

LAND AT STONE CROSS LANE, LOWTON, GREATER MANCHESTER.

BARN OWL MITIGATION STRATEGY

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Background and Rationale

- 1.1 ERAP Ltd. (Consultant Ecologists) was commissioned by Wainhomes North-west to provide appropriate guidance with regards to Barn Owl for at Land at Stone Cross Lane, Lowton, Greater Manchester in January 2012.
- 1.2 The central grid reference for the site is **SJ 615 971**. Guidance was required in connection with proposals to develop the site for housing.
- 1.3 This report is an addition to the Stone Cross Lane, Lowton: Ecological Appraisal (ERAP 2011).
- 1.4 The requirement for this additional report is a consequence of the detection of a Barn Owl hunting during bat surveys conducted in June 2012.
- 1.5 Further to this, a correspondence with Judith Smith from the Manchester Raptor Group confirmed the presence of a roosting Barn Owl within the hay barn at Stirrups Farm, to the south of the development site.
- 1.6 Following discussions with the client this *Mitigation Strategy* has been prepared to demonstrate that adequate mitigation and compensation for Barn Owls can be achieved in connection with the development proposals.
- 1.7 This Strategy is in accordance with guidance presented in the following publications: -
 - a. English Nature (2002) *Barn Owls on site - A guide for developers and planners*;
 - b. Ramsden and Twigg (2009) *Barn Owls and Rural Planning Applications "What needs to happen" A guide for Planners*; and,
 - c. Ramsden and Twigg (2009) *Making provision for Barn Owls - a guide for Planners, Applicants and Developers*.
- 1.8 All aspects of this Strategy have been agreed, through discussion, with the client. It is recommended that implementation of the actions detailed in this Strategy form the subject of a suitably worded planning condition.

Objectives and Scope of Strategy

- 1.9 This Strategy covers the following: -
 - a. A summary of the status of Barn Owl at the site and an assessment of impacts;
 - b. Works to be carried out prior to and during the removal of the hay barn at Stirrups Farm;
 - c. Specification of the compensatory habitat to be provided for use by roosting (and nesting) Barn Owl and other wildlife;
 - d. Confirmation of responsibilities and long-term maintenance and monitoring; and,
 - e. A programme of works including the specification of the appropriate timing of works.

Wildlife Legislation

1.10 A synopsis of all relevant wildlife legislation is presented at **Appendix 2**.

2.0 SUMMARY OF STATUS OF BARN OWL ON SITE AND ASSESSMENT OF IMPACTS

2.1 Roosting and Nesting Barn Owl

Current Status

- 2.1.1 January is not an appropriate time of year to detect evidence of nesting Barn Owl. This Strategy has relied on survey information recorded during the previous Bat survey (Martin Prescott 2011) and information provided by Judith Smith of the Manchester Raptor Group.
- 2.1.2 ERAP surveyors did not confirm roosting Barn Owl during the initial survey in 2011 and were unable to gain access to the most of the buildings at Stirrups Farm due to their state of dilapidation, the hay barn which is an open steel structure was inspected but no evidence of Barn Owl was seen at that time. However Judith Smith visited the site on the 10th January 2012 and reported the presence of faecal splashes and a fresh Barn Owl pellet within the barn.
- 2.1.3 Other Barn Owl records (provided by Judith Smith) also exist within the wider area.
- 2.1.4 Therefore, for the purposes of this Strategy, use of the site by nesting Barn Owl is assumed.

Assessment of Impacts

- 2.1.5 Demolition of the hay barn, in connection with the development proposals, will result in the loss of Barn Owl nesting and roosting opportunity.
- 2.1.6 Commencement of works at an inappropriate time of year, when the Barn Owl are nesting and/or dependent young are present, may result in an offence under the *Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981* (as amended), refer to **Appendix 2**.
- 2.1.7 This Strategy provides appropriate guidance to ensure a breach of wildlife legislation is avoided and provisions for nesting Barn Owl are conserved at the site in the long-term.

2.2 Hunting Barn Owl

- 2.2.1 The development will result in the loss of several fields which may be used by hunting Barn Owl. The majority of these fields are arable in nature with one field containing improved grassland.
- 2.2.2 Arable farmland with coarse grassland margins and pasture represent favourable habitat for use by hunting Barn Owl.
- 2.2.3 However the ERAP (ERAP 2011) report noted that “...The arable field margins within the Site are species poor, less than 2 m wide and clearly not managed for wildlife. As such, they do not fit the UK BAP Priority Habitat definition and can be considered of *negligible value*.”
- 2.2.4 As such the fields to the north of the site represent sub-optimal habitat for use by hunting Barn Owl.

- 2.2.5 It is considered that the area of semi-improved grassland to the south of the site, together with the open farmland present within the wider area will provide ample hunting habitat for any Barn Owls roosting and/or nesting at the site.
- 2.2.6 No significant adverse effects on availability of habitats for use by hunting Barn Owl will occur; habitats favorable for hunting Barn Owl will remain to the south of the site.

3.0 MITIGATION STRATEGY

3.1 Provision for Use by Roosting/Nesting Barn Owl

- 3.1.1 Prior to the demolition of the hay barn an alternative provision suitable for use by roosting/nesting Barn Owl will be provided at the site. The text below and **Figure 1**, appended, provides the specification.

Type of Provision

- 3.1.2 Following discussion with the client it was concluded that a purpose-built ‘Barn Owl tower’ was the most appropriate option. The tower was selected for the following reasons: -
- a. It will provide a Barn Owl box within a structure which is more favourable and attractive than an exposed pole-mounted box;
 - b. The tower can be constructed on land within the client’s control/ownership which avoids the need for a Section 106 Agreement;
 - c. Use of a stand-alone structure is more favourable in the consideration of long-term provision than a feature for Barn Owl within a private dwelling.
- 3.1.3 Examples of existing towers are presented at **Insert 1**, below.



Insert 1: Examples of Barn Owl towers.

Location

- 3.1.4 The tower will be located in accordance with the following: -

-
- a. Away from the planned buildings, in an area which is intended to be kept as green space;
 - b. Facing open countryside to the south with no obstructions;
 - c. Away from main roads which may cause a hazard to Barn Owl;
 - d. In an area of the development where post-development disturbance will be deemed to be as low as possible; and,
 - e. Within 200 metres of the existing roosting site at the Stirrups Farm, in accordance with guidance in Ramsden and Twigg (2009).
- 3.1.5 Provisionally it is suggested that the tower will be located to the south of the site, close to pond 1 (see ERAP 2011 and **Figure 1**), but this is subject to finalisation of a reserved matter application. It is suggested that the siting and design of the tower is subject to a planning condition.

Dimensions and Construction Materials

- 3.1.6 The proposed dimensions of the tower are annotated on **Figure 1**.
- 3.1.7 The Barn Owl tower can be constructed from brick or timber framed (or a mixture e.g. a brick foundation with a timber framed box, refer to **Figure 1**). The external elevations will be faced to match the adjacent properties.
- 3.1.8 The actual Barn Owl box must be constructed from external-ply to the specification at **Insert A, Figure 1**.
- 3.1.9 The tower will have a pitched, concrete tile covered roof.

Interior

- 3.1.10 Inside the tower a 1.2 metre square cube will contain a Barn Owl box built to the specification at **Figure 1**.
- 3.1.11 Old Barn Owl pellets gathered from the floor of the existing roost in the hay barn at Stirrups Farm will be added to the floor of the box. This may encourage use by Barn Owl and will also provide a suitable substrate to prevent eggs from rolling around (Barn Owl do not make a nest lined with twigs or other materials).

Barn Owl Access

- 3.1.12 Barn Owl access into the internal box will be provided on the north elevation via a 0.2m by 0.2m square hole. A small perching ledge will be available beneath the hole. A hood or cowl will be fitted over the top of the hole to minimise rainwater ingress, refer to **Figure 1**.

Access for Monitoring

- 3.1.13 Access for monitoring will be available from the north side of the tower. A locked and hinged timber door will be installed at the rear (northern elevation) of the tower. The door will lead into a removable lid at the top of the Barn Owl box, refer to **Insert A, Figure 1**. This will permit access for monitoring and removal of debris. The door way will be accessible with ladders. The ladders must not be left on site to avoid unauthorised access and reduce the risk of vandalism.

Surrounds and Fencing

- 3.1.14 The tower will be surrounded by 1.8 metre high fencing with a locked gated access, refer to **Figure 1**.

Other Opportunities for Wildlife

- 3.1.15 The construction of the tower provides an opportunity to install provisions for other nesting birds such as House Sparrow, a UK Biodiversity Action Plan Priority Species. A Schwegler 1SP House Sparrow terrace will be installed on the eastern elevation of the tower, refer to **Figure 1**.

3.2 Timing of Demolition of the Large Warehouse

- 3.2.1 Owing to the reported presence of roosting Barn Owl it is recommended that demolition of the hay barn is not carried out between March and August inclusive. **Unless** it is appropriately demonstrated by an Ecologist that no evidence of nesting Barn Owl (or other bird species) is present.

3.3 Pre-Demolition Survey

- 3.3.1 Immediately prior to the commencement of demolition of the hay barn (and provided the Barn Owl tower has been completed for 30 days) a pre-demolition survey of the hay barn for evidence of use by nesting Barn Owl (and other birds) will be carried out.
- 3.3.2 The survey will be carried out by an appropriately experienced (and if necessary licensed) Ecologist.
- 3.3.3 If no evidence of nesting is detected the instruction will be provided to proceed with the demolition.
- 3.3.4 If evidence of nesting is detected the hay barn must remain undisturbed until it is confirmed, by an Ecologist, that the young birds have fledged.

3.4 Long-term Maintenance and Monitoring

Ownership

- 3.4.1 The tower will remain in the ownership of Wainhomes. The possibility of passing the tower to an interested conservation group such as Manchester Raptor Group will be fully explored.

Maintenance and Monitoring

- 3.4.2 Maintenance of the tower will be minimal but the following will be essential: -
- a. Annual strimming of the grassland around the base of the tower to ensure self-seeded trees and shrubs are controlled;
 - b. Ensuring the Barn Owl entrance to the tower is free from obstructions;
 - c. Annual clearing out of the Barn Owl box in the winter months. Dead chicks, prey remains, pellets and general debris will be removed. Although a thin layer of trampled pellets will be retained to encourage re-use the following year and provide a surface to prevent the eggs from rolling around;
 - d. Annual clearing out of the House Sparrow terrace box;
 - e. Repair and replacement of the bird boxes, as required.

3.4.3 Any signs of use will be reported to the Lancashire Environment Record Network (LERN) to contribute to their long-term record database.

3.5 Timetable of Works

3.5.1 A suggested timetable/order of works is presented at **Table A**, below.

Table A: Suggested timetable/order of works

Action	Pre-requisites	Responsibility
Construction of the Barn Owl tower to the specification at Section 3.1 and Figure 1 .	Planning consent. At least 30 days prior to scheduled demolition of large warehouse, refer to timing restrictions in Section 3.2 .	Wainhomes North-west under the guidance of ERAP Ltd.
Pre-work survey of large warehouse for Barn Owl	Prior to proposed demolition. At least 30 days after the completion of the Barn Owl tower. Refer to timing restrictions in Section 3.2 and 3.3 .	ERAP Ltd (commissioned by Wainhomes)
Demolition of hay barn	Provided pre-work survey demonstrates an absence of nesting Barn Owl (and other bird species).	Wainhomes
Maintenance and monitoring of Barn Owl tower for signs of use in accordance with Section 3.4	-	ERAP Ltd/Wainhomes or the relevant group such as Manchester Raptor Group.

4.0 REFERENCES

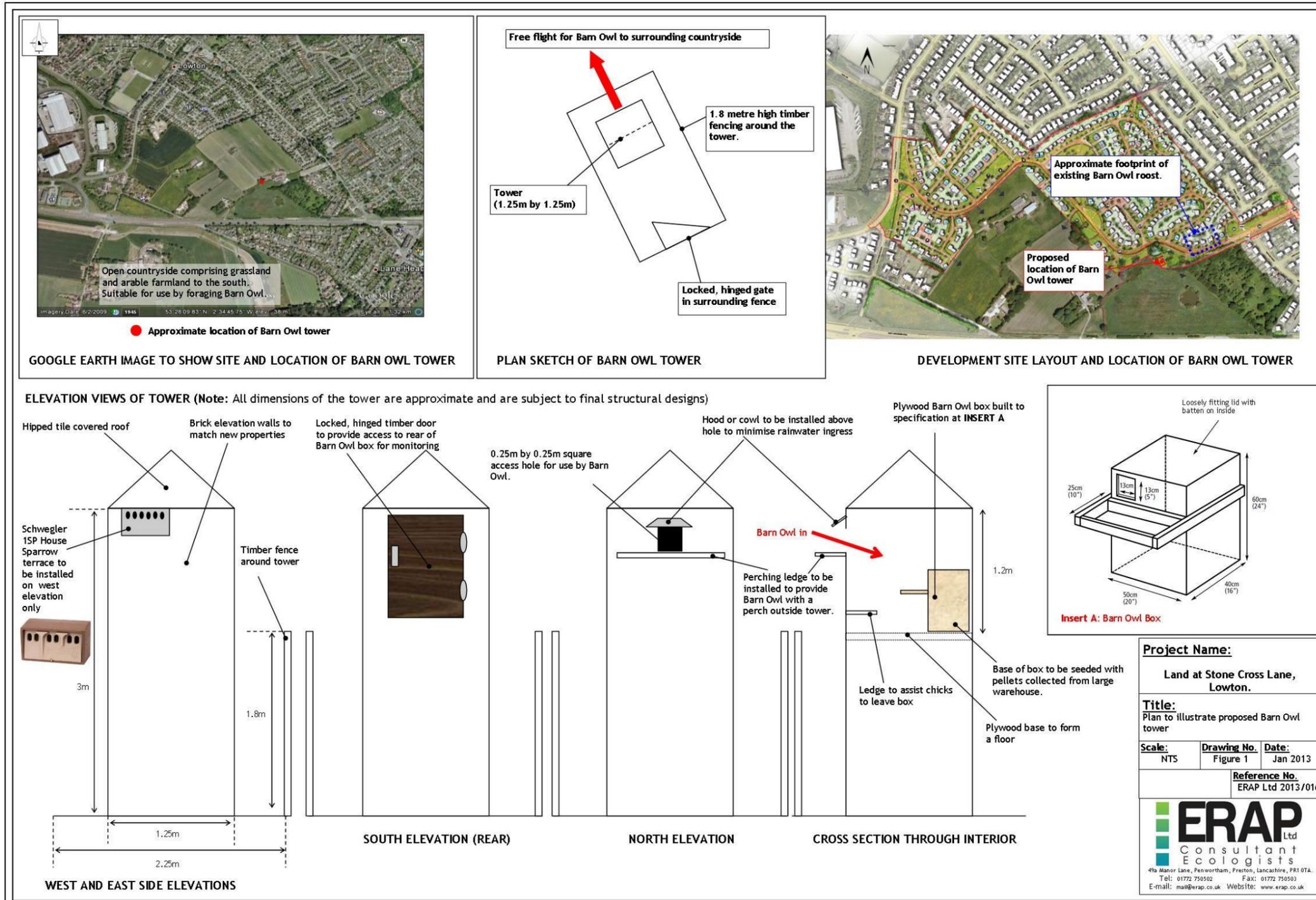
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5.0 APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: FIGURE 1: Plan to illustrate proposed Barn Owl tower and Provisional Location.



APPENDIX 2: SYNOPSIS OF RELEVANT LEGISLATION

Breeding Birds

All wild birds are protected under the *Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981* (as amended), whilst they are actively nesting or roosting. Section 1 of this Act, makes it an offence to kill, injure or take any wild bird, and to intentionally take, damage or destroy the nest of any wild bird while that nest is in use or being built. It is also an offence to take or destroy any wild bird eggs.

Barn Owl

Barn owls are listed on Schedule 1 of the *Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981* which gives them special protection.

It is an offence, with certain exceptions, to:

- Intentionally kill, injure, or take (handle) any wild Barn Owl;
- Intentionally take, damage or destroy any wild Barn Owl nest whilst in use or being 'built' (Barn Owls do not 'build' a nest but may make a nest scrape);
- Intentionally take or destroy a wild Barn Owl egg;
- Have in one's possession or control a wild Barn Owl (dead or alive), or egg, (unless one can show that it was obtained legally);
- Intentionally or recklessly disturb any wild barn owl whilst 'building' a nest or whilst in, on, or near a nest containing eggs or young;
- Intentionally or recklessly disturb any dependent young of wild Barn Owls.