

BAT PRESENCE/ABSENCE SURVEYS (PAS)

SIGNAL ROCK STABLE BLOCK HIGHER TOWN, ST MARTIN'S, ISLES OF SCILLY



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Executive Summary

Overview
<p>A total of one Presence/Absence Survey (PAS) was undertaken on the stable block associated with Signal Rock in St Martin's, Isles of Scilly. The purpose of the survey was to provide an evidence base which meets Best Practice Guidance following the initial findings of the Preliminary Roost Assessment (PRA) which was completed in May 2023.</p> <p>The results of the PAS survey are provided in this report which should be read alongside the PRA to provide a comprehensive assessment of the building with regards to bats.</p>
Results
<p>The surveys did not identify any bats emerging from the property.</p> <p>The surveys generally recorded moderate levels of foraging by common pipistrelle bats, predominantly offsite to the south of the property. No other bat species were recorded.</p>
Conclusion
<p>The survey evidence accords with the Best Practice Guidance requirements to conclude 'Probable Absence' of bats.</p> <p>No further surveys are required and there is no requirement for a European Protected Species Mitigation Licence (EPSML).</p>
Mitigation Strategy
<p>It would be appropriate to ensure that works are undertaken with due regard for the unlikely eventuality that bats may make transient use of roosting features identified in the PRA report – the conclusion of 'likely absence' does not preclude the possibility of occasional use of features by bats on an exploratory/opportunistic basis.</p> <p>A Precautionary Method of Works (PMW) is therefore provided in Appendix 1. This should be followed during works to ensure legislative compliance on the part of the contractors.</p> <p>If the applicant wishes to provide biodiversity enhancement, a bat box could be erected on the dwelling or within the grounds of the property. Guidance on suitable specifications is provided.</p>
Planning Recommendations
<p>A Planning Condition requiring compliance with the PMW outlined in Appendix 1 could be attached to a Decision Notice at the discretion of the LPA.</p> <p>The PRA and PAS reports together provide an appropriate ecological baseline for the purposes of assessing the Planning Application. No further surveys would be required.</p> <p>This report provides an appropriate baseline to inform Planning and allow works to take place within the next 12 months. After July 2024, if works have not commenced, an update should be undertaken.</p>

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1. Introduction

1.1. Background to Surveys

The building under survey is a stable block set within the garden of Signal Rock in Higher Town on St Martin's, Isles of Scilly. The proposed schedule of works involve the conversion of the building to provide staff accommodation.

A Preliminary Roosting Assessment (PRA) was carried out in May 2023 – this assessment identified low potential for use by roosting bats.

The PRA report stated that further PAS surveys would be required to provide an evidence base sufficient to identify the status of the buildings with regards to bats, and inform any mitigation measures required to ensure legislative compliance. This PAS report provides the results of the recommended surveys. It should be read alongside the PRA report to provide a comprehensive assessment of the building with regards to roosting bats.

1.2. Survey Objectives

In accordance with the Best Practice Guidance¹, the building was subject to one PAS survey with two surveyors positioned to observe those locations where potential access or roosting features were identified.

The survey also aimed to watch the attached offsite building for any signs of emerging bats in order to take into account potential impacts relating to indirect disturbance effects.

The overall objective is to provide a comprehensive baseline upon which to assess the potential impact of the proposed re-roofing works to roosting bats.

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

2. Survey Methodology

2.1. Surveyor Details

The survey was led by James Faulconbridge. James is a Level 2 licenced bat worker with over 15 years' experience in undertaking emergence, re-entry and activity surveys.

Additional surveyors are experienced in undertaking emergence and re-entry surveys and worked under the supervision of the Licenced Bat Worker.

2.2. Survey Methodology

The dusk emergence surveys were conducted following Best Practice methodology for bat surveys.

The dusk emergence surveys commenced from approximately 20 minutes before sunset and continued until 90 minutes after sunset. The survey was undertaken with regard for the appropriate weather conditions ($\geq 10^{\circ}\text{C}$ at sunset, no/light rain or wind).

Frequency division bat detectors were used to detect and record all bat passes. The surveyors recorded metadata including the time the pass occurred, the behaviour observed (foraging/commuting) and where possible, the species of bat observed. Results from the bat detector recordings were analysed using BatSound/Analook sonogram analysis computer software.

2.3. Survey Validity and Update

Bats are transient in their use of habitats such as these, and apparently minor changes in condition or use of the building can affect suitability. However in the absence of significant changes in condition or building use, the nature and character of the site suggest that the PAS survey can be considered valid for a period of 12 months after the survey was completed, until July 2024.

3. Results

3.1. Surveyor Positions

In order to ensure that the different elements of the building were surveyed comprehensively in line with the Best Practice Guidance, a total of two surveyor positions were identified. These are identified in Map 01 below.



Map 01 – showing surveyor positions around the building.

3.2. PAS Survey 1

3.2.1. Survey Conditions

The dusk survey was undertaken on 20th July 2023. The survey commenced at 21:04, approximately 20 minutes before sunset at 21:24. It was completed at 22:54.

The temperature throughout the survey was 15°C. The evening was calm, dry and clear with 5% high cloud. There was no precipitation throughout the survey.

3.2.2. Survey Results

The emergence survey did not identify any emergence activity associated either with either the stable block or the offsite outbuilding attached on the north-western aspect.

The surveyor in Position S2 recorded regular foraging in lane to the south of the site from 22:03 until the end of the survey. The surveyor in position S2 recorded only occasional, brief bat passes towards the end of the survey.

All recorded bat passes were common pipistrelle – no other species were recorded.

3.3. Summary and Evaluation

3.3.1. Overview

The surveys did not identify any bats emerging from the building – this is sufficient to conclude ‘Likely Absence’ in accordance with the Best Practice Guidance.

The surveys showed moderate levels of foraging activity by common pipistrelle in the environs of the property.

3.3.2. Requirement for Further Surveys

No further surveys are required to provide an appropriate ecological baseline in accordance with the Best Practice Guidance.

3.4. Limitations and Constraints

3.4.1. Seasonal Timing

The timing of the surveys was within the Best Practice window of late-May to early-September.

3.4.2. Survey Conditions

The weather conditions were optimal with no precipitation or other adverse conditions which might be expected to affect bat behaviour.

3.4.3. Visibility and Coverage

The surveys were comprehensive with regards to surveyor visibility of all potential features identified in the PRA survey.

4. Mitigation Strategy

4.1. EPSML Requirement

The project does not require an European Protected Species Mitigation Licence (EPSML) to proceed.

4.2. Precautionary Method of Works

As individual bats can be exploratory or make transient use of roosting opportunities, it is important that contractors undertaking the proposed works are aware of the unlikely risk for bats to be encountered - works should therefore proceed with appropriate caution and vigilance.

A Precautionary Method of Works (PMW) is outlined in Appendix 1 of this document and should be followed by contractors undertaking works.

4.3. Timing of Works

4.3.1. Bats

The results of the PRA/PAS surveys do not indicate that there is a requirement for seasonal constraints on the timing of works with regards to bats.

4.3.2. Nesting Birds

Assessment of potential for nesting birds, and appropriate mitigation measures, are provided in the PRA report. These recommendations are not repeated here, for brevity.

4.4. Habitat Enhancement / Mitigation

4.4.1. Bats

If the applicant wishes to provide biodiversity enhancement, the established trees within the garden of the property 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. The location 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, as confirmed by the PAS survey.

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

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

4.4.2. Nesting Birds

Recommendations relating to nesting habitat retention or creation works for breeding birds are provided in the PRA report. These recommendations are not repeated here, for brevity.

APPENDIX 1 - 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.*

The following guidance outlines measures required to ensure that contractors are suitably informed of the potential for bats to be present, and undertake works in a manner which minimises the risk of impact to bats in the unlikely event of their presence.

Measures entailed by a Precautionary Method of Works

- Contractors undertaking the works should be informed of the potential for bats to be present in the features outlined in the PRA report – specifically gaps behind the fascias and potential roosting locations beneath the tiles. This could take the form of a Toolbox Talk or site induction when contractors commence works on the site;
- Contractors should be aware of their own legal obligations with regards to bats;
- The features identified in the PRA report should be visually inspected by contractors before works, after which they should be subject to a ‘soft strip’ approach whereby they are removed carefully and by hand such that in the highly unlikely event of bats being present, they are not crushed and can disperse freely;
- If there is any uncertainty around the ability to remove or expose these features safely in accordance with this guidance; or any ambiguity around the features which should be included within the PMW scope, the Licenced Bat Worker should be contacted for further advice in advance of works commencing.

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 Licenced Bat Worker should be 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.