



PIPERWELL FARM, SHEPLEY.

BARN OWL MITIGATION STRATEGY.

Ref No: 251009/Barn Owl.

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1. INTRODUCTION.

1.1. An application is being prepared to convert a farmhouse and barn building into a residential dwelling.

1.2. During a Preliminary Roost Assessment survey carried out by Whitcher Wildlife on 2nd October 2025, field evidence of barn owl breeding was identified in the barn. Therefore, Whitcher Wildlife was subsequently commissioned to prepare a barn owl mitigation strategy to support the application.

1.3. Appendices I of this report provides additional information on barn owls and the protection afforded to them and is designed to assist the reader in understanding the contents of this report.

2. ECOLOGICAL BASELINE

2.1. The survey area is located in a rural area in Shepley, West Yorkshire, and consists of a two-storey stone-built farmhouse, with an attached two-storey stone-built barn, and an attached single-storey stone-built stable. The building has been split into four separate sections, consistent with the initial Preliminary Roost Assessment (PRA) prepared by Whitcher Wildlife. The diagram below is an extract from the PRA to show the buildings surveyed.



2.2. Evidence of barn owl nesting, including a large number of pellets of various ages, adult and juvenile feathers, and droppings, was found inside the “Barn” during the PRA survey. Without appropriate mitigation in place, the proposed conversion of the buildings could have a high impact on barn owls if carried out at a time when the owls are nesting. Furthermore, without appropriate mitigation, the development of the building would 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 one barn owl nestbox erected within 200m of the current barn. As all of the buildings will be subject to disturbance, and the only tree within the survey area is adjacent to a road, it will be necessary to erect the nestbox on a pole. The box will meet the Barn Owl Trust specification and will be erected at least 4.5m from ground level.

3.1.3. The nestbox should be kept free from disturbance by on-site protection measures such as signage and fencing.

3.1.4. The location of nest box is shown on the aerial image below.



3.2. *During development*

3.2.1. No works to the Barn or works to other parts of the building that has potential to cause disturbance to barn owls within the barn will take place between March and August inclusive.

3.2.2. In addition, as the barn owl nesting season can vary in timing, 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. This should take place no more than three days prior to works commencing. 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 last dependent young has stopped returning to the nest. 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.

3.2.3. 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. Permanent nesting provision will be integrated into the Barn. The nesting space will adhere to the following specifications:

- The existing entrance hole on the eastern aspect of the Barn will be retained, and the permanent nesting provisions will be joined onto this access point.
- The floor area of the nesting chamber will have a dimension of at least 1m².
- The depth from the bottom of the entrance hole to the floor of the nesting area must be at least 460mm, ideally more than 540mm.
- The interior must remain dry through periods of prolonged heavy rain.
- An access point for humans will be created, allowing access for periodically clearing out old nest debris.
- The building was also assessed as having high potential for roosting bats, but surveys have not yet been carried out. If bats are found to be present within the building, the mitigation strategy for barn owls should be read in conjunction with any mitigation proposed for roosting bats, ensuring that specifications for both are adhered to.

3.3.2. The owner and/or residents of the Barn will be made aware of the nesting space and the requirement for clearing out old nesting debris. The nesting space should be cleared out every 3-4 years during the winter months.

3.3.3. As the site is surrounded by ideal rough grassland habitat within the ownership of the adjacent quarry, no further mitigation is proposed for the retention of foraging habitats.

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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.