

Project Profile

Ecology Support to Derbyshire County Council

Background

BSG Ecology's Derbyshire Office has been providing advice to Derbyshire County Council (DCC) for 15 years, working on over 230 projects during this period. This long standing working relationship with DCC staff has enabled us to gain an in-depth understanding of their needs. During this time BSG Ecology has worked with various teams at DCC to help them gain an understanding of the ecological risks and requirements of their projects. In addition to the direct relationship, BSG Ecology also provides specialist advice to DCC through the national SCAPE framework supply chain, which ensures a consistency in approach and delivery of objective ecological advice based on our knowledge of DCC assets.

We have also provided training sessions to DCC staff on bat ecology, with particular regard to how to approach works to buildings and trees. These sessions are aimed at providing DCC surveyors and architects with the tools needed to identify which of their projects may require bat survey work, and be aware of the advantages of procuring such work at an early stage in the project.

Our role in the projects

One common role for us is to undertake bat surveys of DCC building stock, which are the subject of development proposals. The Council is responsible for a significant building stock and many of these buildings, due to their age and construction, have the potential to support bats. Amongst them are the buildings that make up over 150 school sites and we have worked with DCC on over 120 school projects, ranging from extensions to re-roofing, as well as demolitions and new school construction.

Many of the 19th and early 20th century Derbyshire school buildings have large expanses of pitched roof, with cavernous loft voids. Often these roofs are original, meaning that not only have they been relatively undisturbed for over 100 years, but that they offer many suitable roosting opportunities for bats, for example, via slipped slates or missing verge and ridge mortar. As these roofs reach the end of their life span and are due for replacement, there is a risk of disturbing bat roosts without careful planning and mitigation.

BSG's Ecologists commonly undertake daytime preliminary bat roost assessments which can be undertaken at any time of the year. We carry out evening emergence or dawn re-entry bat activity surveys where they are required and, if roosts are found to be present, and likely to be affected by the proposals, we work with DCC to prepare and submit a European Protected

Species (EPS) Licence to Natural England. BSG Ecologists have been 'Named Ecologists' on over 30 EPS Licences for bats for DCC projects.

As an example, one of the more complex projects involved the re-roofing of a Victorian school near Alfreton. The site supports several bat maternity colonies (common pipistrelle bat, brown long-eared bat, whiskered bat and Brandt's bat).

CLASP (*Consortium of Local Authority Special Programme*) Building System

Many of the mid-20th century schools in Derbyshire were constructed using the CLASP building system. BSG Ecology has developed considerable experience of surveying and assessing these prefabricated, concrete and steel structures for bats. To the untrained eye, they may appear not to offer the types of features in which one might expect bats to roost. For example, they typically have flat roofs with no loft voids. However, our experience has shown that a significant proportion of CLASP buildings do support bats. The bats often roost within the modular panels covered with hanging tiles or behind barge boards and roof edge trim. The running programme of school maintenance and refurbishment regularly involves the replacement of the modular panels in CLASP buildings with more durable and thermally efficient panels. We are often required to work with DCC to provide inventive ways of incorporating bat roosting facilities into the new panels. Methods have ranged from integrated off-the-shelf bat tubes to substantial bespoke bat boxes faced with some of the original hanging tiles.

Outcome

DCC is the custodian of many bat roosts. The collaborative approach between DCC and BSG Ecology and the use of the SCAPE framework ensures that DCC has regard to the requirements and provisions of the EC Habitats Directive and the associated domestic legislation (the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010) to maintain the favourable conservation status of bats. At the same time the council is fulfilling its obligations with regard to the delivery of necessary building works. In addition, DCC continues to have regard to those species of bats that are species of principal importance, under the provisions of the general duty for public bodies under the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006.