

THE TYRER PARTNERSHIP



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Roadside Farm Barn, Preston Road, Alston, Lancashire, PR3 3BL

Inspection & Assessment in Relation to Bats & Breeding Birds

Prepared for:

H & D Whittle
Roadside Farm Barn
Preston Road
Alston
Lancashire
PR3 3BL

24 MAY 2012	
FOR THE ATTENTION OF	

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APPENDIX 1 - Site Photographs

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1.0 Introduction & Reason for Survey

- 1.1 As part of a proposed Planning Application at Roadside Farm Barn, Alston, an inspection and assessment was undertaken in relation to bats and breeding birds, H & D Whittle, the site owners commissioned the inspection and report. It is understood that the proposals for the site include the internal refurbishment of the existing property to make it habitable for residential purposes and that the external elevations and roof will not be affected. As part of the Local Authority's Planning Policies ecological surveys are generally required, particularly where a specially protected species is or may be present and could be affected by the proposals for which the Application seeks consent.
- 1.2 The aim of the inspection was to initially ascertain if the property is of value to bats or breeding birds, notably barn owls; if the building was found to be suitable for bats or signs of use were located then more detailed surveys by way of dusk surveys during the active season of bats would be recommended. If bats were subsequently found during those detailed surveys and may be affected by the work then a European Protected Species Mitigation Licence would be required to proceed with the development.
- 1.3 The optimum time to investigate buildings for evidence of a bat roost is May – August, however that is not to say they cannot be inspected and assessed outside of that time and frequently the results can be conclusive, which can save time and expense for Planning Applicants but it should be borne in mind that equally the inspection can be inconclusive. If potential was found to be high or the results of the survey were inconclusive then recommendations would indicate the requirement for nocturnal surveys to be undertaken at the site during the breeding season of bats. (May – August)

2.0 Protected Species

- 2.1 All British bats and their roosts are afforded protection under the 1981 Wildlife & Countryside Act (as amended) and are listed in Schedule 2 of the Conservation of Habitats & Species Regulations 2010. When dealing with cases where a European Protected Species (all UK bats) may be affected, a planning authority is a competent authority within the meaning of the Regulation 7 of the 2010 Regulations and therefore has a statutory duty to have due regard to the provisions of the Regulations in the exercise of its functions.
- 2.2 Use of Buildings by Bats

- a) Summer breeding roost.
- b) Hibernation.
- c) Transitional or temporary roost.

Roost selection is often closely correlated to suitable foraging habitat within a reasonable commuting distance from the roost and different sites are used depending upon insect densities and abundance, climatic conditions can also affect their ability to successfully forage. All British bats are insectivorous.

** The term roost is generically referred to as a place that bat/s use for the any of the above reasons, however it should be noted that under the Conservation of Habitats & Species Regulations 2010 (Regulation 41) the term roost is not used but refers to "a *breeding site or resting place of such an animal*" which essentially is the same and is afforded legal protection. The roost, breeding site or resting place of bats, which ever terminology is used is legally protected whether or not bats are in occupation.

- 2.3 All wild birds (with only minor exceptions) and their nests whilst being built or containing eggs or dependant young are protected under the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). Birds listed on Schedule 1 e.g. Barn owls are afforded a greater level of protection. Where nesting birds are present then work should be timed outside of the nesting season (March – August) so as to avoid disturbance and subsequently committing an offence.
- 2.4 Barn owls (*Tyto alba*) are a specially protected as a Schedule 1 Part 1 species under the 1981 Wildlife & Countryside Act (as amended), which gives protection to barn owls at all times. The main points in relation to nest sites are: "It is offence to intentionally or recklessly disturb them at or near a nest containing eggs or young. Intentionally damage or destroy a barn owl nest whilst in use or being prepared for use. It is also an offence to intentionally or recklessly disturb dependant young of a wild barn owl."
- 2.5 Barn owls are essentially a bird of the open countryside, particularly where rough grassland exists, which supports their main prey by way of small mammals and successful breeding is heavily dependent upon 1) a secluded nest site and 2) a plentiful supply of prey being available. It is possible that loss of an occupied nest site can have an adverse affect even if other alternative sites were made available. Thus where possible it is always preferable to retain an occupied site and not take the approach of providing an alternative in a different location.

3.0 Protected Species in Lancashire

- 3.1 Up to ten bat species have been recorded in Lancashire most of which use built structures, notably occupied residential properties, for roosting. The most frequently encountered species is the Pipistrelle bat (*Pipistrellus*) and its abundant status in Lancashire is reflected throughout the UK.
- 3.2 The number of breeding barn owls within Lancashire is not high, which is a situation that is mirrored throughout most UK counties and they are constantly under threat from loss of habitat and nesting opportunities.

4.0 Survey Methodology

- 4.1 The survey was conducted on 21st May 2012 by Mrs K Wilding an experienced and Natural England bat licensed ecologist and an accredited agent on a barn owl licence. The building that is due to be refurbished was inspected for potential places that may be of value to bats and if evidence of use was present. An upper floor is present within the dwelling which was searched for signs of bat use, which mainly includes droppings or remains of prey items, additionally any external gaps were investigated for stains, which can be present when regular use of an ingress point is made by bats. The exterior elevations were investigated, with the aid of close focussing binoculars, for places that are frequently used by bats as roosts or as access into roost chambers.
- 4.2 The survey was conducted at a time when bats will have returned to their summer roosts and formed maternity colonies, which is the optimum time to investigate buildings/structures for evidence of use.

4.3 A number of factors are used for the survey methodology, which include:-

Knowledge of bat species relevant to the site location
Nature of the immediate and surrounding habitat in relation to foraging opportunities
Condition of the building
Presence/absence of roost potential
Value of roost potential – if present

4.4 During the survey the surrounding habitat was assessed in relation to bats as very often roost selection is closely correlated with the surrounding habitat; the interior/exterior of the building was inspected for signs of nesting birds.

5.0 Constraints

5.1 The survey was conducted during the breeding season of bats, and in relation to assessing the level of bat roost potential a full investigation and appraisal of the building was achievable. The inspection for nesting birds was conducted in tandem with the aforementioned species, when most will birds will be nesting or in the process of nest building/mating/territorial activity; furthermore, evidence of use and activity by barn owls is usually apparent. Based on this information it is considered that there were no survey constraints that would prevent the gathering of information on which to reach conclusions and recommendations.

6.0 Results

6.1 Roadside Farm Barn is a purpose built structure and sympathetically designed in relation to the surrounding rural buildings; it is located on the outskirts of an urban environment, just off the B6243 Preston Road, approximately 1.58 kilometres north east of Grimsargh. The site perimeter borders open and grazing pasture and agricultural land; and as such can be considered as some value for bat species such as the crevice dwelling Pipistrelle, (*Pipistrellus*) which is the most frequently occurring species in urban and semi-urban areas. The surrounding and extending habitat consists of a tree line running along the north perimeter boundary, with Grimsargh Reservoir and Alston Reservoir, located approximately 0.88 kilometres south west and 0.78 kilometres north east respectively. Where such habitat is present close to buildings then the percentage use of those buildings, by bats, increases given that roost opportunities are available. The breeding roosts of Pipistrelle bats are proportionally higher in occupied residential dwellings where the warm, dry conditions favour the requirements of a maternity colony but other structures are also used, especially for hibernation or by male bats which do not need the same conditions as a maternity colony. Due to the nature of the surrounding environment the habitat is considered less suitable for the specific foraging requirements of the loft dwelling Brown Long Eared bats. (*Plecotus auritus*).

6.2 The presence of open pasture, agricultural land, rough grassland and hedgerows that are present outside of the site will increase the possible presence of barn owls in the locality.



Approximate location of Roadside Farm barn with surrounding habitat

- 6.3 Roadside barn that is included in the Planning Application is a purpose built structure with similar appearance to nearby residential dwellings which have previously undergone conversion and refurbishment from redundant rural buildings. The building is constructed in stone with a slate pitched roof; it is in good external condition but refurbishment work is required to make the building suitable for habitation. A loft space is currently absent; however, an upper floor has been constructed although the interior is open to the ridge beam. The first floor was found to be extremely light filled due to windows and roof lights and is to approximate dimensions of 23 metres long x 10 metres wide x 2.5 metres high but due its light filled nature and the habitat around the site it is considered as not being suitable for loft dwelling bats such as Brown Long Eared, which is a species that favours a large enclosed loft space that allows unrestricted free flight. During the internal inspection no recent or historic evidence of this or any other bat species was located within the building.
- 6.4 It is noted that a breathable membrane is present beneath the roof slates in the building, which will significantly increase the potential for crevice dwelling bats, such as the Pipistrelle, whereby they often roost between the two materials, subject to external access being available. Breeding roosts of Pipistrelle bats are proportionally higher in occupied residential dwellings where the warm, dry conditions favour the requirements of a maternity colony; however other structures are also used for other roost purposes.

6.5 The external inspection revealed the presence of gaps that could offer minor opportunities for crevice dwelling bats i.e. between the roof slates and between the fascia boards and stonework at the front (south east) and rear (north west) elevations of the property. Notwithstanding the presence of the gaps these areas will not to be affected as part of the work and will remain available for bat use. Furthermore, no evidence of use was found at or beneath the gaps during the external inspection that would suggest evidence of bat use.

6.6 In relation to barn owls no recent or historic evidence of use by this species was observed within the building and there are no suitable nesting places was found within the structure. There is some potential for common woodland/garden birds within the trees, shrubs and scrub, to the rear of the property, which will be retained. During the survey historic signs of other nesting birds that rely upon built structures, e.g. House martin (*Delichon Urbica*), Swift (*Apus apus*) and Swallows (*Hirundo rustica*) were not found within or on the exterior of the building.

7.0 Conclusions

7.1 From the results of the survey it can be concluded that on the day of the survey evidence of use by bats was absent and roost potential within the building was found to be low. Based on the results of the survey the proposed internal refurbishment of the building will not result in the loss of high value bat roost potential and nocturnal or any additional surveys will not be required.

7.2 There are no current implications in relation to barn owls that would prevent the refurbishment taking place and any proposals would not result in the loss of a site that is used by barn owls.

8.0 Recommendations & Implications

8.1 There are no specific implications or recommendations for the species for which the survey was undertaken in relation to the conversion of the building although if at anytime bats are encountered or suspected of being present then as a legal requirement work should immediately cease and a bat ecologist contacted for further advice.

8.2 It is recommended however, that if any of the trees or shrubs are to be removed it should be undertaken outside of the breeding season of birds. (March - August) If this cannot be achieved then a further site visit should be conducted to monitor if nesting birds are present as all wild birds (with only minor exceptions) and their nests whilst being built or containing eggs or dependant young are protected under the Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981 (as amended).

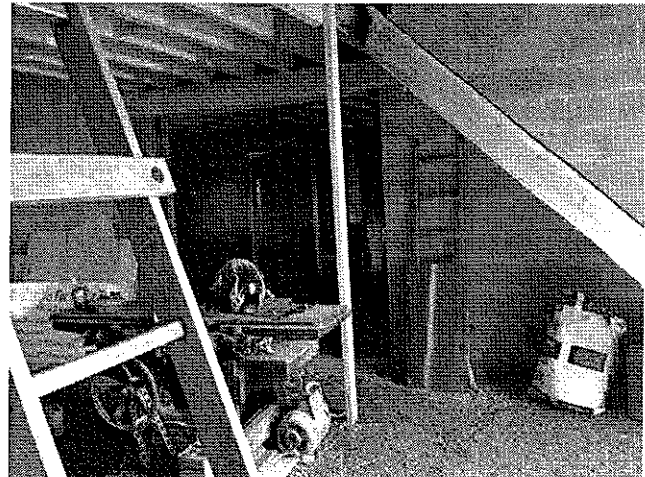
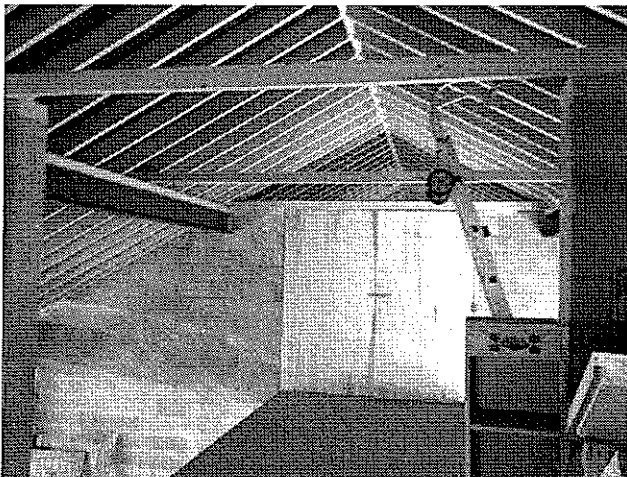
8.3 Retention/improvement of the tree lines in close proximity to buildings will be of high value to most wildlife that can be anticipated as being present in the immediate vicinity of the site.

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**APPENDIX I
Site Photographs**



Front (south east) & rear (north west) elevations of barn proposed for conversion



Upper floor and ground floors of property at Roadside farm barn



Immediate habitat located to the rear of the property