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Preliminary Building Assessment – Bats, Barn Owls & Breeding Birds

Bleach Green Paddock, Whitehaven



Prepared for Richard J Lindsay
Calva Design.

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S.A.P Ecology & Environmental Ltd will submit any records of protected species to the appropriate biological records centre on an annual basis.

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1. Executive Summary

1.1 Summary

S.A.P Ecology & Environmental Ltd were contacted by Richard J Lindsay of Calva Design, regarding the proposed alterations and change of use of an old farm building at Bleach Green Paddock. A preliminary building assessment was commissioned to assess the property for use by bats, barn owl and breeding birds.

Features in the form of gaps at wall heads, slipped or broken slates, gaps within the walls and gaps at the ridge were recorded. These features have the potential to allow bats access to potential roost areas or be a roost area themselves. The number of potential roost features, their type and the environmental setting of the property has afforded building surveyed a moderate level of suitability to support roosting bats.

The proposed alteration works will result in a negative impact to bats if roosts are present, therefore further survey is required to confirm/deny bat presence, roost type and species. The proposed works will not have any effect on commuting and feeding opportunities within the surrounding area.

There was evidence to suggest a barn owl are using the property as a roost as 60 owl pellets were found on the ground floor. Seven disused swallow nests were recorded within the property.

A desk study was completed which highlighted no known records of bats and three records of Barn owl within 1km of the property.

1.2 Recommendations

-  **Bats:** It is recommended that a minimum of two activity surveys are undertaken on the property during the bat active period (May – September inclusive);
-  **Barn Owl:** Barn owl can establish nests during any month; therefore, a pre-works check is required to confirm presence/absence of breeding activity (recommended within 48 hours);
-  **Breeding birds:** If works are to be carried out during the breeding bird season (March – August, inclusive), a breeding bird check should be undertaken no more than 48 hours prior to works commencing. If breeding birds are found, works will need to be postponed until birds have fledged.

2. Introduction

2.1 Project background

S.A.P Ecology and Environmental Ltd were contacted by Richard J Lindsay of Calva Design, on behalf of their client who proposes to renovate the existing barn into a residential dwelling. The proposals are currently in the planning stage. The building will be referred to as the 'property' in the remainder of the document.

The property is located at grid reference NX98334 19288, situated on the edge of a housing estate approximately 1.5 km from the centre of the Whitehaven town (figure 1). The surrounding area is comprised of residential housing, recreational grounds, farmland used for grazing livestock and agricultural crops. There is a belt of mixed deciduous woodland immediately to the north, running east to west of the property.

2.2 Project brief

S.A.P Ecology & Environmental Ltd were commissioned to carry out a preliminary building assessment of the property. The brief was to:

- ✪ Conduct a ground level internal/external inspection of Bleach Green Farm barn building, during which a licenced ecologist will:
 - ✪ Look both internally and externally for bat feeding signs, signs of bats and bats themselves;
 - ✪ Inspect any cavities present within the roof and wall structure with an endoscope;
 - ✪ Confirm the level of suitability the property has to support roosting bats;
 - ✪ Take photographs of all potential access and egress points and map the locations to advise emergence/return to roost survey locations;
 - ✪ Carry out a full Barn Owl survey of the property;
 - ✪ Record all birds' nests found on the property;
- ✪ Produce a detailed report of the preliminary building assessment outlining relevant methodologies, results and any legal and planning policy issues and our recommendations for how these may be overcome;
- ✪ The report will highlight any ecological constraints and our recommendations for how to overcome these;
- ✪ The report to be supported by appropriate digitised mapping.

3. Methodology

3.1 Desk Study

Biological records within 1km of the property were checked using public records and compared with the Cumbria Local Biodiversity Action Plan (2009). The S.A.P Ecology & Environmental bat roost database was also checked for known roosts within the local area.

3.2 Preliminary Building Assessment

The preliminary building assessment (PBA) was undertaken during daytime hours on the 28th of March 2025. The assessment comprised of both an internal and external building inspection to assess the level of suitability the property has to support roosting bats. The surveys were carried out with the aid of high-powered binoculars, a high-powered torch and an endoscope (Rigid CA100) to ensure that all accessible features could be adequately assessed.

The survey was conducted in line with the BCT Good Practice Guidelines, 4th edition (Collins, 2023).

External Inspection

A thorough external inspection was carried out to look for any signs of past or current use by roosting bats. As evidence of bats is not always easy to find on the external of a building, due to adverse and changing weather conditions, the inspection also recorded areas which may have the potential to support roosting bats. Specific attention was given to:

-  Any gaps in stonework and their internal structure;
-  Gaps at the wallheads and windows;
-  Gaps at lintels and soffits;
-  Gaps or crevices in ventilation;
-  Roof ridge and roofing slates.

Any areas which offered bat roosting potential were recorded and mapped to ensure adequate coverage for any required activity surveys.

Internal Inspection

Where considered safe to do so, the internal structure was entered and searched for areas which offered roosting potential and for evidence of bats and bats themselves. Within the building spaces specific attention was given to:

-  Any exposed beams and floor surfaces located below them;
-  Gaps within the internal roofing structure such as mortice/wood joints;
-  Tops of gable ends or dividing walls;
-  Internal structure of ridge;
-  Cavities in the wall and roof structure.

Where possible features were inspected with an endoscope. All potential roosting features, evidence of bats or bats themselves were recorded and compared to that which was found in the external inspection. This combined information can be used to advise any required activity surveys.

Barn owl field survey

Where it was considered safe to do so, the internal and external areas of all accessible buildings in the immediate area were searched for potential roosting/nesting Barn owls. This process includes:

- Assessing the current suitability of the entire site;
- Intensively searching all areas which could potentially be used by Barn owls;
- Searching for and mapping any Barn owl evidence such as pellets, feathers or nests.

3.3 Surveyors

The preliminary building assessment was undertaken on the 28th of March 2025 by Sarah Parkin BSc (Hons), Natural England Bat Licence number 2015-11580-CL5-CLS and Nick Gorman, assistant ecologist.

3.4 Limitations

The survey was undertaken at the correct time of year for this type of survey.

4. Results

4.1 Desk Study

The desk study highlighted no records of bats and three records of Barn owls within 1km of the property. The surrounding habitat is suitable to support a number of UK bat species.

4.2 Preliminary Building Assessment

The property is situated in a residential environment with farmland close by and consists of an original barn structure with two added extensions. The building (circa 1800's), is built of a combination of stone and brick which is showing deterioration with gaps, cracks and missing mortar with the roof being built of slate over batons (plate 1). Externally the main roof and extension roof are in poor condition with gaps/missing slates. Internally a lot of the original beams have been taken out to the floor upstairs.



Plate 1: Bleach Green Farm barn (SW aspect).

External Inspection

Several access/egress features were recorded that could provide bat roosting opportunities including gaps at the ridge (Plate 2), gaps/missing/lifted slates (Plate 3), gaps in coping stones (plate 4), gaps at wallhead (Plate 5 and 6), gaps in mortar (plate 7), cracks in walls (plate 8), gaps in broken windows (plate 9) and an exposed internal wall (plate 10).



Plate 2: Gaps at ridge (SE aspect)

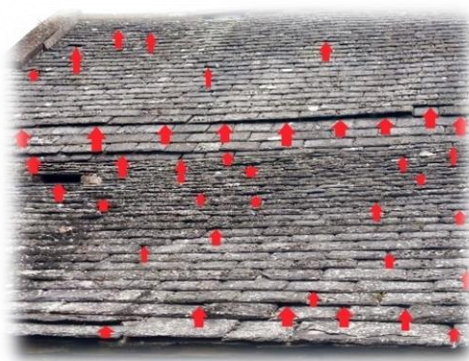


Plate 3: Gaps/lifted slates (W aspect).



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Plate 4: Gaps under coping stones.



Plate 5: Gaps at wallhead.



Plate 6: Gaps at wallhead.



Plate 7: Gaps in mortar.



Plate 8: Cracks in wall SW aspect).



Plate 9: Gap in broken skylight window (SE aspect).



Plate 10: Exposed internal wall E aspect).

Internal Inspection

The internal of the barn comprised of one primary space with two additional extensions erected to the west and north of the property. The internal roof batons are in good condition, however there is no lining present in the primary roof area and timbers have been removed from this space (plate 11). All doors are kept closed however there is access through air vents and arrow loops (plates 12). The internal walls are in good condition with the wallheads being well-sealed. The roof of both extensions shows a higher rate of deterioration, with no roof lining or lime mortar (plate 13). Swallow (*Hirundo rustica*) nests were found in the northern and western extension on the roof timbers (plate 14), however these were inactive at the time of the survey.



Plate 11: Barn 1 interior, showing removed timbers.



Plate 12: Air vents



Plate 13: Interior extension roof.



Plate 14: Swallow nests.

4.3 Barn owl Survey

Where safe to do so, all aspects of the property were systematically inspected looking for evidence of Barn owl (*T. alba*) and potential for any roosting/nesting locations. The exterior of each building was walked followed by a detailed search of the internal of each building. Approximately 60 Barn owl pellets were recorded at the southern aspect of barn near to the dividing wall of the neighbouring property (plates 15 and 16). The condition of the pellets suggests they were deposited within 7 days and up to three months of the date of survey. No further evidence of Barn owls such as nesting material was recorded within the property or in any of the other surrounding buildings.



Plate 15: Barn owl pellets on barn floor.



Plate 16: Barn owl pellets on barn floor.

5. Discussion & relevant legislation

5.1 Preliminary Building Assessment Summary

The property is surrounded by residential housing; farmland used for grazing livestock and agricultural crops with other residential and commercial properties nearby. The presence of woodlands, within the immediate surrounding provides excellent foraging and commuting habitat for a number of UK bat species. The presence of other buildings and trees within the vicinity also provide bats with additional roosting opportunities.

No direct evidence of bats was recorded within the interior or exterior of the property during the Preliminary Building Assessment (PBA), however several access/egress features were recorded, including missing/slipped slate, at the wallheads, in the mortar, cavities in the walls, gaps under the ridge and ventilation holes. These features could allow bats to access potential roost sites or be a roost location themselves.

Based upon the results of the preliminary building assessment, when considered in conjunction with the suitability of the surrounding environment and previous survey results, the property has been assigned a **moderate** level of suitability to support roosting bats.

Evidence of Barn owl was recorded with approximately 60 owl pellets recorded inside the property on the floors and on what remained of the upper floor. No additional evidence of Barn owl was recorded either within the property and the surrounding buildings were not accessible at the time of survey. It is likely that the pellets recorded were deposited by an individual owl which is using the property to roost. There is the potential that the remaining section of upper floor could become a suitable nest site, if the individual finds a mate.

The inside of the barn is easily accessible, as was evident by the number of disused swallow nests found within. It is likely that the swallows will return in subsequent years, therefore any proposed works should happen outside of the breeding bird season to limit impact on that species.

5.2 Protected Species

Bats

All bat species in the UK are protected from killing, injury and roost disturbance by both national and international law, in the form of the Wildlife and Countryside act (1981) as amended. In England, bats are also protected under The Conservation (Natural Habitats &c) (Amendment) Regulations 2007. The legislation that is in place makes it an offence to:

-  Intentionally capture, injure or kill a bat;
-  Intentionally disturb a bat which will likely:
 - Impair its ability to survive, breed, reproduce or rear its young;
 - Impair its ability to hibernate or migrate, or;
 - Affect the local distribution or abundance of the species.
-  Intentionally or recklessly disturb a bat roost;
-  Intentionally or recklessly obstruct access to a roost;
-  Damage or destroy a resting place or breeding site;
-  Keep, transport, sell or exchange any live or dead bat or part of.

Barn owl

Barn owls are afforded a level of protection whilst breeding that extends beyond that of other bird species. They are protected from killing, injury or capture under Schedule 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside act (1981) as amended. In summary the legislation makes it an offense to:

-  Intentionally kill, injure or take a barn owl;
-  Intentionally take or destroy an egg of a barn owl;
-  Intentionally or recklessly disturb a barn owl while it is in or on a nest containing eggs or young;
-  Intentionally or recklessly disturb dependant young of a barn owl.

Barn owls have been recorded to breed and nest within every month of the year; therefore, timing of works can be difficult and if a nest site has been identified, a pre- works check, regardless of the time of year, is recommended.

Birds

All birds, their nests and their eggs are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended).

Care should be taken to ensure that no birds are present during the works and that no harm comes to any nest, eggs or nesting birds.

6. Potential Ecological Issues, Impact Assessment & Recommendations

6.1 Bats

The property has been assigned a moderate level of suitability to support roosting bats.

6.2 Barn Owl and Breeding Bird Survey

Evidence of Barn owls was recorded during the preliminary building assessment inside the property.

Disused bird nests were recorded in the property.

6.3 Impact Assessment & Recommendations

Bats

Considering the results of the preliminary building assessment, the proposed development of the property may result in a negative impact on bats. Further survey is required.

In the year prior to development, it is recommended that a minimum of two activity surveys be carried out on each building within the property during the bat activity season (May-September inclusive). These surveys will aim to confirm whether bats are using any of the features highlighted to roost, and if so in what capacity. The required surveys will take the form of dusk emergence surveys.

The proposed development will not have any impact on the surrounding environment and therefore it is not considered that these proposals will have any effect on commuting or foraging bats.

Barn owl

There was evidence of Barn owl use within the property with approximately 60 barn owl pellets found during the inspection. As barn owls can establish nest sites at any time of the year it is recommended that a site check be carried out prior to works commencing to confirm if breeding is taking place. If breeding owls are found, works will need to be postponed until birds have fledged and appropriate buffer zones applied.

Breeding Birds

A total of seven nests (inactive at time of survey) was recorded during the survey. It is recommended that if works are to be undertaken during the breeding bird season (March – August, inclusive) a breeding bird check for nesting birds be undertaken by an ecologist prior to works commencing. If breeding birds are found, works will need to be postponed until birds have fledged and appropriate buffer zones applied.

6.4 Further Survey

Bat activity surveys are required to confirm the current use of the buildings and by what species. Surveys are only valid for a limited amount of time (18 months) therefore it is recommended that surveys are completed in the year prior to development.

7. Conclusion

Recommendations have been made for further bat surveys of the property; these surveys will help to provide an accurate assessment of the potential impact to bats.

In relation to breeding birds, for standard species a breeding bird check should be undertaken (no more than two days prior to works). If outside the breeding season (March – August inclusive) a barn owl check only will need to be performed prior to works. If breeding birds or nesting Barn owl are found, works will need to be postponed until the young have naturally fledged.

Subject to the recommendations within this report being followed, the proposed works should be compliant with relevant legislation and planning policy regarding protected species.

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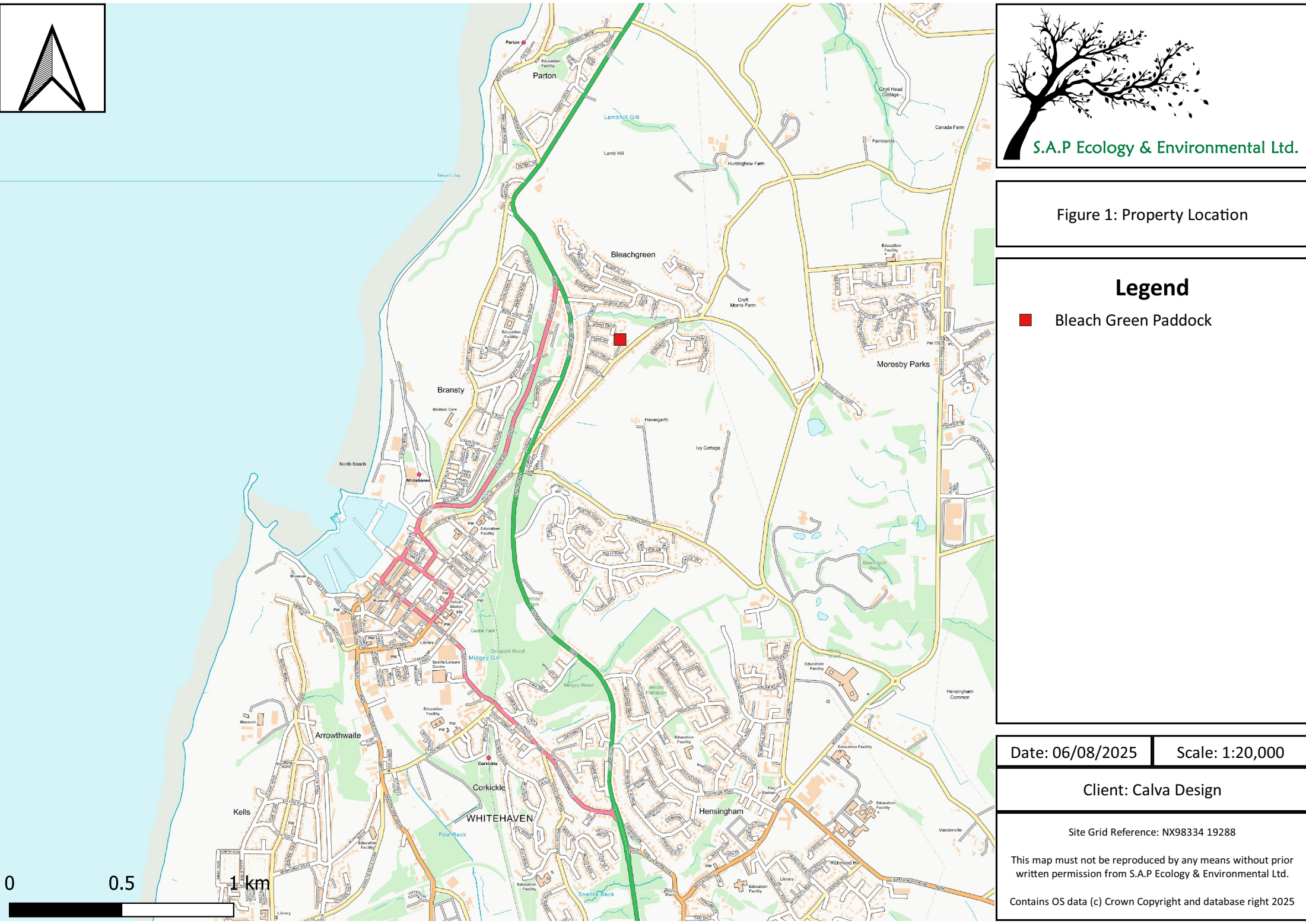


Figure 1: Property Location

Legend

■ Bleach Green Paddock

Date: 06/08/2025	Scale: 1:20,000
Client: Calva Design	
Site Grid Reference: NX98334 19288	
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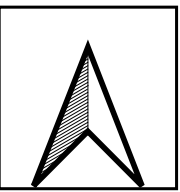
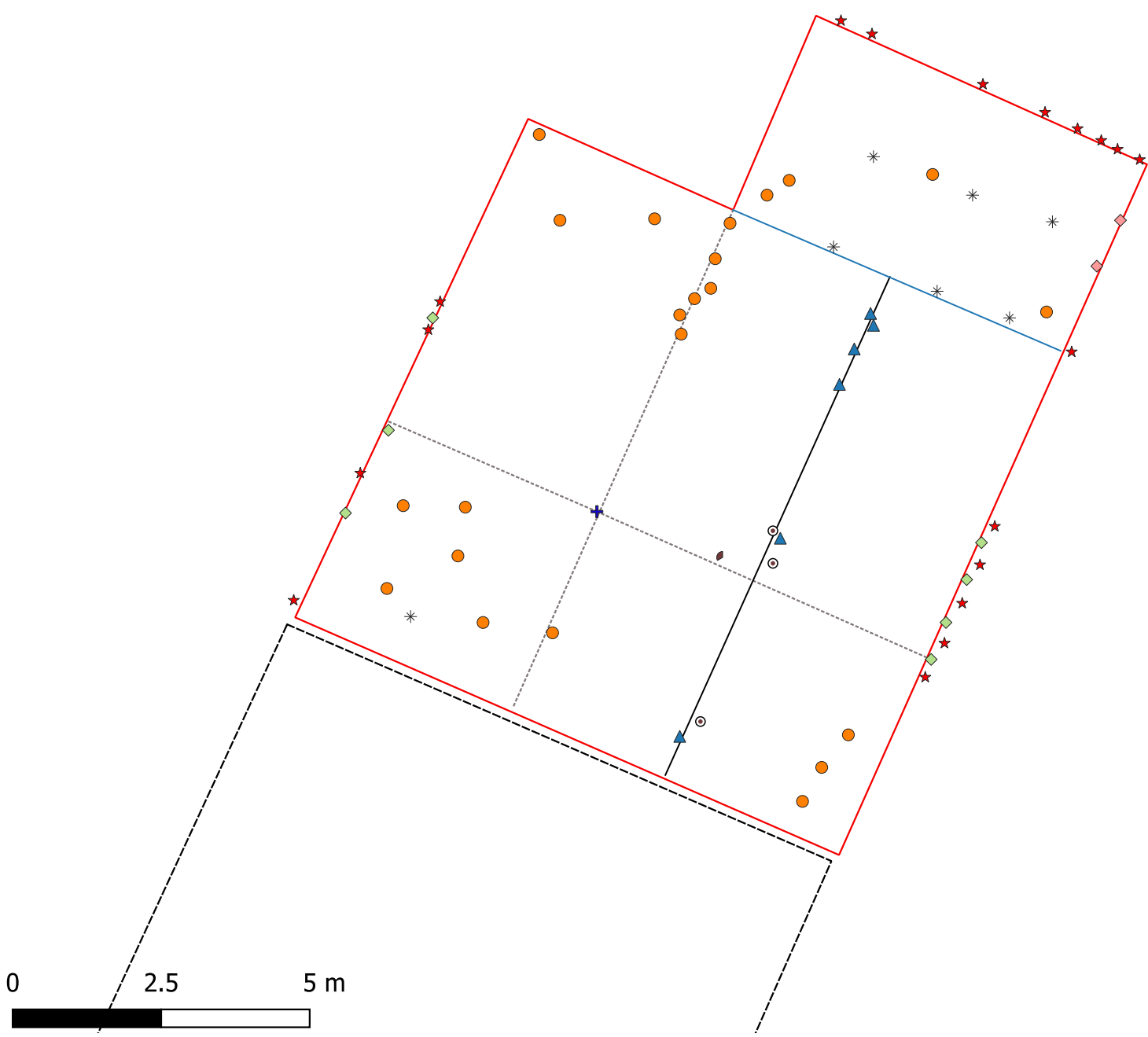


Figure 2: Internal/External Survey Results



Legend

- Property Outline
- Adjoining Building

Roof features

- Roof ridge
- Roof edge
- Internal wall

Internal Survey Results

- Barn owl pellets
- Splash
- Birds nest

External Survey Results

- Ridge gap
- Lifted/slipped slates
- Gap at wallhead
- Broken skylight
- Missing mortar
- Crack

Date: 06/08/2025 Scale: 1:100

Client: Calva Design

Site Grid Reference: NX98334 19288

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