DAYTIME BAT SURVEY AT BOWER COTTAGE, WHITLE FOLD, NEW MILLS, DERBYSHIRE

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Rachel Hacking Ecology Limited was commissioned in 2014 to undertake a bat survey of a barn at Bower Cottage, Whitle Fold, Derbyshire. The barn will be the subject of a planning application for conversion to accommodation.

1.2 Bower Cottage is located off Whitle Bank Road, north of New Mills town centre in Derbyshire (O.S. grid reference: SJ999867). The barn is located to the south of the main farm building. It is a stone built barn with a pitched stone tile roof. It is currently in use for storage.

1.3 Bower Cottage is located in a hamlet, surrounded by farmland. Mature trees and hedgerows are scarce in the landscape, however the surrounding farmland does offer suitable foraging for bats.

1.4 All bat species are European Protected Species under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010. They are also fully protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) and included on the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 and the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006. It is illegal to disturb or damage a bat roost whether or not there are bats present. The presence of a protected species is a material consideration in planning.

2.0 METHODOLOGY

2.1 A daytime bat survey was undertaken to search for, and to assess the potential for, a bat roost to be present within the barn at Bower Cottage. The building was searched internally for evidence of a bat roost, which included looking for the following signs:

- live or dead bats
- bat droppings
- bat entry/exit points
- bat urine staining
- grease marks on any timbers
- feeding remains such as insect wings
- areas clear of cobwebs.

2.2 An external survey was also carried out, which included, for example, looking for gaps between any soffit boards and walls, gaps between window frames and the walls and looking for bat droppings on the walls and window ledges.

2.3 A pair of close-focussing binoculars, a high-powered torch and an endoscope were used (where required) to search for evidence of bats internally and externally.

Personnel and timing

2.4 Rachel Hacking and Andy Harmer carried out the daytime bat survey on the 20th August 2014. Building inspections and assessments for bats can be undertaken at any time of year. August is within the optimum season for bat activity.

2.5 Both surveyors have over 13 years of experience in protected species surveys and mitigation.

3.0 RESULTS

3.1 The barn at Bower Cottage is constructed of stone, with a pitched stone tile roof. The majority of the barn is two-storey in height. Two small one-storey extensions to the barn exist. To the north of the barn, is a one-storey extension with a corrugated metal roof. On the south side of the barn is a one-storey self-contained chicken coup, also constructed of stone with a stone tile roof (see Photograph 1).

Photograph 1 showing the south side of the barn

External Survey

3.2 The barn was easy to survey externally. Many potential bat access holes were located. Gaps exist between the stonework, where the roof tiles meet the walls and through gaps in window shutters and doors, particularly on the western gable end (see Photograph 2). The majority of the gaps were covered in cobwebs.

Photograph 2 showing the gaps in the stonework

3.3 The small extension with a metal corrugated roof also exhibits gaps. This section of the barn is partly covered in Ivy *Hedera helix* (see Photograph 3). This was thoroughly inspected and no evidence of bat activity could be located.

Photograph 3 showing the one-storey extension to the barn

3.4 The roof tiles and ridge tiles are intact and none are missing.

Internal Survey

3.5 The whole barn could be surveyed internally. The ground floor areas are used for storage and as a stable. The barn is well-lit throughout and in constant use. Thick cobwebs were evident throughout the barn (see Photograph 4), on walls, wooden beams and beneath the stone tile roof.

Photograph 4 showing the cobwebs evident on all woodwork and walls

3.6 The first floor of the barn is used for storage. The walls are partly rendered and easy to inspect. The roof is in a good state of repair. No gaps were evident within the wooden beams. The roof tiles were easy to inspect internally (see Photograph 5). All were covered in cobwebs and few gaps existed between the roof tiles.

Photograph 5 showing the internal roof tiles and beams

3.7 The single-storey extension with the corrugated metal roof offers little opportunity for roosting bats. Internally, the roof is covered with cobwebs.

Photograph 6 showing the internal corrugated metal roof

3.8 Within the chicken coup, the walls and internal roof are covered in cobwebs.

3.9 No signs of bats or evidence of bat activity could be located during the survey. No bat droppings or feeding remains were located. Despite the external features of the barn offering potential entry and exit points for bats, internally there is little opportunity for roosting bats. The thick cobwebs indicate no recent usage of the barn by bats.

Other Species

3.10 An active Swallow *Hirundo rustica* nest was located within the ground floor of the barn. No evidence of Barn Owl *Tyto alba* could be located during the survey. The barn is not considered to be optimal nesting habitat for Barn Owl.

4.0 SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 No evidence of a bat roost could be located within the barn at Bower Cottage, despite conducting a thorough internal and external survey. The barn offers limited potential for use by bats. Internally, the barn is well-lit and in constant use. No roof voids exist.

4.2 It is considered that the renovation and conversion of the barn can proceed without the need for further survey work (e.g. bat activity surveys), as no evidence of a bat roost was located during the survey and it is considered the barn has low potential to support roosting bats. However, if the development works are delayed by longer than two years from the date of this report, a further bat survey will be required to update the findings.

4.3 It should be noted that bat absence is very difficult to prove definitively due to their mobility and size, and single or small numbers of bats are able to roost in extremely small spaces, such as between roofing tiles. Therefore it is recommended that all removal of roof tiles and ridge tiles is to be undertaken with care.

4.4 **If during development works a bat (or an accumulation of bat droppings) is discovered at any time, work is to temporarily cease whilst an experienced bat ecologist is contacted for guidance and assistance**. This can be Rachel Hacking Ecology (0161 427 3548) who undertook the initial survey, any licensed bat worker, or the Bat Conservation Trust (BCT) helpline (0845 1300 228).

4.5 Due to the active Swallow nest within the barn, any renovation work should be undertaken outside of the bird nesting season. All birds are protected at the nest under the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). As part of any new development, it is recommended that Swallow nest boxes are erected on the external walls.

4.6 It is a general recommendation that bat roosting features are integrated into the new development such as bat boxes erected on external walls or located within the wider environment (e.g. on trees) to provide potential for roosting bats in the future.

REFERENCES

Hundt, L. 2012. *Bat Surveys: Good Practice Guidelines, 2nd Edition*. Bat Conservation Trust.

Mitchell-Jones, A. J. 2004. *Bat Mitigation Guidelines*. Natural England.