Technical Note

URBAN EDGE ENVIRONMENTAL CONSULTING

Project	Grandpont House, Abingdon Road, Oxford	**Date**	March 2024
Note	Ecological Walkover Survey	**Ref**	UE0490
Author	Tim Lees BA (Hons) MSc MCIEEM		
Status	First issue to client		

1 Introduction

1.1 Urban Edge Environmental Consulting Ltd (UEEC) was commissioned to undertake an Ecological Walkover Survey (EWS) at Grandpont House, Abingdon Road, Oxford (Grid Reference: SP 51496 05433). The purpose of the survey was to reassess the extent, character and condition of habitats present within the survey area to establish any change from the 2022 Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA) and protected species surveys. The survey area's potential to support protected species, including buildings and trees for roosting bats, was also updated with reference to any implications arising from the Proposed Development.

1.2 The survey was carried out on 26 February 2024 by Tim Lees BA (Hons) MSc MCIEEM, an Associate Director with eleven years' professional consultancy experience. Weather conditions were mild (9°C), with a light breeze (Beaufort scale 2), 10-30% cloud cover and no precipitation.

Site Description

1.3 The Application Site boundary is expected to be the same as the survey area boundary.

1.4 The survey area lies to the south of the centre of Oxford, and comprises c.0.73ha of partly developed land, including a mosaic of woodland, scattered trees and scrub, introduced shrub, tall ruderal, amenity grassland, running water, buildings and bare ground.

1.5 The survey area is bounded to the north by a branch of the River Thames and the site of an educational establishment, to the east by the River Thames, to the south by a Holy Rood church and playing fields, and to the west by the A4144 Abingdon Road. The extent of the survey area is outlined in red on Figure 1.

Proposed Development

1.6 Planning consent is being sought for the internal and external refurbishment of Grandpont House to include:

1) Internal and external refurbishment to the main Grade II* listed building including partial demolition, reinstatement and restoration of original features, rendering and framing; retrofit to building fabric and installation of new ventilation and heating;

2) Internal and external refurbishment of existing stable block to create new accommodation, including alterations to roof, formation of mezzanine and new fenestration; and

3) Erection of extensions to the listed building to create new accommodation and chapel; single story glazed link entrance; boat house and garden room.

1.7 A proposed site plan for the development is shown at Figure 2.

Project Background

1.8 A range of recommendations for avoiding and mitigating ecological impacts were made in the 2022 PEA (Appendix IV) and Protected Species Surveys report (Appendix V), together with recommendations for ecological enhancement. The findings from the 2022 assessments have contributed to an updated evaluation of constraints within section 4 of this note, and the recommendations at section 5.

2 Methodology

2.1 During the 2024 walkover survey, habitats and ecological features on site were noted in accordance with the methodology for Phase 1 habitat survey[1]. This basic methodology was extended to provide more detail in relation to habitats with potential to support rare or protected fauna, as described by the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management's *Guidelines for Preliminary Ecological Appraisal*[2]. The assessment of habitat suitability for protected, rare or priority species is based on current good practice guidance such as that presented in the *Herpetofauna Workers' Manual*[3] and *Bat Surveys for Professional Ecologists: Good Practice Guidelines*[4].

2.2 The ecological walkover survey included a Preliminary Roost Assessment (PRA) and Ground Level Tree Assessment (GLTA), which was carried out in accordance with the latest *Good Practice Guidelines* from the Bat Conservation Trust as well as Natural England Standing Advice on bats. Structures and trees within the survey area were subject to an external and internal inspection, where possible. All features observable from ground level which were potentially suitable for bats were noted and the overall suitability of the structure or tree for roosting bats was classified with reference to Table 1 and Table 2.

[1] Joint Nature Conservation Committee (2010): *Handbook for Phase 1 Habitat Survey. A Technique for Environmental Audit*, Joint Nature Conservation Committee, Peterborough.

[2] CIEEM (2017): *Guidelines for Preliminary Ecological Appraisal. 2nd Edition*, CIEEM, Winchester.

[3] Gent, A.H. and Gibson, S.D., eds. (2003): *Herpetofauna Workers' Manual*. Joint Nature Conservation Committee, Peterborough.

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

Grandpont House, Abingdon Road, Oxford

Site boundary

Figure 1: Survey area

0 70 140 N

Meters

Scale: 1:2,500 **Created by:** MT

Date: Feb 2022 **Reviewed by:** NP

Drawing number:

UE0490ECO-Grandpont_SiteMap_220209

URBAN EDGE ENVIRONMENTAL CONSULTING
Tel: 01273 686 766
Email: hello@ueec.co.uk
Web: www.ueec.co.uk

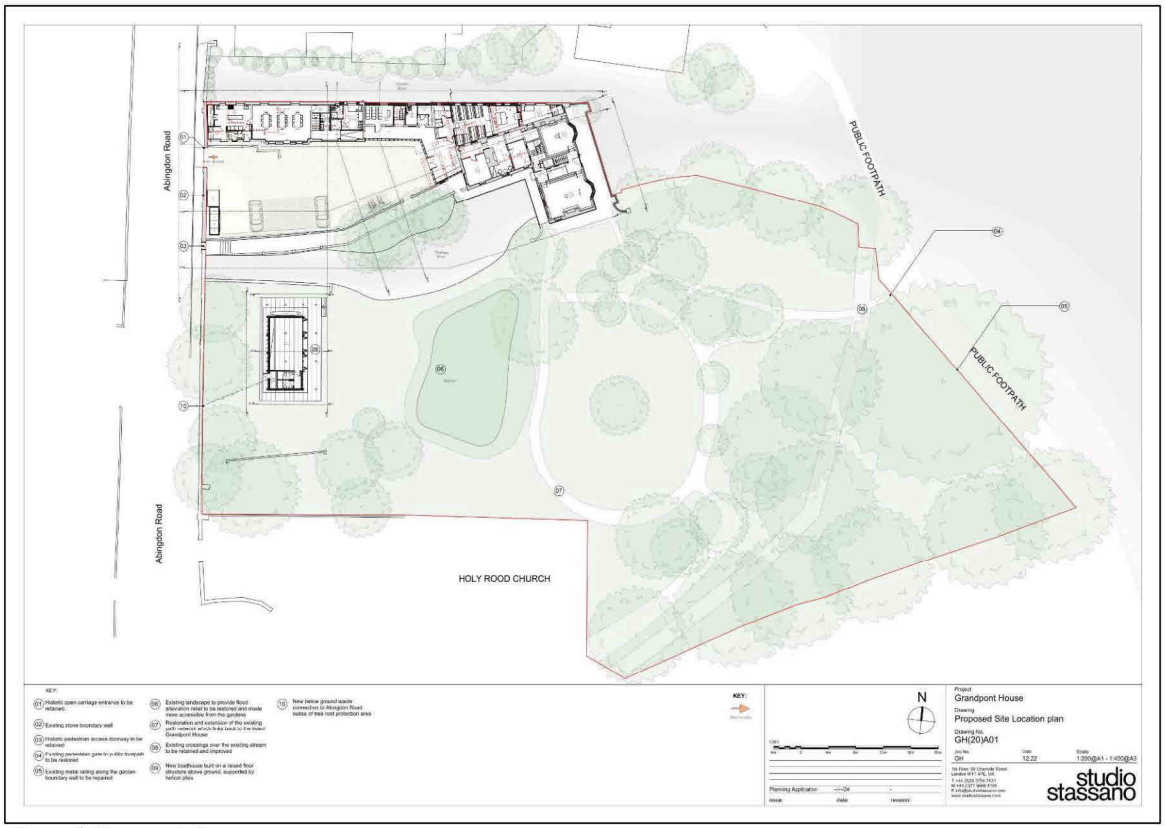


Figure 2: Proposed plan

Table 1: Potential suitability of structures for roosting bats (after Collins, J (ed.), 2023)

Suitability	Roosting habitats
None	No habitat features on site likely to be used by any roosting bats at any time of year (i.e. a complete absence of crevices / suitable shelter at all ground / underground levels).
Negligible	No obvious habitat features on site likely to be used by roosting bats; however, a small element of uncertainty remains as bats can use small and apparently unsuitable features on occasion.
Low	A structure with one or more potential roost sites that could be used by individual bats opportunistically at any time of year. However, these potential roost sites do not provide enough space, shelter, protection, appropriate conditions and/or suitable surrounding habitat to be used on a regular basis or by larger numbers of bats (i.e. unlikely to be suitable for maternity and not a classic cool / stable hibernation site, but could be used by individual hibernating bats).
Moderate	A structure with one or more potential roost sites that could be used by bats due to their size, shelter, protection, conditions and surrounding habitat but unlikely to support a roost of high conservation status (with respect to roost type only, such as maternity or hibernation – the categorisation described in this table is made irrespective of species conservation status, which is established after presence is confirmed).
High	A structure with one or more potential roost sites that are obviously suitable for use by larger numbers of bats on a more regular basis and potentially for longer periods of time due to their size, shelter, protection, conditions and surrounding habitat. These structures have the potential to support high conservation status roosts, e.g. maternity or classic cool / stable hibernation site.
Confirmed roost	Bats or unequivocal evidence of bats found, i.e. bat droppings. Suitability categories are irrespective of the presence of a roost. Accordingly, if a roost is confirmed then the categorisation still stands and 'confirmed roost' should be added.

Table 2: Potential suitability of trees for roosting bats (after Collins, J (ed.), 2023)

Suitability	Roosting habitats
None	No habitat features on site likely to be used by any roosting bats at any time of year (i.e. a complete absence of crevices / suitable shelter at all ground / underground levels).
Negligible	No obvious habitat features on site likely to be used by roosting bats; however, a small element of uncertainty remains as bats can use small and apparently unsuitable features on occasion.
PRF-I	PRF is only suitable for individual bats or very small numbers of bats either due to size or lack of suitable surrounding habitats.
PRF-M	PRF is suitable for multiple bats and may therefore be used by a maternity colony.

DNA Analysis

2.3 The inspections included a search for bat droppings which, if found, would be collected in accordance with BCT protocols[5] to be sent for DNA analysis by the ecological forensics team within the School of Life Sciences at the University of Warwick.

Limitations

2.4 There were few difficulties in gaining access to the majority of the survey area to assess the habitats and protected species suitability. The exception was the south-eastern corner, which was heavily flooded at the time of survey. However, observations of the area from adjacent land provided sufficient viewpoints to confirm the consistency of conditions in this area.

2.5 Additionally, it was not possible to internally inspect B1, B2, B3, B4 and the basement of B5 in relation to their suitability for roosting bats. However, the external inspection of the buildings and roof void within B5, provided sufficient information to assess the suitability provided for roosting bats. The basement of B5 is not due to be affected by proposals and thus the exclusion of this area was not considered a significant limitation.

3 Results

Habitats

3.1 The following Phase 1 habitats were identified within or adjacent to the survey area and are shown on the Phase 1 Habitat map at Appendix I:

- Broadleaved semi-natural woodland;
- Broadleaved plantation woodland;
- Scattered trees;
- Scattered scrub;
- Introduced shrub;
- Tall ruderal;
- Amenity grassland;
- Wet and dry ditch;
- Running water;
- Buildings; and
- Bare ground.

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

3.2 The habitats recorded within survey area were broadly consistent with those identified in 2022. Notwithstanding periods of heavy rainfall, which had led to flooding of the survey area, only minor variations were present in structure or composition of the habitats recorded. Due to the high water levels, the area of wet woodland was more distinct from the surrounding dry habitats, caused by floodwater from the River Thames. The ditch was wet along its entire length and floodwater had spread to the area of plantation east of the ditch. Updated photos for each of these habitats are provided below. Target Notes recorded in 2022 were consistent during the 2024 survey and are listed at Appendix II.

Area of wet woodland with standing water – view looking north

Dry areas of woodland located west of the wet woodland – view looking north-west

Plantation woodland in the south-eastern extent of the survey area – view looking south-west

Flooded plantation woodland in the south-eastern corner of the survey area – view looking west

Scattered trees (background) in eastern extent of the survey area – view looking south

Scattered trees and amenity grassland at centre of the survey area – view looking north-west

Scattered scrub and dense ivy *Hedera helix* in the west of the survey area – view looking south-west

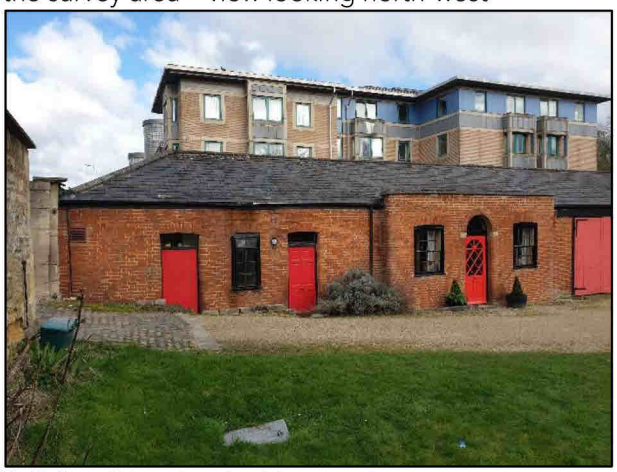
Butterfly bush *Buddleia davidii* by river wall (tall ruderal) – view looking west

Lawn area (amenity grassland) located in the north-east of the survey area – view looking north-east

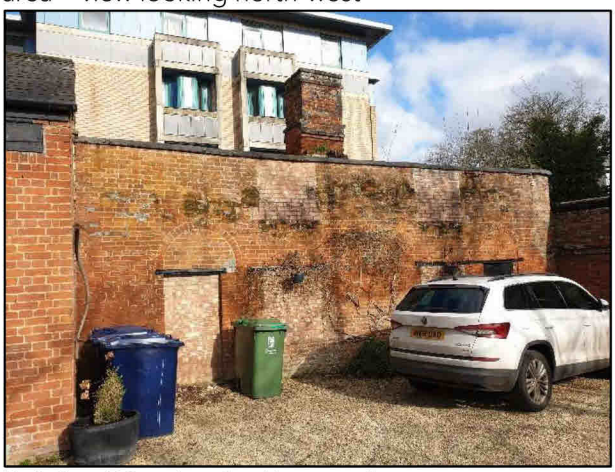
Flooded ditch in the south-east of the survey area – view looking south-west

Overflowing banks of River Thames in the west of the survey area – view looking north-west

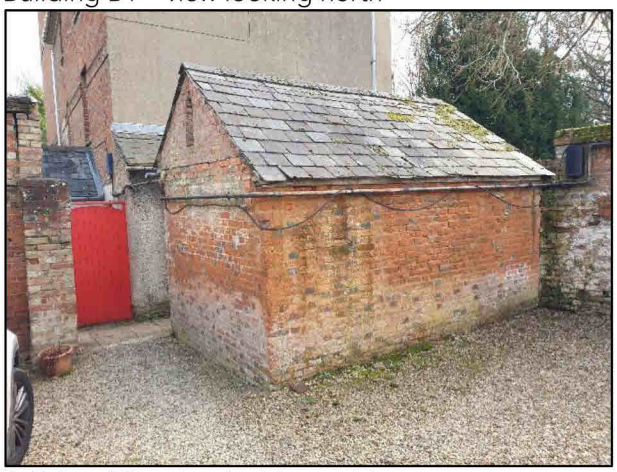
Branch of River Thames in the east of the survey area – view looking north-west



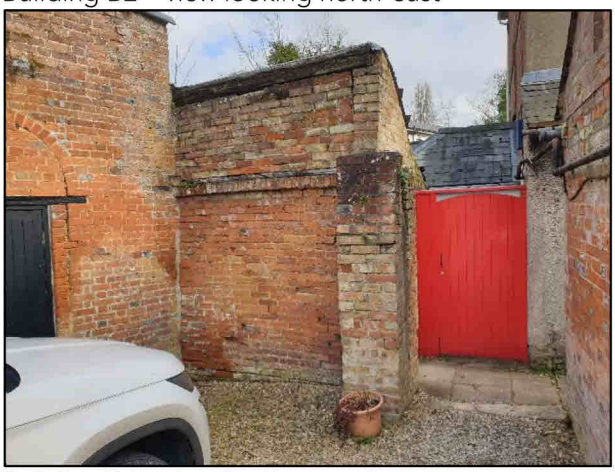
Building B1 – view looking north



Building B2 – view looking north-east



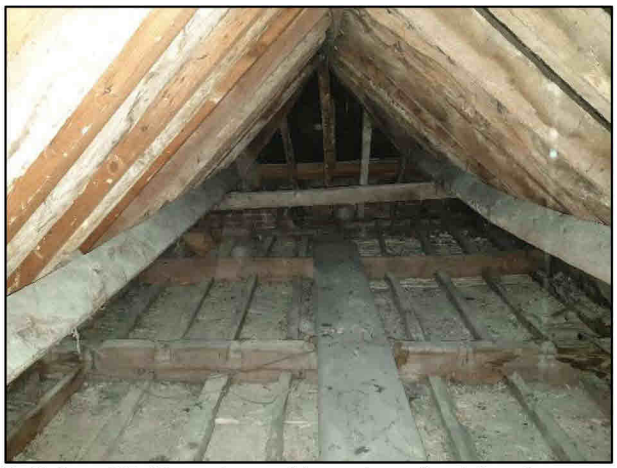
Building B3 – view looking south-east



Building B4 – view looking north-east

Building B5 (Grandpont House) – view looking north-west

Building B5 (Grandpont House) roof void – view looking north



Building B5 (Grandpont House) roof void – view looking south

Car parking area (bare ground) in the north-west of the survey area – view looking west

Preliminary Roost Assessment

Buildings

3.3 B1-B4 were assessed as providing low suitability for roosting bats in 2022 due to the presence of missing / slipped tiles; gaps under barge boards; missing and cracked / damaged brickwork; gaps around timber lintels; and gaps within the roof structures. The condition of B1-B4 was considered to be consistent with that recorded in 2022 and they retained low bat roosting suitability.

3.4 B5 was assessed as providing high suitability for roosting bats in 2022 due to the presence of holes and cracks in brick walls; cracks / gaps in render on chimney stack; cracks between sections of the building; missing / slipped roof tiles and gaps beneath ridge tiles; gaps beneath lead flashing; gaps under lifted lead flashing; and gaps beneath windows and at top of walls / eaves. The condition of B5 was considered to be consistent with that recorded in 2022 and it retained high bat roosting suitability. See updated photos for all buildings above.

DNA Analysis

3.5 A single suspected mammal dropping was collected in a sampling pot from the north-eastern area of the roof void in B5, and sent for DNA analysis. Bat genotyping results were received on 26 March 2024 and are summarised below. The results letter is reproduced at Appendix III.

- Sample labelled UE0490/B5 Grandpont House, 26.02.24: *Sorex minutus* (pygmy shrew)

3.6 Accordingly, the results of the DNA analysis provided no additional evidence of roosting suitability over and above observations of the PRA.

Trees

3.7 Eleven trees were identified as providing suitability for roosting bats in 2022 (T1-T11; Appendix IV). The majority of trees were consistent with records from 2022, but T4 was considered to have altered in its classification. The release of the *Bat Surveys for Professional Ecologists: Good Practice Guidelines 4th Edition*[6] in 2023 revised the structure of GLTA, which has resulted in a new classification system. Table 3 provides a conversion of the 2022 results in line with the updated methodology.

Table 3: Preliminary Roost Assessment of trees within the survey area

Tree No.	2022 category	2024 Category
T1	Low	PRF-I
T2	Low	PRF-I
T3	Low	PRF-I
T4	Low	PRF-M
T5	Moderate	PRF-M
T6	Low	PRF-I
T7	Low	PRF-I
T8	Low	PRF-I
T9	Moderate	PRF-M
T10	Low	PRF-I
T11	Low	PRF-I

4 Evaluation

4.1 Table 4 presents a summary of ecological constraints and opportunities identified within the survey area, which take into account surveys carried out in 2022.

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

Table 4: Summary of ecological constraints and opportunities

Feature	Detail
Constraints:	
Designated sites	None of the designated wildlife sites within the desk-study search zone are likely to be affected by the Proposed Development, considering the size and nature of the proposal and its distance from the designated sites.
Priority habitats	The woodland Priority Habitat will be retained as part of the Proposed Development, although there may be minor impacts on the area of Wet Woodland arising from the reinstatement of the historic pond (TN1). However, works will be small-scale to retain the wet woodland feel of the area, limited to non-native sycamore *Acer pseudoplatanus* removal, light pruning and native marginal species planting. These impacts are not expected to be significant.
Other habitats	Permanent losses of up to c.650m^2 of dense ivy, tall ruderal and scattered scrub, depending on the extent and layout of development proposals. These areas are of relatively low ecological value but provide habitats suitable for a number of protected species (e.g. nesting birds, [redacted] and reptiles).
[redacted]	
Bats (roosting)	Buildings B1, B2, B3 and B4 were assessed as having low suitability and building B5 as having high suitability to support roosting bats. Other structures and ivy clad walls may also have some potential for roosting bats. No roosting bats were recorded using any of the buildings or culvert during the surveys (Appendix V). High levels of foraging activity were recorded over the River Thames tributary which passes through the survey area. The trees at T1-T11 contain features suitable for roosting bats (e.g. woodpecker holes, lifted bark, dense ivy clad). It is currently anticipated that these trees will be retained and protected as part of the proposed development.
Reptiles	Permanent losses of up to c.500m2 of suitable habitats (dense ivy, tall ruderal, scattered scrub and brash / rubble piles). Risk of killing/injury to reptiles within this habitat, if present during the works, which would be unlawful under the WCA.
Opportunities:	
Priority habitats	The woodland priority habitats within the survey area are of high intrinsic value and can provide a focus for ecological enhancement measures.
Habitat creation / enhancement	Habitat creation and enhancement opportunities include woodland management, pond creation / restoration, habitat piles and bird / bat boxes.