

SHARING YOUR PROPERTY WITH BATS

(For client use only)

So often when property owners consider that roof extension they are asked to provide the Local Planning Authority with a "Bat Survey". For them this is an unbudgeted afterthought. They look for a low cost quotation and in many cases the surveyor announces there are no bats. This survey is called a Preliminary Roost Appraisal and looks at the suitability of the building to provide roosting opportunities. In about 20% of the surveys we undertake and especially with that lovely period home there are definable opportunities for bats to roost. Now what happens?



Well British bats are under threat due to habitat loss and are therefore protected. We have to share our environment with them to give them a chance to survive and hopefully thrive.

Protective Legislation

Bats and their roost sites are protected under UK and European legislation including the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended), Countryside Rights of Way Act 2000, the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010 and the Habitats Directive. This legislation makes it an offence for any person to:

- Deliberately capture, injure or kill a bat.
- Intentionally or recklessly disturb bats, where that disturbance may affect the ability of those bats to survive, breed, rear or nurture their young, or is likely to significantly affect the local distribution or abundance of any bat species, whether in a roost or not.
- Damage or destroy a place of shelter (roost) of a bat, be that a resting or breeding place.
- Possess a bat, whole or in part, alive or dead.
- Intentionally or recklessly obstruct access to a roost
- Sell or offer for sale or exchange whole or parts of bats, alive or dead.

There are Wildlife Units attached to most police forces across the country and prosecutions are frequent. Penalties are severe with high fines, potential imprisonment and more recently further compensation enforced under the Proceeds of Crime Act.

Solutions

Most of our clients genuinely want to seek a solution that is in the best interest of the bats that share their environment. For this we then need to conduct further bat activity surveys to better understand what species of bat might be present and how they are using the building if at all. These are only possible during the bat active season from May to August.

If roosting bats are present the LPA will require the ecologist to propose mitigation measures to enable the development to go ahead without undue disturbance of any roost. These measures will need to be approved and licenced by Natural England and only undertaken under the supervision of a licenced ecologist. Furthermore bats may only be handled by an appropriately licenced and experienced ecologist (needs an up to date Rabies vaccination too).

Crevice roosting bats

There are two ways in which bats will roost in our buildings that have quite different implications. The most frequently found are crevice dwelling bats such as common pipistrelle. They will crawl into gaps and crevices in walls and under roof tiles etc. where they can feel warm, dry and safe from predators. Most roosts in buildings are temporary summer day roosts. Such bats can often be simply moved by a licenced ecologist into Bat box type accommodation provided appropriately nearby. If there are a significant number of these roosts then it will become more complicated.



Void Roosting bats

Species such as the brown long-eared bat require an internal void in which they will fly for a while before emerging. This we call "light tasting" and it's a mix of stretching their wings, socialising and preparing for their foraging trip whilst making sure there are no predators about. This void need to be 4 metres wide by 5 metres long by 2,5 metres high. Quite something to provide within a building. If this is not possible the bats could be transferred to a similar building nearby or even into a purpose built bat house.



Natural England

Natural England is the government body charged with looking after our countryside and wildlife. They look to the bats best interest. It is our role to persuade them that your development could go ahead without harm or unnecessary disturbance to the bats. This will require the best option for relocating a roost undertaken in the most carefully managed method. Once they are satisfied with our proposal they will licence the works which will have been conditioned as part of your Planning Approval by the LPA. The solution will be expected to be successful and long term.

Fee Assessment

Now that low cost bat survey we mentioned earlier has become rather irrelevant. The most cost effective solution now lies in the realm of the more experienced ecologist with a strong reputation (seldom the cheapest) and who can avoid the many pitfalls for you along the way. If you think you may have bats in your building please think carefully before instructing that survey.