Menlo Castle Phase 4

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Introduction

MKO have been working with 7L Architects and Galway City Council on a project to stabilise and conserve the ruins of Menlo Castle. The works are essential to prevent further deterioration of the castle and its ultimate collapse. The site of the proposed works area is located on the banks of the River Corrib in Galway city (Grid reference: E128479, N227868). MKO have completed several ecological surveys and assessments since 2021 and have consulted extensively with NPWS regional staff and Galway City Council. The ruined castle is known to support a roost of lesser horseshoe bats, kestrels and barn owls.

Following the precautionary principle, it has been identified that Phase 4 of the works has the potential to cause disturbance to the roost of lesser horseshoe bats. Whilst no works are proposed on the spine wall, where the main roost entrance is located, repointing and stabilisation works are proposed on the adjacent interior and exterior southern elevation wall. In addition, a dusk survey carried out on the night of the 13th August 2024 identified both Soprano pipistrelles and Nathusius' pipistrelles activity around the area where the works are proposed. It is likely that they are roosting in this area.

This briefing note includes a brief description of the works proposed in this phase of the conservation works, the survey works that have been undertaken by MKO and the proposed mitigation that is designed to ensure that there will be no adverse effects on protected fauna.

Proposed Phase 4 Works

The proposed works associated with Phase four of the conservation of the castle will be focused on the southern elevation wall and will include: Rough racking and stone pinning of exposed wall tops and wall core, consolidation of voids evident to the walls at each level, and repair of displaced or loose stone, flaunching of the ruined, uneven wall heads along the wall tops using small flat stones and lime mortar, installation of limestone lintels to windows and fireplaces, repair of surviving stone window surrounds, using salvaged stone (where appropriate) and stone grafts to provide necessary stability. Loose or missing joints are to be raked out, pinned and pointed using lime and sand mortar. Stitching of cracks using stainless steel ties.

As described above, there will be no works on the spine wall where the lesser horseshoe are located and will only involve necessary minor works at the location where the pipistrelles could potentially be roosting.

Survey Results 2024

MKO carried a dusk survey on the night of the 13th of August 2024. Two licenced ecologists, assisted by two students, were equipped with active full spectrum bat detectors, Batlogger M (Elekon AG, Lucerne, Switzerland). The emergence survey focused on the interior and exterior southern elevation wall where the Phase 4 works are proposed to take place. One surveyor also had a visual of the known lesser horseshoe roost and another surveyor had a visual of the previously confirmed barn owl roost.

Lesser horseshoe bats were recorded emerging from the known main roost and using several other cavities for night roosting but none were observed in the area of the Phase 4 works. Five bats, confirmed to be a mixture of Soprano pipistrelle and Nathusius' pipistrelle bats were seen to be emerging from cavities on the interior, southern wall. This roosting location has been highlighted in the photo below.

In addition to the bats, four kestrels were observed and are still active within the site, an exact roost location could not be confirmed (likely eastern wall as per previous survey). A barn owl was also observed flying over the castle. The barn owl is believed to be utilising the previously installed nesting box located at the nearby derelict stable building as it did not emerge from western interior wall. Evidence of use of the nesting box in the form of whitewash and pellets were also observed on the night. Persistent screeching was heard after it left, indicating the presence of a second owl.

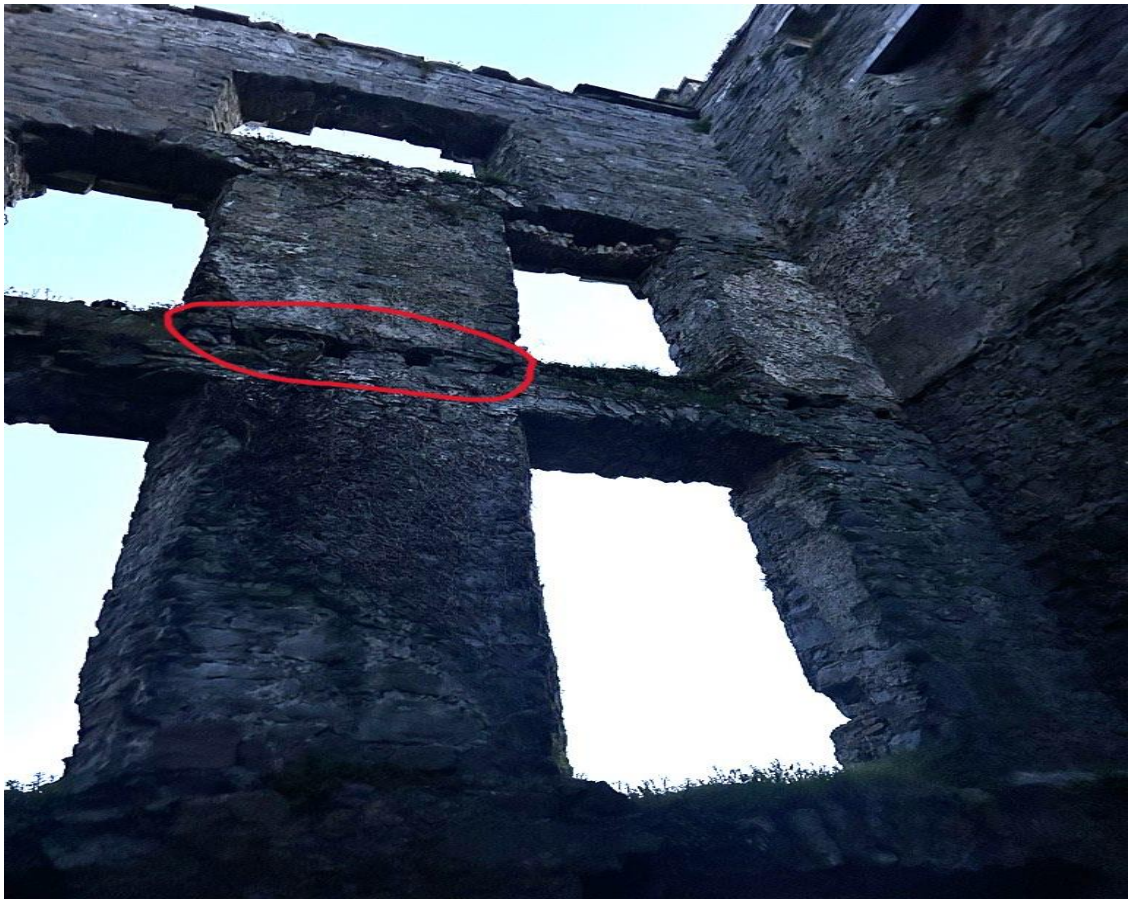

Plate 1 Pipistrelle spp. Roosting locations.

Plate 2 Confirmed pipistrelle spp. Roosting locations circled in blue

Mitigation Measures:

1. A precautionary bat derogation licence will be obtained from NPWS prior to works commencing on the structure.
2. A dusk bat survey has been carried out to determine where roosting bats are present and their potential exit points (as above).
3. Prior to the commencement of works, a toolbox talk will be undertaken to ensure that all site staff are fully aware of the sensitivities of the site.
4. No works will be undertaken on the spine wall where the entrance to the Lesser horseshoe roost is located, scaffolding in this area will be designed in such a way as to not block the roost.
5. Following the erection of the scaffolding, a pre-commencement endoscope and visual inspection survey will be carried out by a licenced ecologist, including inspection of all areas where maintenance is proposed, to search for roosting bats or evidence of roosting bats. Should roosting bats be found, no works will be undertaken in the vicinity to avoid potential disturbance.
6. The loss of potential roosting habitat within the castle will be minimised through the maintenance of as many suitable crevices in the stonework as possible.
7. The confirmed pipistrelle roosts will be marked for retention and avoided throughout the works.
8. All works will be undertaken outside the main period of bat activity (May to August inclusive).
9. No lighting options are proposed to illuminate the castle or woodland edge surrounding the works area. Potential lighting required to facilitate works within the castle will be reasonably managed, with all lighting turned off after working hours. Interior lighting will be directed away from any identified roosts.
10. Known barn owl and kestrel roost areas will be avoided throughout the works.