

October 2018

BATTING FOR BEGINNERS

This is a long story about what one would think was a very simple project. In fact it is a simple project. But if you are thinking about making even modest changes to your property beware, there may be bats about that can affect your plans. Bats are often hiding away in cracks and crevices and can squeeze through the smallest of gaps. Bats are specially protected under strict environmental regulations.

As Principal Ecologist for RML I get involved in projects that vary in scale from the largest of infrastructure schemes to the smallest of domestic builds. The latter can often be very interesting and offer their own challenges.

A case in point is when a client wanted to demolish an old garage to make way for a new one on a slightly larger footprint. The garage was comprised of a timber frame clad on both the inside and outside with asbestos cement panels. The garage had been built in 1938.

As part of the planning application an ecology survey was undertaken and while no direct evidence of bats was noted, the possibility of them using the vertical hanging tiles on the gable end of the garage was highlighted. An emergence survey was undertaken in order to inform the planning process.

The evening survey in May this year found a single pipistrelle bat emerging from the tiles. Best practice suggests a second emergence survey be undertaken at least two weeks after the first, and this survey found no bats emerging. The roost was therefore likely to be in occasional summer use by a limited number of crevice dwelling bats, in this case pipistrelle. The appropriate method statements and licence from Natural Resources Wales (NRW), the statutory body granting licenses for works associated with European Protected species, such as bats) was sought and granted 6 weeks later. All in all 24 weeks had elapsed between the initial planning application with the council and the granting of the licence by NRW.

Prior to works commencing on site, a bat box was installed on a nearby tree, to be a refuge if bats were encountered during the demolition work.

Work commenced on the 12th September 2018. As the licenced ecologist I was in attendance and had several duties to perform.



Bat box mounted on a nearby tree

By way of my tool box talk the specialist contractors who there to remove asbestos were informed of the potential presence of bats and what was found from previous surveys, what to look out for as well as the licence requirement, legislation and bat ecology.

I first inspected areas where bats had been noted previously as well undertaking a general internal and external inspection prior to works proceeding. The surveys were conducted with an endoscope and a high powered torch (an Eagtac SX25L3).

The demolition progressed without incident and on the 20th September this involved the removal of the hanging tiles at the east gable end, followed by the removal of the roof tiles. My toolbox talk was put into action again to inform the main demolition team of what to look out for and the ecology of bats and the licence requirements as well as previous survey results.

A week had passed since the asbestos strip, so prior to the removal of the tiles, an inspection of the structure was made using the endoscope and torch. Fresh droppings were noted inside the roof void on the crawl boards located to the east gable end. These were characteristic of pipistrelle species and were new. They could have been left by a bat which was utilising the now open roof void for refuge or simply flying around inside.

Checks were made under the hanging tiles prior to removal. No bats were noted, however numerous droppings were found. The majority of these were found on a wooden ledge above the access hatch to the loft space and also an accumulation on the hanging tiles, most likely trapped over many years.

The hanging tiles offered an excellent roost space for a small number of crevice dwelling bats which was used continually over a number of years. Added to that, being east facing, the roost was warmed by the early sun.

In order to mitigate for the loss of this roost, the client is installing integrated bat bricks, at the same location as where the droppings were noted.

Specially made bat bricks will be installed prior to the bats active season next year, in the hope of them returning to roost. Interestingly, if the client wants to do work on his main property at some



Bat droppings on crawl board in the roof space



Accumulation of bat droppings noted on ledge above door

time in the future then the fact that he has installed bat boxes in the new garage will be an important contribution to any future mitigation that might be required. A stitch in time perhaps.

We are in October now and the bats active season is ending soon. Temperatures are dropping and that in turn corresponds with a decline in bat activity, although warmer evenings will have them out and foraging for resources prior to hibernation which usually begins in November.

Thinking ahead, if you have a project which you feel may impact upon bats (this could be something as small as an extension to a property or full scale demolition) then our surveyors can conduct preliminary roost assessments at any time of the year, even over winter, which can inform the extent of surveys required when bats become active again.

Planning ahead can provide you with useful information early on in your scheme which may save you costs and delays later on. Call us for advice.

Kind regards

Donna

Principal Ecologist
Richards, Moorehead & Laing Ltd



Small Red
215 x 215 mm

GOING ROUND AND ROUND



Roundabouts have been criticised on account of the way that they interrupt the flow of traffic. I think that I first heard this comment quite some time ago. It was made by an American engineer who was on a visit to the UK and probably used to using grade-separated junctions. He said that roundabouts were all very well until you put vehicles on them. I am pleased that we are involved in plans to remove the two roundabouts on the A55 in North Wales. Apparently they are the only roundabouts on the European Highway that runs between Holyhead and St Petersburg. One of the reasons why removal is being considered is the problem of heavy vehicles slowing down on approaching the roundabouts

and then accelerating away after leaving them. The environmental damage caused by all of this this is quite serious. The aim of the work is to improve connectivity and the quality of life for local residents.

Connectivity is a favourite topic of mine especially because I believe that connectivity is a very important aspect of business. Connectivity comes in various shapes and sizes and at different levels, personally and professionally. I believe that the day of the page is returning, but few people are writing letters these days. 'Word' along with cut and paste is so tempting isn't it? I wonder how often technical reports get printed-out these days.

Connectivity is reflected in our newsletters that are written and issued in the hope that they at least tell the recipients that we are still alive and kicking. I have printed and bound a set of the early ones which have been well received when I have handed them around to visitors. If you would like to have them just drop me a line, by email of course but with your address included!

I well remember attending a workshop in London about planning infrastructure and the point was made that London Docklands went nowhere until the Docklands railway and a few significant highway improvements were completed. Before that happened the development was a complete white elephant, but look at it now. Connecting docklands with the outside world was the key step to ensuring that the development was successful

We have started work with engineering colleagues on preliminary assessments of circulation/connectivity problems in the Wrexham area. Talk to most people and they will tell you about their problems in trying to get into the town. Roundabouts, or rather vehicles on roundabouts cause many of the problems. The town has been successful in regenerating itself after several important industries closed down, coal and steel for example. But now there is an urgent need to improve connectivity if Wrexham is to grow any more.

Wrexham industrial estate is large, very large, and it lies several miles outside Wrexham. Originally it was an important centre for armament production in the 1940's so I guess that it needed be located well away from residential areas. People who worked there making the munitions were bussed-in from all over North Wales. The first time I had to visit the estate for a meeting to discuss its enlargement I went the night before to find it and failed. For several years I was involved in regrading the old munition sites and designed and supervised the construction of new roads through and around the estate. But links to Wrexham and the wider world were not touched. I am pleased to note that there is now a dual carriageway connecting the industrial area to the Wrexham bypass.

And as I mentioned earlier, we have just started to look at traffic density on the by-pass along with a few severe circulatory problems in the area.

Kind regards

Ivor

Managing Director

Richards, Moorehead & Laing Ltd

CREATING THE WELLBEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS

The Welsh Assembly has passed an act that requires us to consider the wellbeing of future generations in whatever we do. Clearly as a team involved in designing and building roads for example and a great many other things too RML has to take this requirement into account.

I have worked as a civil engineer in Wales since 1961 including many days at Aberfan starting on the morning of the 21st of October 1966.

Most of us now realise that it is professionally satisfying if we work with nature and communities. It is best for our livelihoods as engineers too. The president of the ICE in 1994, Professor Edmund Hambly said “Civil engineering is as broad as the infrastructure and environment in which engineers serve” and warned us that if we did not respect the environment then we would suffer as professionals and individuals. A bit of self-interest does no harm on occasions.

After Aberfan an emotional drive saw us develop a good many things involving new lives and new landscapes, things one would recognise today as the stirring of thoughts about doing things differently. Sustainability hadn't been invented but in looking back we were intent on producing results for the long term at a reduced cost in terms of using resources to the best advantage. One of our 'drivers' in trying to do things differently was John Locke's idea that “Nature never makes excellent things for mean or no usage”.

The concept of place as a specific human experience has been important to my colleagues in RML. I have mentioned before how emotion can and should play a significant part in one's professional work and would suggest that cynefin and hiraeth issue from the same spring as our emotions about challenges after Aberfan.

I would say that here in Wales we have come an awfully long way since the 1960s in improving the degraded situations that we then found in communities but there is still much to do to improve people's wellbeing. You know that these days I count connectivity as being amongst the most important things that we must address. If we are to improve lives then we need to improve productivity and connectivity must come first. We need improvements in roads, railways and broad band to name just a few - oh and housing availability too. We have the tools and what I am interested in is making our landscape intelligent landscapes, that is, they work for us rather than them just sitting there looking pretty.



We must consciously create cynefin, our home place, for future generations to reflect on.

Cynefin is the state of being influenced by multiple pasts of which we can only be partly aware: cultural, religious, geographic, tribal and linguistic pasts for example. Cynefin describes that relationship: the place of your birth and of your upbringing, the environment in which you live and to which you are naturally acclimatised. Cynefin is also knowledge and a sense of place that is passed down the generations and can also refer to fleeting moments in time: a place or the time when we instinctively belong or feel most connected. In those moments what lies beneath mundane existence is unveiled and the joy of being alive can overwhelm us. It can be a great release if one has a word that describes these feelings.

The principle of wellbeing revolves around cynefin. Actively 'getting out of the house' and people visiting places for the sake of their healthy minds and bodies is fundamental. In fact, the Welsh Government's Active Travel Act is part of encouraging physical activity for health.

Kind regards

Ivor

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