La Bodega
1 Pant Road
Dowlais
Merthyr Tudful
CF48 3SH

A Supplementary Ecological Survey Report

For

Mr Kristian Davis

August 2024

Morgan Ecology

Status	Name	Date
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Reviewer	Diane Morgan BA (Hons) ACIEEM, Senior Ecologist	19 August 2024

Contents

Tables

Figures

Plates

1 Summary

1.1 In December 2023, a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal and Preliminary Roost Assessment were undertaken of a property known as La Bodega, on Pant Road, Dowlais. The building, which was in a state of being stripped out, was inspected internally and externally. The presence of asbestos material in the loft meant that the roof void was only viewed from the entrance hatch.

1.2 No evidence for the presence of bats was noted, either inside or externally, but the building was considered to offer moderate potential to be used by bats with several Potential Roost Features noted. Further survey was recommended before any further work was done on the structure, particularly the roof. Subsequently the building was re-roofed, being considered to be permitted development. However, as the property was subject to a planning application for change of use, the planning ecologist for Merthyr Tudful County Borough Council advised that two dusk observations must be undertaken before he could consider the implications of the development.

1.3 The original ecological report made several other recommendations, and these included advice on a mitigation package, to allow bats to use the structure into the future, and access provision for bats was detailed if re-roofing was to take place. External lighting was specified to minimise the impact on foraging and commuting bats. Additionally, measures were proposed for Net Benefits for Biodiversity, and a Green Infrastructure Scheme, both required under Section 6 of Planning Policy Wales 12.

1.4 In addition to the applications for change of use, the owner also proposed to add an extension to the rear of the former public house/restaurant, and mindful of this likely future application, the original ecological report considered this possibility. To address the on-going application for change of use, and a future application for an extension, the owner commissioned additional survey work for bats, and this was undertaken in July and August 2024, by two experienced, licenced, independent ecologists, using good quality detection equipment and night vision aids.

1.5 This report details the findings of the two dusk observations and makes appropriate recommendations considering the findings. However, it cannot be considered in isolation, and must be read together with the original ecological survey report of February 2024.

1.6 Survey found no evidence for use by bats, and during the first of the two observations no bats were heard at all – being apparently totally absent in this area. Matters were a little better during the second dusk survey, when a bat was heard faintly late in the observations – which was too far away to obtain a good recording for analysis. Four herring gulls were also seen flying over the site during the second observation, but generally, in its current condition, the site has no apparent ecological value or significance. No evidence of nesting birds was observed.

1.7 The original site appraisal, undertaken in the winter of 2023, did not find any Invasive Non-Native plant species on the property. However, recognising that such species can lay dormant, and undetected in winter, a further consideration of these plants was carried out during the August 2024. No invasive species were found on the site, but a stand of Japanese knotweed was noted on a neighbouring property – 18 Glendower Street, which abuts the site on its south-western boundary.

2 Survey team experience

2.1 The lead surveyor, and author of this report is Phil Morgan, who has 40 years' experience of undertaking building, tree, and cave surveys for all bat species. In addition, he has undertaken foraging and flight line surveys using heterodyne and other echo-location equipment, and in 1991 made a significant contribution to a Bristol University run project, which established the methodology used in the National Bat Monitoring Programme. Phil has also undertaken numerous radio tracking exercises on both lesser horseshoe and Daubenton's bats. He holds a

Natural Resources Wales (NRW) licence for bats (S094090/1, expiry April 2026), as well as other species including dormice. Phil was previously the Ecologist with Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water, and responsible for over 37,000ha of land, before becoming Principal Ecologist with the Just Mammals Consultancy LLP, a business which he established in 2001. He is now the Principal with Morgan Ecology. He is a Chartered Environmentalist, with the Society for the Environment (CEnv), and a full Member of the Chartered Institute for Ecology and Environmental Management (MCIEEM). Phil has, for the past 27 years, been the County Mammal Recorder for Vice County 42: Sir Frycheiniog/Brecknockshire, and is responsible for verifying bat and terrestrial mammal records in that area.

2.2 Assisting with the survey was Diane Morgan, an Associate Member of the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (ACIEEM). Diane has considerable experience (over 30 years) of surveying-built structures for bats, and has carried out ringing of Daubenton's bat as part of a multi-year project on the species, undertaken monitoring work on several important lesser horseshoe maternity sites, and assisted in radio tracking projects on the same species. Prior to her current role, she was the Director of Brecknock Wildlife Trust, and involved in a wide range of nature conservation work including species and habitat protection, and conservation land management. Diane holds an NRW licence to disturb bats (S093558/1 expiry February 2026). Other areas of interest include otters, dormice, water voles, reptiles, amphibians, fungi, and crayfish. Diane is a Senior Ecologist with Morgan Ecology.

3 Assessment methodology

3.1 As the Preliminary Roost Assessment (PRA) had assessed the original building to have moderate potential to be used by bats, additional survey, in the form of two dusk emergence/activity observations was recommended. These were subsequently commissioned and undertaken in July and August 2024, by a team of two experienced observers, aided by using an infra-red video camera.

3.2 Observers were positioned at strategic locations during the visits (see Appendix I), so that they could record all bat activity, but particularly seeking to identify whether bats emerged from the building. Surveyors documented the time, bat species, and behaviour. This survey schedule was based on the Bat Conservation Trust's, Bat Surveys Good Practice Guidelines (Collins 2023).

3.3 Both surveyors used Pettersson D-240x bat detectors during the dusk observations. These detectors are extremely sensitive, and ideal for separating species which employ the middle range frequencies for foraging (45 – 55 kHz). They are therefore excellent for identifying the different pipistrelle species (*Pipistrellus sp.*), and the different myotid bats* (*Myotis sp*.) (*myotid bat is a collective term used where the species could not be specifically identified beyond this broad group). The myotid group encompasses seven species of British bat including Alcathoe's (*Myotis alcathoe*); Bechstein's (*M. bechsteinii*); Brandt's (*M. brandtii*); Daubenton's; mouse-eared (*M. myotis*); Natterer's; and the whiskered bat (*M. Mystacinus*).

3.4 The Pettersson D-240x machines were used in time expansion mode, with the received signals being downloaded to Roland RO-5 recording devices, for later analysis. Time expansion allows recording of a digital signal of the bat's ultrasonic echo-locations calls, then slowing it down for playing back at a measured speed. As the signal is stretched out in time, it is possible to hear details of the sound not audible with other types of detector.

3.5 Time expansion retains all aspects of the original call, making it perfect for analysis. In addition to the simple echo-location calls which bats can use for commuting, and finding their way about, they also make feeding 'buzzes' for foraging. These buzzes occur when the bat closes in on its prey and are a consequence of the Doppler Effect, which results in a 'buzz' as the reflected signal shortens when the animal approaches its prey. Such buzzes are used to assess the importance of an area for foraging. The recorded echo-location calls are then interpreted initially using SonoBat

30.0 software, with more detail interpretation later, using the BatSound package. By use of these software packages it is possible to separate the different species by examining the sonograms produced, and have high confidence in the accuracy of the identification.

3.6 A Night vision aid (NVA) was also used, to complement the observations by the ecologists. A Canon XA60 infra-red camera, was employed on both dusk survey visits, with additional infra-red output provided by a set of twin unit Splenssy illuminators. The camera was set up to view the south-western side, and south-eastern gable aspects of the former restaurant. It was not possible to set up a camera on the north-eastern side because of a busy road, and to do so would have blocked the narrow pavement. Table 1 below details the equipment employed in undertaking the survey effort. The observers used handheld walkie-talkie radios to keep in contact and co-ordinate on any potential emergence activity.

Table 1: Equipment used in the assessment

Equipment items	Purpose used
Canon IXUS 100IS digital camera (1)	Taking photographs
Canon XA60 MP4 digital infra-red video camera (1)	Taking video film of bat activity during dusk observations
Cluson RE1T red eye torch (1)	Illuminating internal roof areas
Ledlenser MH8 head lamp (1)	Inspecting cavities
Motorola Talkabout T82 handheld radios (2)	Communication between observers
Pettersson D-240x bat detectors (2)	Detecting and recording bats
Roland RO-5 digital recorders (2)	Recording bat calls detected
Splenssy Model 81120B infra-red illuminator (1 x 2)	Increasing infra-red light during filming of dusk observations

4 Constraints or limitations

4.1 It was not possible to use two sets of Night Vision Aids (NVA's) for the dusk observations due to the lack of a suitable safe location to set up the camera/illuminators on the east, or street side of the building. Possible locations would have prevented public access/obstruction to the pavement, or vehicle access to the properties opposite La Bodega. However, the observer on that side of the road had a good view of the structure, and the clear conditions meant that any emergence activity would have been noted.

5 Survey findings

5.1 Table 2 below details the conditions under which the two-dusk emergence/activity observations were undertaken. The surveyors were able to stay in contact with each other using walkie-talkie hand held radio sets. Wind speeds employ the Beaufort scale.

Table 2: Survey and conditions

Date	Survey type	Timing	Weather conditions
27/07/2024	Dusk Emergence/Activity Observation (DM/PM)	20.38 – 23.07 hours British Summer Time (BST) (Sunset 21.12 hours)	Air temperature: 16.6°C – 15.8°C Cloud cover: 0/8 oktas Conditions: Dry and clear Wind speed: F2, light breeze
18/08/2024	Dusk Emergence/Activity Observation (DM/PM)	20.00 – 22.20 hours BST (Sunset 20.29 hours)	Air temperature: 15.5°C – 14.1°C Cloud cover: 1/8 – 8/8 oktas Conditions: Dry Wind speed: F1, light air
Surveyors	Diane Morgan (DM), Phil Morgan (PM)		

5.2 Prior to undertaking the first observation, on Saturday 27 July 2024, the surveyors inspected the exterior of the building. The re-roofing was apparent, and there were suitable access gaps to bats at the south-eastern gable apex, between the soffit box and exterior walls. No evidence of bats was noted, but photographs were taken.

5.3 Observations commenced at 20.38 hours, some 34 minutes before sunset, which on the day was at 21.12 hours. The observation was terminated at 23.07 hours, some 1 hour and 55 minutes after sunset. No bats were seen or heard by either observer during the survey, and no bats were captured by the video camera.

5.4 A second observation was conducted on Sunday the 18th of August 2024 in excellent conditions. No bat or bird activity was noted until 20.58 hours, when four herring gulls (*Larus argentatus*), were noted flying over the site to the west of the building, flying from south-east to north-west. No bat activity was apparent until a single animal was faintly heard, but not seen to the east of the building at 22.08 hours. A recording was made, but unfortunately the call was too faint to obtain a sonogram to analysis. No nesting bird activity was noted during the dusk surveys.

5.5 Prior to undertaking the second observation, a assessment was made of the general site, and it was much the same as when originally surveyed in December 2023. However, what was noted, and was not evident in the winter period, was a stand of Japanese knotweed (*Reynoutria japonica*) in the garden of a neighbouring property – 18 Glendower Street. Although this contamination has not spread to 1 Pant Road, it's presence nearby needs to be noted. A decomposed starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*) was also noted behind La Bodega, which appeared to have been dead of some time.

6 Discussion

6.1 In the author's experience, the results of the first observation, in July 2024, were remarkable. In over 40 years of undertaking bat observations, this was only the third time when no bats were recorded or seen at the site, or nearby. Bats are reasonably ubiquitous, so to get total absence is extraordinary.

6.2 The absence of bats was similar during the second dusk survey in August 2024. However, a bat was heard but not seen, to the front of the property late in the observation period. Sadly whilst a recording was made, it was too faint to produce a sonogram for analysis. Four herring gulls were seen flying over the property during the second observation, and a dead and well decomposed starling was noted on the ground in the back garden of La Bodega.

6.3 The only noteworthy finding, although not directly related to the proposals for change of use, and to extend the original building, is the presence of Japanese knotweed in the back garden of a neighbouring property. Although this contamination has not spread to the garden of La Bodega, it has the potential to do so. Whilst the original recommendations are fit for purpose, following this additional assessment, it is also appropriate to offer advice with regard to Japanese knotweed, if it spreads to the property.

7 Recommendations

7.1 The recommendations made in the original report, of February 2024, still apply, and again it is stressed that this supplementary report must be read in conjunction with that document. Clearly, given the building has been re-roofed following the recommendations originally made, it is not expected that there are any future implications with respect to that structure

7.2 Recommendations made with respect to the proposed rear extension are still appropriate, and the finding of a dead starling in the back garden suggests that the proposed starling nest box is suitable for this site (see separate Architects drawing – La Bodega Full 02B).

7.3 Despite the apparent absence of bat activity in the surroundings, the recommendations for a integrated bat box (see separate Architects drawing – La Bodega Full 02B), also remain good, as do the other recommendations to provide Net Benefits for Biodiversity in compliance with Section 6 of Planning Policy Wales 12.

7.4 Similarly the original Green Infrastructure statement is appropriate and these recommendations must also be fully complied with.

7.5 Presence of Japanese knotweed on a neighbouring property, 18 Glendower Street is consideration and cannot be ignored. The two properties are separated by an apparently solid stone/concrete wall, but this highly invasive plant is entirely capable of punching through tarmac and other solid man-made surfaces. Possible contamination of the development site needs to be considered and it is therefore recommended that the following measures are pursued.

7.6 It would be wise for the owner of La Bodega to assess during works if the ground may be contaminated with knotweed rhizomes. Nothing was obviously apparent, but it can remain hidden. If rhizomes (see Plate 6) are found, then the whole of this material, and any soil must be removed to a licenced disposal site. It will also be essential to clean any digging equipment used (e.g. JCB/Bobcat), and any soil washed from the vehicle will also be disposed to the licenced contractor. This is best achieved by engaging a specialist contractor to undertake the necessary work.

7.7 If the owner of the neighbouring property is known, then they must be advised to control the plant – although there is no legal requirement for them to actually do so! If the property is unoccupied, then there is no legal mechanism for dealing with it. Nonetheless, these situations must be encountered often across Wales, and taking actions to control it is not unreasonable, particularly if it is becoming a nuisance for the owner of La Bodega. Stem injection of each rhizome found is the most appropriate means of limiting any further spread or damage. The owner of La Bodega will however need to continue to monitor the knotweed for the foreseeable future.

8 Conclusions

8.1 The bat observations revealed that bats are apparently absent from the site in summer, but this does not dismiss their potential presence at other times of year. Nonetheless, the change of use, and proposal extension of the building does not appear to have implications for bats, or for that matter nesting birds. The recommendations of the original report remain appropriate and must be followed the event that bats or birds are subsequently encountered.

8.2 Presence of Japanese knotweed on a neighbouring property is a concern, but provided the owner exercises caution with respect to its presence, the proposed development is not considered to be an issue that will lead to its spread. Nonetheless it is appropriate for the owner to monitor its presence and in the event that it spreads to the property, deal with it in a proper manner.

9 References

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Appendix I: Site layout aerial photograph

Figure 1: Site layout aerial photograph

Current La Bodega structure shown red

- Positions of observers
- Positions of video cameras
- Japanese knotweed contamination on neighbouring property

Appendix II: Site photographs

Plate 1: Southern corner of La Bodega (July 2024)

Plate 2: Gaps between wall and soffit box (arrowed red)

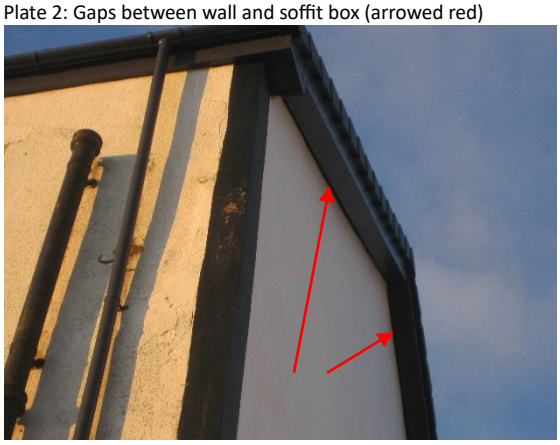

Plate 3: Street view of La Bodega (July 2024)

Plate 4: Infra-red camera image (July 2024)

Plate 5: Infra-red camera image (August 2024)

Plate 6: Japanese knotweed roots or rhizomes

In preparing this document, we assert that we have exercised reasonable skill and care, taking into account the project objectives, the agreed scope of the work, prevailing site conditions, the degree of manpower and resources allocated to the project, and in compliance with the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management's Code of Professional Conduct.

This document is valid for a defined period, in compliance with National Guidelines, for a period of one year from the front cover date.

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