

DAVID CLEMENTS ECOLOGY LTD

PONTYGWAITH FARM, TREHARRIS

BAT SURVEY REPORT

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Version

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SUMMARY

This report has been prepared by David Clements Ecology Ltd (DCE) on the instructions of Thora Walton and John Stephens. It sets out the results of bat surveys carried out at Pontygwaith Farm, Treharris, Merthyr Tydfil, South Wales (ST 08071 97661).

The current site consists of a stables block, which is attached to a farmhouse. The site lies northeast of the town of Treharris in a rural location, between the A470 and A4054. The River Taff is situated within 20m of the site. The surrounding habitat provides good foraging habitat for bats, with good connectivity to the river corridor and large areas of woodland.

It is proposed to extend of the roofline of the farmhouse at the southern end between the current family room section to the stables.

There are no existing bat records from the site itself, but there are various records for roosts, foraging and commuting within 2km of the site for several bat species. The data search returned a small number of records of roof nesting birds within 600m. Previous surveys of the site found evidence of brown long-eared bats in the northernmost section of the farmhouse and soprano pipistrelle bats in the farmhouse and stables. Evidence of nesting birds was also found within the stables which included two defunct swallow nests and a further undetermined nest.

Surveys undertaken by DCE in 2023 found no evidence of bats or nesting birds using the section of the building that will be affected by the proposed development.

Appropriate mitigation and enhancement measures are recommended.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This report has been prepared by David Clements Ecology Ltd (DCE) on the instructions of Thora Walton and John Stephens. It sets out the results of a survey for bats of Pontygwaith Farm, Treharris, Merthyr Tydfil, South Wales (ST 08071 97661). The site location and context is shown at Plan 1.
- 1.2 The site includes a farmhouse which is attached to a stables block. The building lies north-east of the town of Treharris in a rural location, between the A470 and A4054. The River Taff is situated within 20m of the site. The surrounding habitat provides good foraging habitat for bats, with good connectivity to the river corridor and large areas of woodland.
- 1.3 It is proposed to extend of the roofline of the farmhouse at the southern end between the current family room section to the stables. A planning application is in the process of being submitted. The MTCBC Ecologist requested a bat survey of the area of the building that will be affected by the proposed development.
- 1.4 Previous surveys found evidence of bats roosting in the farmhouse building and also in the stables (Acer 2021; DCE 2021). These surveys were carried out to support a planning application to convert the stables into bedrooms; work was previously carried out on this section under a EPS derogation licence.
- 1.5 The remainder of this report sets out the results of bat flight survey work undertaken in 2022-23 at the site. It also assesses the likely impact of the proposed works on bats and nesting birds and makes recommendations regarding appropriate mitigation for any potentially adverse biodiversity impacts.

1.6 Designated Sites of Biodiversity Interest

Statutory Sites

- 1.6.1 The site does not contain or lie immediately adjacent to any statutory sites of nature conservation interest such as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), National Nature Reserves (NNRs) or Local Nature Reserves (LNRs). There are no sites designated for bats within 10km of the site.

Non-Statutory Sites

- 1.6.2 A search for non-statutory sites was not undertaken owing to the small size and extent of the site.

1.7 Statutory Position and Background Information

- 1.7.1 Bats are flying insectivorous mammals. There are about 17 species resident in Britain which vary from comparatively common and widespread species (eg common and soprano pipistrelles, brown long-eared bat) to internationally rare and endangered species (eg the horseshoe bats). Bats do not make nests but have 'roosts', which may

be solitary or gregarious. Individual bats require a range of different roosting sites for differing purposes: in the summer, for example, daytime roosts in buildings and trees may be used, whilst for winter hibernation roosts in locations such as humid caves, basements or deep within the fabric of stone-built structures are preferred. Other roosts may be used at various times for the rearing of young, mating and as temporary feeding perches etc.

- 1.7.2 All bats and their roosts require strict protection under the EU Directive on the Conservation of Natural Habitats and of Wild Flora and Fauna (92/43/EEC; the ‘Habitats Directive’), which is implemented in the UK via the Conservation of Habitats & Species Regulations 2017 (the ‘Habitats Regulations’)¹. Some additional protection against disturbance is also conferred under the amended Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981. Bats are listed under the Bern Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats and also under the Agreement on the Conservation of European Bats 1992 (the ‘Eurobats Agreement’), signed within the framework of the Bonn Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species of Wild Animals 1979.
- 1.7.3 All bats are listed in Annex IV of the EC Habitats Directive, and the British species are listed on Schedule 2 of the Habitats Regulations 2017, and are therefore designated ‘European Protected Species’ by the latter. Such species are subject to enhanced protection and more stringent licensing provisions than those which are protected under the Wildlife & Countryside Act alone.
- 1.7.4 Both the animals themselves and any structures or places used for breeding or shelter are fully protected against both intentional or unintended but ‘reckless’ disturbance or harm, the latter irrespective of whether or not bats are present in them at the time. Where works are allowed to affect such places there is a legal requirement to obtain a licence (or ‘derogation’) in advance and to ensure that the works do not result in any avoidable harm to bats. The bats should also enjoy continued ‘favourable conservation status’ once the works are completed, through the incorporation of suitable mitigation and enhancement measures.
- 1.7.5 The issuing of licences which allow the disturbance of European Protected Species by development, or for any other reason, is the responsibility of Natural Resources Wales (NRW). The licensing restrictions are considerably more onerous than those of the Wildlife & Countryside Act and could potentially have significant impact on the viability of a given development proposal, irrespective of whether or not a valid planning consent has been obtained. Further details on the procedures are set out in TAN 5 (WAG 2009).
- 1.7.6 All species of bat in Britain are believed to be declining in range and numbers, with about half of the resident species classed as ‘rare’ and three classed as ‘endangered’

¹ The European legislation cited herewith is that which was applicable at the time of survey, but it should be noted that new arrangements have become applicable after 31 Jan 2020 as a result of ‘Brexit’. At the time of writing these comprise a continuance of the current legal and protection arrangements by means of Statutory Instrument No. 579 (*The Conservation of Habitats and Species (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations*, 2019) but the longer term arrangements which will apply after the end of the Brexit ‘Transition Period’ are still to be confirmed and may differ in detail from those which previously applied.

(Morris 1993; Richardson 2000). Several species of bat are listed as priorities for conservation on Section 7 of the Environment (Wales) Act 2016².

- 1.7.7 Some of the rarest bat species in Europe, including the horseshoe bats, barbastelle, Bechstein's bat and greater mouse-eared bat, are additionally listed on Annex II of the Habitats Directive. This requires the EU nation states to designate key areas of habitat used by these species as Special Areas of Conservation (SACs), and to implement policies to conserve and enhance their populations through appropriate management etc. These species are accorded enhanced conservation significance in the UK, although they are not subject to any additional protection measures.

Derogations

- 1.7.8 Amongst other things, the Habitats Regulations make it an offence to:

- capture or kill;
- disturb;
- take or destroy eggs or young, or;
- damage or destroy a breeding site or resting place of;

a European Protected Species, except under certain narrowly defined circumstances. New developments which would contravene the protection afforded to such species require derogation, in the form of a licence, from the Habitats Directive which must be issued by NRW.

- 1.7.9 Before such a licence can be issued, NRW must be satisfied that:

- the derogation would not be detrimental to the 'favourable conservation status' of populations of the species concerned within its natural range.
- the derogation is in the interests of public health and public safety, or for other imperative reasons of over-riding public interest, including those of a social or economic nature, or will have beneficial consequences of primary importance to the environment.
- there is no satisfactory alternative to the derogation which would allow the development to proceed but which would avoid, or reduce, the need for adverse impact to the species.

- 1.7.10 Failure to obtain a derogation would render any actions which cause harm or disturbance to bats illegal, including any activities which might be undertaken under a valid planning consent. The possession of planning consent in no way alleviates or over-rides the requirements of the Habitats Regulations, and neither does it automatically ensure that a derogation may be obtained.

- 1.7.11 Current planning guidance in Wales requires that local planning authorities are in possession of all of the survey information which is necessary in order to determine the

² In Wales the s.7 list of the EWA 2016 supersedes the s.42 list of the Natural Environment & Rural Communities Act 2006, which in turn replaced the 'Priority Species' lists of the UK Biodiversity Action Plan.

probability of impact to European Protected Species, and the likely viability and success of any required mitigation measures, before determining any given planning application. As of 1 October 2008, planning authorities cannot register a new planning application until all of the necessary survey information has been made available. NRW will not consider any application for licences in relation to a proposed development until after it has received notice of the planning consent.

Nesting Birds

- 1.7.12 Almost all species of birds native to the British Isles are afforded at least some level of statutory protection under the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981, the only exceptions being a handful of pest and game species which may be killed under certain specified and licensed conditions. In the great majority of cases, birds are protected against injury or killing, and this protection extends to their nests, eggs and young. Certain rare species, which include barn owl, are subject to enhanced protection against disturbance whilst nesting, by virtue of their listing on Schedule 1 of the Act.
- 1.7.13 The protection of common nesting birds (i.e. those not listed on Schedule 1) typically applies only to the animals themselves and to the site of their nests *whilst they are in use*. The nesting site *per se* is not protected once nesting has ceased and the nest is no longer occupied by the adults, eggs or young. More stringent regulations may apply to the nesting sites of Schedule 1 species, however.

2.0 APPROACH AND METHODS

2.1 Survey Methodology

Building Inspection

- 2.1.1 A daytime internal building inspection was conducted in accordance with current best practise guidance provided by BCT (2016), on 21st July 2022 in good weather. A full external inspection was carried out on 25th May 2023. These surveys were carried out by a licenced and experienced surveyor. All accessible areas of the buildings were entered and searched using high-powered lanterns (Clulite FAN1). Other equipment was available as required, including a digital endoscope (Rigid Seesnake CA350) for the examination of any crevices in the fill of stone walls etc, and ladders to inspect high areas. Interior and exterior searches were made especially for evidence such as bat droppings and feeding remains, as well as for sightings of actual bats (e.g. in cracks and crevices) and secondary signs such as fur-oil and urine stains, scratch marks etc.
- 2.1.2 The layout and construction of the building was recorded, briefly described and characterised, with an estimate being made of the potential attractiveness and suitability for bats with reference to a range of factors including human disturbance, light levels, air movement, exposure and thermal stability etc. Any evidence of the presence of nesting birds was also recorded.

Flight Surveys

- 2.1.4 Flight surveys for bats were conducted, in accordance with current best practice guidance (BCT 2016). Dusk emergence surveys were undertaken on the eastern-most elevation of the farmhouse only (i.e. the gym and family room sections, which are adjacent to the stables), on 25th May and 5th July 2023, utilising two surveyors to survey each elevation of this section of the building. The results of these surveys are included in this report. During these surveys all surveyors were equipped with Peersonic RPA3 full spectrum detectors. A monocular night vision scope (Nightfox Cub Digital Night Vision Monocular) was also used. All bat calls recorded were logged and subsequently analysed using Kaleidoscope software to confirm species.

2.2 Data Trawl

- 2.2.1 In addition to original survey, a data trawl was carried out with the Southeast Wales Biodiversity Record Centre (SEWBReC) in order to obtain access to any existing ecological information or records from the site. SEWBReC is the main repository for biodiversity and wildlife records in the south-east Wales region. Relevant records are referred to in the text.

2.3 Survey Constraints

- 2.3.1 The current surveys were undertaken in the recommended time period and under appropriate weather conditions; therefore the survey was not considered to be constrained in this respect. Two dusk emergence surveys were undertaken, following the current guidelines.

3.0 SURVEY RESULTS

3.1 Data Trawl

- 3.1.1 No records for bats or birds were recorded for the site itself, nor were any sites designated for bats located within the vicinity.
- 3.1.2 Several bat roost records were returned with the data trawl within 2km of the site, with the closest situated approximately 110m away, with a single pipistrelle found roosting within the structure of a bridge. An undetermined bat species was also found roosting in a roof approximately 120m away. There are hibernation records for Natterer's bat and a species of long-eared bat in a tunnel within 1km, and a possible pipistrelle maternity roost located 1.5km away from the site. Another significant roost record exists for an undetermined bat species about 1.8km away, where over eighty bats were noted to be roosting in an attic. Other roost records within 2km include Natterer's bat, brown long-eared bat, Daubenton's bat, soprano pipistrelle, common pipistrelle and possibly whiskered bat (LERC reference: 0234-335).
- 3.1.3 Records for bat foraging and commuting were also included in the data trawl, the closest of which pertains to soprano pipistrelle documented approximately 140m away from the site. Nathusius' pipistrelle has also been recorded around 1.9km from the site. Other foraging/commuting records include whiskered bat, serotine, lesser horseshoe bat, Natterer's bat, noctule, Daubenton's bat, brown long-eared bat, common pipistrelle, and undetermined myotis species (LERC reference: 0234-335).
- 3.1.4 A previous ecological assessment of the farmhouse identified bat droppings indicative of brown long-eared bat within the northern section of the main farmhouse building (Acer Ecology 2021). Dusk emergence surveys recorded five soprano pipistrelles emerging from the western elevation of the farmhouse and a single soprano pipistrelle emerged from under a lifted tile on the southern elevation of the adjoining stables block (DCE 2021).
- 3.1.5 There are several records for roof nesting birds within 500m of the site, which includes peregrine falcon, a 'Schedule 1' species, and spotted flycatcher and kestrel, 'Section 7' species, as well as herring gull, house sparrow and starling. Other records returned with the data trawl within 1.2km of the site include swallow, swift, great tit, pied wagtail, blue tit, lesser black-backed gull and redstart (LERC reference: 0234-335). Two swallow nests and another unidentified nest were found within the stables building during the previous survey (Acer 2021).

Bats

3.2 *Building Inspection*

- 3.2.1 The two southern-most sections of the main farmhouse building (the gym and family room areas) will be affected by the currently proposed development. (See Plan 2). Only these sections were surveyed on this occasion. The gym is adjacent to the stables which was subject to previous surveys for bats and nesting birds (DCE 2021; Acer 2021). The potential attractiveness of these sections for bats and nesting birds was assessed and the results described in Table 1 below.
- 3.2.2 The building has been assessed as having some potential for roosting bats during the spring, summer and autumn months. However, the building does not appear to be suitable for hibernating bats, lacking the thermally stable conditions required for hibernation.

Building	Description	Evidence of Bats and Nesting Birds	Bat Roosting Potential
Farmhouse			
‘Family Room’	Exterior: Dual-pitched concrete tiled roof. Walls of stone/ breeze block with concrete render. Wooden fascia boards and barge-boards. Skylights on roof.	No evidence of bats or nesting birds on the exterior.	Moderate bat roosting potential. Some gaps under roof tiles and ridge tiles.
Gym	Hip-roof with concrete tiles. Dual-pitched, wooden panelled dormer facing southern elevation. Stone/ breeze block walls with light concrete render. uPVC fascia and barge boards. Skylights on roof.	No evidence of bats or nesting birds on the exterior.	Moderate bat roosting potential. Some gaps under roof tiles and ridge tiles. Gaps under fascia boards.
‘Family Room’ and Gym	Interior: Short staircase leads to loft room. Complex roof structure with timbers in generally good condition. Felt liner appears to be intact with no obvious gaps providing entry points into the void. Relatively clean inside. Half of this section open to ceiling from ground floor.	No evidence of bats found in the interior. No evidence of nesting birds observed.	Low bat roosting potential. Some gaps present between roof timber joints.

Table 1: Building Inspection Results

3.3 *Flight Surveys*

25th May 2023 - Dusk Emergence Survey

- 3.3.1 A dusk emergence survey was completed on 25th May 2023. Two surveyors were utilised to survey each elevation of the building. The weather conditions were dry and cloudy, with a light wind. Temperatures were approximately 15.5°C at the start of the survey and sunset was at 21:13.
- 3.3.2 No bats were seen emerging from the building. Very high activity levels of noctules were recorded commuting overhead with some foraging. There were also high activity levels of soprano pipistrelles commuting, with lots of foraging and social calls recorded. There were very low activity levels of common pips recorded commuting. A Myotis species was also recorded occasionally commuting.

5th July 2023 - Dusk Emergence Survey

- 3.3.3 A second dusk emergence survey was completed on 5th July 2023. Two surveyors were utilised to survey each elevation of the building. The weather conditions were dry, calm and cloudy. Temperatures were approximately 13°C at the start of the survey and sunset was at 21:33.
- 3.3.4 No bats were seen emerging from the building. High activity levels of noctules were recorded commuting overhead, with some foraging. Unusual, rapid social calls were recorded while two noctules were observed being chased by a bird of prey (probably a hobby). Low activity levels of soprano pipistrelles were recorded commuting. A single Myotis species and a single common pipistrelle were also recorded commuting.

3.4 *Nesting Birds*

- 3.4.1 No evidence of nesting birds was recorded during the current surveys. A number of swifts were recorded overhead during the bat flight surveys, as well as wren, robin, blackbird and song thrush.

4.0 ASSESSMENT OF DEVELOPMENT IMPACTS

4.1 Bats

4.1.1 Plans for the site involve the extension of the roofline of the farmhouse at the southern end between the current family room section to the stables.

4.1.2 No evidence of roosting bats was found within the sections of the building that will be affected by the development. Therefore a European Protected Species (EPS) derogation licence is unlikely to be required and the proposed development is unlikely to have an impact on bats using the building. A precautionary approach to the works is recommended, however.

4.2 Nesting Birds

4.2.1 There is no evidence that nesting birds are currently using this section of the building and no evidence of any Schedule 1 species, such as barn owl nesting on the site. No further bird surveys are considered necessary, although a precautionary approach to works is advised.

5.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Bats

- 5.1.1 All contractors will receive a toolbox talk from a suitably experienced bat ecologist covering the legal protection of bats and working methodologies to be used.
- 5.1.2 As a precaution, features which could potentially harbour roosting bats including gaps under ridge tiles, loose slates fascia, soffits, bargeboards etc will be removed carefully by hand, with constant vigilance and checking to make sure that no bats (or nesting birds) are present concealed under or behind such features. The rear or underneath of any materials which are removed will be checked visually for bats before the item is dumped or smashed. This ‘soft-stripping’ technique will be carried out under the guidance of a licensed bat ecologist, who will be on-call throughout the works. Contractors must continue to follow a precautionary approach when removing the remaining slates, etc.
- 5.1.3 In the event that any bats are encountered, all works will cease and advice will be sought from Natural Resources Wales (NRW). This advice may include the requirement of a European Protected Species Licence (EPSL). The licenced ecologist will capture the bat by gloved hands or hand net and place the bat in a draw-string cloth bag. The bats will then be transferred to a day-holding facility (such as a well-insulated and specially designed bat box, kept in a safe location) for subsequent release near the site on the evening of the day of capture. Any injured bats should be immediately taken into care and provided with veterinary treatment as required. Where live bats are encountered, the ecologist will consult with the Species Officer at Natural Resources Wales (NRW) for advice before works restart.
- 5.1.4 As a general principle, builders and contractors should not handle, or attempt to handle, bats. In addition to comprising a legal offence, there is also a small theoretical risk of acquiring rabies-like infections from bats. Where the handling of bats by unlicensed contractors cannot reasonably be avoided (eg in emergency situations where the bat might otherwise suffer harm unless moved immediately) this must be by means of gloved hands only, and kept to the minimum handling necessary to rectify the immediate situation. The bat should be contained in a box until a licenced bat worker can attend the site and deal with the situation.
- 5.1.5 The new roof will be lined with BS747 Type 1F bitumen roofing felt **only** throughout. No breathable membranes will be used. Where treatment of existing timbers is required in-situ, only products suitable for use around bats will be used, as specified by Natural England and DEFRA at:
<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/bat-roosts-use-of-chemical-pest-control-products-and-timber-treatments-in-or-near-them>
A copy of the approved list will be issued to all contractors. New timbers will be pre-treated prior to installation.

5.2 Nesting Birds

- 5.2.1 Works affecting either the building or the site must have regard to the possible presence of nesting birds. The bird nesting season runs approximately between March and August

inclusive, and therefore it is recommended that any building works are undertaken outside of this period. Undertaking works outside the bird nesting season minimises the risk of causing avoidable harm or disturbance to nesting birds, which is a statutory obligation. If this timing is not possible, however, then the works must be preceded by a survey by an appropriately qualified person to ascertain that no nesting birds are present.

- 5.2.2 In the event that nesting birds are found to be present during works, all works in the immediate vicinity must cease immediately and appropriate expert advice sought as a matter of urgency. The ‘immediate vicinity’ would comprise any nesting bird-occupied void in its entirety, plus an area of at least 5m radius around the find site. Nesting birds must not be harmed or disturbed and should be carefully covered over and wherever possible left in situ until expert assistance has been obtained. This is a statutory requirement.

5.3 **Enhancement Measures**

- 5.3.1 As an enhancement, one new Schwegler 2F bat box (or similar design) will be installed on a nearby tree. The bat box will be sited in such a manner that predators such as cats cannot reach them, and be at least 4m (preferably 5m) above ground level. The entrances to the bat box will not be illuminated at night and not be obscured by vegetation. Bat boxes should ideally be of ‘woodcrete’ construction (such as those manufactured by Schwegler Ltd), since these are much more robust and longer-lived than traditional wooden boxes and require less after-maintenance. (See Appendix 1).
- 5.3.2 Additionally one new Vivara Pro 28/32mm general bird box, (or a similar model) will be used to provide nesting opportunities for a range of bird species. The bird-box will also be installed on a tree in the vicinity of the building. The bird box will be installed on the northern aspects of the trees, at a minimum of 4m (preferably 5m) above ground level, in locations where the entrances will not be obscured by vegetation and will not be illuminated at night (See Appendix 1).
- 5.3.3 The exact position of the bird and bat boxes and the installation will be supervised by a suitably qualified ecologist.

6.0 REFERENCES

Acer Ecology (2021) *Pontygwaith Farm, Treharris, Preliminary Bat Roost and Nesting Bird Assessment and Walkover Survey of Area Proposed for New Store*. Unpublished Report.

Bat Conservation Trust (BCT 2016) *Bat Surveys for Professional Ecologists. Good Practice Guidelines, 3rd Edition*. Bat Conservation Trust, London.

Bat Conservation Trust (BCT 2018) *Bats and Artificial Lighting in the UK Guidance Note. Bats and the built environment series*. Bat Conservation Trust, London.

Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (2013) *Guidelines for Preliminary Ecological Appraisal*. CIEEM, Winchester.

David Clements Ecology (DCE 2021) *Pontygwaith Farm, Treharris Bat Survey Report v2.2*. Unpublished Report.

Site Photos (July 2022; May 2023)



1) Southeast elevation – showing gym (white building) and family room (reddish building)



2) Gable end of family room section



3) Loft above family room



4) Internal area of gym

APPENDIX 1: BIRD AND BAT BOXES FOR TREES

EXAMPLES OF NON-INTEGRATED BIRD BOXES FOR TREES AND BUILDINGS

Suspended Designs



Schwegler 1B
General box



Schwegler 2H open-front
'robin' box



Schwegler 5
'large owl' box



Schwegler 1CGA
'small owl' box



Schwegler 20
'starling' box



Schwegler 28 'kestrel' box



Schwegler 5KL 'nuthatch' box

Surface-mounted Designs



Schwegler 1MR general box



Vivara Pro open-front
'robin' box



Vivara Pro ova open-front
'robin' box



Vivara Pro 'starling' box



Vivara Pro 28/32mm
general box



Vivara Pro 28/32mm
oval general box

EXAMPLES OF SURFACE-MOUNTED BAT BOXES

Tree-mounted boxes



Schwegler 2F General Box



Schwegler 1FD Nursery Box



Schwegler 1FS Nursery Box (Large)



Schwegler 1FW Winter Box
(Very large box)



Schwegler 2FN
Noctule Box



Schwegler 2F DFP
Daubenton's Bat Box



Miramar General Box

Tree or building-mounted boxes



Schwegler 1FF General Box



Schwegler 1FQ Decorative Box



Schwegler 1FFH General Box



Vivara Woodstone Low Profile Box



NHBS Cavity Box
(Brown Long-Eared Bat Box)



NHBS Crevice Box

Pontygwaith Farm, Treharris, Bat Survey Report

Plan 1: Site Location & Context

DCE 1136 NTS Aug 2023

Key

 Site Boundary



Pontygwaith Farm, Treharris, Bat Survey Report

Plan 2: Site Plan

DCE 1136 NTS Aug 2023

Key

-  Current Survey Area
-  Previous Survey Area
-  Area Not Surveyed

