

**BAT & BARN OWL SURVEY RESULTS  
& RISK ASSESSMENT  
FOR 'THE COACH HOUSE'  
BRANCEPETH VILLAGE**

Veronica Howard, BSc (Hons), PhD, MCIEEM  
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## 1. SUMMARY

- 1.1 The aim of the study was to confirm the possible presence of a bat roost or barn owl nest site in a building known as 'The Coach House' in Brancepeth Village, County Durham where the building is to be converted to living accommodation. This report is an update of a report from 2016 produced by EcoSurv Ltd.  
The building is presently used as garaging on the ground floor and storage of household items on the upper floor and is in regular use
- 1.2 Daylight surveys and risk assessments were carried out in October 2019 to establish the potential for bats or barn owls to use the building.
- 1.3 No signs of bats were found and few potential roost sites were found in exterior walls or inside the building in 2019 or 2016 and no bats emerged from the coach house during the 2016 emergence surveys. There were no signs of barn owls or other bird species using the building.
- 1.4 There is good bat feeding habitat in the area and a range of other buildings that may provide potential roost sites for bats.
- 1.5 The building is very unlikely to be used by bats because of the lack of potential roosts or hibernation sites in the walls and the high level of artificial light at night to both the front and rear of the property. This is known to deter bats from utilising buildings. As the building is unheated it is unsuitable as a maternity roost site for common pipistrelle bats, the species most recorded in the Brancepeth area. This species is known to prefer warm buildings for nursery roosts. The interior is assessed as unsuitable because of the high internal light levels during daylight hours and the high level of human disturbance.  
There is a high level of human disturbance in the building and the site is surrounded by other buildings and a busy road so it is very unlikely to be used by barn owls.
- 1.6 There is very low risk to any bat species due to the conversion of the building because of the low level of potential roost sites and there is no evidence of use. Since no bat roost has been identified in the building it is considered that a license from Natural England will not be needed in this instance. There is no risk to barn owls as the building is unsuitable for barn owl use.
- 1.7 In line with good conservation practice mitigation will be put in place to protect the conservation status of bats in the area. This will include careful working practices, careful re-pointing of the stonework, the use of 'bat friendly' chemicals for any timber treatment and careful removal of roofing materials when re-roofing. A method statement will be given to the contractors carrying out the work to ensure no accidental harm to bats.

## 2. INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 These surveys and report were commissioned by Emerald Architects on behalf of the owner of the property, in October 2019. The aim of the study was to confirm the possible presence of a bat roost or barn owl nest site in a building known as 'The Coach House' in Brancepeth Village, County Durham where the building is to be converted to living accommodation. This report is an update of a report from 2016 produced by EcoSurv Ltd.
- 2.2 The building is presently used as garaging on the ground floor and storage of household items on the upper floor and is in regular use.

### Site description

- 2.3 The building is two-storey stone built with a lined slate roof. There are garage type doors on the ground floor front elevation but no windows. On the upper floor there is a hayloft door and windows into both the front and rear elevations so the interior is well lit during daylight hours. The upper floor is accessed via internal stone stairs. The building is detached but faces onto a courtyard at the front with stone buildings, mainly dwelling houses around it. The rear of the property faces onto a busy road with street lighting and the rear courtyard is also well lit at night.



Front elevation facing onto a courtyard



Rear elevation facing onto the A690

- 2.4 The building is generally in a good state of repair with a few crevices in the front exterior wall. The interior walls are plastered and painted and the roof is intact. The roof lining and timbers are covered with cobwebs and there are cobwebs around the window and door frames.



- 2.5 There are a good number of other traditional stone buildings in the immediate vicinity and the site lies close to Brancepeth Castle.

### **Surrounding Habitat**

- 2.6 There are numerous mature trees around the village, along the roadsides and in the grounds of other properties plus parkland around the castle.

## **3. METHODOLOGY**

### **Methods**

- 3.1 Because of the evidence from the 2016 and the limited potential for the building to serve as a bat roost site only a daylight survey and risk assessment were deemed necessary in this instance to update the report.

- 3.2 The daylight survey involved checking the exterior and interior of the buildings for signs of bats, i.e. bat droppings and urine stains on the exterior walls, on window sills and on the ground or bat droppings and insect remains inside the buildings.

- 3.3 Persistent urine stains provide a good indication that there is an access point to a roost somewhere above where the stains are found and can be a useful indication that a site is used. Bat droppings are unlikely to persist over the winter period or in wet weather unless the exterior wall is very well sheltered, and are far less likely to be found during winter surveys on exteriors of buildings. Where the interior of a building is dry bat droppings and/or insect remains persist indicating that a site is used in other seasons of the year.

- 3.4 There were no cracks and crevices in the walls that required checking with an endoscope.

- 3.5 The buildings were also checked for signs of barn owl use i.e pellets, feathers, feeding debris etc. and for the signs of other nesting species.

### **3.6 Timing**

The site visit and assessment were carried out on 29<sup>th</sup> October 2019 at the end of the bat breeding season but at a time when bats were active. (The 2016 emergence surveys were completed on July and August during the bat breeding season).

### **Personnel**

- 3.7 The assessment was carried out by an ecological consultant who has worked extensively on bat conservation in North-east England for the past 29 years.

## 4 THE LAW RELATING TO PROTECTED SPECIES

### BATS

- 4.1 All bats in Britain are protected by law. Under the 1981 Wildlife and Countryside Act and the Conservation (Natural Habitats) Regulation 1994, (Directive 92/43/EEC) it is illegal to:-
- \* catch, injure, kill or sell any bat
  - \* damage, destroy or obstruct bat roosts (even when bats are not present)
  - \* disturb bats while they are roosting, for example by entering known roosts or hibernation sites.

A breeding site or resting site of any bat is known as a bat roost. A bat roost is any structure as bat use for shelter or protection. It is an offence to damage or destroy a bat roost at any time of year.

- 4.2 The following activities are those most likely to cause disturbance to bat roosts:-
- \* Demolition of buildings
  - \* Restoration, building conversion or remedial work including re-roofing, repointing of stonework.
  - \* Timber treatment.
  - \* Tree felling or extensive tree surgery.

Bats are most at risk from disturbance during the breeding season late May through to late September, after this the nursery roosts disperse. They are also vulnerable during the hibernation period; roughly late November to late March, as they are torpid and unable to move quickly from their hibernation roosts.

- 4.3 **Natural England** must always be consulted if any building work, including demolition, is to be undertaken which may cause disturbance to bats or their roost.
- 4.4 Any development which is likely to result in disturbance of a European protected species, or damage to its habitat usually requires a licence from Natural England.  
'Development' is interpreted broadly to include projects involving demolition of buildings, rebuilding, structural alterations and additions to buildings.

### BIRDS

- 4.5 Under the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981) it is illegal to:-
- \* Kill, injure or take any wild bird (unless under licence)
  - \* Take damage or destroy a bird's nest whilst in use or being built.
  - \* Take or destroy the egg of any wild bird.
  - \* Disturb any wild bird listed on Schedule 1 of the Act while it is nest building or at a nest containing eggs or young, or disturb the dependant young of such a bird. Barn Owl is a Schedule 1 Species.
- 4.6 European legislation is also pertinent, since it places certain obligations on the member states. The Directive on the Conservation of Wild Birds (79/409/EEC) makes specific reference to migratory birds and requires

member states to protect the habitat of migratory species. This includes their breeding, moulting and wintering areas and staging posts along migratory routes. Annex 1 of this Directive lists those species for which conservation measures must be taken for all stages of their life cycle.

## 5 RESULTS OF SITE ASSESSMENT

- 5.1 No signs of bat use were found on any of the exterior walls of the building or in the interior in 2016 or 2019. No bats emerged from the building during either of the 2016 emergence surveys.
- 5.2 Few potential roost sites for bats were found in the exterior walls as they are well pointed. The interior was assessed as unsuitable for bat use because of the high light levels during daylight hours. In addition the building is in regular use as garaging and storage.
- 5.3 There is good bat feeding habitat in the area due to the large number of mature trees and open parkland.
- 5.4 Both the 2016 and 2019 surveys found no signs of barn owls using the building and the high light level, human disturbance and location would deter this species from using it. There was no evidence of other bird species nesting in the building.
- 5.5 A record search by Durham Bat Group found the following records for the Brancepeth area. There are no records for the Coach House.

Grid Ref.	Date	Location	Species	Activity
NZ2138	2000	Goodwell Field Farm, Brancepeth	Species unknown	Roost status unknown
NZ2236	2008	Whitworth Lane	Pipistrelle	Flight
NZ2237	1992	The Cottage (Club House) Brancepeth Castle Golf Course	5 Brown long-eared	Roost
	1993	Buckburn, Brancepeth	168+ Pipistrelle	Roost
	1996	Sylvan Towers, Brancepeth	12+ Pipistrelle	Roost
	1999	Charis, Brancepeth	200+ Common pipistrelle	Exclusion
	2006	The Cottage (club house)	2+ Common pipistrelle	Feeding
	2006	Brancepeth Castle Golf Courses	2+ Noctule 2+ Natterer's	Feeding Feeding
	2008	Brancepeth village	Pipistrelle	Flight
	2008	Castle Lodge	Common pipistrelle	Flight
	2015	St Brandon's Church	2, Species unknown	Roost ?

## **6. SITE EVALUATION**

- 6.1 The building is very unlikely to be used by bats because of the lack of potential roosts or hibernation sites in the walls and the high level of artificial light at night to both the front and rear of the property. This is known to deter bats from utilising buildings. As the building is unheated it is unsuitable as a maternity roost site for common pipistrelle bats, the species most recorded in the Brancepeth area. This species is known to prefer warm buildings for nursery roosts. The interior is assessed as unsuitable because of the high internal light levels during daylight hours and the high level of human disturbance.
- 6.2 There are other buildings in the surrounding area that may provide potential bat roost sites.
- 6.3 There is good bat feeding habitat in the area.
- 6.4 There is a high level of human disturbance in the building and the site is surrounded by other buildings and a busy road it is very unlikely to be used by barn owls.

## **7 IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

- 7.1 There is very low risk to any bat species due to the conversion of the buildings because of the low level of potential roost sites and the lack of evidence of use. Mitigation measures will be put in place to ensure no accidental harm to bats.
- 7.2 There is always a very small possibility of a bat/bats being found during any building work or demolition work on any building of any construction even when surveys have found no evidence of use. In line with good conservation practice, precautions need to be put in place working on the assumption that a bat(s) could be present.
- 7.3 Since no bat roost has been identified in the building it is considered that a license from Natural England will not be needed in this instance.
- 7.4 There is no risk to barn owls as the building is assessed as unsuitable for barn owl use.

## **8. MITIGATION**

### **Maintenance of Conservation Status**

- 8.1 Given it is known that bats occur in the general area, the following mitigating steps will be taken to minimise any possible impacts:-
- a) The contractors will be made aware of the need to proceed with caution and to check for the presence of bats. They will be requested to follow a method statement, and should there be any difficulty complying with this method statement they will contact the consultant for further advice.
  - b) Any cracks or crevices in the building will be checked for the presence of bats by illuminating with a torch before the walls are re-pointed.
  - c) If re-roofing then all roofing materials will be removed with care with particular care taken when the slates are removed. If the window and door frames are to be changed then the old frames will be removed with care. Any gaps around the frames will be checked for the presence of bats before the frames are removed.
  - d) Any timber treatment in the roof area will use only 'bat friendly' chemicals and any new timber in the roof area will only have been treated with similar products.
  - e) In the unlikely event of a bat or bats been found during building work and accidentally disturbed, work will cease and the consultant will be contacted for advice [REDACTED]. If it is necessary to remove a bat to prevent it being harmed, then it will be handled with care and gloves will be worn. It will be transferred to a box with ventilation and placed in a quiet place until it can be released at dusk or removed to another undisturbed part of the building where it can be placed out of the view of predators.
  - f) In the event of the consultant not being available Natural England will be contacted for advice. All contact numbers will be left with the owners and the contractors.
- 8.2. A method statement has been appended to this report that is to be issued to the contractors carrying out the work.

## **METHOD STATEMENT – BUILDING KNOWN AS ‘THE COACH HOUSE’ AT BRANCEPETH VILLAGE**

1. Objective - To maintain and protect the populations of bats in the Brancepeth area.

2. Though the building has been assessed as very unlikely to support a bat roost, it is known that bats occur in the general area and it is still possible to discover a bat during building work.

A bat can be hidden away in cracks, in rubble fill within a wall, in gaps in the mortar around windows or under roofing materials and can be difficult to see. Therefore great care is needed when working on any building when there are bats in the area.

It is the responsibility of the contractor to follow the guidelines set out below in Section 4 to ensure that no bats are harmed.

3. All bats in Britain are protected by law. Under the 1981 Wildlife and Countryside Act and the Conservation (Natural Habitats) Regulation 1994, (Directive 92/43/EEC) it is illegal to:-

- \* catch, injure, kill or sell any bat
- \* damage, destroy or obstruct bat roosts (even when bats are not present)
- \* disturb bats while they are roosting, for example by entering known roosts or hibernation sites.

A breeding site or resting site of any bat is known as a bat roost. A bat roost is any structure as bat use for shelter or protection. It is an offence to damage or destroy a bat roost at any time of year.

The following activities are those most likely to cause disturbance to bat roosts:-

- \* Demolition of buildings
- \* Restoration, building conversion or remedial work including re-roofing, repointing of stonework.
- \* Timber treatment.

4. The following guidelines must be followed when working on the building:-

a) If re-roofing, roofing materials from the building must be removed carefully by hand. Especial care should be taken when removing the slates as there is very small chance of a bat or bats roosting beneath them.

b) Any cracks or crevices in the buildings should be checked for the presence of bats by illuminating with a torch before the walls are re-pointed. Re-pointing should avoid the bat hibernation period (late November to late March).

c) If the window and/or door frames are to be renewed then the old frames should be removed with care and any gaps found around the frames checked for the presence of bats before the frame is removed.

d) Any timber treatment in the roof area should use only 'bat friendly' chemicals and any new timber in the roof area should only have been treated with similar products.

e) In the very unlikely event of a bat/bats been found during building work and accidentally disturbed, work must cease and the consultant should be contacted for advice (Tel 0191 3773697). If it is necessary to remove a bat to prevent it being harmed, then it should be handled with care and gloves should be worn. The bat should be transferred to a box with ventilation and placed in a quiet place until it can be released at dusk or removed to another undisturbed part of the buildings where it can be placed out of the view of predators.

f) In the event of the consultant not being available Natural England should be contacted for advice. The contact numbers for the consultant and Natural England should be kept on site.