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High Ling Bank, Cumbria

Ecological Constraints Study; 2023

AVISON YOUNG

VERSION 2

Final

2 August 2023

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Document History and Status

Version	Date	Reviewed By	Approved By	Date	Comment
1	02/08/23	RM			Draft for Technical Review
2	02/08/23	RM	RM	02/08/23	Final

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Client	Avison Young
Name of Project	High Ling Bank, Cumbria
Name of Document	Ecological Constraints Study; 2023
Document Version	2
Document Status	Final

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1. Introduction

BiOME Consulting Ltd was commissioned by Avison Young in November 2018 to undertake a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA) (including a desk study)¹ of a property proposed for remedial works. This property, High Ling Bank (the 'site'), Cumbria, is centred on National Grid Reference NY 05133 04486 (Figure 1). Following this PEA, dedicated bat² surveys were completed.

Figure 1. Site location



Works have been delayed and due to the amount of time that has elapsed since the completion of these surveys, and in line with relevant guidelines³, an update PEA/Ecological Constraints Study (ECS) was deemed necessary to inform the proposed works.

¹ BiOME Consulting Ltd (2018). *High Ling Bank, Cumbria. Preliminary Ecological Appraisal*

² BiOME Consulting Ltd (2020). *High Ling Bank, Cumbria. Bat Survey Report; 2020*

³ CIEEM (2019). *Advice Note on the Lifespan of Ecological Reports & Surveys*

At the time of writing, the scope of works includes demolition of the house within the site, although it is understood that further works may also occur.

1.1. Site Description

The site is located between the village of Gosforth and Sellafield Nuclear Power Station, in western Cumbria (Figure 1).

The site layout is shown on Figure 2, four buildings were present within the site:

- **House:** located in the southeast of the site, had rendered walls with the exception of the southern gable end which was stone and mortar. A small stone lean-to outbuilding was present at the southern gable. It had a pitched slate roof, with a glazed conservatory present adjoining the south-eastern corner.
- **Stone barn:** located in the north of the site and was constructed in stone and mortar, with a pitched slate roof which exhibited holes/slipped tiles in places.
- **Outbuilding 1:** located in the southern corner of the site, was constructed of stone and mortar with a pitched slate roof.
- **Outbuilding 2:** located adjacent to the western boundary, was constructed in stone and mortar with a pitched slate roof. The northern end of this building was enclosed, with an open-fronted store at its' southern end.

The buildings were accessed via a driveway to the north and enclosed a gravel/concrete yard area. Gardens/amenity grassland were present to the east, associated with the house. Further out, mixed woodland predominated to the south and west, with improved grassland fields present to the east and north (over a minor road).

Figure 2. Site layout



2. Existing Survey Data

The key results of the previously completed surveys are detailed below.

2.1. PEA – 2018

The site comprised common habitat types (amenity grassland, buildings and ornamental planting), none of which were considered to have any intrinsic ecological value.

In relation to the proposed works, the following potential issues were identified during the site survey/desk study, with consequent recommendations:

- Evidence of bat use (droppings) was identified within the house and stone barn, and all buildings within the site were considered of moderate suitability for roosting bats. Nocturnal surveys were recommended to evaluate if/where bats are roosting in the buildings to be impacted by the proposed works, in addition to identifying which bat species are present and numbers/type of roosts.
- Although no Badger *Meles meles* evidence was noted, the occasional presence of foraging Badgers was considered possible and precautions to ensure that this species is protected from harm during construction operations are recommended.
- The site supported common nesting bird species.
- Rhododendron was present within and in the vicinity of the site

No other legally protected species or species of particular nature conservation value are considered likely to be present or represent a potential constraint to development.

2.2. Bat Surveys – 2020

Day-roosting bats were recorded in three of the four buildings that were surveyed in spring/summer 2020:

House– peak count of two Soprano Pipistrelles *Pipistrellus pipistrellus*.

Stone Barn – Maxima of five Brown Long-eared Bats *Plecotus auritus*, five Soprano Pipistrelles and a single Whiskered *Myotis mystacinus*/Brandt's Bat *Myotis brandti*.

Outbuilding 1 – Up to three Brown Long-eared Bats and one Natterer's Bat *Myotis nattereri*.

No evidence of larger or more important (e.g. maternity) roosts were identified and it was considered that the results accurately reflect the status of roosting bats during spring/early summer 2020.

3. Methodologies

3.1. Desk Study

A comprehensive desk study was completed in 2018. Further desk study was not considered necessary to inform this 2023 ECS.

3.2. Preliminary Ecological Appraisal Survey

A PEA survey^{4,5} was undertaken on 27 June 2023 by an experienced ecologist, Martyn Owen MCIEEM, in excellent weather conditions. Martyn holds survey licenses in relation to GCN (2016-19752-CLS-CLS), bats (2022-10620-CL18-BAT) and a variety of Schedule 1 birds (including Barn Owl *Tyto alba*). During the survey all areas within the site and site boundaries were walked and habitat types assessed. Signs of protected species, invasive plants (*i.e.* those included on Schedule 9 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended)) and other notable species were also searched for during the survey, as well as noting habitats considered to have the potential to support protected species.

3.3. Bats

3.3.1. Preliminary Roost Assessment

An update Preliminary Roost Assessment (PRA) survey⁶ was completed by Martyn Owen MCIEEM on 27 June 2023. This survey was completed in suitable weather conditions (overcast and dry). Prior to the completion of the site survey, aerial imagery was reviewed⁷.

The survey involved an inspection of the interior (where accessible) and exterior of the buildings to identify potential or actual bat access points and roosting sites, and to locate any evidence of bats such as live or dead specimens, bat droppings,

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

5 CIEEM (2017) *Guidelines for preliminary ecological appraisal* [online] available at: <https://www.cieem.net/guidance-on-preliminary-ecological-appraisal-gpea> (accessed 1 June 2023)

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

7 Google Maps [online] available at: <https://www.google.co.uk/maps> (accessed 1 June 2023)

urine splashes, fur-oil staining and/or squeaking/scratching noises. It should be noted that sometimes bats leave no visible sign of their presence on the outside of a building (and even when they do wet weather can wash away evidence).

The inspection was facilitated by the use of ladders, binoculars, a high-powered torch, endoscope and small dental mirrors to inspect accessible crevices with the potential to support bats.

The potential suitability of the survey area for roosting bats was assessed in line with relevant guidelines⁶ and allocated to one of the categories detailed within **Table 1**.

Table 1. Guidelines for assessing the potential suitability of proposed development sites for bats

Suitability	Description of Roosting Habitats
Negligible	Negligible habitat features on site likely to be used by roosting bats.
Low	A structure/tree with one or more potential roost sites that could be used by individual bats opportunistically. However, these potential roost sites do not provide enough space, shelter, protection, appropriate conditions and/or suitable surrounding habitat to be used on a regular basis or by larger numbers of bats (i.e. unlikely to be suitable for maternity or hibernation).
Moderate	A structure/tree with one or more potential roost sites that could be used by bats due to their size, shelter, protection, conditions and surrounding habitat but unlikely to support a roost of high conservation status (with respect to roost type only – the assessments in this table are made irrespective of species conservation status, which is established after presence is confirmed).
High	A structure/tree with one or more potential roost sites that are obviously suitable for use by larger numbers of bats on a more regular basis and potentially for longer periods of time due to their size, shelter, protection, conditions and surrounding habitat.
Confirmed Roost	Definitive evidence of roosting bats present.

3.3.2. Emergence/Re-entry Surveys

Two update nocturnal survey of all buildings on site was undertaken (**Table 2**).

Surveyors were equipped with electronic bat detectors (EM Touch Pro 2) and sound files were analysed with appropriate bat analysis software (Kaleidoscope) once the surveys were completed. Infra-red cameras (Canon XA60) and additional infrared lighting (Nightfox XB5 IR and flood lamps) were used, with cameras positioned to ensure that all areas with the potential to support roosting bats were covered. Following the survey, recorded footage was analysed.

To ensure coverage of all areas which could support bats the nocturnal surveys of the were completed by six surveyors (**Table 2**); Martyn Owen MCIEEM, Richard Moores MCIEEM (NE bat licence no. 2015-12257-CLS-CLS), Samuel Dreux QCIEEM, David Lee, Laura Owen and Steve Forrester, all of which are highly experienced nocturnal bat surveyors.

The nocturnal bat survey was undertaken in weather conditions considered appropriate for surveys of this kind (**Table 2**).

Table 2. Survey details

Date	Sunrise	Time		Cloud (octets)	Wind (Beaufort/ Direction)	Min. Temp (°C)	Precip.
		Start	Finish				
26/06/23	21:53	21:38	23:45	5-8	1-3 SW	11	Nil
25/07/23	21:23	21:08	23:20	1-2	0-1 NE	12	Nil

3.4. Limitations

The findings presented in this study represent those at the time of survey and reporting, and data collected from available sources. Ecological surveys are limited by factors which affect the presence of plants and animals, such as the time of year, migration patterns and behaviour.

No access was possible to the interior of the buildings on site.

4. Results

4.1. PEA Site Survey

The updated PEA/ECS conducted on 26 June 2023 did not suggest any significant changes to the observations made during the previous PEA.

4.2. Bats

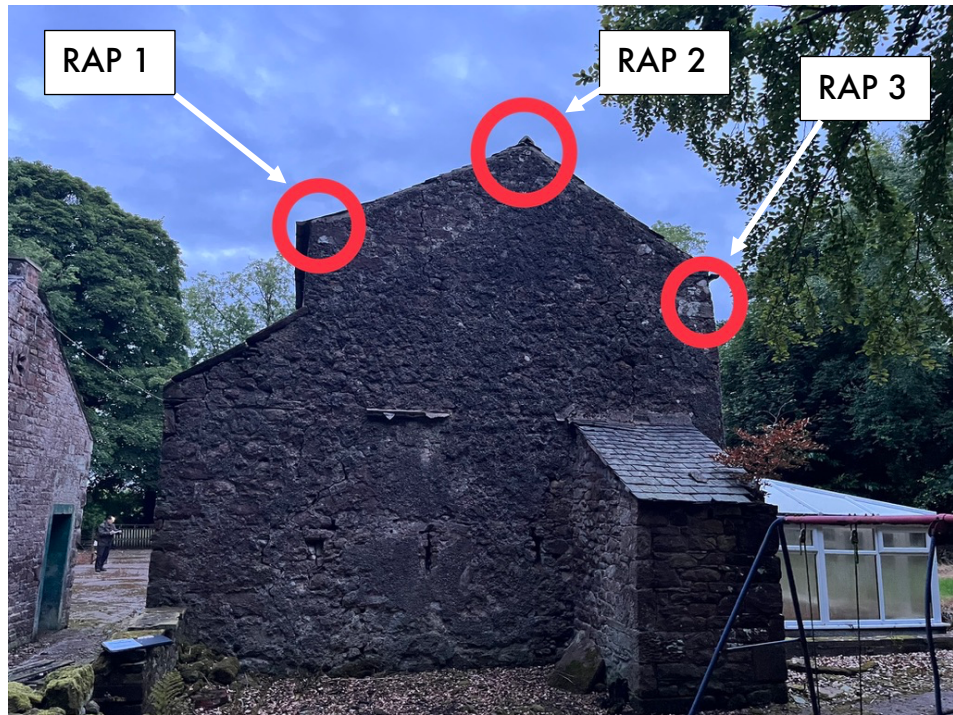
The buildings were in near-identical condition to during the original PEA and nocturnal bat surveys, and the previous conclusions of the PRA remain valid. No bat evidence was found on the building exteriors. The results of the update nocturnal surveys are provided below.

4.2.1. 26 June 2023 (dusk)

House: Seven Soprano Pipistrelle exited day roosts in the house;

- Five roosted at the eaves on the southern gable (three at Roost Access Point (RAP) 1, with singles at RAP 2 and 3 – **Photograph 1**).
- One roosted behind guttered on the western façade (RAP 4, **Photograph 2**); and
- One roosted within a wall crack on the eastern façade (RAP 5, **Photograph 3**).

Photograph 1. RAP 1, 2 and 3



Photograph 1. RAP 4



Photograph 1. RAP 5



It is considered highly likely that these bats roosted in close proximity to their emergence points.

Stone Barn: No bats emerged.

Outbuilding 1: No bats emerged.

Outbuilding 2: No bats emerged.

4.2.1. 26 June 2023 (dusk)

House: Five Soprano Pipistrelle exited day roosts;

- Three exited from the eaves on the southern gable (three at Roost Access Point (RAP) 1, with a single at RAP 2 – Photograph 1).
- One roosted behind guttered on the western façade (RAP 4, Photograph 2); and

Stone Barn: No bats emerged.

Outbuilding 1: No bats emerged.

Outbuilding 2: No bats emerged.

4.3. Invasive Non-native Species

Rhododendron is present within, and in the vicinity of, the site. No other INNS of plant (listed on Schedule 9 of the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 (as amended)) were observed during the survey.

4.4. Other Species

The results of the update PEA in relation to other species/habitats remained consistent from the previous surveys in 2019.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

An updated PEA survey and re-entry bat survey has been completed. Prior to demolition further additional survey/assessment works are required.

5.1. Bats

5.1.1. Summary

Bat surveys completed (during 2020 and 2023) in line with best practice guidance concluded that the buildings on site are confirmed day roosts of:

House: Peak count of seven Soprano Pipistrelles.

Stone Barn: Maxima of five Brown Long-eared Bats, five Soprano Pipistrelles and a single Whiskered/Brandt's Bat.

Outbuilding 1: Up to three Brown Long-eared Bats and one Natterer's Bat.

No evidence of larger or more important (e.g. maternity) roosts were identified and it is considered that the results accurately reflect the status of roosting bats during spring/early summer 2020.

No bats roosted in Outbuilding 2.

Any works that could destroy/modify a bat roost/access point or disturb⁸ roosting bat/s will require a Natural England licence to enable the works to be completed legally.

5.1.1. Natural England Licencing

The confirmation of roosting bats that will be impacted means that a licence from Natural England will be required to enable the proposed works to proceed lawfully. Following submission of appropriate forms, the application takes up to 30 working days to be assessed by Natural England.

⁸ Disturbance of animals in this context includes in particular any disturbance which is likely—(a) to impair their ability (i) to survive, to breed or reproduce, or to rear or nurture their young; or (ii) in the case of animals of hibernating or migratory species, to hibernate or migrate; or (b) to affect significantly the local distribution or abundance of the species to which they belong.

No works that may disturb roosting bats or prevent access to a potential bat roost should be completed until a licence is in place.

5.1.2. Timing of Works

There are no restrictions with regards to when (e.g. certain months of the year) works can take place, although it would be best practice to avoid low winter temperatures when bats may be in torpor (pipistrelles can use the same roosts year-round).

To inform the licence application surveys must have been completed during the most recent bat active season. Consequently, if works do not occur before May 2024 at least one update survey will be required.

5.1.3. Supervision of Works

Works in the area of roosts will need to be supervised by Suitably Qualified Ecologist (SQE). Prior to works commencing, the SQE would provide a 'toolbox talk' to those contractors on site in which details of e.g. best working practices and what to do in the event of discovering a bat would be discussed.

During supervised works to the area of the roosts the SQE would capture any bats that do not fly away and move them to a temporary bat box (erected on a nearby tree/structure prior to works commencing).

These works (when capture/handling and exclusion of bats is possible) should ideally take place in conditions suitable for bats to be active (spring-autumn inclusive). However, works can also be undertaken in the winter as long as weather conditions allow (sunset temperature of at least 8°C on preceding 2+ days).

5.1.4. Compensation

Mitigation will be required for the loss of bat roosts. Once the full scope of works has been determined, the impacts to roost should be assessed and appropriate mitigation identified.

5.2. Nesting Birds

Due to the potential presence of nesting birds within all buildings on site, any works with the potential to impact nests should ideally be completed outside the

bird nesting season (1 March to 31 August). If demolition works must be undertaken during the nesting season, a survey to identify any nests which may be impacted will be required. Should an occupied bird nest (of any species) or a nest in the process of being constructed be encountered, works must cease in this area and should only re-commence once the birds have fledged or the nest is abandoned.

5.3. Badger

No Badger setts were present within the site or adjacent areas. Nevertheless, the occasional presence of foraging Badgers is considered possible; it would therefore be prudent to consider Badgers during demolition works, this may include (if relevant):

- covering trenches at the conclusion of each working day, or include a means of escape for any animal falling into excavations, and
- any temporarily exposed open pipe system should be capped in such a way as to prevent Badgers gaining access.

5.4. Invasive Plants

Rhododendron is present within and in the vicinity of the site; this plant should be removed wherever the opportunity exists to do so in line with best practice guidance⁹.

5.5. Other Species

No further works in relation to other species are considered necessary.

5.6. Report Validity

The findings of this report are considered valid until 1 May 2024 from the date of this report¹⁰. If the works are delayed beyond this period, update survey/s will be required.

⁹ Edwards, C. (2006). *Practice Guide; Managing and Controlling Invasive Rhododendron*. Forestry Commission

¹⁰ CIEEM (2019). *Advice Note on The Lifespan of Ecological Reports and Surveys* [online] available at: <https://cieem.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Advice-Note.pdf>