



Bat Survey: Princess Royal Theatre, Civic Centre, Port Talbot, SA13 1PJ



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CONTENTS

1. Background and Purpose
2. Site Description
3. Report Constraints
4. Legal Constraints
5. General Information
6. External Scoping Survey
7. Internal Scoping Survey
8. Emergence Surveys
9. Concluding Remarks and Recommendations
10. Proposed Enhancements
11. Appendices

Aerial Site Photograph

Surveyor & NVA Positions

OS Map

Guidance Note

1.0 Background and Purpose

1.1 The Princess Royal Theatre is located within the eastern wing of the Civic Centre building and is situated in a semi-urban environment in the town of Port Talbot. The theatre is currently in use and planning permission is sought to extend and refurbish the building and to undertake external and internal renovation works. For completeness, the bat survey covers the entire building. This report will investigate if there is potential to disturb bats and will be used to assist in the planning process.

1.2 To support the planning application a bat report has been commissioned to investigate if bats use the current property in any capacity during the maternity season, and for any evidence suggesting that bats use the property at other times of the year.

1.3 The report is prepared and undertaken by Mr. Richard Watkins BSc., an experienced Natural Resources Wales licensed bat ecologist with 13 years experience, license number S0931358-1.

1.4 A data search was undertaken with SEWBRc (0245-020) to provide information on local bat and bird species in the area. The data search did not identify any historic records of bats being present within the building. The nearest recorded roost is approximately 940m from the site which is a record for a Common Pipistrelle (*Pipistrellus pipistrellus*) day roost from 2013.

1.5 There are various non roosting records for bats, the nearest being approximately 530m and 780m from the site which are records for commuting Common Pipistrelles; 810m from the site which is a record for a Common Pipistrelle; Noctule (*Nyctalus noctula*); Myotis Species (*Myotis sp.*) and Soprano Pipistrelle (*Pipistrellus pygmaeus*) live sighting and 910m from the site which is a record for a commuting Common Pipistrelle and a foraging Soprano Pipistrelle.

1.6 A number of records for nesting birds were returned as part of the data search within 500m of the proposed development site. Species records include Curlew; Dartford Warbler; Herring Gull; Kingfisher; Lapwing; Song Thrush and Starling.

1.7 The site is not within 2km of a designated SAC or SSSI for bats.

2.0 Site Description

2.1 The Princess Royal Theatre is located within the right (eastern) wing of the Civic Centre building. The Civic Centre building consists of a main building with two wings and is brick built and three storeys in height with a multiple pyramidal slate roof. Roof lights are visible on some lower sections of the roof. There is a timber soffit board around the entire perimeter of the building at eaves level. There is likely to be a cavity wall in the building.

2.2 The Princess Royal Theatre was built in 1987 and is situated in a semi-urban environment. There are likely to be minimal amounts of ambient lighting within the vicinity of the building.

2.3 The nearest significant watercourse is the River Afan, approximately 60m to the south east of the building and the River Neath, approximately 4.6km to the north west of the building at their nearest points.

2.4 The Princess Royal Theatre is situated in a semi-urban environment in the town of Port Talbot. The building is immediately surrounded by a number of commercial properties and car parks but backs onto substantial amounts of open land. There is a riparian corridor along the River Afan and the Stepping Stones Nature Reserve lies approximately 660m to the north east of the building. There is excellent ecological connectivity for bats to the wider environment.

2.5 The National Grid Reference of the site is approximately: **SS 76556 90267**

3.0 Report Constraints

3.1 Ecological surveys are limited by factors which affect the presence of plants and animals such as the time of year; migration patterns and behaviour. The survey methods employed can provide evidence for the potential presence of bats at the times when the site was visited. Although the methods follow best practice guidance and were carried out in such a way as to maximise the chances of detection, failure to detect the target species cannot be considered as definitive proof of their absence.

3.2 The report is solely concerned with bats in relation to this building. Trees and other buildings not mentioned directly have not been included in this report.

3.3 Even though bats are habitual creatures they can still move to new roosts if more suitable. Therefore this report cannot predict the status of the structure in regard to bat occupancy in the future. This report should be acted upon as soon as practical. Natural Resources Wales will only accept survey data up to two years old from date of issue for licence applications, although some Local Planning Authorities will only accept survey data up to eighteen months old. If planning or building works are delayed, it is the responsibility of the client to discuss and gain approval from the *author* before work commences.

3.4 An internal scoping survey was not undertaken as the building is in use and suspended ceilings were present which obscured any attic spaces.

4.0 Legal Constraints

4.1 Bats, and any place a bat uses for breeding or shelter, either currently occupied or unoccupied are protected by European and British law, predominantly by **The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017**, which are the principal means by which the Habitats Directive is transposed from European directive into law in England and Wales.

4.2 In summary this law states that it is an offence to:

- **Deliberately capture or kill a bat**
- **Deliberately disturb a bat**
- **Damage or destroy a breeding site or resting place of a bat**
- **Keep; transport; sell; exchange or offer for sale or exchange a living or dead bat or any part of a bat**

4.3 ‘Deliberately’ may also be interpreted, as not intending to injure or kill a bat but having done so due to being insufficiently informed and unaware of the consequences of the action.

4.4 For a more comprehensive description and exact wording of the legislation please refer to:

4.5 Where there is a risk that a bat roost may be present, it is incumbent upon the owner to commission a specialist bat survey to identify bat roosts before any work commences. Maximum penalties for offences relating to disturbance to bats or their roosts can amount to imprisonment for a term not exceeding six months or fines of up to Level 5 on the standard scale under the Criminal Justice Act 1982/1991 (i.e. £5000 in April 2001) per roost or bat disturbed or killed, or to both.

4.6 If a bat roost is discovered, no work that could affect the roost can be undertaken until Natural Resources Wales grants a licence endorsing the work. A thorough method statement and adequate mitigation proposal will need to be submitted to support any licence application.

4.7 The Environment (Wales) Act 2016 puts an onus onto responsible bodies such as Local Planning Authorities to not only preserve, but also to enhance biodiversity meaning that planning applications must offer an element of ecological gain as well as preserving any aspects of ecological importance.

5.0 General Information

5.1 Bats are unable to build roosts themselves but instead rely on both man made and naturally occurring features to provide suitable accommodation. Bats generally prefer older buildings built with traditional materials, as traditional building methods provide more opportunities for gaps and entrances to buildings. Traditional cut roofs are preferred to a roof with trusses. Bats also prefer to roost where the external roost area has access to sunlight during the day such as south facing roof elevations.

5.2 Bats can utilise the following features on a building; end tiles, barge boards, soffit, gable ends, porches, lead flashing, hanging tiles, ridge tiles, broken tiles, eaves, sash window frames, wood cladding, fascia boards, window sills and internal roof spaces and timbers. Although this list demonstrates the most popular roosting sites it is by no means definitive. Bats can use apertures as small as 10mm in diameter to gain access.

5.3 The U.K bat population is divided into two distinct families, Rhinolophidae and Vespertilionidae. In general, Rhinolophidae (Horseshoe) bats differ in their roosting requirements to Vespertilionidae (the remainder of UK bat species). Horseshoe bats prefer to roost in large areas such as internal attic spaces and hang in the open from the roof of the roost. They tend to roost in visible clusters to maintain the high temperatures that a maternity colony needs. Horseshoe bats also prefer free flight access and egress into the roosting area. Horseshoe bats tend to be more light averting to other UK bat species, and routinely fly around the internal roosting area to warm up before exiting. It is noted that Plecotus (Long Eared) bats share some of these preferences. Vesper bats are, on the whole, crevice dwelling bats who squeeze into small apertures to access the roost. These, like Horseshoe bats, will cluster in maternity colonies, but are normally hidden from view. Vesper bats, with the exception of Long Eared bats, do not require a large internal roost to fly around before exit. Long Eared bats, although part of the vesper family, are very light averting and will, on occasions share the roosting patterns of both Horseshoe and crevice dwelling species.

6.0 External Scoping Survey

6.1 An updated external scoping survey was undertaken on the **27th March 2024** in conditions of good natural light. All external aspects of the building was comprehensively evaluated for roost potential. Evidence was also sought for any staining or droppings which could suggest bat occupation.

6.2 The building was inspected for overt evidence of bat presence and occupation such as:

- Staining around the entry of roosting point caused by oils secreted by the bat into its fur
- Scratching on surfaces caused by the bat in the acts of take off and landing
- Bat droppings on walls; floors; roof voids; window sills or panes and barge boards
- Urine stains below a possible entrance site, within the entrance to a cavity or on timbers used for roosting
- Bats can produce chatter on warm evenings prior to leaving the roost. A heterodyne bat detector is used to help determine this
- Flies around the entrance or on the floor of possible roosts, which may be attracted to bat guano

6.3 In general the roof around the entire building appeared to be in good condition. An occasionally slightly raised slate was noted across the roof. One section of soffit was missing on the north eastern corner of the building. However, around the entire building, slots were present within the soffits; between the boards and the walls; approximately every 2m. The slots were subject to a visual inspection using binoculars and no mesh or blockage of the gaps were visible. Given the potential roosting features within the building and proximity of the building to the River Afan, the building was assessed as having moderate potential for bat roosting use.

6.4 No droppings or evidence of bats were discovered on any external features although this would not be definitive of bats not using the building at other times of the year.

6.5 No evidence of nesting bird use of the building was observed during the scoping survey.

6.6 Examples of apertures allowing access to cavities in the building:



7.0 Internal Scoping Survey

7.1 An internal scoping survey was not undertaken as the building is in use and suspended ceilings were present which obscured any attic spaces.

8.0 Emergence Surveys

8.1 The emergence surveys were carried out during the maternity season and adhered to current best practice guidelines. These surveys were conducted from half an hour before sunset until two hours post sunset. The surveyors used are all experienced bat counters who have undergone sufficient training in basic bat ecology and bat activity. All sound analysis was undertaken by Richard Watkins.

8.2 The emergence surveys gave extra consideration to the features identified during the external scoping survey which could be utilised by bats.

8.3 First Emergence Survey on 5th June 2024

- Sunset: 21:28
- Weather: Dry and calm with full cloud cover
- Temperature: 13 degrees celsius
- Surveyors: Jonathan Daniels; Tyrone Evans; Allen Harvey; Adam Hughes; Ryan Offers; Debbie Parry; Caitlin Smith; Mason Smith; Keith Watkins and Richard Watkins

No bats were observed emerging from the building.

8.4 Second Emergence Survey on 7th July 2024

- Sunset: 21:33
- Weather: Dry and calm with approximately 20% cloud cover
- Temperature: 13 degrees celsius
- Surveyors: Jonathan Daniels; Hannah Evans; Tyrone Evans; Allen Harvey; Adam Hughes; Ryan Offers; Caitlin Smith; Mason Smith; Keith Watkins and Richard Watkins

No bats were observed emerging from the building.

8.5 The weather conditions were dry and calm with little wind and no rain and therefore conducive for bat activity. The temperature was above 10 degrees celsius during the emergence surveys.

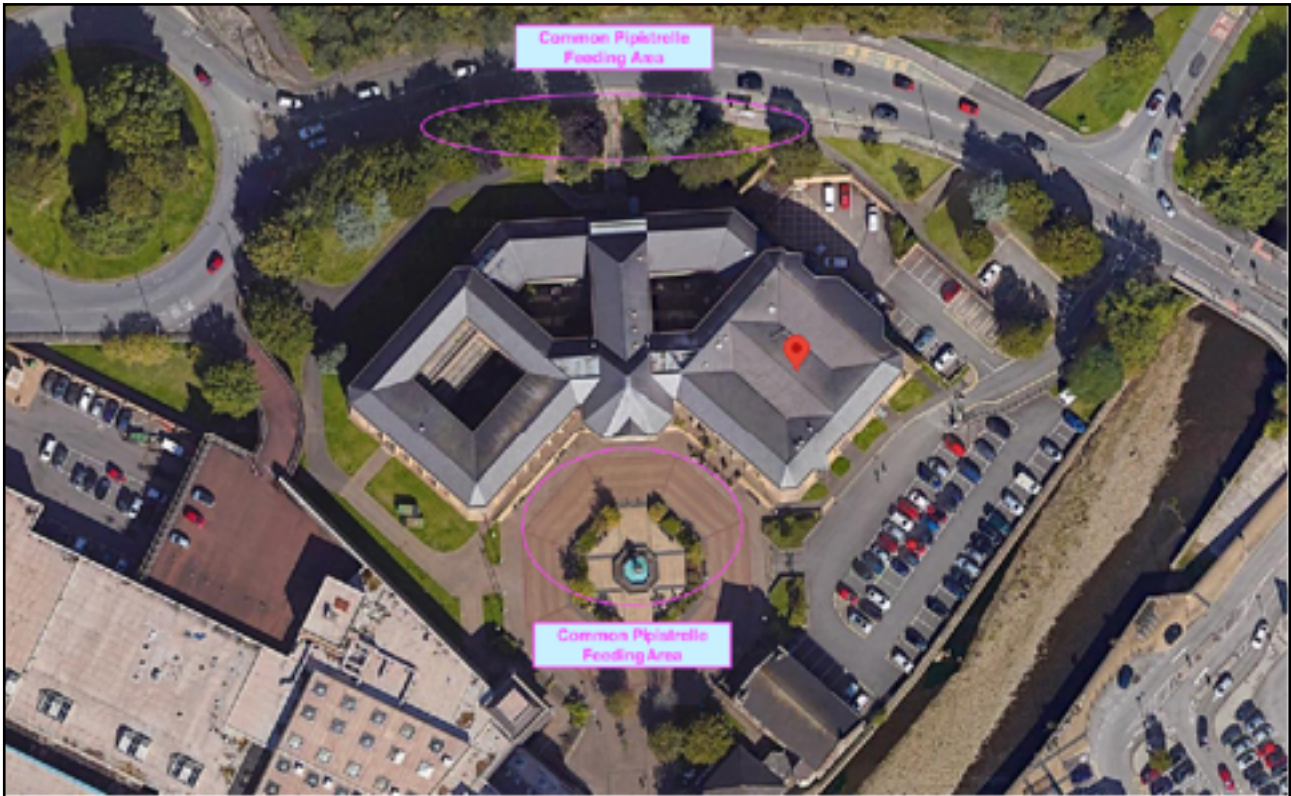
8.6 The best viewing conditions were obtained.

8.7 Echo-meter Touch 2 Pro bat detectors were present to acoustically record any bat calls. Nightfox Night Vision Goggles with record features were also used alongside additional infrared spotlights. These were positioned with the surveyors.

8.8 Analysis of sound recording on bat detectors:

Species of Bats Recorded in the Area:	
Common Pipistrelle	<i>Pipistrellus pipistrellus</i>
Noctule	<i>Nyctalus noctula</i>

8.9 During the emergence surveys, a very low number of bat calls were recorded. A small number of Common Pipistrelles were observed foraging around the site but did not emerge from the building. A Noctule was detected but was not observed.



8.10 Examples of NVA Still Shots:



9.0 Concluding Remarks and Recommendations

9.1 During the emergence surveys, no bats were observed emerging from the building.

9.2 Throughout the surveys, a very low number of bat calls were recorded and no bats were observed using the building. Therefore it is suggested that the proposed building works will have a negligible impact on the local bat population.

9.3 The building does not offer significant hibernation potential for bats. The external walls were sound with no visible apertures for bats preventing access into the wall structure. The building is in use and therefore central heating will be on which does not provide a thermally stable environment for hibernating bats. When considering the absence of bat access points into the wall structure, the hibernation use of the building is considered to be limited.

9.4 No evidence of nesting bird use of the building was observed during the surveys.

9.5 Given the potential roosting features within the building and proximity of the building to the River Afan, the building was assessed as having moderate potential for bat roosting use.

9.6 The site is located in an area with excellent ecological connectivity for bats to the wider environment and the surrounding environment does offer potential for bat use.

9.7 There were moderate amounts of ambient lighting within the vicinity of the building.

9.8 Following commencement of works; outside any ecologically supervised period and in the unlikely event that the contractor encounters any bats during any works, then work must immediately stop and the bat worker summoned. If for any reason they cannot be contacted, advice must be sought from Natural Resources Wales, (Telephone Number 0300 065 3000). No works would recommence until a licence is issued by NRW sanctioning works going forward. The guidance note on finding bats found in the appendices must be followed.

9.9 A suitable external lighting plan must be implemented to reduce any disturbance to the bats feeding and commuting within the vicinity of the property.

10.0 Proposed Enhancements

10.1 To comply with the Environment (Wales) Act 2016, ecological gain will be included into the scope of works. **All proposed enhancements will need to be shown on architectural drawings.** This will consist of:

1 Schwegler IFQ Surface Mounted Bat Box. This can be painted with a water based paint to match the surrounding colour scheme.

2 Vivara Pro WoodStone Swift Nest Boxes. Care must be taken not to obstruct the entrance holes.

If any of the above products are not available, then further advice must be sought from a suitably qualified ecologist regarding a suitable replacement product.

10.2 It is proposed that new roosting for bats be created by fitting one Schwegler 1FQ surface mounted bat box on the northern elevation of the building.



10.3 Bat enhancements will benefit from the southern elevation or an elevation where there is direct access to sunlight as the bats can tolerate and prefer high levels of temperature in their roost.

10.4 Two Vivara Pro WoodStone Swift Nest Boxes will be surface mounted on the northern elevation of the building. **These will not be situated on a south facing elevation. Care must be taken not to obstruct the entrance holes.**



10.5 Any nesting bird enhancements will not be suited on the south elevation as this may experience excess heat from the sun.

10.6 Direct and prolonged illumination of the building, especially near any roost entry points or bird boxes must be avoided as this will cause disturbance.

10.7 Where practical, all bat features should be located far enough from any windows to avoid any direct light spill, at least a minimum of 2 metres away.

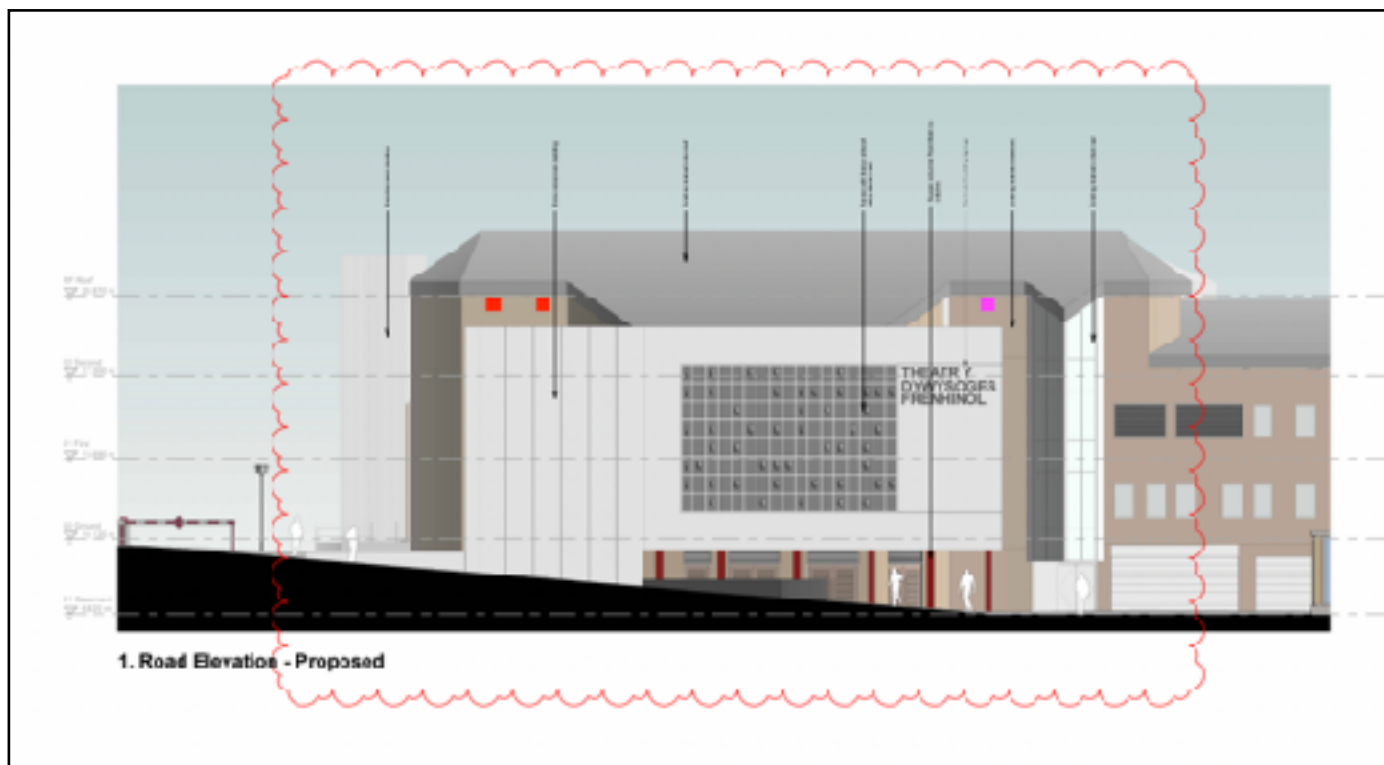
10.8 On occasions the suggested enhancements can be in short supply. Please order the enhancements as soon as practical to avoid supply issues during the building phase. If supply is depleted please seek advice from a suitably qualified ecologist on a suitable replacement prior to the purchase.

10.9 Recommended Locations of Bat and Bird Enhancements :

 Location of Vivara Pro WoodStone Swift Nest Box

 Location of Schwegler 1FQ Bat Box

Northern Elevation



Signed: *R Watkins* Date: October 2024

11.0 Appendix

Aerial Site Photograph

OS Map

Surveyor & NVA Positions

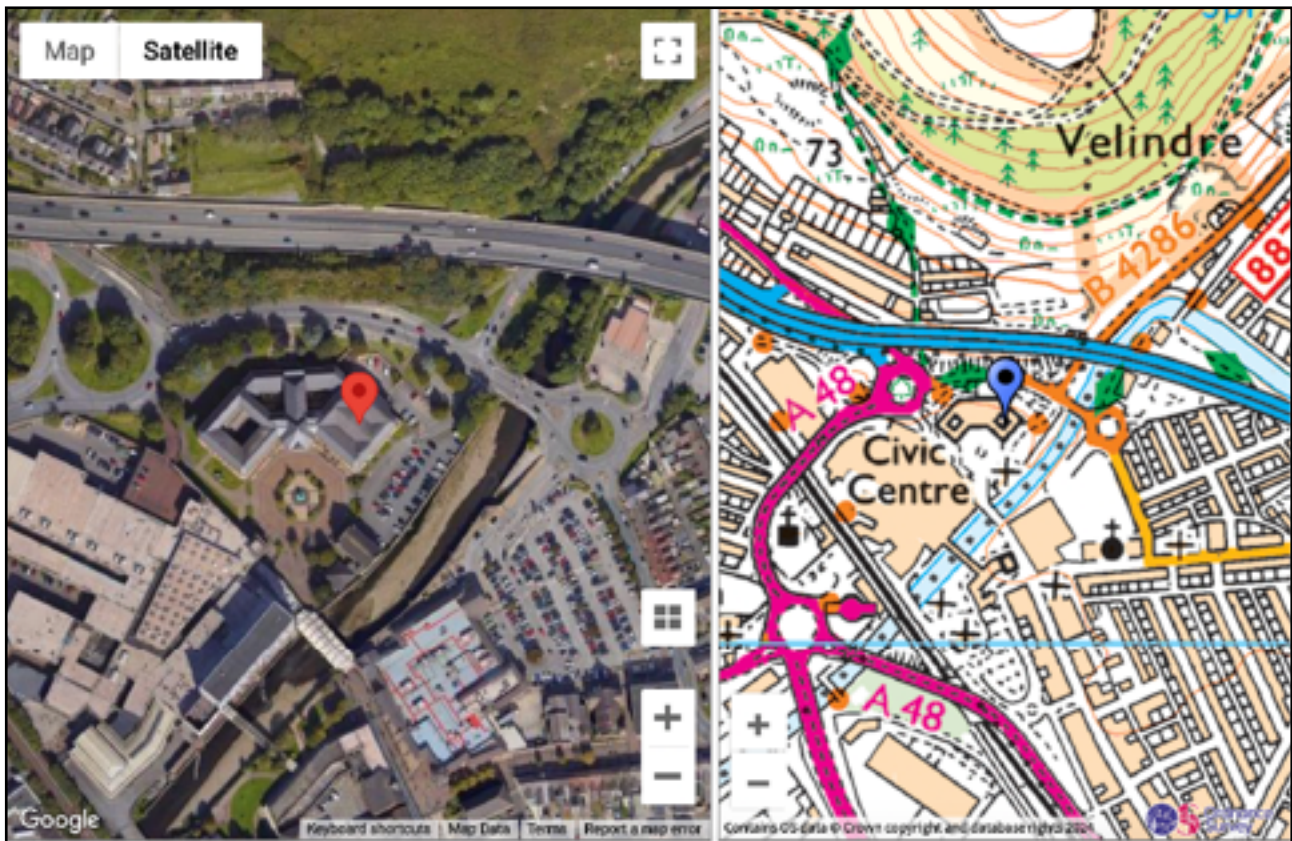
Guidance Note

Appendix 1 Aerial Site Photograph

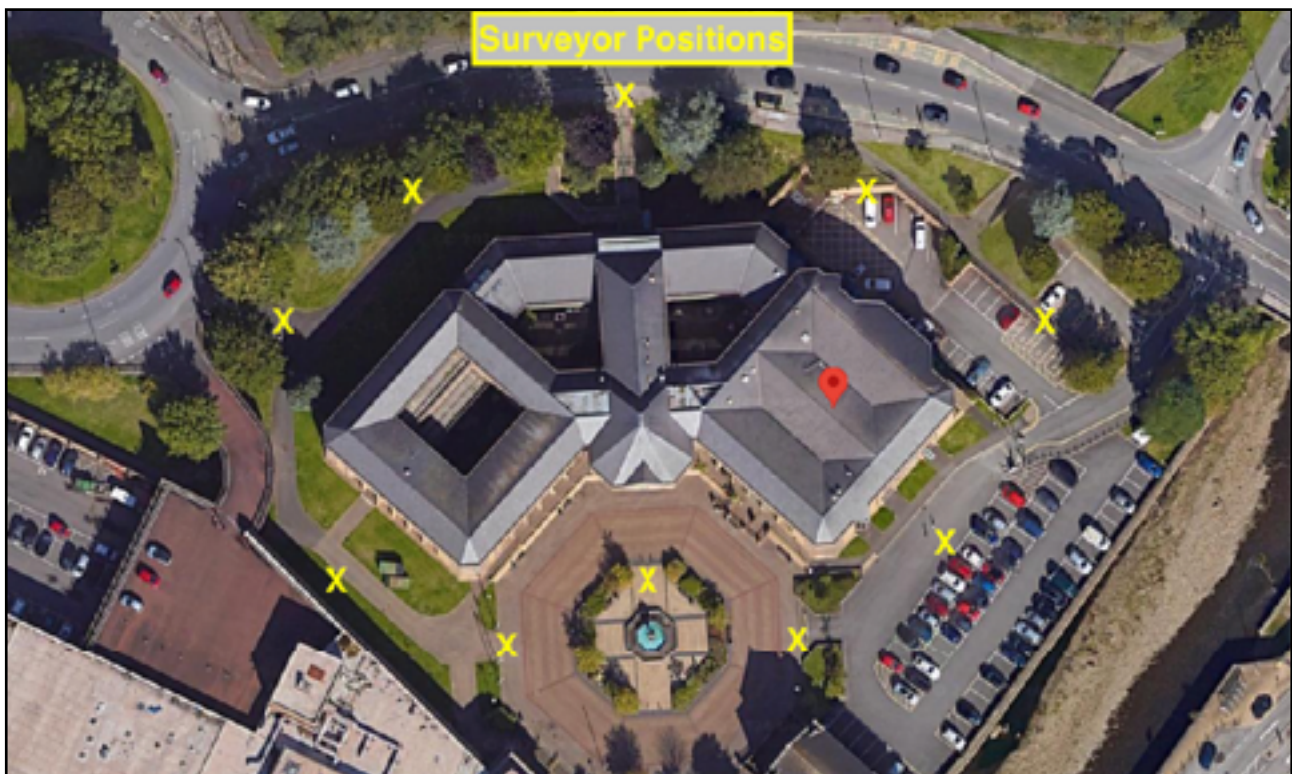


The site in its wider environment offering excellent ecological connectivity to the surrounding habitat.

Appendix 2 OS Map National Grid Reference SS 76556 90267



Appendix 3 Surveyor & NVA Positions



Guidance Note (Important information in the unlikely event that bats are discovered)

Where any building or demolition work is to commence, all contractors should remain vigilant at all times during the course of the works, looking for signs that bats are present or that bats have formerly occupied the building. Whilst this survey has been undertaken and no visible evidence of bats found within the building, the possibility of a bat or bats being present cannot be absolutely ruled out. In the extremely unlikely event that bats are discovered during the works, then work must **stop** as soon as it is safe to do so, The bat worker must be contacted immediately and Natural Resources Wales informed in order for a licence to be granted to complete the works. No works will be permitted until such time a license is approved.

If in the unlikely event a roost is accidentally opened up, any loose bats should be returned to the roost and apertures closed to prevent their escape until they can be examined for injury by a bat worker. Dead bats should be retained. Bats are very fragile and should be handled by a professional, and unless absolutely necessary should not to be approached and disturbed. However, where a bat is clearly injured and distressed, the contractor should carefully collect them and place in a light proof box. Gloves must be worn when handling bats*

In the Event of a Bats being discovered the bat worker must be contacted immediately that it is safe to do so on 07866461726

If the bat worker is not available, Natural Resources Wales must be contacted on 0300 065 3000

*Bats can potentially carry European Bat Lyssa Virus (EBLV) which is a strain of rabies virus that is found in some bat species although extremely uncommon, a potential risk occurs; therefore, all bats must be handled with thick gloves.