

## **BAT SURVEYS AND PLANNING APPLICATIONS**

### ***Information for agents and applicants***

**Pre-determinative bat surveys are increasingly required by local planning authorities (LPAs) where building works requiring planning permission may affect roof spaces or other areas used by bats, including non-commercial alterations to residential properties. This leaflet is intended to provide information and advice to assist applicants and agents faced with such requests.**



Photo: Whiskered bat - John Martin

#### ***Why are bat surveys required?***

Bats and their roosts are protected under national and international law. Bats roost in a wide range of structures in rural and urban settings, and the legislation makes no distinction between size or type of development. Therefore LPAs are obliged to request bat surveys to accompany planning applications where there is a reasonable likelihood that bats are present, whether it is a commercial development or a householder application, e.g. for a loft conversion or extension.

The LPA will expect a bat survey to be undertaken and a report to be prepared by a suitably qualified ecological consultant. Normally the LPA will not validate the application until this has been done, because Government policy requires that all relevant information relating to protected species is provided before the application is determined.

#### ***What does a bat survey involve?***

There are two levels of survey that may be required for a planning permission. The initial bat survey can be carried out at any time of year and should consist of a background data search and a full building inspection to look for evidence of bat use and to assess whether the building has the potential to support bats. Depending on the results of this, bat activity surveys may also be required; these can only be undertaken during May to August, but may be continued into September in suitable weather conditions. If activity surveys are required, it is extremely important that they are carried out during the specified time period, regardless of the status of your planning permission. Otherwise, the start of works may be delayed for up to a further year; the LPA will not “let you off” if you have missed the required survey season. Hibernation surveys may also be required, but these are less common.

#### ***What happens if I have bats?***

Usually, the presence of bats does not mean that a development cannot proceed, but it may influence the details, timings and working methods. A licence from Natural England (NE) may be needed before any work can be undertaken, and NE’s requirements for survey are stringent, so you must ensure that these have been met. Depending on the status of the bat roost and the impact of the work, sometimes work can be carried out under a non-licensed method statement, which reduces time and costs. Full details of this are beyond the scope of this leaflet, but a good ecological consultant will be able to advise on this and any other matters outlined above. If there is a bat roost present, certain works can generally only take place during March/April or September/October, when bats are neither hibernating nor

breeding. This can be a significant constraint on the progress of works, so it is as well to be aware of it from the outset.

### ***Where do I go to get a survey done?***

Choose a reputable and experienced ecological consultant who will be able to help guide applicants through the process as smoothly as possible. Ensure that the consultant you choose is a member of the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM) and is also licensed to survey for bats, otherwise they may not be able to carry out an adequate survey. Ask consultants if they have experience of the LPA in question, as requirements vary from authority to authority, and a consultant that already has a good reputation with the relevant LPA can be invaluable in saving money, time and trouble in negotiating the system. Your architect or planning consultant may be able to recommend someone, or the LPA may have a list of suitable consultants; otherwise, you can use the CIEEM website [www.cieem.net](http://www.cieem.net) – click on Professional Directory and then search by postcode.

### ***What about costs?***

The need for a bat survey for non-commercial alterations to residential dwellings can come as a complete surprise – and an unwelcome additional cost - to householders. However, the standard of survey and reporting that is required by law and by the LPA is the same whether the development is private or commercial, and therefore the cost to the consultant is the same regardless; unless the law or the system is changed, the consultant is powerless to alter this. Nevertheless, many consultants will reduce their fees for non-commercial developments, and may also give discounts for strictly non-profit developments e.g. churches. Please bear in mind that most ecological consultants are trained and professionally qualified to a very high degree – certainly to an equivalent level to an architect, engineer or surveyor - and many now have chartered status. Therefore it should be expected that a professional fee will be charged for a professional job.

Actual costs will vary and, as with any profession, be cautious if one quote appears to be substantially lower than others. Obtain written quotes, and when comparing them make sure you are comparing like for like; the survey must meet the LPA's requirements otherwise you may have to do more work to address the shortfall.

### ***Where can I get further advice?***

At Swift Ecology we are happy to give free, no-obligation advice on bats or other protected species and we can carry out the full range of surveys; we are a small and highly experienced company and can offer competitive rates. Please feel free to contact us using the details below. Otherwise, any good ecological consultant should be able to advise.

Your LPA's ecologist or biodiversity officer can also advise and may publish further guidance on their website.

You can also try the Bat Conservation Trust (BCT) [www.bats.org.uk](http://www.bats.org.uk) or your local bat group.

***Swift Ecology (offices in Warwickshire, Gloucestershire and Worcestershire)***  
***Main office: contact Lisa on 01299 890261***

Website [www.swiftecology.co.uk](http://www.swiftecology.co.uk)  
Email [swifteco@swiftecology.co.uk](mailto:swifteco@swiftecology.co.uk)

