HERTFORDSHIRE ECOLOGY

Providing ecological advice to Hertfordshire's Local Authorities and communities

Environmental Resource Planning, Hertfordshire County Council
County Hall, Hertford, Herts, SG13 8DN
ecology@hertfordshire.gov.uk
Tel: 01992 555220

Tom Rea
Planning Officer
Development Management
North Hertfordshire District Council,
PO BOX 10613,
Nottingham, NG6 6DH

Ask for: Anita Parry

Tel: 01992 556149

Date: 16/05/2018

Dear Tom,

Full Planning Permission: Change of use of agricultural land to residential use and erection of a part single, part two storey dwelling following demolition of existing stables. Provision of associated garden, parking area and vehicular access.
Land Off, Burge End Lane, Pirton, Hertfordshire
Application No: 18/00912/FP

Thank you for consulting Hertfordshire Ecology in this application.

The Hertfordshire Environmental Records Centre does not have any habitat or species data for the application site itself, which is a stable block and field in a rural setting surrounded by agricultural land.

I am aware that Barn Owls nest within 50m of the application site and the nest site is regularly monitored by the Wildlife Conservation Partnership (WCP). I understand the location of this Barn Owl nesting site is part of a long-standing project that has been developed carefully with guidance from WCP and there is concern that it, and associated Barn Owl foraging habitat within the application site, would be impacted adversely by this proposed development.

All wild birds are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981) (as amended), making it an offence (with certain exceptions) to kill injure or take any wild bird species; and to take, damage or destroy its nest or eggs. Some species, such as Barn Owl, are listed in Schedule 1 of WCA 1981 which gives additional protection in that it is an offence to intentionally or *recklessly disturb them at the nest*.

Barn Owls are a specialist predator of small mammals and need open habitats to hunt across in low light conditions. Therefore, they require a food-rich, quiet rural environment with no light pollution to live and breed normally.

Although widely distributed across the UK, they are nowhere common and the population has experienced significant decline in recent years. The decline is largely attributed to the

intensification and mechanisation of agricultural practices, which has removed suitable nest sites and foraging habitat from much of the farmed landscape. Consequently, land management is the biggest factor affecting Barn Owls. Barn Owls also need places to roost and nest and are highly faithful to the sites they adopt. They are generally intolerant to change.

The Local Planning Authority has been informed that the applicant should be aware that Barn Owls are present. However, it is noted that section 13 on the application form *Biodiversity and Geological Conservation: a) Protected and priority species* has been incorrectly filled in with "*No*" whereas this should have been "*Yes, on land adjacent to or near the proposed development*".

The development proposals for change of use of agricultural land to residential use will result in the change of habitat from grazed field to residential/garden, although no landscaping plans have been submitted. This could lead to increased disturbance and / or loss of appropriate foraging resource, and given the presence of Barn Owls, adverse effects on the species cannot be ruled out. Furthermore, no bat survey of the stables has been undertaken. If bats are present, they will be affected by the proposals.

Therefore, given that no information has been provided regarding Barn Owls or bats, the LPA has insufficient information to determine the application in respect of these protected species, if it wishes to ensure their conservation is fully considered.

Consequently in order to determine this application, I advise an **ecological survey** of the application site is undertaken by a suitably qualified ecologist and recommendations provided that will:

- Describe the nature and extent of the main habitats and features within the application site;
- Assess the stables for bats and the large trees on the site boundary for potential Barn Owl use. Evaluate the impact of the proposals on the ecological interest found and provide recommendations for protection and or, mitigation measures (if necessary) for bats and Barn Owls.
- Provide suggestions for reducing disturbance and enhancing the site for Barn Owls to achieve biodiversity gain – consistent with NPPF expectations - which should be incorporated into the development proposals. This could include establishment of a suitably managed buffer strip adjacent to the existing Barn Owl nest site.

The report should be submitted to the satisfaction of the LPA to enable determination of the application.

I trust these comments are of assistance.

Yours sincerely,

Anita Parry
Ecology Advisor
Hertfordshire Ecology