

Preliminary Bat Roost
Assessment

Westmill Village Hall & Village Hall Cottage, Westmill

T & M Greg Trust

February 2024

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1. Summary

- 1.1.1** T & M Greg Trust propose a suite of thermal upgrades to the Grade II listed Westmill Village Hall and adjoined Village Hall Cottage located in Westmill, Buntingford. The works include removing the roof to facilitate the installation of Celotex insulation between rafters and installing insulated plasterboard on external walls.
- 1.1.2** A planning application for the proposed works was submitted to East Herts District Council in January 2024. However, East Herts District Council were unable to process the application, stating that Hertfordshire Ecology or a suitably qualified ecologist should be contacting to provide further advice.
- 1.1.3** T & M Greg Trust commissioned Babec Ecological Consultants in February 2024 to undertake a preliminary bat roost assessment of the property and provide a report detailing the findings. The objective was to look for bats or evidence of bats, assess the potential of the property to support roosting bats and provide appropriate recommendations to enable the proposed works to proceed in accordance with the relevant legislation and planning policy relating to bats.
- 1.1.4** The preliminary bat roost assessment was undertaken in February 2024 by an appropriately licensed and experienced ecologist following the methods set out in the Bat Conservation Trust's good practice guidelines¹. No significant limitations were noted.
- 1.1.5** During the desk study, the habitats surrounding the property were assessed to be of moderate quality for foraging and commuting bats. While no records of bat roosts were identified within the property, Herts Environmental Records Centre hold records of four Local Wildlife Sites that have been designated for bat roosts within 2km of the property, as well as records of roosting Daubenton's (*Myotis daubentonii*), Natterer's (*Myotis nattereri*), Leisler's (*Nyctalus leisleri*) and brown long-eared bat (*Plecotus auritus*).
- 1.1.6** No bats or evidence of bats was recorded during the inspection. However, the property incorporates multiple high quality access points and potential roosting features for bats, including gaps under roof tiles, gaps under lead flashing, gaps at the eaves and gaps around the beams at the apex of the western gable end. Overall, the property was assessed as having high potential to support day roosts, transitional roosts and maternity roosts, moderate potential to support hibernation roosts and negligible potential to support night roosts or feeding perches.
- 1.1.7** All species of bat and their roosts are strictly protected by law and planning policy, principally through the Conservation of Habitats Species Regulations (2017). Development affecting bats and their roosts is also subject to a licensing procedure administered by Natural England.
- 1.1.8** While no bat roosts were confirmed to be present within the property during the building inspection, multiple high quality potential roosting features would be directly affected by the proposed development. Three emergence surveys are therefore required to establish the presence or likely absence of roosting bats from the property prior to any works being undertaken, as detailed in Section 6. The emergence surveys should be undertaken from at least six survey locations using suitable nightvision aids. The surveys should be conducted in suitable weather conditions between May and August (with up to one visit also permissible during September) with at least three weeks (preferably more) between each survey visit. As the property has the potential to support a maternity roost, at least one of the emergence survey visits should be conducted in June or July.

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

- 1.1.9** While the property has moderate potential to support one or more bat hibernation roosts, it is not considered possible to survey the property for hibernating bats to a useful level, principally due to the inaccessibility of potential roosting features². As such, it is considered appropriate to employ precautionary avoidance measures for hibernating bats rather than undertake a bat hibernation survey of the property.

² BCT guidelines (2023) concede that the extent to which non-classic hibernation sites can be surveyed is limited, particularly those within/behind external features of a building.

2. Introduction

2.1 Development background

2.1.1 T & M Greg Trust propose to undertake a number of thermal upgrades to Westmill Village Hall and adjoined Village Hall Cottage. It is understood that the property comprises a 17th century Grade II listed timber framed barn, which was converted to a village hall and cottage c1900³.

2.1.2 The proposed works to the property include:

- The removal of the roof to facilitate the installation of Celotex insulation between rafters and/or new insulation above existing ceiling joists. Breathable roofing felt will then be fitted on rafters before the roofs are re-battened and tiled.
- Installing insulated plasterboard on external walls, to be finished with a skim coat.
- Insulating floors with Celotex insulation
- Installing secondary glazing on one of the windows in the main hall.

2.1.3 A planning application for the above works was submitted to East Herts District Council in January 2024. However, East Herts District Council were unable to process the application, stating that Hertfordshire Ecology or a suitably qualified ecologist should be contacting to provide further advice.

2.1.4 Westmill Village Hall and Village Hall Cottage are located in the Civil Parish of Westmill in the District of East Hertfordshire (What3Word location *///wiser.limits.discussed*), see Figure 1 in Appendix A.

2.2 The brief and objectives

2.2.1 T & M Greg Trust commissioned Babec Ecological Consultants on 12 February 2024 to undertake a preliminary bat roost assessment of the property and provide a report detailing the findings. The objective was to look for bats or evidence of bats, assess the potential of the property to support roosting bats and provide appropriate recommendations to enable the proposed works to proceed in accordance with the relevant legislation and planning policy relating to bats.

³ British Listed Buildings (2023). *Village Hall and Village Hall Cottage (East of Vine House)*. <https://britishlistedbuildings.co.uk/101173951-village-hall-and-village-hall-cottage-east-of-vine-house-westmill>. Accessed 20 February 2024.

3. Methods

3.1 Personnel

3.1.1 The building inspection for bats was undertaken by Jon Bannon BSc MSc MCIEEM. Jon holds a Natural England level 2 class licence for bats (registration number 2015-11543-CLS-CLS), is a full member of the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM) and has over 13 years' commercial experience in conducting building inspections for bats. Jon is also the named ecologist on several Natural England bat mitigation licenses.

3.2 Desk study

3.2.1 In the first instance, aerial photographs were examined to assist in understanding the local context of the property, particularly its connectivity with surrounding habitats.

3.2.2 The Multi-Agency Geographical Information for the Countryside (MAGIC)⁴ interactive map tool was then used to search for Special Areas of Conservation and Sites of Special Scientific Interest designated for bat species within 5km of the property and records of granted protected species licenses for bats within 2km of the property.

3.2.3 Records of bats within 2km of the property were also sought from Herts Environmental Records Centre.

3.3 Building inspection

3.3.1 An external and internal building inspection of the property was undertaken on 19 February 2024 to look for bats or evidence of bats, and to record the presence of potential roosting features and potential access points for bats. The property was then assessed and placed into a category (negligible, low, moderate, high) for its level of potential to support roosting bats. The inspection was undertaken in accordance with the Bat Conservation Trust's good practice guidelines (2023)⁵.

3.4 Limitations of survey methods

3.4.1 The building inspection for bats was undertaken in February, which is outside of the active period for bats but is still considered to be a suitable time of year to undertake this type of inspection. Weather conditions during the inspection were dry, mild (approx. 10°C), with a few clouds (2/8 Oktas) and a light breeze (Beaufort Scale 2).

3.4.2 There was a limited view of the exterior of a small section of roof during the external inspection, as shown on Figure 2 in Appendix A. Furthermore, there were two loft voids that could not be accessed during the internal inspection due to the absence of access hatches, as shown on Figure 3 in Appendix A. Whilst it is acknowledged that these were limitations to the inspection, as further surveys have been recommended the limitation is not considered to be significant.

3.4.3 It should be noted that whilst every effort has been made to provide a comprehensive preliminary bat roost assessment of the property, the results of the assessment are preliminary, and no investigation can ensure the complete characterisation and prediction of the natural environment. Buildings, and their suitability to support roosting bats is also subject to change over time and

⁴ MAGIC (2023). *Map and Geographic Information Centre Interactive Map Tool*. <http://magic.gov.uk>. 20 February 2024.

⁵ Collins (ed.) (2023). *Bat Surveys for Professional Ecologists: Good Practice Guidelines* (4th edn). The Bat Conservation Trust, London.

therefore the results of the inspection will become less reliable as time progresses. As a general rule, the results should not be relied upon after 18 months from the date of the inspection.

4. Results and interpretation

4.1 Desk study

4.1.1 The property is located centrally in the small village of Westmill in East Hertfordshire. Habitat surrounding the property comprises low density residential housing and gardens moving into pasture and arable interspersed with small blocks of broadleaved woodland. The River Rib is located approximately 400m to the east. Overall, the habitats surrounding the property are assessed to be of moderate quality for foraging and commuting bats.

4.1.2 No Special Areas of Conservation or Sites of Special Scientific Interest designated for bats were identified within 5km of the property during the desk study⁶. However, three granted Natural England protected species licences for bats were identified within 2km of the property as detailed in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Granted protected species licences for bats within 2km of the property.

Natural England licence reference	Bat species listed on licence	Activities listed on licence	Licensing period	Minimum distance to proposed development site (km)	Bearing
EPSM2013-5879	Common pipistrelle, soprano pipistrelle, brown long-eared bat, natterer's	Destruction of a resting place	03/06/2013 31/12/2014	0.3	SE
2014-2905-EPS-MIT	Common pipistrelle	Destruction of a resting place	01/09/2014 31/10/2014	1.6	N
EPSM2009-715	Common pipistrelle, Leislars, brown long-eared bat	Destruction of a breeding site and resting place	16/04/2009 30/04/2011	1.7	N

4.1.3 Herts Environmental Records Centre (HERC) hold no records of bat roosts from within the property. However, they do hold records of four Local Wildlife Sites that have been designated for a bat roost within the search area. These are located approximately 0.2km to the east, 1.5km to the south, 1.9km to the north and 1.5km to the North. Herts Environmental Records Centre also hold several records of bats within 2km of the property, including nearby roosts of Daubenton's (*Myotis daubentonii*), Natterer's (*Myotis nattereri*), Leisler's (*Nyctalus leisleri*) and brown long-eared bat (*Plecotus auritus*). A summary of all bat roost records within 2km of the property is set out in Table 2, below. Please note that only records from the last 10 years have been included.

Table 2. Species records within 2km of the property⁷.

Species	Summary of records
Serotine	HERC hold a single record of a serotine, comprising an audible record from a bat detector approximately 900m from the property.

⁶ MAGIC (2024). *Map and Geographic Information Centre Interactive Map Tool*. <http://magic.gov.uk>. Accessed 20 February 2024.

⁷ Herts Environmental Records Centre (2024). *Bat record search within 2km of Westmill Village Hall*. Records supplied on 21 February 2024.

Species	Summary of records
Daubenton's bat	HERC hold 24 records of Daubenton's bat within 2km of the property. All of which appear to be records of hibernating bats at a site approximately 1,400m to the south of the property.
Natterer's	HERC hold 19 records of Natterer's bat within 2km of the property. All of which appear to be records of hibernating bats at a site approximately 1,400m to the south of the property.
Leislars	HERC hold five records of Leislars bat within 2km of the property. Two of the records comprise audible records from bat detectors, and the other three records relate to a roost approximately 1,900m from the property.
Noctule	HERC hold two records of field observations of Noctule within 2km of the property, dating from 2014 and 2020.
Nathusius' pipistrelle	HERC hold three records of Nathusius' pipistrelle, all comprising audible bat detector records dating from 2014.
Common pipistrelle	HERC hold 18 records of common pipistrelle within 2km of the property. All records comprise field observations or records from bat detectors. The closest record is approximately 500m from the property.
Soprano pipistrelle	HERC hold three records of soprano pipistrelle within 2km of the property. All records comprise field observations or records from bat detectors dating from 2014. The closest record is approximately 1,900m from the property.
Long-eared / brown long-eared bat	HERC hold a single record of a long-eared bat within 2km of the property, comprising a field record from 2014. HERC also hold two records of hibernating brown long-eared bats within 2km of the property, dating from 2015 and 2016.

4.2 Building inspection

- 4.2.1** The property comprises a large timber frame barn which has been historically converted into a village hall (western section) and cottage (eastern section). The property has a complex pitched roof clad with clay tiles. There have been a variety of extensions on the rear elevation of the property, the roof of one such extension is clad with slate tiles. All external walls have been finished in roughcast.
- 4.2.2** No loft voids are present within the main (oldest) section of the property, with the void above the main hall being barrel vaulted. However, four small loft voids are present within the more modern extensions at the rear of the property. Loft void 1 is a small void (3.3m wide x 2.8m long x 1m high) above a modern extension clad with slate tiles. The floor is insulated with fiberglass insulation and no roof membrane is present. Loft void 2 is a slightly larger and more modern loft void (4.0m wide x 5.2m long x 1.3m high) above the cottage. The floor has been partially boarded and there is a modern sheeting material over rafters. Two further loft voids are inferred to be present (loft void 3 and loft void 4), although access could not be gained to these voids.
- 4.2.3** No bats or evidence of bats was recorded during the inspection. However, the property incorporates multiple high quality access points and potential roosting features for bats, including gaps under roof tiles, gaps under lead flashing, gaps at the eaves and gaps around the beams at the apex of the western gable end. No access points into loft void 1 or loft void 2 were noted, and as such these voids are likely to be unsuitable for roosting bats.

- 4.2.4** Overall, the property was assessed as having high potential to support day roosts, transitional roosts and maternity roosts, moderate potential to support hibernation roosts and negligible potential to support night roosts or feeding perches.
- 4.2.5** The results of the external and internal building inspection are illustrated in Figure 2 and Figure 3 in Appendix A, respectively. Photographs are provided in Figure 4 in Appendix A.

5. Assessment

5.1.1 All species of bat and their roosts are strictly protected by the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended) and the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). Taken together, these make it an offence to:

- Deliberately capture, injure, kill or disturb a bat.
- Deliberately disturb a bat in such a way as to be likely to:
 - Impair its ability to survive, to breed or reproduce, or to rear or nurture its young.
 - Impair its ability to hibernate or migrate.
 - Affect significantly the local distribution or abundance of the spaces to which they belong.
- Damage or destroy a breeding site or resting place of a bat.
- Disturb a roosting bat or obstruct access to a roost or place of shelter.

5.1.2 Development affecting bats and their roosts is also subject to a licensing procedure administered by Natural England.

5.1.3 In addition to the above legislation, the government circular on biodiversity⁸ states that “*the presence of a protected species is a material consideration when a planning authority is considering a development proposal that, if carried out, would be likely to result in harm to the species or its habitat*”.

5.1.4 While no bat roosts were confirmed to be present during the building inspection, multiple high quality potential roosting features would be directly affected by the proposed works. A suite of bat emergence surveys is therefore required to establish the presence or likely absence of roosting bats from these features in accordance with the Bat Conservation Trust’s good practice guidelines (2023)⁹ prior to any works being undertaken, as detailed in Section 6.

5.1.5 The property has moderate potential to support one or more bat hibernation roosts, principally under roof tiles, in gaps in the eaves and gaps around the beams at the apex of the western gable end. However, it is not considered possible survey these features for hibernating bats to a useful level, principally due to their inaccessibility¹⁰. Furthermore, the deployment of static detectors outside of the property would be likely to record bats commuting past on warmer nights rather than confirm winter use of the property. As such, it is considered appropriate to employ precautionary avoidance measures for hibernating bats rather than undertake a bat hibernation survey of the property.

⁸ Office of the Duty Prime Minister (2005). *Government circular: Biodiversity and geological conservation – statutory obligations and their impact upon the planning system*.

⁹ Collins (ed.) (2023). *Bat Surveys for Professional Ecologists: Good Practice Guidelines* (4th edn). The Bat Conservation Trust, London.

¹⁰ BCT guidelines (2023) concede that the extent to which non-classic hibernation sites can be surveyed is limited, particularly those within/behind external features of a building.

6. Recommendations

- 6.1.1** In accordance with the Bat Conservation Trust's good practice guidelines¹¹, three emergence surveys should be undertaken to determine the presence or likely absence of roosting bats from the property. The surveys should be undertaken from at least six survey locations using suitable nightvision aids. The surveys should be conducted in suitable weather conditions between May and August (with up to one visit also permissible during September) with at least three weeks (preferably more) between each survey visit. As the property has the potential to support a maternity roost, at least one of the emergence survey visits should be conducted in June or July.

¹¹ Collins (ed.) (2023). *Bat Surveys for Professional Ecologists: Good Practice Guidelines* (4th edn). The Bat Conservation Trust, London.

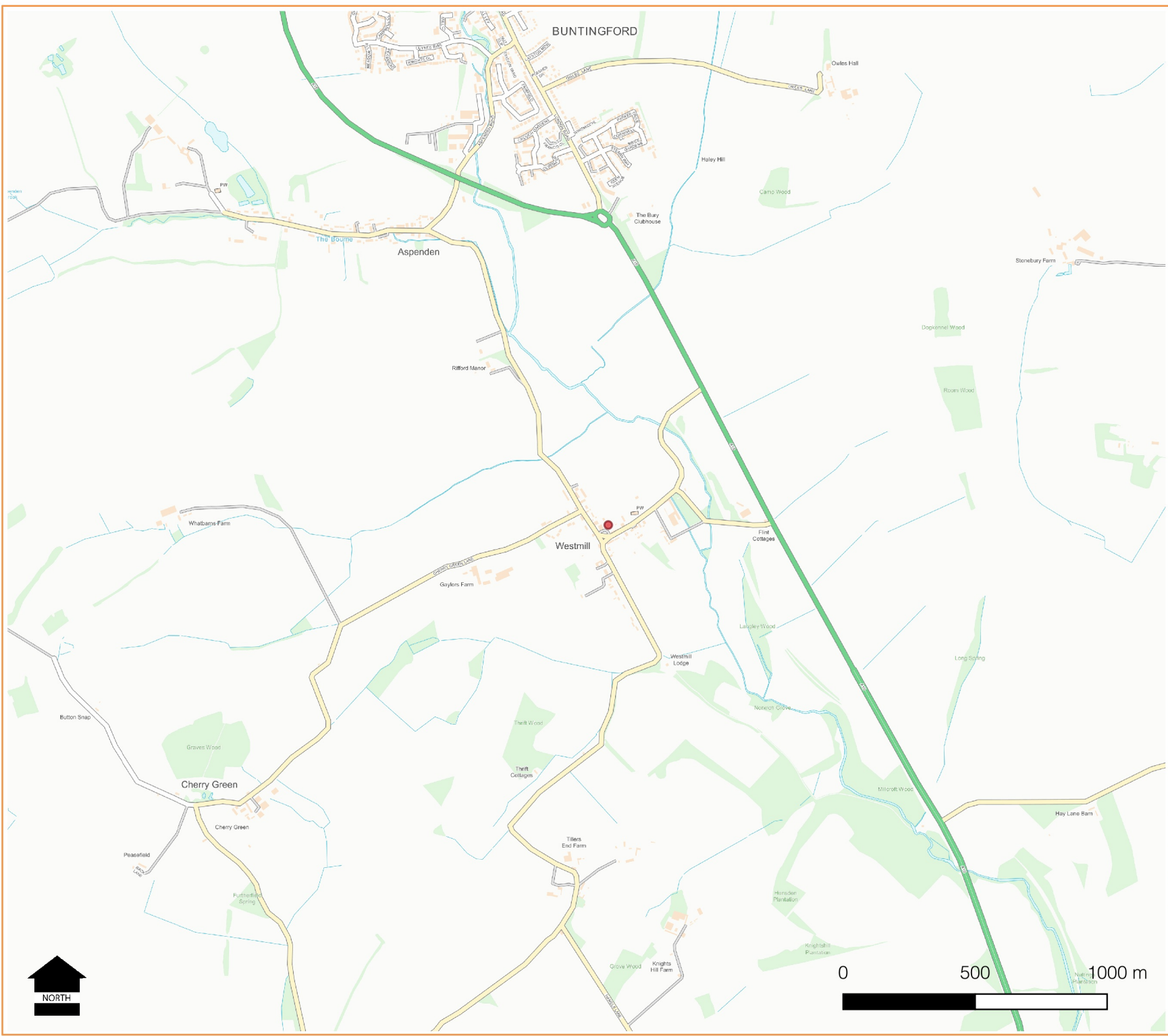


Figure 1.
Location of the property

Legend

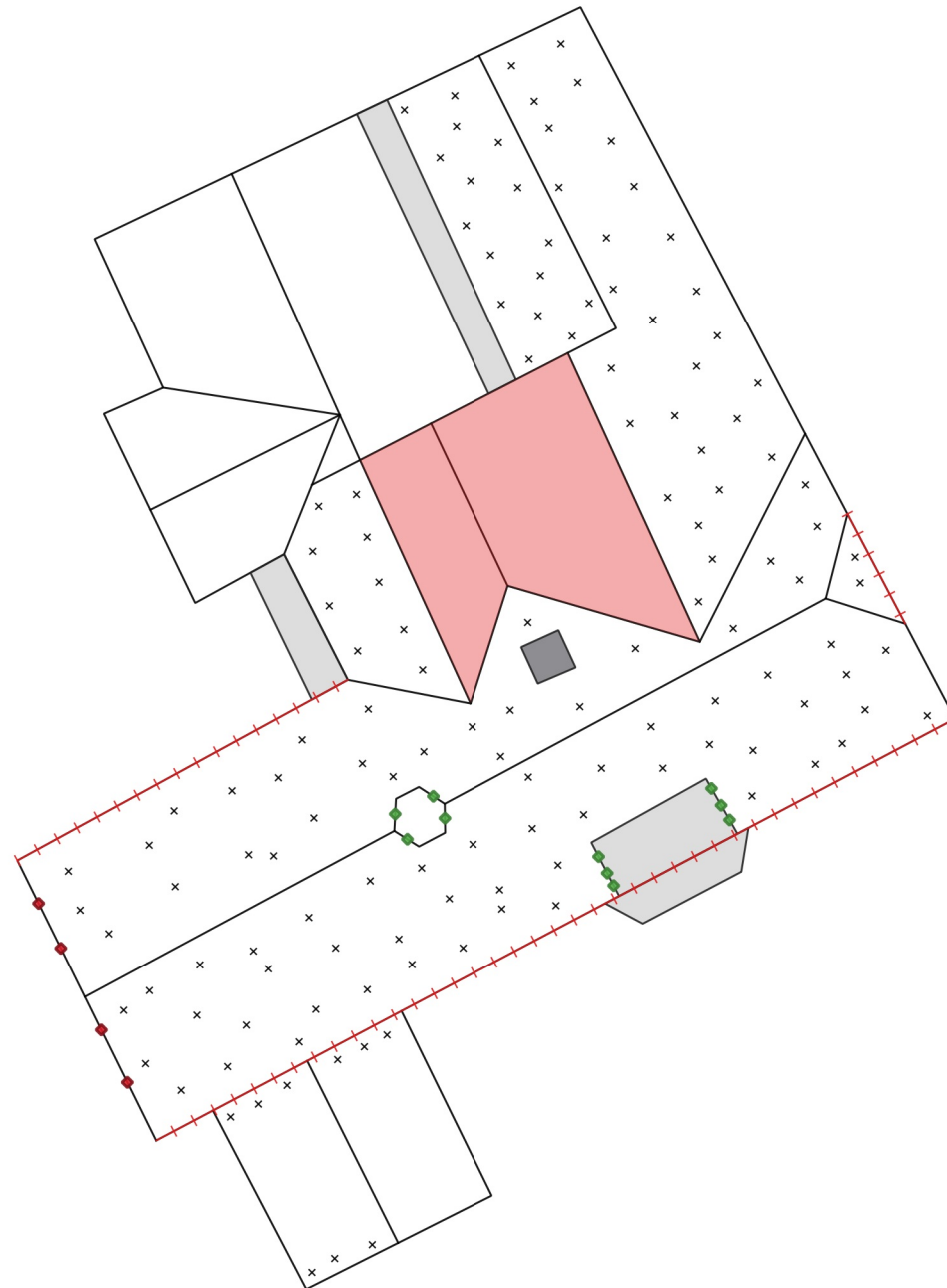
- Location of the property

Date of survey	N/A	
Date of issue	TBC	
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Status	FINAL	



Figure 2.

Results of the external building inspection



Legend

Results of the external inspection

- ◆ Gaps around beams
- ◆ Gaps under lead flashing
- No view of roof
- - - Gaps at eaves
- x Gaps under roof tiles

Building details

- Chimney
- Flat roof

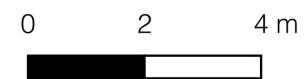
Date of survey 19 February 2024

Date of issue TBC

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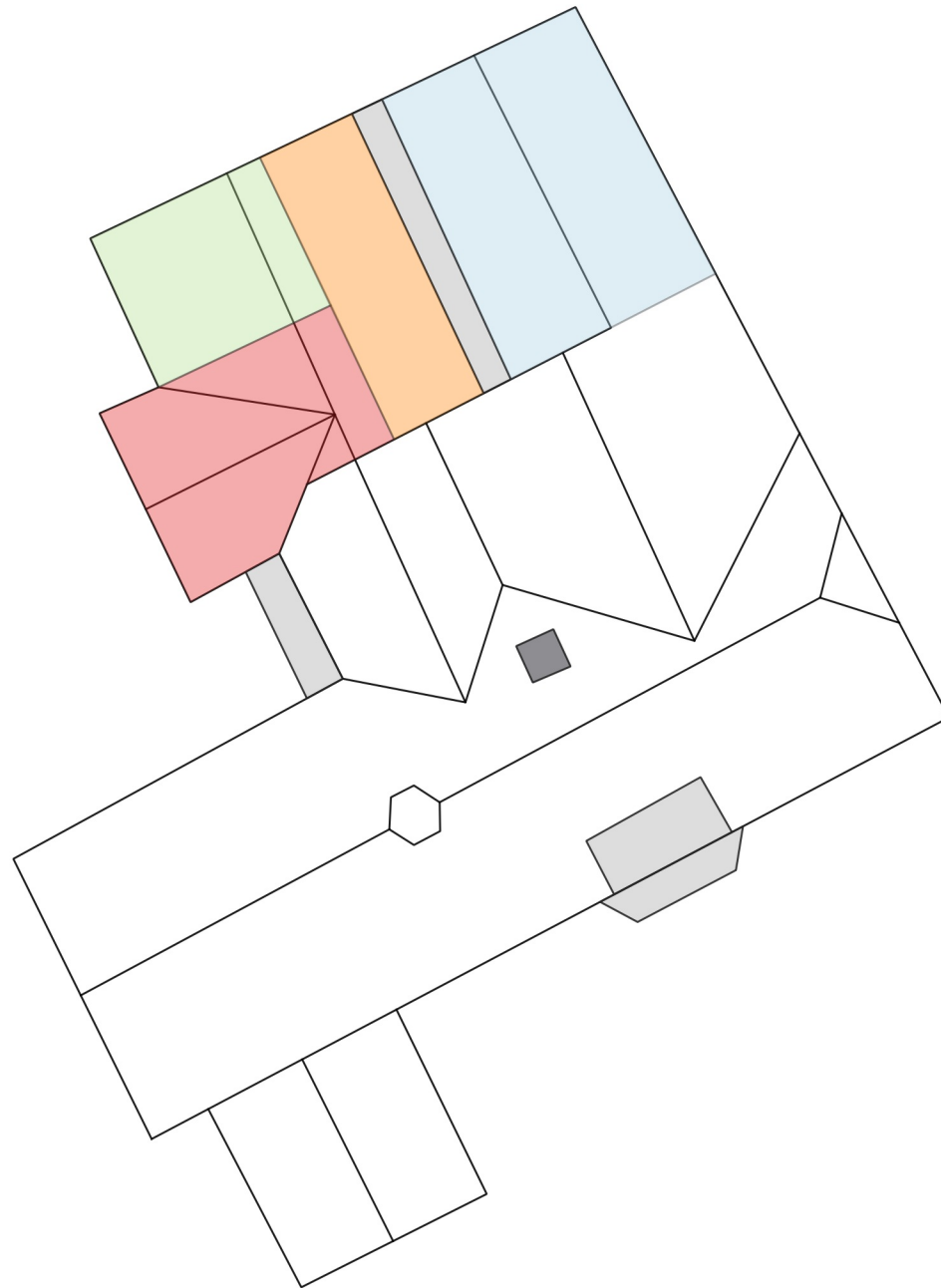
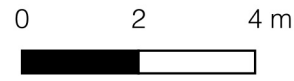


Figure 3.
Results of the internal building inspection

- Legend**
- Results of the internal inspection**
- Roof void 1
 - Roof void 2
 - No access to loft void 3
 - No access to roof void 4
- Building details**
- Chimney
 - Flat roof
 - Building outline

Date of survey	19 February 2024	
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Status	FINAL	





Photograph 1: Front and side elevations of the property.



Photograph 2: Front and side elevations of the property.



Photograph 3: Rear elevation of the property.



Photograph 4: Gaps under roof tiles.



Photograph 5: Roof void 1.



Photograph 6: Roof void 2.

Figure 4: Photographs

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