

# PRELIMINARY ROOST ASSESSMENT (PRA)

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## COOTAMUNDRA, MCFARLANDS DOWN, ST MARY'S, ISLES OF SCILLY



*Client: Island Construction*

*Our reference: 23-2-1*

*Planning reference: Produced in advance of submission*

*Report date: 4<sup>th</sup> February 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 onsite structures 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 edition<sup>1</sup>

## 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 summary of standard Good Practice to be observed by contractors is provided in Appendix 1.

It is not recommended that any Planning Conditions are required with regards to bats in order to ensure legislative compliance during demolition works.

In order to provide biodiversity enhancement, a bat box could be erected on the eastern aspect of the new dwelling. Guidance on suitable specifications is provided.

## Nesting Birds - Results and Findings

All of the structures on site provide suitable nesting habitat for breeding birds, with historic nests identified in the dwelling house and the garage unit. Both the greenhouse and the makeshift oil tank shelter would also provide suitable nesting habitat in discreet locations.

The more mature vegetation within the garden, especially small trees and shrubs around the boundaries, are likely to support suitable nesting habitat for breeding birds.

## Nesting Birds - Recommendations

Recommended measures to ensure legislative compliance and Good Practice with regards to nesting birds is outlined in the report. This includes methodologies for pre-emptive exclusion in specific locations; timing of works to avoid impacts; or as a last resort, a pre-commencement nesting bird survey.

In order to mitigate the loss of nesting habitat as a result of the demolition works, nest boxes should be erected either on the dwelling or within the garden. Guidance on suitable specifications is provided.

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

## PRELIMINARY ROOST ASSESSMENT (PRA)

<b>Planning Authority:</b> Isles of Scilly	<b>Location:</b> SV 91319 12423	<b>Planning Application ref:</b> Report produced in support of application
<b>Planning application address:</b> Cootamundra, McFarlands Down, St Mary's, Isles of Scilly		
<b>Proposed development:</b> The proposed works were identified by the client and should accord with the documentation submitted in support of the application. These involve: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) The demolition of the existing buildings on site including the main dwelling house; a single-storey garage; a derelict glasshouse; and a makeshift canopy covering the oil tank.</li> <li>2) The construction of a new dwelling within the approximate footprint of the existing dwelling.</li> </ol>		
<b>Building references:</b> The individual buildings within the plot are identified in the plans provided in Appendix 2.		
<b>Name and licence number of bat-workers carrying out survey:</b> James Faulconbridge (2015-12724-CLS-CLS)		
<b>Preliminary Roost Assessment date:</b> The visual inspection was undertaken on 3 <sup>rd</sup> February 2023 in accordance with relevant Best Practice methodology <sup>2</sup> .		
<b>Local and Landscape Setting:</b> Cootamundra is situated at the northern extremity of the residential area of McFarland's Down to the north-west of St Mary's in the Isles of Scilly.  The land to the north and west is largely open with a mix of agricultural and pasture land with areas of heathland and coastal grassland on the approach to the shoreline. To the east, directly bounding the garden of the property, is an area of mature coniferous tree cover which extends north towards the shore and south inland. The property is bounded on the southern aspect by a residential property with associated amenity garden.  A common pipistrelle roost was recorded within McFarland's Down in 2014 in a garage approximately 180m to the south of Cootamundra, with further transient/day roosts recorded associated with properties over 500m away to the east.		
<b>Building Description(s):</b> There are four distinct structures associated with the property – these are all proposed for demolition as part of the current proposals. For clarity, these buildings will be described and assessed individually. The individual components are identified in the map provided in Appendix 2.		

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

### *Dwelling House*

The main dwelling house is a dormer bungalow which is rendered externally in good condition. Occasional cracks are present, but these, are superficial only. The doors and windows comprise a combination of wooden and uPVC units which – whilst they are deteriorating in places – are well-fitted offering no gaps around the frames. There is a bay window and porch at the front of the property, both with flat roofs – no structural features offering roosting opportunities were noted associated with these.

The roof is covered with slate-effect tiles which are thin but well fitted – no gaps were noted which could potentially provide a roosting opportunity for bats. There are rounded ridge tiles present – these too were well fitted with no gaps. The roof verge at the two gables were inspected and found to provide no gaps or access features; similarly the structure of the eaves permits no potential access. The valley between two roof pitches was well-sealed with no lifted flashing. The chimney is rendered and in good condition with no gaps in the flashing which joins the main roof. There are boxed soffits throughout the gables and eaves – these were all tightly fitted with the exception of a single location at the north-western corner. This would not provide access to the gable soffit due to the construction, but does support an old nest which was found during a video endoscope inspection. This entirely fills the gap along the eaves, indicating no current or recent occupation by bats. Video endoscope inspection confirms this.

Internally, the property is in significantly poorer condition, arising from a long period without occupation and water damage caused by a leak during this time. There are occasional open or damaged windows which have permitted access for birds – a nest was located in the kitchen and another in the porch.

In principle, it is possible that the open windows could permit access for bats, though a thorough search of the property did not identify any current presence or evidence of historic roosting in the form of droppings or other signs.

Loft spaces are present above the tie-beam of the A-frame roof timbers and also built into the eaves. The void at the apex was small and could not be accessed fully – however inspection from the loft hatch reveals well-fitted underfelted and insulation. Those voids built into the eaves were used for regular storage and were boarded out internally with insulation above. Occasional evidence of mice was noted, but a comprehensive inspection did not identify any evidence of bats.

### *Single-storey Garage*

The garage unit is built using the same construction style and materials as the house – the pitched roof uses the same roof covering; the boxed soffits are equivalent; and the exterior is rendered in the same material as the house.

The roof is well-fitted with no gaps noted. Window and door frames are well-fitted with no gaps noted; however the windows were open in places. The internal A-frame roof timbers were well-fitted and in good condition – the terminal structures adjacent to the breeze-block walls were tightly adjoined to the wall with no gaps behind. A ridge board is present with underfelted in good condition above the timbers. A damaged soffit in the south-western corner would potentially provide access into the garage, but does not offer a roosting opportunity in its own right due to the lack of a suitable enclosed or terminal apex cavity. An inspection using a video endoscope did however identify the presence of a nest in this location. The remaining boxed soffits were in good condition with no gaps noted. There was evidence of mice in this building, but no evidence of access or occupation by bats was identified. The only potential features would be free-hanging from timbers, or use of idiosyncratic roosting features associated with stored garage items and equipment.

### *Glasshouse*

A derelict glasshouse is present in the corner of the garden – this is a timber-framed structure

built onto a breeze block lower wall. The door was open and there are frequent broken panes allowing ease of internal access for birds. An old grape vine is present along the apex, with dense brambles in the base. No suitable roosting opportunities for bats were noted associated with this structure.

#### *Makeshift Oil Tank Shelter*

A shelter has been built around the oil tank adjacent to the glasshouse – this is a combination of ply and corrugated sheet materials around a wooden frame. An aviary is present at the eastern end of this structure. The shelter was fully inspected – no evidence of occupation by bats was noted and the structure did not appear to have suitable roosting features for the bat species present on the island.

#### **Survey Limitations**

It was not possible to fully inspect the apex loft space in the main dwelling; however the roof structure is remarkably tightly fitted and well-sealed given the overall condition of the property. No suitable access points for bats were identified anywhere within the roof structure making it highly unlikely that a bat would be able to access this void.

There were no other significant limitations to access or survey inspection which might affect the evidence base for 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 with regards to the dwelling house and single-storey garage.

**No potential** for bats was identified associated with the glasshouse and the makeshift oil tank shelter.

#### **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, especially if the condition of structural features were to change. A summary of standard Good Practice to be observed by contractors is provided in Appendix 1.

It is not recommended that any Planning Conditions are required with regards to bats in order to ensure legislative compliance during demolition.

In order to provide biodiversity enhancement, bat boxes could be installed on the new building. The location of the new property adjacent to the pine trees on the northern edge of McFarlands Down would offer an ideal location. The box should be positioned facing the tree line and at a height of at least 3m from the ground to minimise the risk of predation – ideally higher either below the gable apex or at the top of the eaves depending on the construction of the eastern aspect. An open-based box design would ensure that it would not require cleaning. 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.

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**

All of the building structures identified in the report offer nesting habitat for birds. These opportunities predominantly arise as a result of the deterioration of the structures and their lack of occupation; therefore they are recently developed habitats rather than long-standing nesting sites.

Nests were confirmed in the kitchen and porch of the dwelling house; and in the individual damaged sections of soffit on the dwelling house and the garage. No active nests were noted in the oil tank shelter or the glasshouse, but they are considered suitable locations.

The more mature shrubs and small trees within the garden, especially at the boundary, would also provide suitable nesting habitat for birds although it is not clear that further removal of woody vegetation would be required to facilitate the development of the site.

### **Recommendations and Justification (Birds):**

There are three approaches which can be taken to ensure that the proposed demolition works do not impact on nesting birds. These are:

- pre-emptive exclusion outside of the breeding season;
- avoidance of impacts through timing of works; and
- pre-commencement inspection.

A combination of approaches can be applied on different structures depending on the schedule of works.

#### *Pre-emptive exclusion*

Excluding access by birds can be undertaken on the **dwelling house** and the **garage unit**. It would not be appropriate to the glasshouse or the oil tank shelter as these structures cannot be easily sealed to confidently exclude access. It would also not be appropriate or practicable to exclude nesting birds from vegetation.

At the time of survey in early February, no active nests were recorded and no birds were identified in the property. There are a small number of discreet access features which could easily be sealed to exclude access out of season. These are:

- Open or broken windows;
- The letterbox which appears to provide access to the nest identified in the porch;
- The gap in the soffit on the north-western corner of the dwelling house;
- The gap in the soffit on the south-western corner of the garage unit.

If all access features are sealed before the end of February, this would ensure that breeding birds do not have opportunity to establish nests. Utmost care must be taken to ensure that no birds are present in the property at the time that the access features are sealed to prevent birds from being trapped. This would require a careful walkover of the property including all rooms and voids where birds may be present. Upon completion of this inspection, windows should be closed and sealed. In the case of soffits, the old nests should be carefully removed by hand and confirmed not to be in active use before these features are sealed. The presence of the dense nesting material and lack of access to further voids within the soffits would currently prevent use of these features by bats.

#### *Timing of Works*

Works affecting **all structures on site** can be undertaken without constraint if completed outside of the breeding season which runs from March – September inclusive. This is also the

recommended approach to any minor clearance works related to **shrubs and small trees** within the grounds of the property.

*Pre-commencement Inspection*

If the recommended timing of works is not practicable, and if pre-emptive exclusion measures have not been undertaken, then a nesting bird survey would need to be carried out by a suitably qualified person prior to the commencement of works. This approach can be applied to **all structures on site** and to minor clearance works related to **shrubs and small trees** within the grounds of the property.

Careful observation would be required to ensure that the parent birds are not constructing a nest or 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 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 and works can continue.

*Enhancement Measures*

It is recommended that enhancement measures are designed into the project to provide replacement nesting habitat for breeding birds. This could be achieved through the erection of bird boxes on the new residential property or within the garden.

The mature garden boundary and the proximity to the tree line to the east of the property would offer a high chance of occupation by a range of birds including woodland edge species. Nest boxes could include those suitable for hole-dwelling species such as blue tits, or open-fronted boxes for species such as blackbird and robin.

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:

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

**Signed by bat worker(s):**

**Date:** 4<sup>th</sup> February 2023



# APPENDIX 1

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## BEST PRACTISE WITH REGARDS TO BATS

The purpose of this Method Statement is to ensure that contractors undertaking demolition works are aware of their legal duties with regards to bats, and aware of the appropriate action to be taken in the highly unlikely event of bats being encountered.

Contractors should 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 structure:**

No features suitable for roosting bats were identified within the proposed works area – however contractors should be aware of the type of feature in which bats might be found in this type of structure.

These include:

- Gaps between roofing or ridge tiles;
- Crevices and gaps between structural elements, such as fascias and boxed soffits;
- Beneath lead flashing, if this becomes lifted to create a cavity;
- Within loft voids, often at the apex of roof timbers;

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



**Map 02** - Showing the main house (green wash) within the blueline site boundary. The single-storey garage is shown in red; the oil tank shelter is shown in magenta; and the glasshouse is shown in yellow.





**Photograph 1:** Showing the main existing dwelling on the site.



**Photograph 2:** Showing an example of the well-fitted window frames with no gaps or crevices. Cracks and damage in the render, as illustrated, are superficial and not suitable to support bats.



**Photograph 3:** Showing the good condition of the boxed soffits throughout the majority of the property.



**Photograph 4:** Showing an example of the eaves where the guttering is displaced, demonstrating the lack of access for bats.



**Photograph 5:** Showing the tight fit of the roof tiles, with no gaps noted throughout.



**Photograph 6:** Showing an example of one of the birds nests within the property, resulting from lack of occupation.





**Photograph 7:** Showing the interior of one of the boarded out loft components within the property – this example is at the apex but those at the eaves are of equivalent construction.



**Photograph 8:** Showing the main loft above the tie-beam in the main dwelling.



**Photograph 9:** Showing the single-storey garage.



**Photograph 10:** Showing the interior of the single-storey garage with A-frame timbers and well-fitted underfelting.



**Photograph 11:** Showing the roof of the canopy sheltering the oil tank.



**Photograph 12:** Showing the aviary located at the end of the oil tank shelter.



**Photograph 13:** Showing the glasshouse.



**Photograph 14:** Showing the interior of the glasshouse with overgrown grape vine and brambles.