Preliminary Roost Assessment

Sheepbank Farm, Littleborough
Reference: 82-065-R1-1
Date: January 25

e3p

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QUALITY ASSURANCE

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Site Address	Sheepbank Farm, Littleborough, OL15 0LH
Coordinates	E 394874, N 415324
Site Area	Approximately 0.1 ha
Current Site Use	The site comprised a farmhouse, comprising a two-storey main building with two one-storey annexes adjoined (B1), and a hardstanding track leading to the property.
Proposed Development	Development proposals include the development of an extension to the two-storey main building and one of the one-storey annexes.
Results	The farmhouse building (B1) was assessed as having 'High' bat roosting due to the hibernation potential of the building within deep cavities in the internal brickwork. In addition, crevices in the internal brickwork and gaps between the roof and stonework may support roosting bats on a regular basis during the summer period. Furthermore, crevices in the external brickwork and missing and lifted tiles may support bats on an occasional basis. The internal features could be accessed by bat species through access points surrounding the upper-floor windows, which were identified during the survey.
Conclusions and Recommendations	B1 was assessed as having 'High' bat roosting potential due to its hibernation potential. Therefore, Hibernation Surveys will be required, comprising crevice inspections in January and February (inclusive) with associated static monitoring during these months. Additionally, B1 was assessed as having 'Moderate' summer bat roosting potential. As such, two Nocturnal Bat Surveys are required on the building between May and September (inclusive) with at least one survey undertaken between May and August (inclusive). If bats are identified roosting within the building, a further survey would be required to characterise the roost and a European Protected Species Licence will be required with up-to-date surveys from the survey season prior to the application submission. Works should not commence on B1 until the further surveys have been completed to ascertain the presence of any protected bat species and ensure compliance with protected species legislation. The building was assessed as having nesting bird value. The works should be undertaken outside of the nesting bird season, which is generally accepted to be from March to September inclusive, although nesting can take place outside this period. If works are necessary during this nesting season a nesting bird check by a suitability qualified ecologist will be required, no more than 48 hours prior to any works. Should any nests, or nests in construction be located, a suitable stand-off distance should be maintained until the young have fledged. The ecologist will advise on suitable stand off and provide a toolbox talk to all site contractors regarding their working limits and legal implications. In line with the Biodiversity Gain Requirements (Exemptions) Regulations 2024, any development undertaken by householders as defined within article 2(1) of the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015 are exempt from Biodiversity Net Gain, therefore, a Biodiversity Net Gain calculation will not be required for the current site.

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. BACKGROUND

E3P has been instructed by Rushtons Developments Limited to undertake a Preliminary Roost Assessment at Sheepbank Farm, Littleborough; hereafter referred to as "the site".

This report has been prepared by Benjamin Hartley, BSc (Hons), MSc, Graduate Ecologist at E3P. Ben has experience in assisting with Preliminary Roost Assessments at many sites across the UK.

1.2. PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

Development proposals include the development of an extension to the two-storey main building and one of the one-storey annexes.

1.3. SITE LOCATION

The site is located southeast of Littleborough and northeast of Rochdale. The site is accessed by a track which joins Syke Road approximately 235 m south of the site. A barn building is located adjacent to the south of the site boundary, in proximity to the on-site farmhouse. The site is surrounded on all aspects by arable land which also comprises the broader landscape. Brearley Brook is located approximately 6 m west of the site boundary. Please refer to Figure 1 for the approximate site location.

Figure 1 Approximate Site Location

1.4. OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the Preliminary Roost Assessment are as follows:

- Determine if bats currently, or could potentially, utilise the building for roosting.
- Determine whether further surveys (e.g. nocturnal bat surveys) and/or further mitigation are necessary for development to proceed.

The survey findings are detailed in this report, as well as any recommendations.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. DESK STUDY

The following sources of information and ecological records were consulted:

- MAGIC – A government web-based interactive mapping system, demonstrating European Protected Species Licences (EPSL) and Natural England Licences which have been previously granted within England.
- Information and species records from South Lancashire Bat Group.

A search via MAGIC was undertaken in December 2024 to identify EPSL within 1 km of the site boundary. This search area is considered suitable for the size of the development and the surrounding habitat.

2.2. PRELIMINARY ROOST ASSESSMENT

The Preliminary Roost Assessment (PRA) was undertaken on 11th December 2024 by Senior Ecologist Lowri Thomas, with assistance from Benjamin Hartley. Lowri has undertaken multiple PRAs on buildings and trees across the UK. Lowri also holds a Class 1 Bat Licence (2021-55376-CLS-CLS). The weather was dry and overcast.

The survey involved undertaking a systematic search of the building, searching for signs of bats, or spaces where bats would be able to access. The methodology followed that described in Bat Surveys for Professional Ecologists, 4th Edition (Collins, 2023).

The building was categorised for its bat roosting potential as described in Table 1 in accordance with Collins (2023).

Table 1 Bat Roosting Potential Classification of Buildings

CATEGORY	DESCRIPTION
None	No habitat features on site likely to be used by any roosting bats at any time of the year.
Negligible	No obvious habitat features on site likely to be used by roosting bats; however, a small element of uncertainty remains as bats can use small and apparently unsuitable features on occasion.
Low	A structure with one or more potential roost sites that could be used by individual bats opportunistically at any time of the year. 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.
Moderate	A structure 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.
High	A structure 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. These structures have the potential to support high conservation status roosts, e.g. maternity or classic cool/stable hibernation site.

3. RESULTS

3.1. LOCAL BAT GROUP RECORDS

Based on information from South Lancashire Bat Group, species present within the local area include Brandt's bat (*Myotis brandtii*) brown long-eared (*Plecotus auritus*), common pipistrelle (*Pipistrellus pipistrellus*), Daubenton's bat (*Myotis daubentonii*), soprano pipistrelle (*Pipistrellus pygmaeus*), Nathusius' pipistrelle (*Pipistrellus nathusii*), Natterer's bat (*Myotis nattereri*), noctule (*Nyctalus noctula*), and whiskered bat (*Myotis mystacinus*).

3.2. MAGIC REVIEW

A MAGIC review did not find any EPSLs located within the 1 km search area. The closest licence was located approximately 2.9 km west of the site boundary, associated with a residential area. The licence was active in 2009 for the destruction of a common pipistrelle and soprano pipistrelle non-breeding roost (EPSL reference: EPSM2009-525).

3.3. SITE CONTEXT

The site is located southeast of Littleborough and north east of Rochdale. The site comprises a vacant farmhouse, consisting of a two-storey main building and two one-storey annexes (B1). The area surrounding the site comprises arable land which is delineated by stone wall boundaries. These habitats are anticipated to provide limited ecological value due to the lack of foraging and commuting features.

Multiple areas of woodland are present in relative proximity to the site, the closest of these is an area of UK Biodiversity Action Plan (UK BAP) Deciduous Woodland Priority Habitat located approximately 60 m northwest of the site. This habitat is anticipated to provide important roosting, foraging, and commuting habitat for a variety of local bat species. This woodland is connected to the site by scattered trees which lie between the site and the Priority Habitat. Additionally, through this woodland runs Brearley Brook, which is likely to provide valuable commuting and foraging resources for local mammal and bird species. This watercourse is anticipated to offer high-value foraging and commuting habitat for bats, especially those which specialise feeding along watercourses such as Daubenton's bat. This watercourse also provides connectivity to further areas of woodland in the wider area.

Areas of good quality semi-improved grassland (Non-priority habitat) are also located close to the site, including an area which is situated adjacent to the east of the site boundary. These habitats are anticipated to attract invertebrates and subsequently provide foraging opportunities for bat species; however, it is likely that bats will prioritise the UK BAP Deciduous Woodland Priority Habitat due to the roosting, foraging, and commuting opportunities.

3.4. PRELIMINARY ROOST ASSESSMENT

A Preliminary Roost Assessment (PRA) was undertaken on B1 on-site. No other buildings were present within the site boundary. Please see Appendix I for the Preliminary Roost Assessment Plan which details the location of the access points (APs) and potential roost features (PRFs).

3.4.1. FARMHOUSE BUILDING (B1)

The building comprised a vacant two-storey main building with two one-storey annexes to the southwest and northeast, with a gabled slate-pitched roof on the main building and the southwest annex. A single-slanted slate roof was present on the northeast annex. The building was constructed out of stone and mortar.

Figure 2 **Showing B1's southwestern aspect**

Externally, the main building appeared to have been repointed and therefore was in good condition with no cracks or missing mortar visible during the survey. There were crevices within the brickwork on the southwestern annex which may provide roosting opportunities for bats (PRF1). However, these features will only support bats on an occasional basis rather than regularly, due to their depth and likely fluctuation in temperature.

Figure 3 **Showing PRF1**

The slate roof appeared to have been recently installed on the main building, as such it appeared to be in good condition, with no broken or lifted tiles noted during the survey which could support roosting bats. However, the slate roofs on both annexes did not appear to be recently installed. Missing and lifted tiles were present on the southwestern annex roof which are likely to support a small number of bats on an occasional basis (PRF2). In addition, gaps were identified between the roof and stonework on the northeastern annexe which are likely to support a small number of bats on a more regular basis because they are more sheltered from external conditions (PRF3).

Figure 4 **Showing PRF2**

Figure 5 **Showing PRF3**

Internally, on the upper floor, numerous crevices between the stonework were noted and were especially evident where the corners of the wall joined. Crevices were identified on the internal southern wall at varying heights (PRF4); on the southwestern and northeastern walls where the joists met with the floor (PRF5); in the northeastern, southeastern, and southwestern corners between the brickwork (PRF6, PRF7, and PRF8 respectively); and on the northern wall surrounding supporting beams (PRF9). These crevices are likely to support bats on a more regular basis and the deeper cavities have the potential to support hibernating bats as they provide a cool, stable, and damp environment for winter torpor and hibernation.

Figure 6 **Showing PRF4**

Figure 7 **Showing PRF5**

Figure 8 **Showing PRF6**

Figure 9 **Showing PRF7**

Figure 10 **Showing PRF8**

Figure 11 **Showing PRF9**

Furthermore, on the upper floor, numerous crevices in the stonework surrounding the windows and brickwork and window ledges on the southwestern (AP1) and northeastern (AP2) aspects were identified, providing access internally for roosting bats.

Figure 12 **Showing AP1**

Figure 13 **Showing AP2**

On the ground floor, a gap in the brickwork was noted within the internal wall opposite the staircase at a height of approximately 1.5 m (PRF10). The gap was too deep to inspect fully but is anticipated to support bats on a regular basis. Additionally, crevices were identified under the stairs (PRF11) and within the chimney (PRF12) on the northern wall and within the brickwork at varying heights in the room to the south (PRF13). These features are likely to support bats on a regular basis and may support hibernating bats.

Figure 14 **Showing PRF10**

Figure 15 **Showing PRF11**

Figure 16 **Showing PRF12**

Figure 17 **Showing PRF13**

No field signs of bats were identified within the building. However, this does not confirm the absence of the species. Bats are known to be elusive crepuscular species, often leaving evidence of their presence in areas which are not easily visualised. Furthermore, due to the gaps surrounding the windows, airflow within the building may remove any droppings present. Despite the lack of these signs, several features were identified internally which showed suitability for roosting bats.

Overall, considering the features which were identified internally and externally and the hibernation potential of the building, B1 was assessed as having 'High' bat roosting potential as it may support roosting bats on a regular basis during summer and hibernating bats over winter.

4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1. BATS

B1 was assessed as having 'Moderate' summer bat roosting potential. As such, two Nocturnal Bat Surveys are required on the building between May and September (inclusive) with at least one survey undertaken between May and August (inclusive). The surveys need to be spaced at least three weeks apart. If bats are identified roosting within the building, a further survey would be required to characterise the roost, and a European Protected Species Licence will be required with up-to-date surveys from the survey season prior to the application submission.

Additionally, it was determined that B1 has the potential to support hibernating bats due to the deeper crevices within the internal brickwork providing a cool, stable and damp environment for winter torpor and hibernation. B1 was therefore assessed as having 'High' bat roost potential due to the hibernation opportunities it offers. Therefore, Hibernation Surveys will be required, comprising crevice inspections in January and February (inclusive) with associated static monitoring during these months.

Works should not commence on B1 until the Hibernation Surveys and Nocturnal Bat Surveys have been completed to ascertain the presence of any protected bat species and ensure compliance with protected species legislation.

4.2. NESTING BIRDS

The building was assessed as having nesting bird value as the Access Points on the upper floor could provide internal access for birds, allowing nesting internally. The works should be undertaken outside of the nesting bird season, which is generally accepted to be from March to September inclusive, although nesting can take place outside this period. If works are necessary during this nesting season a nesting bird check by a suitability qualified ecologist will be required, no more than 48 hours prior to any works. Should any nests, or nests in construction be located, a suitable stand-off distance should be maintained until the young have fledged. The ecologist will advise on suitable stand off and provide a toolbox talk to all site contractors regarding their working limits and legal implications.

4.3. BIODIVERSITY NET GAIN

In line with the Biodiversity Gain Requirements (Exemptions) Regulations 2024, any development undertaken by householders as defined within article 2(1) of the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015 are exempt from Biodiversity Net Gain, therefore, a Biodiversity Net Gain calculation will not be required for the current site.

5. REFERENCES

- Bat Conservation Trust (2023). Bats and Artificial Lighting At Night.
- The Biodiversity Gain Requirements (Exemptions) Regulations 2024. (S.I. 2024/47)
- Collins, J. (ed.) (2023). Bat Surveys for Professional Ecologists: Good Practice Guidelines, 4th edition. The Bat Conservation Trust, London.
- Institute of Lighting Engineers (2005). Guidance Notes for the Reduction of Obtrusive Light.
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- JNCC (2004). The Bat Workers Manual. 3rd Edition.
- 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.
- The Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015 (S.I. 2015/595) (As amended).

END OF REPORT

APPENDIX I
PRELIMINARY ROOST ASSESSMENT PLAN

Key:

- Site Boundary
- Building 1
- Access Points
- External Potential Roost Features

Internal Potential Roost Features

- Ground Floor Potential Roost Features
- Upper Floor Potential Roost Features

Notes

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