

CAREDIG HOUSING ASSOCIATION

22 VICTORIA GARDENS, NEATH

BAT ACTIVITY SURVEY - ADDENDUM REPORT

JULY 2024



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1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Soltys Brewster Ecology were commissioned by Caredig Housing Association to undertake a supplementary bat emergence survey to inform the proposed refurbishment/conversion works at 22 Victoria Gardens. A combination of desk study and day-time inspection survey in June 2024 (SBE, 2024) established that there was no evidence of current or historical use by bats although a limited number of features that could allow access for bats (or birds) at the gable ends in particular, where access to wall tops and any associated cavity were noted. The site was considered of Low quality in terms of foraging and commuting habitat and is relatively isolated within an existing residential area on the edge of the town centre. The combination of features present at the building and its context in the local area were such that it was considered of Low bat roost potential.
- 1.2 Under best practice guidelines (BCT 2023), structures of **Low potential** require a single emergence or re-entry survey to provide a robust appraisal of the likely presence/absence of roosting bats. To supplement the daytime inspection, a single dusk emergence survey was undertaken on 02 July by a team of two surveyors positioned to observe any emergence or bat activity at 1) the northern elevation of the house and single storey extension & 2) the north western corner allowing a view of northern and western gable ends. The current report provides the findings of the dusk emergence survey and provides recommendations with regards to the proposed works based on the combined survey findings (i.e. day-time inspection & emergence survey).
- 1.3 The current report should be read in conjunction with the day-time inspection survey report (Soltys Brewster, 2024) which also contains information relating to nesting birds and other site features (e.g. invasive weeds).

2.0 METHODOLOGY

Bat survey – dusk emergence

2.1 The dusk emergence survey was undertaken on 02 July 2023 by a team of two suitably experienced ecologists including an NRW bat licence holder.¹ The bat activity survey aimed to identify:

- if bats are present within the surveyed parts of the building and, if so, which species are present;
- the type of roost (e.g., maternity roost, day roost used by males or non-breeding females, feeding perch);
- how bats use the building and curtilage (e.g., location of roosting bats, flight paths and flight behaviour, exit and entrance points to the roost); and
- the intensity of use (e.g., likely number of bats, time and duration of use).

2.2 The dusk survey commenced 15 minutes before sunset at 21.15h and extended for 90 minutes after sunset to 23.00h. Surveys were conducted using broad-band bat detectors (Peersonic, EMT-2 & Anabat Express). Bat calls were either identified in the field or using computer-based sonogram analysis software (e.g., Wavesurfer or Analook Insight). Surveyors were positioned as described in Section 1.2 so as to allow visual coverage of the areas/features identified as of limited (Low) potential during the day-time inspection (SBE, 2024). To supplement the surveyor observations, Night Fox Whisker night vision camera was positioned to view the western gable end – the camera was set up to record over the duration of the survey (i.e. from 21.15h – 23.00h). The features visible from surveyor locations are illustrated in Plates 1 & 2 with a still image taken from the Night Fox at 22.30h at Plate 3.

2.3 Weather conditions were not considered a constraint during the survey with air temperatures 16°C at the start (21.15h) and 14°C at the end of the survey, no rain and calm conditions (Beaufort scale Light Air – Force 1). Street lighting is present along Victoria Gardens, with lights on from approximately 21.40h – this lighting did illuminate the western frontage of the building (e.g. see front cover photograph).

¹ NRW Licence S094325/1
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Plate 1 Surveyor view to northern elevation.



Plate 2 Surveyor view to north western corner.



Plate 3 Night Fox Image of western gable, 22.30h



3.0 RESULTS

Bats

- 3.1 No bats were seen to emerge from either of the survey positions and levels of bat activity were generally low - moderate over the survey period, although regular foraging by a small number (or individual) bats was recorded by the surveyor to the north east in particular. Review of the Night Fox camera footage also confirmed no observations of emerging bats although Swift *Apus apus* was confirmed returning to a nest site at the western gable (see Section 3.3). The majority of bat activity was attributable to Common Pipistrelle *Pipistrellus pipistrellus* with a single Noctule pass and 3no. contacts for Soprano Pipistrelle *P. pygmaeus* also noted.
- 3.2 The first bat activity noted was for Common Pipistrelle *Pipistrellus pipistrellus* at 22.06h, with an individual bat noted foraging over the yard/lane immediately to the north of the building by both surveyors – the bat moved off to the north. Observation at 22.07h confirmed a second Common Pipistrelle moving north on a similar flight path with the bat approaching from the lane at the rear (eastern side) of the property. A total of 23 separate bat observations were made by the two surveyors although this included bouts of regular/constant foraging by individual bats, with bats seen foraging over the yard to the north side of the building and along the lane to the rear. For example, the surveyor to the north west noted continuous

foraging passes noted by Common Pipistrelle from 21.47h – 22.52h to the north of the building with similar constant foraging noted along the eastern lane between 22.48h – 22.58h. The bouts of regular foraging are reflected in the number of bat passes registered by the Anabat Express Unit at the north east corner, with 59 passes by Common Pipistrelle, 3 Soprano Pipistrelle and 1 noctule – the number of passes does not relate to number of individual bats. Foraging activity continued up to the end of the survey at 23.00h, with an individual Common Pipistrelle still foraging along the yard to the north side of the building.

Birds

- 3.3 A number of House Martin and Swift were observed feeding/in flight around the building and in the surrounding area at the start of the survey with birds still present up to approximately 21.55h. A total of four birds were seen returning to nest sites on No. 22 and the adjacent properties over the course of the survey. House Martin were seen entering the gable end of No. 24 (to the north) at 21.32h, confirming the nest location noted during the day-time inspection survey (SBE, 2024). Swift was also seen returning to a nest site under the new PVC fascia at the western gable of No. 20 Victoria Gardens at 21.48h. Separate nest locations for Swift were also confirmed for the northern gable end (21.25h) and western gable end (21.50h) for No. 22 – the nest location is likely to be on top of the stone wall beneath the fascia/soffit. The entry at 21.50h was also confirmed following a review of the Night Fox camera footage.

4.0 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Bats

- 4.1 The combination of daytime inspection and dusk emergence survey has established the likely absence of roosting bats from No. 22 Victoria Gardens. On this basis, no specific mitigation or licensing would be required for the proposed refurbishment/conversion works.
- 4.2 As set out in the day-time inspection report, there are features of Low bat potential associated with the building although the findings of the current survey indicate likely absence of roosting bats. In addition, the levels of bat activity noted during the current survey, and the low quality of the surrounding habitats/connectivity are such that the risk of occasional use by individual or small numbers of bats on an irregular basis is similarly low. However, no amount of survey could rule out the possibility that an individual roosting bat may be present and the precautionary measures identified in the day-time inspection report (SBE 2024) remain applicable and are as follows:
- *Provision of 2 no. bat boxes or bat access slates suitable for use by roosting Pipistrelle bats. Box location could include the eastern gable end or bat access slates to be provided on the south facing*

roof aspect to allow access between the roof slates and any new felt or insulation. Any felt used in the vicinity of bat access slates must be Type 1F bitumen felt – breathable roof membranes are not to be used.

- *Toolbox talk to contractors (by an ecologist) prior to any roofing works to advise on the low risk of bats being present. Works to remove the existing fascia, slates and ridge tiles on the property to be undertaken using hand-tools (e.g. claw hammers, crowbar);*
- *If bats, or evidence of bats (e.g. droppings) are encountered during the works, all works will be stopped immediately and a licenced bat ecologist or Natural Resources Wales (NRW) contacted for advice on how to proceed. No disturbing works shall re-commence until a licence is in place.*

Birds

- 4.3 Recommendations relating to nesting birds and invasive weed are set out in the day-time inspection report (SBE 2024) remain applicable although consideration of Swifts would be required alongside the mitigation/enhancement identified for House Sparrow and House Martin. The evening emergence survey has identified 2no. Swift nests at the northern and western gable of No. 22 with the nest location assumed to be the top of the wall below the fascia/soffit. Retention of the existing arrangement to allow continued access for birds to the wall tops would be recommended – as set out in the day-time inspection report. Where possible, existing timber fascia and soffit should be retained, although if replacement were needed, the fitting should ensure that a gap was maintained (to match existing) to allow access for the birds. As noted during the 02 July survey, a Swift was seen entering a nest site behind the new PVC fascia at the gable end of No. 20.
- 4.4 Any work to the fascia/soffit or to remove roof slates should be undertaken outside the bird nesting season (March -August inclusive) and no works at confirmed nest locations – 2no. Swift and 1no. House Sparrow – should be undertaken prior to September 2024 unless a visual inspection confirms nests are inactive. The Conversion/refurbishment works to the exterior of No. 22 should also aim to be completed by March/April 2025 such that any returning Swifts have access to established/existing nest sites.

REFERENCES

Bat Conservation Trust (2023) *Bat Surveys for Professional Ecologists – Good Practice Guidelines*. Bat Conservation Trust, London. 4th Edition.

Soltys Brewster Ecology (2024). *22 Victoria Gardens, Neath. Building Inspection (Protected Species) Survey*.
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