

Preliminary Ecological Assessment



Project: Trinity Fields School, Ystrad Mynach

Instructed by: Caerphilly County Borough Council

Reported by: Ecological Services Ltd
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Contents

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Site Description
- 1.2 Survey Constraints
- 1.3 Surveyor Experience

2. Desk Top Study

- 2.1 Protected Sites
- 2.2 Potential Impacts to Protected Sites

3. Phase 1 Survey

- 3.1 Habitats
- 3.2 Great Crested Newt
- 3.3 Dormouse
- 3.4 Bats
- 3.5 Otter
- 3.6 Badger
- 3.7 Birds
- 3.8 Reptiles & Amphibians

4. Recommendations and Mitigations

Appendix

Species List

Site Photo's

Habitat Map

Aerial View of Site Location

Building Descriptions

1. Introduction

Planning consent is being sought to create an extension on the south elevation of Trinity Fields School, Ystrad Mynach. The proposed development site is centred at ST1447793991. Current development proposals seek to create a new school building to the south of the current structure. The new building will be linked to the current building via a small corridor to the south east of the building, where pupils are currently dropped off for school. The site was originally surveyed in October 2020 with bat activity surveys competed in 2021. As development plans have progressed an additional parcel of land is now included within the site boundary.

The additional portion of land is directly east of the school boundary, adjacent to the A472 Caerphilly road roundabout and immediately north of the Penallta Rugby Football Club building.

This report will assess the potential for the land within the site boundary to support habitats and species and the implications that the development proposals could have on them.

1.1 Site Description

The proposed development site is generally flat and sits within the current school boundary. The site is located to the south of the town of Ystrad Mynach and is considered to be in a semi urban location. Housing is present immediately to the west with roads and Penatla RFC located to the east. A church and its associated grounds are present immediately to the north. An area of public open space and scattered trees with public footpaths are located to the south. An area of woodland is present to the south west of site.

In the wider area a college campus, centre of sporting excellence and hospital is present to the south. Residential housing is present to the west and north. The River Rhymney lies approximately 130m to the east of site at its closest point.

1.2 Survey Constraints

Full access was gained to all areas of the proposed development site. The original site visit was undertaken during October which is outside of the optimum time to undertake phase 1 habitat surveys. An updated site visit was completed on the 9th February 2023 to inspect a small additional parcel of land to the south east of the school. October and February are a sub-optimal time of year to undertake botanical surveys, however a broad assessment of habitat types was still possible.

Internal and external access into the building was possible during the 2020 survey visit.

1.3 <u>Surveyor Experience</u>

Aislinn Harris is a full member of Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM). Aislinn is an ecologist with 12 years experience undertaking a wide range of flora and fauna surveys. Aislinn is a licence bat worker with a current NRW survey licence (S085699-1).

All survey work is undertaken following JNCC Phase 1 Survey Guidelines and CIEEM Guidelines for Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (2013).

1.4 Previous Survey Work

ECUS Ltd were commissioned by Caerphilly County Borough Council in 2016 to complete bat surveys of Trinity Field School to support a proposed extension to the east elevation of the school building. Three bat activity surveys were completed on the building using 3 surveyors during each visit. Detailed survey methodology and findings can be found in the report 'Trinity Fields School, Ystrad Mynach, Caerphilly; Bat Survey Report' dated July 2016 by ECUS Ltd. A brief summary of the survey and findings is provided below:

- 26th May 2016 1 soprano pipistrelle bat emerged from the south facing gable apex to the south west of building, 1 soprano pipistrelle emerged from west facing gable to the south west of the building.
- **15th June 2016** 1 soprano pipistrelle bat returned to roost on the south facing gable apex to the south west of building.
- 1st July 2016 1 soprano pipistrelle bat emerged from the south facing gable apex to the south west of building

A small number of soprano pipistrelle bats were found to be using the south western area of the building as a day roost. The numbers observed in 2016 indicate the presence of male or non breeding female bat roosting use.

2. Desktop Study

A data search was undertaken via SEWBReC in 2021 for the proposed development site and surrounding area. A 2km buffer zone was searched and records returned within 500m of site are noted below:

- Records for the presence of Common Pipistrelle bat record of a grounded bat within the school itself,
- Records for the presence of Noctule Bat commuting / foraging directly over The school buildings,
- Records for the presence of Hedgehog closest approximately 160m away,
- Records for the presence of Otter closest approximately 170m away,
- Records for the presence of Badger closest approximately 380m away,
- Records for the presence of Common Lizard closest approximately 400m away,
- Records for the presence of Common Toad closest approximately 430m away,
- Numerous bird records including House Sparrow, Kingfisher, Bullfinch, Song Thrush and Dunnock.

Records of note returned for the rest of the buffer zone are detailed below:

- Bat roost records associated with the old Ystrad Mynach hospital which has since been demolished,
- Common Frog,
- Slow-worm,
- Brown Long-eared bat,
- Common Pipistrelle bat roost,
- Cuckoo

2.1 Protected Sites

A data search for species records was undertaken for the proposed development site and surrounding area. The search also considered statutory and non-statutory protected sites.

Statutory Protected Sites

There are no statutory designated sites within 2km of the proposed development site.

Non-Statutory Protected Sites

The proposed development site lies directly adjacent to Coed Mawr Site of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC). The SINC lies directly adjacent to the sports field to the south of the school but extends away to the west and south. There are a number of other SINC within the search area around the development site. The remaining SINC sites in the search area and an approximate distance from the development site are listed below:

- River Rhymney (149m)
- Victoria Road Slopes, Fleur De Lys (1364m)
- Cefn Hengoed Hillside, North of Hengoed (1706m)
- Penallta Meadows, West of Hengoed (1193m)
- Tredomen Tip Ponds, Nelson (1763m)
- Mynydd Eglwysilan, North of Senghenydd (1777m)
- Coed Penallta and Railway Line, Ystrad Mynach (777m)
- Tir-Twyn Woodlands, Ystrad Mynach (946m)
- Llanbradach Fawr Woodlands, North of Llanbradach (766m)
- Maesycwmmer Meadows, Maesycwmmer (1021m)
- Mynydd Bach Slopes, East of Llanbradach (1767m)
- Coed Mawr, North of Llanbradach (1258m)

There are a large number of Ancient Semi Natural Woodland (ASNW) sites within 2km of the proposed development site. Sections of the Coed Mawr SINC are designated ASNW. There is also an area of ASNW approximately 400m to the east of site along the A469 and approximately 400m to the west along the railway line. All other areas of ASNW are at least 500m away.

2.2 Potential Impacts to Protected Sites

The proposed development works will take place directly adjacent to the Coed Mawr SINC. Without appropriate mitigation measures during the construction works the habitat within the SINC could be negatively affected. The design of lighting will also

be important to ensure the adjacent mature habitat is not artificially lit once the construction works are completed.

Providing appropriate mitigation measures can be included within the proposed development an on site construction works, there is unlikely to be any negative effects to protected areas as part of the development.

3. Phase 1 Survey

3.1 Habitat

A walkover survey was completed **26th October 2021** which included all areas of the land within the proposed development site boundary. The grounds directly adjacent to the school building are used by the school for outdoor recreation. Access into the school grounds is via a **tarmac road** which leads into a large **parking area** to the east of the building. A small area of **semi improved grassland** and **ornamental shrub planting** is present directly in front of the drop off point for the school.

As the development proposals will only affect the southern elevation of the school, close attention was paid to the habitat in these areas. The school building has a large playground areas for use by pupils to the south west and west of the building. A small area is also used for gardening with 4 large **raised beds** and a large poly tunnel. **Ornamental shrub planting** is present to the south of the school to create smaller play areas and secluded seating spots. A wooden play house / shed and a wooden octagonal seating area are also present in the school grounds.

A **hedgerow** is present to the south east of the school along the boundary. The hedgerow is made up entirely of beech trees which have grown to about 3m in height. A large **metal chain link fence** forms the boundary to the south west of the school. A band of **semi improved grassland** is present along the boundary and scattered across the school grounds. The grassland is frequently mown making detailed species identification difficult but it was possible to identify yarrow, daisy, dandelion, ribwort plantain, creeping bent and annual meadow grass. **Scattered trees** are also present across the school grounds which are likely to have been planted as part of the soft landscaping when the school was built. A large number of ornamental trees are present but some at least are thought to be a species of birch.

As the development proposals have evolved an additional parcel of land to the east of the school is now proposed for inclusion within the development. A walkover survey of the additional parcel of land was completed on the **9th February 2023**. This portion of land is roughly rectangular in shape with the eastern long edge following the radius of the A472 roundabout. Central on this radius on the edge of the path which surrounds the roundabout sits a **telecommunication mast** and associated control boxes.

The southern and western boundary is a planted ornamental Dogwood strip approximately 2m wide and 1.5m high this is interspersed by ornamental planted Birch trees (19 in total). An area of cotoneaster planting is present to the north of the

ornamental planting. This area has been mapped as ornamental planting within the habitat map in Appendix 3. To the west of the ornamental planting is the school boundary **hedge** which is an ornamental evergreen hedgerow thought possibly to be a Quince species growing approximately 3m in height. To the north of the Dogwood strip is a section of Cotoneaster approximately 2m high and 1m in width in from the edge of the path. There are two Ash trees growing in the south west corner corner and a Hazel just north of there on the boundary.

The rest of the portion of land is short **species rich semi improved grassland** containing species such as; Ox-eye Daisy, Knapweed, Yarrow, Clover sp, Common Vetch, Creeping Cinquefoil, Wood Avens, Barren Strawberry and Yorkshire Fog amongst others. There are Scot's Pine trees (16 in total) planted closely together in three groups within the grassland at approximately 15-20ft in height, there are three further Scot's Pines planted centrally in the western Dogwood strip.

3.2 Great Crested Newts

Great crested newts (*Triturus cristatus*) are a European protected species and are protected under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulation 2017. In summary, they are protected from:

- Deliberate capture, killing and injuring,
- Deliberate disturbance of a breeding site or resting place,
- Deliberate taking or destroying of eggs,
- Damage or destruction of a breeding site or resting place.

Great crested newts (GCN) are listed on schedule 5 of The Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 which protects them from intentional or reckless disturbance or obstruction when using a structure or place for shelter and / or protection. It is also an offence to sell, offer or expose for sale a great crested newt. Great crested newt and common toad are listed in section 7 of the Environment (Wales) Act 2016 which makes them key species to sustain and improve biodiversity.

The closest record for the presence of Great Crested Newt (GCN) is approximately 1.6km away from the proposed development site.

There are no waterbodies present within the site boundary and none visible within 500m of the site when viewing aerial photography. The vast majority of land within the site is considered unsuitable for use by such species. The well mown grassland, buildings, tarmac footpaths and car parking areas provide limited cover from predation or foraging habitat. Given the lack of records and suitable water bodies in

close proximity to site it is thought highly unlikely that GCN are present. No further recommendations are made for this species.

3.3 Dormice

The dormouse (*Muscardinus avellanarius*) is a European protected species and is protected under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017. In summary, they are protected from:

- Deliberate capture, killing and injuring,
- Deliberate disturbance of a breeding site or resting place,
- Damage or destruction of a breeding site or resting place.

Dormouse are listed on schedule 5 of The Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 which protects them from intentional or reckless disturbance or obstruction when using a structure or place for shelter and / or protection. It is also an offence to sell, offer or expose for sale a native dormouse. Dormouse is listed in section 7 of the Environment (Wales) Act 2016 which makes them a key species to sustain and improve biodiversity.

The closest record for the presence of dormice is approximately 2.2km away from the proposed development site. The record is for a dormouse gnawed nut.

The habitats within the proposed development site is considered to have very negligible potential for use by dormice. Whilst there is woodland adjacent to the development site, it will not be impacted on as part of the development proposals. It is considered highly unlikely that dormouse are present within the site boundary. No further surveys are recommended for this species.

3.4 <u>Bats</u>

All British bats are a European protected species and are protected under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulation 2017. In summary, they are protected from:

- Deliberate capture, killing and injuring,
- Deliberate disturbance of a breeding site or resting place,
- Damage or destruction of a breeding site or resting place.

Schedule 5 of The Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981) also protects all species of British bat and their roosting locations. British bats are protected from intentional or reckless disturbance and or obstruction of their roosting places. Barbastelle, bechstein, noctule, brown long eared, common pipistrelle, soprano pipistrelle,

greater horseshoe and lesser horseshoe bats are also listed in section 7 of the Environment (Wales) Act 2016 which makes them a key species to sustain and improve biodiversity.

There are a number of bat records for the school itself. A common pipistrelle bat was found within the school building in 2007. Ecus Ltd confirmed 2 soprano pipistrelle bats roosting within the school during activity surveys in 2016. There are other bat roost and foraging records within 500m of the development site.

A detailed building description is provided in Appendix 5. A 1FF bat box was noted on the south facing gable end of the building during the site visit. The building is assessed as having low potential for use by roosting bats. However there are confirmed bat roost records in the south western corner of the building directly where the new extension is proposed. **Bat activity surveys are recommended to support the development proposals.**

The building within the site are assessed as having low potential to support roosting bats. In line with the BCT Survey Guidelines (2016) buildings assessed as having low potential for use by bats require activity surveys. A suite of activity surveys are recommended which focus on the areas of the building which will be directly impacted on by the proposed extension.

3.5 Otters

The Common Otter (*Lutra lutra*) is a European protected species and is protected under the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017. In summary, they are protected from:

- Deliberate capture, killing and injuring,
- Deliberate disturbance of a breeding site or resting place,
- Damage or destruction of a breeding site or resting place.

Otter are listed on schedule 5 of The Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 which protects them from intentional or reckless disturbance or obstruction when using a structure or place for shelter and / or protection. It is also an offence to sell, offer or expose for sale an otter. Otter is listed in section 7 of the Environment (Wales) Act 2016 which makes them a key species to sustain and improve biodiversity.

The closest record for the presence of Otter is approximately 170m away along the River Rhymney and is for otter signs. There are a number of other otter records within 1km of the proposed development site associated with the River Rhymney.

No evidence of mammal use within the site boundary was noted and the habitats on site are not considered to be suitable for use by otter for shelter or resting. No watercourses run through the development site or within close proximity to it. No further surveys are recommended for otter.

3.6 Badger

Badgers are protected under the Protection of Badgers Act 1992. In summary they are protected from:

- Taking, killing or injuring;
- Cruelty;
- Interfering with a badger sett;
- The selling and possession of badgers;
- Marking or ringing.

Badgers are also listed on schedule 6 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 as amended.

Badgers tend to have a variety of setts with different uses and functions within the territory for the family unit. In general there is usually a main sett which the family will use the most. There are then annex, subsidiary and or outlier setts which depending on family structures and environmental pressures may be used at different times of the year. As female Badgers tend to have their cubs over winter the disturbance and damage of badger setts is prohibited between December and June inclusive. NRW are the licensing body for any actions which may contravene the above legislation.

The closest recent record for the presence of Badger is for a road traffic collision approximately 380m from the proposed development site. No evidence of the presence of Badger, such as sett, latrine or digging, was noted during the site survey. The site is well used throughout the day by school pupils and the playing field is used by local residents. Given the open nature of the site and frequent human presence, it is considered unsuitable for use by badger apart from occasional commuting purposes and no further recommendations are made.

3.7 Birds

All breeding birds are protected under schedule 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981) as amended. Under this Act it is an offence to:

 Intentionally take, damage or destroy the nest of any wild bird while it is in use or being built. Intentionally take or destroy the egg of any wild bird.

Enhanced protection is afforded to species listed on Schedule 1 of the Act, this additional protection makes it an offence to:

• Intentionally or recklessly disturb any wild bird listed on Schedule 1 while it is nest building, or at a nest containing eggs or young, or disturb the dependent young of such a bird.

No birds nests were noted during the site visit. However the buildings and mature scattered trees all have the potential for nesting use during the summer months. Whilst no specific bird surveys are recommended, mitigation for the loss of nesting habitat must be provided.

3.8 Reptiles and Amphibians

Reptile such as the Slow-worm, Common Lizard, Adder and Grass Snake are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981(as amended). They are protected from killing, injuring and sale. In Wales Sand Lizard, Smooth Snake, Adder, Grass Snake, Slow-worm and Common Lizard are listed in section 7 of the Environment (Wales) Act 2016 which makes them a key species to sustain and improve biodiversity.

The closest amphibian record to site is for Common Toad approximately 430m away. The closest reptile record is for Common Lizard approximately 870m away from the site.

The majority of the site is felt to have negligible potential for use by reptiles. The buildings, tarmac and closely mown grassland areas provide very little foraging habitat or shelter from predation. The tree lines, hedgerow and ornamental shrub planting around the periphery of the site do have some potential for use by reptiles during the summer and winter months. Species such as slow worm may use the areas in small numbers for overwintering, foraging and commuting purposes. Given the small amount of suitable habitat within the site boundary it is assumed that only small numbers of reptiles would be present.

Reptile surveys are not recommended in this instance due to the frequent use of the school grounds and public access to the remains areas within the proposed site boundary. Any artificial refugia would be disturbed frequently putting any animals sheltering under it at risk and possibly negatively skewing any survey results. Instead it is recommended that a small number of common reptile species are assumed to be present within the site boundary. Any future development proposals will require a reptile mitigation strategy

4. Recommendations and Mitigation

It is proposed to create a new extension to the south of the current school building. The extension will tie into the south eastern end of the building and the current drop off / entrance into the school building.

The current development proposals are to create a new section of the school building with a link corridor to the current building. The extension will sit to the south of the current building where pupils are dropped off to school at present. The aim of a preliminary ecological appraisal is to help inform the design process for the development and flag any further surveys that could be required.

The development proposals could negatively affect nesting birds, reptiles and bats within the local area and result in overall habitat loss. No direct impacts to the current identified bat roost location on the southern elevation of the school will be experienced. However indirect impacts via lighting could be experienced. Recommendations are made below to help reduce and avoid any negative impacts that the development proposals may have:

- The building is known to support a small number of roosting bats as found during bat surveys in 2016. A roost location was confirmed to the south west of the building where part of the new extension will be created.
- Bat activity surveys were complete by Ecological Services Ltd in 2021. The bat
 activity surveys confirmed the presence of a Common Pipistrelle bat roost in the
 south western extension of the building. A bat was seen to emerge from an area
 of timber cladding on the western aspect of the south elevation during two June
 activity surveys.
- The buildings and mature scattered trees on site have the potential for use by nesting birds. Any building demolition and tree removal must be completed outside of the bird nesting season of March to August inclusive. If this is not achievable an ecologist must inspect any trees or structures for active birds' nests prior to removal works beginning. If an active nest is identified a buffer zone of 5m around the nest must be observed until the chicks have fledged. Only then can the vegetation be removed.
- Careful consideration must be given to the use of lighting within the site as this
 can adversely affect activity by a variety of fauna, particularly foraging bats,
 nesting birds and invertebrates. Light spillage into adjacent semi-natural habitats
 must be avoided and brightness kept to the lowest permissible level in the areas
 adjacent to such habitats. All external lighting must be motion activated and set to
 the lowest time to remain lit that is possible. This will avoid lights being left on
 over night.

- No additional external lighting will be provided on the western elevation of the new extension. This will help to reduce light spill onto the known bat roost location.
- Mature trees must be retained where possible as they provide a habitat type to a
 wide variety of flora and fauna. Any loss of mature trees within the site boundary
 will require replacement planting. A sapling is not and adequate replacement of a
 mature tree, it is recommended that at least 4 saplings for every mature tree lost
 is provided.

The Environment Act (Wales) 2016 places a duty on competent authorities such as Caerphilly County Borough Council to conserve and enhance biodiversity. The below bullet points are some simple measures that could be achieved to enhance the biodiversity of the site:

- A number of bird boxes could be used as part of any redevelopment proposals. A variety of integrated bird boxes built into the walls of any new buildings would offer nesting opportunities for birds where limited opportunities currently exist. The exact number, design and location will depend on the development proposals for the site.
- A number of bat boxes or integrated roosting features for bats designed into any new buildings within the site boundary could offer increased or improved roosting opportunities for bats. The exact number, design and location will depend on the development proposals for the site. Also such features must be over and above any requirements needed should bat use of the buildings be identified by bat activity surveys.
- Soft landscaping within proposed development site boundary would improve the biodiversity levels of the development site. Native species tree planting and hedgerow creation across the site would create diversity. As mature specimen planting as possible is recommended to ensure survival and reduce potential for vandalism. The creation of wildflower areas subject to low frequency cutting would also help to improve habitat diversity within the site
- A park is located to the south and south west of the school which is owned by Caerphilly County Borough Council. The provision of a barn owl box suitable for use within trees would be welcomed within the park. The elevations of the new building were not available at the time of writing this report but they unlikely to be suitable for a barn owl box. The revision of a barn owl box on a large mature tree would create additional roosting space for this species. Further work to identify a suitable tree and agree the location and maintenance will be required.

- Any fencing around the site will be hedgehog friendly in design. A friendly
 design is considered to allow the passage of small animals across the site.
 It should provide either a continuous gap between the bottom of the fence
 and ground of approximately 5cm or gaps cut a set distance along fencing.
- SUDs features will be required as part of any development proposals
 within the site boundary. SUDs features if carefully designed and
 engineered can be a biodiversity enhancement for a development site.
 Native plant species are recommended for inclusion in features. Also biorentention ponds and swales should be engineered to hold water for most
 of the year.

Appendix 1 - Species List

Common Name	Latin Name
Creeping buttercup	Ranunculus repens
Beech	Fagus sylvatica
Bramble	Rubus fruticosus agg
Birch sp	Betula sp
Ribwort Plantain	Plantago lanceolata
Rosebay willow herb	Chamerion angustifolium
Common nettle	Urtica dioica
Daisy	Bella perenis
False oat grass	Arrhenatherum elatius
Dandelion	Taraxacum egg.
Ivy	Hedra helix
Bent species	Agrostis sp
Clover species	Trifolium sp
Cocksfoot	Dactylis glomerata
Sycamore	Acer pseudoplantanus
Ribwort plantain	Plantago lanceolata
Annual Meadow grass	Poa annua
Creeping cinquefoil	Potential reptans
Birds foot Trefoil	Lotus corniculatus
Hop trefoil	Trifolium campestre
Yorkshire Fog	Holcus lanatus
Dove's-foot Crane's-bill	Geranium molle
Ox-eye Daisy	Leucanthemum vulgare
Common Knapweed	Centaurea nigra
Yarrow	Achillea millefolium
Common Vetch	Vicia sativa
Field Wood-rush	Luzula campestris
Barren Strawberry	Potentilla sterilis
Herb Robert	Geranium robertianum
Wood Avens	Geum urbanum
Cat's-ear	Hypochaeris radicata
Bird's-foot Trefoil	Lotus corniculatus
Broad-leaved Dock	Rumex obtusifolius

Appendix 2– Site Photographs



Access to school



Beech hedgerow south school boundary



Tarmac & vegetation to south east



Playground to south of school



Raised beds to south west of school



Wooden shed in school grounds



Internal view of school



Drop-off canopy



South facing gable to south east



Internal view of school



South east view of school



Overhang of south facing gable



Bat box on south facing gable wall



Example view of roof line



East facing pitch of southern extension

*09/02/2023 Additional plot of land



Tight fitting soffit boards



Facing west towards the school, Penallta RFC left of shot



Facing north west showing edge of roundabout.

Facing west Dogwood strip on left



Facing north Dogwood strip on left



Facing north Dogwood strip then Cotoneaster



Facing south showing edge of roundabout



Telecommunications mast

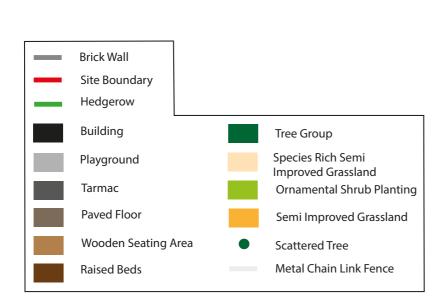
Appendix 3 - Habitat Map

TRINITY FIELDS SCHOOL, YSTRAD MYNACH

Habitat Map

February 2023





Appendix 4 - Aerial View of Site Location



Appendix 5 - Building Description

	Building Description	
School Building - External	Brick built single storey building with multiple pitched roof sections, building forms a rough figure of 8 shape with two internal courtyards that were not accessed during the site visit. A section of the roof to the east of the school building has been raised to two stories high but has no gable ends. The roof line is made from round clay tiles. Solar panels are present on the south facing elevation fo the roof line to the south east of the building. A number of roof lights are present across the building. A tiled roof canopy has been created to the south east of the school which extends	
	over the access road to create a dry area for school children to get in and out of vehicles. The canopy is has a tight fitting metal sheet ceiling. An extension is present to the south west of the building which has a south facing gable end. Verge protectors and a plastic barge board are present along the roof line. The roof is extended form the building walls by approximately 2m creating an overhang. The ceiling of the overhang is lined with wooden boarding.	
	Potential features suitable for bat use - Missing section of barge board on south gable end, dislodged piece of wooden panelling at south gable apex of overhang, roof line is generally tight but occasional slightly raised tiles around roof lights noted.	
School Building - Internal	No accessible roof space present. A suspended ceiling present throughout the building. Sections of building are open to the ridge line which has glazing along it allowing natural light into the building.	