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Ecological Appraisal for bats at Spout House Stables, Sandwith

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Report commissioned by:

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On behalf of:

Neil Amor Spout House Stables Sandwith Whitehaven CA28 9UG



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Carr Ecology was commissioned to undertake a survey for bats and owls at Spout House Stables, Sandwith to inform a planning application to demolish a workshop and small stable.

A desk top survey identified three mitigation licences for protected bat species within 5 km of the site. The nearest licence was 3.5 km from the site and was granted to destroy a resting place for a common bat species. The site is within an area of moderate quality bat foraging and commuting habitat.

A preliminary roost assessment was undertaken in February 2022. The surveyor was provided access to all parts of the site and surrounding area. All internal and external areas were systematically searched using ladders, a high-powered torch and an endoscope. No bats were found and no field signs associated with roosting bats was documented during the preliminary roost assessment. No presence or field signs associated with owls was present at or within the buildings. The remnants of swallow or martin nests were present within the workshop. Access for birds had been removed.

Potential for roosting bats was documented within the workshop although the characteristics of the building and current use reduce the quality of this potential. The two buildings were assessed as providing negligible potential for roosting bats.

Roosting bats are likely absent from both buildings. The proposed development will not remove commuting or foraging potential for bats. The proposed demolition of the two buildings is unlikely to destroy bat roosts or negatively impact bats. The proposed demolition will not impact on barn owls. No further survey effort is required. No mitigation is recommended.

The onus is on the developer to ensure the recommendations are followed.

1. INTRODUCTION

Terms of Instruction

1.1. Carr Ecology (ecological consultant) was commissioned by Wright Land & Property Ltd on behalf of Neil Amor (client) to undertake an ecological appraisal for bats and survey for owls at Spout House Stables, Sandwith as part of a planning application to demolish two buildings and build five houses with associated gardens and access road.

Documents provided

1.2. As background information the following documents were provided:

- Preliminary Sketch Proposal 1 Project 2017 Drawing number: 1. Ashwood Design Associates Ltd.
- Site Location Plan Land at Spout House Stables, Sandwith, Whitehaven. Plan Reference Number: TQRQM21365112456409. Wright Land and Property Ltd.

Site description

1.3. The site consisted of a large detached single storey workshop and small horse stable. The workshop was constructed of concrete block walls. External walls were rendered and covered with pebble dash. The internal walls were mostly exposed with some areas of render. The blockwork was in good condition without any gaps. The roof frame consisted of a steel frame on top of concrete pillars. The pillars and frame were in good condition. The roof was unlined and clad with corrugated concrete. There were 19 skylights distributed throughout the workshop. There were two glazed windows and two partially blocked windows at the walls. The west gable was single skin wooden slats with a breathable membrane. A large opening was present at the apex that was covered with a plastic sheet. A small open porch was present at the west gable. The porch had a small lost void. The building was used (past and currently) as a car workshop, joinery workshop, to house animals and as storage. There was a strong smell of diesel / oil throughout.

The horse stable was small (suitable for one horse). It was not in use at the time of the survey. The stable was next to a chicken coop. The stable was constructed of single skin wood and clad with a plastic and bitumen felt roof covering. The wooden frame consisted of tightly joined machine sawn timber. The northern side was open.

The barn was immediately surrounded by a driveway, garden, amenity grassland, and dwellings. The habitat surrounding the site included scattered trees, hedgerows, semi improved grassland, agricultural land, and Sandwith Village. The site was 1.25 km from the coast (figure 1).



Figure 1. Aerial view of the site with red line boundary for the workshop and small stable.

Survey aims

1.4. Survey aims were to locate the presence of bats and owls, and associated field signs, categorise the potential for these protected species at the site, and recommend further survey effort and mitigation if applicable. An assessment of the likely impact of the proposed works on bats and owls is made.

2. METHOD

Desk study

2.1. A review of online resources, including the Multi Agency Geographic Information for the Countryside (MAGIC) database was undertaken to establish the ecological context of the site (accessed 01st February 2022). The MAGIC website was also reviewed to identify any designated sites of European importance and granted protected species mitigation licences within 5 km of the site.

Preliminary roost assessment for bats

Building assessment

2.2. All buildings within the site were subject to external and internal inspection to search for evidence of bat activity where safe to do so.

2.3. Internal voids (if present) were subject to an inspection, whereby the surveyor used ladders, high-powered torches, mirrors and an endoscope to search for evidence of current or historic use by bats. Particular attention was paid to gaps between rafters and beams. Specific searches were undertaken for bat droppings, which can indicate current or past use by bats and indicate the extent of use.

2.4. An exterior inspection was undertaken in order to search for any signs of use by bats, such as droppings or staining, and to identify any potential access points. Binoculars were used to inspect any inaccessible areas more closely.

2.5. Where no direct or indirect evidence of roosting bats were confirmed, buildings were categorised as being of high, moderate, low or negligible potential to support roosting bats based on the type and number of suitable bat features present, in accordance with best practice guidance (Collins, 2016).

2.6. Bat foraging and commuting provision was also assessed to provide a full assessment of the value of potential at the site.

2.7. The building was categorised as follows:

1) High potential – one or more potential roosting features present within a structure, with enough suitable surrounding commuting and foraging habitat and which is large enough to be able to shelter a large number of bats on a regular basis. These include maternity and hibernation roosts.

2) Moderate potential – one or more potential roosting features present within a structure that is likely to shelter a number of bats, but unlikely to support a roost of high conservation status.

3) Low potential – one or more potential roost features present within a structure yet is not surrounded by suitable commuting and foraging habitat and does not provide enough protection and space to shelter large number of bats. This also includes trees with no visible potential roost features but is of adequate age and structure to offer limited roosting potential.

4) Negligible potential – whereby no evidence of bats was observed and no suitable features for bats are supported, such that their presence is considered negligible.

Barn owls

2.8. All buildings within the site were subject to external and internal inspection to search for evidence of bird activity where safe to do so. Field signs associated with barn owls including whitewash, nesting material, pellets and dead chicks were searched for and documented.

3. LEGISLATION

3.1. The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) is the primary piece of national legislation which pertains to the protection of flora, fauna and the countryside. The Act is the means by which the Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats (Bern Convention) and the Council Directive 79/409/EEC on the conservation of wild birds (Birds Directive) are implemented in Great Britain.

3.2. The Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 (NERC) made provision for all public authorities, including local planning authorities, to consider biodiversity in their roles. Local planning authorities are to ensure that there is no net loss of biodiversity on a site, no net loss in habitat connectivity and must aim to enhance biodiversity. Section 41 established a list of the species and habitats of principal importance for the purpose of conserving biodiversity.

3.3. The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 consolidates all the various amendments made to the Conservation (Natural Habitats, &c.) Regulations 1994 in respect of England and Wales. The 1994 Regulations transposed Council Directive 92/43/EEC on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora (EC Habitats Directive) into national law.

3.4. All bat species and their roosts are legally protected, by both domestic and international legislation. You may be committing a criminal offence if you deliberately take , injure or kill a wild bat, intentionally or recklessly disturb a bat in its roost or deliberately disturb a group of bats, damage or destroy a place used by bats for breeding or resting (roosts) (even if bats are not occupying the roost at the time), possess or advertise/sell/exchange a bat of a species found in the wild in the EU (dead or alive) or any part of a bat, intentionally or recklessly obstruct access to a bat roost.

3.5. Wild barn owls are given the highest level of legal protection possible under the 1981 Wildlife and Countryside Act. You may be committing a criminal offence if you kill or injure a barn owl, catch a barn owl, take or destroy any egg of a barn owl, damage or destroy an active nest site with eggs or young or before eggs are laid, disturb the dependent young of a barn owl, possess, offer for sale or sell a barn owl.

4. RESULTS

Desk study

4.1. Six protected species mitigation licences had been granted within 5 km of the site including:

- EPSM2010-2371. C-PIP destruction of resting place 3.6 km south east
- EPSM2013-6035. WHISK; BRAN; NATT destruction of resting place 4.5 km east
- 2017-31499-EPS-MIT. C-PIP destruction of resting place 3.5 km north

4.2. No statutory designated habitats were present within 2 km of the site. Mature hedgerows and tree lines passed by the site and provided good commuting features for bats.

4.3. Wider habitat included improved, semi-improved, and agriculture.

Preliminary roost assessment for bats

Building

4.4. A site visit and preliminary roost assessment was made by Andrew Carr (Natural England licence 2018-38224-CLS-CLS and 2018-38223-CLS-CLS) on 02nd February 2021.

4.5. Full site access was achieved as was a walk over of the surrounding area.

4.6. The site consisted of a large detached single storey workshop and small horse stable. The workshop was constructed of concrete block walls. External walls were rendered and covered with pebble dash. The internal walls were mostly exposed with some areas of render. The blockwork was in good condition without any gaps. The roof frame consisted of a steel frame on top of concrete pillars. The pillars and frame were in good condition. The roof was unlined and clad with corrugated concrete. There were 19 skylights distributed throughout the workshop. There were two glazed windows and two partially blocked windows at the walls. The west gable was single skin wooden slats with a breathable membrane. A large opening was present at the apex that was covered with a plastic sheet. A small open porch was present at the west gable. The porch had a small lost void. The building was used (past and currently) as a car workshop, joinery workshop, to house animals and as storage. There was a strong smell of diesel / oil throughout.

The horse stable was small (suitable for one animal). It was not in use at the time of the survey. The stable was next to a chicken coop. The stable was constructed of single skin wood and clad with a plastic and bitumen felt roof covering. The wooden frame consisted of tightly joined machine sawn timber. The northern side was open (figures 2 - 4).

4.7. The two buildings were closely and systematically inspected. No bats were observed and no field signs associated with bat roosts were documented. Potential for bats to roost was present within the worshop itself (void dwelling bats) although this potential was considered negligible due to relatively high light levels, disturbance, odour and presence of cats.

4.8. Following good practice guidelines, the dwelling was assessed as providing negligible potential for roosting bats.



Figure 2. Spout House Stables workshop external elevations. Potential for roosting bats was assessed as negligible.

Figure 3. Spout House Stables internal. Potential for bats to roost was present within the worshop itself (void dwelling bats) although this potential was considered negligible due to relatively high light levels, disturbance, odour and presence of cats.

Figure 4. Spout House Stables stable. This building was assessed as providing negligible potential for roosting bats and barn owls.

Barn owls

4.9. The workshop did not have any field signs associated with barn owls. Egress points for owls to access features, such as ledges, were blocked off. The level of daily use of the workshop and the characteristics of the stable were such that the buildings were unsuitable for owls. An owl pellet was recorded during the site visit on an adjacent log pile. This was associated with a single capture event of a prey item followed by the deposit of the pellet and not an indication of shelter or nesting. It does provide some evidence that at least one owl hunts close to the site. Due to the abundance of foraging grounds for owls surrounding the site the proposed plans are unlikely to significantly reduce foraging opportunity for owls.

Limitations

4.10. Close inspection was achieved throughout. The site visit was considered an appropriate level of survey effort. Although the time of year was such that external field signs could be removed through weathering the overall negligible potential of the two buildings means the survey was robust.

5. EVALUATION AND RECOMMEDATIONS

5.1. Carr Ecology was commissioned to undertake a survey for bats at Spout House Stables, Sandwith to inform a planning application to demolish a workshop and small stable.

5.2. A desk top survey identified three mitigation licences for protected bat species within 5 km of the site. The nearest licence was 3.5 km from the site and was granted to destroy a resting place for a common bat species. The site is within an area of moderate quality bat foraging and commuting habitat.

5.3. A preliminary roost assessment was undertaken in February 2022. The surveyor was provided access to all parts of the site and surrounding area. All internal and external areas were systematically searched using ladders, a high-powered torch and an endoscope.

5.4. No bats were found and no field signs associated with roosting bats were documented during the preliminary roost assessment. No presence or field signs associated with owls was present at or within the buildings. The remnants of swallow or martin nests were present within the workshop. Access for birds had been removed.

5.5. Potential for roosting bats was documented within the workshop although the characteristics of the building and current use reduce the quality of this potential.

5.6. Roosting bats are likely absent from both buildings. The proposed development will not remove commuting or foraging potential for bats. The proposed demolition of the two buildings is unlikely to destroy bat roosts or negatively impact bats. The proposed demolition will not impact on barn owls. No further survey effort is required. No mitigation is recommended.

5.7. The onus is on the developer to ensure the recommendations are followed.

6. REFERENCES

CIEEM. 2017. Guidelines for Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (2nd edition). Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management, Winchester.

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