PROTECTED SPECIES (BAT) SURVEY AND FOLLOW-UP SURVEY OF SHEEPY PARVA FARM HOUSE SHEEPY PARVA LEICESTERSHIRE

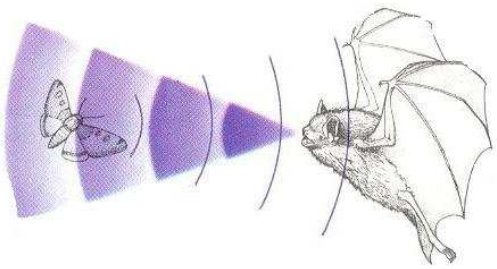
A report to:

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1.0 Introduction

1.1. This report has been prepared by B J Collins – Protected Species Surveyor for Mr C Miller and Miss S Price. The report provides the results of two protected species surveys, focused upon bats (*Chiroptera*), of a former farm house.

1.2. The building is located at Sheepy Parva Farm, in the village of Sheepy Parva, Leicestershire, as OS Grid Reference SK 333 015.

1.3. The farm house was first inspected whilst carrying out a separate study of the adjacent and associated farm buildings on the 31st January 2009 (*see B J Collins PSS – Protected Species Survey (Bat) of Sheepy Parva Farm, February 2009*). At this time nine old bat droppings were found that pointed to some roosting in the farm house in the past. The time of year and the ongoing renovation works at this time prevented a determination as to the actual situation with regard to roosting bats and as such a follow-up survey was completed during the active season and with sufficient time between studies to assess whether there was any change in the situation.

1.4. This report deails the initial findings and the results of the follow-up survey. The objective of both surveys was to assess whether there will be any impact upon bats from the renovation and re-roofing of the farmhouse.

Legislation applicable to Bats

1.5. All species of British bat and their roosts are protected under British law by the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended), and bats are classified as European Protected Species under The Conservation (Natural Habitats, & c.) Regulations 1994. This makes it an offence to kill, injure or disturb a bat and to destroy any place used for rest or shelter by a bat.

1.6. Development works that affect a bat roost can only be permitted under a licence from Natural England. In such cases Natural England seek advice with both local and national statutory conservation advisors as to whether a licence should be granted.

1.7. Licences in respect of European Protected Species affected by this type of work can be granted under Regulation 44(2)(e) of the Conservation (Natural Habitats, &c.) Regulations 1994, for the purpose of preserving public health or public safety or other imperative reasons of overriding public interest including those of social or economic nature and beneficial consequences of primary importance for the environment.

1.8. Under the Conservation (Natural Habitats, &c.) Regulations 1994 licences can only be issued for a development if Natural England are satisfied that:

- There is no satisfactory alternative to the work specification and

- The action authorised will not be detrimental to the maintenance of the population of the species at a favourable conservation status in their natural range.

1.9. Natural England aim to process licence applications within 35 working days of receipt.

Breeding Birds

1.10. Under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended), all native birds and their nests, whilst in use, are protected from harm, disturbance or destruction during the breeding season. As such any work that could affect breeding birds should be timed for outside the breeding season, variable between March and August.

2.0 Site Description

2.1. The site is a three-storey farm house. It is constructed of brick with a pitched roof covered with flat clay tiles. The building is in the process of renovation and has been "gutted" for the installation of supporting metal girders under internal walls. Part of the rear of the building has been demolished. There is a loft within the roof structure that had been previously exposed by the removal of the ceiling on the second floor. The roof is un-lined.

The farmhouse frontage, the western elevation



The rear of the farmhouse, the eastern elevation



2.2. The surrounding countryside is characterised by mixed farmland with mature hedgerows and scattered woodland, as well as the built environment of Sheepy Parva and the adjacent village, Sheepy Magna. The River Sence flows between these, within 100m of the site.

3.0 Survey Methodology

Desk Study

3.1. An initial data trawl for records of protected species that could be reasonably expected to occur on or adjacent to the site was carried out in January 2009. This entailed interrogation of records found on the National Biodiversity Network web site (http://data.nbn.org.uk/), at a 10km squared resolution.

Field Survey

The 31st January Inspection

3.2. The farm house was searched by an experienced, licensed bat worker in order to locate evidence of current or past bat roosts, in the form of bats, droppings, staining, feeding signs, and/or remains of bats. The outside of the building was searched for access points, and any evidence of their use by bats. The likely value of the various habitat features for foraging bats was also critically assessed. This survey was undertaken on the 31st January 2009 whilst carrying out an assessment of the adjacent and associated farm buildings.

3.3. Survey equipment used included powerful lamps (Clulite 1m candle power), small pen lights (Maglite), binoculars (Opticron BGA 8*42), endoscope (Provision 300) and ladders.

3.4. An emergence and activity survey was not attempted on the day of the survey because this was outside of the main activity period for bats.

The 16th April Follow-up and Activity Survey

3.5. The follow-up survey was completed on the 16th April 2009. Again the building was searched by an experienced, licensed bat worker before dusk to identify any recent changes between the situation reported in January and that in the active season April. Principally this was evidence of bat occupation in the form of droppings and observations of bats. Features internally that were identified during the initial inspection were searched where possible with a high-power torch.

3.6. Weather conditions were suitable if not ideal for bat foraging with an external temperature of 10 degrees Celsius. The evening was overcast with rain showers later in the study period. Bats were actively foraging during the study.

3.7. Immediately following the inspection of the farm house the internal roof void area was floodlit with infrared lighting to enable for night vision video recording of the void area across the bat emergence period. Videos were set to remotely monitor the roof void to the north of the dwelling and the separate small void to the south. Each was supported with a bat detector to record any bat calls made inside the void with an Anabat SD1 unit left in the main void across the whole period.

3.8. A surveyor then watched the property from a location as to intercept any bats emerging and flying to cover, the northeast corner of the property the most likely location. The internal area was then inspected every 15 minutes to check the recording equipment and complete a manual check for bats activity in the roof void prior to emergence. The surveyor utilised a bat detector, Batbox Duet, for this purpose.

4.0 Results

Field Survey

The January Bat Survey results.

4.1. Limited signs of bats were found inside the farm house, as shown in the sketch plan in Appendix I (Target Notes 11 and 14). These were a total of nine old bat droppings considered to be from a long-eared bat (*Plecotus* sp.).

The 16th April Bat Emergence Survey results.

4.2. The search of the internal area located four of the nine droppings found in January alongside the northern gable wall of the house. These were below the western purlin suggesting roosting at some time above this wall. There were no fresh droppings located in any area.

4.3. The night vision videos were set to record the principal roof void pointing towards the northern gable and the separate felt lined roof void to the south. The voids were searched at 15 minute intervals for bats perching after emergence and none were found. The inspection of the night vision videos failed to note any bat activity inside any void. Also the Anabat unit did now record any bat call or activity internally.

4.4. Externally the first bat pass noted was at 20.30 hours, a common pipistrelle foraging to the rear of the farm house. This bat returned on a beat and was recorded in the same location at 20.32, 20.34, 20.48, 20.49 and 20.54. Bat activity terminated at this point with the onset of a heavy rain shower. The survey finished at 21.30.

4.5. There were no bats observed emerging from the farmhouse or flying close to the structure to suggest possible emergence. With sunset at 20.04 hrs it is considered likely that the common pipistrelle was roosting in a building close to the site.

Nesting birds

4.6. There were signs of old nests in the farm house roof structure. These were believed to be from house sparrow (*Passer domesticus*).

5.0 Assessment

Bats

5.1. At the time of both the January and the April surveys, no bats were found roosting in the building. The limited signs that were found in January suggested small numbers had roosted in the farmhouse in the past. The situation between the January and the follow-up in mid April had not changed and there were no fresh droppings as would be found in a dry environment if bats were currently in residence.

5.2. The farm house is considered to be a site that has supported a bat(s) in the past but that there is no current use. With bats foraging in the local area and a suite of features that bats select use in the future is a possibility.

Birds

5.3. The building has also been used in previous season as a nesting site for at least the house sparrow. This bird is on the Red List of Birds of Conservation Concern because it has experienced a Rapid (≥50%) decline in the UK breeding population over the last 25 years. Again there remains a risk that these birds could begin to construct nests in the near future.

6.0 Recommendations

Bats

6.1. The two surveys have indicated that a bat(s) had roosted in the building in the past but that current signs were that this was not recent. The follow-up survey failed to find any bat activity in this area. Therefore to prevent the risk of bats using the site in the future and to ensure any risk of birds starting to nest we recommend that the roof is removed from the building as soon as is practical.

6.2. However it is important that this proposal is put to Natural England without delay to allow them time to object or comment. The reason for this is that whilst the signs are that the site has been a bat roost in the past it is still a roost under the terms of the Wildlife and Countryside Act. To ensure that there is no perceived breach of this legislation then the recommendation to remove the roof without delay should be proposed to Natural England's local species officer.

6.3. Currently alternative habitat for brown long-eared bats to roost sporadically or transiently remains in the farm buildings proposed for future development on the farm. To ensure continuity of habitat availability, once development of the barns begins in the future we recommend that provision of a suitable roost, a loft area for use by bats, is included in the scheme as an enhancement measure.

6.4. Finally with bats flying in the vicinity of the farm house there is considered to be a small risk that a bat could be discovered at the time of works to remove the roof. To ensure all eventualities are covered there is a procedure outlined in Appendix II that covers such a discovery and this should be briefed to all site workers before roof removal begins.

Birds

6.5. To avoid any conflict with breeding birds we recommend that work to remove the roof of the house is completed without delay once Natural England have been consulted about the destruction of the old bat roost area. In any event with the breeding bird season beginning every area should be thoroughly checked before work to ensure there are no nesting birds present. Note that damage or disturbance to active nests must be avoided until all eggs have hatched and chicks have fledged and left the nest and that a nest is legally protected from the beginning of its construction.

6.6. Provision for nesting house sparrows should be made to compensate for the loss of nesting sites in the building. In the case of house sparrows, this could be achieved by providing nesting boxes on the outside of the stables. Several designs are available commercially.

6.7. Examples of nest boxes and features for house sparrows and swallows are shown in Appendix III of the survey report for the Farm Buildings (*see B J Collins PSS – Protected Species Survey (Bat) of Sheepy Parva Farm, February 2009*).

7.0 References

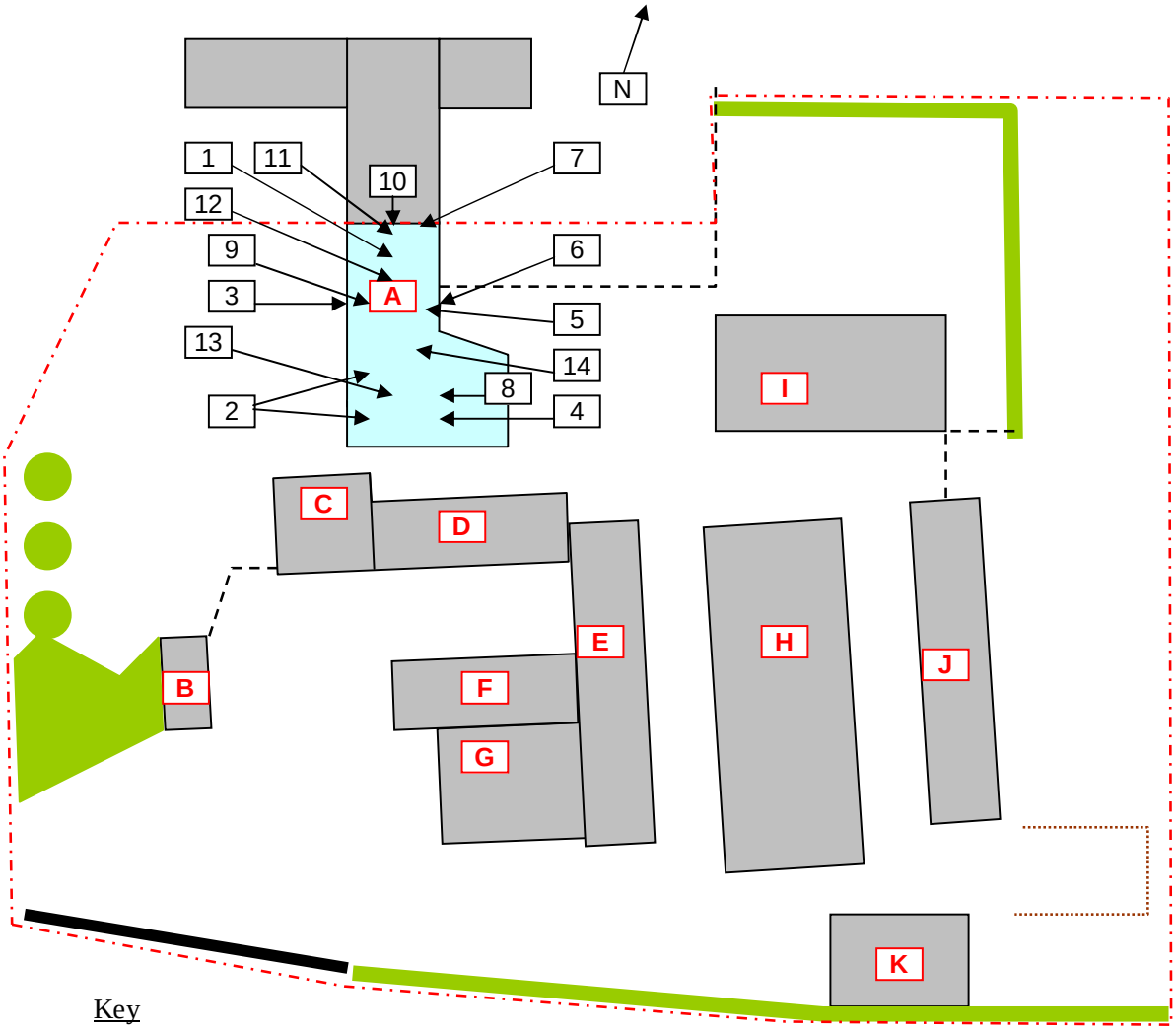
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Appendix I: Site layout with Target Notes and Photographs



Key

Extent of survey area

Building surveyed and reference (see text)

Target Note

Hedge

Fence

Wall

Scrub

Trees

Adjacent building (not surveyed in this survey report)

Old silage clamp

Target Notes

Unless otherwise stated, all Target Notes refer to features that could be used by roosting bats. None were proven to be used as such during the survey of January 2009.

Farmhouse (exterior)

1. Missing ridge tiles may allow bat access to crevices along the ridge line and/or into roof void.
2. Missing roof tiles may allow bat access to crevices along the ridge line and/or into roof void.
3. Half pane of glass missing from middle window on the second floor. This may allow access for bats into the building.
4. Loose lead flashing around dormer window.
5. Gaps under tiles where part of the rear has been demolished.
6. Possible crevices where purlins have been removed.
7. Loose tiles at gable ends.

Farmhouse (interior)

8. Small roof void on first floor at rear of property. This has been opened out by the removal of plasterboard on partition walls. Not surveyed extensively for health and safety reasons.
9. Crevices around ceiling joists of first floor.
10. Exposed crevices on wall tops and between bricks on gable end.
11. Five old bat droppings (probably from brown long-eared bat) on the floor below the ridge line.
12. Drill holes and old mortise joints in large timbers of roof.
13. Extensive crevices around chimney and on wall tops.
14. Four old bat droppings (probably from brown long-eared bat) on the floor below the ridge line.

Appendix II: Procedure to follow if bats are discovered during conversion works

- If at any point in the works bats are discovered then contractors must stop work immediately and telephone B J Collins PSS on 0115 9665568 or 07957 122217.

- B J Collins PSS will either provide an appropriately licensed bat worker to the site or provide a member of staff who will liaise directly with Natural England. Actions will then be taken following advice given. This may include removal of bats, but only where direct written or verbal permission is gained from Natural England.

- Bats are a protected species and there should be no attempt to handle a bat if discovered. The bat should be covered with a light material (cloth) and the bat ecologist called out to carry out the rescue.

- Only when Natural England is satisfied that the risk to bats is ceased will works recommence.

- Should it transpire that the operation being carried out is of more risk to bats than was originally thought, then works will be stopped until they can be supervised by an appropriately licensed bat worker.

- If a bat is found under a tile or any other aperture, works will stop immediately (as above). If the bat does not voluntarily fly out, then the aperture will be carefully covered over to protect the bat(s) from the elements, leaving a small gap for the bat to escape voluntarily. Any covering should be free from grease or other contaminants, and should not be a fibreglass-based material.