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Bat Survey of The Dining Hall at The Crescent in Buxton, Derbyshire

A report to:

High Peak Borough Council

BAT SURVEY OF THE DINING HALL AT THE CRESCENT IN BUXTON DERBYSHIRE

A report to:

High Peak Borough Council
Municipal Buildings
Glossop
Derbyshire
SK13 8AF

By:

EMEC Ecology
The Old Ragged School
Brook Street
Nottingham
NG1 1EA

Tel: (0115) 964 4828
Fax: (0115) 964 4829
E-mail: emec@dial.pipex.com

E. Palmer MSc MIEEM

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 This report has been prepared by EMEC Ecology for High Peak Borough Council. It provides the details of a bat survey carried out on an old dining hall building which forms part of The Crescent ex-hotel complex. The demolition of the building is likely as part of the re-development of the site.

1.2 The building is located in the centre of Buxton (grid reference SK059737).

1.3 The survey was commissioned to ascertain whether the proposed works would affect bats (*Chiroptera*).

1.4 All species of British bat and their roosts are protected under British law by the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended), and bats are classified as European Protected species under The Conservation (Natural Habitats, & c.) Regulations 1994. This makes it an offence to kill, injure or disturb a bat and to destroy any place used for rest or shelter by a bat (exceptions apply to disturbance within the living area of a dwelling).

1.5 Development work can only be permitted to affect a bat roost under a licence from the Department of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA). In such cases, DEFRA will seek advice from English Nature as to whether a licence should be granted.

1.6 Licences in respect of European protected species affected by development can be granted under Regulation 44(2)(e) of the Conservation (Natural Habitats, &c.) Regulations 1994, for the purpose of preserving public health or public safety or other imperative reasons of overriding public interest including those of social or economic nature and beneficial consequences of primary importance for the environment.

1.7 Under the Conservation (Natural Habitats, &c.) Regulations 1994 licences can only be issued if DEFRA are satisfied that:

- There is no satisfactory alternative and
- The action authorised will not be detrimental to the maintenance of the population of the species at a favourable conservation status in their natural range.

1.8 DEFRA aim to process licence applications within 30 working days of receipt.

2. SITE DESCRIPTION

2.1 The building surveyed is shown on a sketch plan in Appendix 1. It is a stone block construction with a twin-pitched slate roof with clay tile ridge. There is a mixed-material annex on the east side. The building is single-storey with a high (approximately 6m) ceiling. All windows are boarded up.

2.2 A tall (approximately 3m) loft area covers the main part of the building. This has circular access hatches at each gable end, one of which has a hole at the bottom of the wooden door. This has allowed the establishment of a large feral pigeon colony.

2.3 There is a large cellar area beneath the Dining Hall. This housed the heating system. There is an exterior door at the north end.

2.4 The building is connected to the rest of The Crescent by a short walkway covered by a flat roof. Adjacent buildings include the tourist information office and a residential block. All of these buildings are constructed with similar materials to The Dining Hall. To the north and east of the building and within the curtilage of The Crescent is waste ground covered with rubble and ruderal plants.

3. SURVEY METHODOLOGY

3.1 The building was surveyed for the following signs of bats: droppings, feeding remains, scratch marks, urine stains and actual sightings, as well as potential access points and roost sites such as holes, cracks and crevices.

3.2 The site was surveyed for the presence of bats on the 8th July 2003 by Mr Eric Palmer MSc, who has an appropriate survey licence. Survey licences are only given to individuals that have demonstrated a suitable level of ability to English Nature.

4. SURVEY RESULTS

4.1 No signs of bats were found in any part of the building.

4.2 Certain features of the building were suitable for bat roosting. These included the following:

- Cracks and fissures where mortar had crumbled from the exterior of the walls and alcoves between wood fittings such as door frames and the stone wall. There were also holes where the roof of another building had been keyed into the east facing exterior wall. Gaps available could provide roosting areas for individual bats or small groups.
- Access points into soffits via gaps between wood cladding and the stone walls.

- Two boarded-off areas of the loft adjacent to the ventilation tower and a chimney could provide a suitable void for the establishment of a roost.
- The cellar provided conditions suitable for a hibernation site. These conditions include a stable low temperature and cracks and crevices for roosting bats. Access into the cellar from the exterior was available through gaps between the wooden door frame and the stonework of the wall.

4.3 The surrounding buildings appeared to be suitable for bat roosting, although these were not surveyed. The habitats in the surrounding area were suitable for bat foraging, including a park with mature trees and a river.

4.4 A wren's (*Troglodytes troglodytes*) nest was found in an alcove on the exterior wall at the point indicated on the plan in Appendix 1. A bird was in residence, suggesting that it was incubating eggs or brooding young.

5. EVALUATION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Since the evidence suggests that this is not a roosting site for bats, a DEFRA licence should not be needed for the demolition to proceed. However, in view of the suitability of the building for bat roosting through the year, the negative results of this survey should be viewed as time limited. Winter roosting would not have been detected during this survey because bats do not defacate often in hibernacula and it is possible that no other signs would be detected in summer. Additionally, it is possible that bats will take up residence, at some point in the near future, in one or all of the other features identified as being suitable for roosting. The soffits and gaps in exterior walls were particularly conducive to bat roosting. Soffits are particularly favoured by pipistrelle bats (*Pipistrellus pipistrellus*), although if bats had been in residence external signs such as droppings on the wall below would have been seen. It is unlikely that bats will use the loft area because of the disturbance, dung and dust created by the pigeons. However, this should not be ruled out and may be used by brown long-eared bats (*Plecotus auretus*) at some point in the future.

5.2 We recommend that demolition should proceed as soon as possible and before November (however, see comments on breeding birds below). If this is not possible and works have to take place in winter, a hibernation survey should be carried out on the cellar to determine if this feature is a hibernaculum. The most appropriate time for this would be in January.

5.3 Care should be exercised in the demolition of the roof, particularly the removal of the boarded-off areas (soffits and loft) and the removal of ridge tiles. Any gaps beneath tiles could provide temporary roosting areas and should be inspected as they are removed. This can be done by site demolition staff. In the unlikely event of finding a bat during the works, the procedure outlined in Appendix 2 should be followed.

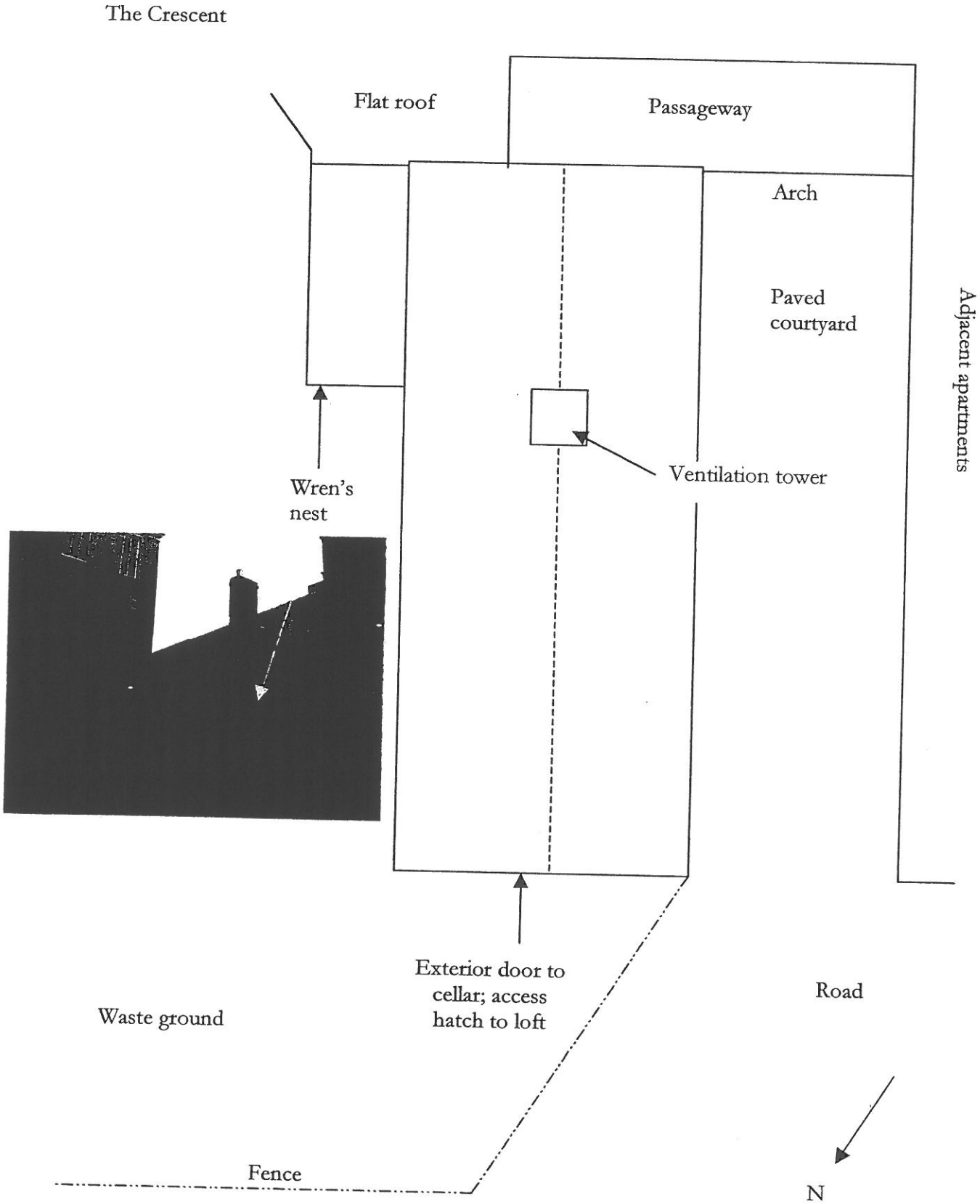
5.4 All birds, with the exception of certain pest species, are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) whilst breeding. This legislation protects nests, eggs and unfledged young from damage, destruction or disturbance. The wren's nest found must be undisturbed until the young have

fledged. Unlike most passerines, wrens do not lay second or third clutches. Instead they are polygynous; that is the male will have several females on eggs such that broods overlap (Snow and Perrins 1998[1]). Therefore, the nest is unlikely to be used again this year by the same female, although another may do. Incubation is 12-20 days and fledging takes 14-19 days. Demolition of the building should be possible after a maximum of 39 days from the day of the survey. However, this should only be undertaken after a second check is made to ensure that the birds have left. This can be undertaken by site operatives.

5.5 If works are to be delayed or carried out during the next bird breeding season (March-September inclusive) we recommend that a search for active nests is undertaken. If active nests are found, these should be avoided until all chicks have fledged.

[1] **Snow, D.W. and Perrins, C. M.** 1998. *The Birds of the Western Palearctic Volume 2: Passerines.* Oxford: OUP

APPENDIX 1: SITE SKETCH PLAN



APPENDIX 2:

PROCEDURE TO FOLLOW IF BATS ARE DISCOVERED DURING WORKS

- If at any point during the works bats are discovered, contractors should stop work immediately and telephone EMEC Ecology on 0115 964 4828.

- EMEC Ecology will either provide a licensed bat worker to the site or provide a member of staff who will liase directly with English Nature. Actions will then be taken following advice given by English Nature. This may include removal of bats, but only where direct written or verbal permission is gained from English Nature.

- Only when English Nature is satisfied that the risk to bats is ceased will works recommence.

- Should it transpire that the operation being carried out is of more risk to bats than was originally thought, then it is likely that works will only be able to proceed under a development licence from DEFRA.

- If a bat is found under a tile or any other aperture, works will stop immediately (as above). If the bat does not voluntarily fly out, then the aperture will be carefully covered over to protect the bat(s) from the elements, leaving a small gap for the bat to escape voluntarily. Further advice will then be sought from (as above). Any covering should be free from grease or other contaminants, and should not be fibreglass-based materials.

- Any injured bats should be gently placed in a secure ventilated box (i.e. cardboard box) by the contractor for the bat's protection whilst awaiting the arrival of the Batworker.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

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SUBMITTED TO: High Peak Borough Council

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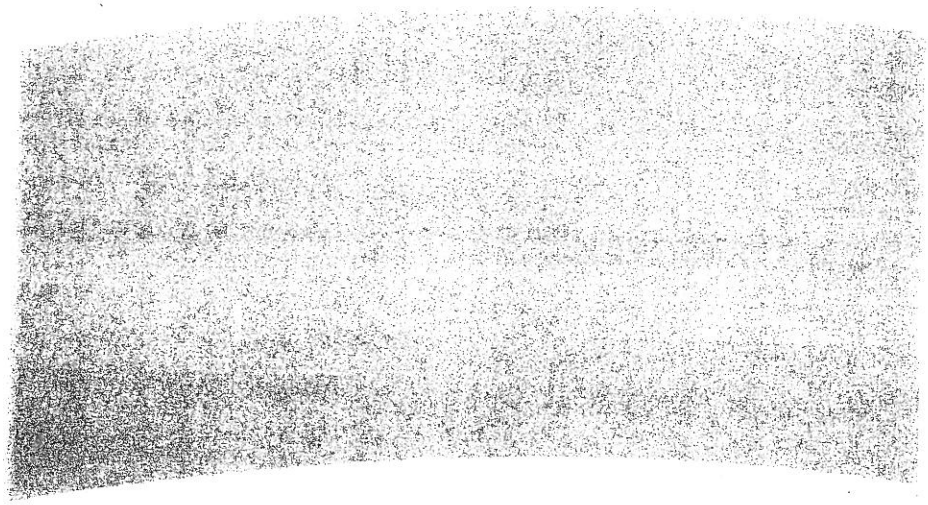
AUTHOR

Name: Eric Palmer MSc MIEEM **Signed:**

CONSULTANCY MANAGER

Name: Matthew Cowley MIEEM **Signed:**



emec
ECOLOGY

The Old Ragged School
Brook Street
Nottingham NG1 1EA

Tel: 0115 964 4828
Fax: 0115 964 4829
emec@dial.pipex.com
www.emec.uk.com