



Bats in Churches: undertaking works



These guidelines must be followed when undertaking all works to a church building. The underlying principle is the same as that for the Faculty Simplification process, that is, taking a responsible but proportionate response to the law which should be followed when undertaking work in Churches.

For the latest information please see <http://www.batsandchurches.org.uk>

One of the questions on the faculty form is ‘Do you have evidence of bats?’

If you believe that your church may be affected by bats this guidance is for you. (Bear in mind that most rural churches are probably home to some bats).

Extra care needs to be taken during works because as a protected species bats are covered by the European Habitats Directive. However, remember that in general the legislation is designed to

protect species, and not individual specimens.

Furthermore, it is and always has been recognised that there is likely to be a need to be more precautionary with rarer or more endangered species than species that are less threatened. In other words a lower hurdle is likely to need to be cleared to allow actions that may affect more numerous species such as the common Pipistrelle than a rarer species such as Natterer’s or greater and lesser horseshoe bats. The size of the roost concerned will also be a

consideration, and this note includes a section for churches with large bat roosts.

When a person reasonably believes that their action would not result in disturbance to bats, but in the process of undertaking works accidentally causes disturbance it is unlikely to be an offence. However, if bats are disturbed during works, continuing with the works would be likely to constitute a breach of the law.

This guidance is issued by the Church Buildings Council under section 55(1)(d) of the Dioceses, Mission and Pastoral Measure 2007. As it is statutory guidance, it must be considered with great care. The standards of good practice set out in the guidance should not be departed from unless the departure is justified by reasons that are spelled out clearly, logically and convincingly.





When considering major works, bear in mind the potential costs of any delay should bats be found. If the work is likely to disturb bats, or damage or destroy bat roosts, a licence from Natural England will most likely be required. Licences are free but the required surveys and submission work can be costly. The vast majority of applications for licences are eventually granted. It is expected that the 'low impact

licences' will be widely available from summer 2017.

1. Minor works

These works can usually be undertaken without bat surveys. However, if you are in any doubt obtain advice from an expert, either a Volunteer Bat Roost Visitor (see below) or a professional ecologist. Your architect should be able to suggest the best solution for you. Remedial works done

within a limited timeframe are unlikely to harm bats and therefore we would encourage PCCs to move promptly on works within this list.

Nevertheless, there are likely to be some times of the year when the potential for bats to be affected by different minor work is more or less likely. The section on page 5 provides an indicative table that highlights this.



Minor roof repair e.g. replacing single slates, redressing thatch or repairing sheet materials

Erecting scaffolding

Small areas of repointing and stone repair
i.e. where the cavities are shallow
and can be checked by eye

Minor overhauling or redecorating
rainwater goods

Limewashing

Repairing and replacing bird netting

Work to floors and floor monuments

Repairing or replacing broken glass or window guards where damage has occurred

Removing vegetation from church walls

Inspection and routine maintenance
of clocks and clock faces

Inspection and routine maintenance of bells, bell frames and the replacement/repair of damaged wooden bell stays, pulleys, bell ropes, the replacement of sliders, ball bearings and the repair of bell wheels (where bells have been out of use for six months or longer, obtain advice from an expert)



2. Routine works

Works listed below could in some circumstances impact on bats and you should therefore arrange a visit by an ecologist or a Volunteer Bat Roost Visitor (VBRV). VBRVs are Natural England volunteers and licenced bat experts and the service is organised and delivered by the Bat

Conservation Trust (call 0845 1300 228). Remember the VBRVs are volunteers so there may be a delay in finding someone suitable who can help.

Whilst VBRVs are bat enthusiasts and have useful knowledge of bat ecology and behaviour, they are not in a position to advise on protection

and conservation of artefacts within the church. Whilst a VBRV is unlikely to be able to undertake a detailed survey, they can provide you with general advice about bats in your church and help you to plan minor works around them. After the visit, a letter will be sent to you detailing the advice that was provided.



Installation of new heating and lighting systems involving extensive work to the fabric of the church

Structural work within boiler rooms and crypts

Major repairs to tombs

Significant plaster repairs

Significant work in tower or roof spaces

Fitting of insulation

Treatment of fixtures and furniture against fungal or beetle infestation, if carried out at a time of the year when bats are in the building

3. More extensive works

If you want to get more extensive works done, such as those listed below, you may need to get the help of a professional ecologist who can undertake bat surveys, and where required, apply for a licence. See [Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management](#). This may be permission to exclude bats from the building but is most

likely to be permission to continue works. After submission of the licence application to Natural England it will take a maximum of 30 working days for a decision to be made. Sometimes, further information is required but the vast majority of licence applications are eventually granted. For advice on how to obtain a licence see [Natural England website](#)

It is hoped that the research conducted by the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) will in due course make it possible to encourage bats to move to less intrusive areas of the church. For the full research please see the [DEFRA website](#)

Applications for licences have to be supported by several surveys, which are generally undertaken during the summer





months when bats are active. Therefore, it is vital that you consider the possible presence of bats and schedule any surveys that may be required into your work plan at the earliest opportunity.

The services of a professional ecologist can be expensive so it is recommended you obtain more than one quote for the work

and discuss how to reduce costs with them. For more information about bat surveys and what to expect, please refer to '[Bat Surveys – Good Practice Guidelines](#)' which is an accepted industry standard.

If grant-aid is to be sought to assist in the works, the ecologist should be appointed before an application is

submitted, so that they can provide potential costs to be included in the application. You should agree with the ecologist that you can contact them for further advice if unexpected risks appear while building work is ongoing. You will need to agree guidelines. Your architect/ surveyor will be able to advise you on the next steps.



Extensions and all other building Work

Roofing work that does not qualify as minor

Repairing large structural cracks as part of a long term programme

Extensive repair work to eaves and ridges

Floodlighting

Major work to doors and porches

Carrying out extensive repairs e.g. to roofs, tower floors and bell frames

Even if you do have to pay for an ecologist you may be able to significantly reduce the bill by PCC members volunteering to assist with the night time survey or by offering to put them up overnight.

Advice for churches with large colonies of bats

If you have a small number of relatively common bats the processes above should run smoothly. However where large colonies of bats are present in a church, there will be an increased risk of encountering bats or their roosts, so if in doubt seek expert advice before starting.

Additional licensing information

Work is in progress to streamline a number of Natural England procedures which may assist in reducing the costs involved in undertaking low impact licence activities. A chargeable pre-screening service is already available from Natural England that may

provide assistance to churches with larger bat colonies.

For more information see the [Natural England website](#).





Timing of common works with suggested optimal times to avoid bat disturbance												
Works	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Minor roof repairs	Sub-optimal	Sub-optimal	Sub-optimal	Optimal	Sub-optimal	Sub-optimal	Sub-optimal	Optimal	Optimal	Optimal	Sub-optimal	Sub-optimal
Re-pointing and render repairs	Sub-optimal	Sub-optimal	Sub-optimal	Optimal	Sub-optimal	Sub-optimal	Sub-optimal	Sub-optimal	Optimal	Sub-optimal	Sub-optimal	Sub-optimal
Replacement of rainwater goods	Sub-optimal	Sub-optimal	Sub-optimal	Sub-optimal	Optimal	Optimal	Optimal	Optimal	Sub-optimal	Sub-optimal	Sub-optimal	Sub-optimal
Lime washing	Optimal	Optimal	Optimal	Optimal	Optimal	Optimal	Optimal	Optimal	Optimal	Optimal	Optimal	Optimal
Timber treatment	Optimal	Optimal	Optimal	Sub-optimal	Sub-optimal	Sub-optimal	Sub-optimal	Sub-optimal	Sub-optimal	Optimal	Optimal	Optimal
Doors, windows and porches	Optimal	Optimal	Optimal	Optimal	Optimal	Optimal	Optimal	Optimal	Optimal	Optimal	Optimal	Optimal

Key:

Optimal	Sub - optimal	Not advised
Optimal	Sub - optimal	Not advised

These are general indications of the times of year that would suit minor work when considering the presence of bats. These timings avoid the sensitive maternity and hibernation periods for bats that the particular activity would most likely disrupt.

However there is often flexibility depending on how bats are using the building.

This indicative timetable is of course only one factor in establishing a project schedule and should be considered alongside obtaining Faculty

permission, the contractor availability, the weather and the funding position. Major projects will inevitably span a number of months and if work is likely to be carried out beyond the windows of opportunity then professional advice will be required.

DEFRA (and Natural England) support this initiative by the Church of England to provide guidance on works to be undertaken in churches that may affect bats

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