a full-length, manual frame-by-frame review by the licensed analyst to eliminate the false-negative drops common to automated movement trackers. To optimize target pixel changes without losing the fast movements of low-surface-area targets, footage was parsed using VLC Media Player with advanced motion-overlay modules active. To prevent the video decoder from discarding critical visual frames during high-bitrate processing or high-speed playback, frame-skipping functions were completely deactivated inside the core program configuration preferences. Playback speeds were locked at 1x native speed to guarantee subtle pixel-level micro-movements of emerging bats were fully evaluated.

2.4 Survey Limitations

25. No limitations were present that affected the survey methodology or validity.

3 SURVEY RESULTS

3.1 Desk Study

3.1.1 Designated Sites

26. A review of the MAGIC mapping database identified the following statutory designations within a 5 km radius of the site.
27. No bat SSSI or bat SAC has been identified within 5km of this site. The three bat-specific designated sites in Wiltshire — Box Mine SSSI (part of Bath and Bradford-on-Avon Bats SAC), Chilmark Quarries SSSI, and Fonthill Grottoes SSSI — are all located in the south and west of the county, well beyond 20km from this location. None are relevant to this desk study.

3.1.2 The Marlborough Tunnel

28. The one bat feature of note in the wider area is Marlborough Tunnel (also known as Savernake Tunnel), a disused railway tunnel at the edge of Savernake Forest, which is a significant hibernation site. Seven species have been recorded, with counts exceeding 380 individuals at peak. It is actively managed by the Wiltshire Bat Group. Based on its location near Posterne Hill (approximately SU197679), the tunnel is estimated to be around 7–8km east-northeast of the site but noteworthy as regional context given the bat populations it supports in the Marlborough Downs landscape.

3.2 Habitat Survey

3.2.1 Site Context

29. The wider landscape is of high ecological value for bats. The site lies within an extensive network of hedgerows that divide the surrounding land into a mosaic of pastoral grassland and arable fields, providing continuous commuting and foraging habitat directly connected to the site curtilage. Hedgerows extend outwards from the site in multiple directions, linking it to areas of broadleaved woodland, scrub and riparian habitat within the wider countryside. Scattered mature and veteran trees occur both within hedgerows and as isolated field trees across the surrounding pasture, adding structural diversity and further roosting and foraging resources.
30. The Ford Brook and Kennet & Avon Canal run approximately 1-1.5km south of the site, passing through West Overton. As a chalk stream it is high-quality bat foraging habitat and a likely commuting corridor for multiple species. West Woods, a large block of mixed woodland approximately 3km to the north represents significant bat foraging and roosting habitat, though it carries no bat-specific statutory designation.
31. A country house estate with ornamental grounds, a large lake, formal water features and extensive mature tree cover surrounds the building and represents a further concentration of high-quality bat habitat in close proximity to the site.
32. The combination of buildings with confirmed roosts, a rich and connected hedgerow network, mature trees, standing water, pastoral grassland and proximity to established bat populations in the surrounding landscape means the site and its immediate context are assessed as providing habitat of high suitability for bats, both as a roosting resource and as a component of a wider ecological network of regional significance.

3.3 Habitats

33. The habitats present on site comprise a mature garden surrounded by mature trees and hedgerows that form part of significant connective features across the wider landscape. Three ornamental ponds are also present on site in various states of disrepair but do provide further habitat diversity which will increase foraging interest for bats.

3.3.1 Buildings and Structures

34. Table 1 summarises the bat roost suitability assessment for each structure surveyed.

Table 1 – Bat Roost Suitability Assessment Summary

Building	Description	Roost features noted	Suitability	Recommendation
Building 1	This is a brick-built property beneath a thatched roof, with a dormer window projecting through the roof slope on the east-facing elevation	Two small holes were identified either side of the dormer window, providing potential roost features (PRF) offering possible access into the roof void. Droppings consistent with brown long-eared bat (BLE) were identified within a cupboard in this room and confirmed by eDNA analysis.	Low	One emergence/re-entry surveys required (BCT 2024)

3.3.2 Building 1 – Outbuilding

35. Two small holes were identified either side of the dormer window, providing potential roost features (PRF) offering possible access into the roof void. Internal access was obtained to the upper floor at the time of survey but it was not possible to safely inspect the cavities either side of the dormer.
36. All windows were confirmed closed at the time of inspection, and no other apparent means of access into the space was identified; it is considered that access most likely occurred via an open window on a previous, unrecorded occasion. No bat carcasses were found. No cracks, crevices, or gaps were identified between the thatch and the plasterboard ceiling capable of permitting droppings to fall from any void above, with the ceiling construction assessed as tightly sealed throughout.
37. Given the presence of droppings without any identifiable access route, roosting feature, or carcass within the room itself, the origin of the droppings could not be determined with confidence at the time of the PRA. The dormer PRF identified externally are considered the most plausible source, notwithstanding the absence of any confirmed internal connection. On this basis, and applying the precautionary principle, a single emergence survey was considered proportionate to establish whether the dormer PRF are in current use.
38. The building is assessed as of low suitability for roosting bats despite the presence of a small number of brown long eared bat droppings.

3.4 Species

3.4.1 Bat Emergence Surveys

Date	Surveyor(s)	Emerging Bats	Location	Notes
14.07.26	Ben Mitchell	None		

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Contact: APT Ecology
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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.

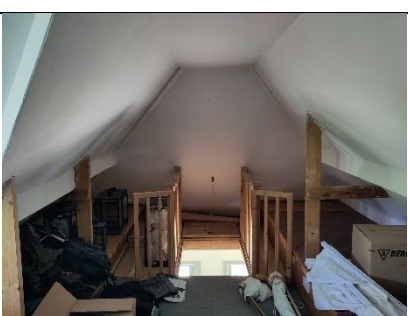
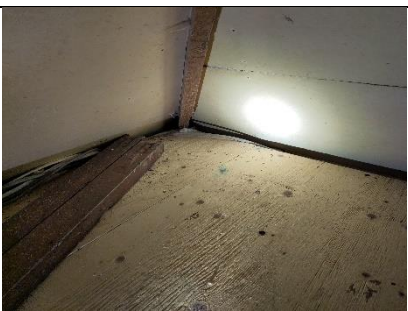
Results

Lab ID	Site Name	OS Reference	Sample Type	Species Name	Match(%)
B26 0492	West Stowell House - SH1		Bat Dropping	Brown long-eared bat (Plecotus auritus)	98.82
Genetic Sequence TGCCACTAATAATTGGAGCCCCTGATATAGCTTTTCCCGAATAAATAACATAAGCTTCTGACTGCTTCCCCATCT TTTCTACTACTTTTAGCTTCGTCTGCAGTAGAGGCTGGAGCAGGTACCGGTTGAACAGTCTATCCTCTTAGCGG GAAACCTAGCACATGCAGGAGAA					
B26 0493	West Stowell House - SH2		Bat Dropping	Brown long-eared bat (Plecotus auritus)	100.00
Genetic Sequence CTGATTGGTGCCACTAATAATTGGAGCCCCTGATATAGCTTTTCCCGAATAAATAACATAAGCTTCTGACTGCTTC CCCCATCTTTTCTACTACTTTTAGCTTCGTCTGCAGTAGAGGCTGGAGCAGGTACCGGTTGAACAGTCTATCCTCCT TTAGCGGGAAACCTAGCACACGCAGGAGAA					

Matters affecting result: none
Reported by: Consuela Sopronyi
Approved by: Alice Cunningham



Figure 3 – Bat eDNA Analysis results.

		
<i>Plate 1 – Building 1 from s</i>	<i>Plate 2 – Building 1 – Dormer</i>	<i>Plate 3 – Building 1 south</i>
		
<i>Plate 4 – Building 1 dormer</i>	<i>Plate 5 - Building 1 dormer north PRF</i>	<i>Plate 6 – Building 1 dormer south PRF</i>
		
<i>Plate 7 Building 1 – lower floor</i>	<i>Plate 8 – Upper floor</i>	<i>Plate 9 – Fitted cupboard</i>
		
<i>Plate 10 Building 1 – Dormer Window</i>	<i>Plate 11 – BLE droppings in fitted cupboard</i>	<i>Plate 12 – Tight fitting plasterboard above BLE droppings in fitted cupboard</i>

4 CONCLUSIONS

4.1 Further Surveys

- 39. No further surveys are required prior to any works affecting the potential roost features present in accordance with BCT (2024) Good Practice Guidelines.

4.2 Mitigation

- 40. No mitigation measures are required, as no active bat roost has been confirmed at Building 1 on the basis of the PRA and single emergence survey undertaken. The presence of brown long-eared bat droppings within the upper floor cupboard remains unresolved in origin, and no access route, roosting feature or carcass was identified within the room itself to confirm current use.
- 41. As a precautionary measure, should bats, fresh droppings, or other field signs be encountered at any point during the proposed re-roofing, works must stop immediately in the vicinity of the find and a suitably licensed bat ecologist contacted for advice before works resume.

4.3 Compensation

- 42. No compensation measures are required as there is no active roost present, however a bat box (such as the Scwegler 2FN or similar) suitable for brown long eared bats should be erected on mature retained trees on the property adjacent to the house.

4.4 Enhancement

- 43. Opportunities for biodiversity enhancement — including the provision of bat roosting and bird nesting features — should be incorporated into the development in line with policy requirements.
- 44. Bird nesting boxes suitable for house sparrow, starling and swift should be incorporated into the fabric of the building where practicable.
- 45. Any new planting should include native species of value to bats and other invertebrates, including night-scented species to support foraging activity.

5 LEGISLATION & PLANNING POLICY

Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended)

Provides protection for all wild birds, their nests and eggs (s.1), including additional protections for Schedule 1 species; protects certain wild animals (s.9) and plants (s.13); and makes it an offence to release or allow the spread of invasive non-native species listed on Schedule 9.

Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended)

Implements strict protection for European Protected Species (EPS) such as all UK bats, great crested newt, dormouse and otter. Offences include deliberate capture, killing, injury or disturbance, and damage or destruction of breeding sites or resting places (Reg. 43). The Regulations also govern the Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) process for 'habitats sites'.

Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006 & Environment Act 2021

Section 41 of the NERC Act lists species and habitats of principal importance for biodiversity. The biodiversity duty on public authorities (s.40) has been strengthened by the Environment Act 2021 (s.102) to require action to conserve and enhance biodiversity and to report on it.

Legally protected species likely to be relevant to the Site (subject to habitat presence) include:

- Bats — EPS protected under the Habitats Regulations and WCA 1981; roosts are protected year-round, even when unoccupied.
- Breeding birds — All wild birds, nests and eggs protected under WCA 1981 (s.1); additional protections apply to Schedule 1 species.

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF, Dec 2024; amended Feb 2025)

Chapter 15 ('Conserving and enhancing the natural environment') requires planning decisions to minimise impacts and secure net gains for biodiversity (para. 187), apply the mitigation hierarchy, and protect Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) and irreplaceable habitats (para. 193).

Local Planning Policy

Core Policy 50 of the Wiltshire Core Strategy requires that development proposals conserve, restore and enhance biodiversity and geodiversity. The policy requires that development should not result in a net loss of biodiversity and, where possible, should deliver a net gain. Development proposals must demonstrate that the mitigation hierarchy has been applied — that is, that potential impacts on biodiversity have first been avoided, then mitigated, and finally compensated for where residual impacts remain unavoidable.

The policy requires that proposals affecting protected or priority species, habitats of principal importance, or other ecological features of value must be supported by adequate ecological survey information proportionate to the nature of the proposed development and the likely ecological sensitivities of the site. Where surveys identify the presence of protected species or priority habitats, appropriate mitigation, compensation and enhancement measures must be incorporated into the scheme design and secured by planning condition or legal agreement.

Core Policy 50 also requires that development adjacent to or affecting internationally, nationally or locally designated sites — including Special Areas of Conservation, Sites of Special Scientific Interest and Local Wildlife Sites — must demonstrate that the proposal will not result in an adverse effect on the integrity or interest features of the designation, either alone or in combination with other plans or projects. Where the site lies within or adjacent to a statutory designation, proposals must be accompanied by an assessment of potential impacts and, where required, undertake a Habitats Regulations Assessment in accordance with the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017.

The application of Core Policy 50 to this proposal requires that the low bat roost suitability identified at Building 1 has been appropriately assessed through a precautionary emergence survey, notwithstanding that no active roost has been confirmed. As no confirmed roost is present, an EPS Mitigation Licence is not considered necessary on current evidence; however, the presence of unresolved droppings within the property means the precautionary principle continues to apply, and any change in circumstances during works — including discovery of bats or fresh field signs — would require works to stop and further ecological advice to be sought. No bat SSSI or SAC lies within 5km of the site, and the Habitats Regulations Assessment process is not considered relevant to this application on current evidence [FLAGGED: confirm no other European site interactions, e.g. via lighting or hydrological pathways, that might trigger HRA]. Opportunities for biodiversity enhancement — including the provision of bat roosting and bird nesting features — should be incorporated into the development in line with policy requirements.

6 REFERENCES

6.1 Methodology and Best Practice References

Bat Conservation Trust (2026) Bat Emergence Surveys with Night Vision Aids: A Technical Guide for Professional Ecologists (1st Edition). Bat Conservation Trust, London.

British Standards Institution (2013) BS 42020:2013 Biodiversity — Code of practice for planning and development. BSI Standards Limited, London.

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