Preliminary Roost Assessment of The Swan Public House, Old Weston, Cambridgeshire



Northwest and northeast elevations

January 2024

Carried out on behalf of
Tony Vaughan

[redacted]

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The Swan Public House, Old Weston Preliminary Roost Assessment

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A preliminary roost assessment was carried out of The Swan Public House which is subject to a listed building application for re-roofing of the main section of the building including the dormer windows, with like-for-like replacement of the existing roof tiles with new tiles. The survey involved carrying out an internal and external inspection of the building for evidence of use by roosting bats and nesting birds.

A small number of old bat droppings typical of those of brown long-eared bat were present in the roof space of the section to be re-roofed, the low number and age of the droppings indicating only low level, occasional use by one or a small number of bats. As long as the roof space remains accessible to bats upon completion of the re-roofing work by installing a couple of raised bat access tiles in the new roof, the work would not require a licence from Natural England, with a schedule of precautionary measures adopted during re-roofing work as outlined in the mitigation section at the end of the report.

No evidence of nesting birds was found, though a check for nesting birds will need to be undertaken prior to re-roofing work commencing. If nesting birds are identified, works in the area of the nest will be delayed until the birds have left the nest.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Surveyor Experience and Competence

The survey was carried out by Philip Irving MCIEEM, who has worked for over twenty years as a Senior Ecologist for a Countryside Management Trust based in Bedfordshire, providing ecological advice on the management of Trust sites and writing management plans etc.

He also undertakes consultancy work including surveys for bats, great crested newts and other protected species, and holds a Natural England Bat Survey Class Licence CL18 (licence registration no: 2015-12411-CLS-CLS), and a great crested newt class licence CL08 (licence registration no: 2015-17174-CLS-CLS).

1.2 Site Description

The Swan Public House is located on the southeast side of Main Street in the centre of Old Weston at Ordnance Survey Grid Reference TL100774.

Housing of various ages and construction is present either side of Main Street to the northeast and southwest of the property, with small, hedged fields of pasture and orchards surrounding the village, and an area of woodland and scrub directly to the southeast of the property. Arable farmland is the predominant land-use in the wider area though small areas of deciduous woodland are present alongside a stream c. 0.5km to the west of the village with other small areas further to the south and west.

1.3 Proposed Works

The Swan Public House is subject to a listed building application for re-roofing of the main section of the building including the dormer windows, with like-for-like replacement of the existing roof tiles with new tiles. Given that the presence of protected species such as bats is a material consideration in the planning process (NPPF), a survey is required to provide information to the local planning

authority (Huntingdonshire District Council) on any impact the proposal is likely to have on any species present. Any impact identified on protected species will need mitigation proposals to be put forward to the planning authority to ensure any populations in the area are maintained at a favourable conservation status.

1.4 Aims of Survey

The aims of the survey are to:

- Assess the current use of the building by bats and nesting birds.
- Determine the impact of the proposed development on any protected species using the building.
- Produce a mitigation plan for any impact on the protected species to ensure the population is maintained at a favourable conservation status in the local area.

2. LEGISLATION RELEVANT TO PROTECTED SPECIES

2.1 Bats

Throughout Europe in the last 30 years there has been an awareness that bat populations are declining considerably. This decline combined with their special roosting requirements has led to them being given special protection by law. All bats and their roosts are protected by law under The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended), through inclusion in schedule 5, section 9. From 1st April 2010, a new version of the Habitats Regulations came into force in England and Wales to become the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations. This version of the legislation updates and consolidates all the amendments to the Regulations since they were first made in 1994 and effectively makes any disturbance of bats an offence. In summary, taken together the legislation makes it illegal to:

- Intentionally kill, injure or capture bats;
- Intentionally or recklessly disturb bats while they are occupying a structure used for shelter or protection;
- Intentionally or recklessly damage, destroy or obstruct access to areas used by bats for shelter or protection.

Structures used by bats for shelter are commonly known as bat roosts. Because bats tend to re-use the same roosts, legal opinion is that, the roost is protected whether or not the bats are present at the time. The appropriate Statutory Nature Conservation Organisation (SNCO) must be consulted of any work that may affect bats, or their roosts. In England, the appropriate SNCO is Natural England who will advise as to whether work can be carried out, and if so, the methods to be used.

Developments that would contravene the protection afforded to bats under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010 require a Habitat Regulations Licence issued by Natural England before any works can commence. Three tests must be satisfied before Natural England can issue a licence or permit otherwise prohibited acts. The Local Planning Authority will need to ensure that tests 1 and 2 have been satisfied and Natural England will need to be consulted regarding test 3. The three tests are:

1. That the development is ‘in the interests of public health and public safety, or for other imperative reasons of overriding public interest, including those of social or economic nature and beneficial consequences of primary importance for the environment’ (Regulation 44 (2) (e)).
2. That there is no satisfactory alternative (Regulation 44 (3) (a)).

3. That the action authorised will not be detrimental to the maintenance of the population of the species at a favourable conservation status in their natural range (Regulation 44 (3) (b)).

The legislation means that the developer will need to have a clearly documented compensation strategy to maintain the numbers of bats in the local area.

2.2 Nesting Birds

Nesting birds are protected by law under The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 which makes it an offence to kill, injure or take any wild bird, and take, damage or destroy any nest in use or being built or any egg.

3. METHODOLOGY

An internal and external inspection of the building was made on the 31st January 2024 by Philip Irving MCIEEM, and evidence of use by bats and nesting birds was looked for, for example droppings, urine streaks, nesting/roosting sites, feeding remains or live animals.

Bats may roost in a variety of situations including within the hollows of timbers, within gaps in brickwork, or below the ridge beam inside buildings. Buildings can be considered as potential roosts if cracks or holes in excess of 8mm x 12mm are present. Such gaps are large enough to allow the smallest species of bats to gain access. It is usual for bats to select roosting areas that are sheltered and warm, avoiding exposed draughty conditions.

Constraints - Bat roosts are of a transient nature and bats may move from roost to roost. A single bat may use a large number and wide variety of roosts during the year. This behaviour may result in some roosting sites not being encountered during the dates of the survey.

The weather at the time of the survey was mostly cloudy with a fresh south-westerly breeze and a temperature of 7°C.

4. RESULTS

4.1 Desk Study

There are few bat records within 2km of the property apart from a recent record of common pipistrelle from the Church of St, Swithin in Old Weston c. 650m to the southwest, with roosts of common and soprano pipistrelle and brown long-eared bat more than 4km to the east and southeast.

4.2 Description

The original 17th century two storey section of the Grade II listed public house requiring re-roofing is timber framed and plastered, and has a pitched, pantile roof, unlined internally. The first floor rooms occupy much of the roof area with three dormer windows, also with pitched pantile roofs, in the northwest roof slope, and two modern skylights at the northeast end of the southeast roof slope. A low roof space above the rooms is accessed from a hole in the wall of the roof space of a slightly higher 19th century extension attached to the southwest elevation that is constructed of brick with a pitched slate roof lined internally with modern breathable membrane.

Attached to the northeast elevation of the main section of the building is a low, one storey extension with a hipped pantile roof lined internally with black felt, with the roof space of this section containing frequent cobwebs.

Attached to the southwest and southeast elevations of the building are modern one storey flat-roofed extensions, the southeast extension constructed of breeze block. The southwest extension has a corrugated sheeting roof, with the roof of the southeast extension felted.

The building appears to be in good structural condition with no obvious damage to the externally rendered walls, though there are numerous small gaps between the pantiles on the roof of the main section.

4.3 Field Survey

The only evidence of bats found in the building were a small number of scattered old droppings in the roof space of the main section, their appearance and location below the ridge beam typical of those of brown long-eared bat. No evidence of bats was found in the roof spaces of the unaffected southwest and northeast extensions, with the modern flat-roofed extensions having no potential to support roosting bats.

No evidence of nesting birds was found in any section of the building.

5. ASSESSMENT

A small number of old bat droppings typical of those of brown long-eared bat were present in the roof space of the section to be re-roofed, the low number and age of the droppings indicating only low level, occasional use by one or a small number of bats.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS AND MITIGATION

6.1 Bats

Bats and their roosts are protected by law under The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010 and a European Protected Species license to derogate from this protection would be required to allow work to be undertaken if a roost was present and the proposed activity is likely to result in an offence, such as significant alterations to or loss of bat roosts.

Even though evidence of use by bats was found in the roof space of the section to be re-roofed, as long as it remains accessible to bats upon completion of the re-roofing work, an EPS licence from Natural England would not be required, though it would be wise to proceed with initial re-roofing work in a way that will enable any bats that may be hidden to be detected and dealt with appropriately. The following measures will be implemented to reduce the impact of disturbance to bats as a result of the proposed work:

- Preliminary re-roofing work will be undertaken in March/April or September/October which are the least sensitive times for bats. The roof tiles along the ridge will be removed first and lifted as carefully as possible, by hand and in an upwards direction to minimise any possible impact on any bats which may be present. This initial work should be overseen by a licenced ecologist, and if any bats are found, they will be placed in a wooden box and released at sunset on the same day. If any bats are found at a later date, work will stop and not continue until they have been removed by the licensed ecologist.

- Any timber treatment products required will be sanctioned by Natural England and a check for roosting bats made before timber treatment commences.

- All people working on the building will be made aware of the potential presence of bats, the protection afforded them and the methods of working required to avoid harm to bats.

- Two raised bat access tiles will be incorporated into the new roof, one at each end of the building on either the ridge or slope, to ensure bats can continue to access the roof space upon completion of the work. Slots will need to be cut into any internal lining below the bat access tiles to allow them access to the interior of the roof. Type 1F Bitumen felt should be used to line the roof and Breathable Roof Membrane (BRMs) should be avoided.

6.2 Nesting Birds

As nesting birds are protected by law under The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, a check for nesting birds should be undertaken prior to re-roofing work commencing. If an active nest is found, clearance work must cease and an appropriate sized buffer established around the nest. The buffer must remain intact until it has been confirmed that the young have fledged and the nest is no longer in use.

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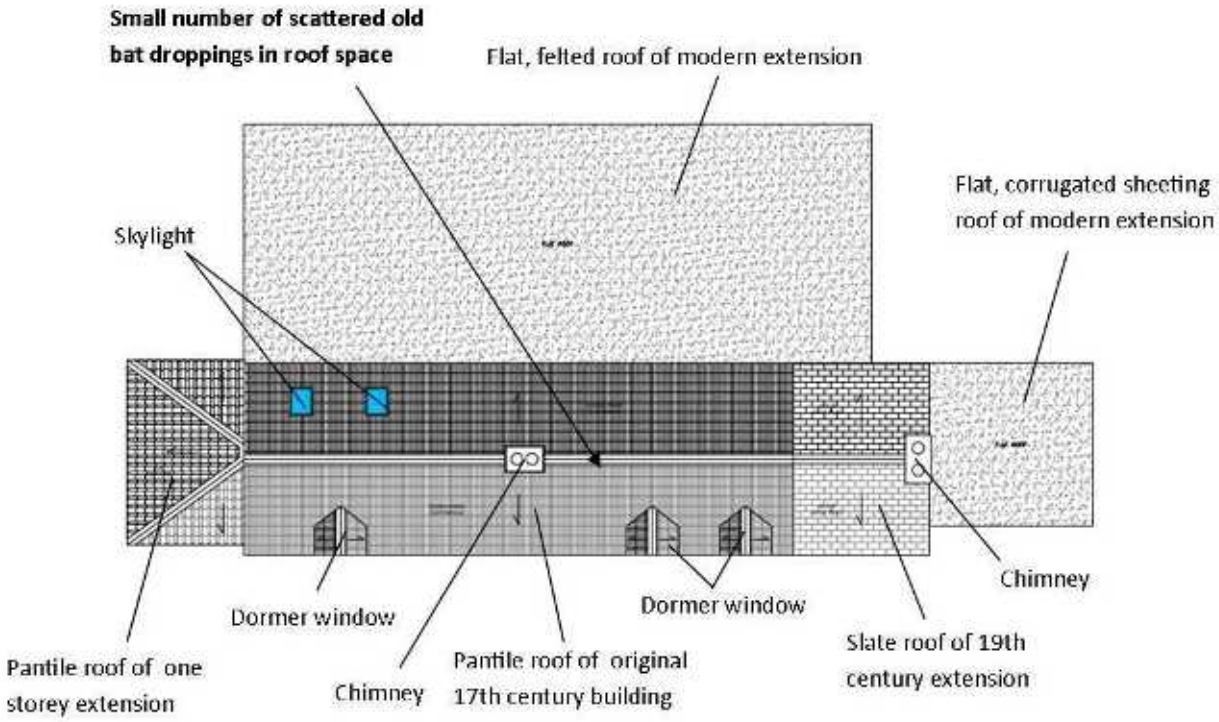
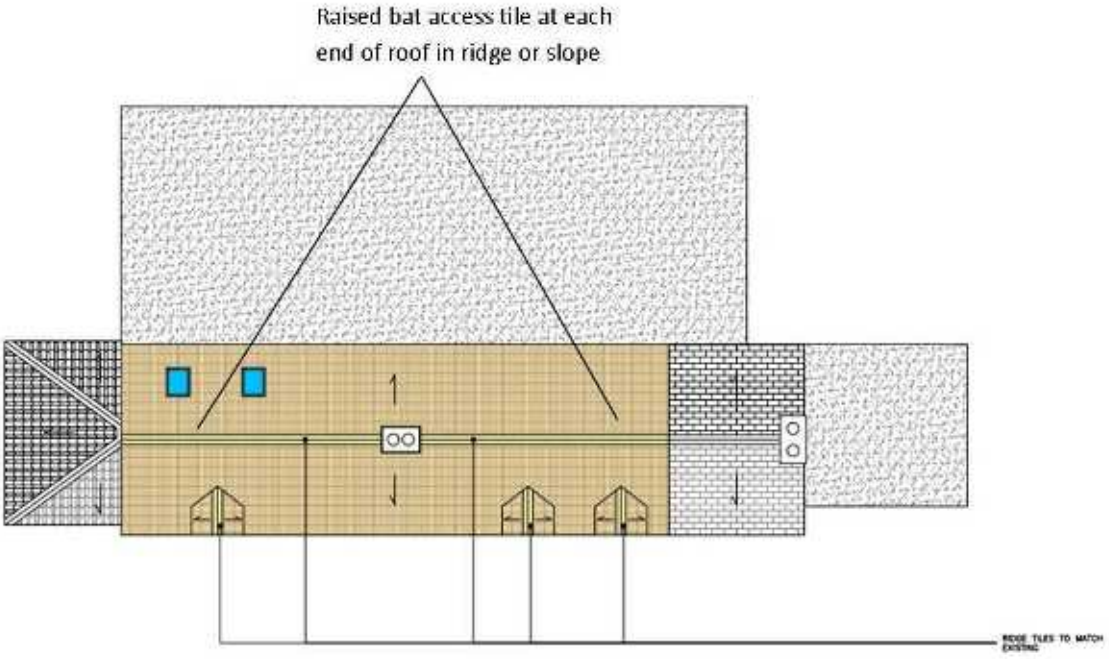


ROOF PLAN AS EXISTING



ROOF PLAN AS PROPOSED

APPENDIX

Photographs



Southeast facing roof slope



Roof space of main section



Northeast end of roof space of main section



Roof space of two storey southeast section



Roof space of one storey northeast section



Flat-roofed extension attached to southwest elevation



Flat-roofed extension attached to southeast elevation



Old bat droppings in roof space of main section