



Wildlife Licencing Unit
NPWS
By email
wildlifelicence@npws.gov.ie

Our Ref: 220943
Your Ref:

19th December 2024

Re: 220943 PUNCH – Markievicz Bridge Repairs Sligo – Bat derogation licence application

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am applying for a bat derogation licence, on behalf of PUNCH Consulting Engineers, in relation to the structural and scour repairs, and vegetation removal of Markievicz Bridge, Bridge Street, Co. Sligo (IG Ref: G 69327 35947).

Background

MKO have been commissioned by PUNCH Consulting Engineers to carry out bat surveys to determine the presence of roosting bats within the Markievicz Bridge. The bridge, which is a protected structure located in the centre of Sligo Town, is in need of structural repair, vegetation removal and scour repairs to ensure its structural integrity.

A bat habitat appraisal and roost surveys were carried out on the bridge by MKO in 2024. The following points set out the main conclusions following the completion of the surveys:

- 3 species of bat were confirmed in proximity of the bridge. These included the soprano pipistrelle, common pipistrelle and Leisler's bat.
- An inspection of the bridge was not carried out due to the high water levels of the Garavogue River at the time of the surveys, and the health and safety concerns associated.
- One active roost was identified at the bridge. A small (6no.) soprano pipistrelle roost was discovered in a gap in the stonework underneath the second to northernmost arch of the bridge.
- A number of bats were observed foraging in proximity of the bridge, and around the bridge arches. A commuting corridor was identified along the northern shore of the river, with bats observed flying east towards the scrub and broadleaf trees located near the bridge.
- No evidence of a maternity roost was observed.

The focus of the repairs will be on the pier footings and the riverbed to extend the pier footings further below ground level to prevent future local scour affecting the structural integrity of the bridge, and to rehabilitate the channel bed in the vicinity of the bridge. Further to this, all vegetation will be removed from the bridge, and effected mortar joints repointed locally. No work will be carried out on the bat roost that was identified during surveys.

This derogation application exclusively refers to urgent repair works of the protected structure.

List of accompanying documents

- Baseline Bat Report
- Derogation Licence Application Form



- PUNCH Consulting Engineers Scope Extents

Preconditions Tests

The NPWS document, *Guidance on the Strict Protection of Certain Animal and Plant Species under the Habitats Directive in Ireland - National Parks and Wildlife Service Guidance Series 1 (2021)*, was reviewed before undertaking this derogation application. Article 16 of the Habitats Directive sets out three pre-conditions, all of which must be met before a derogation from the requirements of Article 12 or Article 13 of the Directive can be granted. These preconditions are also set out in Regulation 54 of the Regulations.

The preconditions are:

1. A reason(s) listed in Regulation 54 (a)-(e) applies
2. No satisfactory alternatives exist
3. Derogation would not be detrimental to the maintenance of a population(s) at a favourable conservation status.

It is believed that the pre-conditions for granting a derogation licence have been met, as follows:

Test 1 – Reasons for Seeking Derogation.

Regulation 54(2) (a)–(e) states that a derogation licence may be granted for any of the reasons listed (a) to (e). We are of the opinion that the following reasons apply:

- (c) In the interests of public health and public safety, or for other imperative reasons of overriding public interest, including those of a social or economic nature and beneficial consequences of primary importance for the environment.

The bridge an important structure that allows for traffic and pedestrian access to the centre of Sligo town. The bridge has been subject to erosion by the Garavogue River and is currently in a state of disrepair. Due to the extent of scour damage and high level of vegetation currently growing within the structure, the bridge will continue to deteriorate further and provide a public health and safety hazard should no structural repairs be undertaken.

Residual effects on bats, following mitigations, are not considered significant.

Test 2 – There is no Satisfactory Alternative

There are no alternatives to the structural works.

Do nothing scenario: While the bridge offers potential for roosting bats, it is currently in disrepair and will continue to deteriorate further without immediate intervention which will diminish the value of the bridge as a roosting resource.

Disturbance Avoidance: Mitigation by avoidance, by carrying out the works during the inactive bat season (November-March) has been considered, however all works will be required to be undertaken between the months of July and September, to coincide with the Inland Fisheries Ireland in-stream works window. Works during the bat activity season cannot be avoided.

Viable Option: Scour repair, vegetation removal and the mortar joint repointing of the bridge will be undertaken between the months of July and September. As this work is to be carried out during the bat activity season, a licenced ecologist will be present to oversee all works and to ensure that no work is carried out in proximity to the roost entrance. All mitigations proposed are described in the Baseline Bat Report provided. An Ecological Impact Assessment is being prepared to inform the planning application. No significant effects on bats are anticipated once the recommended mitigations are followed.

Test 3 – Favourable Conservation Status



In order to ensure the protection of bats under Regulation 54 (2) (a) of the Birds and Natural Habitats Directive, we are applying for the licence, in the interest of protecting wild fauna. To ensure no significant effects on bats occurs during works, a number of mitigation measures will be in place, as outlined in the Baseline Bat Report.

The licence has been applied for to ensure that, in the event that bats are found to be roosting in the bridge during the works, that they are appropriately cared for, and no potential for detrimental impacts on the local bat population exists. In addition, the current roost resource will be retained and avoided during the works. As a result, it is not anticipated that the works will impact the favourable conservation status of bats present within the site.

I hope that this is satisfactory for you to consider the grant of a derogation licence for these structural repair and vegetation removal works. Please do not hesitate to contact me for any further clarification.



David Culleton (B.Sc., M.Sc.)
MKO Bat Ecologist

