



Natrix Ecological Limited

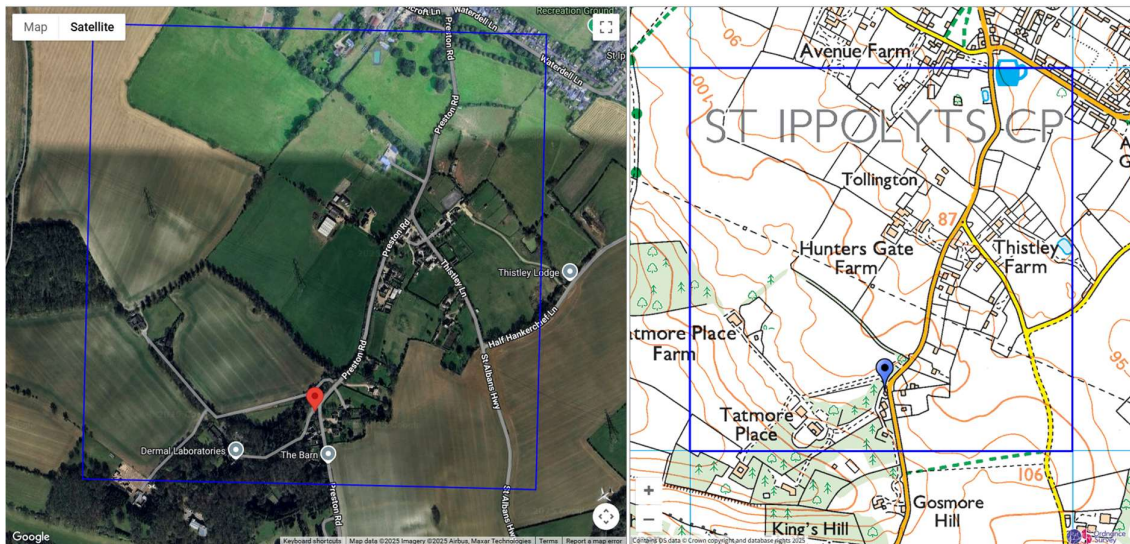
Preliminary Roost Assessment (PRA)

The Lodge, Preston Road, Gosmore, Hitchin

Introduction

Background and purpose of the report

Natrix Ecological Limited was instructed by Melanie Evans (the Client) to undertake a Preliminary Roost Assessment (PRA) for bats at The Lodge, Preston Road, Gosmore, Hertfordshire (hereafter known the Site). The Site is centred around Ordnance Survey grid reference TL 1850 2615. The property in good general repair and is currently occupied by the Client. The Local Planning Authority (LPA) is Stevenage Borough Council.



Map 1. Location of site (red) showing surrounding habitat

Planning advice offered to the Client indicated that a bat survey was required due to the age of the building, brick and exposed woodwork and the surrounding habitat.

On 21st May 2025, a Preliminary Roost Assessment (PRA) of The Site was undertaken. Internal and external inspections were undertaken of both the main (occupied) house (hereafter Building A) and the adjacent single-storey garage (hereafter Building B)

Assessment purpose

A PRA is undertaken to determine the actual or potential presence of bats or features which may offer potential roosting areas for bats, and any need for further survey and eventual mitigation.

Surveyor details

The survey was undertaken by David Willis (Natrix Ecological Limited). Mr Willis is licensed to disturb, take and handle all species of bats in all counties of England under licence number (2024-12429-CL17-BAT). He has six years' experience of bat handling,



rehabilitation and field work. He has undertaken bat surveys with several consultancies since 2023.

Reason for survey

The revised planning application is for the removal of corrugated plastic/Perspex roof, and replacement with more thermally efficient materials. The roof level will also be slightly higher than the present construction. There is no longer an intention to extend the property or make any alterations or changes to the structure of the house itself. However, given the concerns raised in the previous decision notice, a PRA has been commissioned for the avoidance of doubt.

Legal and planning context

All species of bats in the UK and their roosts are legally protected by UK and European legislation, as noted in the decision notice. The UK the legal protection is summarised as follows:

You will be committing a criminal offence if you:

1. Deliberately* capture, injure or kill a bat
2. Intentionally or recklessly disturb a bat in its roost or deliberately disturb a group of bats
3. Damage or destroy a bat roosting place (even if bats are not occupying the roost at the time)
4. Possess or advertise/sell/exchange a bat (dead or alive) or any part of a bat
5. Intentionally or recklessly obstruct access to a bat roost even if bats are not present at the time

*In a court, 'deliberately' will probably be interpreted as someone who, although not intending to capture/injure or kill a bat, performed the relevant action, being sufficiently informed and aware of the consequence his/her action would most likely have.

Removal and replacement of the Perspex roof will not result in any of these offences.

Site location

The Site was previously the lodge house of a larger property and is located at the entrance to the drive. As such there is extensive parkland, woodland and other habitat suitable for bats in the immediate vicinity.

Overall, the Site is in a rural area, and is surrounded by open farmland, roads and small settlement.

Habitat within 50m of the house includes mature trees, hedgerows, open pasture, and busy unlit roads. Habitat within 500m includes, open farmland, hedgerows, mature



trees, small blocks of woodland, watercourses, ponds, busy unlit roads, houses, and agricultural buildings.

Trees, hedgerows, and open farmland locally, potentially provide good quality foraging opportunities for bats in an area which is subject to little disturbance from light, noise, and human activity.

Methods

Survey timings

The building inspections were completed on 25th May 2025. Weather conditions during the survey were clear, warm and dry, with a temperature of 17°C. It was possible to make a full assessment of the relevant structures.

Desk study

No data search was required in relation to this Site. The surrounding habitat can be assumed to be utilised by the local bat population. For example, the Site is c. 2km north-west of a known barbastelle *Barbastella barbastellus*.

The absence of records from the immediate area could therefore not be taken to indicate absence, given the quality of the surrounding habitat. A desk study

Habitat assessment

The habitat on site and in the surrounding area was initially assessed using Ordnance Survey mapping, and aerial photography. Habitat features on site, and those in the surrounding area were visually assessed for their suitability for use by bats during the site visit.

The Site is connected to wider habitat by lines of trees following Preston Road north to south. These are bordered by fields to the west. Due to their age, other houses in the area may also contain potential roost feature.



Photograph 1. Mixed deciduous trees close to the Site



Assessment

As noted, given the alteration to the planned development, the inspection was restricted to the single-storey entrance area and the roof intended for replacement.

A systematic search of the relevant area of building was made to identify potential or actual bat access points and roosting places. Careful attention was paid to any ledges or other flat surfaces for the presence of discarded insect parts or droppings.

Comprehensive efforts were made to find any evidence of bats such as live or dead specimens, bat droppings, urine splashes, fur-oil staining and or sounds attributable to bats. Bat specimens and droppings are the most reliable type of evidence; the other types are not always the result of bat activity. Sometimes bats leave no visible sign of their presence on the outside of a building, and this can be removed by wind and rain.

Included in the search were:

- areas beneath potential (bat) access points
- windowsills
- windowpanes
- walls
- soffit boxes/ fascias
- lead flashing

Gaps in brickwork and stonework were noted whenever present. Any evidence of bat activity would have been photographed, as would any features likely to have offered potential for roosts.

A systematic search of the inside of the building was undertaken to identify potential or actual bat access points and roosting places, and to locate evidence of bats. Bat specimens (live or dead) and droppings are the most reliable type of evidence. Other evidence can include urine splashes, fur-oil staining, feeding remains, squeaking noises, bat fly (Nycteribiid) or odour.

A Clulite 1 000 000 cpw torch, head torch (GoodYear) and 8x 42 binoculars were used in conducting the assessment.

Assessment limitations

All relevant areas of both buildings were inspected. The building inspection was completed in active bat season, following a period of warm weather. Therefore, some activity might have been expected, with associated external signs of use, such as droppings.



Results

External inspection

Building A

Building A is a two-storey building of brick and timber construction. As noted above, the age of the building (>100 years) increases the likelihood of potential roosting features. The slate-tiled roof is hipped with joints to widow eaves. Lead flashing has been used to seal hip joints. Roof is in good condition, with minor lifting of tiles noted on eastern aspect (Photograph 8).



Photograph 2. Building B showing herringbone brickwork, lead flashing, slate tiles and render. Note overall good repair.

The upper storey exhibits more original features including exposed wood and traditional herringbone brickwork. The brickwork also appears damaged in places. The ground floor appears to have undergone much more recent renovation, with painted rendering in

Building B

This single-storey building is aligned north-west to south-east. It is a garage but has been used by the Client for the storage of household goods for some years. The garage door is on the north-west aspect, with the building connected to Building A through an archway/gate structure. There is a wooden lean-to at the rear of the building, without walls. This was also inspected during the assessment.



Internal inspection

Building A

Building A is currently occupied and in good repair. The internal inspection was restricted to the loft space. This is accessed via a ladder in the centre of the building. The loft was empty of belongings, facilitating access throughout. The roof is hip-jointed, with the loft space above the first floor being accessible.

The roof trusses and boarding are in good condition, with the internal space being well-sealed. Several disused common wasp nests were found. These had been subject to chemical extermination treatment the previous year (2024). There were no indications of habitation by any bat species. For example, there were no droppings found. There was a significant amount of accumulated spiderweb hanging in the loft space which did not appear to have been disturbed through bat activity.



Photographs 3 & 4. Interior of loft space, Building A. Note webs, wasp nest and good state of repair.



Building B

Building B is a single-storey garage of modern construction with a single-pitch roof. The interior is well sealed. There is a single-pane, wooden-framed window on ground floor. The roof space was visible from the ground floor. There is no indication of any bird, bat or insect mammal activity in the roof space. A small number of rodent droppings were present on the windowsill. The building is currently used for storage and is in regular use.



Photograph 5: Interior of the roof space, Building B



Photographs 6. Mouse droppings, Building B



Photograph 7. Bird nest, Building B



Limitations

The site visit was undertaken in good weather conditions. There was adequate lighting and visibility was good. Access was facilitated by the Client and there was no indication of cleaning or other removal of potential signs.

Evaluation and conclusion

Impact assessment

The initial development is reportedly to be restricted to a change of use of the garage, from storage to living area.

Required actions

Building A possesses several features which mean it has **low** roost potential for bats. These are the lifted tiles, ageing window frames (1st floor) and holes in the brickwork. These will require an emergence survey to be undertaken to ascertain whether these features are utilised by bats. In accordance with BCT guidelines (2023), it is therefore necessary to undertake one survey, due to the assessed potential. However, should bat activity be noted in relation to the structure, further surveys will be required.

This will require **2-3 surveyors** to allow all roost features to be viewed during the survey.



Photograph 8: Potential roost features identified on the eastern aspect, Building A.
Recommended view for survey.





Photograph 9: Example of lifted slate tiles, sufficient to provide roost space for bats. Eastern aspect, Building A.



Photograph 10: Holes in soffits, eastern aspect of Building A



Photograph 11: View from opposite side of Preston Road. Potential survey location.





Photograph 12: Hole in brickwork on the northern aspect of the upper storey.
Recommended view for survey.

It is noted that few of the potential roost features appeared to offer access to sufficient internal voids for roosting. This would nonetheless require confirmation through an emergence survey.

Building B is of **negligible** potential for bat roost features. Care should be taken to avoid disturbing any nesting birds. One nest was found under the lean-to. However, change of use without significant works and on-site noise, nocturnal lighting and other disturbance is unlikely to cause harm to resident bats or their habitat.



Photographs 13&14. Rendering and eaves with negligible roost potential, Building A



Photographs 15, 16 &17. North and easterly aspects of Building A, with indication of surrounding habitat.



References

Collins, J (ed.)(2023) *Bat Surveys for Professional Ecologists: Good Practice Guidelines* (4th Edition). The Bat Conservation Trust, London.



