

**Bat & Owl Survey
of
Pear Tree Farm Barn
Ashfield-cum-Thorpe**

On behalf of:

**Hollins Architects
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Prepared by:

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December 2016

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1) Summary

As part of a planning proposal involving a barn at Pear Tree Farm, Ashfield-cum-Thorpe, Stowmarket, Suffolk IP14 6NA, a site visit was undertaken on 21st December 2016 to determine whether the building had been used by bats and barn owls.



Photo 1: The north-eastern elevation. The other three sides have corrugated asbestos cladding to c. 2m above the ground

The survey building is an open-sided barn with a corrugated asbestos roof and cladding to three sides. The barn is aligned NW-SE and has a sawn timber frame. The interior receives daylight illumination due to its design and also six via transparent panels in the roof. In such conditions, bats seek out dark areas or crevices in which to roost, and the lack of such features, together with the draughty interior, made the building unsuitable as a roosting place for bats. The barn is currently in use as a shelter for sheep that graze the paddocks to the north.

There is no vegetation affected by the proposal that has loose bark, crevices or woodpecker holes that might offer potential roosting places for bats.

Although a barn owl box is sited in the barn, there was no evidence of their presence on the floor of the building, or of guano splashed onto the roof beams. However, as compensation

for the loss of this box, a replacement has already been attached to an Oak tree in a hedgerow 300m to the north.

The lack of potential roosting places and absence of any evidence of the presence of bats means that **no** further surveys are required for this building.

Since there was no evidence of bats at the site, a European Protected Species Licence will **not** be required for this project.

Although no evidence of bats was found, it is probable that bats from nearby roosts will forage across the site and along the tree-lined road at the front of the property. This behaviour would be expected to continue after any building work has been completed and therefore it is considered that the planning proposal for this site will not have a detrimental effect on the local bat population.

Please note that this survey records the status of the building at the time of the survey. However, if more than a year were to elapse before the start of the building work, it is considered unlikely, due to the exposure to draughts and lack of potential roosting places, that bats would colonise the site during the intervening period.

2) Introduction

Essex Mammal Surveys were requested to carry out a survey of a barn at Pear Tree Farm, Ashfield-cum-Thorpe to investigate for signs indicating the presence of barn owls, bat colonies and their roosts. The identification of protected species is vital in the proposed development of a site to comply with existing legislation and also allows any work that may otherwise be detrimental to bats to be appropriately scheduled. John Dobson, a bat worker and trainer licensed by Natural England (Licence No. 2015-15258-CLS-CLS) and author of *Mammals of Essex* (Essex Field Club, 2014), carried out the survey on 21st December 2016. John Dobson has been elected a Fellow of the British Naturalists' Association and received the David Bellamy Award for natural history in 2015. The site is located at Grid Reference: TM212631.

John Dobson has extensive experience of barn owl nest sites and pellets, having collected pellets from a site at Canewdon for 24 consecutive months during 1995-1997. The data from this study formed part of the total of 6,950 pellets analysed for prey items, the results of which were published in *The Mammals of Essex* (Lopinga Books, 1999). Most recently, in September 2011, in the company of a licensed bird ringer, five barn owl nest sites were visited on Foulness and 277 pellets recovered for analysis. The results of this research were published in the *Essex Naturalist* in 2015. Pellets collected ranged from recent, black, shiny examples, through shades of grey to crumbling, dusty examples of greater age.

3) Legislation and planning policy relating to bats & barn owls in the UK

All bat species in Britain are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 through inclusion on Schedule 5. They are also protected under The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 1994 (which were issued under the European Communities Act 1972),

through inclusion on Schedule 2. On 1st April 2010, these Regulations, together with subsequent amendments, were consolidated into the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2010.

European protected animal species and their breeding sites or resting places are protected under Regulation 39. It is an offence for anyone to deliberately capture, injure or kill any such animal or to deliberately take or destroy their eggs. It is an offence to damage or destroy a breeding or resting place of such an animal. It is also an offence to have in one's possession or control, any live or dead European protected species.

The threshold above which a person will commit the offence of deliberately disturbing a wild animal of a European protected species has been raised. Now, a person will commit an offence only if he deliberately disturbs such animals in a way as to be likely significantly to affect (a) the ability of any significant groups of animals of that species to survive, breed, or rear or nurture their young, or (b) the local distribution of abundance of that species. However, please note that the existing offences under the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981) as amended which cover obstruction of places used for shelter or protection (for example, a bat roost), disturbance and sale still apply to European protected species.

This legislation provides defences so that necessary operations may be carried out in places used by bats, provided the appropriate Statutory Nature Conservation Organisation (in England this is Natural England) is notified and allowed a reasonable time to advise on whether the proposed operation should be carried out and, if so, the approach to be used. The UK is a signatory to the Agreement on the Conservation of Bats in Europe, set up under the Bonn Convention. The Fundamental Obligations of Article III of this Agreement require the protection of all bats and their habitats, including the identification and protection from damage or disturbance of important feeding areas for bats.

Paragraph 98 of Circular 06/2005 states that *'the presence of a protected species is a material consideration when a planning authority is considering a development proposal that, if carried out, would be likely to result in harm to the species or its habitat'*.

Section 9 of the National Planning Policy Framework 2012 (NPPF) states that *'the planning system should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment byminimising impacts on biodiversity and providing net gains in biodiversity where possible.'*

Since August 2007, building development that affects bats or their roosts needs a Protected Species Licence under The Conservation (Natural Habitats &c.) (Amendment) Regulations 2007 administered in England by Natural England.

The barn owl is protected under Schedule 1 and Schedule 9 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. It is therefore an offence to injure, kill or capture the bird, to disturb nesting birds, to take eggs, and to release captive owls into the wild without a licence. The barn owl is also recognised by the UK Biodiversity Group as a "Species of Conservation Concern".

4) Methods

4.1 Buildings survey

The exterior surfaces of the buildings were examined for any signs of use as bat roosts, such as the presence of droppings on walls, windows or staining around roost entrances. The use of a crevice by a colony of bats produces droppings on brickwork and adjacent surfaces close to the crevice, together with an accumulation of droppings beneath the roost entrance. However, upon examination, many surfaces will have one or two droppings, randomly placed, caused by bats seeking out new roost sites.

The internal survey was conducted using a powerful torch. The roof of the barn was searched for evidence of roosting, the floor areas for droppings and the beams for crevices and staining indicative of the presence of roosting bats. An Xtend & Climb Pro Ladder and a ProVision 300 endoscope were available to inspect crevices in brickwork and around beams.

4.2 Barn owls

The building was inspected for roof voids and cavities that might form potential nesting sites. The floor area of the building was searched for feathers, nest debris and pellets – the remains of small mammals and other prey items that are regurgitated from a perch. Where owls are present, there is usually splashing of excreta on beams and floors as this is expelled whilst perching.

5) Results

5.1 Building survey



Photo 2: North-western elevation

The survey building is an open-sided barn with a corrugated asbestos roof and cladding to three sides. The barn is aligned NW-SE and has a sawn timber frame. The interior receives

daylight illumination due to its design and also six via transparent panels in the roof. In such conditions, bats seek out dark areas or crevices in which to roost, and the lack of such features, together with the draughty interior, made the building unsuitable as a roosting place for bats. The barn is currently in use as a shelter for sheep that graze the paddocks to the north.



Photo 3: Looking south-west within the barn. Note transparent roof panels, sawn timber beams and ivy growing within the building

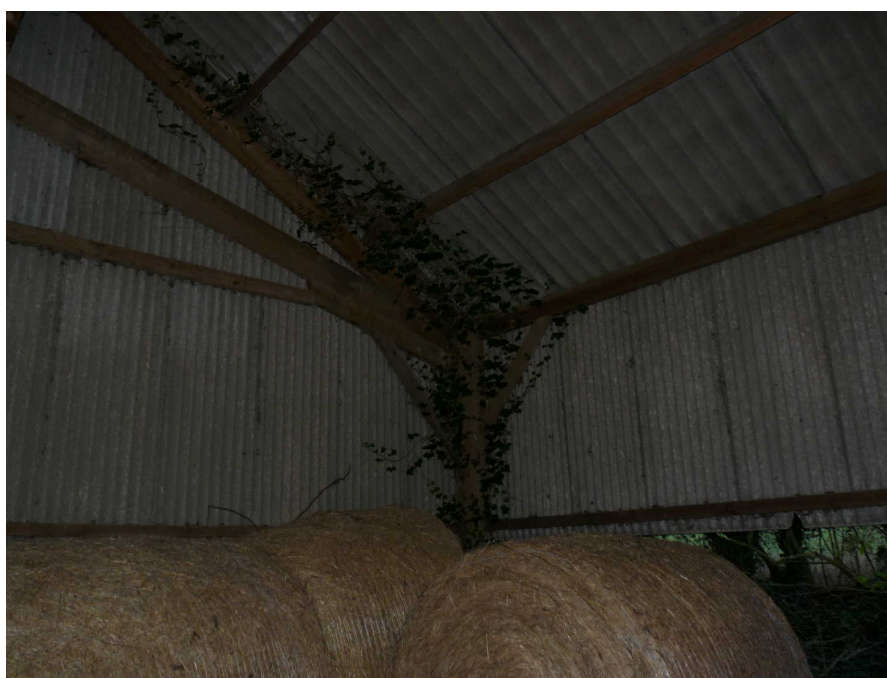


Photo 4: South-western corner



Photo 5: Looking SE within the barn



Photo 6: Looking NW within the barn

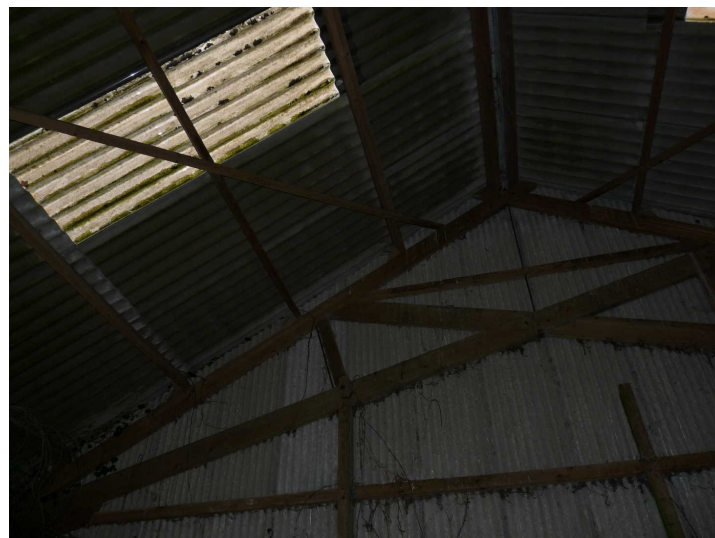


Photo 7: Showing sawn timber beams that lack crevices for bats

There is no vegetation affected by the proposal that has loose bark, crevices or woodpecker holes that might offer potential roosting places for bats.

No evidence of the presence of bats was found at this site.

5.2 Barn owls

Although a barn owl box is sited in the barn, there was no evidence of their presence on the floor of the building, or of guano splashed onto the roof beams. However, as compensation for the loss of this box, a replacement has already been attached to an Oak tree in a hedgerow 300m to the north.

6) Discussion

Bats are inquisitive, highly mobile animals, which constantly investigate their surroundings, evaluating good feeding areas and potential roosting opportunities. Where suitable habitat such as woodland, woodland edge or sheltered pasture occurs, bats will travel up to several kilometres to take advantage of this resource. To reach favoured sites, small bats will follow linear landscape features such as hedgerows, streams and lanes etc. The absence of such features can make an otherwise suitable site inaccessible to bats. In addition, new roosts will become established in such areas - examples being the rapid colonisation of artificial roost boxes placed in conifer forests or the occupation of new houses by nursery colonies of pipistrelle bats within a year or two of their completion.

Since there was no evidence of bats at the site, a European Protected Species Licence will **not** be required for this project.

Although no evidence of bats was found, it is probable that bats from nearby roosts will forage across the site and along the tree-lined road at the front of the property. This behaviour would be expected to continue after any building work has been completed and therefore it is considered that the planning proposal for this site will not have a detrimental effect on the local bat population.

Please note that this survey records the status of the building at the time of the survey. However, if more than a year were to elapse before the start of the building work, it is considered unlikely, due to the exposure to draughts and lack of potential roosting places, that bats would colonise the site during the intervening period.