

St James the Less Church

Bat Risk Assessment

May 2011

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.01 A. C. S. Consulting is instructed by Bernard Taylor Partnership, Stockport on behalf of The St James the Less Trustees, to advise on bats in respect of three trees and the main building at St James the Less Church, New Mills, High Peak.

1.02 The Phase 1 assessment was of the outside of the main building and the outhouse block and three trees (ash, beech and lime) within the development site. The survey also included a bat activity survey.

1.03 The site was visited 9th May 2011. The site was visited from 19.30 hrs to 21.45 hrs. The weather was warm with temperatures ranging from 20°C at the start to a low of 16°C. The wind was light from the south east with cloud cover approximately 30 – 50%. Very light rain was noted for a few minutes during the survey. Throughout the day, there had been heavy and thundery showers in the vicinity with winds gusting to force 5-6.

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2.0 BACKGROUND

The Site

2.01 The site is located close to New Mills town centre. It comprises an ecclesiastical property, single storey, of stone walls with a slate roof. Part of the property is used as a domestic dwelling. The property is set in small grounds, surrounded to the north, south and west by residential property. To the north and west are grounds, part of which are used as a vegetable garden. The north and western boundaries are formed by a small access lane that leads to residential property. Along this lane are a number of mature trees. The trees were surveyed in detail by ourselves in 2009. The site benefits from an extant permission to demolish a boundary wall of stone and re-roof the main church property. As part of the application, three trees are to be removed. The trees are located on the northern boundary of the site. The site is under development with the boundary wall and some general shrubbery being removed.

Statutory Protection

2.02 All bat species in Britain are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 through inclusion in Schedule 5. They are also protected under the Conservation (Natural Habitats &c.) Regulations 1994 (which were issued under the European Communities Act 1972), through inclusion in Schedule 2. On 1st April 2010, these Regulations, together with subsequent amendments, were consolidated into the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010.

3.0 SURVEY/FINDINGS

Trees

3.01 Three trees – an ash, beech and lime were surveyed.

3.02 The object of this survey was to establish, where possible, whether any of the trees are used by bats and, if necessary, recommend further work in order to advise on mitigation measures. Trees have been classified into the three groups: Low Potential, Medium Potential/Unknown and High Potential.

***Low Potential:** Trees that have limited features suitable for roosting. No physical evidence of bats using the trees. This includes immature trees or trees with smooth bark or isolated specimens.*

***Medium Potential/Unknown:** Trees that have a number of features suitable for bats. Limited or ambiguous features observed giving rise to roosting potential.*

***High Potential:** Significant specimens containing many features suitable for bat roosting or direct physical evidence of use by bats*

All the trees were assessed as part of the survey. A high powered torch, extendable ladder, binoculars and an endoscope were available during the inspection. Many features that give rise to concerns about tree safety are suitable for bats – cavities, cracks and splits in stems and branches, loose bark with some attachment, very dense epicormic growth and ivy to some degree. The presence or past usage of a crevice by bats can be detected by the presence of droppings on bark adjacent to the hole and sometimes by a dark urine stain on the trunk of the tree below the roost entrance

3.03 Of the three trees to be removed only one – the ash, was considered suitable to have any potential as a roost. The lime and beech had no features that were considered suitable for roosting bats. The ash is a former pollard that has evidence of a significant infestation of canker with lesions on the stem. Currently, it has a stem of approximately 5 metres in height with no epicormic or other re-growth typical of pollarded trees. This appeared to have been removed and was stacked at the base. The amount of material suggests that the re-growth was not particularly dense and therefore had no potential for roosts.

3.04 At the pollard head was a cavity. However, the cavity is unsuitable as it faces upwards and will fill with rainwater and is too open and subject to other weather factors.

Building

3.05 The building was assessed. It comprises the main church property with a small attached low rise outbuilding. The outside of the main building was assessed only. Access inside was not possible partly due to the time of day and the fact that the method of internal construction is such that there is no access to the roof space. As with the tree survey, a high powered torch, extendable surveyor's ladder, binoculars and an endoscope were used. It was possible to internally inspect the outbuildings. The building is constructed of a light coloured stone with a slate roof with lead flashing. The main property comprises a large single storey building generally rectangular in shape cut into the land.

3.06 The building was assessed for signs of bat activity – droppings, urine stains, grease marks and claw marks. The features of the building were also assessed for their potential to provide roosting habitats for bats – soffits, cladding, panelling, roofs, and mismatched joints. Whilst a number of potential features were identified, there was no evidence of bat activity on the pale stone walls, where their presence would have been readily apparent. One area of timber was noted, this was covered in old cobwebs and again had no features such as claw marks.

3.07 The outbuilding was inspected internally, much of the plasterboard fixing beneath the roof trusses had fallen away exposing them. There was no evidence of the outbuilding being used by bats.

Bat Activity Survey

- 3.08** The bat activity survey was commissioned following concerns from local residents regarding the presence of bats seen in the area. The activity survey was undertaken using a Pettersson D240x recording onto an MP3 player. The activity survey commenced 15 minutes before dusk and continued for 30 minutes after.
- 3.09** The surveyor was stationed between the north wall of the building and the two trees to be removed. The location was considered to be the optimal location as the eastern side of the building fronts the main road and is well lit by street lamps. Bat activity was noted and recorded and in addition, where possible, feeding and commuting. Bat calls were also recorded. The activity survey was conducted at a sub-optimal time, the optimal time being June, July and August. However, the survey is still considered to be of use in determining the use of the trees and the buildings by bats. The survey was conducted during May as work has begun on site.
- 3.10** One bat was seen and recorded. The bat was first seen to the north of the site foraging between the residential properties. The bat was then seen passing the trees within the site and onto the road, the view of the bat was lost. The bat was again seen following the tree line from the west of the site then travelled easterly towards the site trees. No other bats were seen or detected during the survey. The lime is considered to be the main tree for foraging. The ash has very limited potential and the beech is too close to the road and street lights to be of any significance. The main focus was to determine the presence of bats, as noted by local residents, and to determine if they were using the trees or buildings as roosts.

4.0 IMPACTS and EFFECTS

- 4.01** The predicted impact includes the loss of one tree as a foraging site and disturbance of potential roosting.
- 4.02** The loss of the lime tree for foraging will have some impact but the number of other trees located to the west off set the removal. The loss of the other trees have no implications.
- 4.03** The lack of potential roosting places in the trees results in a minimal implication from their removal in terms of bats roosting.
- 4.04** The re-roofing of the main building is likely to have a significant implication if bats are roosting. However, the survey of the building noted a number of potential features, there was no evidence of bat activity on the pale stone walls, where their presence would have been readily apparent. One area of timber was noted, this was covered in old cobwebs and again had no features such as claw marks. The eastern and southern sides of the building are considered unsuitable due to street lighting and noise from the road. Surveying the northern side and western sides of the building noted no emergence or features. As an additional precaution, the roofline is to be inspected once the scaffolding is in place.

5.0 CONCLUSIONS

5.01 The survey discovered no features in any of the trees suitable for bat roosting. The trees have a low potential for bat roosts. Whilst there was evidence of foraging by one bat, only one tree was considered suitable for foraging. The loss of the tree has a minimal effect due to the presence of other trees adjacent to the application site.

5.02 The buildings have a number of features that could be suitable for bat roosting. No evidence was found to indicate the roof space is being used as a bat roost. However, as one bat was noted in the area, an additional survey of the roof is recommended once the scaffolding is in place, prior to stripping the slates, to allow better access than from a ladder.

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Appendix 1

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Photographs

Photograph 1



Typical gaps in masonry

Photograph 2



Typical gaps in masonry

Photograph 3



Typical gaps in masonry

Photograph 4



Typical gaps in masonry

Photograph 5



Typical cracks/fissures in ash

Photograph 6



Ash to be felled

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