

# New rights to develop barns affects our wildlife

## Another nail in the coffin for old farm buildings: The Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (Amendment and Consequential Provisions) (England) Order 2014.

As of 6 April 2014, barn conversions outside National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty can be carried out under Permitted Development Rights. They no longer require a planning application, just a prior notification to the local planning authority.

In spite of promises of being “the greenest government ever” (David Cameron, 2010) the new policies and paperwork do not even mention biodiversity interests! There is no longer even a requirement for a wildlife survey to be carried out. Wildlife interests are certain to be damaged as a result.

The Barn Owl Trust provided comments on the Greater Flexibility for Change of Use – Consultation document in 2013 as did Natural

England and other agencies. Unfortunately, the problems pointed out by conservation organisations and the changes suggested were ignored.

David Ramsden, the Barn Owl Trust’s Head of Conservation, said “We are extremely disappointed that under the new system there is no requirement for a wildlife survey to be undertaken and the presence or absence of any protected species will be based solely on a declaration by the landowner. In an overwhelming majority of cases, the landowner will lack any training or experience of ecological surveying and will have a vested interest in finding protected species to be absent”.

No aspect of the new legislation

alters the Biodiversity Duty placed on planning authorities under the Natural Environment & Rural Communities Act 2000. However, even before this new policy, the planning decisions often failed to achieve protection of biodiversity interests, let alone enhancement. The idea that bird interests are adequately covered via wildlife legislation is incorrect. Although the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 protects individual birds, it affords no protection to the sites they use when nests are unoccupied. Such protection can only be delivered by the planning system.

The Barn Owl Trust’s position regarding development of known or potential barn owl sites has not changed:

- A wildlife survey should always be undertaken by a suitably qualified person.
- If necessary, timing restrictions and/or temporary alternative provision for barn owls should be put in place during the course of the development.
- Permanent provision for barn owls should be made inside the completed development.

It remains to be seen whether or not local planning authorities will honour their biodiversity duty when dealing with prior notifications for barn conversions.

**For further information, contact David Ramsden, Barn Owl Trust, [david@barnowltrust.org.uk](mailto:david@barnowltrust.org.uk)**  
**For further information on barn owls, barn conversions and other developments, visit: [barnowltrust.org.uk](http://barnowltrust.org.uk)**

David Ramsden (Barn Owl Trust)



**Sites like this one where barn owls, kestrels, little owls, and stock doves nest, can now be converted without a wildlife survey and without planning permission.**