

**R & H Hall Flour Mill,
Ferrybank,
Waterford City**

Bat survey report for Waterford City and County Council

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10/07/2017

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Background

The R & H Hall Flour Mill, also known as the Hennebique Building, is located on the North Wharf, just off the Dock Road in Ferrybank, Waterford City (grid reference S 608 128). The site of the former flour mill complex, bounded by the River Suir and the Waterford-Wexford railway, is earmarked for redevelopment. To allow for redevelopment, the now disused flour mill buildings are in the process of being demolished. The only substantial building still standing at the site is the original mill building, constructed in 1905.

Due to the possibility of the presence of bats (which are protected by law) at this complex of buildings, a bat survey was carried out by Conor Kelleher at the request of Waterford City Council in April 2014. This survey found no evidence of bats at the site, but did note some potential for roosting sites for bats. Since then, the majority of the buildings at the site have been demolished, including grain storage silos, sheds and warehouses, portacabins and small office buildings, and a more substantial concrete mill building. Currently only the original concrete mill building and small brick-walled shed remain on the site. As three years have elapsed since the last bat survey was carried out, a more up to date survey was requested by Waterford City and County Council before the demolition of the remaining buildings.

Survey methodology

In order to assess whether bats were present in the buildings at this site, a daytime survey was first carried out to search for signs of the presence of bats. The buildings on site were thoroughly searched, examining likely daytime roosting places such as crevices in woodwork, brickwork and concrete, or within steel pipes. Indirect signs of the presence of bats were also searched for, including bat droppings, prey remains (e.g. butterfly wings) and grease stains around potential roost entrances. Signs of other wildlife likely to be affected by demolition works were also noted, e.g. bird nests.

Night-time surveys were also carried out to watch for bats exiting the building at dusk, and “swarming” by bats outside the roost entrance before re-entry at dawn. The exterior of the main building was watched for an hour after dusk (9:45pm-10:45pm at the time of survey) and an hour before dawn (4am-5am) to identify any bats leaving or entering the building, using a bat detector to record bat calls for species identification.

Survey results

Daytime survey

A daytime survey of the mill building was carried out on the morning of the 29th of June 2017 with the help of a planner from Waterford Council. All nine floors of the main mill building were searched, with the exception of the roof and a small structure at the very top of the building, which were not accessible. No signs of bats could be found in any part of the building. The building was judged not to be especially favourable for roosting bats, but there was some potential for roost sites, especially in crevices in a wooden chute structure which extended down through the building from the top floor on its eastern side. A concrete silo-type structure which also extended down through several floors could not be examined as its interior was inaccessible, but from a hole in the bottom it appeared to be walled with smooth concrete and thus did not seem to be suitable for bats. The exterior of the small brick-walled and slate roofed building some distance from the main building was also examined. No bat signs could be found, but it did appear to be a suitable roosting site for bats. The interior could not be accessed.

Several bird nests were found within the main mill building. Some swallow (*Hirundo rustica*) nests were found on the fourth floor, but these were not in use. A single occupied swallow nest was found on the second floor which contained several chicks, as well as another disused nest nearby. Three feral pigeon nests were found on the floor of a room on the ground floor.

Dusk and dawn surveys

Night-time surveys were carried out at dusk on the 1st of July and at dawn on the 2nd of July 2017. The weather conditions were favourable for bats, being dry, calm and temperature ranging from 12°C to 10°C. No bats were seen exiting or entering either the main mill building or the smaller brick-walled shed during the night-time bat surveys carried out.

A single pipistrelle bat (*Pipistrellus sp.*) was heard briefly passing by the western side of the main mill building during the dusk survey, but was not spotted exiting the building. This bat was heard about 45 minutes after sunset, and as pipistrelle species usually emerge much earlier in the evening (usually within 10-15 minutes after sunset), it was judged that this bat was more likely simply passing by on the way to a feeding area and was not roosting in the immediate area. The nearby railway is lined with vegetation which could provide a corridor for bats travelling to and from feeding areas, or could be used as a feeding area in its own right.

An otter (*Lutra lutra*) was seen on the riverbank next to the mill building during both the dusk and dawn surveys. This area appears to be regularly used by this species, as there were many otter footprints on the mudbanks here. Some of the tracks led under the concrete platform of the riverside wharf, indicating that otters may use the area underneath as a hiding place.

Recommendations

This survey did not find any evidence that the R & H Hall mill building is in use as a roost by bats, which was also the finding of the earlier bat survey report by Kelleher (2014). The smaller shed nearby similarly does not appear to be in use by bats. Therefore, the demolition of these buildings does not appear to pose any risk of injuring or killing bats, or of damaging or destroying a bat roost and thus should not require a derogation licence from the National Parks and Wildlife Service. However, should a bat be discovered in the building during the course of demolition work, works should be halted immediately and the local NPWS ranger should be consulted before proceeding further. Any demolition work should preferably be carried out no earlier than the start of September, after which bats have ceased breeding activity and should be less vulnerable to disturbance, should any be potentially present within the building. However, if possible demolition should be left until later in the year (November onwards), as bats will be in hibernation and the risk of disturbance at this site will be very low. The birds found to be nesting within the main mill building should similarly be free to fledge their chicks and leave of their own accord if demolition is delayed until at least early September.

Otters are also present on this site, and may be using the area of riverbank underneath the concrete wharf platform as a resting/hiding place, as noted above. As this area is most likely fully inundated by the tide, it seems unlikely that an actual otter holt (i.e. burrow) is present, and the otters are most likely simply taking advantage of the shelter of the platform. No search was undertaken under this platform to confirm this during this survey. However, if future works involve the complete removal of this concrete platform, a more detailed survey for this purpose may be required, as the disturbance or destruction of an otter holt is an offence under the Wildlife Act 1976 (as amended) and requires a derogation licence from the NPWS.

More detailed mitigation measures to make the future development of this site friendly to bats and wildlife in general is provided in the bat survey report written by Kelleher (2014).

References

Kelleher, C., 2014. Former flour mill plant, Ferrybank, Waterford. Bat fauna study prepared on behalf of Waterford County Council.