



Snowdonia National Park Authority's Guidelines for ecology reports relating to Bats and other UK and European Protected Species

How this document is organised

This guidance document is in three parts.

Part 1 deals with the background to the guidelines and considers why they are needed and who might make use of them. The context of the guidelines is also outlined, both in terms of Snowdonia National Park Authority's responsibilities, and also other published advice and guidance.

Part 2 outlines key issues about the format and contents of ecological reports.

Part 3 identifies relevant issues which may need consideration in certain types of projects or at certain times in a development project calendar.

Part 1

Background

This document is part of a series of advice notes and guidance documents for developers, planning agents, architects and ecological consultants. The document outlines minimum requirements of Snowdonia National Park Authority for ecology reports, in relation to bats and other UK and European protected species, submitted as part of planning applications.

Snowdonia National Park Authority's Guidelines for ecology reports are intended to be utilised on a case-by-case basis to guide individuals and agencies as to the information required to enable Snowdonia National Park Authority to make decisions about developments and their impacts on protected species.

Who this document is for

The document has been written to assist anyone involved in submitting and commenting on a planning application. It is expected that developers, planning agents, architects and ecological consultants will find the document particularly useful when preparing written reports for submission to Snowdonia National Park Authority.

Why this guidance is needed

- It is important that the Snowdonia National Park Authority is able to clearly demonstrate that it is fulfilling its requirements under Planning Policy Wales (Technical Advice Note 5 – Nature Conservation and Planning) and relevant legislation, and that requests for additional information are to help the Authority to discharge its legal duties
- Bat surveys, survey reports and mitigation proposals received by Snowdonia National Park Authority frequently do not provide sufficient information for Snowdonia National Park Authority staff to confidently determine planning proposals and to ensure no detrimental impact on the Favourable Conservation Status of any affected populations of bat in the short and long term.
- Recent evidence from the Snowdonia National Park Authority Bat Mitigation Pilot Project (Waring 2011) has shown that a number of basic issues are not being sufficiently addressed in documentation submitted as part of planning submissions. In addition, the Bat Mitigation Pilot Project showed that non-compliance in mitigation could, in many cases, have been avoided by adoption of more robust and comprehensive survey, mitigation and reporting techniques.
- There is a need for specific guidance that reflects the special nature of Snowdonia National Park (SNP) (e.g. the fact that certain bat species occur frequently in SNP, the opportunistic behaviour of some species, and the fact that certain types of development with particular implications also occur frequently within SNP; for example conversion of agricultural buildings and development associated with Listed Buildings).

- There is a need to show that Snowdonia National Park Authority requirements comply with national best practice guidance (e.g. 2007 Bat Conservation Trust Guidelines for Bat Surveys) with sufficient latitude to enable a clear rationale to be presented by the bat consultant/ecologist where survey, mitigation and reporting deviate from national best practice guidelines

Duty as a Competent Authority

Local planning authorities are “Competent Authorities” for the purposes of The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010. Consequently, LPAs have a duty, in the exercise of any of their functions, to have regard to the requirements of the Habitats Directive so far as they may be affected by the exercise of those functions. Snowdonia National Park Authority’s Guidelines for ecology reports help to ensure that Snowdonia National Park Authority is able to make decisions that have regard to the requirements of the Habitats Directive.

Duty of Public Authorities under NERC 2006

Every public authority has an obligation under Section 40 (1) of the NERC Act 2006 to ensure that in exercising its functions, that it has regard, so far as is consistent with the proper exercise of those functions, to the purpose of conserving biodiversity.’ Section 40 (3). Snowdonia National Park Authority’s Guidelines for ecology reports help to ensure that Snowdonia National Park Authority is able to make decisions that have regard to the purpose of conserving biodiversity.

Links between this document and other guidance

This document is designed to be used as a stand-alone piece of guidance for report authors and those wishing to make use of reports in the planning process. The content and emphasis of this document reflects other relevant, current guidance in the UK; this includes:

Oxford, M. (2010) *Interactive Bat Protocol; Correct Decision-making Process For LPAs Determining Applications Where Bats Are Involved*. On behalf of Planning Officers, Society Wales and Countryside Council for Wales.

Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (2006) *Planning For Biodiversity And Geological Conservation – A Guide To Good Practice*. ODPM

Welsh Assembly Government (2009) *Planning Policy Wales - Technical Advice Note 5 – Nature Conservation and Planning*.

Bat Conservation Trust (2007) *Bat Surveys - Good Practice Guidelines*: Bat Conservation Trust, London.

Natural England (undated) *Standing Advice Species Sheet: Bats*. Natural England, Peterborough

Confidential information

Where reports include information about sensitive species or other information which is regarded as confidential, this should be brought to the attention of Snowdonia National Park

Authority and included as an appendix or separate document. Such documents will not be placed with other reports as publicly accessible material on the Snowdonia National Park Authority website or public files

Part 2

Format

Snowdonia National Park Authority recognises that information can be reported in different formats including advisory letters, preliminary scoping documents and full, detailed reports. Snowdonia National Park Authority also recognises that responsibility for selecting a report format and report content ultimately lies with developers and their advisors.

The guidance in this document is appropriate when submitting a full, detailed report in relation to protected species – for example where UK or European protected species have been found on a proposed development site, and the development is expected or likely to create offences under legislation as a result of its impact on protected species and/or features which affect the Favourable Conservation Status of protected species.

All reports are expected to contain information that clearly addresses the following subject areas, but is not necessarily restricted to the following headings.

Summary

Normal minimum content/checklist of key points:

- Client details
- Survey overview
- Protected species observed and other evidence (e.g. signs) found
- The importance and potential of the site to support protected species
- Outline of advice and recommendations

Principle
All reports submitted must enable Snowdonia National Park Authority to develop a clear overview of important information, issues and actions in relation to ecology.
Snowdonia National Park Authority expects that a summary will accurately reflect the remainder of the report without the inclusion of additional material.

Introduction

Normal minimum content/checklist of key points:

- Client details
- Planning Application Ref. No. (if known) e.g. NPx/xx/xx
- National Grid Reference (minimum 8 figure) e.g. SH xxxx xxxx
- Name of Property
- Nearest Settlement
- Outline of proposed development

Principle

All reports submitted must provide Snowdonia National Park Authority with an accurate description of the proposed development. Snowdonia National Park Authority will check that this information matches that in other documents, including Design and Access statements and project specifications.

In particular, Snowdonia National Park Authority will expect to be appraised of the information about the development that was available to the Ecologist at the time of survey and report writing; this will enable Snowdonia National Park Authority to check that methods, interpretation of results, impacts and mitigation have been given appropriate consideration.

Personnel

Normal minimum content/checklist of key points:

- Names, experience, qualifications, competencies and licence numbers of all personnel involved in ecological assessment of the site

Principle

All reports submitted must contain sufficient information to enable Snowdonia National Park Authority to determine whether all personnel involved have the qualifications, skills, knowledge and experience to:

- Undertake the work described
- Identify relevant results from surveys and impacts of development
- Interpret survey results and the significance of impacts
- Make informed judgements about appropriate advice and recommendations

Objectives of surveys

Normal minimum content/checklist of key points:

- Objectives for all ecology surveys

Principle

All reports submitted must enable Snowdonia National Park Authority to develop a clear understanding of the basis on which information has been gathered and presented.

Snowdonia National Park Authority expects that all parts of a report will be guided by, and closely reflect, a suitably comprehensive list of objectives.

Methodology

Normal minimum content/checklist of key points:

- Details of techniques, equipment and dates for all surveys
- Reference to best practice/good practice documents to show how the methods used comply or differ (NB: rationale required when significantly different approaches have been adopted)
- Number, location and rationale for arrangement of surveyors (e.g, during emergence and re-entry surveys)

Principle

All reports submitted must enable Snowdonia National Park Authority to form a judgement about whether or not appropriate techniques and equipment have been used for all aspects of each project, including surveys, data analysis and evaluation.

Snowdonia National Park Authority expects that methods will reflect relevant best practice/good practice documents, and that where this is not the case, a clear explanation is provided.

Description of survey site

Normal minimum content/checklist of key points:

- Site location and context
- Site description including land cover features (e.g. vegetation, water features)
- Structural description of buildings including materials, condition, size, environmental factors (e.g. lighting and temperature)
- Arrangement and number of buildings (e.g. location, spatial arrangement, whether connected or detached)
- Usage of buildings

Principle

All reports submitted must provide Snowdonia National Park Authority with a clear, up to date and accurate view of the proposed development site and, where appropriate, its immediate and wider surroundings. Snowdonia National Park Authority will check that the description in the ecology report matches that in other documents including Design and Access statements and architects drawings.

Snowdonia National Park Authority expects that reports will be sufficiently illustrated (e.g. by diagrams and photographs) to accurately pinpoint building/tree/site feature subject to survey and to include evidence from surveys, condition of appropriate features (e.g. building structures) and location and context of survey points.

Results and interpretation of surveys

Normal minimum content/checklist of key points:

- Weather conditions including parameters such as temperature, cloud cover, wind, precipitation e.g. intensity and duration of during emergence/re-entry counts.
- Observations of protected species
- Signs of protected species
- Interpretation of findings (e.g. types of bat roost present, importance of site for protected species, potential of site to support species)

Principle
All reports submitted must enable Snowdonia National Park Authority to develop a clear understanding of how the results relate to methods employed and evidence found. In addition, Snowdonia National Park Authority must be able to determine if the interpretation has a clear and justifiable basis.
Snowdonia National Park Authority will expect all interpretation to be based primarily on methods chosen and results of surveys, but will also expect a reflection on external information (including published documents) where this is appropriate.

Limitations of surveys and methodology

Normal minimum content/checklist of key points:

- Constraints to surveys and interpretation (e.g. timing, weather, access, equipment limitations)

Principle
All reports submitted must demonstrate to Snowdonia National Park Authority that sufficient consideration has been given to limitations and constraints. Snowdonia National Park Authority's judgement will also therefore draw on information in methods, results and conclusions, as well as advice and recommendations.

Impacts

Normal minimum content/checklist of key points:

- Impacts at different stages of the proposed development (short-term, long-term, post-development)
- Scale of impacts

Principle

All reports submitted must provide sufficient information for Snowdonia National Park Authority to fully consider the impacts of the proposed development in relation to legislation and, where appropriate, to planning guidance.

Where European Protected Species (EPS) are concerned, Snowdonia National Park Authority expects to be able to make judgements about Favourable Conservation Status and Continued Ecological Functionality, based on the information provided in reports.

Where there are legal aspects or implications of a proposed development e.g. as regards EPS, Snowdonia National Park Authority will expect these to be given full consideration in reports.

It is recognised that impacts are not always known or clear at the time of ecological surveys and reporting. Impact assessments may therefore be included as appendices or form the basis of additional reports. Where reports contain information about impacts, Snowdonia National Park Authority will expect reports to also address mitigation, compensation and enhancement measures.

Conclusions

Normal minimum content/checklist of key points:

- Conclusions drawn from each area of survey, evaluation and impact assessment undertaken

Principle

All reports submitted must be clear enough for Snowdonia National Park Authority to understand how conclusions have been reached.

In particular, Snowdonia National Park Authority will expect conclusions to reflect the information in results, limitations and impacts.

Where there are legal aspects or implications of a proposed development e.g. as regards EPS, Snowdonia National Park Authority will expect these to be given full consideration in the conclusion section of reports.

Advice and recommendations

Normal minimum content/checklist of key points:

- Advice regarding legislation, constraints to proposed works, requirement for licences
- Limitations of advice (e.g. length of time that survey findings remain valid)
- Recommendations regarding site management
- Rationale for all advice and recommendations

Principle

All reports submitted must enable Snowdonia National Park Authority to distinguish between advice and recommendations.

In particular, Snowdonia National Park Authority will expect the report to be sufficiently clear to understand the relationship between results, interpretation, impacts and any advice and recommendations.

Snowdonia National Park Authority will also expect the basis for advice and recommendations to be made clear in the report, and that where appropriate, timescales and responsibilities are also clearly stated.

References

Normal minimum content/checklist of key points:

- Material cited in the text of the report.

Principle

Where resources are referred to and relied on in reports, Snowdonia National Park Authority will expect them to be clearly identified in this section of the document.

Appendices

Normal minimum content/checklist of key points:

- Raw data (submitted in a format that facilitates direct input to Local Record Centre)
- Species lists
- Supplementary information

Principle

Where information is included in the appendices, Snowdonia National Park Authority will expect it to be clearly labelled to show its origin (e.g. ecologist, developer, architect) and where appropriate, the version number, orientation and scale.

Where architect's drawings and specifications are included, Snowdonia National Park Authority will expect them to accurately reflect comments and specifications in ecology reports e.g. through appropriate labelling and annotation.

Part 3

Submission of multiple reports

Snowdonia National Park Authority recognises that the content of ecologists' reports, including conclusions, advice, and recommendations, will reflect the information available at the time of report preparation. It is also recognised that development plans may be prepared in stages, using information gained to inform the next stage of development. For example, it may be appropriate for a bat survey report to inform a building design, which may in turn inform a mitigation plan.

It is also recognised that protected species surveys may be undertaken in stages (e.g. as part of phased developments) and that a planning submission may be accompanied by a series of reports.

As a result of the above circumstances, it may be necessary for developers and their agents to submit a series of ecological reports, including documents relating to surveys and mitigation.

Where multiple reports are submitted with a planning application, Snowdonia National Park Authority expects that a covering letter or similar is provided to give a clear overview of the number, content, relevance and relationship between reports.

Mitigation reports

Where reports contain proposals for mitigation (including compensation and enhancement), Snowdonia National Park Authority expects a clear legal and/or conservation rationale to accompany each proposed element. Reports should enable Snowdonia National Park Authority to reach a clear, unambiguous conclusion as regards the expected impact on Favourable Conservation Status of protected species, as well as the Continued Ecological Functionality of the features on which protected species are dependent.

Where architect's drawings or specifications are included in mitigation reports or method statements, Snowdonia National Park Authority expects that these will be clearly annotated to show that they incorporate the ecologist's comments and recommendations, and have been checked by the project ecologist. In addition, Snowdonia National Park Authority expects that architect's drawings and specifications will be cross-referenced to or accurately reflect the information in ecologist's reports.

It is recognised that mitigation, compensation and enhancement measures may not always be known or clear at the time of ecological surveys and reporting. Mitigation plans may therefore be included as appendices or form the basis of additional reports.