

Reinhardt Slabbert

Dim South Ltd
Hazel Cottage
Warren Road
Brighton BN2 6DA

19 November 2020

Our ref: UE0263

Your ref:

Dear Reinhardt,

RE: Pollards Farm Barn, Ditchling Road, Ditchling Common, West Sussex: Preliminary Roost Assessment

Urban Edge Environmental Consulting Ltd undertook a preliminary bat roost assessment (PRA) at the above site on 22 September 2020. The purpose of the survey was to assess a building with regards to its suitability to support roosting bats, in reference to proposals for a demolition and rebuild.

Weather conditions during the survey were warm and bright with no precipitation, no wind, 60% cloud, and a temperature of 20°C. The site visit was undertaken by Jeff Turton (BSc(Hons) GradCIEEM), an ecologist with five years' professional consultancy experience.

Site Description

The site is located on Ditchling Road, Ditchling Common, West Sussex (Grid Reference: 533212, 118313). The site currently comprises a timber barn which is used for storage and is situated within the wider curtilage of Pollards Farm, see Figure 1. Other habitats within the curtilage included amenity grassland, hedgerows, scattered trees, hard standing, introduced shrub and a pond.

The site is set within the semi-rural landscape of Ditchling Common, with nearby residential gardens, mature hedgerows, tree lines, mixed farmland, ancient / deciduous woodland, ponds and waterways.

Proposed Works

Planning consent is being sought for a residential development on previously developed land. Currently there is a barn within the footprint of the development and the proposals would include the complete demolition of this building to enable a new build granny annex.

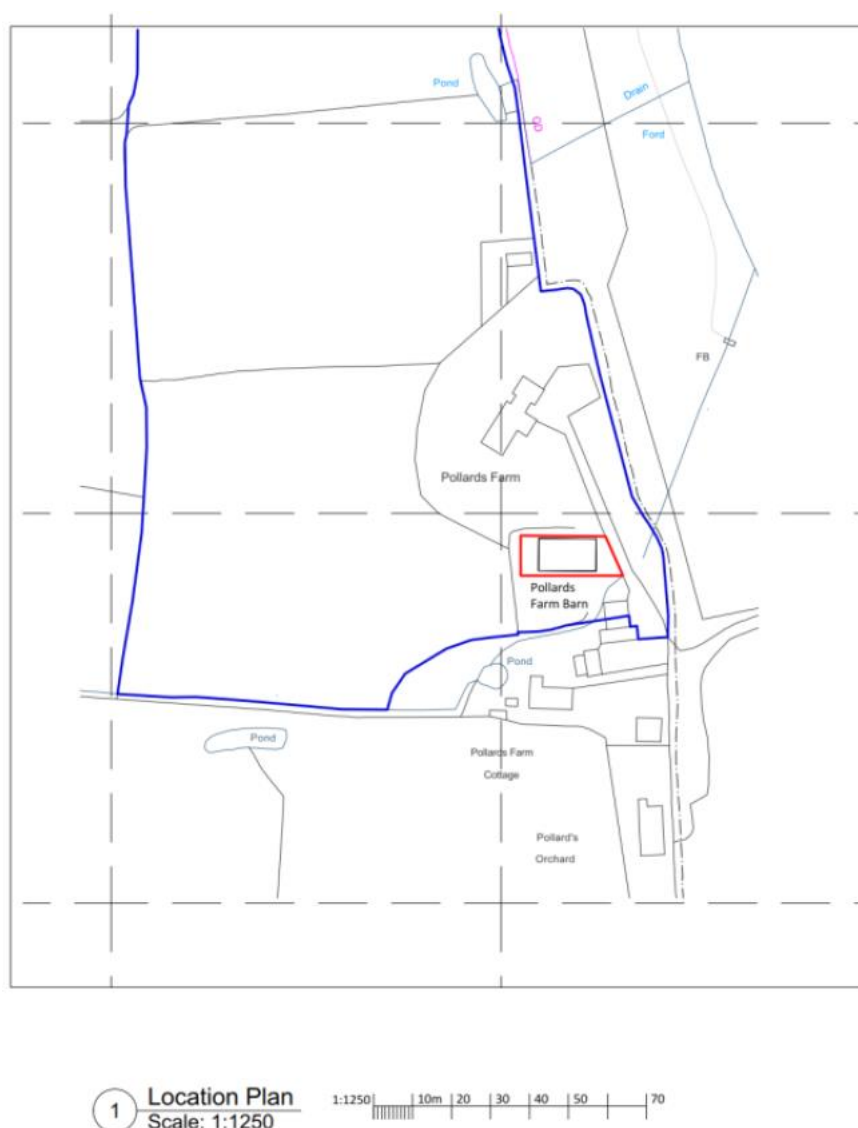


Figure 1: Location plan

Project Background

The proposal site was subject to the following ecological surveys in 2018:

- Urban Edge Environmental Consulting (2018): *Land at Pollards Farm, Ditchling Common, East Sussex: Preliminary Ecological Appraisal Report.*
- Urban Edge Environmental Consulting (2019): *Land at Pollards Farm, Ditchling Common, East Sussex: Bat Survey.*

The Preliminary Ecological Appraisal, based on a site survey undertaken in April 2018, concluded that the barn was of low suitability for roosting bats. A bat presence/absence survey, comprising one dawn re-entry survey in August 2018, was subsequently carried out and recorded no bats roosting in the building.

Survey Objective

The current PRA was carried out in order to verify whether the condition of the building has changed significantly since 2018 in relation to its roosting bat potential, and therefore whether the results of the bat presence/absence survey could still be relied upon.

Legislation

Bats and their roosts are fully protected by the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) and the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended). The legislation affords all bat species European Protected Species (EPS) status and makes it an offence, among other things, to:

- ▶ Intentionally kill, injure or capture/take a bat.
- ▶ Intentionally or recklessly damage, destroy or obstruct access to any place that a bat uses for shelter or protection. This is taken to mean all bat roosts whether bats are present or not.
- ▶ Intentionally or recklessly disturb a bat while it is occupying a structure or place that it uses for shelter or protection. It is unlawful to enter a roost unless properly licenced.
- ▶ Sell, offer or expose for sale, or possess, or transport for the purpose of sale, any live or dead bat, any part of a bat, or anything derived from a bat.

Methodology

The PRA was carried out in accordance with the latest *Good Practice Guidelines* from the Bat Conservation Trust (3rd edition; Collins (ed.), 2016) as well as Natural England Standing Advice on bats. The building was subject to a physical internal inspection, particularly focused on the roof voids where applicable, and an external inspection which recorded potential access points and roosting opportunities. All features observable from ground level which are potentially suitable for bats were noted and the overall suitability of the structure for roosting bats was classified with reference to Box 1.

The inspection included a search for live animals and other signs that give an indication of past or present occupancy. In the case of bats, typical indicators include droppings (which are characteristic and are often indicative of species), signs of fur oil staining, urine splashing, characteristic odours, and accumulations of discarded prey remains. The inspections were undertaken with the aid of the following equipment: telescopic ladders, Wildlife Acoustics EM3 full spectrum bat detector to record and identify the calls of any bats which are present; CB-2 (1 million candlepower) searchlight fitted with a red filter to search dark areas for signs of bats; telescopic mirror to inspect hidden cavities; Hawke Sport Optics 10x42 close-focusing binoculars to view areas inaccessible on foot; and digital camera with flash to record any evidence of bats or features suitable for use by bats. Approximately two hours of search effort were expended.

Box 1: Potential suitability of structures/trees for roosting bats (after Collins, 2016)

Suitability	Roosting habitats
Negligible	Negligible habitat features on site likely to be used by roosting bats
Low	A structure with one or more potential roost sites that could be used by individual bats opportunistically, but do not provide enough space, shelter, protection, appropriate conditions and/or suitable surrounding habitat to be used on a regular basis or by larger numbers of bats A tree of sufficient size and age to contain potential roost features (PRF) but with none seen from the ground / using ladders or features seen with only very limited roosting potential
Moderate	A structure or tree with one or more potential roost sites that could be used by bats due to their size, shelter, protection, conditions and surrounding habitat but unlikely to support a roost of high conservation status (for roost type only)
High	A structure or tree with one or more potential roost sites that are obviously suitable for use by larger numbers of bats on a more regular basis and potentially for longer periods of time due to their size, shelter, protection, conditions and surrounding habitat

The PRA was informed by the Bat Roost Trigger Index (BRTI) tool developed by Swift Ecology and reported in the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management's *In Practice*¹. The BRTI is a systematic approach to PRA but is a working prototype and we are participating in its further testing and critical appraisal. The tool is designed to increase the robustness of PRA by giving each feature a set of defined outcomes which can be numerically calculated, reducing the potential for surveyor bias and subjectivity. Each feature is given a trigger index value relating to its potential suitability as part of a bat roost. These values are then averaged to derive a final trigger index value, which helps to ascertain the structure's suitability as a summer bat roost in relation to Box.1. We have created an additional table which includes contextual information to inform the application of professional judgement in the suitability assessment.

Results

Exterior

The barn is approximately 6m tall and 8m wide and is constructed entirely of timber except for a corrugated felt roof. It is of a simple box shape, but there is an open-sided lean-to on the south elevation which has various items stored beneath it. The lean-to provides some crevices in the wood joinery but these are very exposed. Some trees are growing directly adjacent but there are no PRF on them. The ground beneath the lean-to was inspected for feeding remains but none were found. It should be noted that there was a lot of organic debris on the ground, making the search for this type of evidence difficult. The east elevation, which is the side immediately next to the driveway, has a crevice provided by planks used as weatherboarding at the top of the outside wall, directly beneath the lip of the roof, although this is not considered to be a good-quality potential roosting feature (PRF). The northern aspect has one glass-paned

¹ Underhill-Day N (2017): The Bat Roost Trigger Index – A New Systematic Approach to Facilitate Preliminary Bat Roost Assessments. *In Practice* **96**, pp.37-42.

window towards the western end. The timbers on this aspect are generally tightly fitting. There is a mature oak tree directly opposite to northern aspect and the canopy extends over the building. There may be PRF on this tree but it was in leaf at the time of the survey and no PRF could be seen. The western aspect contains two windows towards the northern end. There are some gaps under timber weatherboarding, but again these are not considered to be of good quality. There is thick and tall vegetation immediately opposite the western aspect. The southern elevation (beneath the lean-to) is constructed of timbers that look newer than elsewhere on the structure, and these are tightly sealed. There is a large opening to the northern end of this elevation at the top of the wall, enabling access into the roof. The building has a pitched and gable-ended roof and the roof has caved-in in places.

Interior

The interior of the barn is gloomy rather than dark due to windows and holes in the roof which allow in daylight. The walls are filled with insulation foam and covered with plasterboard which is coming away in places. There is a suspended ceiling constructed of mineral fibre tiles which is very dilapidated. The interior was not inspected above the ceiling as it was not considered safe to do so. The interior of the barn measures approximately 14.8m long by 3.3m tall (to ceiling) by 4.3m wide and is currently used for storage purposes. There are minimal PRF on the inside of the building, with the only potential in timber joinery gaps and potentially uninsulated wall cavities. No bats or evidence of bats were noted on the inside of the building, but again there was a lot of organic matter on the floor, making searching for field signs difficult.

BAT ROOST TRIGGER INDEX (TI): RESULTS

TRIGGER INDICES	CATEGORY	TI VALUE
A) Location, habitat and environmental context of structure		
T1: General location	Rural	1
<i>In a rural setting to the west of Burgess Hill, good-quality semi natural habitat within close proximity</i>		
T2: Foraging opportunities within 250 m	Good	1
<i>Immediate access to mature hedgerows, lines of mature trees, woodland, medium bodies of water and gardens</i>		
T3: Foraging opportunities within 5 km	Good	1
<i>Access to a farmland, water corridors, and gardens</i>		
T4: Commuting opportunities	Good	1
<i>Access to linear features – hedgerows and tree lines</i>		
T5: Cover in vicinity of structure	Good	1
<i>Tall and dense natural vegetation immediately to the south, west and north</i>		
T6: External lighting in vicinity of structure	Low	0.67
<i>Potential roost exits remain dark</i>		
T7: Number and character of nearby buildings	Mixture of old and new	0.67
<i>Range of buildings, providing range of roosting features</i>		
T8: Structure/building exposure	Low	1
<i>Well protected</i>		
B) Exterior features and characteristics of structure or building		

T9: Structure/building age	Less than 50 years	0.33
<i>Some timber looks relatively new but no part of the building looks old</i>		
T10: Size of Building	Intermediate sized structure	0.67
<i>Typical house size but of less value</i>		
T11: Main wall construction material	Mixture of materials	0.67
<i>Timber with fiberglass insulation</i>		
T12: Condition of wall/roof pointing/render	Some gaps noted	0.67
<i>Generally OK</i>		
T13: Condition of lintel/door frame features	Tightly sealed	0.33
<i>Tightly sealed</i>		
T14: Condition of eaves/soffits/bargeboards	Some gaps noted	0.67
<i>Some potential crevices but not good quality</i>		
T15: Condition of weatherboarding/cladding	Tightly sealed	0.33
<i>Generally OK</i>		
T16: Condition of lead flashing	No flashing	0.2
T17: Roofing material	Corrugated material	0.33
<i>Corrugated felt</i>		
T18: Bat access potential	Substantial holes/collapsed roof	0.2
<i>Large holes in collapsed roof</i>		
C) Interior features and characteristics of structure or building		
T19: Character of roof void/roof space	Open roof space	0.33
<i>Suspended ceiling with many holes, no actual void</i>		
T20: Character and condition of roof supports	Some gaps or cracks noted	0.67
<i>Rough timbers with occasional gaps</i>		
T21: Presence and extent of cobwebbing	Some cobwebs	0.67
<i>Some areas heavily cobwebbed, others no cobwebs</i>		
T22: Presence and condition of roof lining	Unlined	0.2
<i>n/a</i>		
T23: Light levels in roof void/space	Light	0.33
<i>Gloomy with light coming in through the roof and windows</i>		
T24: Protection from weather/wind	Draughty	0.33
<i>Holes allow in weather</i>		
T25: Temperature regime	Intermediate	0.67
<i>Likely changeable due to insulation and holes</i>		
T26: Level of (human, animal) disturbance	Moderate	0.67
<i>Used for storage</i>		
T27: Flight Space	Good	1

Large and uncluttered area

T28: Flying Access (Horseshoe bats) n/a n/a

Site not within species core distribution

TRIGGER INDEX SCORE = 0.55

BAT ROOST SUITABILITY = LOW

CONTEXTUAL INFORMATION: RESULTS

INDICES	CATEGORY	SUITABILITY
---------	----------	-------------

D) CONTEXTUAL INFORMATION - GENERAL

T29: Current usage	Occasional use	Moderate
---------------------------	----------------	----------

T30: Roof type	Pitched	Moderate
-----------------------	---------	----------

Pitched roof

T31: Outbuildings	None	n/a
--------------------------	------	-----

E) CONTEXTUAL INFORMATION – EXTERIOR

T32: Gaps >8mm in weather boarding, soffits and fascia's	Yes	Moderate
--	-----	----------

Some gaps noted

T33: Cellar access	n/a	n/a
---------------------------	-----	-----

No cellar

T34: Vegetation cover	Moderate	Moderate
------------------------------	----------	----------

Immediate vegetation cover on the south, west and north

F) CONTEXTUAL INFORMATION -INTERIOR

T35: Unused rooms	None	n/a
--------------------------	------	-----

Interior used for storage

T36: Cellar	n/a	n/a
--------------------	-----	-----

No cellar

T37: Condition of walls and pointing/render in void	Low	Low
--	-----	-----

Walls are timber and filled with insulation

G) CONTEXTUAL INFORMATION -SIGNS OF BATS

T39: Dropping number	0	n/a
-----------------------------	---	-----

No droppings noted

T40: Dropping pattern	n/a	n/a
------------------------------	-----	-----

n/a

T41: Dropping age	n/a	n/a
--------------------------	-----	-----

T42: Oil staining or fur at potential access points	None observed	n/a
--	---------------	-----

T43: Urine staining	None observed	n/a
----------------------------	---------------	-----

T44: Bats	None observed	n/a
------------------	---------------	-----

T45: Scratch marks	None observed	n/a
T46: Feeding remains	None observed	n/a
T47: Bat noises	None observed	n/a
H) CONTEXTUAL INFORMATION -SIGNS OF BIRDS		
T48: Barn owl potential	None observed	Low
<i>No signs recorded but potential for transitory roost, not breeding roost due to narrow timbers.</i>		
T49: Bird nests	None observed	Low
<i>Possible but none seen</i>		
BAT ROOST SUITABILITY	LOW	



Photo 1: Eastern elevation



Photo 2: Southern elevation and vegetation (T5)



Photo 3: Northern elevation and mature oak (T5)

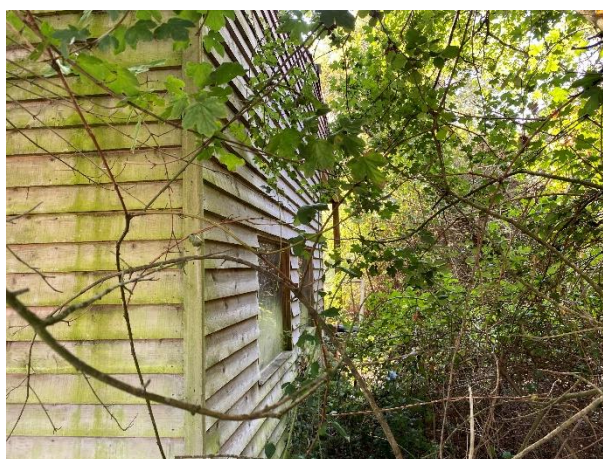


Photo 4: Western elevation and vegetation (T5)

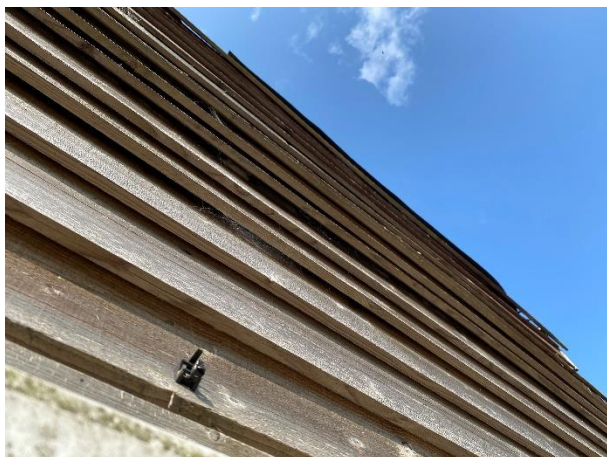


Photo 5: Gaps under weatherboarding on east elevation (T15)



Photo 6: Large gap in wall on southern elevation



Photo 7: Interior of the barn



Photo 8: Lifted plasterboard showing cavity insulation

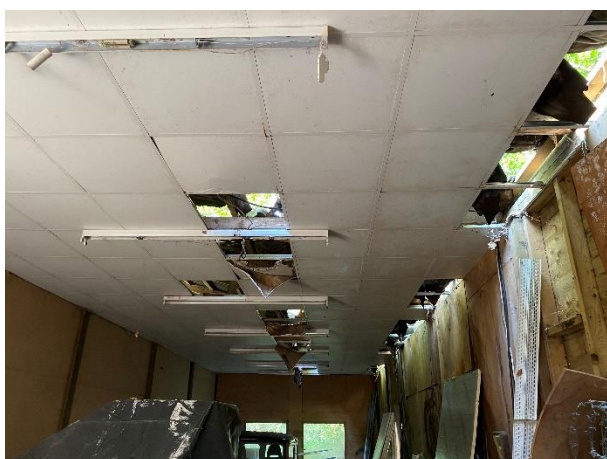


Photo 9: Dilapidated suspended ceiling and roof



Photo 10: Light into interior from windows (T23)

Evaluation

Overall, the building continues to provide some limited opportunities for roosting bats. These include lifted weatherboarding to the east and west, and some gaps in timber joinery/cracks on the south. Internally there is some potential for bats to access wall cavities, but it is assumed that they are all filled with fiberglass insulation. The inside is also considered to be too brightly lit to encourage bats. The lean-to on the southern side has a structure which could provide conditions for a feeding roost. However, no evidence of bats roosting or feeding was found on the outside or inside of the building. This type of evidence is often removed by weather conditions and there was a significant amount of organic debris carpeting the floor both inside and outside, which made finding evidence of this kind problematic.

The Bat Roost Trigger Index produced an outcome of low suitability as a potential bat roost. The contextual information results returned an outcome of low suitability. Using professional judgement following evaluation of contextual and trigger index features, including the potential roost features internally and externally, it is concluded that the building continues to be of low suitability.

The findings of the current PRA are consistent with those of the 2018 surveys, which found the building to have low suitability for roosting bats. Following a single dawn re-entry survey during which no roosting bats were recorded, it was concluded that the building was not a bat roost. Taking account of the current condition of the building, its consistency with the previous conditions recorded in 2018, and the relatively recent nature of the bat presence/absence survey (just over 2yrs old), it is considered reasonable to conclude that roosting bats are still likely to be absent.

Conclusions

It is concluded that proposals to demolish the barn are unlikely to result in the killing, injury or disturbance of individual bats, or damage, destruction or obstruction of a bat roost.

Recommendations

No further surveys for roosting bats are considered necessary, however, precautionary measures in relation to nesting birds are required to ensure that an offence under the relevant legislation is avoided; see Table 1 below.

Table 1: Recommendations

#	Recommendations for further ecological survey and precautionary measures
R1	It is possible that birds could nest within the building during the nesting bird season. Negative impacts on breeding birds should be avoided by undertaking vegetation clearance and building demolition works which would result in removal of potential nesting habitats – <u>including the site's hedgerows and trees</u> if they are affected by the proposals – outside of the bird breeding season, which runs from 1 March to 31 August. Removal of nesting bird habitats should therefore be carried out between September and February. Any construction works undertaken within the bird breeding season where suitable bird breeding habitat exists will require a site check for nesting birds by a suitably qualified ecologist.

#	Recommendations for further ecological survey and precautionary measures
	This should take place no more than two days prior to works commencing. This is to ensure that no disturbance to active bird nests occurs. If a nest is found it must be cordoned off and works adjacent to the nest must be delayed until such time that the chicks have fledged from the nest. This should be supervised by a suitably qualified ecologist. The building has some potential to support roosting barn owls, but it is not considered likely that they would breed within the building given the thin beams. It should be noted that while evidence of barn owl was looked for during the survey, the top of the suspended ceiling could not be inspected. Consideration for barn owls within this building can be covered by the recommendation for nesting birds given above.

I trust this letter provides you with the detail you require at the present stage with respect to the ecological constraints associated with the proposals for this site. Should you have any queries or comments please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,



Nicholas Pincombe
BA(Hons) MSc CEnv MIEMA MCIEEM
Director

E: nick.pincombe@ueec.co.uk
T: 01273 686 766
M: 0797 027 6491