



STOCK NOOK HOUSE BARNS, HEYWOOD.

BARN OWL MITIGATION STRATEGY.

Ref No: 231128/Barn Owl.

Date: 4th January 2024.

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1. INTRODUCTION.

1.1. There are plans to convert three barns off Dr Fold Lane, Heywood into residential properties. To facilitate the development there is also a requirement to create two new passing places along Dr Fold Lane leading up to the site.

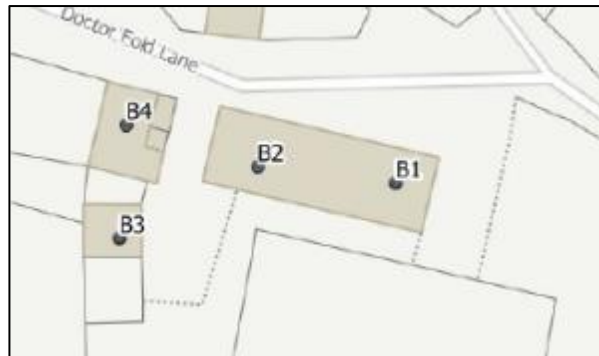
1.2. During bat activity surveys carried out by Whitcher Wildlife between July and September 2023, barn owl activity was noted within the area, and field evidence of barn owl breeding was identified in building 2.

1.3. It was recommended by the council that “*prior to determination [of the planning application] a barn owl mitigation and enhancement strategy is provided*”.

1.4. This document is designed to satisfy that condition.

2. ECOLOGICAL BASELINE

2.1. The survey area comprises three barns of Dr Fold Lane, Heywood. The barns have been split into four separate buildings, consistent with the initial PRA prepared by Tyler Grange Group Ltd. The diagram below is an extract from the PRA to show the buildings surveyed.



2.2. A barn owl was identified using Buildings 2 and 4 during the surveys, with evidence suggesting that they nest inside Building 2. The proposed conversion of the buildings will have a high impact on the barn owls if carried out at a time when the owls are nesting and will result in the loss of a nesting site.

3. MITIGATION STRATEGY

3.1. *Pre-development*

3.1.1. At the earliest opportunity and at least 30 days prior to the commencement of construction works alternative nesting/roosting provisions will be made.

3.1.2. Alternative provisions will consist of three barn owl nestboxes erected on poles and/or on suitable mature trees within 200m of the current nesting/roosting sites and adjacent to suitable foraging habitat. The boxes will meet the Barn Owl Trust specification and will need to be installed in accordance with their guidance. Each box will also be lined with wood chippings on the base.

3.1.3. The location of nest boxes is shown on the aerial image below.



3.2. *During development*

3.2.1. The works will be immediately preceded by a nesting bird survey carried out by a competent person who also holds a survey licence for barn owls. If the barn owls are found to be nesting in one of the buildings, then no works can begin that will cause any disturbance to the barn owl or its nest until the young have fledged. Similarly, if any other bird species are found to be nesting, the works in the vicinity of the nest will be restricted until the young have fledged.

3.2.2. In the event that nesting barn owls are discovered or suspected after the works have commenced, an ecologist licenced to survey barn owls will be consulted to

advise on the most appropriate course of action. This may require temporarily stopping works and/or the implementation of buffer zones until young have fledged.

3.3. *Post-development*

3.3.1. The barn owl nestboxes will remain in perpetuity. The boxes will be inspected annually during the winter months (November to January), and any necessary repairs or removal of excessive debris carried out during this time.

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Appendix I. BARN OWL INFORMATION.

Ecology

The diet of the Barn Owls consists almost entirely of small mammals such as mice, shrews and voles. Consequently, areas of moist, moderately long grassland are especially important for foraging with 90% of prey taken within a 1km radius of the nest site.

Their feathers are specially structured for silent flight and, by using their extremely sensitive hearing, Barn Owls can find and swoop noiselessly onto their prey. Although Barn Owls can see perfectly well in daylight, they tend to hunt mainly at night.

Suitable nest sites are predominantly in derelict buildings such as farm buildings, church towers and old chimneys. Nest sites must be dry and warm to prevent fatal chilling of the owlets in wet weather.

Barn Owls generally produce 4 – 7 eggs, laid at intervals of 2 – 3 days during the breeding season (March to August inclusive). This gives a staggered hatch, with the first hatchling being as much as a week older than the last. In poor prey years the youngest chicks are unlikely to fledge.

Habitat loss due to agricultural change and urbanisation has had the most significant impact on Barn Owl numbers. The drainage of grasslands, increases in cereal crops, autumn sowing, the decline in haymaking, the loss of wild grassland, edge habitats and hedgerows, the vermin proofing of grain storage and the fragmentation of habitats as a result of land take for new roads, factories and housing schemes have all had an influence on the availability of suitable foraging habitat.

This has been compounded by the loss of traditional nest sites as a result of building improvements and conversions for other uses including residential.

As birds are pushed to exploit prey rich roadside verges and railway embankments they increasingly become prone to deaths from collisions with trains and road vehicles. Death can also be caused by consuming prey items which contain residues of rat and mouse poison.

The effects of disturbance are more pronounced at different times of the year. The early stages of the breeding season are the most vulnerable and birds may abandon nest building or even eggs if disturbed. When the eggs have hatched, they tend to tolerate a higher level of disturbance before abandoning young birds in the nest. Generally, disturbance should be avoided between April and September.

Surveys

Walkover surveys will look identify areas of suitable foraging habitat for Barn Owls. They will also look for suitable nesting locations and any signs of pellets within these areas.

Legislation

Barn Owls are protected under Schedule 1 and Schedule 9 of The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

It is therefore an offence to intentionally kill, injure or take any wild bird, take damage or destroy the nest of any wild bird while that nest is in use or being built, or to take or destroy an egg of any wild bird. Special penalties are available for offences related to birds listed on Schedule 1 of The Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981), for which there are additional offences for disturbing these birds at their nests, or their dependent young.