
**The Slopes,
Rochdale Town Hall**

**Preliminary Roost
Assessment**

February 2021

Issue Status

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1.0 Introduction

1.1 Background

- 1.1.1 This Preliminary Roost Assessment (PRA) has been prepared by Anthony Nickson Ecology Ltd on behalf of Rochdale Borough Council to accompany management of land south of the Rochdale Town Hall Restoration and Transformation project.
- 1.1.2 Previous bat surveys (AN Ecology Ltd, 2020) identified foraging activity for common and soprano pipistrelle bats within area known as 'The Slopes' at the north-eastern end of Broadfield Park.
- 1.1.3 The Preliminary Roost Assessment survey carried out in 'The Slopes' aims to provide an up-to-date dataset to identify any ecological constraints associated with bats on the site. It is intended that the field survey data submitted in this report will be used to guide the proposed site management activities by providing a means for assessment of the effects of the proposed arboricultural management. This Preliminary Roost Assessment of the existing trees within "The Slopes" has been undertaken in accordance with the Bat Surveys for Professional Ecologists Good Practice Guidelines (BCT, 2016).
- 1.1.4 The Slopes (hereinafter referred to as "the site") is located in Rochdale Town Centre (grid reference: SD8959613177). The site is approximately 1ha, bound by Vicars Gate and Rochdale Town Hall to the north, Church Steps and St Chadds Gardens to the east, Vicar's Gate to the west and St Chad's Churchyard to the south (ref. figure 1).



Figure 1: Site location

- 1.1.5 The habitats present within the site comprise of scattered trees, woodland, bramble scrub and garden planting (introduced shrub) and hardstanding. The site is set in the heart of Rochdale Town Centre, enclosed by typical town centre commercial developments to the east and green space associated with Rochdale Memorial Gardens to the north and Broadfield Park to the west and south. The partially culverted River Roch flows above the northern boundary of the site.

1.2 Proposed Works

- 1.2.1 The proposed works will comprise of management of the tree stock within 'The Slopes', to allow ground management to take place in the amenity area. Activities will involve felling of the existing tree stock.

1.3 Legislation

- 1.3.1 All British bat species and their roosts are protected under European Law (Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017) and UK Law (Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, as amended). As such it is an offence to undertake the following acts:

- Deliberately capture, injure or kill a bat
- Intentionally or recklessly disturb a bat in its roost or deliberately disturb a group of bats
- Damage or destroy a bat roosting place (even if bats are not occupying the roost at the time)
- Intentionally or recklessly obstruct access to a bat roost

2.0 Methodology

2.1 Desktop Study

- 2.1.1 The desktop review of publicly accessible online mapping systems was undertaken to assess the habitats present on site and in the surrounding area. The review assessed the suitability of the habitats to support and provide connectivity for commuting and foraging bats in accordance with the guidelines for assessing the potential suitability of proposed development sites for bats, based on the presence of habitat features within the landscape (BCT, 2016). These were then confirmed during the site survey.

2.2 Site Survey

Habitat Suitability

- 2.2.1 The habitats identified on site and within the surrounding area were checked for any significant changes by undertaking a site walkover and by reviewing publically accessible online maps. The habitats' suitability to support and provide connectivity for commuting and foraging bats was then determined (See Table 1. adapted from Collins, 2016).

Table 1. Guidelines for assessing the potential suitability of proposed development sites for bats based on the presence of habitat features within the landscape

Suitability	Commuting and foraging habitats
Negligible	Negligible habitat features on site likely to be used by commuting or foraging bats.
Low	Habitat that could be used by small numbers of commuting bats such as a gappy hedgerow or un-vegetated stream, but isolated, i.e. not very well connected to the surrounding landscape by other habitat. Suitable, but isolated habitat that could be used by small numbers of foraging bats such as a lone tree (not in a parkland situation) or a patch of scrub.
Moderate	Continuous habitat connected to the wider landscape that could be used by bats for commuting such as lines of trees and scrub or linked back gardens. Habitat that is connected to the wider landscape that could be used by bats for foraging such as trees, scrub, grassland, or water.
High	Continuous, high-quality habitat that is well connected to the wider landscape that is likely to be used regularly by commuting bats such as river valleys, streams, hedgerows, lines of trees and woodland edge. High-quality habitat that is well connected to the wider landscape that is likely to be used regularly by foraging bats such as broadleaved woodland, tree lined watercourses and grazed parkland. Site is close to and connected to known roosts.

Preliminary Roost Assessment

- 2.2.2 A Preliminary Roost Assessment of the existing trees within "The Slopes" was undertaken at ground level. The external ground level survey was undertaken to search for, and to assess the potential for a bat roost to be present in accordance with the guidelines set out in the 'Bat Surveys for Professional Ecologists, Good Practice Guidelines' (BCT, 2016).
- 2.2.3 External searches involved a visual examination of each tree from the ground using close focusing binoculars to search the trunk and the canopy for potential roosting features (PRFs). A high-powered torch, binoculars and a camera with a telephoto lens were used to inspect cavities or shaded areas of the tree. Features of trees commonly used by bats for roosting and shelter, and field signs that may indicate use of trees by bats, would be recorded. Potential roosting features that may be used by bats include:

- woodpecker holes;
- rot holes;
- hazard beams;
- other vertical or horizontal cracks and splits (such as frost cracks) in stems or branches,
- partially detached pealed bark,
- knot holes arising from naturally shed branches, or branches previously pruned back to the branch collar,
- man-made holes (e.g. cavities that have developed from flush cuts) or cavities created by branches tearing out from parent stems,
- cankers (caused by localised bark death) in which cavities have developed,
- other hollows or cavities, including butt-rots,
- double-leaders forming compression forks with included bark and potential cavities,
- gaps between overlapping stems or branches,
- partially detached ivy with stem diameters in excess of 50mm,
- bat, bird or dormouse boxes.

2.2.4 The value of the trees were graded for 'suitability' in accordance with the guidelines for assessing the potential suitability of proposed development sites for bats based on the presence of suitable roosting features within a structure (Table 2. Guidelines for assessing the potential suitability of proposed development sites for bats adapted from Collins, 2016.).

Table 2. Guidelines for assessing the potential suitability of proposed development sites for bats adapted from Collins, 2016.

Suitability	Description of Roosting habitats
Negligible	Negligible habitat features within tree likely to be used by roosting bats.
Low	A structure with one or more potential roost sites that could be used by individual bats opportunistically. However, these potential roost sites do not provide enough space, shelter, protection, appropriate conditions and/or suitable surrounding habitat to be used on a regular basis or by larger numbers of bats (i.e. unlikely to be suitable for maternity or hibernation). A tree of sufficient size and age to contain PRFs but with none seen from the ground or features seen with only very limited roosting potential.
Moderate	A structure or tree with one or more potential roost sites that could be used by bats due to their size, shelter, protection, conditions and surrounding habitat but unlikely to support a roost of high conservation status (with respect to roost type only – the assessments in this table are made irrespective of species conservation status, which is established after presence is confirmed).
High	A structure or tree with one or more potential roost sites that are obviously suitable for use by larger numbers of bats on a more regular basis and potentially for longer periods of time due to their size, shelter, protection, conditions and surrounding habitat.

N.B This system of categorisation aligns with BS 8596:2015 Surveying for bats in trees and woodland (BSI, 2015).

2.2.5 The assessment should advise the likelihood of a bat roost and (if applicable/possible from the data obtained) the type of bat roost (day, night, feeding, transitional, maternity, hibernation, satellite) that the tree(s) could support.

- 2.2.6 The potential roost feature survey was led by Bruce Shortland, MCIEEM. Bruce is an are experienced bat workers and their qualifications and experience meet the criteria defined in the Technical Guidance Series Competencies for Species Survey: Bats (CIEEM, April 2013) and they are both also full members of the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (MCIEEM).

Limitations

- 2.2.7 The weather on the day of the survey gave slightly misty photos when zoomed in, yet visibility through binoculars was unhindered. Ground conditions in some areas were heavily saturated and avoided.
- 2.2.8 All measurements provided within this report are approximate only, they have been either estimated while on site or calculated using mapping software (MAGIC map/ Grid reference finder/ Google Earth/ QGIS). Grid references were collected on site using a Garmin 62S GPS.
- 2.2.9 It is the opinion of the surveyor that despite these limitations a reliable assessment was made.

3.0 Results

3.1 Desktop Study

- 3.1.1 The site is within the Rochdale Town Centre Conservation Area, Designated 1973 - Extended 2011.
- 3.1.2 The desktop study confirmed that there are no sites with European or National statutory designation within the site or within a 1km radius thereof.
- 3.1.3 The desktop study confirmed that there are no Local Nature Reserves (LNRs) within the site or within a 1km radius thereof.

3.2 Site Survey

Habitat Suitability

- 3.2.1 The site is Victorian parkland in an urban setting and is surrounded by, buildings, hardstanding, scattered trees, and large areas of urban green space associated with the public gardens and Saint Chad's Parish Church which is adjacent to the southern boundary of the site. The managed green space recorded on site and scattered tree habitats would support small numbers of foraging bats. The survey area is listed as a priority habitat (woodland) and currently provides moderate foraging opportunities for bats with some connectivity to the surrounding areas identified as well as open mosaic habitats on previously developed land that are present within 1km.

Preliminary Roost Survey

- 3.1.4 Bat Surveys carried out in January 2022 identify the trees on Site to be of negligible, low and/or moderate suitability to support roosting bats.
- 3.1.5 Three trees outside of the issued survey area were asked to be surveyed along Packer Street. All trees held negligible bat roost potential.

Table 3. Summary of results of trees surveyed on Packer Street

Tree Ref.	Species	Notes	Suitability to support roosting bats
T1	Silver Birch	Street tree, 12-15m high, 40cm DBH. Previous season wood pigeon nest at top. Grid Ref: SD 89657 13297	Negligible
T2	Ash	Street tree, 12-15m tall. West facing limb tear on trunk but feature is sealed. 43cm DBH Grid Ref: SD 89659 13288	Negligible
T3	Maple	Street tree, 12-15m tall. Bird nest from last year at top of canopy on south side. 46cm DBH. Grid Ref: SD 89662 13280	Negligible

No further consideration is given to these features in the report

3.1.6 Seventeen trees classified as low or moderate bat roost potential were recorded on the Slopes.

Table 4. Summary of results of trees surveyed on the Slopes

Tree Ref.	Species	Notes	Suitability to support roosting bats
A1T1	Sycamore	Ivy up to 10m. Moderate bird roost potential in rot hole. Grid Ref: SD8966513197	Low
A2T1	Ash	Pollarded ash tree NE facing lifting bark at 6m height Grid Ref: SD8966313200	Low
A3T1	Ash	Standing deadwood with lifting bark features and hollow trunk >2m with approx. 50cm diameter west facing hole in short sward grassland Grid Ref: SD8964313194	Moderate
A3T2	Ash	Mature Ash tree with dense ivy to 10m Grid Ref: SD8964013202	Low
A3T3	Ash	Dense Ivy to 14-18m. Two knot holes both north to north-west facing 16+18m respectfully. Hight feature possibly sealed. Grid Ref: SD8962013183	Moderate
A3T4	Ash	18m limb tear rot hole with a visible east facing cavity. Ivy to 12m Height. South facing knot hole 14m height west facing. Grid Ref: SD8962413188	Moderate
A3T5	Sycamore	Ivy covered sycamore south-east facing rot hole Grid Ref: SD8965013186	Low
A4T1	Ash	Southside 15m height branch tear but appears sealed. Dense Ivy <12m to ground. Pigeon nests from previous year present and might be used early. Grid Ref: SD8961413184	Moderate
A4T2	Ash	Ivy cover up to 12m. North facing cavity of north side of main trunk 10m height. 15m branch cavity NW facing-downward facing. Grid Ref: SD8962413181	Moderate
A4T3	Lime	Windthrow tree dense ivy covering trunk possibly obscuring features. Tree currently a hazard and requires removing. Grid Ref: SD8961913159	Low
A4G1	Sycamore	Windthrown sycamore with moderate ivy cover. multiple syringes on ground near to trunk. Grid Ref: SD8961213172	Low
A4T4	Sycamore	mature ivy to top of tree. Moderate density. aerial inspection up trunk to ensure additional features are not obscured. Grid Ref: SD8960313163	Moderate
A4 T5	Lime	Mature tree moderate ivy cover <15m. Vertical fracture of trunk in canopy providing wide cavity open to elements. Grid Ref: SD8959913167	Moderate
A5 T1	Sycamore	Ivy cover below 12m. Lifting bark on south-west facing trunk at 4-6m height. Grid Ref: SD8960013186	Low

A6T1	Ash	Tree by boundary of St Chads church. South-west facing branch at 5m with lifting bark and an upward facing knot hole. Dense ivy cover below 8-10m. Grid Ref:SD8963413151	Low
A1G1	Larch	Tree by St Chads retaining wall. Dense ivy cover up stem with leaders >5cm. Grid Ref: SD8969013187	Low
A1G2	Sycamore	Dense ivy cover with some thick stems on both trees. Grid Ref: SD8968513204	Moderate

4.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

4.1 Bat Survey

- 4.1.1 The survey identified moderate habitat for foraging and commuting bats. The trees on site held negligible, low and/or moderate suitability to support roosting bats.

Negligible

- 4.1.2 Where trees have not been referred to in Table 4 or marked up on the site plan (ref. Appendix B), they were viewed as negligible value for bats. Operations can proceed without any further need for bat survey or inspection work and no mitigation measures are needed.

Low

- 4.1.3 Where trees are identified as a 'Low' risk, operations can proceed following inspection of any identified features and no mitigation measures are needed. During the inspection, if a climber's entry into the tree has the potential to disturb, remove or destroy a feature with bat potential, such as a large section of loose bark, an alternative method of entry should be investigated, such as a Mobile Elevated Work Platform (MEWP) or ladder.

Moderate

- 4.1.4 If operations will fell, directly disturb, remove, or destroy timber with bat suitability, they should only proceed using the following mitigation measures:

- Wherever possible, work should be carried out between March and April.
- Works will be carried out under the guidance of a suitably qualified and licenced ecologist, providing a watching brief to site works.
- Prior to felling or removing timber with bat potential, workers should conduct an aerial visual inspection of potential roosting features. If bats or roosts are discovered, prior to or during operations, works should stop, and advice should be sought from an ecologist for ways to proceed with a confirmed bat or roost presence.
- During the inspection, if a climber's entry into the tree has the potential to disturb, remove or destroy a feature with bat potential, such as a large section of loose bark, an alternative method of entry should be investigated, such as a Mobile Elevated Work Platform (MEWP) or ladder.
- If aerial inspections are not possible then dusk and dawn emergence surveys (presence/absence surveys) may be necessary (N.B. Dusk and dawn surveys can only be undertaken between May and September).
- Work should be conducted in a sensitive manner, and timber with bat potential should not be directly sawn through. If such timber is removed, it should be soft felled (Where it is impractical to lower potential bat roosts, piles of brash or logs can be used to soften the impact of them hitting the ground.) and left at the base of the tree for at least 48 hours before removal/chipping.

- 4.1.5 It should be noted that bat absence is very difficult to prove definitively due to their mobility and size, and single or small numbers of bats are able to roost in extremely small spaces, such as under lifting bark. Therefore, it is recommended that all removal of all trees is to be undertaken by hand, with cut timber with bat potential lifted instead of dragged. In the unlikely event that during vegetation works a bat, or an accumulation of bat droppings (ref. plate 23) is discovered at any time, work is to temporarily cease whilst a bat ecologist is contacted for guidance and assistance.

- 4.1.6 The results of the bat survey is valid until February 2023.

4.2 Other protected species

- 4.2.1 All bird species are protected at the nest under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. Due to the existing property supporting suitable habitat for nesting birds it is recommended that if any site works are scheduled on any areas that will impact suitable nesting features to take place outside the peak bird breeding season (March to September). Old inactive wood pigeon (*Columba palumbus*) nests were present within a number of trees. Windthrown trees covered in ivy provide suitable nesting features for species such as robins (*Erithacus rubecula*), wren (*Troglodytes troglodytes*), but no signs were present to indicate active nests at the time of survey.
- 4.2.2 If site works or activities to any habitats where any nesting birds may be present is to be undertaken within the nesting season, then an appropriately qualified ecologist will be required to undertake a site inspect to visually assess potentially suitable nesting habitat for active nests within the construction zones.
- 4.2.3 Evidence of red fox (*Vulpus vulpus*) was recorded within the site and a fox earth was present on the steep embankment (grid ref: SD8956113202). Destroying, blocking, or filling up a fox earth that contains live foxes is an offence under the Wild Mammals Protection Act (1996).
- 4.2.4 If site works or activities to any habitats where any resting foxes may be present is to be undertaken, then either it is advised that the embankment within 5m of the earth is avoided, and any materials felled from the embankment are either soft felled or felled away from the location of the earth, to limit the chance of collapse of the entrance and any animals present becoming entombed.
- 4.2.5 A small stand of the Japanese knotweed (*Fallopia japonica*) was recorded at the base of the 'Slopes', east of a pathway in the south-western corner (approximate grid ref: SD8958713194). Japanese knotweed is listed under section 14(2), schedule 9, of the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981, as amended). The Act states that "if any person plants or otherwise causes to grow in the wild any plant which is included in Part II of Schedule 9, he shall be guilty of an offence". Further advice should be sought for this species with a view to eradicate it from the site.

References

Bat habitat assessment prior to arboricultural operations - Guidance for Natural England's National Nature Reserves, Natural England, Alsop, Joe, Le Bas, Ben, Harrison, David, Murray, Ash and Mitchell-Jones, Tony. Additional consultation with Steve Rudd and Kevin Rye. 2010

Bat Mitigation Guidelines, English Nature, A J Mitchell-Jones A J, 2004

Bat Surveys for Professional Ecologists: Good Practice Guidelines, 3rd Edition, Bat Conservation Trust, J. Collins, 2016

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Competencies for Species Survey: Bats. CIEEM, 2013

Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations, 2017

Handbook of Biodiversity Methods: Survey, Evaluation and Monitoring. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge. Bats '433-449'. R, Stebbing, H, Mansfield and M Fasham, 2005

Wildlife and Countryside Act, 1981

Appendix A - Photograph Plates



Plate 1. Three street trees (T1-T3) assessed along Packer Street. All held negligible bat roost potential. Species recorded were silver birch, ash and a maple.



Plate 2. View west from the bottom of the church steps at the eastern extent of the 'Slopes' survey area.



Plate 3. Pollarded ash, tree



Plate 4. Dense ivy cover, typically recorded within the survey area.



Plate 5. Standing dead wood ash tree (A3T1) with hollow trunk.



Plate 6. Dense ivy cover obscuring trunk on mature tree.



Plate 7. Dense Ivy up trunk.



Plate 8. Dense ivy covering trunk into canopy.



Plate 9. Dense ivy within the cluttered area of standards.



Plate 10. Dense ivy up trunk of tree.

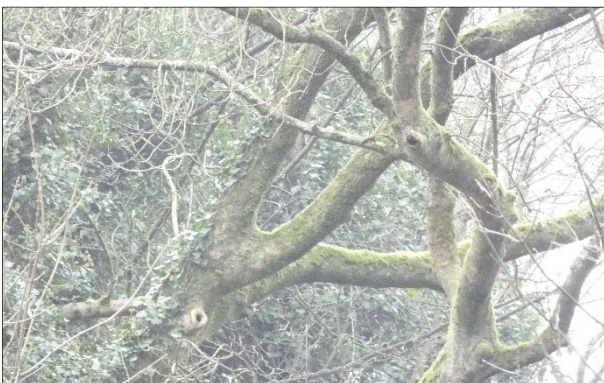


Plate 11. Dense ivy up trunk of tree.



Plate 12. Dense ivy up trunk of tree of windthrow tree on edge of A6, listed as A4T3.



Plate 13. Dense Ivy up trunk of tree Area 4 .



Plate 14. Dense Ivy up trunk of tree and lifting bark providing potential roost features.



Plate 15. Dense Ivy up trunk of tree A4 T5. Vertical fracture at fork in the trunk providing wide cavity open to elements. Requiring aerial inspection prior to felling.



Plate 16. Tree A4 T5 vertical fracture in trunk fork.



Plate 17. A6T1 South-west facing branch at 5m with lifting bark and an upward facing knot hole. Requires inspection prior to felling .



Plate 18. Dense ivy up trunk of larch trees A6 G1.



Plate 19. Dense ivy up trunks of sycamores A6G2.



Plate 20. Active fox earth recorded on the steep western bank at grid ref: SD8956113202. The earth appeared active at time of visit.



Plate 21. Stand of Japanese knotweed recorded at the base of 'the slopes' in the south-western corner of the site.



Plate 22. One of the discarded syringes found on the ground in Area 4.



Plate 23. For reference the picture indicates a fully grown common pipistrelle bat and pipistrelle bat droppings

Appendix B - Site Plan



- Legend
- line boundary
 - Low Potential
 - Moderate Potential

PRA Area

- A1
- A2
- A3
- A4
- A5
- A6
- A7

Project:
Rochdale Town Hall – ‘The Slopes’,
Broadfield Park

Drawing Title:
Preliminary Roost Assessment
Site Plan

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01