

# Bat Case study no. 4

## Stalham Baptist Church

### NORFOLK



At this church, bats were discovered in an inaccessible roof void during building works. The ceiling timbers required treating for woodworm and the National Bat Helpline was contacted for free advice. Following a visit by a volunteer bat surveyor, the treatment work could proceed without delays.

### Location

Stalham is mentioned in the Domesday book of 1084-86 as a large village of over 70 households. Today, Stalham is a small market town on the river Ant in the Norfolk Broads and a popular starting point for North Norfolk boating holidays – the broads from here are navigable to Great Yarmouth and beyond. In Stalham, visitors can learn about local history at the Museum of the Broads.



### The church



The Stalham Baptist church is in the centre of town. It was built in 1884, without a damp proofing course, and in 2012 a large-scale renovation project transformed this formerly chilly building into a warm and welcoming place of worship.

### The building and its use

The congregation numbers 70-80 people at the regular Sunday service, but numbers are boosted on special occasions and when holiday makers are in the area. On occasion, more than 100 people have been known to turn up at the church! The Stalham Baptist church is in very active use, the door is always open for visitors and many clubs and societies hold their meetings at the church. A children's area complete with toys, books and chairs and tables invites younger members of the congregation to come and take



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a look at what's on offer. A stage and modern PA and sound system enable concerts to be held and the choir practices in the church regularly.

### Bats in the church

The Stalham Baptist church has a loft space which is not easily accessible to people, but bats have found their way into this area, entering it from the outside of the building and using the space for roosting. No bats have ever been seen by the congregation or even the bat worker who visited the site, but long-eared bats were identified as the resident species from droppings left behind.



The congregation and the bats have shared the Stalham Baptist church probably for many years, seemingly unaware of each others' existence! It was only when the building was undergoing extensive renovation works that the bats were discovered. Scaffolding had been erected inside the church which gave the opportunity for the building contractors to visit the loft space in late August. While there, they discovered woodworm which required the ceiling timbers to be treated. On the same inspection visit, bat droppings were discovered.

### What has been done

Luckily the building work contractor visiting the loft space had attended a training course on bats in buildings and knew about the legislation protecting bats and their roosts, and to use wildlife-friendly chemicals when treating timbers near a bat roost. He also knew of the National Bat Helpline, and Natural England's volunteer bat roost visitor service which is available free of charge to householders and churches.

The National Bat Helpline was called and advice was sought on how to proceed with the required timber treatment. In order to find out what bat species were using the church and whether they were present at the time, the Helpline staff arranged for a Natural England volunteer bat expert to come and visit.



The volunteer contacted the church within a couple of days of the initial call to the Helpline, and arranged for a visit the same week. He entered the loft space, high above the floor level of the church, to search for bats and evidence of their presence. No bats were found, but the quantity of droppings present suggested that the loft space may be used by a maternity colony. Long-eared bats prefer space within their roost to fly, and the Stalham Baptist church loft matched their needs. The bat worker could not find any signs to suggest that bats could enter the church hall below, and in fact the congregation had never seen any evidence of bats being in the building. As the visit took place in late summer, after the bats' maternity period, and no bats

were present at the time, the advice given was to use appropriate chemicals for the timber treatment, proceed with care and look out for any bats that may have stayed behind.

The timber treatment was carried out the following week, and no bats were seen in the loft space during work. Due to the speedy response of the Natural England volunteer and the opportune timing of the planned works, no delays were caused by the discovery of the bat roost. The scaffolding was removed within two weeks of

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being erected, the bat roost had not been altered and the ceiling timbers were now protected against the damaging effects of wood worm.

### What can we learn?

The National Bat Helpline gives advice and support at any stage of building and maintenance works. It is best to contact them as soon as works are planned on areas where bats could be roosting – in churches, these are often in gaps and crevices in the ceiling and roof timbers, as well as any voids above the ceiling or inside walls. The standard advice for carrying out any works that have the potential to affect bats is to proceed outside the most vulnerable times in a bat's life: the hibernation and maternity periods.

Those looking after Stalham Baptist church had no idea that bats were present. Initial work plans had not involved the loft space, but as scaffolding was erected inside the church for other purposes the opportunity was taken to access this area. Bats were discovered during the inspection and the National Bat Helpline was contacted promptly. As the Helpline was aware of the cost implications of having scaffolding up and was able to arrange for a volunteer bat roost visit to take place quickly, no costly delays occurred. As luck had it, the work took place in late summer when the bats had already left the roost.

The story of Stalham Baptist church shows us that the National Bat Helpline can save the church the cost of hiring ecological consultants when bats are discovered, whilst making sure advice on carrying out building and maintenance work is received from the Statutory Nature Conservation Organisation (in this case, Natural England). By following the advice that was given to them, the church was able to carry out the necessary works in keeping with the wildlife legislation that protects bats in the UK. The church goers can now enjoy services and events held in modernised surroundings, while the bats are able to carry on with their non-intrusive lives high above the congregation!



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## Contacts and more information

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