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North Bridge Farm, Staintondale

Barn Owl Survey

December 2015

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Chris Hansell, Hawk and Owl Trust

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 PROJECT BACKGROUND

In December 2015 Chris Hansell (Hawk and Owl trust) was commissioned by Denis Atkinson to undertake a Barn Owl *Tyto alba* survey at North Bridge Farm, Staintondale, Scarborough, North Yorkshire (NGR SE 99782 97850). It is understood that the site is to be redeveloped in holiday apartments.

1.2 SITE DESCRIPTION

The study area is situated in a rural location, approximately 10km north of Scarborough town centre in North Yorkshire and is surrounded by agricultural land characterised by sheep grazing. The site is approximately 1km inland from the North Sea coast. The surrounding fields consist of improved sheep and horse grazed pasture, interspersed with isolated trees. The former Scarborough to Whitby railway runs within 200 metres of the sites eastern boundary. The survey area itself is dominated by buildings and areas of bare ground (farmyard).

1.3 LEGISLATION

This section contains a summary of the legislation with regards to barn owl. The reader should refer to the original legislation for the definitive interpretation.

1.3.1 Barn Owl

Nesting and nest building birds are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act WCA 1981 (as amended). Some species (listed in Schedule 1 of the WCA) are protected by special penalties. Subject to the provisions of the act, if any person intentionally–

- kills, injures or takes any wild bird;
- takes, damages or destroys the nest of any wild bird while that nest is in use or being built;
- or takes or destroys an egg of any wild bird,

'Reckless' offences with regard to the disturbance of nesting wild birds included in Schedule 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act were added by the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000.

Barn owls are protected by special penalties under Schedule 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 which provides protection to wild birds, their nests and eggs. Under the Act it is an offence to:

- kill, injury or take wild birds
- take, damage or destroy their nests while in use or being built
- take or destroy their eggs
- be in possession of complete or part of live, dead bird or egg.

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2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 BARN OWL SURVEY

A daytime (pre-dusk) walkover of the buildings and surrounding habitat within the site was undertaken. The capacity of the site to support roosting and nesting barn owls was visually assessed and the area was examined for any signs of activity or presence (faecal matter, feathers, pellets, nest locations and feeding remains).

3. EXISTING INFORMATION

3.1 BIOLOGICAL RECORDS

The National Biodiversity Network Gateway website identified records of barn owl within the 10 km squares TA09 and SE99 within which the site sits.

3.2 ANECDOTAL RECORDS

Discussion with the client and neighbours revealed that barn owls have been observed using the site and foraging within the surrounding 200 metre area. One neighbour suggested that they had seen adult and juvenile owls interacting in 2015 suggesting successful breeding occurred within the locality within the past 12 months.

4. RESULTS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The barn owl survey was conducted on 11th December 2015 by Chris Hansell, Hawk and Owl Trust. Weather conditions at the time of the barn owl survey were recorded and are presented below:-

Parameter	Condition
Temperature	8°C
Cloud Cover	100%
Precipitation	n/a
Wind	12mph W

4.2 BARN OWL SURVEY

A single building complex was surveyed, which included three separate buildings.

Building 1 – This building is located at the western end of the complex and comprises a single storey barn with local stone walls and an original pitched pan-tile roof. The southern half of this building has partially collapsed and contains no roof. The northern section has a roof void, accessible by steps. This building is currently used for storage.

Building 2 – This building is located along the northern edge of the building complex and comprises a single storey barn with local stone walls and an original pitched pan-tile roof. This building has an open roof void and has had part of its roof re-constructed in recent years. This building is partially used for storage and partially as a stable.

Building 3 - This building is located along the eastern edge of the building complex and comprises a single storey building with local stone walls and an original pitched pan-tile roof. This building has an open roof void and is used as storage. This building is used for storage and has an access hole linked to a box for barn owls on its southern gable.

Figure 1 - Map of the buildings within the Study Area



- Location of Pellets
- Location of Droppings

Barn Owl pellets were found in all three of the buildings in small numbers. The pellets in buildings 1 and 3 were less than 4 weeks old and the pellets found within building 2 were over 6 months old. Buildings 2 and 3 also contained small amounts of droppings. No evidence of nesting behaviour was observed in any of the buildings and no nest sites were found. No eggs, nestling remains or large accumulations of droppings, feathers etc were noted. Subsequently it can be concluded that Barn Owls still use the study area and based on currently knowledge use the site as an occasional roost location.

4.3 HABITAT ASSESSMENT

The proposed development site occurs in an area dominated by mixed agricultural land, dominated by horse and sheep grazed pasture. The local landscape has a moderate amount of woodland cover. Most optimum foraging habitat in the vicinity of the site occurs along road verges, woodland edge, hedgerows, dry-stone wall edges and similar areas where semi-improved grassland occurs. The surrounding habitat is evidently suitable enough for barn owls given the close proximity of roosting and nesting birds.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMENDATIONS

5.1 CONCLUSIONS

Evidence of barn owls was recorded within the study area. Barn Owls currently use the study area to roost, this most likely concerns an individual bird which sporadically uses the site

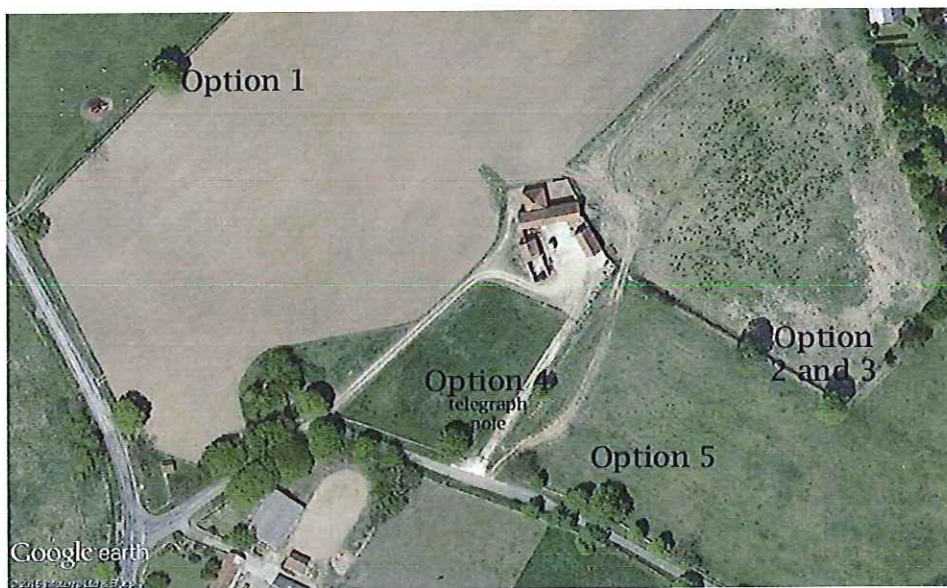
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during the non-breeding season. The relatively low amount of activity suggests that this site is not heavily used all year round or used for breeding. The buildings within the study area will be renovated as part of a proposed re-development scheme resulting in the loss of the existing roost sites. None of the surrounding foraging habitat will be altered or impacted upon by this proposed development.

5.2 RECOMMENDATIONS

As the proposed development will result in the loss of barn owl roosting habitat, it is proposed that two barn owl boxes are erected on parameter trees surrounding the study area. During the daytime inspection a number of trees were identified which offer undisturbed locations in which to position owl boxes.

Figure 2 – Location of proposed nest boxes



The following points should be considered when placing barn owl boxes

- Where possible, the box should face onto grassland and be reasonably conspicuous with an open flight path to it, easily visible to the bird. It should not face into the prevailing wind.
- Although barn owl nests are usually well spaced out, placing boxes in pairs, from twenty to a few hundred metres apart, will provide a pair with roosting as well as nesting sites. The male and female roost separately, and some pairs use different boxes in those good years when they can have two broods.
- Since many barn owls are killed by road traffic, it is best not to put up owl boxes close to motorways and main roads.
- Barn owls are specially protected by law, and so it is illegal to disturb them close to their nest. Occupied nests should only be visited by someone who holds a licence and are best placed in quiet undisturbed areas away from locations which require regular summer access.

- The box should have an erection height of no less than 3m above ground level.
- The box should be positioned where it will remain completely dry for many years.
- The box should be easily accessible to help clearing out debris so as to maintain internal depth.

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