Whitchurch Town Hall, Hampshire

Vesper Conservation & Ecology Limited

07/07/2019

Phase 1 & 2 Bat Surveys:

Whitchurch Town Hall

Whitchurch

Hampshire

Survey and report by: Vesper Conservation & Ecology Limited

Report produced by: Robert West BA(Hons), PGDip, MCIEEM

Non-Technical Summary:

Site name and location	Whitchurch Town Hall, Newbury Road, Whitchurch, RG28 7BH. SU 46243 48095.
Scope of works	Phase 1 bat survey undertaken on 27th November 2019 Phase 2 Activity surveys June 2020
Assessment and survey methods	The Phase 1 survey were carried to the standards set down in the Bat Conservation Trusts Bat Surveys for Professional Ecologists: Good Practice Guidelines (3rd Edition) (2016) and guidance from the Chartered Institute for Ecologists and Environmental Managers (CIEEM).
Lead Surveyor	Robert West BA (Hons), PGDip. MCIEEM
Purpose of Works	The purpose of this survey is to inform planning application for: • The proposed work is to reroof this building
Summary of Surveys and evaluation	Bat droppings where found on the internal inspection, the building is being used by bats. DNA sample have come back with Brown Long-eared bats.
Recommendations	A bat mitigation License **will be needed** and can only be applied for once full planning has been granted. The addition of bat access tiles is needed to maintain the local populations.

1. Introduction

1.1 This report was commissioned by the trustees to determine if there are any ecological issues associated with the proposed change to the Town Hall.

1.2 Whitchurch Town Hall, Newbury Road, Whitchurch, RG28 7BH. The national grid reference number is SU 46243 48095.

1.3 Whitchurch Town Hall is situated in the centre of the market town of Whitchurch which is between the two towns of Basingstoke (east) and Andover (west), this is a rural Hampshire town which is surrounded by farmland (both arable and pastoral fields), and this part of Hampshire has numerous woodlands and has many mature hedgerows. The town has the River Test running through it and it is with in 200m of the Town Hall.

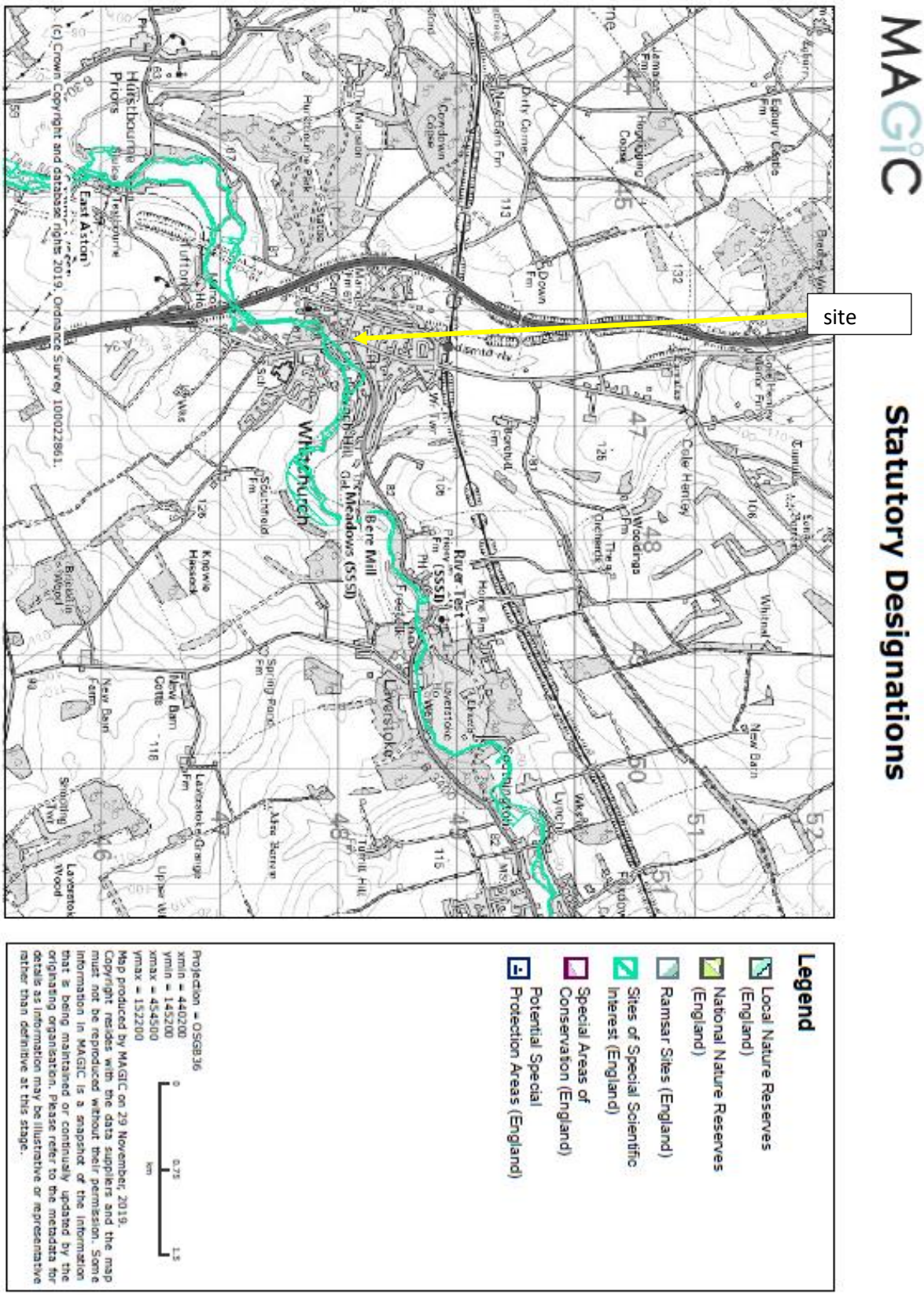
1.4 Whitchurch Town Hall is within 5km of three Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). The SSSIs are the River Test, Bere Mill Meadows and East Aston Common. (see map 1)

1.5 There is are no statutory habitats on site as it is a built-up area, but the areas around the town have many see map 2 for details.

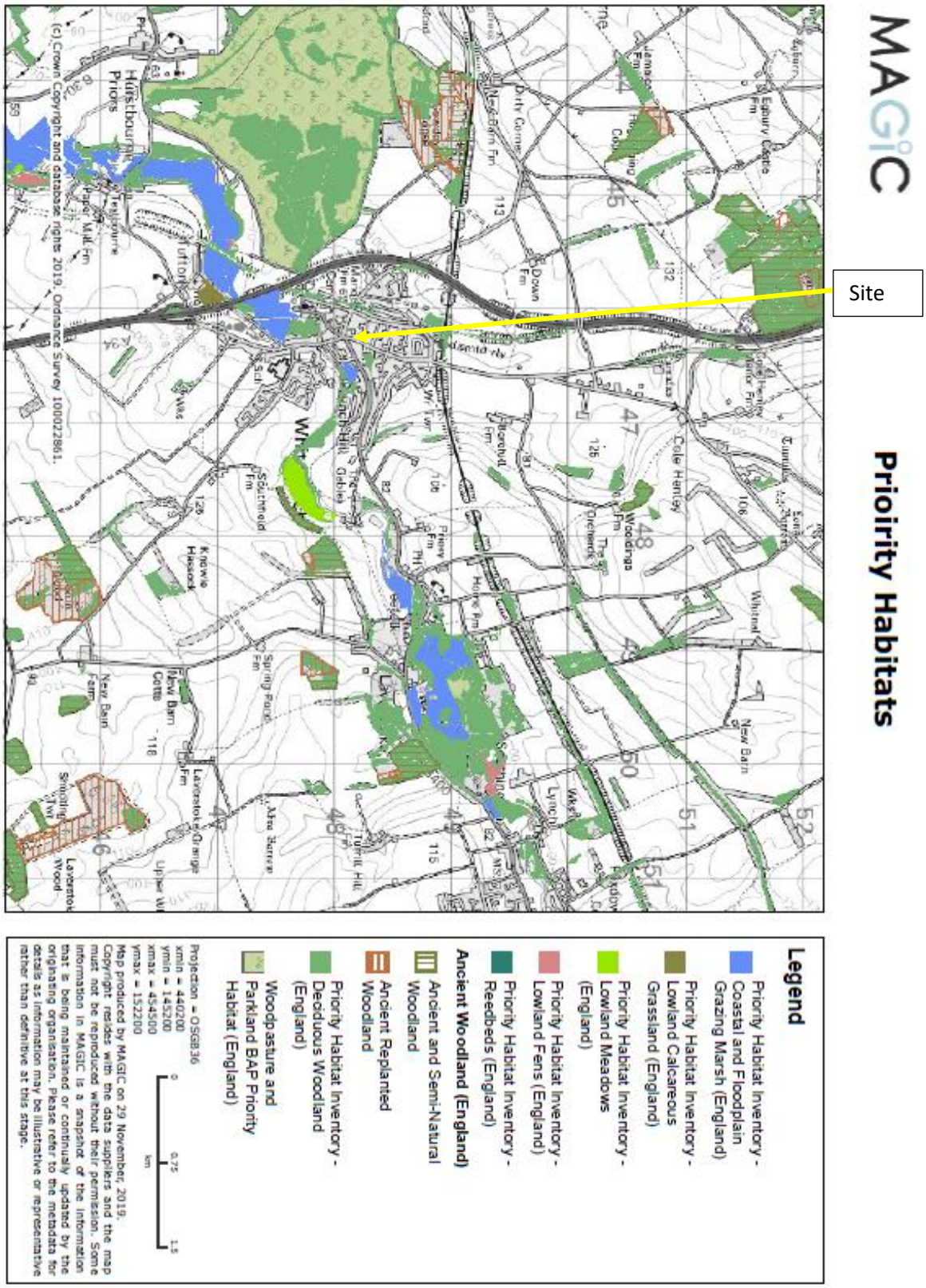
1.6 A search of data on the records held by the Hampshire Bat Group has shown that there are records of both Pipistrelle species (***Pipistrellus pipistrellus, Pipistrellus pygmaeus***), Long eared bats (***Plecotus auritus***) Serotine (***Eptesicus serotinus***) and Myotis species in the area.

1.7 There are 18 species of bat in the UK, 7 of which are UK BAP priority species and Species of Principal Importance in England under S41 of the NERC Act 2006. All bats and bat roosts are protected under Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). Bats are also a European Protected Species protected under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017. (see appendix)

1.8 This Phase 1 survey were carried to the standards set down in the Bat Conservation Trusts Bat Surveys for Professional Ecologists: Good Practice Guidelines (3rd Edition) (2016) and guidance from the Chartered Institute for Ecologists and Environmental Managers (CIEEM).



Map 1: Designated sites



Map 2: Priority Habitats

2. *Field Survey*

Building Inspection:

2.1 An external and internal inspection of the cottage was undertaken on the 27th of November 2019 by experienced ecologist and bat surveyor Robert West (NE license number 2018-33612-CLS-CLS). This inspection was undertaken to identify any potential ingress/egress points with-in the roof and the body of the structures and any other potential for bat activity.

2.2 The weather was cool with some wind; there had been rain on and off for several days. The surveyor was equipped with binoculars, head torch, weather writer and a camera.

2.3 The town hall is a grade II listed building and is a Late 18th Century red brick building over two storeys and sits in the middle of the town.

2.4 The roof is covered in small clay tiles with matching ridge detail, the cement pugging seems to be intact along the ridge although small gaps could not be ruled out.

2.5 There are numerous gaps and lifted tiles on all elevations of the building that would allow ingress into the building, the hip tiles have numerous gaps and missing cement which could allow ingress into the building.

2.6 There is a large ornate clock and bell tower on the eastern elevation of the roof which is in good order and the lead work around it seems intact and tight

2.7 There is a small dorma type window on the western elevation, which has wooden cladding on the front and is clad in the same tiles on the roof, the pugging is all intact and there are no obvious holes or gaps that would allow ingress into the building.

2.8 The external inspection suggest that the building has high potential for bats to be using this being as a roost

Internal inspection (see pictures in appendix)

2.9 This town hall roof space covers the whole of the building; the roof space was easy to access through out, the floor of the roof is covered in a thick layer of glass fibre insulation, there is some access boarding with in the roof.

2.10 The roof space is large with a height of about 3m to the ridge, there is a single ridge beam that covers the whole roof (north to south), the frame of the roof is a King post construction with numerous large beams crossing the roof space.

2.10 The tiles are backed with a bitumen type felt, there are areas where it overlaps and flops out into the roof space there are no obvious tears or holes in it, the felt looks relatively new.

2.11 The clock and bell tower workings are housed in an area that has been boarded out from the rest of the roof, with the mechanical bits for the clock heading out from this area to the clock face on the eastern elevation.

2.12 The northern most wall has had new fire wall protection placed on it, there are no obvious signs of bats at the northern end of the building, access beyond the fire wall is not possible.

2.13 Bat droppings where seen on top of cross beam (nearest the enclosed area) and on the fibre glass insulation at the southern end of the roof, these look like small to medium size droppings from a although no bats where seen during the internal inspection. Droppings were collected and sent for DNA analysis, the analysis should that they were from Brown Long-eared bats.

2.14 Because bat droppings where found it is considered that Whitchurch Town Hall is a bat roost.

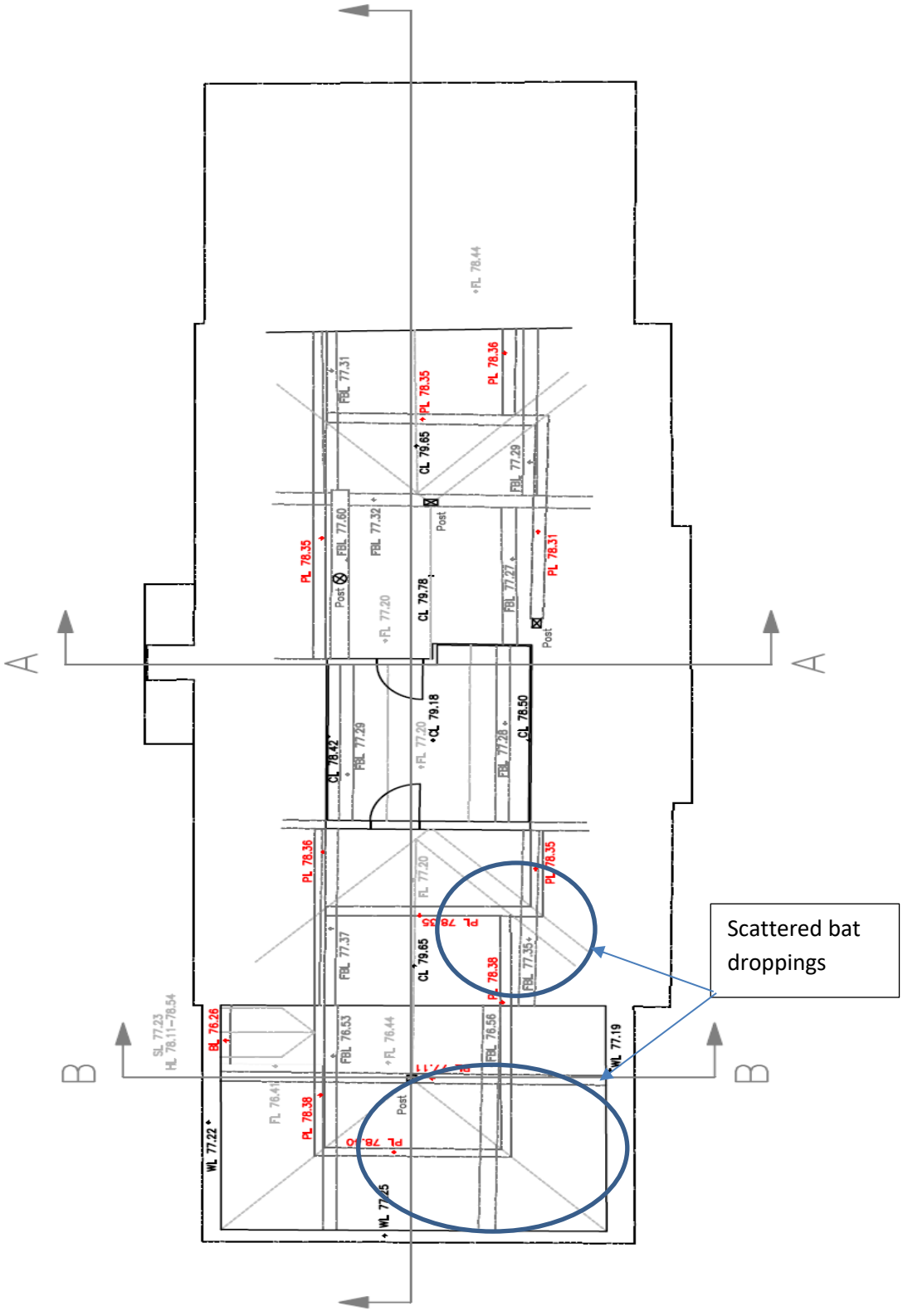


Figure 1: Showing areas bat droppings where found

3 Phase 2 activity survey

3.1 Three activity surveys were undertaken to establish the use of the site by roosting and foraging bats (Dusk 02/06/20, 16/06/20) and Dawn (30/06/20). Surveys were undertaken in accordance with the Bat Conservation Trusts Guidelines for Bat Surveys (3rd Edition, 2016), as endorsed by Natural England.

3.2 The surveys were undertaken under good weather conditions:

	Time st	Time fin	Temp h/l	Wind	Cloud	Rain
02/06/20	**20:50**	**22:40**	**20.8 / 16.6**	**0**	**0%**	**no**
16/06/20	**21:10**	**22:50**	**19.3 / 15.4**	**0**	**0%**	**no**
30/06/20	**03:23**	**04:55**	**12.9/11.8**	**0**	**95%**	**no**

3.3 Due to the size of the building and its irregular shape three surveyors were used and sited around the house to cover all possible elevations of the building. The surveyors used Anabat Walkabout or battlogger to record any unusual or difficult to identify bats.

3.4 During the first dusk survey (02/06/20) 2 species were recorded (Common Pipistrelle and Noctule), No bats were seen emerging from the building there was limited foraging activity to the west of the building (See figure 1). (Rob West, Jake Cousins, Peter Allen)

3.5 During the second dusk survey (16/06/20) 32species were recorded (Common and Soprano pipistrelle). No bats were seen emerging from the building there was limited foraging activity to the west of the building (See Figure 5) (Rob West, Jake Cousins, Peter Allen).

3.6 During the dawn survey (30/06/20) A single species was recorded during the survey (Common pipistrelle). No bats were seen emerging from the building there was only a single bat recorded passing during the survey (See Figure 4) (Rob West, Jake Cousins, Des Purdy).

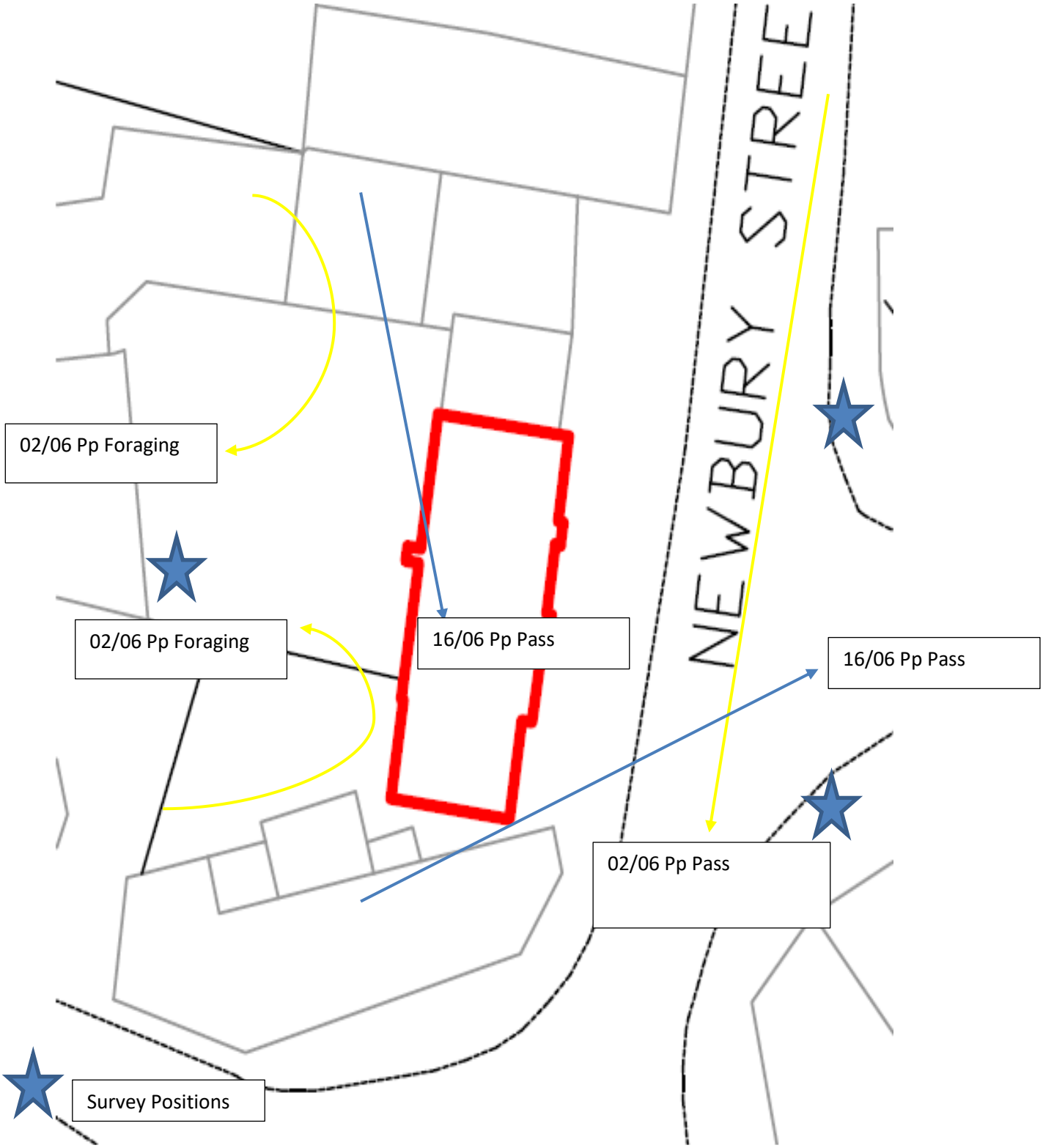


Figure 2: Dusk Surveys summary map (for the activity survey 02 & 16/06/2020)

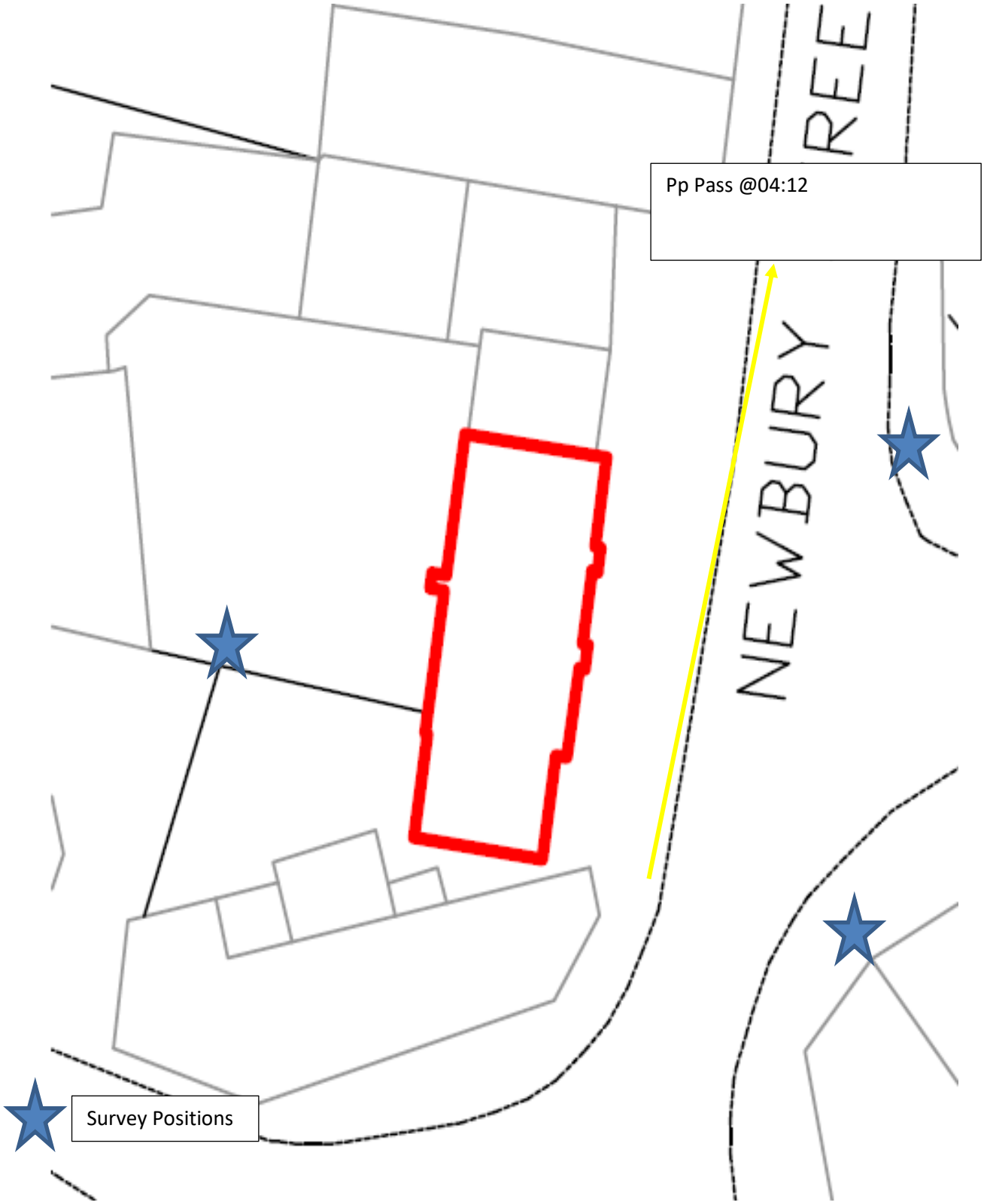


Figure 3: Dawn Survey summary map (for the activity surveys 30/06/2020)

Survey conclusion

3.7 The preliminary survey carried out on 27th November 2019 showed that there were bats using this building as a roost with droppings (DNA analysis showed that these were Brown Long eared Bats) found on the internal inspection, due to this three activity surveys were undertaken.

3.8 On the three activity surveys there was some foraging activity around the building especially to the west, with reduced passes on the eastern side of the building

3.9 No Bats were seen emerging during the 3 activity surveys, but the Brown Long eared bat is quite a cryptic species and can be difficult to detect, the presence of droppings within the roof space shows that the building is being used as a roost.

3.10 The phase 1 survey confirmed that bats are using the building. Therefore, to carry out the proposed works, a suitable mitigation strategy needs to be developed. A European Protected Species Licence (EPSL) in respect of bats will also be required to carry out any works affecting the bat roost. This will require an application to Natural England and can only be applied for **after** the granting of full planning permission.

4 Mitigation Strategy

4.1 The Phase 1 survey showed that bats have been using the building as a roost with DNA analysis showing that Brown long eared bats are present.

4.2 It is not thought that the roost found here is a substantial or maternity roost and is likely to be a small number of bats roosting within the roof space or behind tiles. However, as the proposed works on the building will result in the roost being disturbed when the tiles are removed and reused, under the provisions of the Habitats Regulations 2010 (as amended) a European Protected Species Licence (EPSL) will be required to ensure the works can be undertaken lawfully (to be applied for subsequent to the grant of full planning permission).

4.3 As part of this Licence application, it will be necessary to demonstrate provision of a suitable mitigation strategy which will meet the three derogation tests within the Habitats Regulations.

4.4 In effect, there are three key elements to the mitigation strategy which is proposed here which are necessary to comply with the provisions of the legislation and licensing requirements.

- That appropriate methods are employed to ensure that bats are not at risk of killing or injury during demolition and construction works.
- That safe roosting provision is provided within the re-developed building suitable for the maintenance of a small roost of Common Pipistrelle bats.
- That adequate provision is made for monitoring of the installed mitigation where required under the existing guidance from Natural England.

Method Statement for the Avoidance of Harm to Roosting Bats

4.5 There are a number of requirements which Natural England will expect to see within the Method Statement document which will be provided as part of the licence application. These will include:

<u>Timing of Works:</u>

- Details of the timings of works will need to be provided within the Annexed Method Statement and Work Schedule.

- Alterations to roosting areas within the building (in this case destroying the roost will not normally be permitted within the most sensitive seasons, **maternity** and hibernation). Works within these sensitive areas will need to be carried out either during the period **March – May** or **September – November.** Prevailing weather conditions can also provide an additional constraint on these windows as overnight temperatures will be required to be in excess of 8^{o}C.

  Demolition Methods:

- Roof tiles, felt and cladding and facia and soffits in sensitive areas will need to be removed by hand to limit the risk of injury or death to roosting bats.

  Supervision and contact with contractors:

- A suitably qualified ecologist **will be required** to oversee sensitive sections of tile and hanging tile removal.

- A tool box talk will need to be provided to contractors working on the roof which will include an overview of the requirement of the bat licence and advice on identifying bat presence and action required in the case of a bat being discovered. A written record of this will need to be provided to Natural England as part of the licence return report.

Provision of Alternative Roosting Opportunities

4.6 Due to the evidence of bat roosting within the building from the internal inspection, it is considered that the bats using the building, the internal evidence showed that there is plenty flying with in the roof space. Consequently, the proposed redevelopment of the property will disturb the roosting of the bats in the short term.

4.7 The following inclusions are therefore recommended for incorporation into the redeveloped building to keep and improve roosting opportunities:

- The addition of 6 bats access tiles 2 on both the eastern and western elevations and 2 on the southern elevation, these should have access to the internal space of the roof. (figure 4)
- During the works a suitable alternative roost will need to be supplied so that any bats found during the destructive search/tile strip of the

building, this should be one Schwegler 1FN bat boxes or equivalent. This will be place in a tree or on a building within the grounds of the property at about 3m from the ground.

4.8 With regards to the construction of the new roof for the extension, Natural England will **no longer accept** mitigation strategies which include access to a roof space which incorporates breathable roofing membranes such as Tyvek within their construction. This is due to the findings of recent research which has highlighted two significant issues with these materials in bat roosting locations:

- Bats are at severe risk of entanglement, and therefore death, in the loose fibres associated with these materials
- Oils and grease from bat fur significantly reduce the breathability and therefore functionality of these materials, in some circumstances rendering them useless.

(Please see http://www.batsandbrms.co.uk/ for further details.)

Monitoring of Installed Mitigation

4.9 A key requirement of the licensing process is that mitigation installations are properly installed as per the license agreement.

4.10 In this circumstance, and given current guidance from Natural England, I would recommend that at least 1 visit is undertaken:

- A post-completion compliance check to ensure all mitigation features have been installed correctly before contractors leave the site.

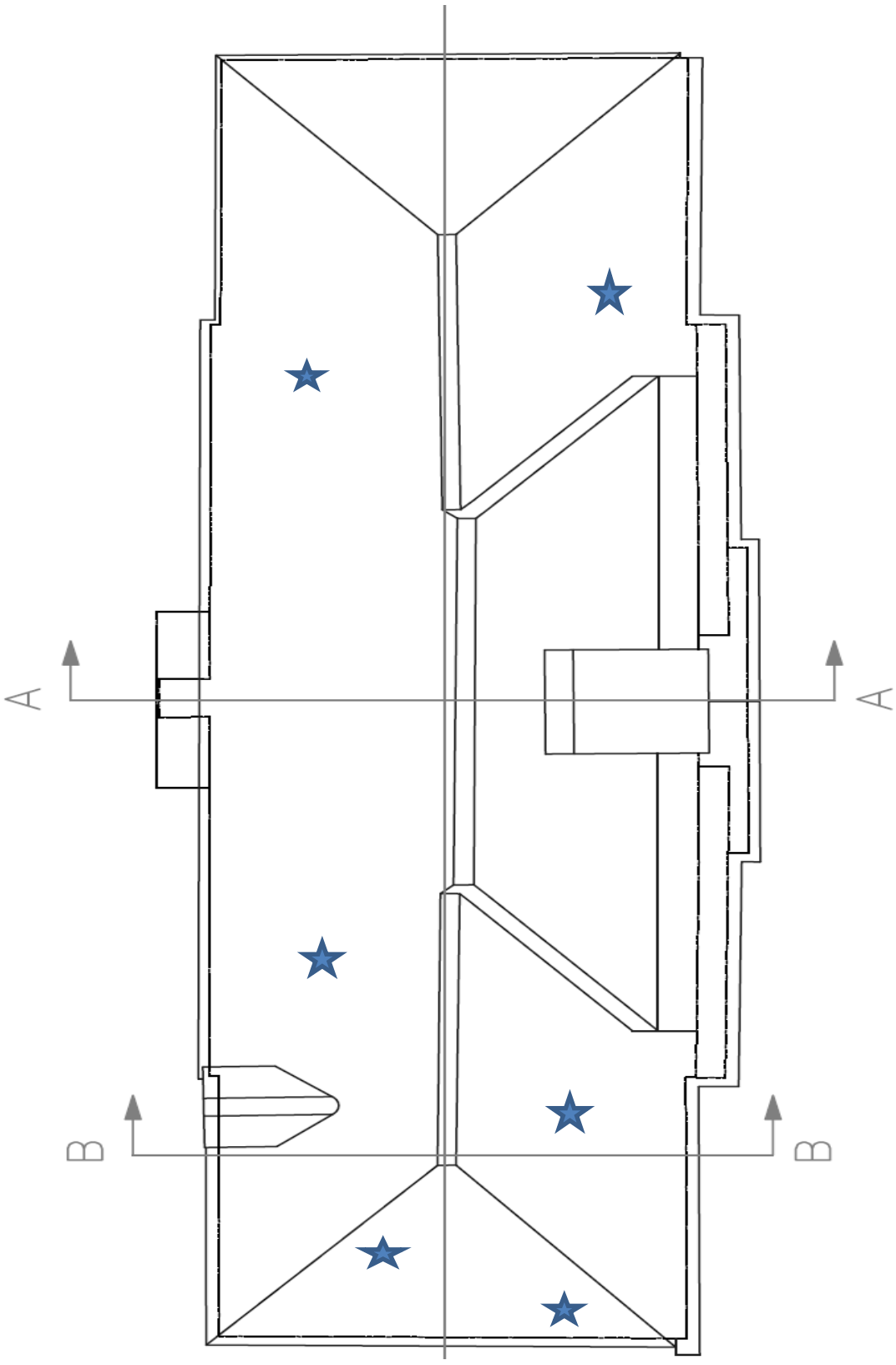


Figure 4: Proposed area of bat access tiles

Appendices:

Bats and the law

Natural England offers further detailed advice which can be applied to planning applications that affect protected species.

Bats

There are 18 species of bat in the UK, 7 of which are UK BAP priority species and Species of Principal Importance in England under S41 of the NERC Act 2006. All bats and bat roosts are protected under Schedule 5 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). Bats are also a European Protected Species protected under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017. It is an offence to:

- Intentionally or deliberately kill, injure or capture bats;
- Intentionally, deliberately or recklessly disturb bats in such a way as to be likely to significantly affect the ability of any significant group of bats to survive, breed, or rear or nurture their young or the local distribution of or abundance of a species of bat;
- Intentionally, deliberately or recklessly damage, destroy or obstruct any place used for shelter or protection (i.e. bat roosts); or
- Possess, sell or transport a bat, or anything derived from it.

Birds

48 species of bird on the UK BAP exist in England. These species, plus the Hen Harrier, are also listed as Species of Principal Importance in England under S41 of the NERC Act 2006. All birds are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended), making it an offence, with

certain exceptions (e.g. game birds), to intentionally kill, injure or take any wild bird and to take, damage or destroy their nests or eggs.

Schedule 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 affords extra protection for a number of species and applies harsher penalties for offences. Any intentional or reckless disturbance of a Schedule 1 bird, whilst it is nesting or rearing dependant young, constitutes an offence.

For more information please read:

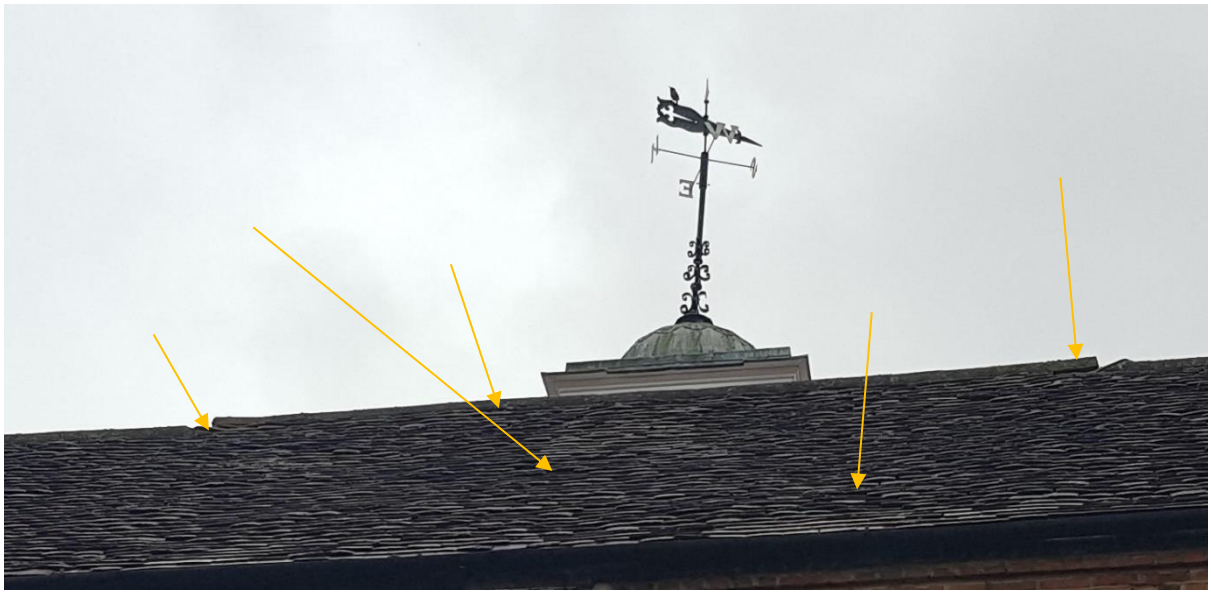
Natural England. 2016. *Standing Advice for Protected Species.* Available from: https://www.gov.uk/guidance/bats-surveys-and-mitigation-for-development-projects

Picture 1: The eastern elevation showing clock and bell tower

Picture 2: Showing the western elevation, small dorma type window

Picture 3: The a close-up of the northern elevation showing gaps under tiles (arrowed)

Picture 4: Showing a close-up of the eastern elevation and gaps under the tiles (arrowed)



Picture 5: Showing a close-up of the western elevation some of the gasp arrows

Picture 6: Showing the new fire wall at the northern end of the roof space

Picture 7: Showing the insulation tucked into the eaves and the bitumen type felt that backs the tiles

Picture 8: Showing a bat dropping on a beam at the southern end of the building

Picture 9: Showing bat droppings on the roof insulation at the southern end of the building

Survey and report by Vesper Conservation & Ecology

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