

Inspection & Assessment in relation to Bats & Breeding Birds

May 2026

Project Reference: PR-26-0085

Middleton Gymnastics

118 Bowness Road

Middleton

Manchester

M24 4NU

National Grid Reference: SD 8549 0645



Middleton Gymnastics, 118 Bowness Road, Middleton, Manchester, M24 4NU
Inspection & Assessment in relation to Bats & Breeding Birds

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Tyrer Ecological Consultants Ltd will however consider forwarding data that is collected as part of its reports to the relevant wildlife records centre.

As per CIEEM Guidelines, in most cases ecological surveys are likely to be valid for 12 – 18 months. Beyond this, an updated site visit, desk study and/or report are likely to be required.

Executive Summary

As part of a proposed planning application with Rochdale Borough Council concerning the former Middleton Gymnastics Club, Tyrer Ecological Consultants Ltd carried out a daytime preliminary roost assessment in relation to bats with an inclusive inspection for breeding birds in April 2026.

The survey was commissioned by Rochdale Borough Council; the proposals are understood to involve the demolition of the building.

Detailed methods, findings, conclusions and recommendations are presented throughout the report; however, the reader should be aware of the following **Key** points:

Bats

Based upon the findings of the DBW and associated GLTA, covered through sections 5.0 – 6.0 of the report and supported by **Appendix I**, Middleton Gymnastics Club is determined to pertain to a bat roost suitability of '**Negligible**', in accordance with Bat Conservation Trust – Bat Surveys for Professional Ecologists: Good Practice Guidelines, 4th ed. (2023).

Table 4.1. Guidelines for assessing the potential suitability of proposed development sites for bats, based on the presence of habitat features within the landscape, to be applied using professional judgement.		
Potential suitability	Description	
	Roosting habitats in structures	Potential flight-paths and foraging habitats
None	No habitat features on site likely to be used by any roosting bats at any time of the year (i.e. a complete absence of crevices/suitable shelter at all ground/underground levels).	No habitat features on site likely to be used by any commuting or foraging bats at any time of the year (i.e. no habitats that provide continuous lines of shade/protection for flight-lines, or generate/shelter insect populations available to foraging bats).
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.	No obvious habitat features on site likely to be used as flight-paths or by foraging bats; however, a small element of uncertainty remains in order to account for non-standard bat behaviour.

No further dusk emergence or dawn re-entry surveys are thus recommended to be conducted at the site during the active season of bats.

The site is also absent of classic and non-classic hibernation suitability.

Breeding Birds:

No impacts are applicable in relation to any Sch.1 (WCA) specially protected bird species such as black redstart, and no further surveys or recommendations are necessary in relation to specially protected birds, with no evidence of or suitability for Sch.1 species within the site boundary.

In relation to wider breeding bird species, the building is absent of any viable nesting platforms which could be utilised within the nesting bird season of March – August, inclusive. As such, impacts can be ruled out.

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1.0 Introduction & Reasons for Survey

- 1.1 As part of a proposed planning application with Rochdale Borough Council concerning the former Middleton Gymnastics Club, Tyrer Ecological Consultants Ltd carried out a daytime preliminary roost assessment in relation to bats with an inclusive inspection for breeding birds in April 2026.
- 1.2 The survey was commissioned by Rochdale Borough Council; the proposals are understood to involve the demolition of the building. See **Figure 1.1** for an existing site layout plan.

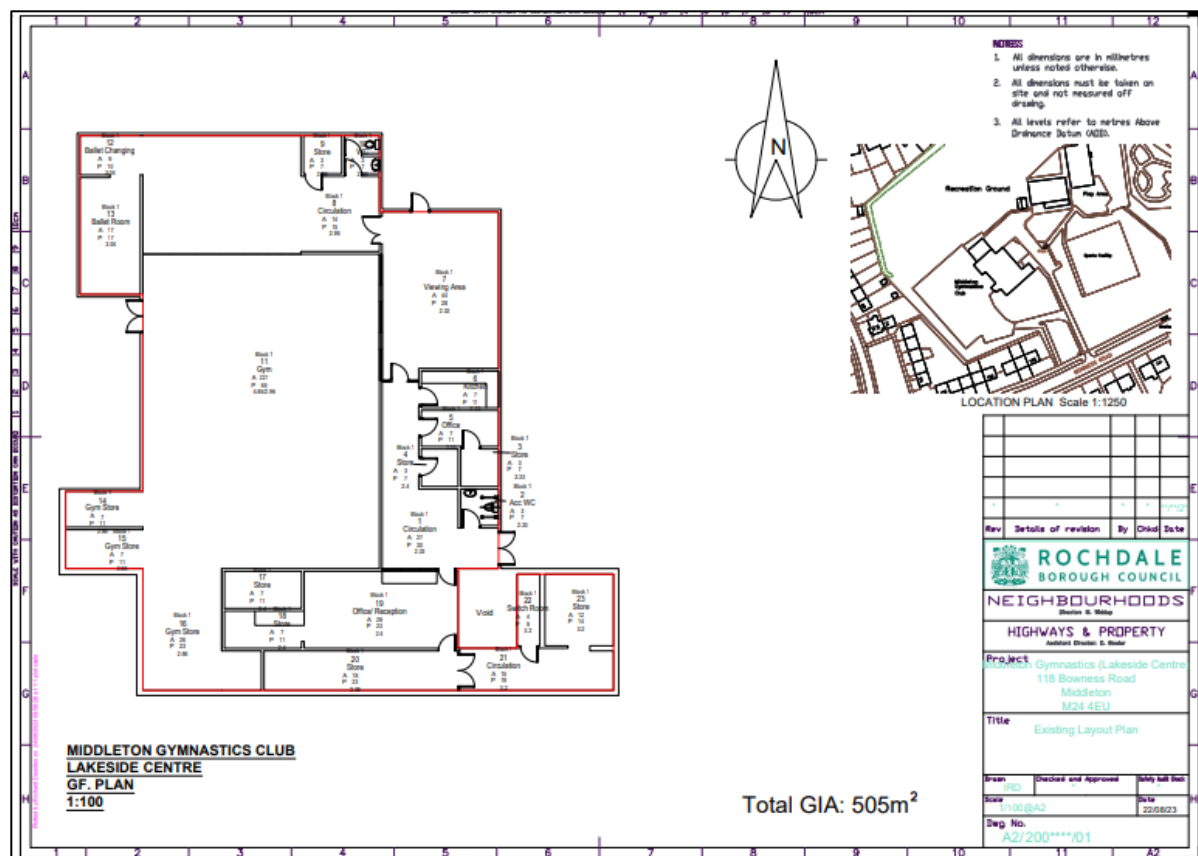


Figure 1.1 – Existing Layout Plan (© Rochdale Borough Council)

- 1.3 The aim of the survey was to ascertain whether the building or surrounding vegetation are of value for bats / bat roosts, whilst an assessment of nesting and general suitability for birds was also carried out. If any potential roost features (PRFs) were found to be suitable for bats, or signs of use were observed, where suitable habitats and / or bat records exist in the locality, then more detailed surveys would be recommended i.e. dusk emergence surveys during the main active season of bats which is May – August (extending into September).
- 1.4 If additional surveys are required following the initial site visit, this report will outline the details of those further requirements, in accordance with Bat Conservation Trust – Bat Surveys for Professional Ecologists: Good Practice Guidelines, 4th ed. (2023).
- 1.5 If it was determined that bat(s) or their roost / place of rest / shelter will be subsequently impacted by the works then a European Protected Species (EPS) licence would be legally required to proceed with the development.
- 1.6 If evidence indicated breeding birds may be impacted by proposals, tailored recommendations would be made accordingly, species pending.

- 1.7 As part of the local authority's planning policies and obligations to the Planning Framework, ecological surveys are generally required prior to planning permission being granted where protected / priority habitats and species are, or may be present, that could be affected by the proposals for which the application seeks consent. Where more detailed surveys are recommended by the ecologist, following an initial daytime investigation, then Local Planning Authorities (LPA), on the advice of their ecological advisors, will not grant permission until such time that all relevant information is gathered.

2.0 Protected Species & Their Requirements

Bats

2.1 All British bats and their **roosts are afforded full protection under the Wildlife & Countryside Act (1981) (as amended) and are listed in Schedule 2 of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations (2019) (EU Exit). When dealing with cases where an EPS (all UK bats) may be affected, a planning authority is a competent authority within the meaning of Regulation 7 of the Regulations, and therefore has a statutory duty, as the local authority, to have due regard to the provisions of the Regulations in the exercise of its functions.

2.2 Uses of Buildings by Bats

- a) Summer breeding roost, and day/occasional roost (May – August)
- b) Hibernation roost (October – March)
- c) Transitional or temporary roost (other months)

2.3 Roost selection is often closely correlated to suitable foraging habitat within a reasonable commuting distance from the roost and different sites are used depending upon insect densities and abundance; climatic conditions can also affect their ability to successfully forage. All British bats are insectivorous.

*** The term roost is generically referred to as a place that bat/s use for the any of the above reasons, however it should be noted that under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations (2019) (EU Exit) (Regulation 43 (d) the term roost is not used but refers to “a breeding site or resting place of such an animal” and is afforded legal protection. The roost, breeding site or resting place of bats, which ever terminology is used is legally protected whether or not bats are in occupation.*

2.4 Up to ten bat species have been regularly recorded within Greater Manchester to date, most of which use built structures, notably occupied residential buildings, for roosting. The most frequently encountered bat species is the common pipistrelle (*Pipistrellus pipistrellus*) and its abundant status in Manchester is reflected throughout the UK.

Breeding Birds

2.5 All wild birds, no matter how common, together with their eggs, young, and nests (while being built or in use), are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. In addition, the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 places a duty on public authorities to have regard to the conservation of biodiversity, which includes wild birds.

2.6 Any work that would damage an occupied nest, eggs or young of breeding birds, regardless of priority status, must be avoided; any damage to nests that may occur as a result of the development should be outside of the main breeding bird season (March – August). On occasions nests can become unoccupied during the breeding season but the status of the nest(s) should be determined by a suitably experienced ecologist / ornithologist.

2.7 Birds listed on Schedule 1 (Sch.1) of the WCA 1981, for example black redstart (*Phoenicurus ochruros*) are afforded a greater level of protection and are also protected from disturbance as well as destruction.

Policy

- 2.8 Paragraph 193 of the National Policy Planning Framework (as revised in December 2024) states:

“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 reasons¹ 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.”

- 2.9 The following policy from Rochdale Borough Council's Core Strategy² is considered relevant to this assessment (see **Table 2.2** below):

Table 2.2 – Relevant policies

Title	Summary
G7 Increasing the value of biodiversity and geodiversity	Development should not lead to a net loss in biodiversity, while developments that improve or increase biodiversity will be favoured. Designated sites, upland farmland, countryside areas and areas of urban biodiversity should be protected. Development affecting protected species will also be avoided, unless it can be demonstrated that impacts are avoided or are adequately mitigated.

Priority Habitats & Species

- 2.10 In the United Kingdom, legal protection and otherwise legislative recognition is afforded to particular habitats and species based on a variety of ecological factors. These are typically referred to as priority habitats and species, and can be identified under a variety of legislation and local policy, notably the UK Biodiversity Action Plan (UKBAP), Section 41 (s.41) of the NERC Act as well as under Local Biodiversity Action Plans (LBAPS).

¹ For example, infrastructure projects (including nationally significant infrastructure projects, orders under the Transport and Works Act and hybrid bills), where the public benefit would clearly outweigh the loss or deterioration of habitat

² See: <https://www.rochdale.gov.uk/downloads/file/405/core-strategy>

3.0 Survey Methodology

- 3.1 As part of the Inspection & Assessment in relation to Bats & Breeding Birds report, a desk-top and field-based study is conducted. Methods for both components of the appraisal are given below.

Desktop Study

- 3.2 Prior to a site visit, a desktop study was conducted using online resources to obtain information pertaining to any sites afforded statutory (e.g. SSSI) and non-statutory (e.g. LWS) designations for nature conservation within 2.0 kilometres of the site boundary. To do so, the Multi Agency Geographic Information for the Countryside (MAGiC – provided by DEFRA) was accessed to gather such information; this particular interactive mapping service was also used to locate any locally granted European Protected Species Mitigation Licences (EPSML) and species records to further inform conclusions concerning such species in the context of the study site and its proposed development.
- 3.3 Historic satellite imagery was reviewed using sources such as Google Earth (© 2025/26) to help establish past use of the land and determine the nature of adjoining and extending habitats; such information aids in the understanding of how the site might interact with its surroundings ecologically and its value in that context, and how the development may impact at a wider scale.
- 3.4 In addition, the Rochdale Borough Council planning portal was utilised to help inform the desktop study by analysis of existing publicly accessible ecological survey results that have been carried out locally within the previous five years.
- 3.5 A commercial data request to the Local Environmental Records Centre serving the area – in this case Greater Manchester Local Record Centre (GMLRC) – has not been sourced and is justified through application of the following recent guidance:

1) The Guidelines for Accessing, Using and Sharing Biodiversity Data in the UK (CIEEM, 2020) states:

“It is generally expected that a desk study, including a data search, will be a key part of the ecological surveys or reports produced to inform a planning application. Freely available web-based sources of data and contextual information should always be used; in some cases, it may be acceptable to not undertake a data search with the LERC or other relevant NSS or local interest groups, for example:

- ii) Situations where the **data search would be extremely unlikely to provide information needed to inform the assessment, due to the scale and location of the proposed development**. The appropriateness of excluding a data search will need to be judged on a case-by-case basis as, in most situations, it will be essential to carry out such a search even if the development is very small or is likely to have a low impact. It can be very difficult to demonstrate that a data search would not have provided relevant information without obtaining and reviewing those data.*
- iii) In some cases for Preliminary Roost Assessments of buildings in **low impact / small-scale scenarios**, such as an extension to a residential property, loft conversions (full or partial), installation of Velux/dormer windows, **single modern agricultural or similar building conversion or demolition**; however, it should not be assumed that data searches are never required for such scenarios and this must be judged on a case by case basis and justified accordingly.*

- 3.6 As exemptions as made **bold** above can be applied at the site, whilst following best practice, it is considered unnecessary to conduct a commercial data request following the desk study effort and daytime assessment at this time, which offers a proportionate level of survey effort. If, however, a data search is considered necessary by the Local Authority advisory body to inform the ecological impact assessment following any further surveys recommended in this report, a proportionate data search should be commissioned with results interpreted into the conclusions and recommendations of a re-issued / updated report.

Field Survey

- 3.7 In context with the above, a diurnal inspection and assessment of the building and the immediate environment in relation to bats and breeding birds was conducted on 9th April 2026 in dry conditions (11°C), wind 2/12 (Beaufort scale), 90% cloud, by the following surveyor (see **Table 3.1**):

Table 3.1 – Site surveyor credentials

Name	Description of most relevant credentials
Mr. H. Mulligan ACIEEM	• Senior Ecologist & BNG Lead with 4 years training and experience, • MBiolSci in Biological Sciences (Zoology), • Accredited agent on the Natural England Class 2 bat licence of Mrs. K. Wilding (2025-84395-CL18-BAT), • Meets the requirements of CIEEM's Competency Framework Section S (Surveying) to Capable or higher level.

Bats

- 3.8 Criteria for roost assessment are based upon the determinants given in the Bat Conservation Trust – Bat Surveys for Professional Ecologists: Good Practice Guidelines, 4th ed. (2023): (see **Figures 3.1 – 3.4** overleaf).

- 3.9 Bat Conservation Trust – Bat Surveys for Professional Ecologists: Good Practice Guidelines, 4th ed. (2023), states:

“The guidelines should be interpreted and adapted on a case-by-case basis according to site-specific factors and the professional judgement of an experienced ecologist. The questions should not be whether the guidelines were followed, but were the defined objectives of the surveys met? Where examples are used in the guidelines, they are descriptive rather than prescriptive.”

- 3.10 The site was assessed for bats; a daytime bat walkover (DBW) was undertaken to observe, assess and record any habitats or features suitable for usage by bats, either as commuting, foraging or roosting provision. Wider connectivity to other habitats was also considered during the DBW.
- 3.11 Buildings and other permanent / semi-permanent structures (where present) were subject to a preliminary roost assessment (PRA), to identify potential areas which may be of value to bats and to determine evidence of use. This typically involves a systematic search of the external aspects of any structure(s), comprising an investigation of features known to be used by bats (for example roofing material, soffits, fascia, lead flashing hanging tiles) using a high-powered torch and close-focus binoculars, where necessary. An internal assessment of the structure(s) was also carried out, with the aid of a high-powered torch and endoscope, where necessary, to identify any evidence of bat use of a structure. Field signs of bats typically

comprise bat droppings, urine splashing, fur-oil staining, incidental animal presence, dead specimens and / or the presence of prey items, such as moth wings.

- 3.12 This assessment also included an assessment of any structures relative to their potential to offer winter roosting suitability for bats, with environmental conditions noted, including temperature, relative humidity, and a systematic inspection of any cracks, crevices and voids for bats undertaken. The information recorded was assessed relative to the non-classic hibernation site criteria contained within the BCT guidelines, and derived from 'Assessing Sites for Hibernation Potential. A Practical Approach, including a Proposed Method & Supporting Notes' (Middleton, 2019).
- 3.13 Trees (where present) would be subject to a ground level tree assessment (GLTA) using equipment such as close-focus binoculars and a high powered-torch. Potential roost features (PRFs) can include woodpecker holes, rot holes, hazard beams, other vertical or horizontal cracks or splits in stems and branches, partially decayed lifted bark, knot holes, man-made holes, tear-outs, cankers in which cavities have developed, other hollows or cavities, including butt-rots, double-leaders forming compression forks with included bark, gaps between overlapping stems or branches, partially detached climbing species with stem diameters in excess of 50mm or pre-existing bat / bird boxes. These PRFs can then be determined as PRF-I or PRF-M, dependent on their suitability for individual / low numbers of bats or their capability to host multiple bats.
- 3.14 Factors considered during the preliminary roost assessment include:
- Practical experience of the surveyor,
 - Knowledge of bat species relevant to the site location and geographical range,
 - Nature of the immediate / surrounding habitat in relation to foraging opportunities,
 - Presence / absence of roost potential,
 - Value and types of roost potential, if present (i.e. – maternity, hibernation, transitional).

Birds

- 3.15 The site and any built structure(s) on site were inspected for evidence of nesting and suitability for relevant species. Bird species observed and heard were recorded on site, and a search was made for nest material, or areas suitable for nesting – this can take the form of searching structures, woody vegetation, semi-aquatic vegetation such as reeds and / or ground flora. Elevations of any buildings or structures on site were inspected for evidence of birds that show a high dependency upon built structures, many of which are in a state of decline. These might include the following species for example (list non-extensive):
- Starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*): Birds of Conservation Concern (BoCC) red status
 - House sparrow (*Passer domesticus*): BoCC red status
 - House martin (*Delichon urbica*): BoCC red status
 - Swift (*Apus apus*): BoCC red status
- 3.16 Additional to the site's capacity to support generally common species for breeding, the area was also subject to an assessment for wider capacity to support species with extra protection under Sch.1 of the Wildlife & Countryside Act (1981) (as amended), as well as those listed in s.41 of the NERC Act and on the Greater Manchester BAP.

Quality Assurance (QA)

- 3.17 The results, conclusions and recommendations of this report have been assessed by Mrs. K. Wilding, the Director of Tyrer Ecological Consultants Ltd, and her assessment is consistent with that of the surveyor Mr. H. Mulligan.

Table 4.1. Guidelines for assessing the potential suitability of proposed development sites for bats, based on the presence of habitat features within the landscape, to be applied using professional judgement.		
Potential suitability	Description	
	Roosting habitats in structures	Potential flight-paths and foraging habitats
None	No habitat features on site likely to be used by any roosting bats at any time of the year (i.e. a complete absence of crevices/suitable shelter at all ground/underground levels).	No habitat features on site likely to be used by any commuting or foraging bats at any time of the year (i.e. no habitats that provide continuous lines of shade/protection for flight-lines, or generate/shelter insect populations available to foraging bats).
Negligible ^a	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.	No obvious habitat features on site likely to be used as flight-paths or by foraging bats; however, a small element of uncertainty remains in order to account for non-standard bat behaviour.
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 ^b 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 and not a classic cool/stable hibernation site, but could be used by individual hibernating bats ^c).	Habitat that could be used by small numbers of bats as flight-paths such as a gappy hedgerow or unvegetated 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	A structure with one or more potential roost sites that could be used by bats due to their size, shelter, protection, conditions ^b and surrounding habitat but unlikely to support a roost of high conservation status (with respect to roost type only, such as maternity and hibernation – the categorisation described in this table is made irrespective of species conservation status, which is established after presence is confirmed).	Continuous habitat connected to the wider landscape that could be used by bats for flight-paths 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	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 ^b and surrounding habitat. These structures have the potential to support high conservation status roosts, e.g. maternity or classic cool/stable hibernation site.	Continuous, high-quality habitat that is well connected to the wider landscape that is likely to be used regularly by bats for flight-paths 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.
a Negligible is defined as 'so small or unimportant as to be not worth considering, insignificant'. This category may be used where there are places that a bat could roost or forage (due to one attribute) but it is unlikely that they actually would (due to another attribute). b For example, in terms of temperature, humidity, height above ground level, light levels or levels of disturbance. c Evidence from the Netherlands shows mass swarming events of common pipistrelle bats in the autumn followed by mass hibernation in a diverse range of building types in urban environments (Korsten <i>et al.</i>, 2016 and Jansen <i>et al.</i>, 2022). Common pipistrelle swarming has been observed in the UK (Bell, 2022 and Tomlinson, 2020) and winter hibernation of numbers of this species has been detected at Seaton Delaval Hall in Northumberland (National Trust, 2018). This phenomenon requires some research in the UK, but ecologists should be aware of the potential for larger numbers of this species to be present during the autumn and winter in prominent buildings in the landscape, urban or otherwise.		

Figure 3.1 – BCT guidelines extract on categorisation of roost potential in structures and habitat suitability

Table 4.2. Guidelines for assessing the suitability of trees on proposed development sites for bats, to be applied using professional judgement.	
Suitability	Description
NONE	Either no PRFs in the tree or highly unlikely to be any
FAR	Further assessment required to establish if PRFs are present in the tree
PRF	A tree with at least one PRF present

Figure 3.2 – BCT extract on tree roost suitability criteria

Table 6.2. Guidelines for categorising the potential suitability of PRFs on a proposed development site for bats, to be applied using professional judgement.	
Suitability	Description
PRF-I	PRF is only suitable for individual bats or very small numbers of bats either due to size or lack of suitable surrounding habitats.
PRF-M	PRF is suitable for multiple bats and may therefore be used by a maternity colony.

Figure 3.3 – BCT extract on tree roost categorisation criteria

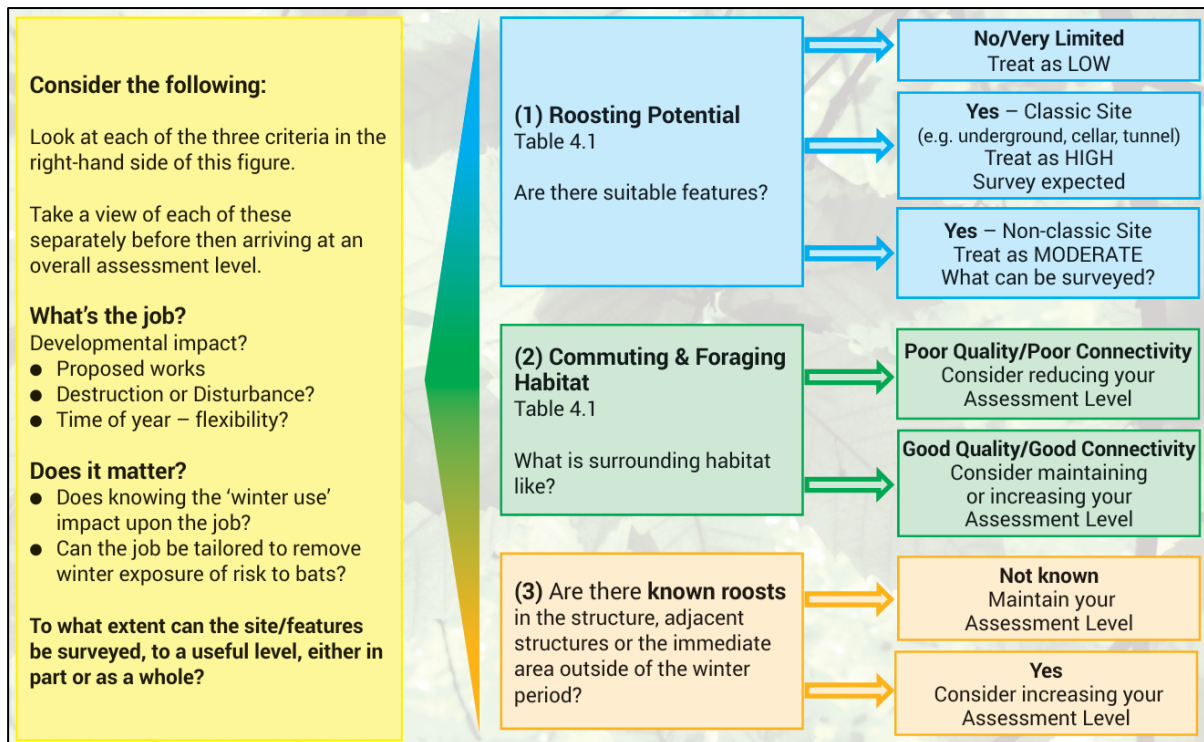


Figure 3.4 – BCT extract on hibernation roost categorisation criteria

4.0 Limitations

- 4.1 The survey was undertaken outside of the bat active season (generally accepted as May – August, extending into September) at a time when bats are spending less time in torpor following the hibernation season, and dispersing from hibernation sites; evidence of bats can be less evident over winter though bat roost suitability can generally still be readily identified by a suitably experienced ecologist.
- 4.2 The survey was conducted within the breeding bird season, when evidence of nesting and other breeding behaviours can be most readily identified.
- 4.3 In considering all potential survey constraints, no significant limitations were experienced that might adversely influence the results, conclusions, and recommendations of this report.

5.0 Desk Study Results

- 5.1 The former Middleton Gymnastics Club building (referred to in-part as “the application site” and “the site”) is situated within the grounds of Demesne Community Centre to the north of Bowness Road in Middleton, approximately 8.0km north of Manchester city centre (see **Figure 5.1** below). The derelict building has an approximate area of 0.07 hectares (ha) and is bordered by a car park and playing fields.



Figure 5.1 – Location of red line boundary within surrounding landscape

- 5.2 The immediate environment is distinctly suburbanised in nature, characterised by semi-detached and terraced residential development. These areas are divided by large green spaces within parks and golf courses which feature areas of grassland, scattered trees, and priority deciduous woodland, notably 0.1km to the south within Truffet Park. Beyond the development to the west land use becomes more agricultural, with large fields divided by hedgerows.

Relevant Planning History

- 5.3 No previous planning applications are visible on the public access system at the site itself. Whilst a number of applications have been made in proximity to the site in the past five years no relevant ecological documents were submitted as a part of any nearby planning applications.

Designated Sites

- 5.4 A single statutory designated site is present within 2.0km of the site (see **Table 5.1** for details and **Figure 5.2** overleaf for a visual aid).

Table 5.1 – Statutory designation types and reasons for designation within 2.0 kilometres buffer

Site name	Designation type	Interest features
Alkrington Woods (1.1km south-east)	Local Nature Reserve (LNR)	A 49.4ha site along the banks of the River Irk that supports woodland, grassland meadows, marsh, standing water and amenity areas. Fishing lodges are also present, with the waterbodies used by a variety of waterbirds and the woodlands supporting a range of fauna.

- 5.5 The site is positioned within the Impact Risk Zone (IRZ) for several SSSIs in the wider landscape, the nearest of which is Rochdale Canal SSSI located approximately 3.0km to the east of the site.
- 5.6 Based on the IRZ – Threshold Checker³ on MAGiC Maps 2026 for the location of the site, the site does not meet any of the listed development descriptions and thus the proposed development is unlikely to have a harmful effect on terrestrial SSSIs and the SACs, SPAs or Ramsar sites that they underpin. Where no impact to SSSI's is predicted, NE issue the following advice within their standing guidance on SSSI impact zones (NE, 2019):

“It is important to note that the SSSI IRZs only indicate Natural England’s assessment of likely risk to the notified features of SSSIs. Where they indicate such a risk is unlikely, this does not mean that there are no potential impacts on biodiversity or the wider natural environment.”

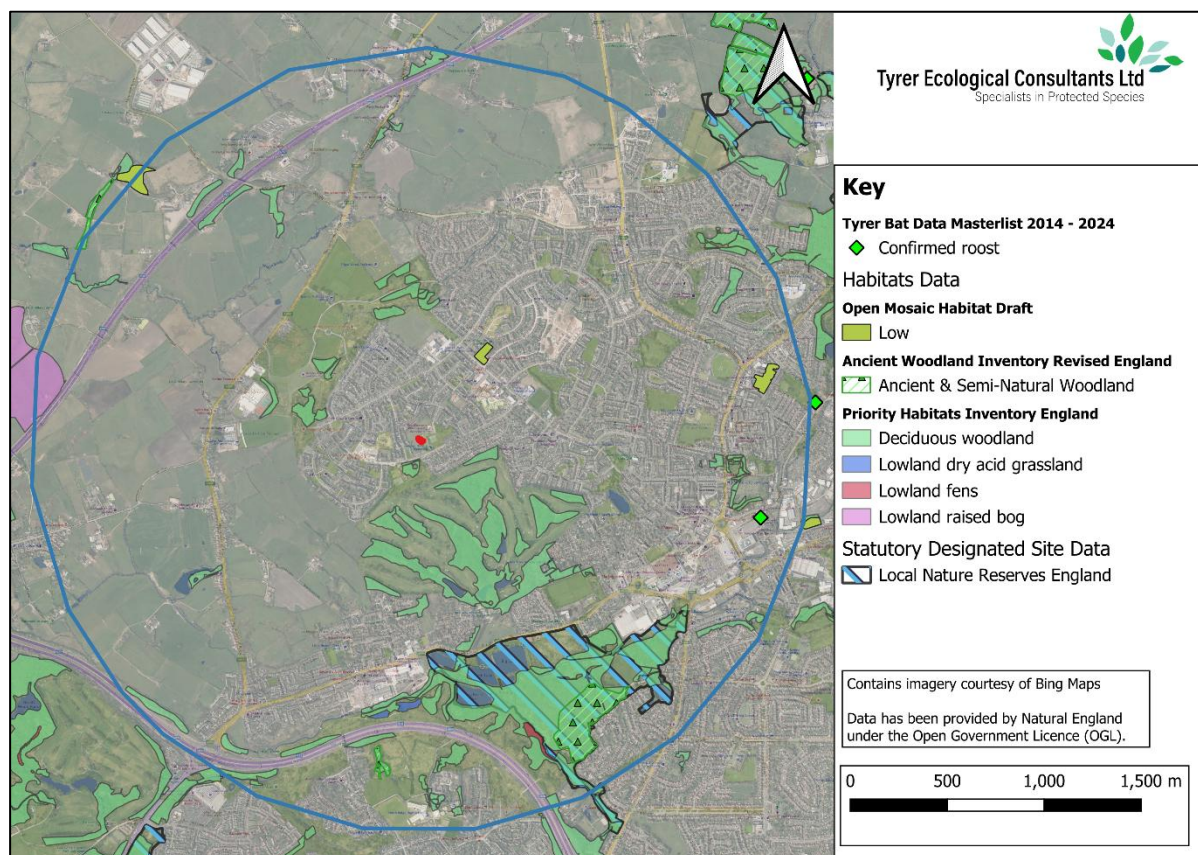


Figure 5.2 – Priority habitat, designated site and protected species data within 2.0km of application site

³ See:

[https://irz.geodata.org.uk/IRZ/step2.html?irzcode=0301000430000¬es=&location=388682,398273%20%20\(IRZ%20polygon%20centre\)](https://irz.geodata.org.uk/IRZ/step2.html?irzcode=0301000430000¬es=&location=388682,398273%20%20(IRZ%20polygon%20centre))

- 5.7 The site also lies within 2.0km of two locally designated sites, in this case Sites of Biological Importance (SBIs), namely Alkrington Woods & Rhodes Lodges, designated for its habitat mosaics, and Boardman Brook, designated for its woodland. However, these are located 1.1km and 1.2km to the south of the site respectively, and as such are not considered relevant to the development.

Bats

- 5.8 An online search of MAGiC maps revealed that a single EPSML has been granted for bats within a 2.0km radius of the site (see **Table 5.2** below for further information).

Table 5.2 – Bat EPSML data records from MAGiC Maps

Licence Number	Distance from site	Context (where relevant)
2015-8774-EPS-MIT	2.0km east	Common pipistrelle; destruction of breeding site and resting place

- 5.9 Tyrer Ecological Consultants Ltd have previous and ongoing projects involving bat roosts within the 2.0km area surrounding the site; as such, the following biological data (see **Table 5.3** below) is readily available to the Ecologist from the company database. All data has been previously submitted to the LERC serving the area, which, in this case, is GMLRC.

Table 5.3 – LERC submitted biological data records collected by Tyrer Ecological Consultants Ltd

Year	Distance from site	Context (where relevant)
2021	1.8km east	Common pipistrelle; day roost, 7 bats

- 5.10 The surrounding land provides moderate value commuting habitats for bats; although the majority of the land is developed, the grassland surrounding the site has scattered trees which offer connectivity to the wider network of woodland extending to the south within Truffet Park and the bordering golf course. These pathways link areas of roosting potential within the development to areas of greater foraging suitability, including the priority woodland blocks mentioned previously, with the site located within this network. The species considered most likely to be present within the surrounding habitat is the common pipistrelle, linked with roosting in buildings, notably occupied dwellings.

NB: *Where quality habitat is present close to buildings then the percentage use of those buildings, by bats, increases given that roost opportunities are available and vice versa.*

Birds

- 5.11 The immediate site surroundings are largely absent of suitable nesting habitat for urbanised species such as black redstart, being comprised almost entirely of residential housing that lacks suitable perches, green roofs, old canals, warehouses or large public buildings with ephemeral roofs.
- 5.12 Given the largely urbanised habitats surrounding the site, bird species most likely to be present are those adapted to these environments such as feral pigeon (*Columba livia domestica*), herring gull (*Larus argentatus*), lesser black-back gull (*Larus fuscus*) and magpie (*Pica pica*), though the green spaces in the surrounding environment are also likely to support passerine species such as blackbird (*Turdus merula*), chiffchaff (*Phylloscopus collybita*), and starling. Additionally, species adapted to urbanisation and common garden species such as house sparrow or swift are also likely to be present.

6.0 Field Study Results

Bats

Buildings

- 6.1 Middleton Gymnastics Club is a disused, single storey, brick-built structure with a flat timber and felt-covered roof, to the approximate maximum dimensions of 40m x 25m x 4m (length x width x height). The structure features timber and UPVC cladding, timber windows, metal and UPVC fascia, and timber soffits, whilst a flat-roofed and UPVC capped plant room with boarded windows is present to the north-west of the building, which extends above the rest of the building to ~10m tall. Whilst the surveyor is not qualified to assess structural integrity, the building was adjudged to be in a poor aesthetic condition, with obvious signs of dereliction and dilapidation to all aspects, including fire damage.
- 6.2 Internally, no true loft space is present in the main section of the building, with it largely open to the roof throughout, with the exception of a small area of suspended ceiling to the south-east, though as various sections of the ceiling are missing the void has consistent character to the rest of the building. The interior is thus brightly illuminated, averagely warm, and draughty throughout. The plant room to the north-west is also open to the flat roof, though is much darker due to the boarded windows, and is very cool, damp and non-draughty.
- 6.3 The building is therefore considered broadly unsuitable for the breeding purposes of loft-dwelling species such as the brown long-eared bat (*Plecotus auritus*); a species which requires dark, open loft spaces with warm, consistent thermal characteristics in which to raise their young. This does not necessarily discount use of the building for purposes other than breeding by such species, though no evidence of use was encountered.
- 6.4 No roof lining is present beneath the roofing materials throughout the building; where present, a bitumen 1F underfelt or other traditional roof lining can improve the value of a building for crevice-dwelling bats such as those of the *Pipistrellus* genus, whereby they roost between the roofing cover and the underlining. No evidence of such species was encountered by the surveyor, however this is often the case owing to their crevice-dwelling nature.
- NB:** *The breeding roosts of Pipistrelle bats are proportionally higher in occupied residential dwellings where the warm, dry conditions favour the requirements of a maternity colony but other structures are also used, especially for hibernation or by male bats which do not need the same conditions as a maternity colony.*
- 6.5 Externally, the building is largely absent of any PRFs to all aspects; the fascias, capping, boarded windows and cladding are all tightly fitted on each aspect. To the south-west of the building, three small areas of degradation were noted to the soffit where damage has created an opening, though on close inspection they appear to be shallow and exposed, only extending to a depth of a few millimetres, and do not extend into the building or provide any crevice-roosting potential, and thus it is considered highly unlikely that they could be utilised by bats.
- 6.6 Given the character of the building and the general absence of PRFs, it is duly categorised as pertaining to '**Negligible**' bat roost suitability, in accordance with Bat Conservation Trust – Bat Surveys for Professional Ecologists: Good Practice Guidelines, 4th ed. (2023).
- 6.7 As per the building description above, the plant room is considered to offer "classic" hibernation potential, given its undisturbed, cool, non-draughty, humid and dark character. However, this section is entirely sealed externally, with no viable ingress opportunities at the roof, doors or windows, which are boarded. As such, the plant room has no viability of being used for hibernation, and the site is therefore absent of classic hibernation potential.

- 6.8 In addition to the above assessment on classic hibernation value, the structure was also assessed for its potential to hold non-classic hibernation value as per **Figure 3.4**. A Hibernation roost is defined as the following: *“A place where bats may be found individually or together during winter. They have a constant cool temperature and high humidity”*.
- 6.9 Whilst the surrounding habitat provides value for bats within the nearby woodland blocks, no known records of roosting bats are present in the immediate area, and the building is entirely absent of any suitable hibernation locations for species which typically hibernate within crevices such as members of the *Pipistrellus* genus.
- 6.10 In line with guidance, the building therefore meets the criteria for a ‘**Negligible**’ value non-classic hibernation site.

Trees

- 6.11 No trees are present onsite, and thus no GLTAs were undertaken.

Activity

- 6.12 From a habitat suitability assessment in relation to bat activity, the site provides ‘**Low**’ value foraging habitat; although trees are present in the wider playing fields, the areas immediately surrounding the site are comprised entirely of hardstanding and simple grassland, thus not providing high value habitat. However, the unoccupied nature of the building indicates that the grassland is likely dimly lit and could form part of a network of commuting pathways facilitating the movement of bats through the landscape.

Breeding Birds

- 6.13 In relation to WCA Schedule 1 specially protected bird species such as black redstart, the site is lacking in suitable nesting platforms, and no direct evidence or evidence of historic nesting was identified by the surveyor. Records of this species are more prominent towards Manchester city centre, where green roofs, old canals, warehouses and large public buildings with ephemeral roofs offer more variety and opportunities for this species to thrive.
- 6.14 In relation to breeding birds, the building is absent of any features that would provide nesting platforms and there are no viable ingress opportunities for urbanised species, whilst no vegetation will be impacted by the works.

7.0 Conclusions & Recommendations

Designated Sites

- 7.1 The site lies within the Impact Risk Zone (IRZ) for Rochdale Canal Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), 3.0km to the east. Based on the IRZ – Threshold Checker, the proposals do not present a likely risk of having a harmful effect on the surrounding terrestrial SSSIs and the Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), Special Protection Areas (SPAs) or Ramsar sites that they underpin.
- 7.2 No further consultation with Natural England (NE) in relation to specially protected sites is considered necessary. Similarly, given the small-scale of the proposed works, it is unlikely that it will impact upon any of the non-statutory sites which occur in proximity.

Bats

Buildings

- 7.3 Based upon the findings of the DBW and associated GLTA, covered through sections 5.0 – 6.0 of the report and supported by **Appendix I**, Middleton Gymnastics Club is determined to pertain to a bat roost suitability of ‘**Negligible**’, in accordance with Bat Conservation Trust – Bat Surveys for Professional Ecologists: Good Practice Guidelines, 4th ed. (2023). See **Figure 7.1** below for a BCT guidelines extract.

Table 4.1. Guidelines for assessing the potential suitability of proposed development sites for bats, based on the presence of habitat features within the landscape, to be applied using professional judgement.		
Potential suitability	Description	
	Roosting habitats in structures	Potential flight-paths and foraging habitats
None	No habitat features on site likely to be used by any roosting bats at any time of the year (i.e. a complete absence of crevices/suitable shelter at all ground/underground levels).	No habitat features on site likely to be used by any commuting or foraging bats at any time of the year (i.e. no habitats that provide continuous lines of shade/protection for flight-lines, or generate/shelter insect populations available to foraging bats).
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.	No obvious habitat features on site likely to be used as flight-paths or by foraging bats; however, a small element of uncertainty remains in order to account for non-standard bat behaviour.

Figure 7.1 – BCT extract on ‘Negligible’ suitability criteria

- 7.4 No further dusk emergence or dawn re-entry surveys are thus recommended to be conducted at the site during the active season of bats.
- 7.5 Bats are a transient species and buildings can deteriorate over time. In the highly unlikely event that bat(s), or evidence of bat(s), are found during the proposed works, then, as a legal requirement, the work at the site should immediately cease and an Ecologist should be contacted for further advice. If bat(s) or their roost(s) will be affected, then an EPSML may be required to legally commence with the works. See **Figure 7.2** overleaf for indicative evidence of bats.



Figure 7.2 – Evidence of bats – droppings on the left / a common pipistrelle on the right - indicative

- 7.6 Whilst the plant room within the building offers some classic hibernation potential, it is entirely absent of ingress opportunities, meaning that it is inaccessible for bats, and thus could not be utilised as a hibernation site. As such, impacts to classic hibernation sites can be conclusively ruled out.
- 7.7 The structure is also assessed as offering '**Negligible**' value as a non-classic hibernation roost; no implications therefore apply in relation to bats and winter usage of the structure, in accordance with the Bat Mitigation Guidelines, which state:

“Where the assessment determines that the likelihood of finding bats in winter is negligible ... then works should be able to proceed without any temperature restrictions. Any bats found would be treated as ‘unexpected finds.’”

Trees

- 7.8 No trees are present onsite, and thus no recommendations apply in relation to bats and trees.

Activity

- 7.9 The wider site provides areas of '**Low**' value commuting and foraging habitat for bats. Whilst this would normally lead to the requirement for nighttime bat walkover (NBW) surveys, the site is small, and the demolition of the building will have no impact upon the wider habitat. As such, NBW surveys are not considered to be necessary, and no further recommendations apply.

Birds

- 7.10 No impacts are applicable in relation to any Sch.1 (WCA) specially protected bird species such as black redstart, and no further surveys or recommendations are necessary in relation to specially protected birds, with no evidence of or suitability for Sch.1 species within the site boundary.

- 7.11 In relation to wider breeding bird species, the building is absent of any viable nesting platforms which could be utilised within the nesting bird season of March – August, inclusive. As such, impacts can be ruled out.
- 7.12 The scheme could consider enhancement by way of erecting suitable nest boxes for the species present within the surrounding landscape, secured via a suitably worded planning condition. Relevant, indicative biodiversity enhancement measures can be found in **Appendix II**.

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Appendix I: Site Photographs



Plate 1 – *North-eastern aspect of the building*



Plate 2 – *Rear aspect*



Plate 3 – *Plant section of building to north-west*



Plate 4 – *Internal character of main section of building*

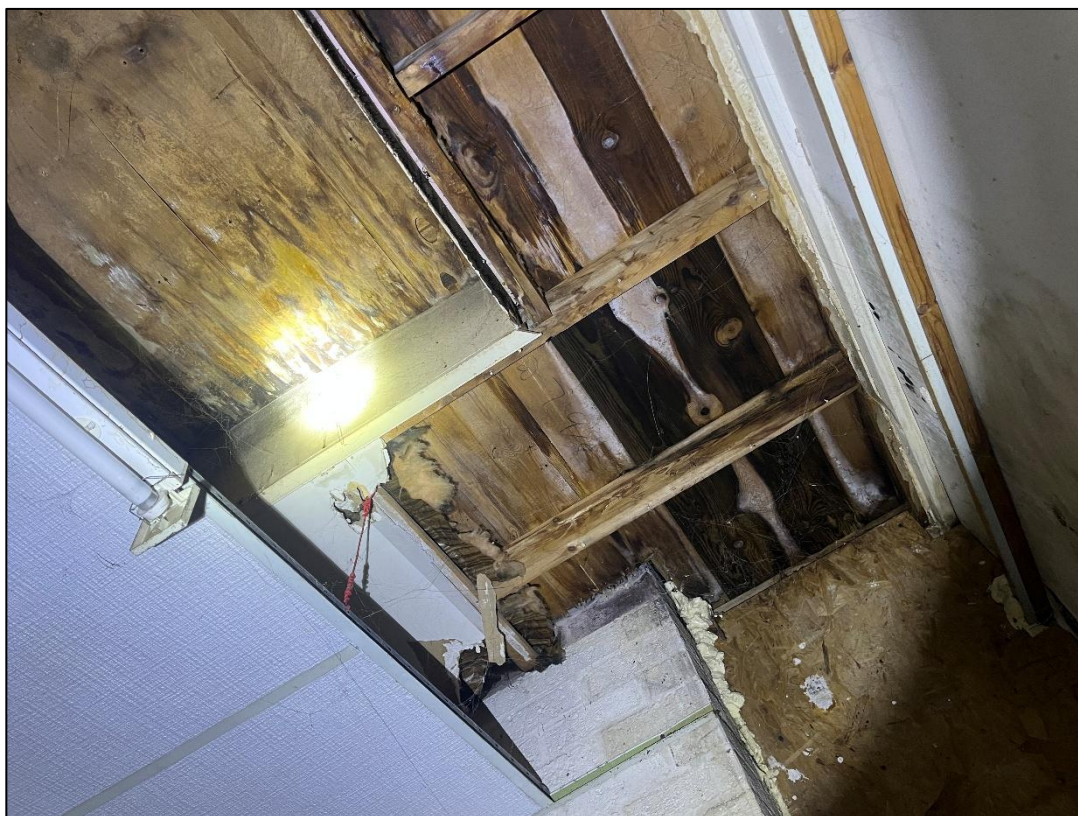


Plate 5 – *Suspended ceiling section of main building*



Plate 6 – *Internal character of plant room*



Plate 7 – *Further view of plant room*

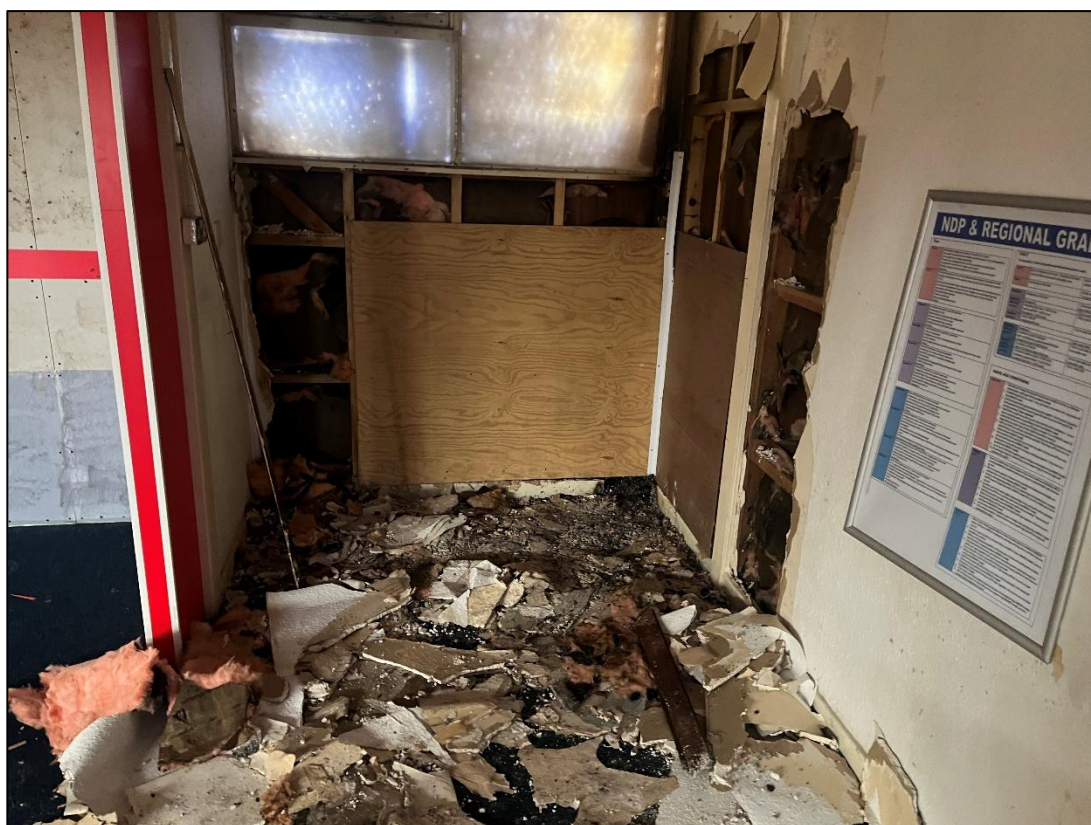


Plate 8 – *Fire damage internally*

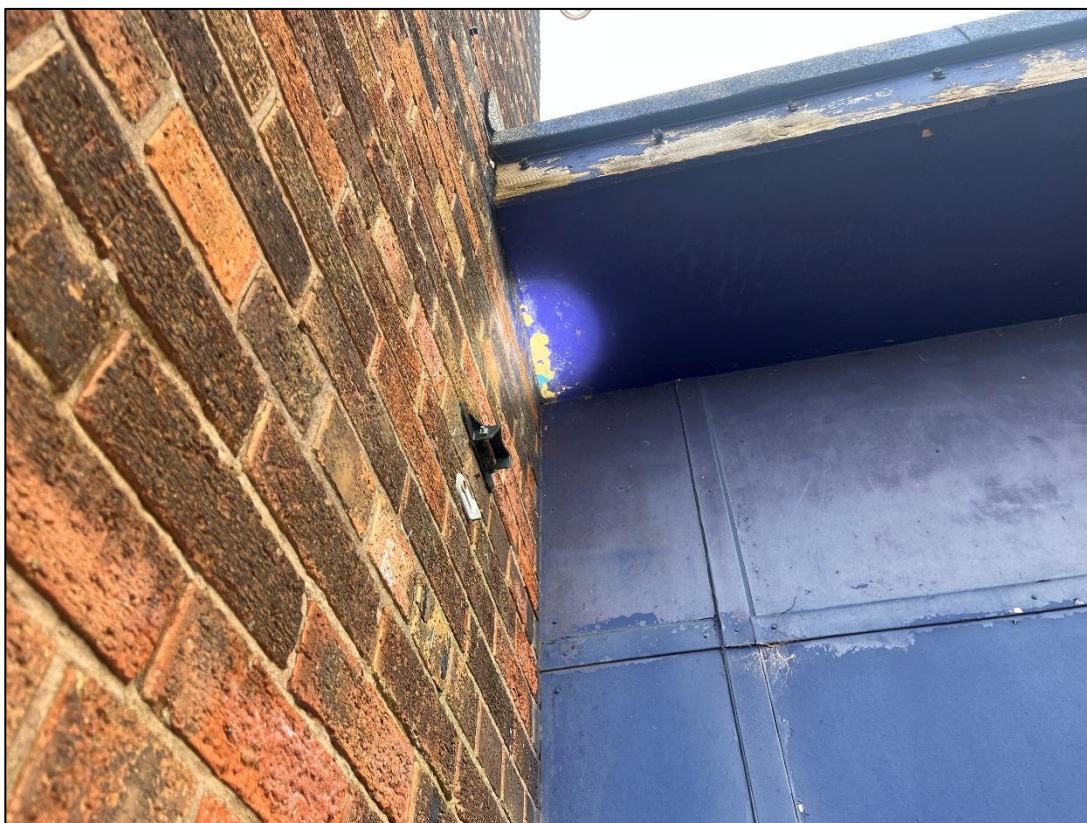


Plate 9 – *Small area of degradation to soffit*



Plate 10 – *Tight nature of capping*

Appendix II: Biodiversity Enhancement: General Recommendations

Bats

Tree-mounted bat boxes

The 2F is the standard and most popular Schwegler bat box. It is ideal as a starter box to see if there are bats in your area or to provide much needed secure roosting space. It has been designed as a summer roosting space for bats and has a simple entrance hole at the front.

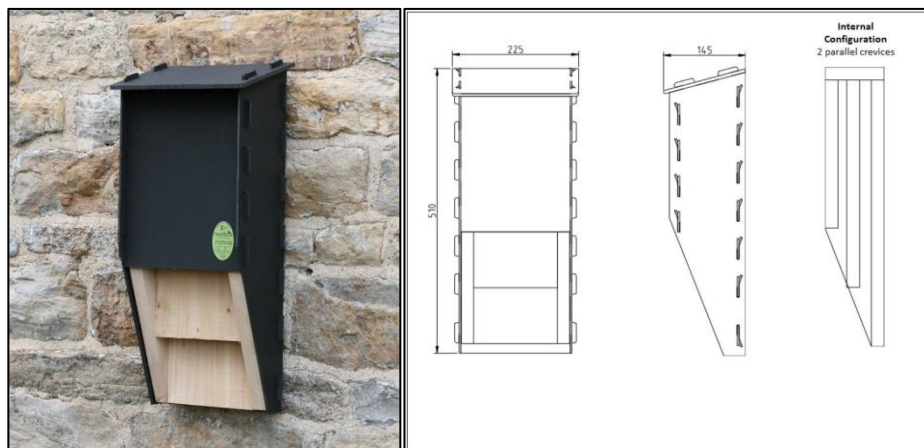
The 2F is manufactured from long-lasting Woodcrete, which is a blend of wood, concrete and clay which will not rot, leak, crack or warp, and will last for at least 20 - 25 years, making it suitable for long-term mitigation projects. Woodcrete is breathable and maintains a stable temperature inside the box and the 2F is painted black to absorb warmth. It also provides a rough surface for bats to cling to and climb up.

The 2F bat box can be sited on a tree or building and is best positioned at a height of between 3m to 6m in an open sunny position. A group of 3 to 5 boxes facing in different directions will provide a variety of micro-habitats.



An alternative to the above is the Eco Kent Bat Box, which is suitable for crevice-dwelling species. The two crevices inside the box are approximately 18mm wide, ideal for common and soprano pipistrelles. The FSC-certified spruce wood is rough on the inside providing good grip for bats once inside the box. This box is self-cleaning and does not require any maintenance, as the droppings fall straight down out of the bottom entrance.

These bat boxes can be mounted on either a tree or building using the 3 concealed keyhole fixings located at the top of the box. If possible, site the box at a height of between 4m and 6m in a sheltered sunny place, away from artificial light sources. The box should not be positioned in direct sunlight. Ideally, several boxes should be placed facing different directions, as this provides a choice for roosting bats. A clear path to the entrance of the box is essential



Breeding Birds – House Sparrow

The sparrow terrace has been designed to help redress the balance of falling house sparrow numbers. The current UK population is now half of what it previously was in 1980 and this is widely attributed to habitat destruction and lack of suitable nesting spaces. House sparrows are social birds and like to nest in company, therefore, this terrace provides ideal nesting opportunities for three families. The terrace can be fixed on to the surface of a suitable wall or incorporated into the wall. It is suitable for all types of buildings.



Breeding Birds – Starling

Starling populations have declined dramatically in recent years and are now on the Red List of birds of high conservation concern. Loss of habitat is one of the major pressures on this species and household renovations and new buildings offer much fewer nesting sites than have previously been available. Providing these birds with a safe and secure habitat and nesting environment is a great way to help ensure their future survival.

This Vivara Pro WoodStone® Starling Nest Box has a 45mm diameter entrance hole which makes it ideal for starlings. It should be sited on an external wall or tree at a height of at least 1.5m using an aluminium nail or screw and wall plug (not included). Site near to vegetation if possible as this will provide additional protection and cover.



Breeding Birds – Swallow

Swallows are a migratory species which can typically be seen in the UK from Spring to Autumn. They create an open topped nest type referred to as a 'cup', often situated within open-sided or dilapidated barn buildings which provide shelter but allow free ingress.

The Vivara Pro Woodstone® Swallow Nest Box recreates these nesting opportunities, and should be situated beneath roofing materials with free access; suitable locations might include overhanging eaves or within an open-sided garage or bin-store.



Breeding Birds – Other

This traditional design has proved to be highly effective in attracting Robins, as well as other small species such as Black Redstart, Spotted Flycatcher and Wren. It is designed to be installed on the walls of houses, barns, garden sheds or other buildings and should be hung so that the entrance is to one side (at an angle of 90° to the wall). The front panel can be easily removed for cleaning.

This type of box should not be made conspicuous on a tree or bush because small predators can enter through the unprotected opening. By hanging on a wall, predators won't be able to reach the box. Alternatively hide the box in Ivy, Honeysuckle or other climbing plants.



Invertebrates – Bee bricks

The Bee Brick can be used in place of a standard brick or block in construction to create habitat for solitary bees. Alternatively, it can be used as a standalone bee house in your garden or wild patch. It will provide much needed nesting space for solitary bee species such as red mason bees and leafcutter bees, both of which are non-aggressive.



Each Bee Brick contains cavities in which solitary bees can lay their eggs before sealing the entrance with mud and chewed-up vegetation. The offspring will emerge the following spring and the cycle will begin again. Each cavity goes part way into the brick, which is solid at the back. Bee Bricks should be placed in a warm sunny spot on a south-facing wall at a minimum height of 1m, with no vegetation obstructing the holes. It is highly recommended that bee-friendly plants should be located nearby so that the bees using the bricks have food, otherwise it is unlikely that the brick will be used.

Available in a choice of four colours: white grey, dark grey, yellow and red.

Specification:

- * Material: Concrete
- * Origin: Cornwall, UK
- * Dimensions: W 215mm x D 105mm x H 65mm
- * Weight: 2.9kg
- * Colours: White grey, yellow, dark grey and red

Native Planting and/or Landscaping

New feature landscaping should incorporate native woody plants as opposed to non-native species that are of significantly less benefit to biodiversity. Species such as Blackthorn (*Prunus spinosa*), Honeysuckle (*Lonicera periclymenum*), Rowan (*Sorbus aucuparia*), Guelder-rose (*Viburnum opulus*) and Hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*) are native and will provide a valuable resource for a myriad of wildlife as opposed to non-native, exotic species which are generally much less effective, particularly to pollinator groups including bees, butterflies and moths.

Suitable Trees	Suitable Woody Shrubs
English Oak (<i>Quercus robur</i>)	Hawthorn (<i>Crataegus monogyna</i>)
Rowan (<i>Sorbus aucuparia</i>)	Honeysuckle (<i>Lonicera periclymenum</i>)
Wild Service Tree (<i>Sorbus torminialis</i>)	Guelder Rose (<i>Viburnum opulus</i>)
Silver Birch (<i>Betula pendula</i>)	Elder (<i>Sambucus nigra</i>)
Ash (<i>Fraxinus excelsior</i>)	Wild Privet (<i>Ligustrum vulgare</i>)
Goat Willow (<i>Salix capraea</i>)	Blackthorn (<i>Prunus spinosa</i>)
Beech (<i>Fagus sylvatica</i>)	
Wild Cherry (<i>Prunus avium</i>)	