

Bat survey reprieve for Midlothian wedding venue

A wedding venue has been given to the end of the year to carry out a survey of resident bats, after getting the green light to put up a marquee and play music outdoors.

Midlothian councillors agreed to allow Rosebery Steadings, near Gorebridge, to add the marquee and play outdoor music to its venue despite being told they had been 'repeatedly' asked to carry out the survey, but refused. Planning officers had originally refused permission for outdoor music because historic evidence had suggested bats – which are a protected species – roosted in a building across from the site.

However a meeting of the council's Local Review Body this week heard an appeal by the applicants who argued they were asked to carry out the survey too late in the season for it to be worth doing and would have to delay wedding events for another year if they had to wait until the time was right to do it again.

Councillor Colin Cassidy supported the need for the venue to operate as quickly as possible, urging fellow review body members to uphold the appeal.

He said: "This is a commercial enterprise they are trying to get up and running and from the looks of it they have spent a lot of money on the project.

"Now I am not one for displacing bats or killing wildlife, by any means, but I think that we have to be pragmatic here.

"This business needs to be up and running to make money and we need to be aware of the pressures businesses are under these

days.”

Councillor Cassidy questioned whether there were any spaces for bats to roost on the site pointing out the roofs seemed sealed up during a visit but was told bats can find ways in through very small spaces.

And Councillor Peter Smaill pointed out there is a belfry at the venue, adding: “If we are going to find bats it is going to be in places like this.”

Councillor Smaill sympathised with both sides of the debate saying it was important to recognise the commercial benefits the success of the venue brings to rural Midlothian.

He said: “I would hate to have to say no because there was doubt about the number of bats.”

Councillors were told that bat surveys carried out in the past for projects always came back with a solution if they were found to be there, which could include putting up bat boxes for them to move to if disturbed.

The council’s planning chief Peter Arnsdorf told councillors: “Bats are a protected species by law and that is why the planning officers have done what they have done. Every time we have dealt with this in the past there has always been a solution to it.”

Councillor Russell Imrie, chair of the review body, said he understood concerns raised by colleagues that waiting for a survey would delay the venue from taking wedding bookings for this year.

However he told the meeting: “They knew these were the conditions and they decided not to carry out the bat survey “I don’t want to stop any business from making money but if they had just done it when they were asked we wouldn’t have this application before us today.”

Councillor Imrie put forward a motion to uphold the appeal and allow a change of conditions but only once a bat survey had been carried out.

An amendment was put forward by Councillor Connor McManus, as a compromise, asking that the venue be allowed to operate under the conditions immediately on the understanding a bat

survey would be carried out before November this year.

He said: "I wouldn't want us to be setting a precedent for future businesses to think that a bat survey is something that is casual and doesn't matter too much.

"It is more about the legal obligations we have and we don't want people thinking this is something they can opt in."

The review body agreed by majority to allow outdoor music and the marquee to operate with a November deadline for a bat survey's results to be provided to the council.