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PRELIMINARY ROOST ASSESSMENT AT NUMBERS 23/25 BEACONS VIEW, CIMLA, NEATH PORT TALBOT.

On behalf of

TAI TARIAN LTD

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Issue 1

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All habitat and protected species surveys present a ‘snapshot’ of conditions existing and species present, or considered having potential to be present, at the time of survey. Many species are mobile and distributions can vary across time. Results and findings presented in this report should be considered with these factors in mind.

Protected species surveys are recognised as having a ‘shelf life’ of two years maximum. Surveys older than this are unlikely to be accepted by a Local Planning Authority or Natural Resources Wales as viable documentation without just cause.

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SUMMARY

Hawkeswood Ecology was instructed to carry out a daytime Preliminary Bat Roost Assessment (PRA) of 23/25 Beacons View, Cimla, a semi-detached property in an estate on the south west of the Cimla conurbation. The building was also assessed for breeding birds during the survey. It is proposed to demolish the building to allow construction of a new access to a proposed development on land at the former Tudor Inn which lies to the rear of the House.

The Site was assessed on 1st October and 6th November 2024. The Preliminary Roost Assessment found the dwelling house to date from approximately the 1950's and to have been recently (within the last eight years) upgraded with External Wall Insulation (EWI) and a new roof. The fixing of EWI has resulted in no gaps being present to the wall tops or loft interior. All soffits and fascias were in good condition and completely sealed by the EWI and subsequent render.

The roof was in very good condition with no evidence of broken or missing tiles, it had a dry ridge which effectively excludes bats from entry to the roof from the ridge. As part of the refurbishment works solar panels were fitted to the west facing pitch of the building.

Internally the loft spaces were lined with a non-bitumen coated roofing membrane and the floor had deep glass fibre insulation. The roof spaces were open cut construction. No evidence of occupation by bats was found inside the lofts.

A very limited opportunity for bats to use gaps as a night roost was noted in the corner of each gable end where a small enclosure was formed between decorative quoins and the gable fascia, there was no access for bats or birds to the building interior however.

It was concluded following the PRA that the house was of negligible value for bats and further survey would not produce any new useful information. Given the finding of the surveys it is considered there are no apparent ecological reasons that would prevent the proposed demolition proceeding with recommendations made in the report to ensure no harm to protected species occurs.

The conclusions of this report are considered valid for two years from the survey date noted in Section 1 of the report.

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Hawkeswood Ecology was instructed by Tai Tarian Ltd to undertake a Preliminary Roost Assessment (PRA) of a semi-detached property, numbers 23/25, Beacons View, Cimla, Neath Port Talbot. It is planned to demolish the building to allow development of a new access road to a proposed residential development on the former Tudor Inn Site which lies to the rear of the house.
- 1.2 The building is a property approximately dated to the 1950's. It is of brick and block construction and has recently, within the last 8 years, been upgraded with External Wall Insulation (EWI) fitted and the roof cover replaced. The house sits in an urban development on the south west boundary of Cimla at Grid ref SS 76086 96065.
- 1.3 The objectives of the survey were to:
 - To establish whether the building is currently used by bats or nesting birds or shows potential for them to occupy it;
 - To assess the potential impacts on bats or nesting birds of the proposed works;
 - To provide mitigation proposals in the case of bats or nesting birds being found.
- 1.4 The PRA and nesting bird check was carried out over two dates, on 1st October and 6th November 2024.

2. METHODOLOGY

Desktop Study

- 2.1 An earlier study of the Tudor Inn Site included a full biological data search and this was referenced in the course of this PRA. In addition, Hawkeswood Ecology has undertaken surveys of the adjacent Tudor Inn Site and those survey outcomes were also referenced in the completion of this report.

Field Survey

- 2.2 The study methodology followed accepted guidelines set out in the Bat Conservation Trust documents 'Bat Surveys for Professional Ecologists, Good Practice Guidelines', fourth edition, 2023.
- 2.3 The principal aim of the daytime inspection was to survey the main structures of the buildings for the presence of, and potential to support roosting bats. Firstly, an external examination was made of the design and structure of the buildings to assess the suitability for use by bats and for potential access points. Indications such as droppings, staining and potential access points were searched for.
- 2.4 The daytime inspection was carried out with close focusing binoculars, an endoscope, ladders and a 1,000,000 candlepower spot lamp available.
- 2.5 During the survey any evidence of nesting birds or potential for them to use the building was also assessed.

Constraints

- 2.6 No constraints to the survey were noted.

3. SURVEYOR EXPERIENCE

- 3.1 The surveyor and report author is Eric Hawkeswood. Eric has been an active member of the Brecknock Bat Group since 1999 and been involved in a number of long running surveys within the county. He is a Natural Resource Wales (NRW) licensed bat worker (no. S092015-1, 2023) and has extensive experience of roost inspections and emergence work and contracts to Natural Resources Wales offering bat advice under Section 10(5) of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). He has been a professional in the nature conservation field for thirty five years formerly working as Reserves Manager and Conservation Officer at Gwent Wildlife Trust and Woodland Manager for the Ruperra Conservation Trust. Eric has worked as an Ecological Consultant as joint proprietor of Hawkeswood Ecology since 2001.

4 DESKTOP STUDY FINDINGS

- 4.1 A desktop survey was undertaken by Ecological Services Ltd. as part of the Ecological Assessment undertaken by them in 2022. They reported common pipistrelle bats foraging and commuting plus house sparrow within 500 metres of the Site.
- 4.2 During transect and passive detector survey in 2023 Hawkeswood Ecology recorded four species of bat using the former Tudor Inn Site. These were common pipistrelle, by far the most frequently recorded, soprano pipistrelle, whiskered, mainly confined to the woody margins and noctule. No activity suggesting roosting was noted from adjacent housing (i.e. such as emergence or swarming behaviour) although this was clearly not the focus of attention during transect surveys.
- 4.3 Local roof nesting birds noted during bat and other surveys were house sparrow, wren, blue tit, great tit, jackdaw and starling.
- 4.4 No statutory sites designated for bats are noted within 10 kilometres of the Site.

5 FIELD SURVEY

- 5.1 The Site consists of a semi-detached property, numbers 23-25 Beacons View, sat in formal gardens within an estate dating from the 1950's. The property is on the western boundary of Cimla with open land to the west. Photographs of the buildings are given in Appendix 1; the Site layout is shown in Figure 1.
- 5.2 The property in question is a traditional brick and block construction semi-detached social housing property. It has been re-roofed in the last eight years and the roof cover is

in good condition with no missing or cracked tiles. It has a dry-ridge system and PV panels are fitted on the rear (western pitch) of the roof of both houses.

- 5.3 The walls are clad with external wall insulation (EWI) which is rendered. The EWI has closed any previously existing access that may have been present to the wall tops, cavity and roof space.
- 5.4 All roof ancillary components are UPVC as are the windows, which all look to have been recently replaced. A soffits, fascias and window casements are fully sealed by the EWI and render with no suitable access for bats.
- 5.5 Internally, the roof is open cut with webs supporting the ridge, although some similarity to a truss, the roof is open and the woodwork is not prefabricated.
- 5.6 The lofts of number 23 and number 25 are separated by a block dividing wall. The floor of both was lined with double depth glass fibre insulation, the chimneys removed and both lie below the roof cover. The lining is a non-bitumen coated breathable membrane and is in good condition and concurrent with the new roof covering.
- 5.7 No evidence of breeding birds was found on either structure.

Surrounding area

- 5.8 To the west of the house are the grounds of the former Tudor Inn which include grassland, scrub and trees, beyond this is open countryside. Other than this the building is bounded by residential developments dating largely to the 1950's with medium sized mature gardens..

Evidence and Potential for roosting Bats

- 5.9 The PRA found no direct evidence (i.e. droppings, staining or animals) of bats using the building. No opportunities to access the property could be seen and it was extremely well sealed against either bat or bird entry. Small 'hollows' were noted at the junctions of the fascia and decorative quoins at the gable ends (see photographs) which may present opportunities for night roosting but do not allow access to the building interior. It was concluded that the property was of **negligible** value to bats and it is considered that further survey would provide no useful information and is not necessary in this instance.

Evidence of use by breeding birds

- 5.10 No evidence of use by breeding birds was noted either internally or externally.

6 DISCUSSION AND IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 6.1 The property is a traditionally built semi-detached social housing property dating from the 1950's which has been subjected to significant improvements to improve its energy efficiency. The improvements include installation of External Wall Insulation (EWI), a new roof cover, increased depth of loft insulation and installation of solar panels on the west facing pitch of the roof.
- 6.2 A detailed inspection both internally and externally of the property found no evidence of, or potential for, bats accessing the building cavity or loft space. Further, no past evidence of bats using the building prior to the improvements was noted when looking beneath the new layers of loft insulation although this would not rule out previous use of the earlier soffits prior to the works.
- 6.3 Potential night roost 'hollows' were noted at both gable ends formed between the decorative quoins and gable fascias. However, this would be expected to be used only for 'resting' purposes and did not allow access to the house interior. Any use of this would be likely to be opportunistic rather than regular and no evidence was found of use such as staining etc.
- 6.4 Houses sealed with a dry ridge (mechanically fixed) often appear to have gaps under the ridge allowing bat access. Given the fixing nature of the ridge, there is no access along it (in the ridge tunnel) or to the loft below as the gap between the top rows of tiles is sealed by a membrane prior to fixing the ridge tiles. There is extremely limited potential that a bat may access a single ridge tile as an opportunistic roost and recommendations are made in Section 8 in relation to this.
- 6.5 No evidence of bird nesting was noted.
- 6.6 Under the Environment (Wales) Act 2016 and Well Being of Future Generations Act 2015 require Local Planning Authorities (LPA's) and other public bodies must seek to maintain and enhance biodiversity so far as consistent with the proper exercise of their functions and in so doing promote the resilience of ecosystems. Assessment of the Ecosystem Resilience is therefore an integral part of the LPA's duty and they are directed to consider the resilience of ecosystems early in the planning process to aid assessment of the impacts of any proposed development upon biodiversity. In addition, a letter from the Chief Planning Officer clarified planning requirements in relation to biodiversity impacts (see Section 8, Relevant Legislation and Policies paragraphs 8.17-8.19) points out the responsibility of the LPA to maintain and enhance biodiversity and to provide '*a net benefit for biodiversity*'.

Ecosystem resilience

- 6.7 The premise for Ecosystem Resilience is laid out in Section 4 of The State of Natural Resources Report, a 2018 document produced by Natural Resources Wales (NRW) on behalf of the Welsh Government. It lays out a framework for assessing ecosystem resilience. However, despite the duty placed on LPA's, there is no currently agreed format for this assessment.

- 6.8 Section 4 names five attributes that NRW consider ‘building blocks’ of ecosystem resilience, these are:
- Diversity
 - Extent
 - Condition
 - Connectivity
 - Adaptability
- 6.9 These factors are considered below, although none of them are considered ‘stand-alone’ and all interrelate to some extent. It is also important to note that it is the responsibility of the LPA to assess Ecosystem Resilience and that any Site based report is not able to make judgements on a wider scale. As pointed out above, it is important to note that there is as yet no agreed format to undertake such an assessment.

Diversity

- 6.10 The Site is not diverse in a biological sense with the presence of a semi-detached property and formal gardens.

Extent

- 6.11 The Site is small, approximately 0.43 square metres of which the building accounts for approximately 135 square metres. The small size of the Site will limit any impacts on species in the local area.

Condition

- 6.12 The Site is in a poor condition from a biodiversity point of view with lawns and formal shrubs present. The house showed no evidence of supporting protected species.

Connectivity

- 6.13 The loss of the house for a new access road to the development to the west may improve connectivity between the remainder of the estate and the open countryside for mobile species.

Adaptability

- 6.14 NRW comments that:
‘Adaptability differs from the other attributes because it is part of the definition of resilience rather than an attribute that supports it. However, its inclusion in the Environment (Wales) Act is important because it emphasizes one of the most important features of resilience: dynamism and the ability to adapt to change.’
- 6.15 NRW also comments that *‘Adaptability cannot yet be quantified in an equivalent way to the other attributes and so we have not used it in the assessment of resilience in this State of Natural Resources Review’*. As such this cannot be considered in this report.
- 6.16 At its most simple, this would mean that the LPA must protect any biodiversity value of the of the Site and any impacts likely to affect adjacent areas. In this instance, it is considered that there are not likely to be any significant impacts if proper mitigation is

put in place prior to, and in the course of, construction. Without mitigation, these impacts could be considered to be significant. Recommendations are made in Section 8 to ensure that any impacts are properly negated.

Assessment of Potential Impacts

- 6.17 The proposed development will require the demolition of the current building and a remodelling of the Site which will remove the existing vegetation. No bats were confirmed as roosting in the building and no evidence of birds using it for breeding.
- 6.18 It is considered that the proposals are of **no significance** in a local or county context. If recommendations made in Section 8 are fully implemented it is considered that there will be potential for enhancement of the biodiversity value of the Site. No negative impact upon the favourable conservation status of bats within the local or wider area is foreseen.

7 RELEVANT LEGISLATION AND POLICIES

Birds

- 7.1 Part I of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) makes it an offence (with certain limited exceptions and in the absence of a licence) intentionally to kill, injure or take any wild bird, or intentionally to damage, take or destroy its nest whilst being built or in use, or to take or destroy its eggs. Consequently, even common birds such as blackbirds or robins, and their nests and eggs are protected in this way. Any works involving removal or other management of trees or shrubs must be undertaken outside the breeding bird season (March- August).
- 7.2 Further, section 1(5) of Part 1 of the W&C Act states any person intentionally disturbing any wild bird included in Schedule 1 whilst it is building a nest or is in or near a nest containing eggs or young or disturbs the young of such a bird is committing an offence and liable to a special penalty.
- 7.3 The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 has strengthened the protection of wild birds and their habitats. The amendment is “To help preserve, maintain and re-establish habitats for wild birds.”
- 7.4 Under the amended Regulations, Local Planning Authorities (as well as national statutory conservation bodies such as Natural Resources Wales) are required to protect and create bird habitat.

Bats

- 7.5 All UK bats are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. Schedule 5 of this act makes it illegal to intentionally kill, injure or take bats. It is also an offence to intentionally damage or destroy their place of rest. In 2007 the offences of killing, injuring or taking species under Section 9(1), 9(2) and 9(4)a of European Protected Species listed in Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) were removed to avoid duplication with their protection under Annex IV of the European Communities Council Directive on the Conservation of Natural Habitats and Wild Fauna

and Flora (The Habitats Directive) as amended. The regulations remove the defence of inadvertent or accidental damage to roosts and make the offence ‘absolute’.

- 7.6 Further all bat species are protected under Annex IV of the European Communities Council Directive on the Conservation of Natural Habitats and Wild Fauna and Flora (The Habitats Directive) as amended which requires the United Kingdom government to provide bats with strict protection. The Habitats Directive is transcribed into England and Wales Law by The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 and consolidated into UK post Brexit legislation by The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations (Amendment) (EU Exit) 2019; this legislation consolidates amendments made to the earlier 2010 act with the 2019 amendment altering wording to satisfy its status as UK legislation post Brexit. This legislation states in Part 3, Protection of Species, paragraph 43(1) that a person who:
- (a) deliberately captures, injures or kills any wild animal of a European protected species,
 - (b) deliberately disturbs wild animals of any such species,
 - (c) deliberately takes or destroys the eggs of such an animal, or
 - (d) damages or destroys a breeding site or resting place of such an animal,
- is committing an offence.
- 7.7 Further, with regard to disturbance of EPS, Paragraph 43(2) that disturbance is an act which is likely to:
- (a) to impair their ability—
 - (i) to survive, to breed or reproduce, or to rear or nurture their young, or
 - (ii) in the case of animals of a hibernating or migratory species, to hibernate or migrate;
 - or
 - (b) to affect significantly the local distribution or abundance of the species to which they belong.
- 7.8 In the case of a development involving the loss or modification of a building which may affect bats the above legislation must be considered and it may be necessary to apply to Natural Resources Wales for a European Protected Species Licence (EPSL).
- 7.9 The introduction of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 has removed the defence of killing or injuring a protected species during a lawful operation, thus even in an instance where planning permission is granted, the presence of bats must be considered and mitigated for prior to commencement of works. Under the above regulations, a WAG licence can only be given if three tests are satisfied:
- The action proposed is in the interest of preserving public health or public safety or other imperative reasons of overriding public interest including those of a social or economic nature and beneficial consequences of primary importance to the environment;
 - That there is not a satisfactory alternative;
 - That the action proposed will not be detrimental to the maintenance of the population of the species concerned at a favourable conservation status in their natural range.

- 7.10 Failure to satisfy the regulations and obtain an EPSL where required is likely to result in prosecution and can lead to severe fines of up to £5000 per bat and possible imprisonment.
- 7.11 Eight species of bat are listed under section 7 of the Environment Wales Act (2106). Section 7 of the Act provides a list of living organisms of principal importance for the purpose of maintaining and enhancing biodiversity in relation to Wales. This is a list of species considered at threat within Wales and in need of conservation management to maintain and enhance population numbers.
- 7.12 A duty is placed on the Local Authority by the Welsh Assembly Government to maintain and enhance populations of species listed in Section 7.

Securing Biodiversity Enhancements

- 7.13 Planning Policy Wales Technical Advice Note (TAN) 5, Nature Conservation and Planning, provides advice on how the planning system should contribute to biodiversity protection and enhancement. TAN 5 recognises the importance of biodiversity and the enjoyment of it. TAN 5 requires Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) to protect and enhance biodiversity during the planning process and to encourage sustainable developments. It also requires LPA's to ensure that protected Sites are properly accounted for within the planning system.
- 7.14 The Chief Planning Officer sent a letter to LPAs (dated 23rd October 2019) following discrepancies over the implementation of LPA duty under the environment (Wales) Act 2016. This letter provides clarification on the Welsh Governments approach to Paragraph 6.4.5 of PPW 11. The purpose of the letter was to *'clarify that in light of the legislation and Welsh Government policy outlined above, where biodiversity enhancement is not proposed as part of an application, significant weight will be given to its absence, and unless other significant material considerations indicate otherwise it will be necessary to refuse permission.'* Biodiversity maintenance and enhancement and Ecosystem Resilience will need therefore to be considered in any future planning application.
- 7.15 Planning Policy Wales (PPW) 12 has recently been released and has strengthened the green infrastructure segments. In respect of the Chief Planning Officers letter (6.32 above) and a consultation process Paragraph 6.4.5 in PPW 12 now requires a net benefit for biodiversity in any development and reads:
Planning authorities must seek to maintain and enhance biodiversity in the exercise of their functions. This means development should not cause any significant loss of habitats or populations of species (not including non-native invasive species), locally or nationally and must work alongside nature and it must provide a net benefit for biodiversity and improve, or enable the improvement, of the resilience of ecosystems. A net benefit for biodiversity is the concept that development should leave biodiversity and the resilience of ecosystems in a significantly better state than before, through securing immediate and long-term, measurable and demonstrable benefit, primarily on or immediately adjacent to the site.

8 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 8.1 No evidence of roosting bats was found at the property, however the following recommendations are made as best practice:
- Prior to commencement of works the ‘hollows’ at each gable end between the decorative quoins and gable fascia should be re-assessed to ensure no bats are present;
 - The ridge tiles should be disassembled by hand to ensure no bats are present..
- 8.2 No specific compensations is considered appropriate in this instance.
- 8.3 Should a bat be found at any time during the works, an appropriately licensed bat ecologist will be called to Site to advise on how best to continue. In this instance, it may be necessary to obtain a Derogation Licence to comply fully with the Regulations.

9 CONCLUSIONS

- 9.1 There is no evidence to suggest that bats use the building for roosting purposes.
- 9.2 Recommendations are made to ensure a safe demolition and biodiversity gains.
- 9.3 The works can proceed without need for a derogation licence being sought. However, should a bat be found at any stage, works will cease immediately and a licensed bat ecologist called to Site to advise on correct procedures.

10 BIBLIOGRAPHY

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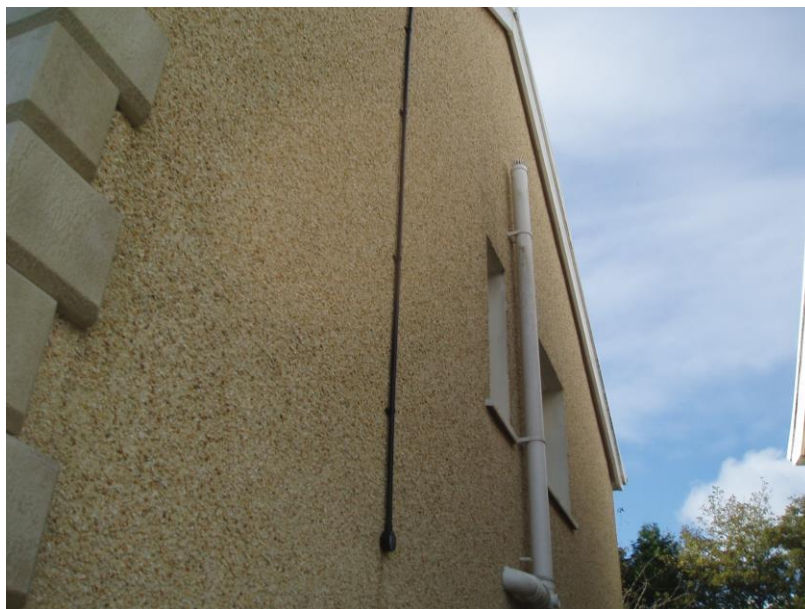
APPENDIX 1
PHOTOGRAPHS



The front, eastern elevation.



The rear western elevation.



Gable end of number 23



A small hollow formed by the decorative quoins and gable fascia (arrow).



Loft of number 23 Beacons View.



Loft of number 25 Beacons View

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*Hawkeswood Ecology is an Ecological Consultancy based in South Wales
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