

BATS IN CHURCHES AND DEMONSTRATOR CHURCHES – A GUIDE

Why bats are an important consideration for Demonstrator Churches?

Around half of all CofE churches have bats in the interior, with even more having bats using other areas of the building. This rises to around 78% for pre-Reformation churches and may be as high as 90% of churches in the East of England.

It is important to consider that it's **illegal** to disturb or harm bats, or damage, destroy, or obstruct a roost. Even if your church has never seen a bat roosting in your church property or had a confirmed sighting, you must conduct appropriate due diligence before commencing your Demonstrator Churches capital works and work with Natural England through the National Bat Helpline.

Having bats will not stop you carrying out works if the bats are taken into consideration when works are planned and you follow the advice given to you by the National Bat Helpline.

Please note that while this guidance has been written for Demonstrator Churches, the legal and practical principles apply to churches conducting any capital works project. Therefore, if your net zero project is a portion of a wider restoration/ conservation and/or reordering project, this guidance applies to spaces which might not be a part of your specific net zero works.

Please note that while you might be more likely to have bats present in your main church building, the law also applies to works in a church hall or other buildings. However, support from the National Bat Helpline only applies to main church buildings. Therefore, while the spirit of the advice given in this document remains for church halls and other buildings, for other church properties, you should seek advice from an ecological consultant instead.

The Church of England's Net Zero Programme would like to thank

the National Bat Helpline

for all their support in developing this guide for Demonstrator Churches.

What action does your church need to take?

1. As you develop your net zero solutions and your plan your works

It is important to consider the potential for the presence of bats from the outset and to contact Natural England as soon as you know where disruptive work might take place, or in other words, as soon as you have some specific net zero solutions your church is deciding between.

This is particularly important because:

1. We want to see as many Demonstrator Churches as possible reaching your new net zero status by December 2025 so that your journey can demonstrate to other churches ahead of our ambitious National 2030 Carbon Net Zero aim.
2. Many of you will be concerned to implement any new heating solution before winter.
3. The findings on bats may be relevant to other project funders too and have steps they want you to take, particularly statutory or lottery funders.

Natural England will need to know the full scope of works planned to be delivered before they would normally deliver an official survey and offer your project advice. However, in some cases, even conducting more intensive technical surveys could disrupt a roost.

We also know that both Net Zero Capital Projects, and the window for conducting bat surveys can mean that it takes time to book the bat survey you need, and that this, and the findings, can impact on the capital works delivery schedule, which you might be developing in your planning stage

While this is not always the case, scheduling disruptive works for Autumn or Spring is likely to minimise disruption to any bats that might be present. Bat surveys are typically conducted in summer as bats are most active at this time and evidence of their presence most easily found. In terms of scheduling works, a summer roost is likely to be a maternity roost with juvenile bats present which should not be disturbed. A winter roost, while less active, indicates the presence of hibernating bats, which are also important not to disturb.

As you develop your project, and consider the right net zero solution for your church, please carefully review Natural England's advice leaflet, [Bats, Churches and Net Zero](#). This document helpfully explains the risks associated with certain kinds of disruption likely to impact a net zero carbon project, with the following types of work being particularly disruptive for any bats in your church:

1. Extensive drilling or activities which cause the space to vibrate. This could be at the main implementation of your net zero project, or while conducting investigative work
2. Extensive use of torches or use of bright lights, either while conducting investigative work or delivering your chosen net zero project.

The following net zero activities might be more likely to affect your "Quick Wins" and/or your church's capital programme of works than the above:

- Any roofing works
- Altering ceilings in any way
- Altering lighting, for example, changing to motion sensors
- Fixing broken windows/ window fastenings
- Changes or additions to walls, for example, new heaters, drapes or wall hangings or the introduction of glass or otherwise zoning activities
- Draft exclusion works, for example fixing gaps in doorways, or adding glass draft lobbies
- Installing insulation.
- Changes to the floors Lifting up floors, for example for underfloor heating, or extensive movement of pews.

Please note that this list is not exhaustive.

2. After you've developed a fully specified schedule of works and before works start

Your church will need a formal bat survey and support from Natural England via the National Bat Helpline, or to follow their specific advice.

The most effective way of considering the impact of planned works on bats is to organise a bat survey. As soon as your stage one preparatory grant/ your stage two capital works project is planned and sufficiently designed to fully understand the scope of works that will take place, **your church needs to contact Natural England via the National Bat Helpline as soon as possible.**

At the earliest appropriate moment, please contact Natural England via the National Bat Helpline to see if your church is eligible for free bat advice;

- Find out more here: <https://www.bats.org.uk/advice/im-working-on-a-building-with-bats/getting-personalised-advice/free-advice-service-for-places-of-worship-in-england>
- You can call **0345 1300 228** or complete a roost visit request form from <https://cdn.bats.org.uk/uploads/pdf/Advice/Church-Roost-Visit-Request-Form.doc> and email to enquiries@bats.org.uk

What does help from the National Bat Helpline look like?

Receiving advice from the National Bat Helpline typically follows these steps:

1. A visit to your place of worship from a Volunteer Bat Roost Visitor working on behalf of Natural England.
2. The volunteer will then submit their report to the Helpline who will issue a statutory advice letter on behalf of Natural England, which you will need before proceeding with the capital works.
3. The letter will advise on how to plan your works to protect bats and their roosts from potential harm and ensure that you don't inadvertently breach the strict laws protecting bats. You can expect to receive advice about bat friendly timings, methodology and materials.

In some cases, the planned works may fall outside of the scope of Natural England's free advice service and you may need a licence from Natural England. In this case, you will need to engage an ecological consultant, as such licences cannot be obtained under the free advice service. In this scenario, please contact <https://cieem.net/> to find an appropriate ecological consultant, noting that the cost of an ecological consultant required to enable your net zero works to go ahead is an eligible use of a portion of your Demonstrator Church cash grant.

What happens if we are already aware of bats roosting in your church?

Perhaps your church has already conducted a bat survey, either formally or informally, or you have embraced their presence as part of your eco church journey. Where this is the case, please collate and share as much information as you have been able to gather about the bats that are present, for example:

- Where are the bats located? How do these locations relate to the locations of planned/ potential works?
- Where any entrance/ exit points? How do these relate to the locations of planned/ potential works?
- Are you aware of the size of the roost?
- When have you observed/ been aware that bats are present in your church?
- What indicators have you observed? For example, you may have noticed droppings rather than specifically observed any bats.
- If known, what species have you observed?

This information, if you have it, can really help the National Bat Helpline to advise you more efficiently but is not a requirement.

It is also possible that your local bat group, may hold records about bats in your church which may similarly prove useful, so do consider reaching out to your local group, noting that bat groups are volunteer-led and may not have capacity to help you.

[Contact your local bat group - Support Bats - Bat Conservation Trust.](#)

Can your church undertake its own bat survey?

Your church might be considering ways to reduce costs or conduct activities in support of wildlife connected to your church as part of eco church. While there is no reason why your church cannot conduct an amateur bat survey, or work with your local amateur bat group, the law still requires that you contact the National Bat Helpline for official guidance. Therefore, if you choose to conduct your own bat survey anyway, **you must still contact the National Bat Helpline before starting works.** Here are some pointers for your church, if you are considering conducting your own bat surveillance:

1. Here is an official Bats in Churches leaflet with the guidance on recording church bats <https://batsinchurches.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/BiC-Legacy-Monitoring-Your-Church-Web-FINAL.pdf> and here are some guidance videos too [eLearning Portal - Bats In Churches](#).
2. You can purchase a bat listening device for around £80 or you might be able to borrow one from your local bat conservation group.
3. You can place clean paper on the floor to be certain there are no bat droppings.
4. Be sure that your church is surveyed at dawn and dusk.
5. Your local bat group may hold bat records for your church which may help when deciding if your church has bats or not, and could help inform further surveys. [Contact your local bat group - Support Bats - Bat Conservation Trust](#).
6. A local recognised wildlife group or your local authority conservation officer may have capacity to work with you conduct a survey instead.

What happens after the bat survey has taken place?

If your church has taken out a careful bat survey, and a bat is found prior to the delivery of the capital project, the project must be designed and delivered to protect the bats so that the works can proceed with minimal disruption to the bats as possible. This may mean carrying out the works at a specific time of year, under the supervision of a licenced ecologist, or for example, half the roof could be isolated while works take place in the other half. Or other plans to protect the bats can be made.

What happens if bats are found during our Demonstrator capital works?

This will depend on whether bat due diligence took place or not.

1. ...despite not pre-identifying the presence of bats in your formal survey

If despite a careful survey, works start and a bat is found, all works should pause, and ensure the bat is not in danger. Contact the Natural England via the National Bat Helpline as soon as possible to ensure bat welfare is taken care of, and advice on how to proceed with the works is sought. Even if the project were unable to proceed it is extremely unlikely we would consider moving to claw back Demonstrator grant funds (unless as yet unspent).

2. ... and we did not conduct any bat due diligence or contact the National Bat helpline no bat due diligence has been conducted

If a church were to find even one bat present when they hadn't conducted a survey, works would have to stop immediately, and bat welfare is taken care of by contacting Natural England via the National Bat Helpline. This might mean returning the church to its former condition and discontinuing the Demonstrator Church project. Continuing works once you have found a bat can be a criminal offence. The project would be stopped. If a way forward wasn't found, we would have to consider clawing back the grant monies paid out already. Your church could be subject to a fine too.