PRELIMINARY ROOST ASSESSMENT (PRA)

LOWENVA,
CHURCH STREET, ST MARY'S, ISLES OF SCILLY

Client: *Matt Davis*

Our reference: *23-5-2*

Planning reference: *P/23/031/HH*

Report date: 1st June 2023

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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 property known as Lowenva by roosting bats. Whilst a negligible potential is concluded, it is noted that there is a small chance of opportunistic/transient use of individual discreet features. This potential is not sufficient to justify further surveys or significant constraints to works, but should be taken into account in accordance with the precautionary principle. 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 edition [1]
Bats – Further Survey Requirements
No further surveys are recommended – the PRA conclusion does not require further survey information with regards to bats in order to inform a planning application.
Bats – Recommendations
Standard good practice and vigilance should be observed by the contractors undertaking the works in acknowledgement that bats are transient in their use of roosting opportunities and may explore potential locations, especially if the condition of structural features were to change. A specific methodology is provided in Appendix 1. A Planning Condition requiring compliance with the Precautionary Method of Works (PMW) outlined in Appendix 1 could be attached to a Decision Notice. If so, it is recommended that this should be compliance only – no further information would be required as the methodology outlined in the PMW is comprehensive. If the applicant wishes to provide biodiversity enhancement, a bat box could be erected on the gable of the building. Guidance on suitable specifications is provided.

Nesting Birds – Results and Findings
There was no evidence of nesting birds recorded within the building; however there are discreet opportunities which may be suitable for some species such as house sparrow.
Nesting Birds - Recommendations
Works should take account of the minor residual risk of species such sparrow making use of nesting opportunities during the breeding season. There is no requirement to replace nesting habitat for breeding birds as no nesting habitat would be lost. If the applicant wishes to provide biodiversity enhancement, nest boxes for common bird species could be erected in the garden or on the buildings.

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

PRELIMINARY ROOST ASSESSMENT (PRA)

Planning Authority:	**Location:**	**Planning Application ref:**
Isles of Scilly	SV 90807 10459	P/23/031/HH

Planning application address:

Lowenva, Church Road, Hugh Town, St Mary's, Isles of Scilly

Proposed development:

The proposed works were identified through the plans submitted to Planning and viewed on the Planning Portal. These include:

1) The extension of the building through the construction of a new unit and linking section which will attach to the existing building on the western half of the southern aspect;
2) Replacement of roof and gable wooden shingles with a modern roof covering, and timber cladding on the gables;
3) Replacement of windows and doors.

Building references:

The building is identified in the plans provided in Appendix 2.

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 1st June 2023 in accordance with relevant Best Practice methodology[2].

Local and Landscape Setting:

The building is located to south-eastern end of Hugh Town, where the land rises and the character of the housing becomes more widely spaced with larger gardens in contrast to the more tightly spaced buildings which characterise the main town.

The property itself is set within a garden plot dominated by a garden lawn, with pittosporum hedging on some of the boundaries but largely open to the south and west.

The land use immediately surrounding the building is residential development on all sides, with associated gardens, roads, hardstanding and access features.

Beyond the residential edge of the town, there is abundant suitable habitat to the east. Approximately 180m to the east is Lower Moors SSSI – a topogenous mire with areas of elm woodland and scrub as well as a series of pools and marshy grassland. Records from the Local Bat Group indicate that this is an important foraging resource for bats on the island. Small-scale agricultural fields and associated trees and hedge lines occur to the east.

There are three records of bat roosts within 500m of the property – all relate to common pipistrelle roosts utilising features such as hanging slates around dormer windows in Hugh Town to the west and south-west of the site.

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

Building Description(s):

The property is a detached bungalow constructed of reconstituted stone blocks which are in good condition. The roof and gables (above eaves height) are clad in timber shingles.

The main cavity walls are in good condition with no access gaps or noted externally. The wooden window and door frames are well-fitted and no gaps were noted.

The boxed soffits have occasional gaps where they are imperfectly cut to the irregular blockwork of the wall – these gaps were inspected with an endoscope and no evidence of bats was noted but it is possible that occasional minor roosting habitats could be found in these features. This applies to those both at the eaves and the gable. Guttering was attached to the eaves soffits only.

The roof itself is constructed around a timber truss framework with timber shingles attached directly to wooden battens with no insulation or underfelting. Despite the suitability of the materials for roosting bats, the characteristics of the shingles mean that there are no suitable cavities between them, nor beneath them. The gable walls internally have minor cavities created by the intersection of timbers, but these were found to be relatively open and well cobwebbed at the time of survey indicating no current or recent occupation by bats. There is a timber ridge board present.

The loft space is used for storage and was clean and tidy – no evidence of bats or other species such as mouse were identified.

Survey Limitations

There were no significant limitations to access or survey inspection which might affect the evidence base or subsequent conclusions of this survey.

Assessment of Potential for use by Roosting Bats

No evidence of current or historic use by bats was identified during the survey and an overall **negligible potential** was determined; however it is noted that there is a small residual risk of opportunistic/transient use of the features noted.

Recommendations and Justification (Bats):

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

Standard good practice and vigilance should be observed by the contractors undertaking the works in acknowledgement that bats are transient in their use of roosting opportunities and may explore potential locations. The potential for individual common pipistrelle bats to make use of minor opportunities associated with listed features should be taken into account during works. These features are:

- The minor gaps where timbers intersect towards the apex of the internal gables;
- The gaps behind the boxed soffits where they adjoin the wall;
- Free-hanging from internal timbers.

At the discretion of the Planning Authority, a compliance condition could be included in any Planning Application approval requiring that works proceed in line with the PMW requirements outlined in Appendix 1 of this report. This is in order to ensure that bats are not impacted by the proposed works.

If the applicant wishes to provide biodiversity enhancement, the eastern gable would offer an ideal location to install a bat box. This should be positioned above 3m from the ground to

minimise the risk of predation. An open-based box design would ensure that it would not require cleaning, though siting should avoid being positioned directly above windows or doors to prevent nuisance. The location and aspect would be optimal for 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 gable to existing vegetation would secure a vegetated fly-in/out habitat.

A suitable box could be purchased or constructed following freely available plans. Kent Bat Box-style boxes are slim easy to construct from appropriate timber using the plans provided at:

http://www.kentbatgroup.org.uk/kent-bat-box.pdf

Assessment of Potential for use by Nesting Birds

No evidence of nesting birds was identified associated with the property; however access at the eaves may allow species such as house sparrow to find nesting opportunities within the building.

Care should be taken to ensure that no birds are nesting prior to works taking place. This could be achieved either through timing of works, or a pre-commencement inspection.

Recommendations and Justification (Birds):

Timing of Works

Works affecting the roof should be undertaken outside of the breeding season which runs from March – September inclusive, where practicable. This would provide the most robust means of avoiding risk of impact to nesting birds.

Pre-commencement Inspection

If this is not possible, then contractors should visually inspect the work area internally and externally before they are affected by the works, in order to confirm that no nests are present. In the unlikely event that a bird nest is present, it must be left undisturbed until chicks have fledged the nest, at which point works can proceed.

Care must also be taken to ensure that the works do not cause disturbance or damage to proximate nesting areas through indirect impacts including vibration, noise or contractor presence. This includes adjacent buildings such as the garden shed, as well as vegetation within the garden and boundary hedges.

Enhancement Opportunities

There is no requirement to mitigate for loss of nesting habitat for breeding birds as no nesting habitat would be removed; however if the applicant wished to provide biodiversity enhancement measures, this could be achieved through the erection of bird boxes on the residential property or within the garden.

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 a wall or tree 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: **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): [redacted] **Date:** 1st June 2023

APPENDIX 1
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PRECAUTIONARY METHOD STATEMENT WITH REGARDS TO BATS

The purpose of this Method Statement is to ensure that proposed 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 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 existing building:**

Soffits

There are occasional gaps where the boxed soffits meet the walls. Where these are to be removed or impacted as part of the proposed works, the soffits should be carefully removed and the gaps behind them exposed in such a way that, in the highly unlikely event that bats are present, they are not injured or killed by the action.

Once these areas are fully exposed, they can be visually inspected by contractors. If any bats are present, or suspected, works should pause and the Named Ecologist contacted to review the situation. If no bats are present, the remaining materials can be removed and works can continue.

Internal Gable Timbers

The only gaps suitable for use by bats within the wooden roof structure are where timbers intersect towards the apex of the gable ends internally.

These locations can be inspected visually using a torch, or exposed through careful removal of timbers. This should be done in such a way that, in the highly unlikely event that bats are present, they are not injured or killed by the action.

Once these minor cavities are fully exposed, they can be visually inspected by contractors. If any bats are present, or suspected, works should pause and the Named Ecologist contacted to review the situation. If no bats are present, then works can continue.

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 2
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LOCATION PLAN AND PHOTOGRAPHS

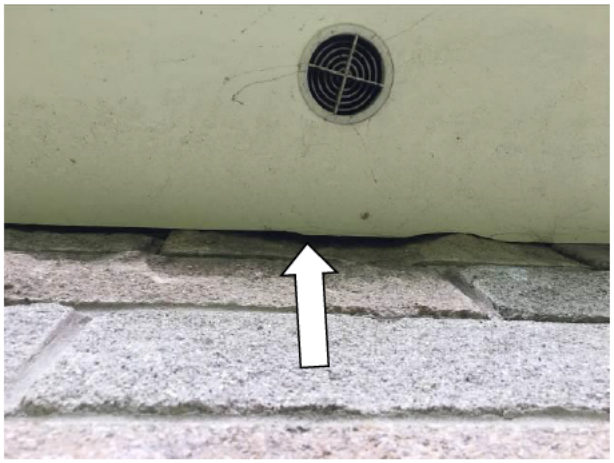
Map 01 – Illustrating the location of the property within the local environs (red circle). Reproduced in accordance with Google's Fair Use Policy.

Map 02 – Showing the building (red). Reproduced in accordance with Google's Fair Use Policy.

Photograph 1: Showing the building viewed from the west

Photograph 2: Showing the shingles on the gable ends of the property

Photograph 3: Showing the wooden windows fitted within the reconstituted stone block walls



Photograph 4: Showing an example of the minor gaps in the boxed soffits where they meet the wall.

Photograph 5: Showing the roof structure with ridge board visible. The shingles are attached directly to the battens.

Photograph 6: Showing the apex of the interior gable – an example of the locations where minor gaps are present are indicated.