

Planning Information on Bats

The UK is currently home to around 17 species of bat. The more abundant species are found throughout the country, while rarer species are often limited to the south and south-west. All species of British bat have experienced a dramatic decline in their numbers over the last 30-40 years, so they are nationally recognised as a conservation priority.

The importance of bats is reflected in the level of protection they are afforded. All species are considered to be European Protected Species (EPS). This protection under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations (2010) states that it is an offence to kill, injure or harm any bat. The Wildlife and Countryside act (1981) states it is also an offence to damage, destroy or obstruct the place of rest of any bat, even if bats are not in full time occupation.

Within the planning system, Defra Guidance Note (06/2005) states that the presence of a protected species is a **material consideration** within the planning process (paragraph 98). It also states that the presence of a protected species must be established **prior to the determination** of an application (Paragraph 99). Local plan policies support this position.

District and Borough Councils and Warwickshire County Council (WCC) take advice on ecological matters from Ecological Services which is a function of the County Council. This service provides planning officers with professional, considered and current advice on ecological matters relating to the planning process. Warwickshire County Council Ecological Services also manage and maintain the Warwickshire Biological Records Centre, which provides up to date species and habitat information to inform the planning process.

The presence of a protected species may have a significant impact on the progress of a planning application; however, it is often possible for both applicant and wildlife to coexist in a mutually agreeable manner.

The need for a bat survey can be highlighted to the applicant through pre-application advice or after a planning application has been submitted and ecological recommendations are provided to the planning officer. A first Initial bat survey is carried out to assess the bat potential of a site, building or trees, and can be carried out at any time of the year. If follow up bat surveys are required after the Initial bat survey these should be carried out at the appropriate times of the year which are from May to the end of August.

Factors that trigger the request for a bat survey include:-

- The local habitat has high potential to support bats, such as nearby woodland, watercourses, or mature hedgerows
- The location is close to a known bat roost (or in some cases is already known to be a bat roost). Generally, a recent bat record within 1km is considered to be significant.
- The building or structure is of a type likely to support bats. For example, houses with a pitched, tiled roof or a stone built farm building.
- The proposed works are of a nature likely to affect or obstruct a bat roost if a roost is present.

- The proposed works would alter conditions such as lighting, in such a way, that if a bat roost was present the location would no longer be suitable for bats.

A bat survey is to be conducted by an experienced and licensed bat ecologist. Bat surveys require an appropriate level of expertise to be conducted properly. Surveys not conducted to this standard will not be accepted, and the consultant will be asked to review or repeat their work.

Bat surveys have two main objectives. Firstly, to establish if a building or structure is suitable for use by bats and then secondly to establish if any bats are present. As such there are two parts of a full bat survey. An initial or 'phase 1' bat survey looks at the building both externally and internally. It will assess the structure for potential access points, evidence of existing bat use (droppings, staining, individuals etc) and assess the building in the context of its surrounding habitat. Initial surveys can be conducted throughout the year.

The next stage is to conduct an activity survey. This is a survey that is carried out either at sunset or sunrise (or ideally both) and looks for bats leaving or entering the structure. Bat Conservation Trust guidelines state that 2-3 surveys should be conducted. Consultants will use highly sensitive microphones (bat detectors) to listen for audible evidence of bats around the building. The optimal time period for carrying out activity (dusk and dawn) surveys is between May and August as this represents the peak activity period for bats. Bats are mostly in hibernation between November and March and hibernation sites will usually be in different locations from roosts used during the summer.

Bat surveys cannot conclusively prove or disprove the presence of bats, however there are acceptable standards that need to be met to ensure that sufficient survey effort has been completed.

For further information please contact Warwickshire County Council Ecological Services on 01926 418060 or planningecology@warwickshire.gov.uk.

Who carries out bat surveys?

For information on who can carry out bat surveys, you can use a search directory, web search under Ecological Consultants, or you could try visiting the [Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management](#) website. On this website you can search the institute's [commercial directory](#) of consultants to find local ecologists who can carry out the work for you. We recommend that you obtain a number of quotes, as prices can vary considerably.

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