

Spectrum Ecology

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Date: 28th May 2020

**Building scoping survey &
Preliminary Roost Assessment
for presence of Bat Roost sites**

At

Gospel Hall,

Ynys Street,

Port Talbot

NPT,

SA13 1YW

Report by

Leigh Tuck

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Licensed Bat Surveyors For

Greg O'Neill

Address as above.

1. Summary

- 1.1. Spectrum Ecology was commissioned by Mr Greg O'Neill, to carry out a preliminary roost assessment for bats at the Gospel Hall, Ynys Street, Grid Ref SS 77089 90251. The survey was requested to support a planning application to the local planning authority, for minor works to widen the access into the hall and provide much needed additional off-street parking. These works would involve the removal of the front porch facing wall and doorway and mirrored on the internal wall of the main building. The roof of the porch and side walls supporting the roof will remain in place and will not be disturbed.
- 1.2. The scoping survey assessment for bats on the building was carried out during the day on the 21st May 2020. As the hall is not currently used, the scoping survey was undertaken in line with current social distancing measures due to Covid-19 and the guidelines issued by Natural Resources Wales and CIEEM.
- 1.3. A detailed internal and external scoping survey inspection was made of the Hall. During the course of these preliminary investigations **no evidence was found to indicate that the building is currently being used as a roost for bats.**
- 1.4. The Gospel Hall front porch is considered to contain a low number of features that provide potential for use by crevice dwelling bats. However, it is considered that due to the depth of many of the gaps especially under the roof tiles and ridge tiles, the suitability of these features is rated as negligible as they would not support anything more than opportunistic roosting. There is a louvered style vent below the roof apex of the front wall of the porch and this provided an access opportunity into the roof void of the porch. There were gaps between the wall and soffits at locations where the natural stone facias did not meet the straight edge of the Upvc fascia. The structural integrity of the roof timbers is unknown and of an unknown age therefore, due to health and safety constraints for the surveyors, the porch roof could not be walked on. However, due to the small size of the porch all features were investigated as far as possible with a spot lamp, close-focussing monocular and endoscope from a ladder.
- 1.5. During the **external inspections**, no evidence of bat activity was found such as staining or polishing of roof material or around the louvered vent which also had some

spider's webs over the openings indicating no recent use of the openings. Nor was any evidence found between the gaps of the roof tiles or the ridge tiles and no incidental evidence such as droppings or insect fragments in the immediate vicinity of these features.

1.6. During the **internal inspection** of the Gospel Hall porch no evidence of current or historic bat use was found. It should be noted that the plasterboard ceiling of the porch had been removed in order to identify certain electrical wires and pipes which were hidden in the porch roof void. This exposed the porch to the rafters which provided an opportunity to inspect the louvred access with no evidence present. No evidence of bats was found in the Porch or the wider building in the form of droppings, staining, insect fragments or deceased bats. There were no constraints in fully accessing all areas of the Gospel Hall.

1.7. The lack of any evidence at the Gospel Hall, relating to bats, during the scoping survey and roost assessment would suggest a negligible likelihood of bats using the building as a current or historic roost site, **based solely on the lack of physical evidence found.**

1.8. In addition to the above, the surveyors considered that due to the location of the building, surrounded by a dense urban sprawl, M4 motorway fly-over any potential commuting routes that may be incidentally used along the riparian habitat and back gardens of Ynys Street. In addition, the river provides excellent foraging opportunity. are other more desirable roosting locations in the pocket woodland adjacent to Ty Draw Hill and Penycae Road, which would present a superior roosting opportunity than the building under survey.

1.9 Notwithstanding the above, the surveyors considered that due to the location it would be appropriate to undertake a dusk emergence / flight survey to further augment the building survey results and establish what the impact, if any, would be if the building were to be redeveloped.

1.10 The dusk emergence / flight survey was undertaken on the evening of the 21st May 2020. No bats were seen or detected exiting/entering the Porch or the wider Gospel Hall building. Approximately 1 or 2 individual bats (culminating in 6 passes), both Common pipistrelle bats were detected at the far end of the Gospel Hall next to the river and headed in a south east direction between the Hall and neighboring property and then turning on reaching Ynys Road to retrace its flight path (approximately 15 mins after sunset). This activity is to be expected in this location and general habitat. There was 1 pass over the building but again that bat emanated from the river.

- 1.11** As a result of the above findings the surveyors believe that the evidence gathered so far including the dusk emergence/flight survey, coupled with small amount of roosting opportunities, it is considered that the Porch in particular is unlikely to have been used as a roost by any crevice dwelling species in the recent past. Given the proximity of the river to the rear of the Gospel Hall this may have been used at some point in the past however on this occasion no bats were detected. However, as the main Gospel Hall is not being developed and only 1 course of bricks removed around the internal entrance to the hall, it is the Porch which it important to characterise in terms of roost and potential. As such the Porch can be said to have an overall low/negligible potential to support bats and their roosts and therefore a low/negligible likelihood of the very minor development works having an impact on bats at a local level.
- 1.12** The redevelopment works, should planning consent be granted, are proposed to be carried out immediately when bats are most able to recover from any inadvertent disturbance. The surveyors conclude that there will be no long-term impact to the local bat species or any impact on the favourable conservation status (FCS) of bats at a local population level. In addition, the retention of a licenced bat surveyor during the redevelopment will reduce the impact of the development to negligible.
- 1.13** Notwithstanding the above, bats are highly mobile mammals and the developer should be alert to the possibility of encountering new or incidental bat roosts unexpectedly during development works in a location such as Ynys Street, due to its proximity to the River Afan 20 metres to north west. In the event that such a bat roost is found, redevelopment works will cease while further advice is sought from the local office of Natural Resources Wales or the licensed bat surveyors named in this report.

2. Survey & Discussion

- 2.1.** The scoping survey assessment for the potential of bats and bat roosts on the Gospel Hall, Ynys street was carried out on the 21st May 2020.
- 2.2.** A thorough investigation of the Gospel Hall was carried out as part of the building scoping survey and preliminary roost assessment. There were no material constraints in surveying the entirety of the voids within the building. With the use of the 'see-snake' endoscope, high-powered spot lamp, a thorough examination was made in

line with BCT guidelines. All such observed features were found to contain no evidence of bats or activity.

- 2.3.** Externally the building appeared to be very sound with an excellent maintenance regime as would be expected in this type of public building. As previously discussed, the roof coverings of the Gospel Hall presented a low number of opportunities to provide gaps for crevice dwelling species. In addition, the fascia boards were relatively new upvc and there was not damaged mortar or gaps in the dressed stone work to provide any roosting opportunity.
- 2.4.** No evidence suggesting recent or historic bat activity was found. No staining or polishing of surfaces was seen around potential entrance points, no insect fragments and feeding remains such as moth wings were found and no bat droppings were found in the vicinity or elsewhere in the roof section or on the building in general.
- 2.5.** There is always the potential for evidence of crevice roosting species to go undetected during a preliminary roost assessment and scoping survey, as these could potentially be utilising areas difficult to examine such as cavities deep within the masonry or between roof covering a roof timber some distance away from a bat's original entry point. However, where possible such areas were searched as far as was possible using the digital endoscope, with no evidence found.
- 2.6.** Following the thorough search, no evidence of current or historic bat activity was found during either the internal or external examinations of the Gospel Hall.
- 2.7.** There is a growing understanding between bat surveyors and bat ecologists that most, if not all, buildings will hold some potential for hibernating bats. The Gospel Hall contained a very limited number of features that could be utilised as a hibernation roost and which could only include the gap between roof covering and timbers as there did not seem to be any cavities in the porch making this section of the building less than suitable for hibernating bats due to the high fluctuation of its thermal properties. However, as the potential exists, it is recommended that the developer should remain vigilant, apply the precautionary principle, and the services of an on-call licensed bat worker should be enlisted to provide advice and assistance throughout the proposed development period.

- 2.8.** Given the thorough building surveys, the retention of a licensed bat surveyor during all works, it is considered that the proposed works will have a negligible impact on the species at a local level. In addition, the surveyors believe that additional surveys would be onerous and unnecessary in this instance.
- 2.9.** Bats are highly mobile and inquisitive mammals and can take up new roosts at any time and there is always the possibility of bats utilising this building at some point in the future, even if they are not present now. Vigilance should therefore be maintained throughout the development works and an experienced and licensed bat worker should be retained on call.

3. Surveyor Experience

- 3.1.** The surveyor, and author of this report, was Leigh Tuck (Licence Number **S085245/1**) with Daniel Lock (Licence Number **S085293/1**) and Robert Scott a trainee bat surveyor. Dan and Leigh are Natural Resources Wales licensed bat workers and has held licences for over 10 years with over 15 years of experience undertaking ecological surveys and bat monitoring experience. Robert has been training with Spectrum since May 2018 and is in his third season of surveys for both protected species and habitat assessments. Rob has a good level of knowledge and experience in surveying buildings for Bats.
- 3.2.** Spectrum Ecology has a wide experience in countryside management and protected species surveys and mitigation and has worked on many projects related to bat conservation. They have experience undertaking surveys as part of BCT's National Bat Monitoring Programme, as well as undertaking numerous building and tree surveys for bats. Within the course of their careers both have also been involved in monitoring and surveying of other European protected species such as Dormouse and Great crested newt and have worked extensively in SSSI habitat management for the enhancement of protected species.

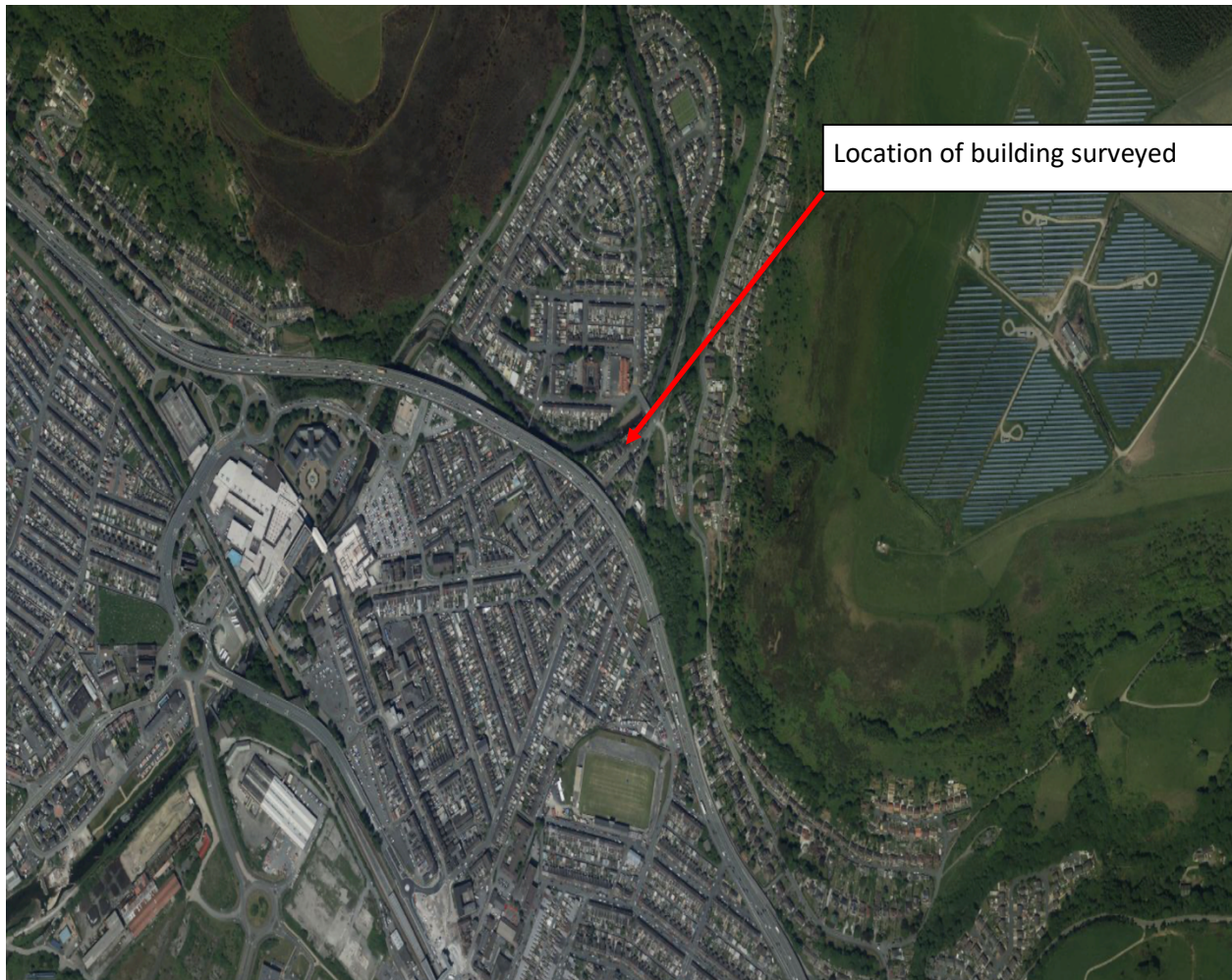
4. Site Description

- 4.1.** The building under survey (The Porch of Gospel Hall) is a worked stone and block-built structure with a timber framed and fibre cement slate roof with the rest of the building being a block and pebble dash render covering to the walls and same roof

construction. The Gospel Hall is a standard meeting hall layout with an entrance porch and large hall with toilets and kitchen facilities at the rear.

4.2. The Gospel Hall is situated within the residential street of Ynys Street in Port Talbot. The area is urban in nature and beyond the local area, the landscape changes to inter-urban and commercial and beyond that rural in nature, with valley sides, Coastline field and hedgerow systems, pockets of woodland.

4.3. The Gospel Hall building at Ynys Street, in a wider landscape context.



Location plan of building under survey



5. Historical and Other Relevant Information

5.1 An online trawl of biodiversity records databases revealed no record of bats within 2km of the property at Ynys Street. No further information regarding historic bat activity at the property or within 1km of the property was available from the desktop study.

6. Recommendations

6.1 Despite the lack of physical evidence for bats currently or historically using the building as a roost site, there is a very low number of features present that could support crevice dwelling bats as described above. The findings of the building scoping survey, preliminary roost assessment and evening emergence flight survey indicate that the property is not currently used as a summer roost or a building that could support a roost of high conservation status.

6.2 It is clearly understood that a negative result does not prove absence; therefore, if planning consent is given for the development of the Gospel Hall it is recommended that plasterboard ceiling of the porch is re-instated to return the conditions of the porch as they were before. In addition, the services of a licensed, on-call bat surveyor be retained

throughout works in order to provide advice in the unlikely event that bats are encountered during works.

6.3 In order that the local planning authority meets its obligations under the Environment (Wales) Act section 6, it is recommended that certain replacement and additional roosting features are introduced to enhance roosting opportunity in the area. Therefore, it is suggested that in the apex of the north western facing gable end of Gospel Hall should be fitted with a bat box such as the Schwegler 1FQ or 1FE, not to mitigate or compensate but to enhance the riparian habitat at the rear of the Gospel Hall.

6.3 Bats are highly mobile flying animals, known to be present along the River Afan, which may set up new roosts at any time. Therefore, all contractors carrying out works should be warned of the possible presence of bats, and of their protected status. It should be clearly understood that in the event of any bats being found during the works, all works should cease in the affected area until appropriate expert advice has been sought.

6.4 Although this development will not require any disturbing works, contractors should be instructed to check for the possible presence of bats on the undersides of roofing materials and fascia boards etc. as they are lifted off, before re-instating them. This is especially important at the outset of the development works, since once works have started the disturbance is likely to drive any bats that may be present, away voluntarily.

6.5 As previously stated bats are highly mobile flying animals which may set up new roosts at any time, therefore this report can only be considered **valid for 12 months**.

Appendix 1

Photographs showing external features and gaps on the porch roof

Gospel Hall porch interface with main building



Slight 10-15mm gap under ridge tiles



Louvered air vent under roof apex of porch



Raised tiles



Disclaimer

This survey was carried out and an assessment was made of the site described at a particular time. The evidence / information that this report contains may be used to draw conclusions as to the likely presence or absence of bats.

Every effort has been taken to provide an accurate assessment of the situation pertaining to this site at the specific time of the survey. No liability can be assumed for omissions or changes after the survey has taken place.

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