

PRELIMINARY ROOST ASSESSMENT (PRA)

BARN AT HILLSIDE FARM, BRYHER, ISLES OF SCILLY



Client: Ruth Eggins

Our reference: 2022-2-2

Planning reference: Report produced in advance of Planning

Report date: 12th February 2022

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Executive Summary

Bats – Results and Findings

The preliminary roost assessment (PRA) survey concluded that there was **negligible potential** for use of the barn by bats.

This judgement was reached in accordance with the survey methodologies and evaluation criteria outlined in the Bat Surveys for Professional Ecologists: Good Practice Guidelines 3rd edition¹

Bats – Further Survey Requirements

No further surveys are recommended – the PRA conclusion of negligible potential does not require further survey information with regards to bats in order to inform a planning application.

Bats – Recommendations

It is not recommended that any Planning Conditions are required with regards to bats in relation to the proposed conversion of the barn assessed in this report.

Standard good practice and vigilance should be observed by the contractors undertaking the conversion works in acknowledgement that bats are transient in their use of roosting opportunities and may explore potential locations. Recommendations to ensure legislative compliance are provided in Appendix 2.

Additional roosting opportunities should be incorporated into the new development to secure enhancement for local bat populations – details and specifications are provided in Appendix 3.

Nesting Birds – Results and Findings

The survey identified a swallow's nest in the interior of the barn, and there is some potential for other species to find nesting opportunities.

Nesting Birds - Recommendations

Standard Good Practice guidance is provided to avoid impacts to nesting birds when works are being undertaken. Appropriate timing is the preferred method; in the event that the recommended timing is not possible within the programme of works then pre-commencement surveys are recommended. These measures will ensure legislative compliance and are outlined in Appendix 4.

Replacement nesting opportunities for swallows should be incorporated into the new building to provide continuity of nesting habitat. If the applicant wishes to provide further biodiversity enhancement, additional nest boxes for other species could be erected on the new building. Guidance on suitable specifications is provided.

Other Ecological Receptors

No further ecological impacts relevant to planning are identified.

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

APPENDIX 1 – PRELIMINARY ROOST ASSESSMENT (PRA)

Planning Authority: Isles of Scilly	Location: SV 87697 14746	Planning Application ref: Report published in advance of planning
Planning application address: Barn At Hillside Farm, Bryher, Isles of Scilly		
Proposed development: The proposed works were identified through inspection of plans and should accord with the documentation submitted in support of the application. These involve: 1) Conversion of the barn to residential use.		
Building references: The barn location is identified in the plans provided in Appendix 5.		
Name and licence number of bat-workers carrying out survey: James Faulconbridge (2015-12724-CLS-CLS)		
Preliminary Roost Assessment date: The visual inspection was undertaken on 10 th February 2022 in accordance with relevant Best Practice methodology ² .		
Local and Landscape Setting: The barn is set amongst several other buildings within Hillside Farm on Bryher, Isles of Scilly. Hillside Farm itself is situated just south of the centre of the island. To the north of the property, the land is predominantly undermanaged scrub with heathy components and abundant non-native self-set species such as pittosporum. To the south lies the agriculturally managed component of the farm with varying land use including grazing, small-scale arable and polytunnels with a variety of fruits and vegetables. To the south-west lies a relatively dense but small scale residential conurbation; with Veronica Farm and other buildings to the south-east. The coastline is in close proximity to both the east and west. Two common pipistrelle roosts are formally recorded, and a further two are anecdotally recorded within 500m of the Site. All of these roosts relate to non-breeding summer roosts of common pipistrelle, or are not fully characterised.		
Building Description(s): The barn is clad with hit and miss boarding with a corrugated sheet roof. The majority of the barn is used as a storage and workshop area associated with agricultural use; whilst a smaller portion is converted for residential use by seasonal staff. The main agricultural element of the structure comprises a single workshop space which is open to the ceiling whilst the residential area is boarded out on both the walls and ceiling. There is a single door on the eastern aspect which is a typical full-height sliding barn door.		

² Collins, J. (ed.) 2016 Bat Surveys for Professional Ecologists: Good Practice Guidelines (3rd edn). The Bat Conservation Trust, London.

Above the door are gaps beneath the hit and miss boarding – these are known to provide suitable roosting habitat for bats on other buildings on the islands; however the features on the barn at Hillside differ in that they do not have a terminal apex and thus do not provide suitable roosting habitat. Windows are timber and well-fitted throughout, offering no suitable roosting habitat between the frames and the walls.

Internally within the agricultural element of the structure, there are limited features which could potentially be used by roosting bats. These are restricted to locations where there is an internal barge board running along the top of the internal hit and miss below the eaves; these features do provide apex cavities indicating notional suitability although inspection with an endoscope identified dense cobwebs and dust indicating no occupation by bats over a long timeframe. The ongoing use of the barn as both an agricultural workshop and as access for residential use means that disturbance, noise and light levels in evenings would make the interior of the barn a suboptimal location for a roost.

The residential component of the building is the only part of the structure that has two external layers which create a void. A close inspection of the exterior of the cladding in this section identified only a single location with a potential access to this void – on the western gable. An endoscope inspection identified dense cobwebs and no associated evidence of historic occupation. The corrugated roof sheets are well-sealed at the eaves preventing access to the void between these sheets and the ceiling of the residential component.

The corrugated sheets associated with the roof structure are tightly overlapping and no gaps were identified at these unions. The capping on the gables was generally tightly fitting or sealed with expanding foam – there are small gaps in the overlapping in places, though an inspection at height using a video endoscope identified that these were highly superficial and unlikely to be occupied by roosting bats.

The hit and miss boarding has occasional gaps, but for the majority of the barn, the single-skinned nature of the structure means these do not lead to roosting opportunities. The only location where gaps may provide access to a void and thus a potential roosting space, is detailed above with regards to the residential component of the structure. Within the agricultural/workshop element, there is no internal wall and thus access would lead only to the main building itself. Similarly, boxed soffits are open internally thus offering no voids or other roosting niches. Guttering runs below the roof line on both eaves supported by well-fitted fascia boards.

A small single-storey kitchen is attached to the right of the main doors on the eastern aspect – this is a separate, recently constructed building with shiplap cladding and a flat corrugated roof. Internally this is entirely sealed and hygienic with no external access features noted. No potential habitat for bats was identified associated with this attached building.

A careful internal inspection of the agricultural element of the barn identified no evidence of current or historic use by bats.

Survey Limitations

There were no limitations on access or visibility which would affect the results of the survey – all features potentially identified were fully inspected with a video endoscope.

The survey was undertaken in February when bats are in a state of reduced activity; however common pipistrelles were recorded in transitional roosts and in flight on neighbouring islands in the preceding days. The timing of the survey is accounted for in the assessment and recommendations arising from the survey.

Assessment of Potential for use by Roosting Bats

It is considered that the barn provides **negligible potential** for use by roosting bats.

Individual features have negligible potential to support individual opportunistic or exploratory bats; this residual risk can be controlled through an appropriate method of working during conversion works.

Assessment of Potential for use by Nesting Birds

The building is confirmed as providing suitable nesting habitat for typical species including swallow – nests from last season were noted at the time of survey.

Potential nesting habitat for other species such as blackbird and robin is also present associated with the interior of the building; though the levels of human activity and potential disturbance associated with ongoing use of the barn makes occupation by these species unlikely.

It is confirmed that the barn provides **suitable habitat** for use by nesting birds.

Recommendations and Justification (Bats):

No further surveys are recommended with regards to bats – the conclusion of **negligible potential** does not require any further information in order to inform a planning application.

It is not recommended that any Planning Conditions are required with regards to bats in relation to the proposed conversion of the barn.

Standard good practice and vigilance should be observed by the contractors undertaking the conversion works in acknowledgement that bats are transient in their use of roosting opportunities and may explore potential roosting locations. Recommendations to ensure legislative compliance are provided in Appendix 2.

In order to enhance the provision of roosting opportunities in the local area, it is recommended that a wall-mounted bat box be installed on the western gable of the renovated barn. This should be positioned so that it not above the door – as an open-based box design it would not require cleaning and its positioning would ensure that no issues arise through bat droppings below the box. The location and aspect would be optimal for bats such as common pipistrelle which is the dominant species present on the island and the most likely species to use the environs for foraging and roosting. The proximity of the western gable to existing vegetation would secure a vegetated fly-in/out habitat.

Appendix 3 provides a specification for the bat box, and installation instructions for the contractors undertaking the works.

Recommendations and Justification (Birds):

In order to ensure legislative compliance, the contractors undertaking the works must ensure that nesting birds are not disturbed in accordance with requirements under the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981). Observation of the recommendations provided in Appendix 4 will ensure this.

It is the responsibility of the contractors undertaking the works to ensure legislative compliance with regards to nesting birds – it is not recommended that Planning Conditions or other mechanisms are required to support this.

The conversion works would result in the closure of the barn to nesting birds – this would prevent swallows from nesting. In order to address this, externally-mounted nest boxes for this species should be provided. These should be situated on the northern aspect of the barn where there is a good fly-in access for this species and where disturbance would be minimal.

If the applicant wished to provide biodiversity enhancement measures, this could be achieved through the erection of further bird boxes on the new structure,, especially on the northern aspect facing scrub and under-managed habitat.

House sparrows nest communally and nest boxes could accommodate this, either through the

installation of a single purpose-built nest box comprising several individual chambers with separate entrances, or the installation of 3+ nest boxes in close proximity. Nest boxes suitable for hole-dwelling species such as blue tits, or open-fronted boxes for species such as blackbird and robin also have a high likelihood of occupation. Boxes should be mounted on the wall if possible, at a height of at least 3m above the ground with an entrance clear of vegetation/other features which may put them at risk of predation from cats.

Boxes can be sourced online, or can be constructed on site using methodology and specifications provided by the RSPB:

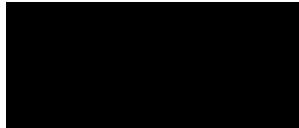
Swallow: <https://www.nestbox.co.uk/products/eco-swallow-nest>

Sparrows: <https://www.rspb.org.uk/get-involved/activities/give-nature-a-home-in-your-garden/garden-activities/createasparrowstreet/>

Other Species: <https://www.rspb.org.uk/fun-and-learning/for-families/family-wild-challenge/activities/build-a-birdbox/>

Signed by bat worker(s):

Date: 12th February 2022



APPENDIX 2

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PRECAUTIONARY METHOD STATEMENT WITH REGARDS TO BATS

The purpose of this Method Statement is to ensure that conversion works can proceed where presence of bats has been determined to be unlikely, but a precautionary approach is still advisable. It has been determined that direct harm to roosting bats during the proposed conversion works would be highly unlikely.

Contractors should, however, be aware of **their own legal responsibility with respect to bats**:

Relevant Legislation regarding Bats

The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017, or the 'Habitat Regulations 2017', transposes European Directives into English and Welsh legislation. Under these regulations, bats are classed as a European Protected Species and it is, therefore, an offence to:

- *Deliberately kill, injure or capture bats;*
- *Deliberately damage or destroy bat roosts.*

A bat roost is commonly defined as being any structure or place that is used as a breeding site or resting place, and since it may be in use only occasionally or at specific times of year, a roost retains such a designation even if bats are not present.

Bats are also protected from disturbance under Regulation 43. Disturbance of bats includes in particular any disturbance which is likely:

- (a) *To impair their ability -*
- *to survive, to breed or reproduce, or to rear or nurture their young; or*
 - *in the case of animals of a hibernating or migratory species, to hibernate or migrate; or*
- (b) *To affect significantly the local distribution or abundance of the species to which they belong.*

Bats also have limited protection under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) and the Countryside Rights of Way Act 2000 (as amended). It is, therefore, an offence to:

- *Intentionally or recklessly destroy, damage or obstruct any structure or place which a bat uses for shelter or protection.*
- *Intentionally or recklessly disturb bats whilst occupying any structure or place used for shelter or protection.*

Contractors should be aware of **where bats are most likely to be found** in respect to the given building structures:

There is a negligible risk of individual bats making transient use of gaps between the hit and miss and the fascia board running along below the eaves internally in the workshop/barn component of the building. The fascia board should be removed carefully and by hand such that in the highly unlikely event of bats being present, they are not crushed and can disperse freely.

There is a negligible risk of individual bats accessing the void between the hit and miss cladding and the internal boarding on the western aspect of the building, by means of a single hole in the cladding. This aspect of the barn should be exposed carefully through removal of either internal or external boarding, and the area inspected visually for evidence of roosting bats prior to work proceeding further.

Contractors should be aware of **the process to follow in the highly unlikely event of finding bats** or evidence indicating that bats are likely to be present:

If bats are identified, works should cease and the named ecologist contacted immediately for advice.

If the bat is in a safe situation, or a situation which can be made safe, they should remain undisturbed.

Only if the bat is in immediate risk of harm can the bat be moved with care and using a gloved hand. This is a last resort and should only be undertaken for humane reasons if the bat is at immediate risk of harm **and** if the ecologist cannot be contacted for advice.

APPENDIX 3 – BOX SPECIFICATION

Box Specification

The box selected should be suitable for use by common pipistrelle bats – the species most abundantly present on Bryher and those most likely to make use of bat box features associated with buildings in a residential location.

The Schwegler 1FF bat box would be optimal but supply issues can occur with this manufacturer. Therefore if this option is not available at the time of works, suitable alternative boxes are detailed below which would secure the biodiversity enhancement.

 <p>A black, rectangular bat box with a slightly protruding front panel and a small yellow label on the front.</p>	 <p>A black, curved bat box mounted on a red brick wall. It has a bat silhouette cutout on the front.</p>
<p>Improved Crevice Bat Box</p>	<p>Beaumaris Woodstone Bat Box</p>
 <p>A black bat box with a built-in wooden rear panel, hanging from a white cord. It has a bat silhouette cutout on the front.</p>	 <p>A light-colored wooden bat box mounted on a tree trunk. It has a simple rectangular design with a small entrance hole.</p>
<p>1FF Schwegler Bat Box With Built-in Wooden Rear Panel</p>	<p>NHBS Kent Bat Box</p>

These boxes can be sourced from online retailers such as NHBS.

Box Location and Siting

The box should be sited close to the apex on the western gable of the barn in the location indicated through the red circle on the photograph below. Positioning to the side of the door would avoid any risk of nuisance through bat droppings etc. as the open based box would avoid the requirement for cleaning or other maintenance.

This location has been chosen as it provides vegetated fly-in/out habitat for bats.



Box Installation

The box should be fixed following the manufacturer's recommendations and using the fixings provided. Whilst cover provided by associated vegetation should provide a good degree of protection from the prevailing winds, care must be taken to ensure that the installation of the box is secure and stable in high wind conditions.

Lighting

It is important that the box is not lit by external lights such as security lights. Any external lighting in this area should be ground mounted and cowled to prevent light-spill.

APPENDIX 4

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METHOD STATEMENT WITH REGARDS TO BREEDING BIRDS

Timing of Works

The most reliable means of ensuring nesting birds are not impacted by the works is for conversion works to be conducted outside the bird breeding season of March to September inclusive. Conversion works can be undertaken outside of the breeding season without constraint.

If a conversion activities are commenced prior to the beginning of the nesting season, and this activity is sustained, then birds are likely to be dissuaded from establishing nests – in this way, works begun during the winter can proceed into the spring/summer with a minimal risk of causing disturbance or damage.

Works Undertaken during the Breeding Season

If conversion works proceed during the breeding season, a nesting bird survey would need to be carried out by a suitably qualified person prior to clearance.

Careful observation of any potential nesting sites, including the confirmed swallow nest but also locations suitable for more discreet species such as robin or wren, would be required to ensure that the parent birds are not visiting a nest and provisioning the young. Nests are only protected if they are active (i.e. being used to rear young) or in the process of being built.

- Where active nests are identified, works affecting these areas must be delayed until the chicks have fledged the nest.
- Once it is confirmed that nests are absent or no longer active, the relevant features should be dismantled carefully and by hand as a precaution.

APPENDIX 5

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LOCATION PLAN AND PHOTOGRAPHS



Map 01 – Illustrating location of property within the local environs (red circle). Reproduced in accordance with Google's Fair Use Policy.



Map 02 – Showing the barn (red) which was subject to the survey.



Photograph 1: Showing the southern aspect of the barn with one of the timber windows.



Photograph 2: Showing the eastern aspect of the building with the full-size barn door. The small kitchen associated with Scilly Chilli is visible to the side of this door.



Photograph 3: Showing the interior of the main workshop/agricultural component of the barn



Photograph 4: Showing the interior of the residential component of the building with boarded out walls and ceiling



Photograph 5: Showing the northern aspect of the building with the corrugated roof structure apparent.



Photograph 6: Showing the interior of the workshop/agricultural component of the building. The swallows nest is visible (white arrow) and the barge board above the hit and miss boarding can also be seen (red arrow).