

Whitehouse Farm Bat Assessment 2023

SEPTEMBER 12

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1. Introduction

1.1. Proposed Development

1.1.1. The proposed development regards a set of disused stables in the back garden of Whitehouse Farm, Farm Lane, Simister, Prestwich, M25 2RX. A planning application was submitted for a change of use of the disused stables from agricultural to office/living accommodation, with the goal of converting the stables to an office workspace. This planning application was queried on 24th August 2023 due to the lack of a bat survey/assessment amongst other issues at the time of application.

1.1.2. This report details the suite of bat surveys carried on the disused stables to inform the above planning application.

1.2. Personnel

1.2.1. All surveys were carried out by Daniel Lines, an experienced ecologist with over 200 hours of bat survey experience. Daniel is a Qualifying member of the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM) and practicing graduate ecological consultant, and is committed to upholding the CIEEM Code of Professional Conduct.

2. Preliminary Roost Assessment

2.1. Methodology

- 2.1.1. First, a Preliminary Roost Assessment (PBA) was carried out in line with Bat Conservation Trust guidelines¹. This involves a detailed external inspection of the structure for any potential bat access or roosting places through the use of visual inspection, high-powered binoculars, and searching for evidence of bat occupation such as droppings or urine staining. An internal inspection seeking the same evidence was conducted where possible (see section 3.2.2).
- 2.1.2. Where potential bat roosting features were identified, these were given a suitability which indicated their likelihood to support roosting bats. The different levels of suitability are detailed in Table 1 below.

Table 1: PRA Suitability classifications

Suitability Level	Description
Negligible	A negligible feature that is unlikely to be used by roosting bats.
Low	A feature that could be utilised by individual bats opportunistically. However, the feature does not provide enough space, shelter, protection, appropriate conditions and/or suitable surrounding habitat to be used on a regular basis or by a larger number of bats.
Moderate	A feature that could be utilised by a number of bats due to its size, shelter, protection, conditions, and surrounding habitat, but is unlikely to support a roost of high conservation status.
High	A feature that is obviously suitable for use by a larger number of bats on a more regular basis and potentially for longer periods of time due to their size, shelter, protection, conditions, and surrounding habitat.

- 2.1.3. Any features assigned a suitability level of low, moderate, or high were then subjected to further survey effort to confirm the likely presence or absence of roosting bats.

2.2. Limitations

- 2.2.1. Under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended), it is a criminal offence to disturb bats or their roosting places without appropriate licences in place. As no licences were in place at the time of the survey, the use of high-powered torches which would usually assist with a PRA was avoided.

¹ Collins, J (ed.) (2016) Bat Surveys for Professional Ecologists: Good Practice Guidelines (3rd edn). The Bat Conservation Trust, London.

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- 2.2.2. An inspection of suitable internal cavities to support roosting bats may also be conducted as part of a PRA, but these were avoided for the same reasons. Only internal spaces that held negligible potential to support roosting bats were entered.
 - 2.2.3. Due to these limitations, a precautionary approach was applied when assigning a suitability to any potential roost features, thereby allowing for further survey effort to be allocated to determine the likely presence or absence of roosting bats.

2.3. Results

- 2.3.1. The structure is located at the bottom of a residential garden in Simister, North Manchester. The immediate surroundings of the structure consist of heavily managed gardens, hedgerows with trees, and fields, and is subject to light levels of disturbance.
- 2.3.2. In the wider area, the north is dominated by a residential housing area, whilst the east leads to large areas of open green space in the form of modified grassland fields. The M60 runs only 120 m south-west of the structure, between which there are more fields.
- 2.3.3. Due to the lack of ecological connectivity in the form of hedgerows and rivers, and lack of suitable foraging habitat in the form of woodland edges and waterbodies, the immediate area is not likely to constitute a significant resource for foraging bats in the local area. There are multiple suitable foraging habitats slightly further afield which local bat populations are likely to favour.
- 2.3.4. The PRA survey was undertaken on 25th August 2023 in clear, calm weather with good light. No limitations were encountered on the day of the survey.
- 2.3.5. The structure is in good condition with no cavities in the outer walls or facades (Appendix 1: Photo 1). At either end of the structure there are small gaps in the brickwork that lead into the interior of the structure (Appendix 1: Photo 2), the suitability of which is covered in section 3.3.7.
- 2.3.6. The roof of the structure is generally in good condition with no lifted tiles and good quality ridge flashing which has no crevices or openings (Appendix 1: Photo 3). At either end of the structure, there are small gaps between the roof lining and roof tiling where the mortar has crumbled, which leads to long, narrow cavities that span the length of the roof (Appendix 1: Photos 4-6). The east end has a relatively cluttered entry point, whilst the west end is clear and open. A small number of bats could use these spaces opportunistically, although it is unlikely to support a large number of bats or bats on a regular basis as there is little shelter from inclement weather provided and there would be large temperature fluctuations depending on conditions. As such, these features were assigned a **low suitability** to support roosting bats. It is not considered to have hibernation potential due to the poor levels of shelter and potentially large temperature fluctuations. There is no other flashing or features such as soffit boxes that may provide a sheltered space for roosting bats
- 2.3.7. The interior of the structure consists of three open stables with no loft space that may provide a suitable sheltered space to support roosting bats (Appendix 1: Photo 7). Visual inspection and verbal confirmation with the owner confirmed that these stables are

subject to regular disturbance from storage and maintenance. The interior walls and roof are in good condition with no cracks or crevices. As mentioned in section 3.3.5, there are small gaps in the brickwork at either end of the structure, but these lead directly outside with no sheltered space to support roosting bats. As such, all internal areas were assigned a negligible potential to support roosting bats.

2.4. Conclusions

- 2.4.1. Despite limitations imposed by the lack of an appropriate survey licence to disturb roosting bats, it is considered that a detailed and thorough inspection of the structure was carried out, and all potential bat roosting features were identified.
- 2.4.2. Due to the findings of the PRA, further surveys were required. Please see Section 4 for the methodology, limitations, findings, and conclusions of these surveys.

3. Emergence/Re-entry Surveys

3.1. Methodology

- 3.1.1. Following the PRA survey, emergence and re-entry surveys were undertaken to determine the likely presence or absence of bats roosting in the identified features. Bat Conservation Trust guidelines recommend that for a low suitability structure, one survey should be undertaken, either an emergence or re-entry survey between May August.
- 3.1.2. An emergence survey was undertaken on the structure in question. The emergence survey began 15 minutes before sunset and ended 1 hour 30 minutes after sunset. The survey involved the surveyor sitting at one end of the structure with a clear view of the targeted features (Appendix 1: Photo 8) assisted by night vision aids (NVAs), and an NVA setup observing the other end of the structure with a clear view of the targeted features (Appendix 1: Photo 9) (Figure 1). The surveyor and the NVA setup were equipped with an auto-heterodyne bat detector to pick up bat echolocation from the targeted features or surrounding area.
- 3.1.3. Nightfox Red Infrared cameras with infrared illuminators were used as the NVAs for the survey. Anabat Scouts were used as the bat detectors for the survey.
- 3.1.4. Any emergences or re-entries into the targeted features were recorded either during the survey or through post-survey analysis of video footage captured by the NVAs. Where possible, bat activity in the surrounding area was also recorded to further examine how local bat populations utilised the structure and wider area.
- 3.1.5. Following the survey, recorded bat calls were analysed using Kaleidoscope Lite (version 5.6.3) to confirm or correct observations made in the field. All video footage captured by the NVAs was analysed to record any emergences, re-entries, or general activity not seen during the survey.

3.2. Limitations

- 3.2.1. Due to the date of the response to the planning application (24th August), it was not possible to schedule the survey to take place before the end of August as recommended in the Bat Conservation Trust guidelines.

3.3. Results

- 3.3.1. Table 2 details the dates, start/end times, and weather of the survey. No emergences or re-entries were observed from any of the low suitability features identified on the structure. No other evidence of roosting bats was observed.

Table 2: Emergence/Re-entry survey information

Date	Type of survey	Start time	End time	Weather information	Bat activity summary

01/09/2023	Dusk emergence	19:45	21:30	Clear, calm, and warm.	Very low amounts of activity. First bat observed at 20:20. All observed bats were identified as common pipistrelles.
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- 3.3.2. Some foraging activity was observed to the north-west of the structure (Figure 1), however this was limited to one or two bats. At least three bats were also noted commuting along the hedgerow to the west of the property.

3.4. Conclusions

- 3.4.1. Due to the lack of emergences or re-entries into the identified features, it is considered that roosting bats are likely absent. Even though there were limitations regarding the date of the surveys, due to the precautionary nature of the PRA and clear view of the features afforded by the NVAs, it is considered that this likely absence of roosting bats has been adequately assessed.
- 3.4.2. The low numbers of bats observed on both surveys suggest that the structure and immediate area do not constitute a valuable resource for local bat populations for foraging or commuting.

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

- 4.1.1. Following the surveys, it is considered that bat roosts are likely absent. However, bats may have multiple roosts in an area that they utilise for short periods of time, so it is impossible to state that bats will never roost in a feature. Bats may also utilise sub-optimal features in certain circumstances. **If any evidence of bats is encountered at any point during development, all work should cease immediately and a suitable qualified ecologist should be contacted.**
- 4.1.2. Due to these unpredictable behaviours, it is therefore suggested that works take place outside of the main activity season (May – September) when features such as the ones present on the structure are least likely to be utilised.
- 4.1.3. The immediate area around the structure does not likely constitute a valuable foraging or commuting resource for local bat populations. The proposed development is not anticipated to significantly affect the hedgerow or small area of green space that was observed to be used by small numbers of bats.
- 4.1.4. Considering the findings of this report, no direct or indirect impacts on local roosting or foraging bat populations are anticipated as part of the development.

Figure 1 -
Survey layout

Legend

Features 

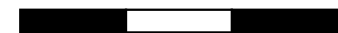
Surveyor locations 

Bat activity

Bat foraging activity 

Bat commuting activity 

0 2.5 5 7.5 m



Scale -

1:300





Appendix 1 – Photographs

Photo key

Photo 1 – Outside of structure

Photo 2 – Gaps between roof and brickwork

Photo 3 – Structure roof

Photo 4 – Gaps between roof and felting (south-west)

Photo 5 – Gaps between roof and felting (north-west)

Photo 6 – Gaps between roof and felting (north-east)

Photo 7 – Structure interior

Photo 8 – SL01 view

Photo 9 – SL02 view