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BAT SCOPING SURVEY

At

Higher House

Moor Road
Holcombe
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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Toby Hart', is positioned below the 'Approved by:' line.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report is written by Jacob Miller BSc IEMA, Graduate Ecologist at United Environmental Services Ltd (UES). It provides an assessment of the potential impacts on bats as a result of the proposed residential development at Higher House, Moor Road, Holcombe.

A bat scoping survey was undertaken on 17th November 2021. The objective of the survey was to establish the suitability of the buildings on site to support roosting bats, based on a site specific survey and habitat assessment. The buildings were searched externally and internally (where accessible) for bat presence and features associated with bat activity, as detailed in Bat Conservation Trust (BCT) guidance (2016).

Higher House is situated in an area which provides moderate quality habitat for bats. The nearby mosaic of habitats, particularly to the north and east of the site, including woodland, blanket bogs, wet and dry heathlands, acid grasslands and hay meadows will provide an abundance of insects on which bats can forage. Furthermore, the treelines, hedgerows and watercourses will provide commuting opportunities, while the residential dwellings and mature trees will provide alternative roosting opportunities. However, habitats to the south and east are of lower quality, as they are urban, with large areas of residential housing and well-lit busy roads, providing limited opportunities for foraging and commuting bats.

There are four outbuildings which will be impacted by the current proposed development plans. These buildings have been numbered for the purposes of the report (see Appendix 1 – Site Plan). No evidence of roosting bats was recorded during the scoping survey but the quality of roosting habitat within the buildings on site is considered to be moderate. A number of external potential roosting features (PRFs) were identified, such as lifted roof and ridge tiles and gaps in the stonework. Furthermore, a number of internal PRFs were identified, such as cracks in the stonework and gaps at the wall plate.

Two further presence / absence surveys are required in order to determine whether bats are using the buildings on site to roost, and if so, the species and numbers of bats present. These surveys should be undertaken by an appropriately licenced ecologist during the bat survey season, May to September inclusive. At least one survey should be undertaken during the peak bat survey season, May to August inclusive. UES have been instructed to undertake these surveys in May 2022.

Due to the potential presence of breeding birds within the buildings at the time of development, it is recommended that the works take place outside of the breeding bird season and should not be undertaken from March to August inclusive. If this is not possible, a breeding bird nest check should be undertaken prior to the commencement of works by a suitably experienced ecologist, and an ecological clerk of works appointed if considered necessary.

The report should be read in conjunction with appendices 1 to 4, which give visual representations of the survey results.



1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Author, surveyors and qualifications

This report is compiled and written by Jacob Miller BSc and UES Graduate Ecologist. Other surveyors include:

- Emily Clark BSc PGdip ACIEEM, UES Senior Ecologist. Emily is licensed by Natural England to disturb, take and handle all species of bats under licence number 2019-39350-CLS-CLS (level 2).

All surveyors have the knowledge, skills and experience identified within CIEEM's "Competencies for Species Survey: Bats" (2013), or were under the supervision of a surveyor with the required competencies.

1.2 Survey objectives

UES was commissioned in November 2021 to conduct site surveys which include the following activities:

- Conduct internal and external building inspections to look for field signs of bats
- Assess the suitability of the buildings for use by roosting bats
- Recommend further surveys, mitigation and compensation, where appropriate

1.3 Proposed development

The proposed plans involve renovation and conversion of the existing outbuildings to form one residential dwelling.

1.4 Structure of the report

This report sets out the methodology, results, and recommendations in relation to a specific bat survey. Recommendations are in line with statutory legislation and planning policy objectives.

The report should be read in conjunction with appendices 1 to 4, which give visual representations of the survey results.



2 METHODOLOGY

2.1 General

All surveys were carried out to recognised guidelines, timings and weather conditions, with particular reference to Natural England and BCT publications (see references for further information).

The habitats on site and in the surrounding area were assessed during a walkover survey and by studying aerial photographs, in order to gauge their suitability to support roosting, foraging and commuting bats.

2.2 Building survey

The buildings on site were searched both externally and internally for bat presence and features associated with bat activity, as detailed in BCT guidance (Collins, 2016). This was conducted on 17th November 2021 by Emily Clark and Jacob Miller.

2.2.1 External inspection

The external inspection of the buildings on site was carried out from ground level using binoculars, and also using ladders and an endoscope to investigate suitable gaps. The objective of the survey was to find and record any signs of bat use, for example:

- Bat droppings
- Feeding remains
- Grease staining / urine marks
- Corpses or skeletons

The bat signs listed above are visible from the outside of a building. The following areas were searched, where present:

- | | |
|---------------------------|---|
| • Roof and ridge tiles | • Gaps under felt |
| • Lead flashing | • Cracks / holes in woodwork or behind cladding |
| • Eaves | • Gaps in brickwork and mortar |
| • Boxed soffits | • Air bricks |
| • Fascia and barge boards | • Grills |
| • Window sills and panes | • Vents |
| • Walls | |

2.2.2 Internal inspection

The internal inspection covered all of the accessible rooms and roof spaces within the buildings.

Bats regularly utilise specific areas within roof spaces, which were searched for any field signs of bats using high-powered torches and an endoscope, where considered necessary by the licenced ecologist. The following features were searched, where present:



- Roof beams and junctions
- Gaps under felt
- Dividing walls
- Chimney breasts
- Gaps in brickwork and mortar
- Cracks / holes in woodwork
- Floor or other surfaces on which droppings could accumulate

2.3 Survey limitations

The survey was carried out in November at a time when bats are spending increasing amounts of time in torpor within hibernation sites. For this reason, exposed droppings from summer roosts may not be evident as they are likely to have decomposed or have been washed away.

Internal field signs should still be evident at this time of year, as should droppings in sheltered locations.

Visibility to some sections of the roof on Buildings 2 and 3 was slightly limited due to the proximity of adjacent buildings. However, external inspections of all visible sections of the buildings was undertaken and detailed internal inspections were undertaken. Therefore, sufficient information was gathered to make a robust assessment as to the potential for the buildings to support roosting bats, with a precautionary approach adopted where necessary.



3 RESULTS

3.1 Habitat assessment

Higher House is located on the outskirts of Ramsbottom, a small rural village in Bury, Greater Manchester. The habitats on site include several buildings and a courtyard, but there is a mature garden, with scattered trees surrounding the site.

The immediate surrounding area to the north and west is rural, with hedge and tree-lined pasture fields surrounding the site. Furthermore, West Pennine Moors Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) is located approximately 200m west of the site. West Pennine Moors SSSI is designated for its diverse mosaic of habitats, including blanket bogs, wet and dry heathlands, acid grasslands, hay meadows and wet and dry woodland. These habitats will provide high quality foraging and commuting habitat for bats. Furthermore, there are several woodlands within 500m of the site, which will provide additional foraging, commuting and roosting opportunities for bats in the local area. However, habitats to the south and east are of lower quality, as they are urban, with large areas of residential housing and well-lit busy roads.

In the wider surrounding area, the habitats are similar in composition; the landscape to the north and west is rural with a mosaic of habitats, including heathland, moorland, and woodland, divided by a network of narrow country lanes. Furthermore, Lower Red Lees Pasture SSSI is also located approximately 1.2km north of the site, which is designated for the presence of herb-rich unimproved neutral to slightly acidic pasture typical of south-east Lancashire. This habitat will provide high quality foraging habitat for the bats. However, habitats to the east are of lower quality as they are urban and the M66 motorway is located approximately 1.5km east, which will act as a barrier to movement for bats to habitats beyond the motorway. However, the River Irwell is located approximately 700m east and there are pockets of greenspace (gardens, playing fields, parks) which will provide some low quality habitat for bats.

3.2 Building survey

3.2.1 External inspection

There are four outbuildings which will be impacted by the current proposed development plans. These buildings have been numbered for the purposes of this report (see Appendix 1 – Site plan).

Building 1 is a small stone-built rectangular building with a mono-pitched roof, located within the north-eastern section of the site, see Appendix 3, Photographs, Photograph 1. The roof is clad with stone roof and ridge tiles (Photograph 2) and there are several gaps where the roof tiles are lifted on the south-eastern aspect of the building. Although, several of the gaps were inspected using an endoscope and no evidence of roosting bats was recorded, but the features are considered suitable for use by bats occasionally. Furthermore, mortar is missing from a small number of the ridge tiles on the south-eastern aspect. In addition, ivy is present on a large proportion of the roof, although it is not dense enough for roosting bats, it does have the potential to support breeding birds (Photograph 2). The walls of the building are generally in good condition, but there a small number of gaps present on the south-western aspect of the building (Photograph 3). However, they were fully inspected using an endoscope, and no evidence of bats was recorded. Furthermore, the structure has no windows, but one open doorway is present on the south-western aspect of the building, providing access into the building (Photograph 3).



Building 2 is located along the south-eastern site boundary. The building is constructed from stone and has a sloping mono-pitched roof, (Photographs 4 and 5). The roof is clad with slate roof tiles and there are slate ridge tiles present on the south-eastern aspect of the building (Photograph 4). There are multiple gaps present where the ridge tiles have lifted or are missing mortar, providing access to the wall plate, see Photographs 6 and 7. Visibility to the western aspect of the roof was limited due to the proximity of the surrounding buildings and the height of Building 2. However, a small number of lifted slate roof tiles were noted. The walls are generally in good condition, but there are a small number of gaps present, particularly on the northern and western aspects of the building. On the northern aspect, several stones are missing, creating a large gap and an old bird's nest was noted within the feature, see Photograph 8. On the western aspect of the building, there are several gaps in the stonework where mortar is missing, see Photograph 9. All features on the western aspect of the building were fully inspected with a high-powered torch and found to be superficial. Furthermore, there are several windows present on the south-eastern aspect of the building, which have stone or wooden lintels that are in excellent condition with no PRFs noted. Several of the windows and doorways on the south-eastern aspect have been boarded with MDF and there are numerous gaps around the MDF boarding providing bats potential access into the building (Photograph 10). Finally, there is also a doorway on the south-western aspect of the building, which is constructed from wood, but this is tightly sealed and in excellent condition, see Photograph 11.

Building 3 is a stone-built outbuilding which attached to the north-western aspect of Building 2. The building has a shallow mono-pitched roof which is clad with stone roof and ridge tiles (Photograph 12) and there are several gaps where mortar is missing from under the roof and ridge tiles. The stonework is generally in good condition, however there are several gaps near the apex of the wall on the eastern aspect of the building, see Photographs 13 and 14. However, the gaps are relatively large and as such are considered to be more suitable for nesting birds rather than roosting bats. The building also has two open doorways on the south-western and eastern aspects, allowing bats access into the building.

Building 4 is a stone-built outbuilding located along the north-western site boundary. The building has been built into the sloping garden and as such has a shallow mono-pitched roof, see Photograph 15. The roof is clad with roof and ridge tiles and there are large gaps where the tiles are lifted, although many of these were inspected and no evidence of roosting bats was recorded. However, the features are still considered to be suitable for one or two bats to use occasionally. There is lead flashing present where the building joins the residential building to the south, which is tightly sealed, see Photograph 16. There is a wooden barge board present on the south-eastern aspect of the building and there is a slight gap between the barge board and wall. However, the gap was fully inspected, and no evidence of roosting bats was recorded (Photograph 17), but the feature is considered to be suitable for use by small numbers of roosting bats occasionally. Finally, the building has two open doorways on the south-eastern aspect, which will allow bats access into the building.

No evidence of bats, such as droppings, was found during the external building inspections.

3.2.2 Internal inspection

Building 1 has no loft void. The roof is a traditional purlin rafter construction, constructed from wooden beams and is unlined (Photograph 18). The roof is in good condition, but there are several gaps between the roof tiles, but these were inspected with an endoscope and no evidence of roosting bats was recorded. Furthermore, additional gaps are present above the wall plate, see Photograph 19, but these gaps were also inspected using an endoscope and



no evidence of roosting bats was recorded, but many of the features could not be fully inspected. The stone walls within the building are in good condition with no PRFs recorded.

Building 2 has no loft voids but the building has been split into two via an internal stone wall, see Appendix 1 – Site Plan and both sections are used for storage.

Section A has a typical wooden purlin rafter design, and the roof is lined with bitumen roofing felt creating additional PRFs between the roofing felt and roof tiles (Photograph 20). The walls within the building are generally in good condition, however there are several gaps present along the wall plate and there are gaps between the end rafter and stone wall (Photograph 21). Furthermore, there is one large crack in the stonework on the northern aspect of the building (Photograph 22). The crack was inspected and extended approximately 40cm into the wall, providing a suitable roosting feature for bats, although no evidence was recorded. Furthermore, one historic birds' nest was noted within the building (Photograph 23).

Section B is similar in design and construction, and the roof is also lined with bitumen roofing felt, see Photographs 24 and 25. Furthermore, there are additional access points into the building due to the gaps around the windows and doors. The walls within Section B have been rendered and are in excellent condition with no PRFs identified, although gaps are still present along the wall plate. Furthermore, one bird's nest was recorded within the building (Photograph 26).

Buildings 3 has no loft void and due to the absence of doors, the building is extremely draughty. The roof is a typical wooden purlin rafter design, but it is in poor condition and the roof has partially collapsed and is currently supported via steel supports (Photograph 27). However, the intact sections of the roof are partially lined with bitumen felt, which is in poor condition with numerous rips present (Photograph 28). Furthermore, there are several gaps in the brickwork, but these were inspected with a high-powered torch and the majority were found to be superficial (Photograph 29). Due to the partially collapsed roof, the building is extremely damp and there is significant water ingress, reducing the suitability of the building for roosting bats.

Building 4 has no loft void and has been split into two small rooms. The roof within both rooms is a typical purlin rafter design and is lined with bitumen roofing felt (Photograph 30), creating PRFs between the roof tiles and roofing felt. Furthermore, gaps were noted along the wall plate and between the end rafter and stone wall. The stonework within the building is in good condition with no PRFs noted.

No evidence of bats, such as droppings, was found during the internal building inspections.



4 EVALUATION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 Evaluation of results

4.1.1 Qualitative assessment of foraging habitats

In summary, Higher House is situated in an area which provides moderate quality habitat for bats. The nearby mosaic of habitats, particularly to the north and east of the site, including woodland, blanket bogs, wet and dry heathlands, acid grasslands and hay meadows will provide an abundance of insects on which bats can forage. Furthermore, the treelines, hedgerows and watercourses will provide commuting opportunities, while the residential dwellings and mature trees will provide alternative roosting opportunities. However, habitats to the south and east are of lower quality, as they are urban, with large areas of residential housing and well-lit busy roads, providing limited opportunities for foraging and commuting bats.

4.1.2 Qualitative assessment of roosting habitats

Although no evidence of roosting bats was recorded during the scoping survey, the quality of roosting habitat within the buildings on site is considered to be moderate. A number of external PRFs were identified, such as lifted roof and ridge tiles and gaps in the stonework. Furthermore, a number of internal PRFs were identified, such as cracks in the stonework and gaps at the wall plate.

4.2 Mitigation and compensation measures

4.2.1 Bats

Although no evidence of roosting bats was recorded during the scoping survey, the quality of roosting habitat within the buildings on site is considered to be moderate. Therefore, two further presence / absence surveys are required in order to determine whether bats are using the buildings on site to roost, and if so, the species and numbers of bats present. These surveys should be undertaken by an appropriately licenced ecologist during the bat survey season, May to September inclusive. At least one survey should be undertaken during the peak bat survey season, May to August inclusive. UES have been instructed to undertake these surveys in May 2022.

The bat scoping report is considered to be sufficient to validate the planning application, but the presence / absence survey results will need be submitted to the local planning authority (LPA) as part of the planning application. In addition, any further mitigation or compensation measures will be detailed in a bat method statement and submitted to and agreed with the LPA prior to a planning decision. It should be noted that these further measures may include an application for a European protected species (EPS) mitigation licence or bat mitigation bat licence (BMCL) from Natural England, which can be completed once planning permission is granted.

4.2.2 Breeding birds

Due to the potential presence of breeding birds within the buildings, it is recommended that the works take place outside of the breeding bird season and should not be undertaken from March to August inclusive. If this is not possible and works need to take place during this period, a breeding bird nest check should be undertaken prior to the commencement of works by a suitably experienced ecologist and an ecological clerk of works appointed if considered necessary.



5 CONCLUSION

Higher House is situated in an area which provides moderate quality habitat for bats. The nearby mosaic of habitats, particularly to the north and east of the site, including woodland, blanket bogs, wet and dry heathlands, acid grasslands and hay meadows will provide an abundance of insects on which bats can forage. Furthermore, the treelines, hedgerows and watercourses will provide commuting opportunities while the residential dwellings and mature trees will provide alternative roosting opportunities. However, habitats to the south and east are of lower quality, as they are urban, with large areas of residential housing and well-lit busy roads, providing limited opportunities for foraging and commuting bats.

Although no evidence of roosting bats was recorded during the scoping survey, the quality of roosting habitat within the buildings on site is considered to be moderate. Therefore, two further presence / absence surveys are required in order to determine whether bats are using the buildings on site to roost, and if so, the species and numbers of bats present. These surveys should be undertaken by an appropriately licenced ecologist during the bat survey season, May to September inclusive. At least one survey should be undertaken during the peak bat survey season, May to August inclusive. UES have been instructed to undertake these surveys in May 2022.

Due to the potential presence of breeding birds within the building at the time of development, it is recommended that the works take place outside of the breeding bird season and should not be undertaken from March to August inclusive. If this is not possible, a breeding bird nest check should be undertaken prior to the commencement of works by a suitably experienced ecologist and an ecological clerk of works appointed if considered necessary.



6 REFERENCES

Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (2013). *Competencies for Species Survey: Bats*.

Collins, J. (ed.) (2016). *Bat Surveys for Professional Ecologists: Good Practice Guidelines*. (3rd ed.) The Bat Conservation Trust, London.

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APPENDICES

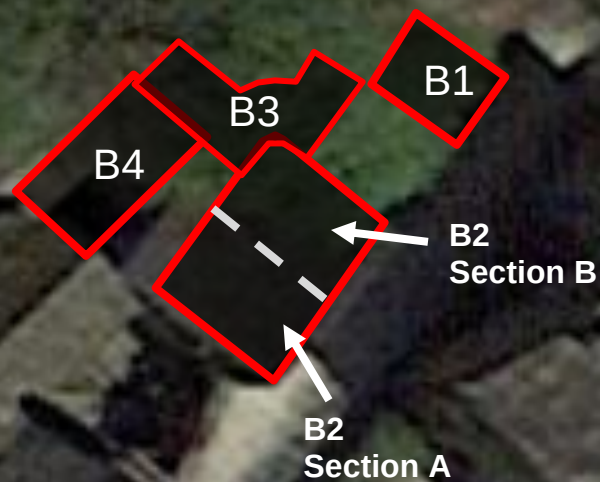
Appendix 1 – Site Plan



Higher House, Holcombe

Site Plan

- Survey boundary
- B# Buildings
- — Internal wall





Appendix 2 – Aerial Photographs



**Higher House, Moor Road,
Holcombe**

Close aerial photograph

— Development boundary





**Higher House, Moor Road,
Holcombe**

Wide aerial photograph



Site location



Appendix 3 – Photographs



Photograph 1 – South-eastern aspects of Building 1 and Building 2.



Photograph 2 – The eastern aspect of Building 1.



Photograph 3 – Southern aspect of Building 1, arrow pointing to gap in stonework.



Photograph 4 – South-eastern aspect of Building 2.



Photograph 5 – Eastern aspect of Building 2.



Photograph 6 – Gaps where mortar is missing underneath the ridge tiles on Building 2.



Photograph 7 – Example gap on the ridge tile on Building 2 where mortar is missing.



Photograph 8 – The northern aspect of Building 2, view of large gap below tiles where stonework is missing. Arrow pointing to location of a historic bird's nest.



Photograph 9 – Western aspect of Building 2, with several superficial gaps in the stonework.



Photograph 10 – Gaps between the stone and MDF boarding on the eastern aspect of Building 2.



Photograph 11 – South-western aspect of Building 2.



Photograph 12 – Southern aspect of Building 3.



Photograph 13 – Eastern aspect of Building 3.



Photograph 14 – Close view of the large gaps at the apex of the wall on the eastern aspect of Building 3.



Photograph 15 – Eastern aspect of Building 4.



Photograph 16 – View of lead flashing on the eastern aspect of Building 4.



Photograph 17 – Gap between the wooden barge board and the wall on Building 4.



Photograph 18 – Internal view of Building 1.



Photograph 19 – Example gaps above the wall plate within Building 1.



Photograph 20 – Internal view of Section A within Building 2.



Photograph 21– Internal view of Section A within Building 2.



Photograph 22 – Large crack in the stonework identified during the internal inspection within Section A of Building 2.



Photograph 23 – Birds nest located within Section A of Building 2.



Photograph 24 – Internal view of roof within Section B of Building 2.



Photograph 25 – Internal view of Section B within Building 2.



Photograph 26 – Birds nest within Section B of Building 2.



Photograph 27 – View of steel support within Building 3.



Photograph 28 – Internal view within Building 3.



Photograph 29 – Gaps in the stonework within Building 3.



Photograph 30 – Internal view of Building 4.



Photograph 31 – Internal view within Building 4, gaps above the wall plate.



Appendix 4 – Statutory and planning context

Ecological assessments

Ecological assessments play an important part within the planning context; they include an initial assessment which highlights any specific interests of a site. From the initial site assessment, the surveyor assesses the suitability of habitats within the site to support protected species and makes recommendations for further survey works if required. The following paragraphs provide a brief interpretation of the legislative protection that is relevant to the findings of this report.

Bats

In the United Kingdom, all species of bat and their roosts are afforded full protection under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) and the Conservation of Habitats and Species Amendment (EU exit) Regulations 2019 (known as the “Habitats Regulations”). The Wildlife and Countryside Act is the domestic implementation of the Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats (the Bern Convention) and was amended by the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. This makes it an offence to:

- Deliberately, intentionally or recklessly kill, injure or capture a bat
- Deliberately, intentionally or recklessly disturb a bat while it is occupying a structure or place that it uses for shelter or protection
- Deliberately, intentionally or recklessly damage, destroy or obstruct access to any place that a bat uses for shelter or protection (even if the bat is not present at the time)
- Keep, transport, sell or exchange, or offer for sale or exchange any live or dead bat, any part of a bat or anything derived from a bat

Under UK law, a bat roost is *any structure or place which any wild [bat] ... uses for shelter or protection*. As bats often reuse the same roosts, legal opinion is that a roost is protected whether or not the bats are present at the time of the activity taking place.

Penalties for offences include fines of up to £5000, plus up to six months imprisonment, for each offence committed.

If an activity is likely to result in any of the above offences, a licence can be applied for to derogate from the protection afforded. These licences must provide appropriate mitigation and are issued by Natural England.

A Natural England mitigation licence application requires a Mitigation Method Statement and, in many cases, a Reasoned Statement of Application. The Mitigation Method Statement contains details of the proposed mitigation works. The Reasoned Statement needs to provide a rational and reasoned justification as to why the proposed development meets the requirements of the Conservation (National Habitats & c.) regulations 1994, namely Regulations 44(2)(e), (f) or (g), and 44(3)(a).

The National Planning Policy Framework 2021 (NPPF) provides guidance on the interpretation of the law in relation to the natural environment and development.

The Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006 lists the following bat species as species of principle importance under Section 41:

- Barbastelle *Barbastella barbastellus*
- Bechstein's bat *Myotis bechsteinii*
- Noctule *Nyctalus noctula*
- Soprano pipistrelle *Pipistrellus pygmaeus*
- Brown long-eared bat *Plecotus auritus*
- Greater horseshoe *Rhinolophus ferrumequinum*
- Lesser horseshoe *Rhinolophus hipposideros*

Section 40 requires every public body in the exercising of its functions ‘have regard, so far as is consistent with the proper exercise of those functions, to the purpose of conserving biodiversity’ (all biodiversity and not just section 41 species and habitats); therefore making these bats a material consideration in the planning process and requiring a detailed ecological bat survey before planning permission can be granted.

Birds

All wild birds, their nests and young are protected throughout England and Wales by the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). It is illegal to kill, injure or take any wild bird, or damage or destroy the nest or eggs of breeding birds. The legislation applies to all bird species, common and rare.

In addition to the protection afforded to all wild birds, more vulnerable species listed on Schedule 1 of the Act receive enhanced protection when breeding. Schedule 1 species, including their dependent young, are protected from intentional or reckless disturbance whilst at or near the nest, in addition to the protection afforded the more common species.

The NERC Act offers further protection to the nests of some species that regularly re-use their nests, even when the nests are not in use.

The leading governmental and non-governmental conservation organisations in the UK have reviewed the population status of 244 UK bird species. "Birds of Conservation Concern 4: the Red List for Birds" is the most recent publication summarising their findings. Three lists, Red, Amber and Green, have been produced based on the most up-to-date evidence available and criteria include conservation status at global and European levels and, within the UK: historical decline, trends in population and range, rarity, localised distribution and international importance. These lists are a valuable resource when considering conservation priorities.

Planning policy

National Planning Guidance is issued in the form of the National Planning Policy Framework 2021 (NPPF). The most relevant section is 15: Conserving and enhancing the natural environment.

Key relevant principles stated in 15: Conserving and enhancing the natural environment are;

- 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;
 - e) preventing new and existing development from contributing to, being put at unacceptable risk from, or being adversely affected by, unacceptable levels of soil, air, water or noise pollution or land instability. Development should, wherever possible, help to improve local environmental conditions such as air and water quality, taking into account relevant information such as river basin management plans; and
 - f) remediating and mitigating despoiled, degraded, derelict, contaminated and unstable land, where appropriate.
- 179.** To protect and enhance biodiversity and geodiversity, plans should:
- a) Identify, map and safeguard components of local wildlife-rich habitats and wider ecological networks, including the hierarchy of international, national and locally designated sites of importance for biodiversity⁶¹; wildlife corridors and stepping stones that connect them; and areas identified by national and local partnerships for habitat management, enhancement, restoration or creation⁶²; and
 - b) promote the conservation, restoration and enhancement of priority habitats, ecological networks and the protection and recovery of priority species; and identify and pursue opportunities for securing measurable net gains for biodiversity
- 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 reasons⁶³ 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.