

Land at Ashdene, Rochdale

**PRELIMINARY BAT ROOST ASSESSMENT &
ECOLOGY WALKOVER**

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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Instruction and Background

Knight Sky Ecology was commissioned to undertake a preliminary bat roost assessment and ecology walkover of an area of land off Ashdene, Rochdale, OL12 6DJ ('the site'). The assessment was undertaken in relation to the proposed construction of a single dwelling within the site. The construction will also require the removal of three garages and the felling of a small number of trees and several shrubs.

The site was subject to a similar development proposal in 2019 (planning reference 19/00376/OUT) which was refused. This planning application was supported by an ecology report (see Sections 2 and 3).

The primary aim of the assessment was to inform the proposals of all considerations relating to bats at the site and to provide an updated ecological baseline. This report presents the results of the surveys and provides all the necessary data, assessment and guidance to satisfy the relevant planning and conservation policy obligations and legislative framework. Details of the legislation afforded to bats is presented in Appendix A.

1.2 Site Description

The site is located between Ashdene and Burwell Close and accessed off Whitworth Road at grid reference SD 88944 15525. The site contains three former garages (referred to as Sheds 1 to 3) with associated access and a lawn area. It is surrounded by a belt of mature trees and shrubs. The site is on the very northern outskirts of Rochdale and the surrounding area comprises a mix of urban land and farmland. Figure 1.1 provides an aerial image of the site location.

Figure 1.1. Site location (imagery dated 09/07/2021)





2 METHODS

2.1 Desk Study

Previous Report and Consultation Responses

The following ecology report was submitted to support the previous application (planning reference 19/00376/OUT):

- Extended Phase 1 Habitat and Protected Species Survey & Report at Ashdene off Whitworth Road, Rochdale, Lancashire, OL12 6DJ (JCA Limited – 22/03/2019)

The above report is nearly 5 years old and the survey data 5 ½ years old. Therefore, in accordance with good practice guidance (CIEEM, 2019) this report is no longer valid. However, the relevant background information has been used where relevant.

This report has also taken into account the response provided by Greater Manchester Ecology Unit within the Delegated Decision Checklist and Report from the previous application.

Data Search

In light of the previous works that have been undertaken, a basic data search was undertaken to update and revalidate previous findings. This primarily involved the use of the Multi-Agency Geographic Information for the Countryside (MAGIC) mapping tool (available from: <https://magic.defra.gov.uk/>) to search for relevant ecological information for the site. Basic initial information about the site and surrounding area was also obtained from aerial imagery (Google Earth – aerial imagery dated 2021) and Ordnance Survey maps in order to provide further contextualised information to the site survey findings

2.2 Survey Personnel

The preliminary bat roost assessment and ecology walkover was undertaken by Ryan Knight MCIEEM (a full member of the Chartered Institute for Ecology and Environmental Management). Ryan holds a Level 2 Natural England Class Licence (ref. 2015-12611-CLS-CLS) and has held this licence for over 11 years. He has also acted as the named ecologist on 17 European Protected Species (EPS) mitigation licences issued by Natural England which covered several bat species (namely common pipistrelle, brown long-eared bat, Natterer's bat and whiskered bat) and roost types including day roosts, hibernation roosts and maternity roosts. Ryan has also acted as an accredited agent on numerous other mitigation licenses issued via the Low Impact Licensing Scheme and the Earned Recognition Project.

2.3 Overarching Guidance

The preliminary bat roost assessment was primarily based on the methods described in '*Bat Surveys for Professional Ecologists: Good Practice Guidelines (4th edition)*'. *Bat Conservation Trust, London.*' (Collins, J., (ed.) (2023). Any deviation from standard practice is justified where required.

The desk-based assessment and site walkover used the approach described in '*Guidelines for Preliminary Ecological Appraisal, 2nd edition*'. *Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management*' (CIEEM, 2017). This approach was refined to reflect the scale and complexity of the project and the level of potential impacts identified. The refined approach is in adherence with the guidelines.



2.4 Preliminary Bat Roost Assessment

A preliminary bat roost assessment of the three sheds within the site was undertaken on 20th December 2023. The assessment involved a visual inspection of the buildings to search for bats and evidence of bats (e.g., droppings) and an appraisal of the extent and suitability of any potential bat roost features present. The assessment included the use of a torch and ladders. A digital endoscope was available for use but not required. The interior and exterior of each building was comprehensively inspected.

Following the assessment, the building was assigned a bat roost suitability category of negligible, low, moderate, high or confirmed roost based on the collated information.

In addition, a preliminary bat roost assessment was undertaken on the trees within the site.

2.5 Ecology Walkover

A site walkover was undertaken on 20th December 2023. The aim of the site visit was to gather sufficient baseline information on the habitats within the site and to identify any habitats or features of potential ecological significance.

In addition, the site visit included a search for incidental evidence of protected / notable species and an assessment of the sites potential to support protected / notable species.

2.6 Assessment Comments

The preliminary bat roost assessment was undertaken outside the main active season for bats (April to October). Whilst evidence of bats (i.e., droppings) do degrade overtime, such evidence can persist in sheltered, dry locations long after bats have left their summer roosts. This includes building lofts, under roof eaves and within wall cavities. However, it should be noted that the main purpose of the assessment was to evaluate the potential of the buildings for use as a bat roost – not to confirm presence / absence.

The sheds were fully accessed with no limitations encountered.

This report will remain valid for a period of 18 months from the date of issue. An ecologist should be contacted for advice on the revalidation requirements of the report if planning permission is not obtained (if required) or works do not commence within this time period.



3 RESULTS

3.1 Desk Study

Previous Ecology Report

The previous report (JCA Limited, 2019) included information from a desk study, an extended Phase 1 habitat survey, bat surveys, a badger survey and an assessment of ponds in relation to great crested newts. The site area subject to survey was larger than the new application site boundary and covered land to the west and south-west. Table 3.1 provides a brief summary of the results of the surveys undertaken.

Table 3.1. Previous survey results in respect of protected and notable species

Date	Assessment Type	Results
June 2018	Building assessment for bats	A pipistrelle sp. size dropping was found on a work counter within Shed 3. All sheds were classified as moderate bat roost suitability.
August and September 2018	Dawn re-entry and dusk emergence bat survey	No evidence of a bat roost. Low levels of foraging activity comprising common pipistrelle.
September 2018	Badger survey	An abandoned (disused) sett was found in the east of the site. Reports of a dead badger found within the site.
September 2018	Great crested newt Habitat Suitability Index assessment	Two ponds located 81m and 252m south of the study area. Both ponds of poor suitability for great crested newts. No further assessment was considered to be required.
September 2018	Invasive non-native species assessment	Japanese knotweed was identified in the land area to the west of the application site. Rhododendron was also identified within the site. The type of rhododendron was not specified.

Designated Sites

No statutory designated sites are located within 2km of the development proposal. In addition, there are no locally designated sites (i.e., Sites of Biological Importance) within a 750m radius.

3.2 Ecology Walkover

General

At the time of the walkover (December, 2023) some vegetation clearance work (including shrub species such as rhododendron) had been undertaken and a proportion of the site was covered in the arisings from this clearance and the ground was also churned up from vehicle movements. The mature trees remained unaffected by the works. The sheds (1-3) also remained. However, the contents of each shed had been cleared (as compared to 2018). The sheds are accessed via an area of hardstanding in the north-eastern part of the site.



Most of the southern section of the site comprised a moss dominated, former garden lawn which was bound by a belt of trees (mixed species) and the cleared shrubs. Please refer to the tree reports submitted to the application for a full list of tree species and condition.

The site has been mapped within the priority habitat inventory as deciduous woodland (magic.gov.uk). However, based on the site visit, the habitat would not meet the criteria of deciduous woodland. The woodland contained a high density (>20%) of coniferous species (Leyland cypress and cedar sp.) in the mid and southern boundary, a high density of shrub species (<5m high) and there were large areas of open ground around the sheds and garden lawn.

The west of the site comprises the houses and private gardens of Ashdene along with a continuation of the tree belt. Further dwellings and associated gardens are to the south, north and east. The wider area comprises a mix of recreational land, residential areas and farmland.

3.3 Preliminary Bat Roost Assessment

Building Descriptions & Bat Roost Suitability

Please also refer to the photos provided below. There are three sheds within the site which are located in a row towards the centre of the site. All sheds were fully accessed. These sheds were empty and not in use at the time of survey. All three sheds were of a similar construction and comprised timber frames with concrete / asbestos sheet side walls. All three had corrugated sheet roofs. The roof of Shed 1 (the southernmost shed) had partially collapsed.

The internal timber framework of the walls of Shed 2 (middle shed) had been clad with timber panelling. This panelling did not provide any potential cavities or access gaps for bats. There were also no potential cavities in the ridges of each shed. In addition, there were no crevices under the fascias.

No potential bat roost features were observed. No shed had any suitable cavities present. There were sufficient gaps for bats to enter the inside of each shed (e.g., gaps under the curvature of the roof sheets); however, no typical bat roost features were present internally.

Overall, no bats, evidence of bats or potential roost features were recorded. A comprehensive inspection was completed both externally and internally. In respect of the absence of potential roost features each shed is categorised as **negligible roost suitability**.

Figure 3.1. Photos of sheds

Photo 1.
Sheds 1 to 3 (front)



Photo 2.
Sheds 1 to 3 (rear)



Photo 3.
Internal view of Shed 3





Photo 4.
Internal view of Shed 3



Photo 5.
Roof of Shed 2



Photo 6.
Shed 1



3.4 Great Crested Newts

Two ponds are located 100m south-west and 250m south of the site. Based on the previous information (JCA Limited, 2019), both ponds are of poor suitability to support great crested newts.



There were also limited desk-study records for the species. The site offers habitats of low suitability for the species (in terms of foraging, refuge and hibernation).

3.5 Nesting Birds

An old bird's nest was observed in a tree and the trees and shrubs within the site provide nesting opportunities for a variety of garden birds.

3.6 Badger

No evidence of badger was observed (including setts) and based on current conditions, the site is unlikely to support setts. Badgers may use the site as part of a foraging territory.

3.7 Other Protected / Notable Species

Hedgehog may use the site as part of a foraging territory. No other protected / notable species of fauna are likely to be present.

3.8 Non-native Invasive Species

Rhododendron was present on the site boundary and several stands of the species appeared to have been cleared and processed through a chipper. Based on previous information, it appears that the rhododendron in the site were cultivated varieties not included on Schedule 9, Part II of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. This could not be fully verified during the December site visit.



4 EVALUATION & CONCLUSIONS

4.1 Habitats and Trees

It is understood that the development proposal meets the remit of a self-build and therefore will be exempt from obligations relating to biodiversity net gain.

The development will require the removal of a small number of trees and works within the root protection areas of other trees. A full evaluation of tree mitigation requirements should be provided within an arboricultural report.

General enhancement recommendations for the landscaping are provided in Section 5.

4.2 Bats

The survey in 2018 found one bat dropping in Shed 3 (JCA Limited, 2019). No photos of the dropping were provided but the report suggested the dropping was probably pipistrelle species. No evidence of a roost was observed during the dawn re-entry and dusk emergence surveys undertaken in 2018.

Certain species of bats do use such structures as feeding roosts or night roosts. However, pipistrelle species are not typically associated with such behaviour. In addition, no structural features of Shed 3 could be associated with a potential roost site.

The circumstances for the bat dropping cannot be fully clarified. Such evidence can often be indicative of a roost site but does not provide conclusive evidence. Bat droppings are often found in open structures (e.g., barns) that bats use for foraging purposes only. However, the sheds are unlikely to have been used for such purposes. Shed 3 may have been associated with a temporary roosting site (e.g., 1-2 nights only) or investigative behaviour. Alternatively, the dropping may have been misidentified.

The survey in December 2023 found no evidence of bats and the buildings did not contain any features typically associated with roosting bats (Collins, 2023). There are undoubtedly rare examples where roosts have been recorded in such structures throughout the UK. These are normally in locations with high levels of bat activity and species diversity.

All British bat species and their roosts are legally protected through The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended) (the Habitats Regulations) as a European Protected Species (EPS). They also receive some protection through inclusion in Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) (see Appendix 1 for full details).

On the basis of the assessment information and specialist knowledge of the potential species concerned, Knight Sky Ecology considers that on balance, the proposed activities (i.e., removal of all three sheds) are reasonably unlikely to result in an offence under Regulation 43 of the Habitats Regulations. No further detailed assessment is recommended (i.e., presence / absence survey) and a European Protected Species licence to undertake the works would not be required.

However, given the nature of bats and roosts along with the previous information from 2018, there is considered to be a very low residual risk of encountering a bat during the initial works. Therefore, to mitigate this risk, further recommendations are made in Section 5.

The preliminary roost assessment has been completed by an ecological consultant with the necessary expertise in surveys, mitigation and licensing for bats (see Section 2.2). The information contained within this report constitutes guidance and recommendations only. The local planning authority may



either accept the recommendations made or request further information dependent on whether they are satisfied that this report discharges the relevant policies and legislative framework with regards to bats.

4.3 Great Crested Newts

Based on the collated information, great crested newts do not present an ecological constraint to the proposals and no further assessment or mitigation is recommended.

4.4 Nesting Birds

Evidence of nesting birds was identified. The proposed development should therefore be aware of the legislation afforded to nesting birds:

- All wild birds in the UK are protected under Section 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) which makes it an offence to intentionally kill, injure or take any wild bird or take, damage or destroy the nest (whilst being built or in use) or its eggs.

The nesting bird season is generally accepted as March to September. Further recommendations to mitigate the risk to nesting birds are provided in Section 5.

4.5 Badger

No badger setts were recorded and the site was considered unlikely to be used for sett digging. Overall, badgers are not considered to represent a potential constraint to the proposals. A general mitigation recommendation is provided in Section 5.

4.6 Other Species

General mitigation advice for hedgehog is provided in Section 5.



5 RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Habitats

The development is recommended to utilise native species or species of proven benefit to wildlife within the site landscaping scheme. These could include nectar rich plants and / or fruit bearing trees. Any seeds, plants or trees used within the landscaping scheme should be sourced from a reputable stockist and is recommended to be of local provenance. All planting within the site should also be appropriate for the ground and site conditions (e.g., soil pH and shade cover).

5.2 Bats

Mitigation

The sheds should be fully re-checked by a licensed ecologist immediately prior to demolition. If a bat or evidence of a roost is found, the works would stop until a Natural England licence is obtained. The presence of a bat could cause a delay of several weeks.

Bat Boxes

The development presents a good opportunity to increase roosting provision for bats via the fixing of bat boxes within the site. Two boxes are recommended. One box can be integrated into the house as it being built and one could be fixed onto the mature trees. Details of these boxes are provide in Table 5.1.

Table 5.1. Bat box models and siting advice

BAT BOXES	
Numbers and Models	Bat box numbers and models along with the locations for purchasing are provided below. Please note, there can be a considerable waiting time for delivery, therefore, several options have been provided. Dwelling • 1no. PRO UK Build-in WoodStone Bat Box (https://www.nhbs.com/); or • 1no. Vivara Pro Build-in Woodstone Bat Tube (https://www.nhbs.com/); or • 1no. Bat Block (https://www.nhbs.com/). Trees • 1no. 1FF Schwegler Bat Box With Built-in Wooden Rear Panel (https://www.nhbs.com/); or • 1no. Greenwood's Two or Three Crevice Bat Box (https://www.greenwoodsecohabitats.co.uk/shop); or • 1no. Eco Kent Bat Box (https://www.nhbs.com/).
Positioning	Dwelling Boxes can be placed within the walls, close to the roof ridge or directly under the roof verge (away from any windows) so as to achieve a height in excess of 3m from the ground.



	Trees Box can be fixed to any mature trees retained within the site. The box should be fixed on the main stem at least 4 metres in height from the ground and provide allowance for a clear flight path to / from the box. The tree location will have habitat connectivity to the surrounding landscape. The box should be sheltered from strong winds and exposed to the sun for part of the day (usually south or south-west).	
Maintenance	The models chosen do not require cleaning as bat droppings do not typically accumulate within these types of boxes to a level likely to cause problems for future habitation.	
Examples		
	PRO UK Build-in WoodStone Bat Box	1FR Schwegler Bat Tube
		
	Bat Block	1FF Schwegler Bat Box With Built-in Wooden Rear Pane



5.3 Nesting Birds

Mitigation

Any works which will potentially impact bird's nests should be undertaken outside of the main nesting bird season of March to August (inclusive). If this is not possible, any works potentially affecting bird's nests must be preceded by a nesting bird check, undertaken by a suitability qualified ecologist. If an active nest is found, it must be left in-situ until no longer in use. This may potentially delay the works programme.

Enhancements

Bird boxes can be installed at the site to provide nesting opportunities. Three boxes are recommended. The locations of the boxes along with siting advice and box models is provided below.

Table 5.2. Bird box models and siting advice

Bird Boxes	
Numbers and Models	The following models would be used: • 1no. WoodStone Starling Nest Box • 1no. Vivara Pro Seville 28mm WoodStone Nest Box • 1no. Vivara Pro Barcelona WoodStone Open Nest Box All boxes can be sourced from https://www.nhbs.com/. In the event that a certain bird box model is unavailable for purchase, a suitable like for like replacement would be sourced.
Positioning	Each box should be faced between north and east, thereby avoiding the strongest sunlight and the wettest winds. The boxes will be sited to ensure birds will have a clear flight path to the nest entrance.
Maintenance	Cleaning of the boxes should be undertaken from <u>October to January, outside of the nesting bird season (March to August inclusive)</u>. Rubber gloves must be worn. The old nesting material which accumulates after every breeding season and the droppings from earlier in the season should be removed along with any egg shells or unhatched eggs.

Examples		
	WoodStone Starling Nest Box	Vivara Pro Barcelona WoodStone Open Nest Box

5.4 Badger and Hedgehog

Mitigation

Potential impacts to badger and hedgehog during construction should be mitigated via the following measures:

- The creation of sloping escape ramps within any trenches / excavations. This can be achieved by edge profiling of trenches / excavations or by using planks placed into them at the end of each working day.
- Open pipework greater than 200mm outside diameter should be blanked.
- Hedgehog holes should be installed if fencing around the boundary of the site is to be used. A 13cm-by-13cm square with the gravel board / base panel is sufficient for any hedgehog to pass through.
- An updated check for badgers should be undertaken if the works do not proceed within the next 18 months.



APPENDIX A. LEGISLATION FOR BATS

The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981

All bat species in England are listed in Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). Section 9 of the Act make it an offence to intentionally or recklessly kill, injure or take any wild animal included in Schedule 5. In addition, it is an offence to (intentionally or recklessly):

- Damage or destroy any structure or place which any wild animal specified in Schedule 5 uses for shelter or protection;
- Disturb any such animal while it is occupying a structure or place which it uses for shelter or protection; or
- Obstruct access to any structure or place which any such animal uses for shelter or protection.

In addition, under this legislation there are offences relating to sale, possession and control of bats.

The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017

Bats are listed within Schedule 2 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended) (the Habitats Regulations) as European Protected Species of animals. Part 3 (Protection of animals); Regulation 43 (1) of the Habitats Regulations make it an offence to:

- Deliberately capture, injure or kill any wild animal of a European protected species;
- Deliberately disturb wild animals of any such species;
- Deliberately take or destroys the eggs of such an animal; or
- Damages or destroy a breeding site or resting place of such an animal.

For the purposes of the legislation, the disturbance of wild animals includes any disturbance which is likely to impair their ability to survive, to breed or to reproduce, or to rear or nurture their young; or in the case of hibernating or migratory species, to hibernate or migrate; or to affect significantly the local distribution or abundance of the species to which they belong.

In addition, under this legislation there are offences relating to possession, control sale and exchange of European Protected Species.

Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006

Section 41 of the NERC Act 2006 requires the Secretary of State to publish a list of habitats and species which are of principal importance for the conservation of biodiversity in England. There are 56 habitats and 943 species of principal importance, often referred to as priority habitats and priority species respectively, which were initially identified as requiring conservation action under the UK Biodiversity Action Plan and which continue to be regarded as priorities under the UK Post-2010 Biodiversity Framework. The Section 41 list is used to guide decision-makers such as public bodies, including local and regional authorities, in implementing their duty under Section 40 of the NERC Act 2006 “to have regard” to the conservation of biodiversity in England when carrying out their normal functions. Bat species listed under Section 41 and known to be present within Lancashire comprise soprano pipistrelle, brown long-eared bat and noctule bat.

An amendment to the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 (NERC Act) section 40 duty, provided for in the **Environment Act 2021**, extends the biodiversity duty on public authorities to include the enhancement of biodiversity alongside conservation by way of creating “the general biodiversity objective”.

APPENDIX B. PHOTOS

Photo 1.
View
south-east
over the
site



Photo 2.
View north-
east from
the site
centre





Photo 3
South
boundary



Photo 4.
View east
over
southern
section of
site

