



# Penpont Ecology Services Ltd

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## THE THATCHED COTTAGE, HOLEMOOR, DEVON

### *Ecological Impact Assessment*

APRIL 2021

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A REPORT TO:

Mr G Austen  
The Thatched Cottage  
Holemoor  
Devon  
EX22 7AQ

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**Table of Contents**

|            |  |           |
|------------|--|-----------|
| <b>1</b>   | <b>INTRODUCTION.....</b>                       | <b>4</b>  |
| <b>2</b>   | <b>LEGISLATION.....</b>                        | <b>4</b>  |
| <b>2.1</b> | <b>Bats .....</b>                              | <b>4</b>  |
| <b>2.2</b> | <b>Nesting birds.....</b>                      | <b>4</b>  |
| <b>2.3</b> | <b>Dormouse.....</b>                           | <b>4</b>  |
| <b>3</b>   | <b>SITE DESCRIPTION.....</b>                   | <b>5</b>  |
| <b>4</b>   | <b>SURVEY METHODOLOGY .....</b>                | <b>6</b>  |
| <b>4.1</b> | <b>Desk Study.....</b>                         | <b>6</b>  |
| <b>4.2</b> | <b>Bats .....</b>                              | <b>6</b>  |
| <b>4.3</b> | <b>Nesting birds.....</b>                      | <b>7</b>  |
| <b>4.4</b> | <b>Dormouse.....</b>                           | <b>7</b>  |
| <b>5</b>   | <b>SURVEY RESULTS.....</b>                     | <b>7</b>  |
| <b>5.1</b> | <b>Desk study .....</b>                        | <b>7</b>  |
| <b>5.2</b> | <b>Site Survey.....</b>                        | <b>8</b>  |
| <b>6</b>   | <b>ECOLOGICAL EVALUATION .....</b>             | <b>9</b>  |
| <b>7</b>   | <b>CONCLUSIONS &amp; RECOMMENDATIONS .....</b> | <b>10</b> |
| <b>8</b>   | <b>REFERENCES.....</b>                         | <b>10</b> |

## Executive Summary

Penpont Ecology Services Ltd was commissioned to undertake an Ecological Impact Assessment of the proposal to extend The Thatched Cottage at Holemoor, Devon, and to remove a 5m section of roadside hedge. This was carried out to support a planning application, and aims to determine presence/likely absence of protected species and to assess the impact the proposed works may have on any species found to be present.

No evidence of roosting bats or nesting birds was identified.

It is considered unlikely the roadside hedge provides suitable habitat to support Dormouse.

The site is evaluated as being of low ecological status, and the proposed works are unlikely to provide a negative impact on protected species.

There are no ecological constraints to planning permission being granted.

A number of best practice cautionary measure are recommended including:

- *The existing lean-to extension shall be dismantled by hand. Should bats be identified at any time, works shall cease immediately, and the advice of Natural England or a licensed bat ecologist shall be sought.*
- *If works are to be undertaken during the bird nesting season, the roadside hedge shall be checked by a suitably qualified ecologist for nesting birds immediately prior to removal. Should an active nest be identified works shall be delayed until young have fledged*

# The Thatched Cottage – Ecological Impact Assessment

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## 1 Introduction

Penpont Ecology Services Ltd was commissioned to undertake an Ecological Impact Assessment of the proposal to extend The Thatched Cottage at Holemoor, Devon, and to remove a 5m section of roadside hedge. This was carried out to support a planning application, and aims to determine presence/likely absence of protected species and to assess the impact the proposed works may have on any species found to be present.

## 2 Legislation

### 2.1 Bats

In England and Wales all bat species are fully protected under The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations (amendment (EU Exit)) Regulations 2019, and the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). Under this legislation it is illegal to:

- intentionally or deliberately kill, injure or capture (or take) bats.
- deliberately disturb a bat in a way that would affect its ability to survive, breed or rear young (or hibernate or migrate in England, Wales and Northern Ireland) or (significantly in England, Wales and Scotland) affect the local distribution or abundance of the species.
- recklessly disturb roosting bats or obstruct access to their roosts.
- damage or destroy a roost (this is an 'absolute' offence and need not be deliberate or intentional).
- possess, control, transport, sell, exchange or offer for sale/exchange any live or dead bat or any part of a bat.

### 2.2 Nesting birds

All nesting birds are protected by the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981. Barn Owls are specially protected under Schedule 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000, making it an offence to;

- intentionally kill, injure or take them
- take, damage or destroy their nest or eggs
- disturb them at the nest

### 2.3 Dormouse

In England and Wales Hazel Dormouse is fully protected under The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations (amendment (EU Exit)) Regulations 2019, and the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). Under this legislation it is illegal to:

- deliberately capture, injure or kill hazel dormice
- damage or destroy a dormouse resting place or breeding site

- deliberately or recklessly disturb a hazel dormouse while it's in a structure or place of shelter or protection
- block access to structures or places of shelter or protection
- possess, sell, control or transport live or dead hazel dormice, or parts of hazel dormice

### 3 Site Description

The Thatched Cottage is a detached, two storey house occupying a roadside position east of the hamlet of Holemoor, Devon at OS Grid Reference: SS 4250 0579 (Fig 1). The immediate surrounding countryside is in agricultural production of permanent pasture, grass leys and arable. Fields are bordered by typical Devon hedgebanks providing good connectivity with surrounding riparian habitats associated with tributaries of the River Torridge, and the plantations of Lashbrook, Great Sarrel and Bramble Wood (Fig 2).



**Fig 1 – OS Map of location (1:25 000)**



**Fig 2 – Aerial photograph showing surrounding land-use.**

The surveyed areas include Thatched Cottage, the northerly lean-to, and a 5m section of roadside hedge (Fig 3).



**Fig 3 – The Thatched Cottage, lean-to and hedge.**

## 4 Survey Methodology

### 4.1 Desk Study

A search of local records was made to identify any historical records of protected species in the area.

### 4.2 Bats

The bat survey was conducted in accordance with guidelines given by Natural England and the Bat Conservation Trust in *'Bat Surveys for Professional Ecologists: Good Practice Guidelines'* (Collins, 2016) and *'Bat Worker's Manual'* (Mitchell-Jones, 1999). The bat survey was carried out to determine presence/likely absence of bat species, and comprised a building inspection including:

- an inspection (with a high powered torch where necessary) of the eaves, ridge beams and hips, and any other likely building habitat for bats; for signs of bats and individuals
- examination of walls and floors for droppings, dead individuals and skeletons
- a search for signs of bats including oily stains at entrance/exit holes, feeding remains, lack of cobwebs, characteristic smells and sounds

- an inspection of the surrounding area for suitable habitats.

### 4.3 Nesting birds

The Thatched Cottage and its surrounding environs, were surveyed for Barn Owls, and nesting birds, using methodologies outlined by Natural England (2002) and the Barn Owl Trust (2010), and included looking for:

- Individuals, corpses, feathers, droppings and pellets
- Nests & potential nesting sites

### 4.4 Dormouse

Habitats capable of supporting Dormouse, such as broad-leaved woodland, scrub and species-rich hedgerows, were searched for evidence of characteristically gnawed Hazel nuts and nests. Where no evidence was found, the potential of habitats to support Dormouse was assessed, according to the results of the desk study, habitat quality and connectivity of the site.

## 5 Survey Results

### 5.1 Desk study

#### Bats

The desk study identified the following records of Bats:

Table 2: Records of bats within 5km

| Species  | Location          | Date | Distance | Recorder |
|--|-------------------|------|----------|----------|
| Pipistrelle sp.<br>( <i>Pipistrellus sp.</i> ) | Brandis<br>Corner | 2020 | 2km      | *DBRC    |

\*Devon Biodiversity Records Centre (DBRC)

The Desk Study has identified one species of bat recorded within 2km of the site. It is considered likely that the surrounding countryside provides suitable habitat for foraging and roosting bats, and that bats may be under-recorded in this area.

#### Barn Owls

Barn Owl and a number of bird species have been recorded within the area.

Table 1: Records of Barn Owls within 10km

| Location   | Date      | Distance    | Recorder    |
|------------|-----------|-------------|-------------|
| Launceston | 1968-2015 | Within 10km | BTO* & BOT* |

\* British Trust for Ornithology

\* Barn Owl Trust

Barn Owls (and other owl species) require mixed farmland with rough grazing, and habitat suitable for their food source, ie. small mammals. Barn Owls commonly nest in tall, mature trees and in the eaves of larger, older agricultural buildings (BOT, 2010).

A search of local records identified Barn Owls within 10km of the site, made by the British Trust for Ornithology and the Barn Owl Trust.

It is considered likely that the surrounding countryside provides suitable habitat for nesting and foraging Barn Owls.

### **Dormouse**

Hazel Dormouse has been recorded within 2km of the surveyed site.

## **5.2 Site Survey**

The Thatched Cottage is a detached house arranged over two storeys. There is a single-storey lean-to extension to the northerly gable end (Fig 4). The Thatched Cottage is of rendered stone construction with a thatched roof. The lean-to has a man-made tiled roof, with timber fascias. There are no exterior gaps that might provide access for nesting birds or roosting bats.



***Fig 4 – Existing lean-to extension to northerly gable end.***

Access to the lean-to loft is made via a hatch over. The loft has a simple timber frame and is lined with bitumastic underfelting. The loft area is less than 1m in height, and is



full of stored items leaving very little potential flight space. No evidence of bats was identified.

The main loft of the house was inspected via a hatch over a first floor bedroom. Access was limited by hatch size and for safety reasons, and therefore was inspected from the hatch. The roof is unlined. No signs of bat or bird presence was identified.

The surveyed section of roadside hedge was inspected for signs of Dormouse presence of for suitable habitat to support Dormouse. The hedge includes non-native rose and beech (Fig 5), with no bank. The hedge is thin and 'leggy' due to unsympathetic management. It is considered unlikely Dormouse is present due to:

- Lack of woodland (Dormouse primary habitat)
- Lack of woodland edges and thick hedgerows (secondary habitat)
- Lack of strong connectivity with woodland
- Lack of Hazel, Honeysuckle and other fruiting species (Dormouse primary food and nest-making resources)
- Human disturbance (presence, traffic, domestic pets).



***Fig 5 – Roadside hedge is thin and 'leggy', includes non-native species and lacks floral diversity.***

## 6 Ecological evaluation

An inspection of the house lofts did not identify evidence of roosting bats or nesting birds.

It is considered unlikely the roadside hedge provides suitable habitat to support Dormouse.

The site is assessed as being of low ecological status.

The beech section of hedge may provide limited bird nesting habitat.

## 7 Conclusions & Recommendations

The proposed works will include removal of the existing lean-to extension, and the removal of 5m of defunct roadside hedge. The new extended section will not key-in to the existing roof. It is considered the proposed works are unlikely to provide a negative impact on protected species, and there are no ecological constraints to planning permission being granted.

The following is recommended as best practice cautionary measures:

- *The existing lean-to extension shall be dismantled by hand. Should bats be identified at any time, works shall cease immediately, and the advice of Natural England or a licensed bat ecologist shall be sought.*
- *If works are to be undertaken during the bird nesting season, the roadside hedge shall be checked by a suitably qualified ecologist for nesting birds immediately prior to removal. Should an active nest be identified works shall be delayed until young have fledged.*

## 8 References

Barn Owl Trust (2012). *Barn Owl Conservation Handbook*, Pelagic Publishing, Exeter.

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Mitchell-Jones, A J (2004). *Bat Mitigation Guidelines*. English Nature, Peterborough.

*This report has been produced in good faith, with all reasonable skill, care and diligence based on the information provided and accessible at the time of its preparation and within the scope of the work agreed with the client.*

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