Highfield, Snodworth Road, Langho, Blackburn

Bats: Building Inspection

Simply Ecology Limited

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November 2018

For

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DISCLAIMER

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background Information

1.1.1 In October 2018, Simply Ecology Limited was commissioned by Ogden Design Consultants to undertake a bat building inspection of Highfield, Snodworth Road, Langho, Blackburn, BB6 8DR (OS grid reference SD706336). See Plan 1: Site location; Plan 2: Existing plans; Plan 3: Existing elevations; Plan 4: Proposed plans and Plan 5: Proposed elevations.

1.2 Aims

1.2.1 The aims of this ecological assessment were to:

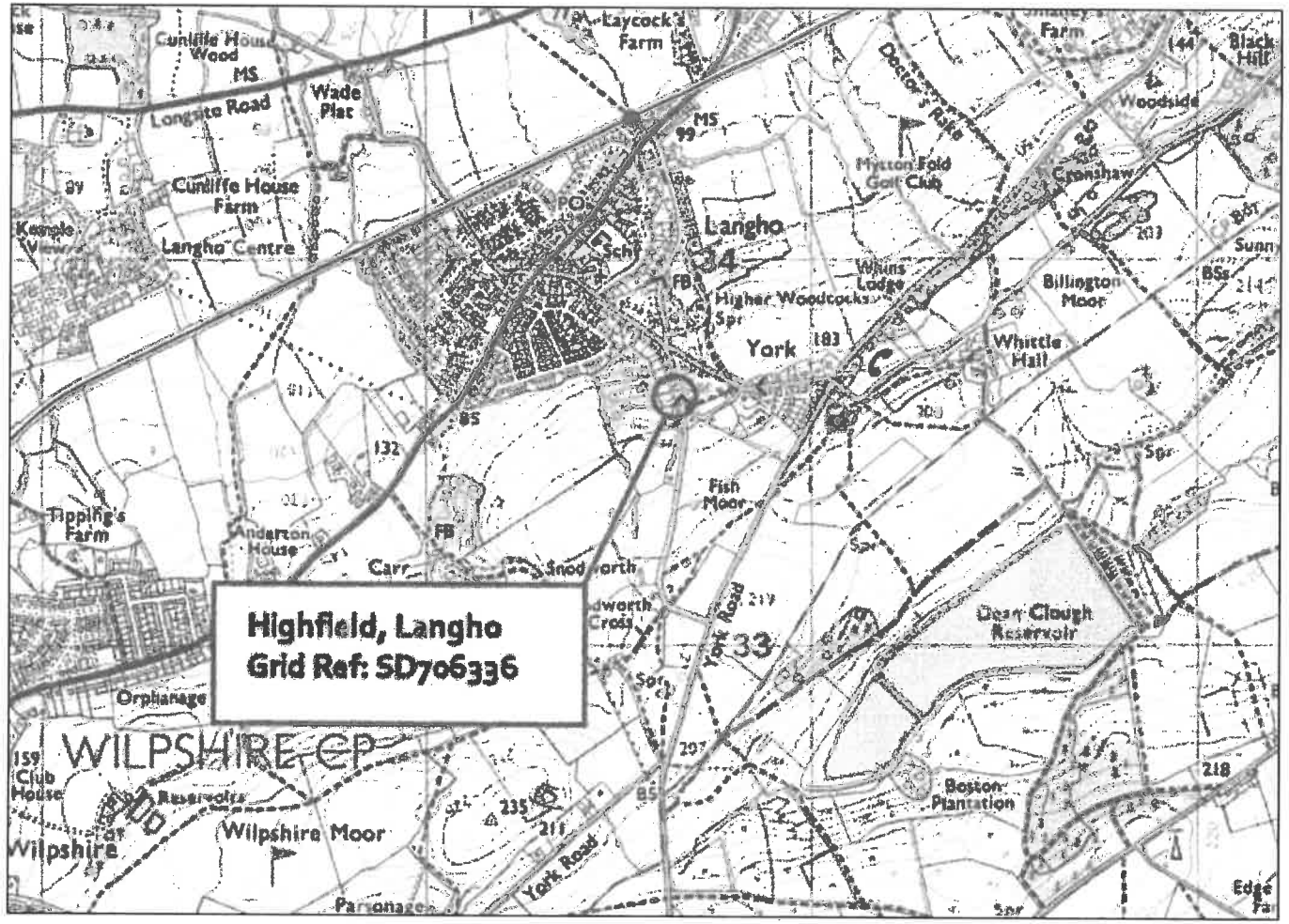
- To provide clear advice to the client, the Local Planning Authority and third parties, on the nature conservation value of the site and surrounding area.
- To confirm the presence or absence of protected species, such as badgers, bats, great crested newts, otter, etc) within the proposed development site.
- To enable the client to comply with legislation afforded to protected sites and species.
- To highlight the presence of any habitats or species of ecological importance, including Habitats and Species of Principal Importance (NERC Act, 2006).
- To identify any ecological constraints on future development.
- To establish the need for any further surveys and assessments.
- To make nature conservation recommendations.

1.2.2 To achieve this, a building inspection was undertaken on 9th November 2018. This submission presents the results of the surveys at the site.

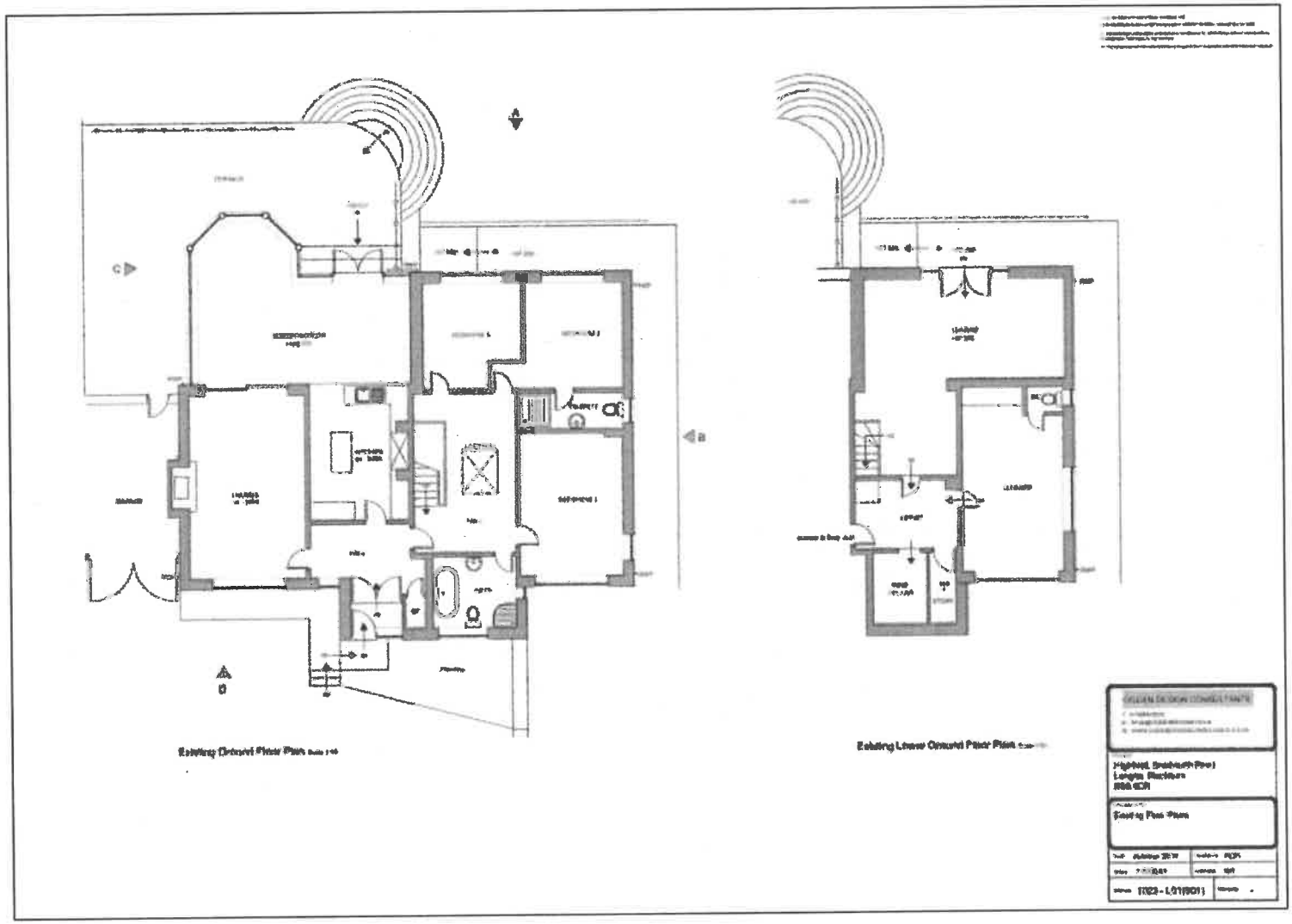
1.3 Site Description and Proposed Works

1.3.1 The site is located within the village of Langho, north of Blackburn (see Plan 1). It comprises of a two storey detached residential dwelling, set on a steep hill overlooking the village (see Plan 2 and Plan 3). The landscape surrounding the property is largely rural, with stands of deciduous woodland adjacent to the east and west of the site.

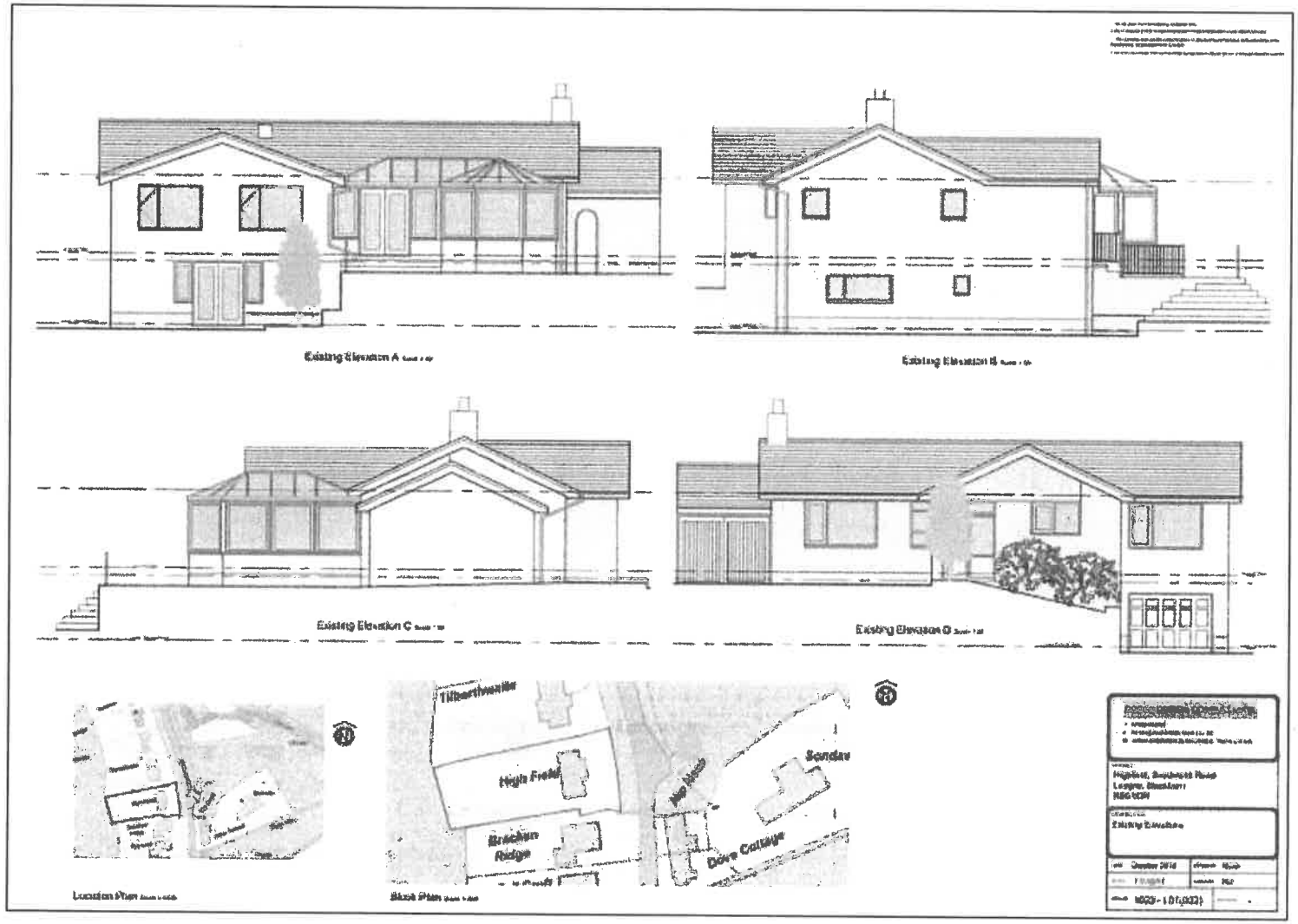
1.3.2 The surveys described in this report were commissioned to inform a planning application for an extension to the rear of the existing building, impacting upon the current loft void (see Plan 4 and Plan 5). The planning process requires up-to-date survey data in order to assess the ecological value of the site and the presence of any protected wildlife.



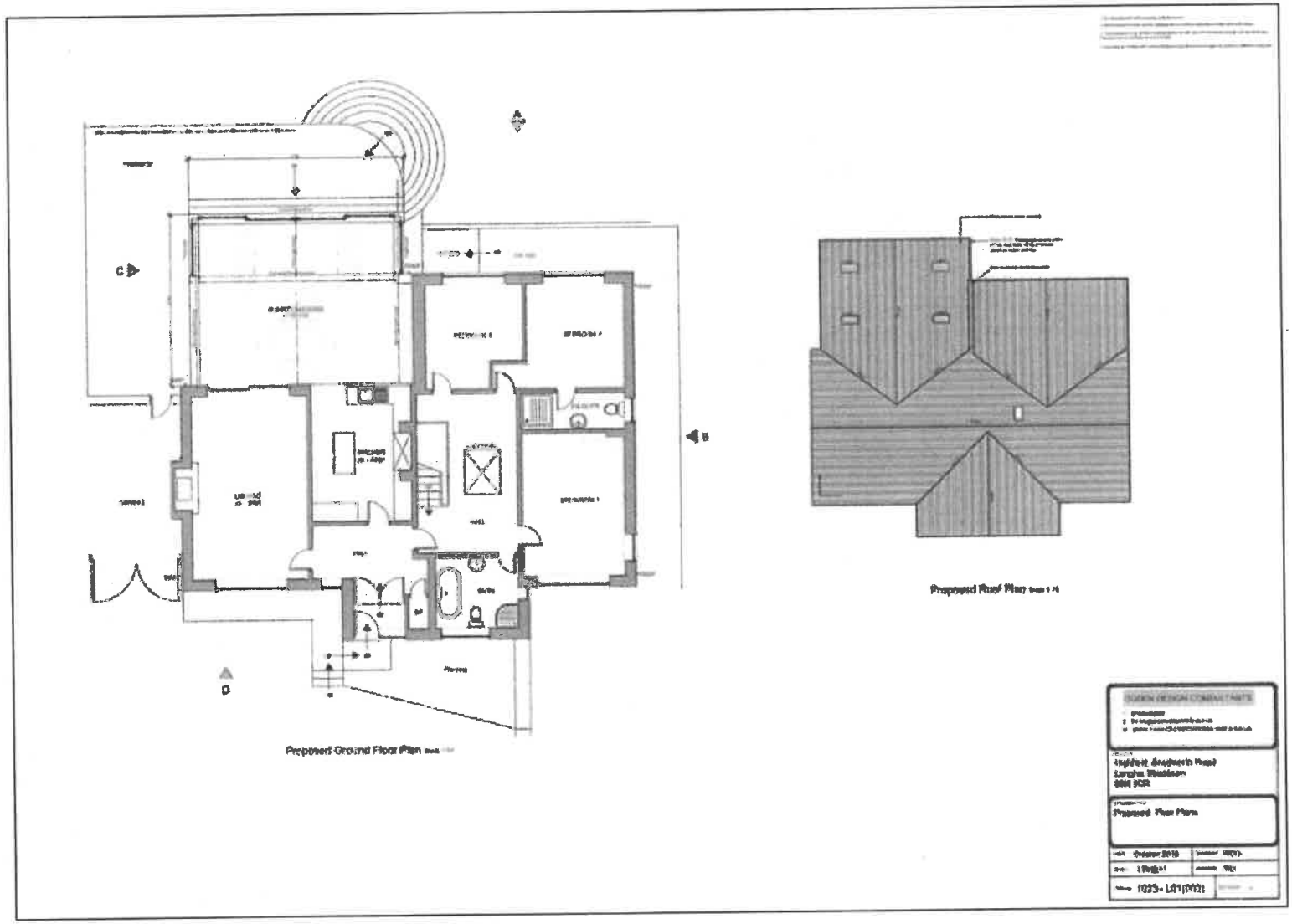
Plan 1: Site location.



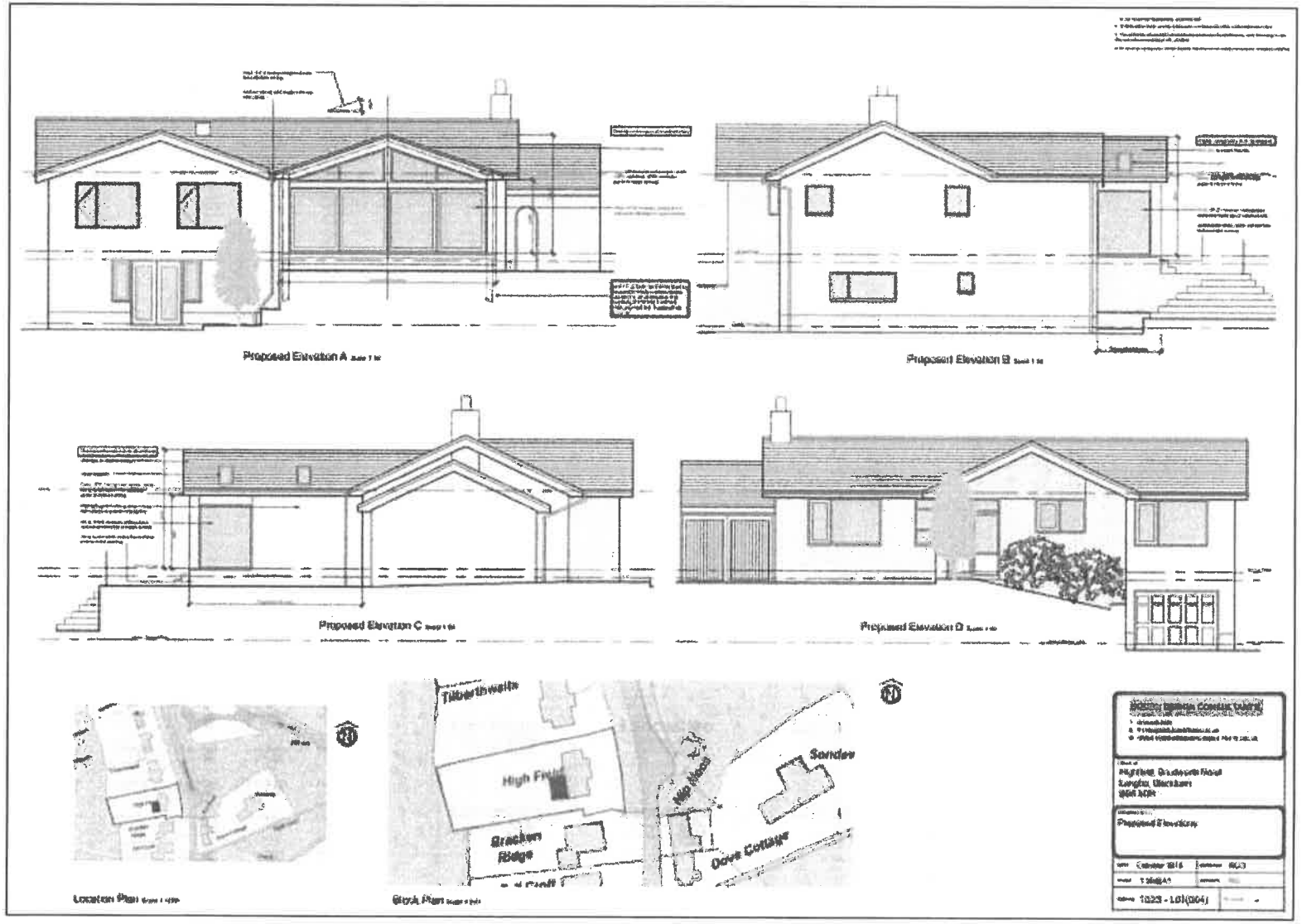
Plan 2: Existing plans.



Plan 3: Existing elevations.



Plan 4: Proposed plans.



Plan 5: Proposed elevations.

2.0 SURVEY METHODOLOGY

2.1 Bats: Building Survey

2.1.1 The building survey was undertaken in accordance with the standard methods described in the 'Bat Worker's Manual' (JNCC 2004) and '*Bat Surveys – Good Practice Guidelines*' (BCT 2016). The survey comprised the following elements:

- An inspection of the exterior of the building to look for obvious signs of bat activity (such as droppings on windowsills) and assessing the potential for entry/exit into the roof.
- An inspection of the interior of the building by examining walls, the underside of the roof and within the loft space of the property to determine whether bats were present, to look for signs of bat activity (such as discarded prey items and droppings) and to assess suitability for bats. Lighting was provided by a Led Lenser XEO 19R (2,000lm).
- An assessment of the surrounding habitat quality for bats was carried out by walking the area on foot and later from reference to aerial images (Bing Maps). These searches were used to identify important land use and habitat features known to be favoured by bats.

2.1.2 Subsequent advice/action would depend on the findings of the building survey. If potential was found then subsequent bat activity surveys would be required in accordance with standard methods described in the 'Bat Worker's Manual' (JNCC 2004) and 'Bat Surveys – Good Practice Guidelines' (Bat Conservation Trust 2016).

2.2 Personnel

2.2.1 The building inspection was undertaken by Samantha Gray BA (Hons) Grad CIEEM. Samantha is a Business Ecologist working for Simply Ecology Limited. Since graduating with a Geography degree from Lancaster University in 2015, Samantha has gained over 2 years' of experience in ecology. During this period she has completed an internship with Simply Ecology, where she developed her skills in botany, bat surveys and data analysis and also subsequently worked at RSPB Leighton Moss, carrying out habitat management and species monitoring work. In 2016 Samantha became a full-time employee with Simply Ecology as an Ecologist and Office Manager.

2.3 Timing and Constraints

2.3.1 The building survey was undertaken on 9th November 2018. The timing of the building inspection to search for signs of bats posed no constraints as building inspections can be undertaken at any time of year. An assessment of the building's potential to support bats can therefore be made according to evidence found, building condition, location and the experience of the surveyor. All areas of the buildings were fully accessible on the day.

3.0 BATS: BUILDING SURVEY RESULTS

3.1 External Inspection

3.1.1 The property was located upon a steep hill and was built upon two levels, with a conservatory at the rear (see Plate 1 and Plate 2). The walls comprised of a mix of well-finished stonework and white stucco plaster cladding. This surface would have been ideal for potential bat droppings to adhere to; however despite a thorough search, no droppings or evidence of bats were found externally (see Plate 3).

3.1.2 All windows and doors to the building were in good condition and fully sealed (see Plate 4). An inspection of the roof edges found no gaps in the soffits, or along the plastic verge end capping (see Plate 5).

3.1.3 Whilst the roof comprised of interlocking tiles, some gaps were present where the tiles did not match up (see Plate 6). Gaps were also present around the flashing at the base of the chimney (see Plate 7). Most significantly however, close inspection of the ridge tiles identified large gaps beneath the lifted plastic roof vents, offering direct access into the loft void (see Plate 8 and Plate 9).

3.1.4 **Overall, despite a thorough inspection, no evidence of bats was found on the exterior of the building and the majority of the roof had no potential access points for bats. However a number of potential access points were identified on the roof of the property, via lifted plastic roof vents, gaps at the base of the chimney and within some interlocking roof tiles.**

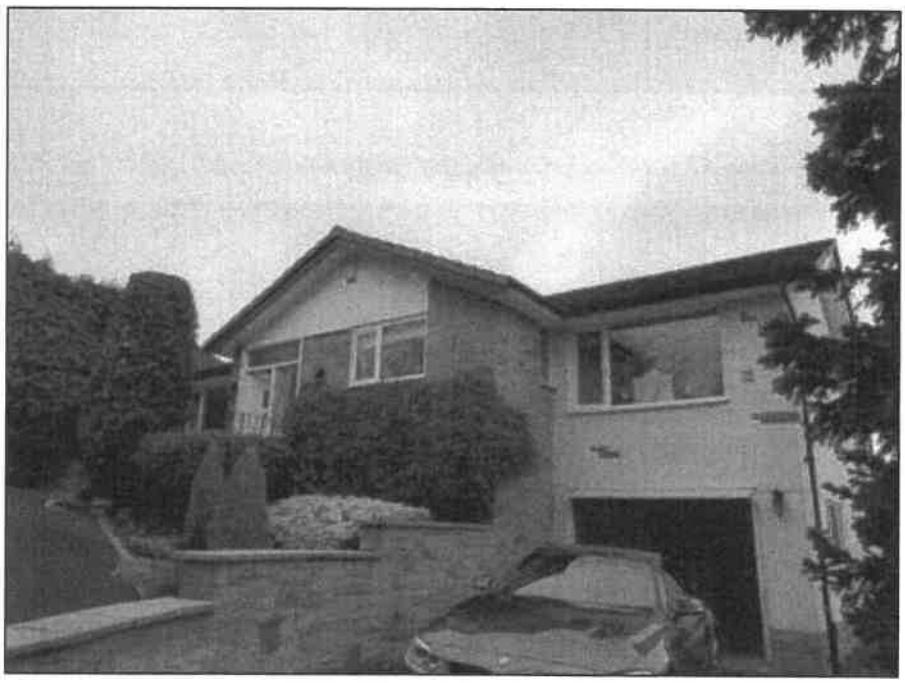


Plate 1: The building was clad in a combination of stucco white wall plaster and well-finished stonework.

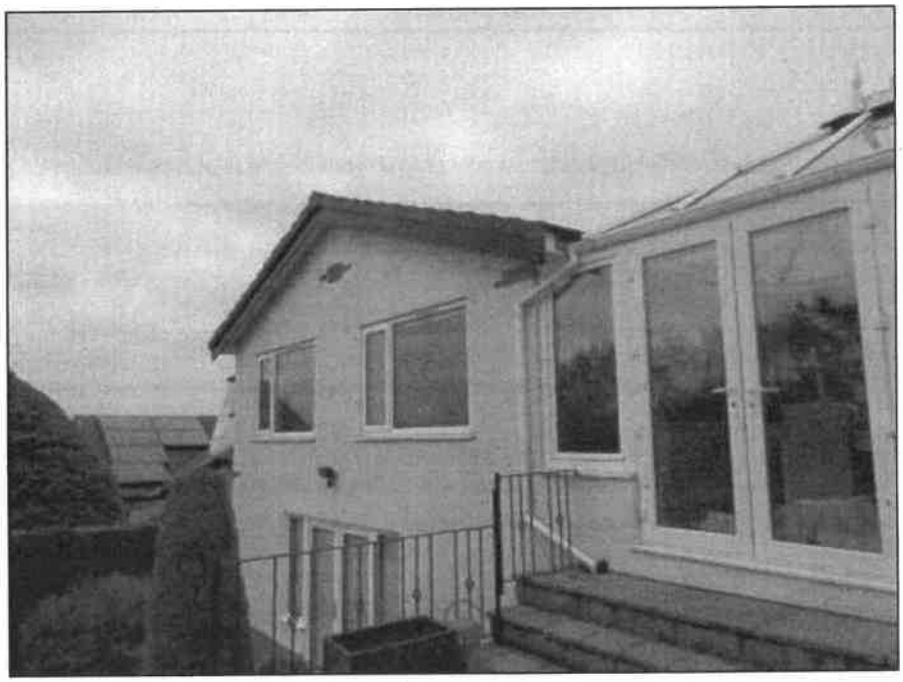


Plate 2: The rear of the building comprised of a conservatory and white stucco plaster.

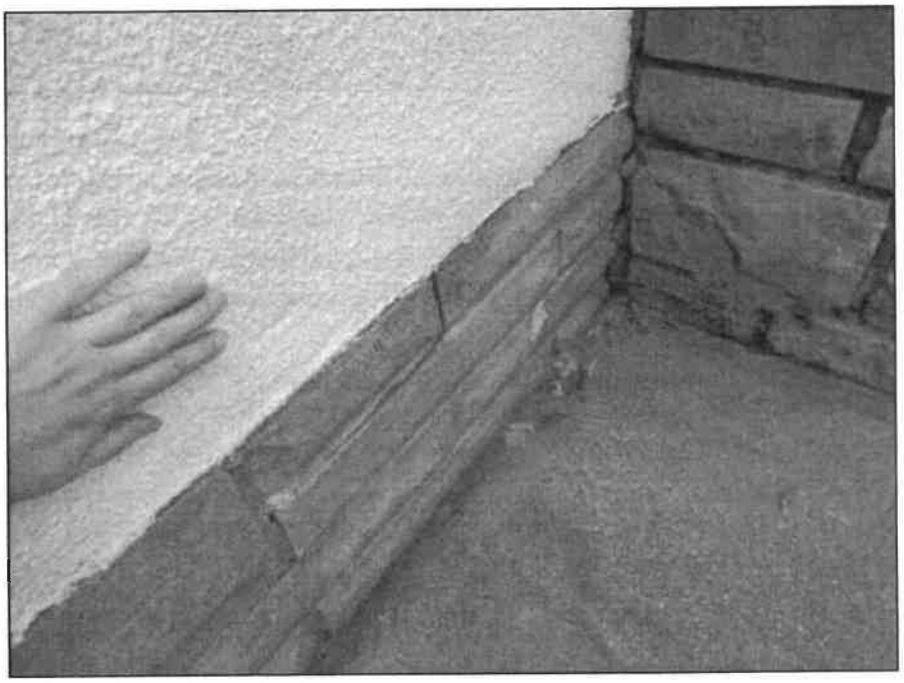


Plate 3: The white stucco walls would have been an ideal surface for bat droppings to adhere to, however despite a thorough inspection no evidence was found.

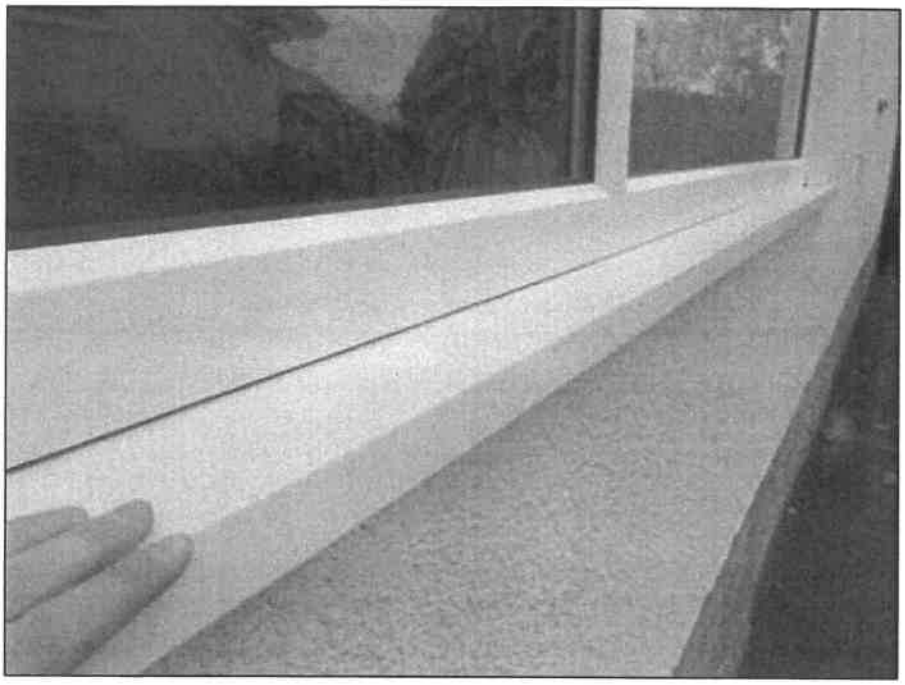


Plate 4: The windows and doors were fully sealed. No evidence of bat droppings were present on the windowsills.

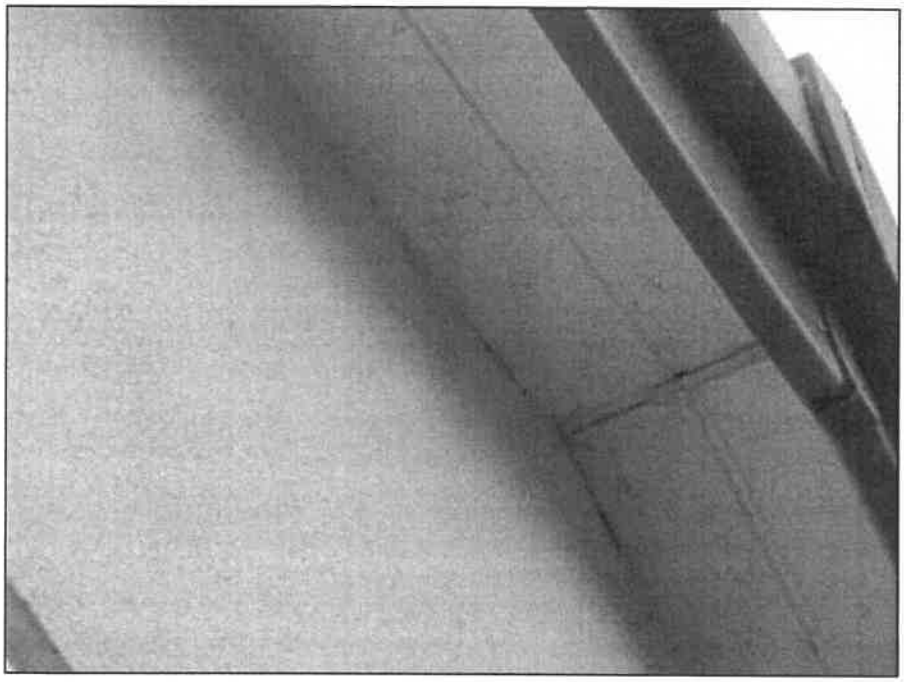


Plate 5: No gaps were present beneath the soffits or the plastic verge caps.

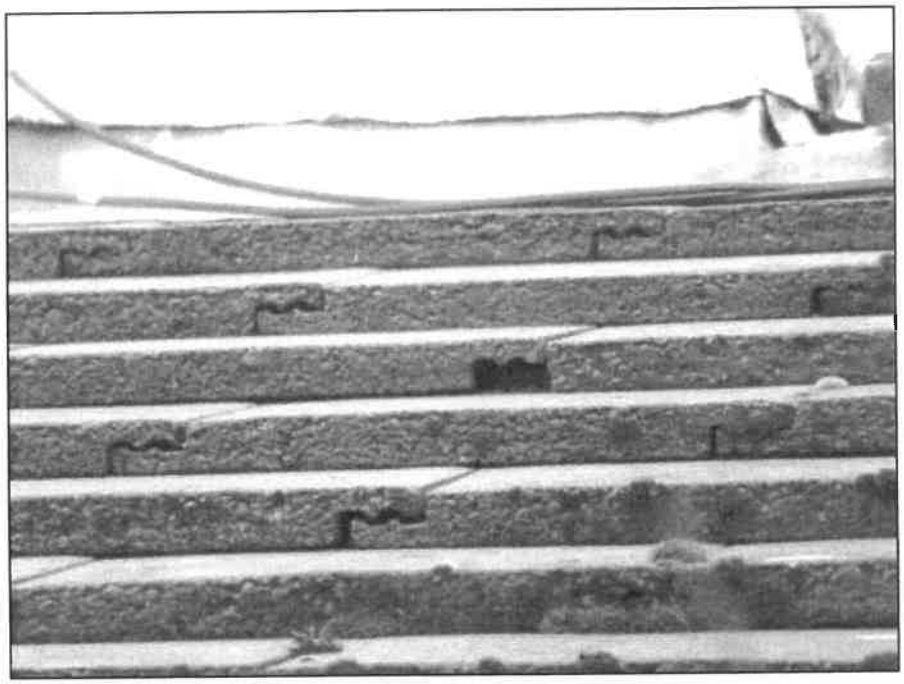


Plate 6: The roof comprised of well-sealed interlocking tiles, however some gaps were present where the tiles did not match.

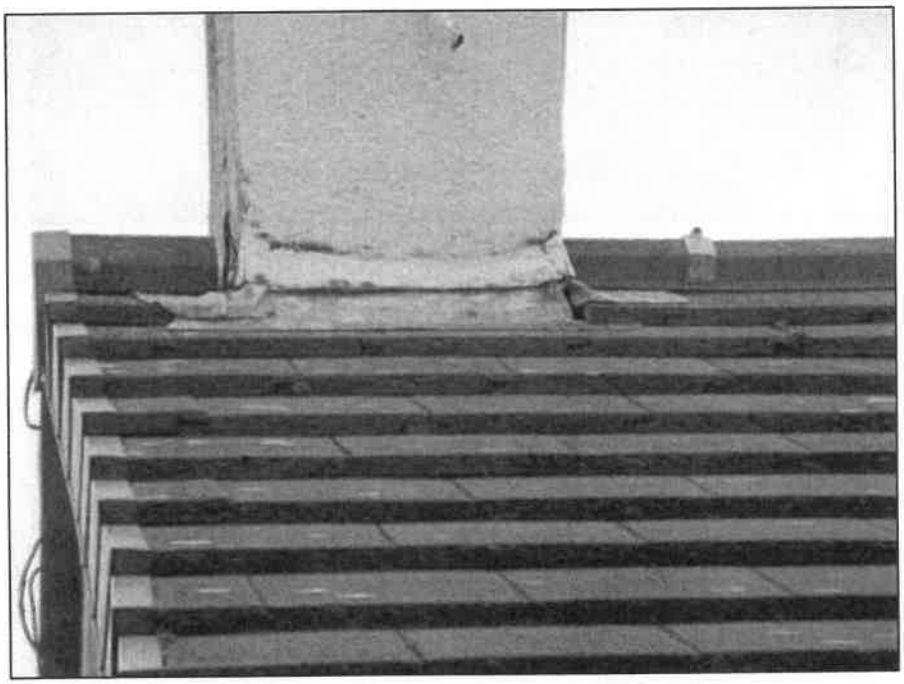


Plate 7: The roof was inspected using binoculars and it was possible to identify small gaps around the flashing at the base of the chimney.

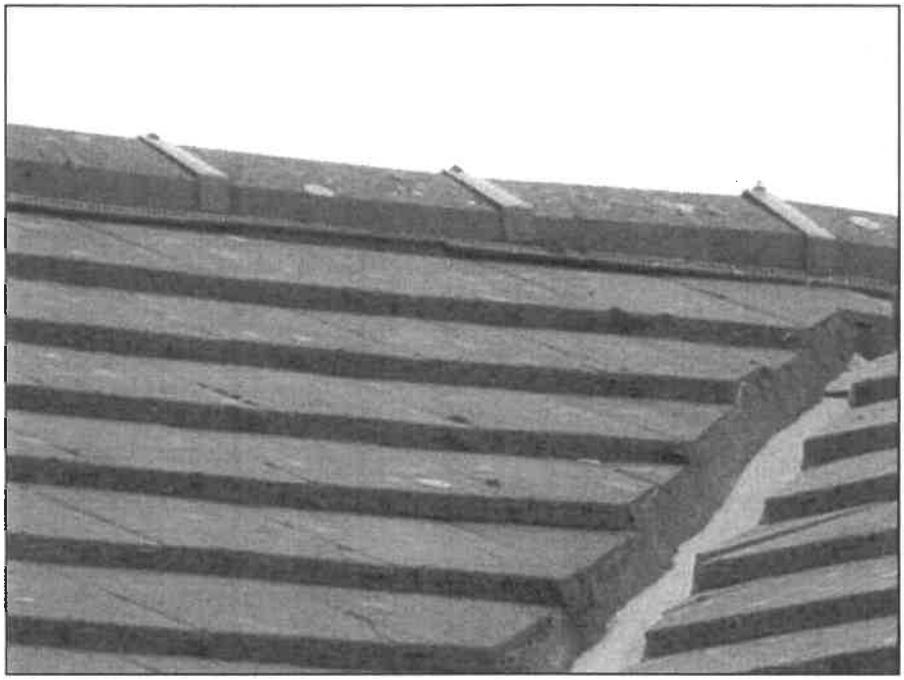


Plate 8: The plastic roof ventilation was lifted along the ridge tiles at the southern end of the property.

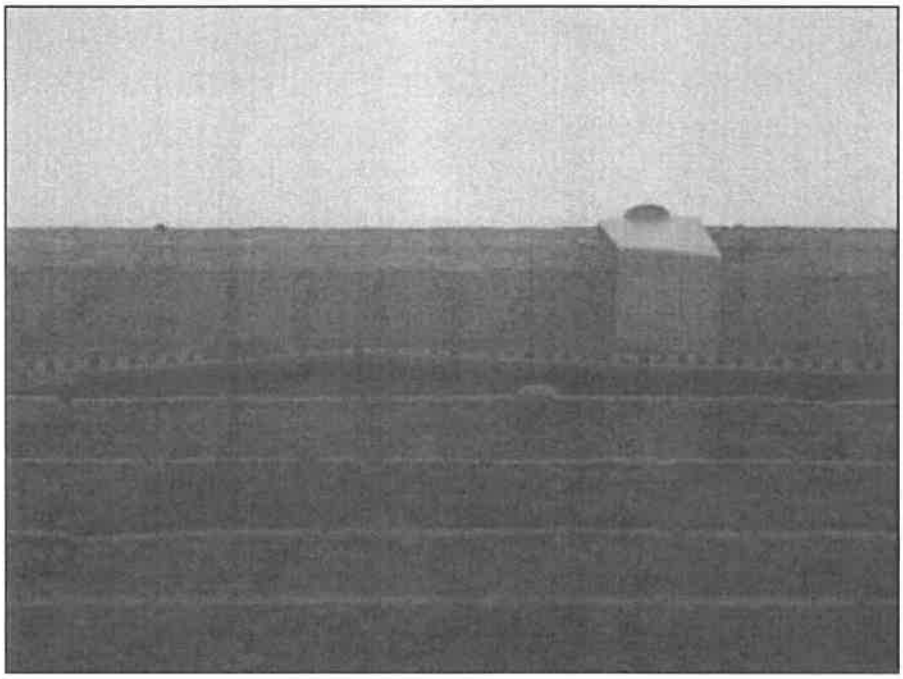


Plate 9: In places the ventilation was lifted enough for bats to easily gain access into the loft space.

3.2 Internal Inspection

3.2.1 An internal inspection was also carried out to look for signs of roosting bats, such as droppings or prey remains. The loft void was a dark and warm space, which was well insulated and fully accessible throughout (see Plate 10).

3.2.2 In the southern area of the loft void, a gap between the timber ridge beam and roofing membrane was present along almost the entire roof (see Plate 11). Within this gap, the

exterior lifted plastic roof vent was visible (see Plate 12). Directly beneath these gaps along the ridge beam were clusters of bat droppings, which were located throughout both the southern and eastern aspects of the loft (see Plate 13). Potential scratch marks were also visible upon the timber ridge beam, which was largely clear of cobwebs (see Plate 14).

3.2.3 The brick wall at the southern end of the building also contained a number of gaps, offering access into a potential void beneath the chimney (see Plate 15). Droppings at the base of the wall suggested this may also be used by roosting bats (see Plate 16).

3.2.4 The northern aspect of the loft was also inspected. However no droppings or other signs of bats were found in this area, which had significantly more cobwebs (see Plate 17). It is envisaged that bats are not using this aspect of the roof void, although the proposed extension to the property is going to significantly impact the southern area of the roof, where it is thought that bats are potentially roosting.

3.2.5 **In summary, a number of bat droppings were identified within the roof space. These were found beneath the main timber ridge beam, where there is direct access into the loft through the lifted plastic roof vents. Given the evidence of historical bat use, it is concluded that further surveys are required in order to establish whether bats are still present within the dwelling.**

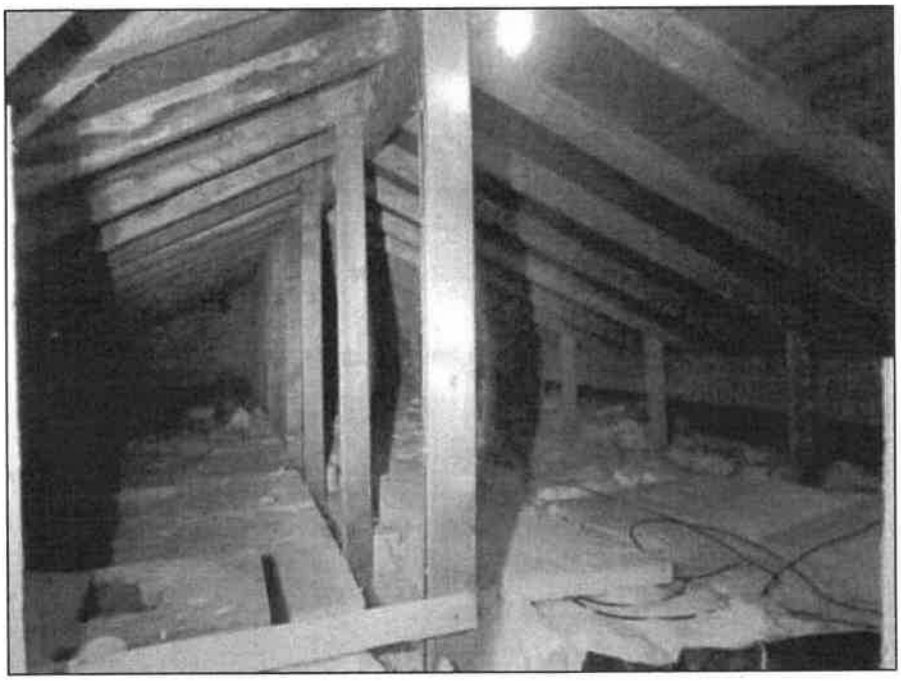


Plate 10: The loft void was warm, dark and well insulated.

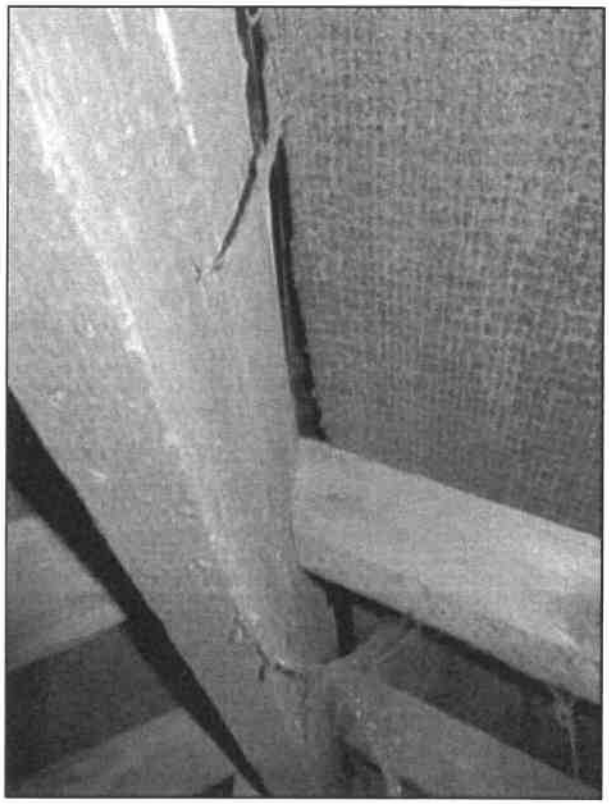


Plate 11: In the southern aspect of the house, there was a substantial gap between the roofing membrane and the ridge beam, sufficient for bats to use.

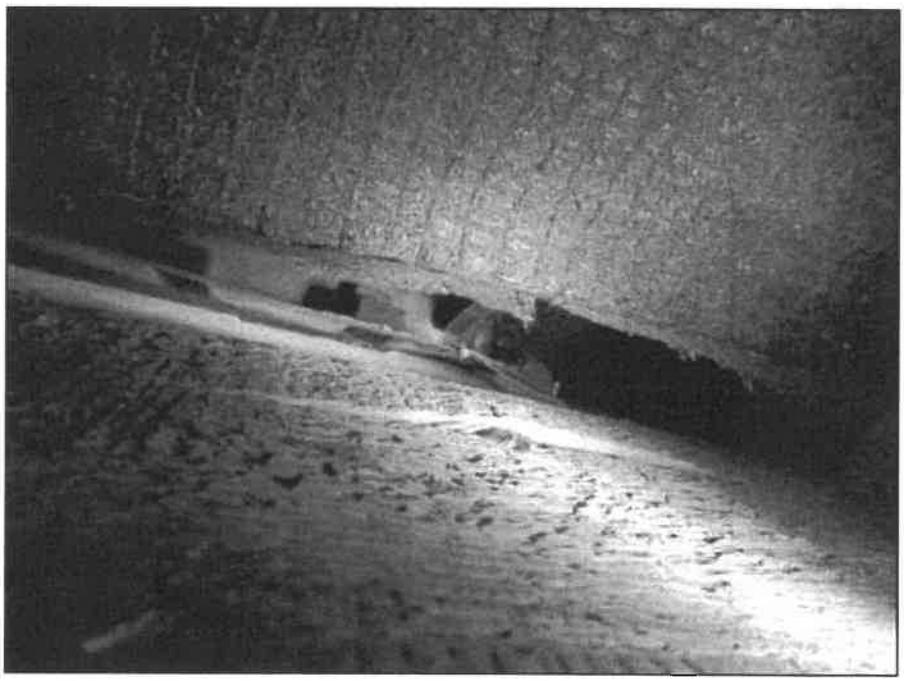


Plate 12: Within the gap, the plastic roof vent was visible.

Plate 13: Directly beneath the ridge beam a number of droppings were identified throughout both the southern and eastern aspects of the loft void.

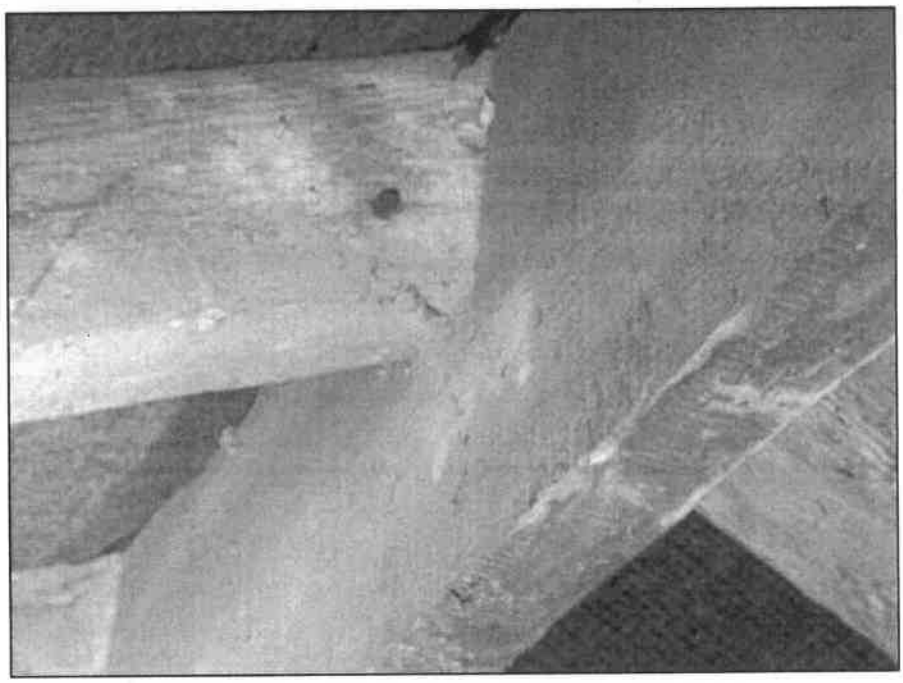


Plate 14: Absence of cobwebs and possible scratch marks were also apparent upon the ridge beam, suggesting roosting bats.

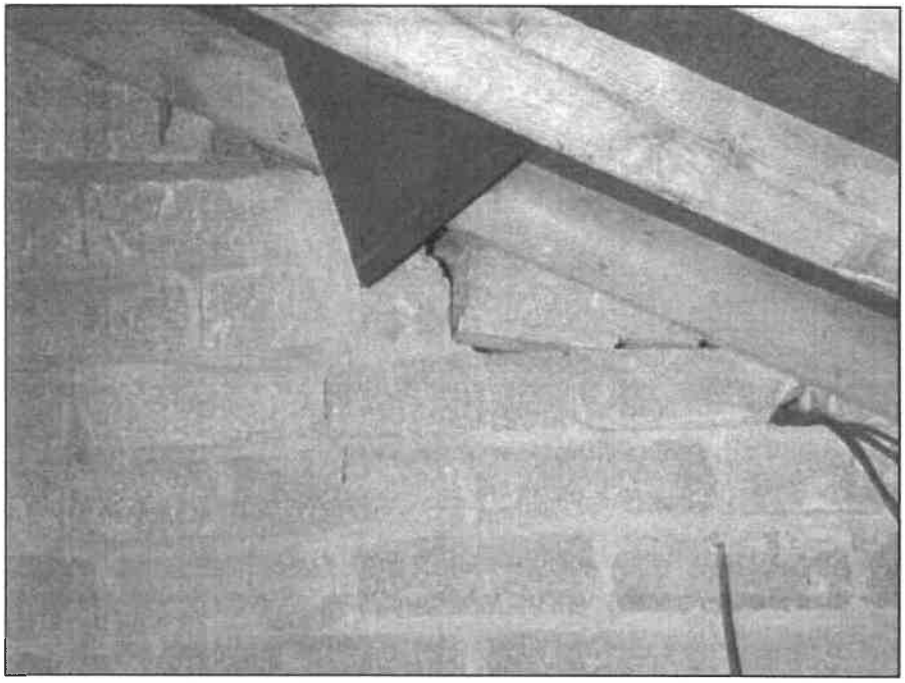


Plate 15: Gaps between the bricks at the southern end wall of the property allowed for potential access into a small void beyond this.

Plate 16: Droppings at the foot of the gable wall suggested bats were using this feature.

Plate 17: The northern aspect of the loft lacked any bat droppings and contained a greater number of cobwebs, suggesting bats were not using this area of the loft void.

3.3 Summary

3.3.1 In summary, the property was thoroughly searched both internally and externally for signs of bats. Externally the roof appeared largely unsuitable for bats except at the ridge. This is, however, a favoured potential roost location. Possible access points were also identified around the base of the chimney and through gaps between the interlocking tiles. Within the loft, no bats were observed, but a number of bat droppings were identified within the southern and eastern aspects of the roof. These were located directly beneath the timber ridge beam, where a gap in the membrane offered direct access to the plastic vents which were visibly lifted all along the roof.. **As a result of this evidence, it was concluded that a bat roost was present. Therefore, further night time bat surveys are required in order to confirm the nature of the roost.**

4.0 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 Bats

4.1.1 In October 2018, Simply Ecology Limited was commissioned by Ogden Design Consultants to undertake a building inspection to search for bats at Highfield, Snodworth Road, Langho, Blackburn, BB6 8DR. It is understood that the development will involve an extension to the rear of the building, impacting upon the current loft void (see Plan 4 and Plan 5).

4.1.2 A full bat scoping survey of the property was undertaken in November 2018. The survey found that whilst no evidence of bat activity was found externally, it is concluded that the gaps along the roof vents and between occasional interlocking tiles offered potential opportunity for roosting bats to gain access into the building. Inside, the loft showed direct evidence of bats being present, with a number of bat droppings being found beneath the main timber ridge beam. A gap between the plastic roof vent and the underfelt offered direct connectivity into the loft space.

4.1.3 Given the evidence of bat activity within the loft, and the nearby presence of deciduous woodland habitat within the wider rural landscape, further surveys will be required in order to confirm the nature of the bat roost present. The presence of legally protected species needs to be fully understood prior to granting any planning permission and subsequent works that might affect the bats or their resting places. Therefore:

- ***It is recommended*** **that further night-time bat surveys should be conducted to establish the type of bat roost, as well as species and numbers of individuals.** Only then can the development be carried out in a way that the developers can be sure they are not negatively impacting on local bat populations. **Reason:** To carry out appropriate survey in accordance with the Bat Conservation Trust guidelines in order to deliver legal compliance. All UK bat species are protected by The Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981) (as amended) and the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations (2017).

5.0 REFERENCES

BAT CONSERVATION TRUST (2016). *Bat Surveys – Good Practice Guidelines*. Bat Conservation Trust, London.

DEPARTMENT FOR COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT (2018) National Planning Policy Framework. HMSO. London

JOINT NATURE CONSERVATION COMMITTEE Mitchell-Jones, A.J. & McLeish, A.P. [Eds.] (2004) *The Bat Workers Manual (3rd edition)*. Joint Nature Conservancy Council, Peterborough.

National Planning Policy Framework 2018:
https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/728643/Revised_NPPF_2018.pdf

Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006:

http://www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2006/ukpga_20060016_en_1

The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017:

https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2017/1012/pdfs/uksi_20171012_en.pdf

Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981:

http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1981/69/contents

ANNEX A: STATUTORY AND PLANNING CONTEXT

A.0.1 The client is advised that many species of British wildlife are legally protected. The following section provides a brief overview of the protection afforded to species commonly encountered during development. The Recommendations at the end of this report will advise as necessary, but it is also useful for the client to have an understanding of the legal protection as this helps to ensure that the law is complied with.

A.1 Badgers

A.1.1 Badgers are protected under Schedule 6 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) (WCA), and the Protection of Badgers Act 1992. It is illegal to:

- Kill, injure, take, possess or cruelly ill-treat a badger or to attempt to do so;
- Interfere with a badger sett by damaging or destroying it;
- Obstruct access to or any entrance of a badger sett;
- Disturb a badger when it is occupying a sett

A.1.2 A badger sett is "any structure or place that displays signs indicating current use by a badger". Natural England, the Government's statutory nature conservation body, classifies a sett as active if it has been occupied within the last 12 months.

A.1.3 Operations that might cause disturbance of an active sett entrance can be carried out under licence from Natural England. If any badgers are found during the course of the survey, this will be highlighted in this report.

A.2 Birds

A.2.1 All wild birds are protected against killing or injury under The WCA 1981 (as amended). This protection extends to bird's nests during the breeding season, which makes it an offence to damage or destroy nests or eggs. Birds that are listed on Schedule 1 of the Act receive additional protection against intentional or reckless disturbance during the breeding season. This makes it an offence to disturb these species at or near to their nesting site.

A.3 European Protected Species (includes bats, otter, hazel dormouse, great crested newts, and others)

A.3.1 The client is advised that all bats and great crested newts are European Protected Species (EPS). These EPS are protected under European legislation that is implemented in England via The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010 (Regulation 41). A full list of EPS is provided in Schedule 2 of the Regulations. In addition, these EPS also receive the protection of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) in respect of Section 9 (4)(b & c) and (5).

A.3.2 If both national and international legislation are taken together, the legislative protection afforded to these species makes it an offence to:

- Intentionally/ deliberately kill, disturb, injure or capture them.
- Intentionally or recklessly damage, destroy or obstruct access to any breeding site or resting place.
- Possess or control any live or dead specimen or anything derived from a European Protected Species.

A.3.3 If an activity is likely to result in any of the above offences, derogation from the legal protection can be issued in the form of a European Protected Species licence issued by Natural England. Licences for development purposes are issued under The Conservation Of Habitats And Species Regulations (2010) and only allow what is permitted within the terms and conditions of the licence. If any EPS are found during the course of the survey, this will be highlighted in this report.

A.4 Protected Mammals and Reptiles (includes water vole, red squirrel, reptiles and others)

A.4.1 All native reptiles and a variety of British mammals also receive protection under The WCA 1981 (as amended). Schedule 5 of The WCA lists animals that are protected. The degree of protection varies. Water voles and red squirrel are examples of species with full protection. The Act makes it an offence to intentionally kill, injure, take, possess, or trade in any wild animal listed in Schedule 5, and prohibits interference with places used for shelter or protection, or intentionally disturbing animals occupying such places.

A.4.2 All native reptiles in the UK are protected. The commoner species such as grass snake, common lizard, slow worm and adder are protected only from unlawful killing and injuring. In practice this may require a reptile protection scheme before implementing a planning permission but no specific licence is required. Sand lizard and smooth snake listed as EPS (see A3.3 above).

A.4.4 If any protected species are found during the course of the survey, this will be highlighted in this report.

A.5 Non-native invasive species

A.5.1 A number of non-native plant species growing wild in the UK are listed on Schedule 9 of the WCA due to their invasive nature and the detrimental impact they can have on native habitats and wildlife. This legislation makes it an offence to plant or otherwise cause to grow in the wild any plant species which is included in Part II of Schedule 9.

A.5.2 This legislation should be considered during site clearance works which could lead to the spread of Schedule 9 listed plant species from the site if plant material is not properly handled and disposed of. Development proposals should also consider the removal of invasive species from areas of site that would otherwise remain unaffected by works in order to avoid the risk of these invasive plants spreading from the site in the future and enhance habitats within the site. This would in turn free up space for wildlife friendly planting, prioritising use of native species within planting schemes where appropriate.

A.6 Planning Considerations

A.6.1 When considering each planning application, the presence of protected species, such as those listed above, is a material consideration which must be fully considered by the Local Authority when granting planning permission. If a licence from Natural England is required, then prior to issuing any planning consent, the local planning authority will need to be satisfied that there is no reason why such a licence would not be issued. Therefore, in reaching the planning decision the local planning authority will need to have regard to the requirements of the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010. The three licensing tests given in the Regulations must be considered. In summary, these are that:

1. The development is required for the purpose of:
    - Preserving public health or public safety;

- For other imperative reasons of over-riding public interest, including those of a social or economic nature and beneficial consequences of primary importance for the environment;
- For preventing serious damage to property.

2. There is no satisfactory alternative.

3. The proposal will not be detrimental to the maintenance of the population of the species at a favourable conservation status.

A.6.2 All necessary information would need to be provided to the planning authority as part of the planning application in order to address the above tests.

A.6.3 The Natural Environment and Communities Act (NERC Act) 2006 extended the biodiversity duty set out in the Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act to public bodies and statutory undertakers to ensure due regard to the conservation of biodiversity. The Duty is set out in Section 40 of the Act, and states that:

"Every public authority must, in exercising its functions, have regard, so far as is consistent with the proper exercise of those functions, to the purpose of conserving biodiversity"

A.6.4 The Duty applies to all local authorities, community, parish and town councils, police, fire and health authorities and utility companies. Section 41 (S41) of this Act (the 'England Biodiversity List') also requires the Secretary of State to publish a list of habitats and species that are of principal importance for the conservation of biodiversity in England. This list is used to guide decision-makers such as public bodies, including local and regional authorities, in implementing their duty under section 40(1) of the Act.

A.6.5 Also, Local Authorities must follow the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) which provides guidance on the interpretation of the law in relation to wildlife issues and development. For each development proposal considered by the Local Planning Authority the NPPF states that the authority must aim to conserve and enhance biodiversity. If significant harm resulting from a development cannot be avoided (through locating on an alternative site with less harmful impacts), adequately mitigated, or, as a last resort, compensated for, then planning permission should be refused.

UK Biodiversity Action Plan (UK BAP)

A.6.6 The UK BAP, which was first published in 1994, was the UK government response to the 1992 Convention on Biological Diversity. It sets priorities for nationally important 'priority species' and 'priority habitats'. Each species and habitat action plan has costed actions and targets, and is used to inform the compilation of national lists such as the Section 41 List described above.