

Renslade House, Exeter Ecological Appraisal (Bats & Birds)

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Client: Belstone Fox (Project Management) Ltd

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(Natural England Bat Class License 2014 – 4916 – CLS)




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Revision	Checked by	Signed	Dated
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Wildlife Checklist (for front of Wildlife Report.)

A.1 Protected and priority species (relates to question 13a in the planning application form).

Species with no suitable habitat present have been omitted from this table.

Location:	Exeter	Grid reference for centre of site:	SX 915 922	Planning Application number:	Surveys undertaken pre-application
Name of surveyor:	Matthew Guy	Year that surveys carried out:	2015	DWC report number:	15/2887

Species Terrestrial, intertidal, marine	Walkover shows that suitable habitat present and reasonably likely species will be found?	Detailed survey needed to clarify impacts and mitigation ?	Detailed survey carried out and included?	Species Present or Assumed to be present on site <u>Indicate with P or A and name the species</u>	Impact on species?	Detailed Conservation Action Statement included?	EPS offence committed? Three tests met?	Grid reference for specific location of species
Bats (roost)	×	×	N/A	Absent	×	✓	×	N/A
Breeding birds	✓	×	N/A	A	✓	✓	×	N/A

Executive Summary

Devon Wildlife Consultants (DWC) was commissioned by Belstone Fox (Project Management) Ltd to undertake an Ecological Appraisal (Bats & Birds) of a large tower block in the centre of Exeter, Devon. In addition to this a walk-over survey of the surrounding landscaping was undertaken following methodology detailed in the Phase 1 Survey Handbook (JNCC, 2010) with additional emphasis on searching for protected species and their field signs or identifying habitat which may support protected species.

The building is currently utilised as office space bound by a car park to the north and a thin strip of grassland and semi-mature trees to the south.

No evidence of bats was noted either in or on the exterior of the building. No evidence of nesting birds was noted on the building or in the trees however there are opportunities for birds to utilise ledges and the roof top in the future.

The walk-over survey did not identify any habitat suitable for additional protected species. Therefore, no further surveys are recommended.

Furthermore, the following construction compliance recommendations are provided:

- The demolition of the building and removal of the semi-mature trees should ideally be undertaken outside of the main bird nesting season which extends from March to August (inclusive). If such works cannot be undertaken outside of the nesting season, a nesting bird check should be undertaken by an ecologist immediately prior to works. The construction schedule should allow for potential delays in this case as any active nests must remain undisturbed until all the young have fledged naturally, which may take several months.

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1 Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This report contains the results of an Ecological Appraisal (Bats & Birds) of a building and a walk-over survey of the surrounding grounds. The site is located in the centre of Exeter, Devon at National Grid Reference SX 915 922.

The building present within the site was surveyed to assess its potential to support roosting bats and nesting birds. The surrounding areas of landscaping were also surveyed for signs of legally protected habitats or species and to evaluate the wildlife value/potential of the site.

1.2 Development Proposals

It is understood that it is proposed to obtain planning permission to demolish part of the existing structure and construct two tower blocks in its place. The existing tower in the central extent of the building will remain unaffected by the works.

2 Survey Methodology

2.1 Ecological Appraisal (Bats & Birds)

A visual inspection of the building was undertaken utilising binoculars, an endoscope, a ladder and a torch to assess for evidence of bat activity such as droppings, insect prey remains, urine staining and/or actual bats. The building was also inspected for the presence of nesting birds, including barn owls, or their field signs such as whitewash, droppings, pellets and/or nest debris. Legislation relating to these species is provided in Appendix 1.

Due to the location of the building within an urban area, evidence of barn owl *Tyto alba* was not specifically searched for.

The walk-over assessment of the site followed the Phase 1 Habitat Survey methodology (JNCC, 2010). All areas within the site were surveyed and assessed for indicators of ecological value, including the presence or signs of any protected or rare species.

The site was surveyed on 26th August 2015 by Matthew Guy, a Natural England licensed bat.

2.2 Tree Roost Assessment

All trees present within the site were assigned a value based on the Bat Survey Guidelines (BCT, 2012). Trees are divided into four categories:

- 1* - tree with multiple, highly suitable features capable of supporting larger roosts.
- 1 - tree with definite potential, supporting fewer suitable features than Category 1* trees or capable of supporting roosts for single/low numbers of bats.
- 2 - tree with no obvious potential for roosting bats although due to its size and maturity the tree may support some features with limited potential to support bats.
- 3 - tree with no roosting potential.

2.3 Limitations

The results of the survey will depend on signs of bat activity being identified, as it is unlikely that bats will be visible. A number of bat species roost in very small crevices, consequently it is possible that individuals may be missed during the survey as not every crevice or void can be fully inspected. In addition, it is possible that bird nests may be situated in concealed locations which may not be visible to the surveyor.

3 Results

3.1 Site Location

The site is situated in the centre of Exeter bound by residential and commercial buildings to the north, east and west and the River Exe to the south.

MAGIC (www.magic.defra.gov.uk) indicates that there is a single record of a Natural England licence regarding bat species within a 2km radius of the site.

3.2 Renslade House

3.2.1 Building Description

Walls	Concrete blocks with areas of glass and metal
Roof structure	Three flat concrete tar and gravel roofs with no internal space
Potential access points for bats & birds	Small gaps around roof tops and small areas of broken corrugated metal sheeting around stairwell access

Table 3.1 Building Description

3.2.2 Roosting Bats

The building has a concrete block construction, which appears to be well sealed. Small gaps were noted and inspected where the walls meet the roof, however, no evidence of bat activity was identified around these areas.

The roof access structures comprise corrugated metal sheeting over a concrete frame. There are a number of gaps, which could allow bats to access the internal space, however, no bats or evidence of bats were recorded.

3.2.3 Nesting Birds

No evidence of nesting activity was identified either within or on the exterior of the building although there is potential for nesting bird species such as house sparrow *Passer domesticus*, carrion crow *Corvus corone* to be present in the future in areas such as the underground car park. Furthermore, it is likely that gull species and feral pigeon *Columba livia* will nest on the roof and on ledges around the building in the future.

3.3 Walk-over Survey

The walk-over survey identified a large area of hard standing to the north of the building bound by beds of introduced shrub comprising bay laurel *Laurus nobilis*, purple leaved sycamore *Acer pseudoplatanus atropurpureum*, beech *Fagus sylvatica* and cotoneaster *Cotoneaster* sp. The southern extent of the site comprised mown amenity grassland. Species identified within this grassland includes perennial rye grass *Lolium perenne*, annual meadow grass *Poa annua*, ribwort plantain *Plantago lanceolata*, red fescue *Festuca rubra*, yarrow *Achillea millefolium* and black knapweed *Centaurea nigra*.

A number of semi-mature trees were identified throughout the area of landscaping including sycamore *Acer pseudoplatanus*, beech, silver birch *Betula pendula*, cherry *Prunus avium* and laurel. It is considered that all of these are of considered to be of Category 3.

4 Recommendations

The following recommendations are based on current UK and EU wildlife legislation and national and local planning policy. The recommendations must be followed to ensure the legislation is not contravened by the proposed development, including any site investigation or vegetation clearance works.

4.1 Further Survey

4.1.1 Roosting Bats

There are no perceived legal implications for the proposed development regarding bat species. It is important to note that although no evidence of roosting bats was present at the time of the survey, bats may use a variety of roost sites throughout the. If bats were discovered during the proposed works, then any sheltering materials should be replaced around the bat and works within the immediate vicinity ceased until advice can be sought from Natural England or Devon Wildlife Consultants.

4.1.2 Additional Species

With the exception of nesting birds (see Section 4.2.1), it is considered that the surrounding landscaped grounds do not support habitat suitable for protected species and therefore no further surveys are recommended.

4.2 Construction Compliance

4.2.1 Nesting Birds

Demolition of the building and the removal of any semi-mature trees/introduced shrubs around the building should be undertaken outside of the main bird nesting season of March to August (inclusive). Nesting may extend outside this period however this is often dependent on weather conditions and species, therefore undertaking works outside of the nesting bird season would minimise the risk of potential delays to the works programme.

If such works cannot be undertaken outside of the nesting season, a nesting bird check should be undertaken by an ecologist immediately prior to demolition/vegetation removal works. The construction schedule should allow for potential delays in this case as any active nests must remain undisturbed until all the young have fledged naturally, which may take several months.

5 Conservation Action Statement

5.1 Introduction

This Conservation Action Statement is required in line with Devon County Council guidance (2014) to detail: Ecological impacts and how they will be avoided, mitigated and compensated; how enhancement measures will be implemented; overall net gain or loss for wildlife; and how the scheme complies with wildlife legislation and planning policy.

Enhancement recommendations are required under the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) which sets out the UK Government's national policies on enhancement of biodiversity and promotion of ecosystem services through the planning system

5.2 Impacts

It will be necessary to partially demolish the building which will potentially result in the loss of bird nesting sites.

5.3 Enhancement

5.3.1 Roosting Bats

A minimum of fifteen bat roosting unit/tube varying in structure and design should be installed at various heights of between 2 and 7 metres on a southerly aspect on the new buildings and where possible on the tower that will be retained.

5.3.2 Nesting Birds

A minimum of twenty swift *Apus apus* boxes should be incorporated into the new building and positioned on the tower to be retained. These should be incorporated into the design of the building and located under the roof edges on external walls and positioned on an aspect that either does not receive direct sunlight or positioned at a sufficient depth to not be affected by sunlight.

Ecological Receptor	Geographical scale of impact	Potential impacts	Mitigation		Impact	
			Avoidance measures	Compensation & Enhancement measures	Short term	Long term
Roosting Bats	Local	Loss of potential roost sites	N/A	Incorporate 15 bat roosting tubes into the buildings	Neutral	Positive at local level
Nesting Birds	Site	Loss of potential nesting sites	Undertake works outside of bird nesting season or subsequent to a nesting bird check	Install 20 swift boxes	Neutral	Positive at local level

Table 5.1 Conservation Action Statement

References

- Bat Conservation Trust. (2012).** *Bat Surveys – Good Practice Guidelines*. Bat Conservation Trust, London.
- Countryside and Rights of Way Act (2000).** HMSO
- Devon County Council. (2008).** *Validation Requirements for Planning Applications to Devon County Council*. Devon County Council, Exeter
- English Nature. (2004).** *The Bat Mitigation Guidelines*. English Nature, Peterborough
- MAGIC.** <http://magic.defra.gov.uk/> [accessed on August 2015]
- Mitchell-Jones A.J. & Mcleish A.P. (2004).** *The Bat Workers Manual*, 3rd Edition. Joint Nature Conservation Committee, Peterborough
- Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act (2006).** HMSO
- UK Biodiversity Action Plan.** <http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/page-5155> [accessed on August 2015]
- Wildlife & Countryside Act (1981), as amended.** HMSO
- Williams, C. (2010).** *Biodiversity for Low and Zero Carbon Buildings: A Technical Guide for New Build*. RIBA Publishing, London.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Legislation

Appendix 1 – Legislation

Bat Species

All British bats and their roosts are afforded protection under Section 9 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, as well as the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010. These pieces of legislation combine to give substantial protection to bats and their roost sites.

In combination, the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981, as amended, and Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010 make it an offence for any person to carry out the following acts:

- Intentionally or recklessly kill, injure or take a bat.
- Damage, destroy or obstruct access to any place that a bat uses for shelter or protection. This is taken to mean all bat roosts whether bats are present or not.
- Intentionally or recklessly disturb a bat while it is occupying a structure or place that it uses for shelter or protection.

In order to undertake actions that would result in damaging, destroying or obstructing access to a roost, or to disturb bats (whether in a roost or not), a licence is required from Natural England. In effect, this means that development activities that may disturb 'European protected species' are subject to such licensing, in order to remain within the law.

Nesting and Nest Building Birds

All birds, their nests and eggs are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). Nesting is determined as being from when birds first initiate nest building up until the point when fledglings stop returning to the nest. It is an offence to:

- Intentionally kill, injure or take any wild bird.
- Intentionally take, damage or destroy the nest of any wild bird.
- Intentionally take or destroy the egg of any wild bird.