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HUGH CLARK/BAT CONSERVATION TRUST

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1. The London Wetlands Centre in Barnes, west London
2. A brown long-eared bat

BATS GET A NEW HOME IN RIBA COMP

By Ruth Slavid

A very different type of RIBA housing competition is being launched – one which will provide a new home for London's bats.

The competition, held in conjunction with the Bat House Partnership, is for a breeding home for bats at the London Wetland Centre in Barnes, west London. The finished bat house will double as an educational resource.

The project was the idea of Turner Prize-winning artist Jeremy Deller. 'I just got interested in bats as fellow mammals living in London. Why should we privilege human beings?' says Deller.

He adds: 'I was going to make a public sculpture which I wanted bats to live in, but then I thought, why not build something tailor-made for their requirements?'

The Bat House Partnership, which is supported by the Arts Council England, the Bat Conservation Trust, the Mayor of London, PlusEquals, the Royal Society of Arts and the Wildfowl and Wetland Trust, has already run a number of competitions for conceptual design, but the difference with this project is that the intention is to build it.

The jury will include Future Systems' Amanda Levete and Rowan Moore of the Architecture Foundation, as well as various wildlife experts.

There are 16 species of bat in the UK and, although they are protected by law, their numbers are declining. The most abundant species, the common pipistrelle, is also the smallest, weighing 3–8g – less than a 2p coin. Renovation of buildings, exclusion of bats and

toxic timber treatments can all threaten their existence.

Ecological consultant John Goldsmith, an expert in protected species, particularly bats, says a building must be able to accommodate colonies of up to 500 bats. There must be darkness within the roost, easy access from outside, and the building must hold the heat, especially late in the day.

'They are little animals that have quite narrow requirements for roost selection,' says Goldsmith.

Deller adds: 'I hope some amazing building will be built [and] that architects can rise to the challenge.'

The closing date for entries is 10 September and winning entries will be published by the AJ. Details are available at www.bathouseproject.org/competition