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PROTECTED SPECIES SURVEY

THE OLD MILL

ABERDARON

GWYNEDD, NORTH WALES

FOR

Mark Roberts Planning

21st September 2015

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1. INTRODUCTION

A preliminary protected species survey was undertaken on the 19.09.2015. The survey was carried out by David Bennett, a licensed and experienced bat surveyor and ecologist (Natural Resource Wales & Natural England licenses) following a request by the current owner of the property. The survey was requested to satisfy planning requirements in respect of any protected species issues for a disused corn mill located at Aberdaron, Gwynedd, North Wales, LL21 9NW. A planning consent is being sought to permit the restoration of the Grade 11 Listed Building.

2. BAT BIOLOGY

There are now 17 species of bat (breeding) in the UK, many of which can be found within this part of Wales. Each bat gives birth just once a year, early in summer, the females tending to gather together in a communal roost to give birth and bring up their young. This is the time when they are most likely to use buildings. By the end of the summer the roosts are often vacated for other more suitable hibernation sites such as caves, mines or trees. Hibernation sites are usually characterised by stable temperatures with a high level of humidity. When temperatures fall and food becomes scarce they hibernate and live off body fat stored during the autumn. During mild winters bats can still often be seen on an evening flying and looking for food. Bats use a variety of different structures for the purposes of roosting, these can include mature trees, caves, mines, buildings (old and new), bridges and tunnels.

Bats will generally cause no harm to buildings or the people that occupy the buildings. They can be very discreet and are often not noticed because of their preference to occupy tiny spaces, cracks and crevices in roof voids. Some species such as the brown long eared bat will utilise open loft areas for flying and moving around in. They will roost on bare exposed timber beams, typically beneath the ridge beam. The droppings produced are harmless (largely made up of insect fragments) and do not carry any disease although a very large roost can sometimes produce large quantities of droppings.

3. LEGISLATION

All of our species of domestic bat are protected under both UK and European legislation. In the UK they are listed under Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) and Schedule 2 of the Conservation (Natural Habitats &c.) Regulations 1994. The Habitats Directive has recently been superseded by The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010 which came into force on the 1st April 2010

To summarise it is illegal not only to intentionally kill, injure or take any bat but also too recklessly or intentionally damage, destroy or obstruct access to any place that a bat uses for shelter or protection, or to disturb a bat while it is occupying such a place. A roost is protected whether or not bats are present at the time. The reason for this is that bats have a tendency to remain loyal to certain roost sites, often over a long period of time.

The presence of a species protected under European or UK legislation is a material consideration when a planning authority is considering a development proposal which, if carried out would be likely to result in disturbance or harm to the species or its habitat. Section 74 (2) of the CroW Act 2000 (now updated by Section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act (NERC) 2006 requires the publication of lists of habitats and species that are of principal importance for the purpose of conserving biological diversity. The list is regularly changed and updated and many bat species appear on it. NERC consolidates the requirements of the CroW Act in placing duties upon government agencies, including local authorities, to ensure the conservation of Biodiversity.

4. AIMS

The aims of the survey were:

1. To describe any evidence of protected species in the study area.
2. To assess the impact of restoring the building.
3. To suggest mitigation measures as appropriate.

5. STUDY AREA

The site consists of the disused mill/leat etc which is located in the centre of the village opposite the bakery. The surrounding habitat includes a stream, areas of open grassland, trees/scrub and coastal habitat.

The building has been constructed in a traditional manner with stone walls supporting a pitched and timber framed roof covered with slate (no underfelt). The building is in a poor condition with missing slates, holes in the roof, timber decay, damp in the walls etc. The leat at the rear of the mill has grown over with bramble scrub, ivy growth is also evident within the roof of the main building.

The site plan is shown in Appendix 1 and the photos are shown in Appendix 2.

6. METHODOLOGY

The building was subjected to an internal and external survey on the 19th September 2015, the weather conditions were sunny, dry and clear. As much of the building as possible was searched (health and safety and access permitting) using a Cluson rechargeable lamp, a Seesnake endoscope (paying particular attention to the roof sections, ledges and any gaps or cavities). A search was made for bat droppings, staining, odour, old skeletons and feeding signs (such as wing casings etc). Other evidence such as bird's nests and other signs of nesting birds was also looked for both internally and externally.

7. RESULTS

No visible evidence of bats was found, no droppings were apparent and there were no signs of feeding, staining, marking etc. The building is quite open and exposed to the weather and many areas are unsafe due to collapsed floor sections etc, all areas can however be accessed.

The majority of the timbers appear to be original and some do support open mortise joints although none are very deep. There are a few gaps in and around the side of some of the utilised roof timber joints but no evidence of bats was found in these areas. A lot of the timbers are just damp and decayed, light levels are also quite high in most areas of the building.

Externally and internally there are gaps in the walls and stonework where the original mortar has eroded and washed away. A lot of these can be inspected but many are out of reach or in locations that are not really safe to access.

Overall the potential of the building to support bats in its current condition is low. The main reasons are levels of light, holes in the roof, airflow, damp etc, the side elevation is also highly illuminated by streetlights (bright led type bulbs).

8. CONCLUSIONS, IMPACTS AND MITIGATION FOR BATS

No visual evidence of bat presence has been found and the potential is low due to the overall condition. However, there are still features which may support certain species of bat although probably only as an occasional roost by sporadic bats.

To assess the use of the building (and also to assess species, numbers and access/exit points) it will be necessary to undertake at least one evening emergence survey when bats are active mid May-September. The results of the survey will indicate if (or how) bats are using the building and this will then direct any mitigation required. If bats are found to be roosting within the building then as well as a suitable mitigation scheme a license will also be required from Natural Resource Wales before works can begin.

As a general note, most buildings offer potential for over-wintering and seasonal occupancy for individual bats. This use can be sporadic during the season and actual presence through emergence surveys cannot be fully confirmed. It is therefore recommended that the following precautionary recommendations (which may change depending on the results of the additional survey/s) should be undertaken as good working practice during the renovation phase.

- **The renovation works will need to take place between October and February inclusive to avoid bats and nesting birds.**
- **All roof tiles should be carefully removed by hand to ensure that no roosting, torpid or hibernating bats are injured during the proposed works.**

- **Door and window frames should be removed with care to ensure that no roosting, torpid or hibernating bats are injured during the proposed works.**
- **Structural members, lintel bearings, purlins or wall plates should be removed with care to ensure that no roosting, torpid or hibernating bats are injured during the proposed works.**
- **In the event that bats were found during the renovation then all work should cease and Natural Resource Wales (Bangor office) and/or a licensed bat worker should be contacted for further advice.**
- **This report is considered to be valid for one year after which time a resurvey may be required in case the situation has changed.**

The restoration of the building offers the opportunity to create/retain some bat friendly features. Pipistrelle sp. and other crevice dwellers such as Myotis bats will readily take to new/and or restored buildings as long as suitable access points and features are created.

Pictures of the examples are shown in Appendix 3.

- **If lining the roof use traditional bitumen roofing felt rather than a modern plastic liner.**
- **Create/retain as many gaps as possible of varying size under the eaves leading up to the space above the wall plate.**
- **Ensure all timberwork is only treated using chemicals shown to be safe for bats.**
- **Ensure any external lighting is low level and directional towards the Ground.**

9. BADGERS

Badgers are protected by the Protection of Badgers Act 1992. Under this Act it is illegal to destroy, damage or obstruct access to a sett or disturb a badger while it is using the sett. A sett is defined by the Act as any structure or place showing signs of current or recent occupation by a badger. Under the current interpretation of the Act a license is required for the following operations:

- Use of hand tools within 10 metres of a badger sett**
- Use of light machinery within 20 metres of a badger sett**
- Use of heavy machinery within 30 metres of a badger sett**

At the time of the survey there was no evidence of badgers (setts, outliers etc) anywhere within the vicinity of the building or within the disused leat (now covered with scrub). Badgers are however a mobile species and the situation could change during the period of any extant planning permission.

10. NESTING BIRDS

Evidence of nesting birds was found throughout the building on wall ledges, crevices and roof timbers etc. A few swallow nests are present as well as nests from blackbird, house sparrow, wren etc. Any works to restore the building will need to take place between October and February inclusive to avoid nesting birds. The same applies to the removal of ivy, scrub or other vegetation either inside/outside of the building or within the leat.

All breeding birds are protected under Section 1(1) and 1(2) of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, as amended. This makes it an offence to damage, disturb, or obstruct access to nests during the bird breeding season (generally March to September).

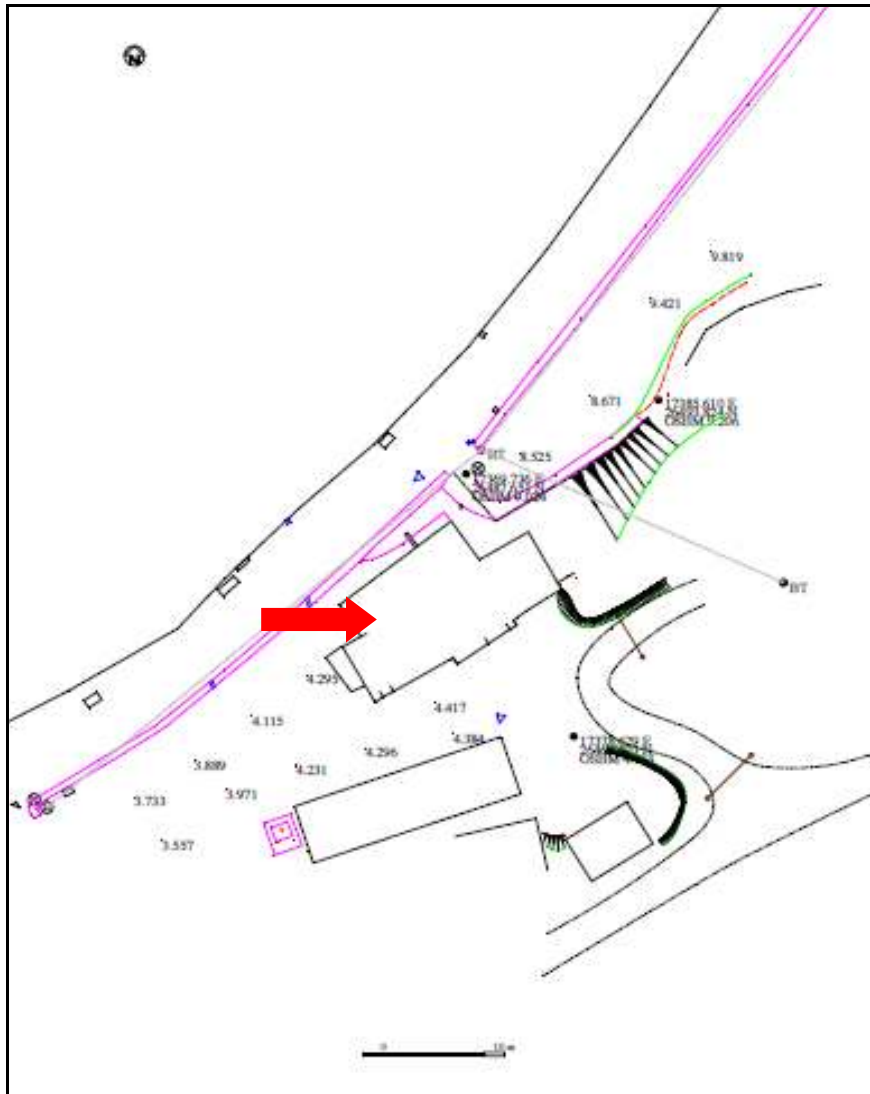
11. REFERENCES

BCT 2012 Good Practice Guidelines 2nd Edition 2012 BCT

Joint Nature Conservation Committee 2004 *Bat Workers Manual* JNCC Peterborough

Mitchell-Jones A J 2004 *Bat Mitigation Guidelines* English Nature Peterborough UK

Appendix 1 – Site plan



Appendix 2 – Site Photos

1. West elevation



2. South elevation



3. South elevation



4. North elevation



5. Light and open roof areas



6. High light levels around wheel area



7. Holes in roof and high light levels



8. Leat at the rear is blocked with scrub



Appendix 3 – Some examples of bat mitigation that can be included after the restoration work has been undertaken.

Slateline bat access tile

