

BLOG: Councils, bats and planning

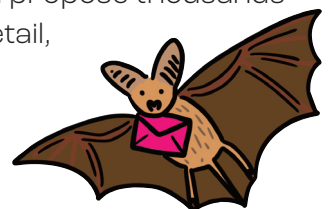


What do Councils need to consider when residents apply for planning permission? How do they take nature and the input of locals into consideration? **Simone Turner**, Ecology Officer at Hammersmith and Fulham Council (H&F) uncovers some of these details in the below interview.



What sorts of applications for developments do you receive at the council?

We receive a wide range of planning applications, varying from small scale householder applications to major schemes which can cover many hectares of land. The smallest of these include the replacement of single glazed windows to double glazed. Other small scale householder applications include building small extensions for existing properties. Meanwhile some of our largest include redevelopment schemes which propose thousands of new homes. These schemes often also propose new commercial, retail, entertainment and green spaces.



How do you decide whether someone needs to carry out bat surveys as part of their application?

All applications are assessed for compliance with both national and local policies, including our Local Plan Policy OS4 on Nature Conservation and the Biodiversity Policy in the London Plan (Policy G6) which require the protection and conservation of priority species such as bats. Deciding whether someone needs to carry out bat or other protected species surveys depends on a multitude of factors. Is part of a building that could hold roost space being demolished? Will there be additional lighting outside of daylight hours? Have there been records of bats in the local area? Is the surrounding area suitable for commuting or as foraging space? These are some of the questions we ask as we assess an application.



Where there is potential for bats or other protected species to be affected, we require that the applicant completes protected species surveys and acts on resulting recommendations before commencing works.

What sort of bat evidence does the council look for when assessing applications/addressing concerns from residents?

We assess all planning applications for their potential to impact bats. We follow Government guidance to assess where protected species are likely to be present and when surveys should be carried out, as well as utilising our own professional experience as Ecologists.

Where there is reasonable likelihood for bats or their roost space to be affected, we require that the applicant completes a protected species survey through qualified ecologists and then acts on their recommendations.



As part of H&F's commitment to doing things with residents, not to them, we welcome residents' feedback and concerns. Flagging a bat sighting near a development could provide us a record where previously there were none. This gives us a greater understanding of where bats are in our borough and thus how we can safeguard their future. Another way to have your sightings recorded for national records, which is accessed by planning authorities, is by reporting a sighting to iRecord: <https://irecord.org.uk/>

Why is bat conservation (/nature/biodiversity) important to the council?

The climate and ecological emergency is one of the greatest collective challenges facing the planet. Human activity is destroying ecosystems and warming the planet with devastating impacts. That's why H&F has pioneered Climate & Ecological Action from the moment we declared a Climate and Ecological Emergency in 2019. Having set the ambitious goal of being a net zero carbon borough by 2030, we have created multiple streams of activity to help make this happen.





We want to provide a safe future for everyone who calls our borough home – including bats. We see bats as particularly important residents as they are ‘indicator species’. This means that changes in their population warns us when our environment is changing. Following this evidence, we can look for a cause and act on it before lasting damage is done.

What advice would you give to someone who might be concerned about the impact of a local development on bats?

Planning authorities have a legal obligation to consider whether bats are likely to be affected by any proposed development. Therefore, it is likely that they have considered the impact and acted where needed. However, if you are still concerned about the impact of a local development, it does not do any harm to flag this concern to your local authority.

The best way to reach your local planning authority about concerns you have would be to comment on the planning application. This can be done online or by sending in a letter. All the relevant information to do this should be available on a site notice. Alternatively, you could input the developments postcode on the following website (<https://www.gov.uk/search-register-planning-decisions>). This will take you to the responsible planning authority, and from there you should be able to find the planning application by either inputting its address or the application reference number which should be available on the site notice. Once you find the correct application, you can submit a comment.

Keep in mind that while developments can impact our bats in many ways, a well-designed development will provide new and improved opportunities for bats. This can include the creation of new roost spaces, safer commuting routes and more suitable habitat and foraging spaces.

Thank you, Simone!



This blog was produced for Project NightWatch as part of our guide to taking action for night-time wildlife. You can find the rest our guide at www.bats.org.uk/resources/nightwatch and more detailed guidance on considering bats as part of local developments on the Bat Conservation Trust website: www.bats.org.uk/advice