

Project Profile

Piece Hall, Halifax: Protected Species and Renovation Works

Background

Renovation works at Piece Hall are currently underway as part of the Piece Hall Transformation Project, which includes internal and external repair works and the construction of an extension to its eastern boundary. The project required ecological surveys and assessment to inform the design and timing of the proposals.

A New Central Library is also being constructed in the vicinity of the Square Spire and Square Church ruins. The proposals also include the creation of a new entrance into the eastern side of the Piece Hall, which will connect Piece Hall to the New Central Library. The work is being funded by CMBC and a Heritage Lottery Fund grant. Piece Hall is due to re-open in summer 2016.

The historic context and value of this site was central to the careful planning and delivery of services by the client team. Piece Hall originally opened in 1779 and was built as a cloth market in central Halifax. It is a Grade I Listed building which is owned by Calderdale Metropolitan Borough Council (CMBC) and is the only structurally intact remaining cloth hall in England/UK. Adjacent to Piece Hall is the Square Spire and Square Church ruins Grade II Listed Building, originally opened in the mid-19th Century and largely destroyed by fire in the 1970s.

BSG Ecology's role in the project

BSG Ecology was appointed by CMBC to carry out a daytime bat and bird survey of both the Piece Hall Transformation Project and New Central Library sites, followed by detailed bat surveys during the summer months. The purpose of the surveys was to check for evidence of bats and nesting birds within the site that may be present and affected by the proposed works to inform the provision of any necessary mitigation measures.

Peregrine: A Schedule 1 bird species

Baseline survey work revealed that peregrine, a Schedule 1 species under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended), uses the upper portion of the Square Church Spire for nesting. Nesting peregrine have been reported by CMBC staff and members of the public in recent years. Under the Act it is an offence to disturb Schedule 1 species whilst they are nest building, at or near a nest with eggs or young, or to disturb the dependent young of such a bird.

The construction of the New Central Library and extension to the Piece Hall required use of a crane in the vicinity of the spire, which posed a risk of disturbance to peregrine. BSG Ecology worked closely with the construction contractors, GRAHAM Construction, to devise practical avoidance and mitigation measures to reduce the risk of disturbance to peregrine during construction.

These measures were set out in a method statement, and the following were to be implemented if peregrine were present during the works:

- Minimise working height of crane to a maximum of 31m.
- Use of slew locks to restrict movement of crane in vicinity of the spire.

The Method Statement stated that if any signs of disturbance to peregrine were noted throughout the works, then the cause of the disturbance must cease immediately. This was monitored by the project ecologist.

GRAHAM Construction set up a CCTV monitoring system on the spire in spring 2015, to record any bird activity associated with the spire, prior to (and during) the crane use. CCTV footage from early June 2015 showed that kestrel (which is not listed on Schedule 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended)) was using the spire for nesting, with no signs of peregrine recorded. Peregrine and kestrel can co-exist in close proximity to each other, however, and therefore camera footage was regularly reviewed to check for the presence of peregrine.

Bats

Baseline survey work found two confirmed common pipistrelle roosts and one possible common pipistrelle roost beneath the roof tiles of the Piece Hall, with individual bats recorded during the survey work.

We subsequently secured a European Protected Species Licence to lawfully permit the disturbance and temporary exclusion of bats from beneath the roof tiles during the renovation works, and we worked closely with the roofing contractors to ensure that any bats present were not harmed. A temporary bat box was installed on-site, in which to place any bats that were found during the works. Gaps have been re-instated under the roof tiles during renovation, meaning that in the long-term there will be no reduction in roosting opportunities associated with the Piece Hall roof renovation.

Outcome

Meeting the strict timelines of the project required practical solutions to be developed working with CMBC, and the construction contractors, as well as taking on board the HLF funding requirements. Together, we achieved legal compliance with regards to the protected species at this publically accessible and high profile site. The renovation work has not affected the potential for the site to be used in future by these species. The Piece Hall will reopen in summer 2016.