

Barn Owl Trust

Wind Turbine Position Statement

The Barn Owl Trust always recommends that a full Environmental Assessment be undertaken, to include desktop surveys and an assessment of the proximity of the proposed turbine to probable flight paths used by Barn Owls before planning permission is considered. This is especially important where Barn Owl population and proposed turbine density are particularly high in any one given area.

Furthermore, the Trust recommends that a weekly system of monitoring around newly erected turbines to search for bird strike carcasses is implemented, over a period of operation of not less than 2 years, and that the results are made publicly available.

Due to the risk of carcass loss, the erection of fox and badger-proof fencing around the whole periphery of the site footprint is recommended to prevent the removal of carcasses by scavenging mammals. Such fences should be erected around installations with a radius equivalent to the height of the turbine mast plus one rotor blade. In addition, the site footprint should be managed to control scrub in order to facilitate the discovery of any carcasses. Despite a perceived reluctance on the part of many local planning authorities to impose such a condition, this recommendation is in line with Government thinking. In response to a question in the House of Commons from Graham Evens MP, the Minister for Energy and Climate Change, Charles Hendry MP, replied:

“Local and national planning authorities can and do refuse planning permission for proposed wind farms where there are likely to be significant impacts on local wildlife populations which cannot be acceptably mitigated. Where appropriate, conditions can be placed on a wind farm to ensure that any impacts on local wildlife populations are minimised, avoided or compensated. This may include post development monitoring of wildlife.” (Barclay 2010)

Natural England Technical Information Note TIN069 further supports the use of collision monitoring schemes, including carcass searches.

Based on available evidence, it is thought that wind farms that are positioned appropriately within the landscape do not pose a significant hazard for Barn Owls. This is because Barn Owl home range varies between 350 hectares in summer and 5000 hectares in winter, thereby reducing the amount of time spent in the vicinity of a turbine in comparison with many other species. Furthermore, foraging predominantly takes place within 3-4m (10-13 feet) of the ground yet most turbines afford a rotor tip ground clearance well in excess of this elevation.

So far, there is only one confirmed case of a Barn Owl being injured or killed by a wind turbine in Britain (04/01/13 in Cumbria caused by a low-level domestic turbine, not a tall commercial turbine), although we are awaiting details of a further two unconfirmed reports of collisions. This is in marked contrast to the situation with major roads where confirmed mortality reports are frequently received and an estimated 3,000-5,000 Barn Owls are killed every year. As far as is known, and despite appeals for information, the number of unsubstantiated reports (where it is alleged that Barn Owls have been killed by wind turbines) is extremely low. Based on available evidence, the Barn Owl Trust takes the view that, overall, the level of threat posed to Barn Owls by wind turbines in Britain is relatively very low.

The Barn Owl Trust would like to be able to investigate all wind turbine applications in order to gauge probable impact but it does not have the resources to do so. In the absence of detailed local knowledge (and given the general lack of evidence) is not appropriate for the Trust to lodge objections to individual wind turbine applications. However, the Barn Owl Trust

would not hesitate to oppose a proposed development should we believe it to pose a significant risk to the species.

PLEASE NOTE. If you or your organisation discovers any evidence of a wind turbine having a detrimental effect on a Barn Owl (or Barn Owl site occupation) please inform the Barn Owl Trust immediately (01364 653026).

Reference

Barclay, C. (2010) Consents for Wind Farms – Onshore, Standard Note SN/SC4370, Science and Environment Section, House of Commons Library, London

Natural England (2010), Assessing the effects of onshore wind farms on birds. Technical Information Note TIN069, Natural England.