



George Bemment Associates

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Mr Gary Chown,
Melberry House,
Moor Lane,
Poltimore,
East Devon, EX4 0AQ.

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Drawings courtesy of Barry Blaker

Dear Mr Chown,

Preliminary Ecological Assessment (Bat and Nesting Bird Survey)

Proposed works: Two-storey extension to northwest elevation of house

Site: Melberry House, Moor Lane, Poltimore, EX4 0AQ.

I am writing to confirm that the above property was visited and inspected by myself (NE licence no.CLS-2020-11834) on the morning of 19 October 2023. The property was inspected internally and assessed externally for evidence of bat use and/or potential suitability for bats, and for evidence of bird nesting activity.

Survey effort: There were no survey constraints. There is full survey access to the original roof void via a ceiling hatch off the landing from which there are good inspection views of the original SE gable wall face, the inner SW and NE gable wall faces at the northwest end of the house; and of the internal building fabric and conditions at the front (SW) facing dormers and NW-facing dormers.

Although not affected by the proposed extension, the small separate roof void at the southeast end of the house was also inspected via a separate ceiling hatch. There are good, unobstructed elevation views from all sides. A ladder, torch, digital camera binoculars and PPE were used. Weather conditions were satisfactory: 16°C, overcast and predominantly dry but with intermittent and brief showers.

I have seen the drawings as proposed and I understand that the application is for a full-height, two-storey extension at the northwest side of the house. The extension roof will be pitched with the ridge tying-in at the existing ridge height and will support four new dormers, two in each slope and matching the current dormer style. The chimney will be retained. The extension will involve the removal of a medium-sized ornamental cherry, assessed separately by a tree expert to be of low [arboricultural] significance.

1. Summary

1.1. Bats

- No evidence of bat use was found in association with the roof or eaves of the house.
 - No significant access or roosting features were identified. The roof tiles are flush-fitting and well bedded and the eaves are predominantly sealed.
 - Roosting potential is poor.
 - The proposed works are unlikely to result in offenses or to negatively impact on bats. The proposed works are unlikely to result in disturbance to bats (as defined) or in harm to bats, and the works will not result in a loss of roost.
 - No potential roost features were identified within the trunk or branches of the tree.
- **No further survey work is required and the works do not need a NE bat licence.**
- **However, the property is in a favourable location for bats of a variety of species, hence standard recommendations of Best Practice are appropriate as a precautionary measure.**

1.2. Nesting birds

- Evidence of bird nesting activity was confirmed.
 - Nest cups and old mud scars from house martins were identified on the southwest, northwest and northeast elevations, indicative of long-term nesting at the property with at least one active nest during 2023.
 - The remains of what appear to be house sparrow nests were also identified in two locations, including within one of the house martin cups.
- **The proposed construction works present the risk of harm to nesting birds and will result in the loss of at least one former nest location for house martins.**
- **Strict recommendations therefore apply regarding the need to take the potential presence of nesting birds at the eaves into consideration.**
- **All recommendations of Best Practice are defined within this report.**

2. Biodiversity enhancement

The Government's National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF, 2019) outlines the need to minimise impacts on biodiversity and to provide net gains where possible.

In this particular case the provision of two new nest cups is considered appropriate as mitigation for house martins and house sparrows. *In addition*, two bat and two extra bird boxes are recommended as biodiversity enhancement. The proposed extension provides an ideal opportunity for the provision of one these bat boxes to be a permanent, inbuilt feature. Site specific recommendations are given below.

Please note: The recommendations within this report for Best Practice, Mitigation and Biodiversity Enhancement are to be conditioned as part of your planning consent and a letter of compliance is to be issued to the LPA at completion of works by the ecologist.

3. Application property

The property is a detached house of cavity-wall block construction, believed to have been built in the late 1980s/early 1990s (Mr Chown, pers.com). Externally, the upper walls are rendered with brickwork below and to the northwest chimney. The southeast end of the building, which can be seen to have a disjunctive ridge line, and the rear flat-roofed kitchen extension are later extensions dating from 2021.

Fig.1. Application building (Google). Fig.2. Northwest elevation and southwest gable.



The original roof is of trussed and braced construction, i.e. with a ‘cluttered’ timber interior and no ridge beam, and is L-shaped with a central, primary ridge line between what was the southeast gable wall and the northwest hip junction and a secondary ridge line runs to the southwest gable. The roof is intersected by two pitched-roof dormers in the southwest slope and one in the northwest slope, near the large brick chimney. The roof covering is of small, flat concrete tiles and concrete ridge and hip tiles lined with traditional 1F bitumastic roof felt. The tiles can be seen to be flat and flush-fitting and the ridge hip lines predominantly solid and well-bedded. The smaller southeast roof is a cut roof with a single ridge line between the former gable wall and the new wall. The roof covering has matching small flat concrete tiles but these are lined with a modern grey breathable roof membrane. The eaves comprise sloping timber soffits to all elevations.

Fig.3. proposed extension



4. Survey findings

4.1. Bats

No evidence of bat use was found in association with the roof or eaves of the house. The roof tiles are flush-fitting and well bedded and the underside of the roof and the inner timber-panel faces of the dormers can be seen to be heavily cobwebbed. Evidence of mice and dead flies are conspicuous and a mummified rat was also noted. The sloping timber soffits, particularly along the northwest eaves appear to be sealed, and no discernible access features were identifiable at the chimney or dormer roof intersections on this elevation. No potential roost features were identified in association with the cherry tree.

4.2. Nesting birds

- Evidence of bird nesting activity was confirmed.
- Nest cups and old mud scars from house martins were identified on the southwest, northwest and northeast elevations, with at least one of these active during 2023.
- On the northwest elevation, two old mud nest scars are evident.
- The remains of two house sparrow nests were identified: One in a house martin nest cup at the apex of the rear gable, with loose grassy material and feathers indicating nesting in 2023, and other, older and historic grassy nest remains inside the roof intersection of the top southeast dormer cheek at the southeast side of the original part of the house.

Figs.4 & 5. Cobwebs at apex of inner southwest gable and mixed invertebrate and dead fly material below. Fig.6. Cobwebs inside northwest-facing dormer. Fig.7. House martin mud nest scar, northwest soffits next to chimney. Fig.8. Likely house sparrow nest material and feathers in former house martin nest, northeast gable apex. Fig.9. Historic nest material, probably house sparrows, southeast dormer of original part of house.



5. Assessment

5.1. Bats

There is no evidence of bat use and roosting potential is poor.

- The proposed works are unlikely to result in offenses or to negatively impact on bats. The proposed works are unlikely to result in disturbance to bats (as defined) or in harm to bats, and the works will not result in a loss of roost.
- No further survey effort is required and the works will not need a NE bat licence.
- However, the property is in a favourable location for bats of a variety of species hence standard recommendations of **Best Practice** are appropriate.

5.2. Nesting birds

Nesting activity is confirmed, including in the area of the proposed extension.

Legislation: Bird nesting activity is protected under the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 and it is an offense to harm nesting birds, i.e. to carry out actions that would result in the abandonment and/or death of eggs and fledglings. Nesting is typically taken to mean the period when nest-building commences to the time when fledglings have left the nest. House martins typically commence nesting in April but house sparrows may begin earlier in March. House martin broods may still be on the nest late in August/early September.

Conservation status: The house martin is a widespread but declining species and is on Red List of Species of Conservation Concern (RSPB). In Devon records indicate a decline from 78% of breeding tetrads in the late 1980s to 64% in 2016 (Devon Bird Report 2021) and the decline continues. Similarly, the house sparrow has suffered a significant population decline over recent decades and is also on the Red List. There are several reasons for declines including the problems of migration for house martins but a reduction in the availability of nest sites is a factor for both species. The provision of artificial nest cups and nest boxes is known to encourage and benefit local colonies.

- **The presence of nesting birds must therefore be taken into consideration in relation to the proposed development.**

6. Recommendations

Please note: The recommendations within this report for Best Practice, Mitigation and Biodiversity Enhancement are to be conditioned as part of your planning consent and a letter of compliance is to be issued to the LPA at completion of works by the ecologist.

6.1. Bats: Best Practice

Prior to the commencement of works the Project Manager or owner must ensure that:

- i) Contractors have been formally notified in writing of potential use by bats.
- ii) The workforce is made aware of the contact details for the ecologist (below) and for the details of biodiversity enhancement that these will be conditioned as part of the planning consent.

The owner is to PROVIDE A PAPER COPY OF THIS REPORT WHEN THE WORKFORCE FIRST ARRIVES ON SITE.

Standard guidelines if a bat / bats are found no site

- Works is to cease in the vicinity of the animal and advice is to be sought immediately from GB (01803 873905 or 07719 541186).
- If the bat is in a safe location it should be left undisturbed in situ while work carries on elsewhere, until it departs of its own accord.
- If the bat is exposed and at risk it may be carefully captured by gloved hand and placed in an alternative safe and undisturbed location, *to be advised*.
- **Under no circumstances may bats be handled without gloves.**
- If the bat is active and flies no attempt should be made to catch it and it should be permitted to depart/ exit the building of its own accord.

6.2. Nesting birds

6.2.1. Best Practice

The confirmed presence of breeding house martins and house sparrows under the eaves of the house must be taken into consideration for the proposed works, including the disturbance caused by scaffolding.

- Ideally, where possible, works should be carefully timed to avoid the nesting season, i.e. to commence at a time when there are no nesting birds, in this case, the period roughly between late August and March (depending on house sparrows).
- **Works may *only* start during the nesting season providing that the absence of nesting activity has been first formally confirmed in the area of the proposed extension by an independent ecologist.**
- Please note that it is legally acceptable to deter nest occupancy outside of the nesting period, assuming nest sites are safely accessible from scaffolding or ladders.
- In this particular case this would mean fixing robust plastic sheeting across the northwest soffits (*only* the northwest soffits) to prevent birds nesting.
- **Plastic mesh netting / chicken wire must NOT be used; these can trap and kill birds.**
- Nesting activity is not to be prevented along the northwest soffits of the house without the provision of the two artificial house martin nests described in 6.2.2, below.

6.2.2. Alternative nest provision (Mitigation) [See Summary of recommendations, p.8.](#)

Prior to the 2024 nesting season and any measures that may be taken to deter nesting under the northwest soffits no less than **2 x artificial nest cups** are to be affixed. I recommend the following locations:

- 1 x nest cup under the southeast face of the front wing, to right of window.
- 1 x nest cup under the northwest elevation, at the far north end which will be at distance from scaffolding.
- Ensure you purchase 1 x left-sided hole and 1 x right-sided hole, as shown below.

Fig.10. House martin nests with left-sided hole (left) and right-sided hole (right)



6.3. Biodiversity enhancement

[See Summary of recommendations, p.8.](#)

The provision of the two new nest cups for house martins, prior to the construction phase is for mitigation. *In addition*, two bat and two extra bird boxes are to be provided as biodiversity enhancement. This is to include the following.

■ 2 x Bat boxes

1 x Schwegler 1FE bat access + back panel

To be installed at the apex of new northwest gable of extension.

PLEASE NOTE:

- These boxes are designed to be built into the wall fabric with the access slot at the front flush with the wall surface. They are NOT designed to be affixed onto the outer wall face.
- The box is in TWO components: a front access panel and a rear cavity panel.

Schwegler 1FE access + back panels; examples with and without bat motif showing.



■ 1 x flat woodstone **Beaumaris Midi** (right).

To be affixed under the eaves of the southeast cheek of the SE dormer at the front of the new extension.

These boxes are heavy and need to be securely affixed by builders from scaffolding.



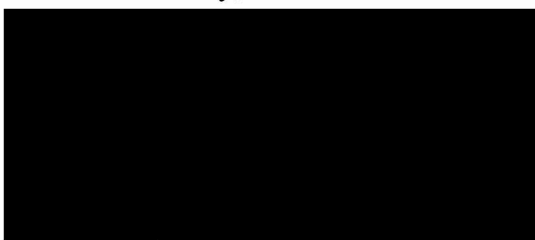
Bird boxes

In addition to the two house martin nest cups, no less than **2 x bird boxes with 32mm entrance holes** are to be provided, suitable for house sparrows. May be woodstone or timber.

Affix while scaffolding is still in place under the northeast eaves of the extension at the north corner, and at the NW gable verge, near the boundary hedge.

All the above features can be purchased from a range of on line site.

Yours sincerely,



Mrs George Bemment
George Bemment Associates

Recommended bat box locations *(drawing courtesy of Barry Blaker)* *Boxes not to scale.*

