

THE ROMPNEY CASTLE, WENTLOOG ROAD, RUMNEY, CARDIFF. CF3 3EB.

PRELIMINARY BAT ROOST ASSESSMENT

Prepared on behalf of Rompney Castle Estate Ltd



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SUMMARY

A preliminary bat roost assessment of The Rompney Castle was undertaken by Dr Richard Tofts MCIEEM. The property is a vacant pub in Rumney, Cardiff. The assessment involved a daytime site survey and a desk study.

No evidence of bats or bat roosts was found anywhere within or on the property. The building is situated in an urban location with extensive artificial illumination and very little semi-natural vegetation. It forms poor bat habitat.

It is concluded that the absence of bat roosting evidence does indeed reflect an absence of roosting and no further survey work is recommended.

During the course of the work, it became evident that a well-established house sparrow population occurs in the vicinity. Several nest sites were found in association with The Rompney Castle itself. Demolition of the building therefore has the potential to result in the destruction of active nests. The main nesting period runs from April to August, but nesting has been recorded during all months. It is therefore recommended that the demolition be undertaken outside of this period and that the initial stages of demolition work (particularly removal of eaves-level woodwork) be supervised by a suitably qualified ecologist to ensure that no active nest sites are inadvertently destroyed. It is also recommended that a stonework gap found to be used as a nest site be blocked outside the period of April to August (following an endoscope inspection to confirm it is unoccupied) to prevent it being used for nesting again at a later date.

It is recommended that the proposed new development should incorporate house sparrow nest sites (house sparrow terraces attached to the building at eaves level or incorporated into the structure itself) in one or more locations out of direct sunlight. This is to provide mitigation for the loss of the existing nest sites.

The provision of swift nest boxes could form a biodiversity enhancement, since this species is reported from the vicinity by the desk study although The Rompney Castle itself currently lacks suitable nest sites.

No recommendations are made in respect of bat boxes or bat tubes simply because these features are unlikely to become occupied owing to the low habitat value of the site and surrounding land.



1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This report sets out the results of a bat survey of a vacant pub 'The Rompney Castle', in Cardiff. The site is located at OS grid reference ST 2197978966. The work was undertaken by *Richard Tofts Ecology Ltd* on behalf of Rompney Castle Estate.
- 1.2 The pub has recently closed and the ground floor rooms are essentially vacant although used for storage in places. The upper floor is still occupied as a residence.
- 1.3 The owners wish to obtain permission to demolish the pub and replace it with apartments and a ground floor commercial space.
- 1.4 All British bats and their roosts are legally protected. In summary, it is a criminal offence to:
 - Deliberately capture, injure or kill a bat;
 - Intentionally or recklessly disturb roosting bats;
 - Damage or destroy a bat roosting place (even if bats are not occupying the roost at the time);
 - Intentionally or recklessly obstruct access to a bat roost
- 1.5 Many bat species occasionally or habitually roost in buildings and a potential conflict sometimes arises between the conservation of bats and their roosts and the implementation of otherwise legitimate development activities such as demolition of redundant properties. For such eventualities, a licensing system exists to allow certain works or activities to be undertaken which would otherwise be illegal.
- 1.6 During pre-application discussions with the council, the applicant was advised that a preliminary bat roost assessment (BCT, 2016) would be required, followed by any detailed follow-up work that might be identified as necessary as a result of the preliminary assessment. The bat survey described in this report has been designed to meet this requirement.
- 1.7 A preliminary roost assessment involves assessing buildings or other features during daylight hours for their potential to provide roost sites as well as searching for evidence of bats themselves. Bats may roost in crevices or other locations that are impossible or impractical to examine internally. Identifying the presence of such features forms an important part of the preliminary assessment since it informs the need for, and nature of, any subsequent work which may involve ultrasonic surveys undertaken during the hours of darkness, normally within the period May-August/September. Ultrasonic surveys are typically also necessary to provide further information where the preliminary assessment reveals bat evidence which suggests that a bat licence is likely to be required. But if the preliminary roost assessment reveals no bat evidence and no significant bat roost potential, further work is unlikely to be needed.



2.0 METHODS

- 2.1 The building was examined internally and externally for evidence of bat roosts and bat roost potential during daylight hours on 9th June 2021 by Dr Richard Tofts MCIEEM¹). Binoculars (8 x 32), endoscope and a Clulite CB2 1,000,000 candlepower torch were used as necessary.
- 2.2 Signs of occupancy by bats which were searched for included:
 - Droppings and urine stains both inside the building and outside potentially suitable roost emergence points.
 - Areas of roof void swept free of cobwebs.
 - Feeding remains (e.g. collections of moth wings).
 - Live or dead bats.
- 2.3 The survey was undertaken having regard to the current bat survey guidelines (BCT, 2016).
- 2.4 In addition to the site survey, a desk study was undertaken in which records of bats from within 2km of the property and roof-nesting birds from within 150 m were obtained from the South East Wales Biodiversity Records Centre (SEWBReC).

¹ Natural England and NRW licensed bat worker



3.0 RESULTS

External survey

3.1 The building is suituated on the southern side of Wentloog Road, the main part of the building running on an approximately east-west axis. Typical views are shown at Figures 1 – 4.



Figure 1: Viewed from north-west.



Figure 2: Viewed from north-east.



Figure 3: Viewed from south-west.



Figure 4: Viewed from south-east.

3.2 The northern aspect at ground level exhibits exposed stone construction but the first floor is rendered with timberwork. The windows are of single-glazed leaded construction in wooden frames. The western gable end is rendered with timberwork and the southern aspect is simply rendered with mixed single glazed windows and double-glazed windows in uPVC frames. The eastern aspect is rendered with timberwork over a single storey extension. On the southern aspect there are single storey extensions and an open but covered area. The roof is of pitched slate construction with three chimney stacks and close-fitting slates, ridge tiles and lead flashing (see examples at Figures 5 and 6).



Figure 5: Close-fitting tiles on main part of roof.



Figure 6: Close-fitting tiles and leadwork on projecting front porch



3.3 The building is surrounded by hardstanding apart from a small grassy area in the south-eastern corner. The northern aspect is evidently well-illuminated by artificial lighting, with street lamps along the adjacent Wentloog Road (Figure 7) as well as halogen downlighting and strip lighting along the northern eaves of the building. The southern aspect is apparently less subject to artifical illumination.



Figure 7: View along Wentloog Road in front of The Rompney Castle, showing streetlighting and hard landscaping around the property.

3.4 The exterior of The Rompney Castle is generally well-sealed, with only localised gaps and cavities being observed. In most cases, these places were already occupied by nesting house-sparrows *Passer domesticus*, a declining 'red-listed' bird species which is evidently still numerous in the locality. Examples are shown at Figures 8 and 9.



Figure 8: Gap between stonework and bricks by window on ground floor northern aspect of the building, occupied by nesting house sparrows.



Figure 9: Rotten gap in woodwork at first floor gable end on the southern side of the building (circled). This was found to be occupied by nesting house sparrows.



3.5 No evidence of any bat roosts was seen during the external examination of the building.

Internal survey

- 3.6 The interior of the building was also investigated, having particular regard to those areas which were poorly-illuminated and seldom accessed. Specifically, this included examination of roof voids.
- 3.7 Two roof voids are present, both being situated along the main east-west axis of the building. Void 1 is located above the first-floor living quarters in the western part of the building and Void 2 is situated above the bar area and dance floor in the eastern part. There is another pitched-roof extension running southwards from the eastern end of the property but this single storey structure is a former skittles alley and lacks a roof void, the underside of the pitched roof being visible from the floor beneath. The other extensions and additions also lack roof voids. The location of these features is shown on the sketch plan at Figure 10.



Figure 10: Sketch plan of building showing key features.

3.8 Void 1 is cramped and divided into two main parts by means of a partially brokenthrough brick internal dividing wall. The void is low on account of the fact that some of the angle of the pitched roof has been incorporated into the living space (bedrooms, kitchen, living room, bathroom etc) immediately beneath. There is bitumastic underfelt beneath the slate tiles here and the roof is supported on a sawn softwood frame. The presence of some vertical battens, deep tie-beams and empty and covered water tanks further adds to the clutter in this confined space. There is no insulation between the joists. Typical views are shown at Figures 11 and 12.





Figure 11: View towards the western end of Void 1, showing empty and covered water tanks.



Figure 12: View towards the eastern end of Void 1.

- 3.9 Void 1 was found to be cobwebby and dusty. No evidence of bats or other significant wildlife was observed anywhere within the void.
- 3.10 Void 2 is a much more capacious feature and is formed above a relatively recent ceiling over the dancefloor. Internal inspection shows that the ceiling above the dancefloor was originally much higher and the void correspondingly smaller, but the old ceiling has been removed leaving just the redundant supporting woodwork.
- 3.11 As was the case with Void 1, Void 2 was also found to be very dirty and cobwebby. The roof timbers are of sawn softwood and there is bitumastic roofing felt beneath the slates. There is thin fibreglass insulation between the joists. The void incorporates air extraction ducting and many other flat surfaces which simplified the search for droppings and other bat evidence but no signs of bats or other significant wildlife were seen. Typical views are shown at Figures 13 and 14.



Figure 13: Interior of Void 2 showing extraction ducting.



Figure 14: Interior of Void 2 showing timbers associated with former ceiling now removed.

3.12 The former skittles alley is now used for storage purposes and some of the floorboards have been removed. No evidence of bats or other significant wildlife was seen here or anywhere else within the interior of the building. Example views are shown at Figures 15 and 16.





Figure 15: Skittles alley, now used for storage.



Figure 16: Dance floor, looking towards bar area.

Wider context and desk study results

- 3.13 The Rompney Castle is situated within an urbanised location with very limited seminatural vegetation in the vicinity. The development in the locality includes residential properties apparently dating to the Victorian period (see eg Figure 7) as well as more recent dwelling houses which appear to have been constructed in the 1970s/80s era. A brief external assessment of these properties indicated that they support a varied range of potentially suitable bat roost feaures.
- 3.14 The closest areas of significant semi-natural habitat (including wooded ground and a lake) lie some 400m or more to the south-west and the north-east of the site and The Rompney Castle is not linked to such areas by any obvious habitat corridors. One potential linear corridor leading from the urban area of Rumney to more extensive semi-natural habitat runs alongside the railway line to the south, but this potential corridor is some 250m from the site at its closest point.
- 3.15 Of the 49 records of bats or bat evidence from within 1 km of the site, all relate either to pipistrelles or unidentified bats except for a record of brown long-eared bat *Plecotus auritus* some 850 m from the site at a property in Newport Road and a dropping of lesser horseshoe bat *Rhinolophus hipposideros* on a railway bridge some 450 m from the site. A further 81 bat records relate to locations between 1 and 2 km from the site and include a further two species and many other generic 'bat' records, but this zone includes many additional habitats and the additional records are of limited relevance in the present case.
- 3.16 Of the closer bat records, there are six dating from 2008-2010 which relate to locations between 128 and 177 metres from the site. These refer either to bats of unknown genera or pipistrelles *Pipistrellus* sp not identified to species level. It is unclear whether any of the records relates to roosting bats, but it seems likely that they may just represent active bats originating from a roost elsewhere since the records were generated either by a garden wildlife survey or an urban bat survey. The closest record to the site which evidently relates to a roost is that of a pipistrelle species some 238m east of The Rompney Castle, closer to both potential corridors and foraging habitat.
- 3.16 The desk study also revealed records of roof-nesting birds, namely house sparrow, starling *Sturnus vulgaris*, blue tit *Cyanistes caeruleus*, great tit *Parus major* and swift *Apus apus* from within 150m of the site, the closest being house sparrow some 35 m from the site.



4.0 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

- 4.1 A preliminary bat roost assessment was undertaken by Dr Richard Tofts MCIEEM of The Rompney Castle, a vacant pub at CF3 3EB in Rumney, Cardiff. The assessment involved a daytime site survey and a desk study.
- 4.2 No evidence of bats or bat roosts was found anywhere within the property.
- 4.3 The property is situated in an urban location with extensive artificial illumination and very little semi-natural vegetation. It forms poor bat habitat.
- 4.4 Two roof voids were examined during the course of the survey. Such places may be occupied as bat roost sites, the most commonly encountered species in these situations being brown long-eared bat. The more cramped of the two voids ('Void 1') is probably unsuitable as a roost site being cluttered and cramped. The larger of the two is physically more suitable although it is unclear whether suitable access points exist, particularly given the extent of the lighting at eaves level along the front of the building. Void roosting species usually leave fairly obvious signs of their presence even where only small roosts are involved. The absence of any evidence in the present case is therefore considered likely to indicate a genuine absence of roosting. The closest known record of brown long-eared bat lies some 850 m from the site. It is probably no coincidence that this record was from a property adjacent to parkland with trees, a typical foraging habitat of brown long-eared bat.
- 4.5 In addition to larger void roosts, some bats may occupy roosts in smaller crevices. Pipistrelles are the commonest species encountered in such roost locations. But the Rompney Castle is in generally good condition externally with close-fitting tiles, flashing and the like. And the few potentially suitable crevices that were observed were mostly found to be occupied by nesting house sparrows.
- 4.6 As a general rule, there is an increased likelihood of poor roost sites ('poor' in terms of their physical characteristics) being occupied by bats when they are situated in an area of good foraging habitat and a correspondingly decreased likelihood of good roost sites being occupied when situated in an area of poor foraging habitat. In the present case, The Rompney Castle is situated in a location that offers poor foraging habitat and the potential roosting opportunities are also limited.
- 4.7 In addition to the fact that The Rompney Castle is situated in an area of poor bat habitat, it is also surrounded by many other structures (principally dwelling houses) dating from various periods, many of them possessing potential roost features (e.g. soffit boxes, lifted lead flashing etc) that the survey site lacks. It therefore seems particularly unlikely that any bats which might be present in the vicinity would be roosting in features associated with The Rompney Castle.



- 4.8 In its correspondence with the applicant, the local authority advised that a preliminary bat roost assessment was required and categorised four possible outcomes based on the results of this preliminary assessment:
 - an adverse impact upon bats is so unlikely that no further action in relation to bats is necessary, or
 - the likelihood of an impact is low, such that precautionary mitigation measures can reduce this likelihood still further, or
 - the likelihood of an impact upon bats is high, so further surveys are needed in order to establish exactly what the impact would be, or
 - the impact is certain and can be determined precisely on the basis of the preliminary assessment, such that no further surveys are needed, but a licence issued by NRW would be required to allow works to proceed legally.
- 4.9 Based on the foregoing discussion, it is considered very unlikely that the demolition of The Rompney Castle would result in an adverse impact to bats and no further action in relation to bats is recommended.
- 4.10 The survey has, however, reavealed the presence of several house sparrow nest sites associated with The Rompney Castle and demolition of the building has the potential to result in the destruction of active nests. The main nesting period runs from April to August, but nesting has been recorded during all months². It is therefore recommended that the demolition be undertaken outside of the period April to August and that the initial stages of demolition work (particularly removal of eaves-level woodwork) be supervised by a suitably qualified ecologist to ensure that no active nest sites are inadvertently destroyed. It is also recommended that the stonework gap on the ground floor northern aspect of the building (see Figure 8) be blocked outside the period of April to August (following an endoscope inspection to confirm it is unoccupied) to prevent it being used for nesting again at a later date. This supervisory oversight would also provide a further alert mechanism in the unlikely and unexpected event of bats or bat roost evidence being encountered, to avoid physical harm and to ensure that appropriate measures are taken.
- 4.11 It is recommended that the proposed new development should incorporate house sparrow nest sites (house sparrow terraces attached to the building at eaves level or incorporated into the structure itself) in one or more locations out of direct sunlight. This is to provide mitigation for the loss of the existing nest sites and it appears very likely that such features would become occupied.
- 4.12 The provision of swift nest boxes could form a biodiversity enhancement, since this species is reported from the vicinity by the desk study although The Rompney Castle itself currently lacks suitable nest sites.

² See eg https://www.rspb.org.uk/birds-and-wildlife/wildlife-guides/bird-a-z/house-sparrow/breeding/



4.13 No recommendations are made in respect of bat boxes or bat tubes simply because these features are unlikely to become occupied owing to the low habitat value of the site and surrounding land coupled with the large number of potentially suitable roost features already present nearby. The lack of potentially suitable foraging habitat is therefore likely to act as a much more significant curb on the local bat population than is the presence of roost features.

REFERENCES

BCT (2016). Bat Surveys for Professional Ecologists: Good Practice Guidelines. Bat Conservation Trust, London.





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