# MEETING HALL, COLES GARDEN, KILMERSDON, SOMESET

## PROTECTED SPECIES SURVEY

**For**

**WHITE HORSE HOUSING**

# Final Report

# 16th October 2023

**Prepared by**

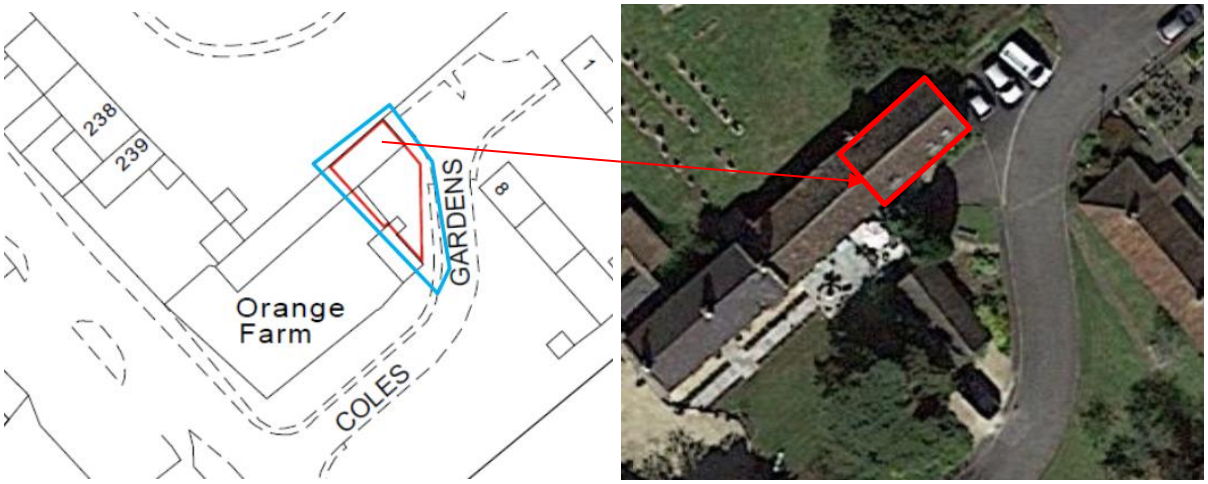
MALFORD
Environmental Consulting

www.malfordenvironmentalconsulting.co.uk

## Contents

# 1 Introduction

The client is seeking planning permission from Somerset Council to convert a semi-detached building, currently used as a meeting hall, for residential use. The existing building is located at Coles Garden, Kilmersdon, Somerset, BA3 5TG as shown below.




Malford Environmental Consulting was commissioned to undertake a Phase 1 bat (building roost inspection) and ecology survey of the existing building. The survey was undertaken by Dr Stephen Dangerfield (NE Class Licence Level 1 WLM-CL17, Licence No. 2015-11600-CLS-CLS) and Rob Spencer (NE Class Licence Level 2 WLM-CL18, Licence No. 2015-14778-CLS-CLS), who have a combined near 50 years' professional experience. Stephen is a full member of the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM).

The survey concentrates on identifying the presence of protected species (particularly bats), inhabiting or using the existing building. This report sets out the findings of the survey, and where necessary makes recommendations for actions to ensure the proposed development complies with nature conservation legislation and meets the requirements of planning policy.

Section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 (NERC Act) requires all public bodies to have regard to biodiversity conservation when carrying out their functions. Under the NERC Act the local planning authority should not determine a planning application if there are any surveys outstanding for European protected species. The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF), July 2021, requires the planning system should conserve and enhance the natural environment (Section 15) by, *inter alia*, 'protecting and enhancing sites of biodiversity value' and 'minimising impacts and providing net gains for biodiversity' (para 174) and 'protection and recovery of priority species' (para 179).

## 2 Scope of Work and Methodology

A phase 1 bat roost inspection and ecology survey was undertaken on 4th October 2023. The survey included an assessment of the actual presence or potential for the building to support roosting bats undertaken by a licensed bat surveyor in accordance with Bat Conservation Trust guidelines[1]. The survey included an external inspection of the building – the building is completely sealed inside being used as a meeting hall and there is no enclosed roof space with the first floor room having a vaulted ceiling. A ladder, high-powered torch, binoculars and endoscope were all available and were used where necessary to examine roof space and other small spaces potentially suitable for roosting bats to occupy.

Evidence of bats, considered during the search included:

- Droppings.
- Urine staining.
- Feeding remains (such as moth wings).
- Smudge marks and scratches around potential bat roost holes.
- Live roosting bats, bat skeletal remains or dead bats.

Conditions indicating an absence of bats can include the presence of spider webs, bird nesting material and wasp nest material blocking access holes or possible roosting gaps, or sheltering live butterflies/moths or cluster flies.

Bat roost potential was established using the following scale:

**1.** *Negligible potential/not a roost*: no suitable features

**2.** *Low potential*: one or more suitable features that could be used by individual bats opportunistically

**3.** *Moderate potential*: one or more suitable features that could be used by bats, but unlikely to support a roost of high conservation status

**4.** *High potential*: one or more suitable features that are suitable for use by larger numbers of bats on a regular basis

**5.** *Confirmed roost*: evidence of current/recent bat occupation

The survey also assessed the building for the presence of nesting birds and other protected species.

[1] Collins, J. (ed.) (2023). *Bat Surveys for Professional Ecologists: Good Practice Guidelines (4th edition*). The Bat Conservation Trust, London

# 3 Baseline Conditions

Photographs of the building are presented in Appendix A.

## 3.1 Building

### 3.1.1 Exterior

The building is two-storey, semi-detached and measures approximately 12m long by 6m wide. External walls are sealed stone. The building has timber single and double doors on the front, which are close-fitting / sealed. There are timber-framed windows on the front, rear and end wall, which are all intact and sealed. Timber lintels over windows are solid and tight-fitting leaving no gaps.

The pitched roof is clad in clay pan tiles and clay ridge capping, which are closely inter-locking with the leading ridge cap edges and end roof tiles all sealed with mortar leaving no gaps.

There are three glazed roof windows on the south-facing roof slope, and these are sealed with close-fitting lead flashing leaving no gaps. There is a chimney stack on the rear wall and a small ventilation pipe on the north-facing roof slope that are both sealed to the roof with close-fitting lead flashing leaving no gaps.

There is one missing roof tile adjacent to the northern-most roof window, which leaves a gap under the remaining roof tile above it. However, this gap was inspected and was classed as being sub-optimal for supporting bats as it was large/open and will be draughty.

Along the front roof line there is a narrow timber barge board supporting guttering. Along the rear roof line the northern half has a narrow plastic barge board supporting guttering, and the southern half has a slightly recessed timber roof plate supporting guttering. There are no gaps associated with the recessed roof plate, and only small/shallow (<2” deep) and open gaps under parts of the narrow barge boards. These were all inspected and found to have negligible potential to support roosting bats being too small / exposed as well as being in permanent shade on the north-facing elevation. Many of the gaps were also spanned by or contained spider webbing.

All external gaps were inspected for evidence of bats (see Section 3.3).

### 3.1.2 Interior

The interior of the building is completely sealed with all areas used by people for meetings or for associated facilities such as kitchen or toilets. The upper room has a vaulted ceiling and there is no enclosed roof / attic space. There are no opportunities for bats or other wildlife associated with the building interior.

### 3.1.3 Setting

The meeting hall is in suburban setting being within the cul-de-sac of Coles Garden, which connects to or is surrounded by other residential property. The land immediately in front of the building is hard-standing roads/parking, small areas of manicured amenity grass and ornamental planting. The rear of the property is the church cemetery but again this supports manicured amenity grass.

## 3.2 Bats

The building is generally totally unsuitable for supporting roosting bats as there are no optimal external gaps and no internal gaps/hidden voids (or access into the building interior) that bats could potentially exploit. The external gaps under the narrow barge boards are unsuitable for roosting bat being very small/shallow (<2" deep) and exposed/in shade but were nevertheless fully inspected for signs of bats. The single gap associated with the missing tile is sub-optimal for roosting bats being large/open but was visually inspected for signs of bats.

There is no evidence of bat roosting or other bat activity: no live bats and no dead bats; no accumulated or scattered droppings within gaps, at entrance to gaps or underneath gaps on walls, windows and window sills; no fur oil stains or scratch marks associated with any gap. Furthermore, many of the gaps were spanned by or filled with spider webbing showing that bats have not entered these spaces or used these features.

Given the physical construction and location of the building combined with a complete lack of evidence of bat use and evidence suggesting an absence of bats (i.e. spider webbing), the building is classed as Category 1 (not a roost) that has negligible potential to support roosting bats in the future.

No further bat survey is necessary for this proposed development. There is no specific bat mitigation required for this proposed development. However, a precautionary working method is defined to replace the missing roof tile – see Conclusion in Section 4.

## 3.3 Other protected species

There is no evidence of active or previous nesting birds on the building, and no birds can access the building interior.

There are no other protected animals inhabiting/using the building or immediate surrounding land.

No further ecological survey is necessary for this proposed development. There is no ecological mitigation required for this proposed development.

# 4 Conclusion

The meeting hall is not used by bats for roosting or as a place of rest and it is concluded that the building has non/negligible potential to support roosting bats in the future. It is concluded that the conversion of the building does not require a Natural England licence under the provisions of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017.

No specific mitigation for the protection of bats is necessary for this proposed development. However, for replacement of the missing roof tile the following precautionary action should be implemented to ensure complete protection of bats:

- Preferably replace the roof tile between September and April inclusive (i.e. not within May-August to avoid the main summer period for bats).
- If the roof tile is replaced during May to August then a precautionary Reasonable Avoidance Method Statement (RAMS) should be defined and issued to the contractor, which is likely to include a pre-inspection by a Natural England licenced bat handler to ensure no bats are present.

No other protected species were found to inhabit or use the building or immediate surrounding land. No mitigation for the protection of wildlife is necessary for this proposed development.

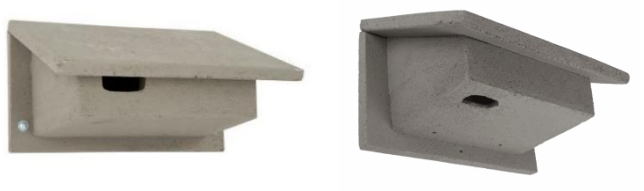
Given that this proposed development is conversion of an existing public use building that is very well sealed, there is very limited opportunity to integrate any wildlife habitat features. A recommended enhancement for nesting birds is presented in Section 5.

# 5 Ecological Enhancement

To provide new nesting opportunities for birds it is recommended that a pair of swift nesting boxes be installed on the building. The building is very well sealed and is unlikely to require significant external modification, as such integrated nest-boxes, i.e. boxes that fit into the fabric of an external wall, cannot be used. Therefore prefabricated nest boxes constructed from 'woodstone' to maximise durability should be used. The boxes should be installed near the apex of the northeast facing gable end elevation with boxes placed either side of the apex. This location provides sufficient height, shelter from both direct sunlight and prevailing wind.

The provision of swift boxes recognises the fact that swift population numbers are in decline and therefore the proposed design aims to provide an additional breeding site for this species. Swift nesting boxes are also readily used by a range of other small passerine birds such as house sparrow and are seen as a 'universal bird box' for new development.

A range of alternative bird boxes are available and can be viewed on-line (e.g. www.nhbs.com or www.wildcare.co.uk), with two different 'woodstone' swift nest boxes shown below. One of these or an equivalent should be used.



## Appendix A Photographs


Front, southeast-facing building elevation (left) with one missing roof tile to immediate right of roof window (right)



Side, northeast-facing gable end elevation and immediate surrounding land (left) and rear, northwest-facing elevation (right)



First floor interior (left) and mown grass to rear of building in Church cemetery (right)