

Former Castle Inn, Manchester Road,
Castleton North, Rochdale
Daytime Bat and Bird Survey
2023



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Client	Rochdale Borough Council
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Executive Summary

Development Details

The client is proposing a development at the Former Castle Inn, Manchester Road, Rochdale, hereafter referred to as the 'site'.

This report describes the ecological features of the site and its surroundings and assesses the potential impacts of the development on the ecological interest. Recommendations are provided so that the development is compliant with biodiversity policy and legislation.

Ecological Interest

The site has a low level of ecological interest. The site offers negligible potential to support roosting Bats. No evidence of nesting birds was found during the survey.

Outcomes

The proposed development has very minor potential to support roosting bats with few access points or roosting features recorded during the daytime survey. To prevent impacts to bats and their roosts, a pre commencement check should be carried out by a suitably qualified ecologist prior to works being carried out. If evidence of bats is found during the pre-commencement check, further survey work may be necessary. If bats are encountered at any time during the construction work, work would have to stop until a licence is obtained to avoid the risk of an offence.



1. Introduction

1.1 Project Brief

- 1.1.1 Rachel Hacking Ecology Limited was commissioned in 2023 by Rochdale Borough Council to carry out a Daytime Bat and Bird Survey of the Former Castle Inn, Manchester Road, Castleton North, Rochdale, hereafter referred to as the 'site'. The site is located at O.S. grid reference: SD 89217 12741 (see Figure 1).



Figure 1. Map showing the location of the site.

Description of Development

- 1.1.2 The site will be the subject of a planning application for the redevelopment of the existing building into 8 self-contained flats with office/ ancillary use in the cellar.

Relevant Planning History

- 1.1.3 No surveys have been undertaken previously at the site.

1.2 Scope of Work

- 1.2.1 The Client commissioned Rachel Hacking Ecology to carry out an external and internal assessment of the buildings on the site affected by the development proposals.

1.3 Aims of the Survey

1.3.1 The aims of the survey were to:

- Assess the potential of the site to support roosting bats;
- Identify the requirement for any further detailed surveys.



2. Methods

2.1 Daytime Bat Survey

- 2.1.1 The exterior of the site was surveyed from the ground using binoculars and a high-powered torch. Features offering potential access to roosting bats were recorded. Such features may include suitable gaps in roof coverings, gaps behind external cladding/facia and gaps in masonry.
- 2.1.2 Evidence indicating the presence of roosting bats was also searched for. This may include bat droppings on walls, windows or on the ground below roost entrances or staining from fur oil around roost entry points.
- 2.1.3 The interior of the site, including the roof void, was surveyed to identify any evidence indicating use by roosting bats. Such evidence may include bat droppings, feeding remains, urine splashes, live or dead bats and staining from fur oil on timbers.

2.2 Nesting Bird Survey

- 2.2.1 The building and habitats within the site were assessed for their potential to support nesting birds.

2.3 Assessment Criteria

- 2.3.1 Interpretation of survey findings and assessment of roosting potential was undertaken using professional judgement and criteria described in published guidance^{1,2}.

2.4 Site Visit Information

Survey Details

- 2.4.1 The survey was undertaken by Matthew Bottomley (Ecologist) and Megan Johnson (Junior Ecologist). Both surveyors have experience in undertaking daytime bat surveys.

¹ Collins, J. (Ed.) (2023) *Bat Surveys for Professional Ecologists-good practice guidelines*. 4th edn. The Bat Conservation Trust, London.

² Reason, P.F. and Wray, S. (2023). UK Bat Mitigation Guidelines: a guide to impact assessment, mitigation and compensation for developments affecting bats. Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management, Ampfield..

Site Conditions

- 2.4.2 The weather at the time of the survey was warm and mild, with an average temperature of 8°C. The site conditions were appropriate for a full assessment to be undertaken.

2.5 Mitigation Hierarchy

- 2.5.1 Mitigation measures should be embedded within the masterplan design and planning application process. Measures during the construction phases should be included in a Construction Environmental Management Plan: Biodiversity (CEMP). This process from proposal to implementation needs to consider the 'mitigation hierarchy' of avoid, reduce, compensate, and enhance:

- Aim to avoid negative effects through the design process.
- Mitigate if negative effects cannot be avoided.
- Use compensation measures to offset residual impacts.
- Identify and implement opportunities to enhance biodiversity.



3. Results

3.1 Survey Constraints

- 3.1.1 Field survey results are valid for a limited duration and no investigation can provide a complete description and characterisation of a site. The composition of habitats and species can change depending on environmental variables and the mobility of species, so the results of a study become less reliable over time. In some cases, surveys that are 3 years old may be acceptable for a project assuming that habitats have not significantly changed in the intervening period, but for protected species it is likely that survey data will need to be no more than 18 months old.
- 3.1.2 Internal access into the garage was not available on the day of the survey.

3.2 Habitat Appraisal

- 3.2.1 The site comprises a large detached semi-converted Public House. The site is located in an urban area with residential properties and commercial units surrounding the site. A small woodland to the west offers suitable commuting and foraging habitat for bats. The River Roch is situated 600m to the west of the site.

3.3 External Survey

- 3.3.1 The site is a detached two-storey building of stone and brick construction with mock Tudor style fronting on the upper level. The external brickwork and stonework is intact.



Photograph 1 showing the exterior of the building

- 3.3.2 The wooden bargeboards are well sealed to the masonry with minimal gaps present. The soffits are, for the most part, intact but there are gaps where the soffit has been damaged.



Photograph 3 showing gaps in the wooden soffit

- 3.3.3 The roof appears to be in generally good condition with only a few slipped and damaged slate tiles present. Sections of mortar between ridge tiles are damaged (see Photograph 4).



Photograph 4 showing the roof

- 3.3.4 Occasional gaps are present under tiles providing potential access points and potential roosting features for crevice dwelling bats where tiles do not lie flush with one another (see Photograph 5).



Photograph 5 showing slipped and damaged slate tiles.

- 3.3.5 A gap is present in the lintel of a doorway on the western elevation of the building, which provides a potential roosting feature for crevice dwelling bats (see Photograph 6).



Photograph 6 showing a gap in the lintel.

3.4 Internal Survey

- 3.4.1 The interior comprises complete rooms, windows have been boarded with plywood sheeting. Several gaps are present where the ceiling has been damaged providing open access from the floor space to the roof void above (see Photograph 7).



Photograph 7 showing a section of the ground floor space

- 3.4.2 The roof void consists of an extensive space that is covered in dust and cobwebs (see Photograph 8). A section of the roof space is well lit due to the presence of a skylight. Cracks are present within timber beams.



Photograph 8 showing a section of the roof void

- 3.4.3 Occasional tears and gaps are present within the roof lining and minor gaps of daylight are visible (see Photograph 9). Fibreglass insulation is present on the loft floor.



Photograph 9 showing a gap in the roof lining

- 3.4.4 There is a small roof space present with a concealed roof void above, the ceiling has been damaged, providing open access into the roof void above (see Photograph 10).



Photograph 10 showing a small roof space

- 3.4.5 The building has an extensive cellar (see Photograph 11). The space is damp and dark, but some daylight is visible from the interior. A gap is present where a vent has been damaged (see Photograph 12). Cavities are present within the stonework throughout the walls of the space (see Photograph 13). No signs of bat activity were recorded.



Photograph 11 showing the cellar space



Photograph 12 showing a gap in the vent.



Photograph 13 showing a cavity in the stonework.

- 3.4.6 A garage is located behind the building. The garage comprises of brick construction with a clay interlocking tiled roof. The interlocking tiles appear to be flush and well-sealed, with minimal gaps present along the ridge tiles. The garage is assessed as having **negligible** potential to support roosting bats.

Nesting Birds

- 3.4.7 No evidence of nesting birds was found during the survey, but the building offers minor entry points that nesting birds may exploit.

4. Assessment

4.1 Interpretation of Results

Bats

- 4.1.1 The site is in an urban location and no internal or external evidence of bat activity was found, so the presence of bats is not anticipated. However, there were a few minor PRFs which could provide opportunities for roosting bats, particularly if there are delays to the start of the proposed development.

Nesting Birds

- 4.1.2 In the absence of mitigation, the proposed development could result in adverse impacts, if nesting birds are present.



5. Recommendations

5.1 Further Surveys

Bats

- 5.1.1 No further surveys are required, but a pre commencement check should be carried out by a suitably qualified ecologist prior to works being carried out, because of the presence of a few gaps in the soffit boxes and raised tiles on the main roof.

Nesting Birds.

- 5.1.2 Impacts on nesting birds should be avoided in particular, by carrying out site clearance and similar operations outside of the bird breeding season (April- August). Construction activities that might directly impact upon breeding birds should hence be limited to the September-February period. If the demolition work has to be undertaken during the bird breeding season checks immediately before demolition by a suitably qualified ecologist will be required. If nesting activity is detected work in that area will need to stop until the ecologist considers that nesting activity is finished.

5.2 General Measures

- 5.2.1 It is not always possible to prove absence of roosting bats. Bats can roost in suitable features opportunistically and are not always identified during surveys. It is recommended that roof coverings are removed with due caution. Should a bat/bats be identified at any time, work should stop in that area and a suitably qualified ecologist contacted to attend site and advise how to proceed.
- 5.2.2 This report is considered to be valid for two years. After this time, a suitably qualified ecologist should be consulted to assess its validity. An assessment update may be required.
- 5.2.3 In accordance with NPPF (2021) and the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act (2006), development should seek to include measures to benefit wildlife. Bat boxes and/or bird boxes could be installed on any new buildings or on suitable nearby trees to provide opportunities for wildlife. Details of the types of boxes and their locations should be confirmed by a suitably qualified ecologist.

Appendix 1: Planning Policy & Legislation

National Policy

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF 2021) describes the Government's planning policy for England and how it should be applied. Within this framework, the requirements in relation to biodiversity are included within several policies. The two most relevant to individual planning decisions are Paragraphs 174 and 180, shown below:

- 174. Planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by:
 - a. protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, sites of biodiversity or geological value and soils (in a manner commensurate with their statutory status or identified quality in the development plan);
 - b. recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, and the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services – including the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land, and of trees and woodland;
 - c. maintaining the character of the undeveloped coast, while improving public access to it where appropriate;
 - d. minimising impacts on and providing net gains for biodiversity, including by establishing coherent ecological networks that are more resilient to current and future pressures; etc...
- 180. When determining planning applications, local planning authorities should apply the following principles:
 - a. if significant harm to biodiversity resulting from a development cannot be avoided (through locating on an alternative site with less harmful impacts), adequately mitigated, or, as a last resort, compensated for, then planning permission should be refused;
 - b. development on land within or outside a Site of Special Scientific Interest, and which is likely to have an adverse effect on it (either individually or in combination with other developments), should not normally be permitted. The only exception is where the benefits of the development in the location proposed clearly outweigh both its likely impact on the features of the site that make it of special scientific interest, and any broader impacts on the national network of Sites of Special Scientific Interest;



- c. development resulting in the loss or deterioration of irreplaceable habitats (such as ancient woodland and ancient or veteran trees) should be refused, unless there are wholly exceptional reasons and a suitable compensation strategy exists; and
- d. development whose primary objective is to conserve or enhance biodiversity should be supported; while opportunities to improve biodiversity in and around developments should be integrated as part of their design, especially where this can secure measurable net gains for biodiversity or enhance public access to nature where this is appropriate

Section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006 places a duty on every public authority to have regard to conserving biodiversity. Section 41 of the same Act requires that the Secretary of State must publish a list of the living organisms and types of habitats that are of 'Principal Importance' for the purpose of conserving biodiversity. The Secretary of State must take steps, as appear reasonably practicable, to further the conservation of those living organisms and habitats in any list published under this section. The list of species and habitats of principal importance currently includes 943 species and 56 habitats.

Legislation

All bat species are protected under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2019 (Amendment) (EU Exit), which make is an offence to:

- Deliberately kill, injure or capture a bat;
- Deliberately disturb bats;
- Damage or destroy a breeding site or resting place of a bat.

The Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) contains further provisions making it an offence to intentionally or recklessly:

- Obstruct access to any structure or place which any bat uses for shelter or protection; or
- Disturb any bat while occupying a structure or place which it uses for that purpose.

Proposed development works that are likely to disturb or destroy bats or their roosts will need to obtain a licence from the relevant Statutory Nature Conservation Organisation (e.g., Natural England) prior to work commencing.

