Bat and Roost Risk Management Considerations during Roofing Works

As well as challenges with the climate we are also facing challenges with biodiversity especially with the loss of natural habitat due to the ever-expanding industrialisation and urbanisation that we are seeing throughout the UK.

The Bat Conservation Trust[1] (BCT) has been championing the protection of our bat species and their habitats throughout the UK, engaging with both people and these intriguing mammals to provide guidance to those whose work might impact bats, for almost 35 years.

What bats do we have in the UK?

The **UK has 17 breeding bat species**[2] which all eat insects, to provide them with an energy-rich food source to enable them to fly, echolocate and keep warm in our temperate climate. Sadly, the loss of natural roosting sites coupled with factors such as intensive agriculture and urbanisation, including increasing levels of light pollution, have all had a dramatic impact on **bat populations, leading to serious declines in the last century**[3].

Why are bats important?

As well as making up a significant portion of Britain's mammal biodiversity, **UK bats are Indicator Species**[4]; this means changes to our bat populations can reveal wider changes to local wildlife populations signalling the health of the environment on which we all ultimately depend.

Where do bats live?

Bats often use buildings for roosting, resting, hibernating and having young—particularly as their natural roosting places in tree holes and caves become scarcer as they are destroyed or disturbed. Bats can use all areas of a building; however, they are mostly found in the walls, eaves and dark roof spaces. Unlike birds or rodents, bats do not make nests when roosting or cause structural damage. With their tiny size, bats can be difficult to detect, which makes them and their roost sites very vulnerable to harm or destruction.

Figure 1: Brown long-eared bats at the roof apex

How are bats and their roosts protected?

All species of **bat in the UK and their roosts are protected by law**[5]. This means it is illegal to damage, destroy or disturb any bats or their roosts without having taken the necessary precautions and sought the correct advice from the relevant Statutory Nature Conservation Organisation (SNCO):

- Natural England[6]
- NatureScot[7]
- Natural Resources Wales[8]
- Northern Ireland Environment Agency[9]

When do bats use buildings?

Due to their life cycles, **bats move roosts throughout the year**[10]. When hibernating, bats will use damp, cool areas such as cellars or within the rubble walls of barns. In the summer bats in maternity colonies use warm, dry spaces such as roof voids or behind south facing tiles to keep themselves and their young warm. Bats may be in clusters to reduce heat loss, or they may roost on their own, both of these scenarios are bat roosts.

Roost sites are protected even when bats are not present, because they still play an essential part in a bat's life cycle and are an ever-decreasing resource for these vulnerable animals.

Bat Conservation Trust

Which bats use buildings?

All species of bat in the UK have been recorded using buildings to some degree; however, such is their importance for some species that they may be considered building reliant. Common and soprano pipistrelles and brown long-eared bats fall into this category as they have been found roosting in houses.

Figure 2 soprano pipistrelle bat

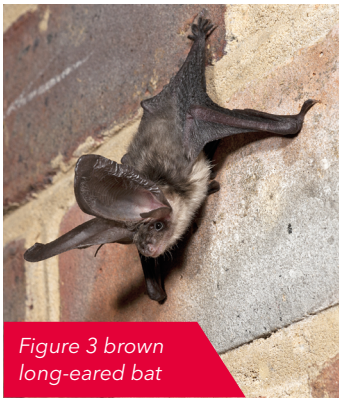

Figure 3 brown long-eared bat

What activities may impact bats?

Roosting bats can be harmed or illegally disturbed by common building works, unless they are planned correctly following advice from a competent person or source, examples include:

- **Repairing or replacing roofs or roof tiles**
- **Repointing brickwork**
- **Replacing fascias or soffits**
- **Pest control activities**
- **Adding solar panels**
- **Adding roofing membranes**
- **Cleaning roof or hanging tiles**
- **Working within roof voids**

How can I ensure bats are considered?

The law does not prevent building maintenance or development where a bat roost is present, however it does restrict how and sometimes when works are undertaken, in line with relevant guidance in order to protect the bats. To prevent any delays, bats should be considered at the earliest stages of planning and design of a project.

You must not do anything that disturbs or harms bats or obstructs or damages their roost sites.

What to check for when planning works:

- Check if the project manager has details on any bat survey work undertaken on the site, including method statement for works or requirements for toolbox talks from an ecologist.
- Check if people at the property have seen bats around or in their house, or know of roosts mentioned by landlords or previous tenants.
- Check gable ends, roof voids, and external faces of the building for signs of bats—including droppings.
- No evidence of bats does not mean bats are not present—proceed with caution and if in doubt ask your company about seeking expert advice.
- If you do discover **evidence of bats or bats themselves**[11], then stop work immediately, inform the home or property owner and follow internal reporting procedures for your company to manage this risk, which could include **seeking expert advice, what type of advice depends on the works involved**[12].

Membranes

When roofing work is planned in areas where bats may be present, careful planning of works and selection of roofing membranes is essential. Non-Bitumen Coated Roofing Membranes (NBCRMs) can pose a risk to bats because the long spun-bond fibres may snag on bat claws, leading to entanglement.

To manage this risk, the Bat Conservation Trust, academics, industry representatives and statutory nature conservation bodies developed a 'snagging propensity test' methodology, which can be used by industry to test their membranes. The snagging test assesses how easily a bat's claws could catch on a membrane surface. Only membranes that pass this test may be recommended by ecologists as part of licensing requirements in bat roosts.

Traditionally, bitumen 1F felt has been the only membrane considered 'bat-safe'. However, a small number of newer products have now passed the snagging test and may be suitable alternatives to be proposed as part of licensing where bats are present and improved thermal performance is required.

Key points for contractors:

- Only membranes that pass the snagging propensity test may be included under advisement of an ecologist for licenses for bat roosts.
- Follow advice from the project ecologist where membrane replacement is required.
- Be aware that guidance differs slightly between England, Scotland and Wales and is being updated as more products are tested.

This ensures compliance with bat-protection legislation and reduces the risk of inadvertently harming bats during roofing works.

How can the roofing industry help?

NFRC is working proactively with the Bat Conservation Trust, roofing contractors, and the supply chain to:

- **Raise awareness and provide guidance for the roofing industry**

  The importance of protecting bats when roof refurbishment or repair work is planned and undertaken through industry Guidance Notes, drafting articles for trade press and through engagement with groups such as the Tutors Forum.

- **Encourage the installation of bat access tiles or boxes**

  It is important to consider installing bat tiles and access tubes as an additional service for your clients. This is also likely to be a material consideration for developers, architects and planners facing greater pressure to improve sustainability and biodiversity measures.

  The Bat Conservation Trust has the Roost Partnership scheme[13] with a range of products designed in line with best practice for a variety of build and use types. Roof focused provisions include:

- **Just Lead bat access tube**[14] *(Figure 4)* and **bat access tile**[15] *(Figure 5)*

- **Ridge Roost**[16] **gable end tile from Manthorpe** *(see Case Study)*

Figure 4. Just Lead's bat access tube for a range of tiled surfaces

Figure 5: Just Lead's bat access tile

Correct placement of bat tiles and access products is fundamental to the successful uptake by bats. Things to consider include:

- Making sure that the bats have a clear flight path to the access point
- Avoiding placement too low as predators such as cats can catch bats as they drop out of the box or feature
- Avoid artificial light shining on the access point or between there and the vegetation bats use to safely commute through the landscape
- If in doubt seek out expert advice, such as the project ecologist.

Develop bespoke eLearning

To support awareness raising across the roofing industry, NFRC and BCT have worked together to develop bespoke **eLearning**[17] approved by both parties.

CASE STUDY:

Manthorpe's Ridge Roost

- Manthorpe became a Roost Partner in 2023 to develop an innovative solution to effortlessly integrate bat roosting habitat into standard roofing products.
- This gable end Ridge Roost[16] *(Figure 6),* just slightly deeper than a standard tile, is very convenient to integrate into both new-build and retrofit projects.
- The Ridge Roost contains a protected chamber for a small number of crevice dwelling bats such as common or soprano pipistrelles to roost *(Figure 7).*
- The materials and design were evaluated and refined by a bat carer.
- Roofers can replace an ordinary gable end tile with a Ridge Roost without ecologist supervision.

Figure 6: Ridge Roost in situ

Figure 7: Testing materials and design with soprano pipistrelle in care

For more information:

[1] Bat Conservation Trust: www.bats.org.uk

[2] UK bat species: www.bats.org.uk/about-bats/what-are-bats/uk-bats

[3] Threats to UK bats: www.bats.org.uk/about-bats/threats-to-bats

[4] Bats as biodiversity indicators: www.bats.org.uk/about-bats/why-bats-matter/bats-as-indicators-of-biodiversity

[5] Bats and the law: www.bats.org.uk/advice/bats-and-the-law

[6] Natural England: www.gov.uk/government/organisations/natural-england

[7] NatureScot: www.nature.scot

[8] Natural Resources Wales: naturalresources.wales/splash

[9] Northern Ireland Environment Agency: www.daera-ni.gov.uk/northern-ireland-environment-agency

[10] A year in the life of a bat: www.bats.org.uk/about-bats/a-year-in-the-life-of-a-bat

[11] Working on a building with bats: www.bats.org.uk/advice/im-working-on-a-building-with-bats/ive-found-a-bat-during-works

[12] Statutory Nature Conservation Organisation advice: www.bats.org.uk/advice/im-working-on-a-building-with-bats/getting-personalised-advice/free-advice-service-from-sncos

[13] Roost Partnership scheme: www.bats.org.uk/our-work/buildings-planning-and-development/roost-replacement-and-enhancement/partnerships

[14] Bat access tube: www.justlead.co.uk/product/bat-tubes-for-slated-tiled-pitched-roofs

[15] Bat access tile: www.justlead.co.uk/product/bat-access-tile-weathering

[16] Bat ridge roost: www.manthorpebp.co.uk/environmental/bat-ridge-roost/bat-ridge-roost

[17] NFRC/BCT eLearning: https://learn.bats.org.uk/courses/roofing_industry

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