WYG Planning & Environment
part of the WYG group

Ref: A070660-24

Date: February 2019

Rebeca Fenn-Tripp
By email to: Rebecca.Fenn-Tripp@bloorhomes.com

Dear Rebecca,

Appendix F5: Sandleford Park – Barn Owl Letter Report

Introduction

WYG was commissioned by Bloor Homes and the Sandleford Farm Partnership in December 2018 to review the findings of the barn owl surveys at Sandleford Park, with reference to the current proposals. This follows barn owl nest checks completed at the site in 2011, 2013 and 2017. Activity surveys for barn owls were completed in 2015 and 2018.

For details of the development description, please see the main ES chapter.

Methodology

Barn Owl Nest Check

In line with guidance in the Barn Owl Conservation Handbook (2012), and since potential nesting places had already been identified in previous surveys, a 'top down' approach was employed. This means that the locations most likely to support barn owls were surveyed first; which increases the potential for disturbance but gives the surveyor the best chance to locate evidence of breeding barn owls on site in the time available. The most recent visit was undertaken by Josh Stafford (NE Barn Owl Licence no: C129/00321) and John Simper on the 7th November 2017 in good weather conditions to inspect these potential nesting places for any evidence of nesting barn owls. The following evidence was searched for:

- Physical sightings of barn owls;
- White staining from droppings;
- Feathers;
- Pellets (composed of regurgitated feeding remains);
- Egg shells.

The period between early-June and mid-July was avoided as this is when barn owls are most likely to have young in the nest, however evidence of nesting barn owls would still be present (although any young were likely to have fledged). Potential nest places were then categorised as confirmed nest sites / roost sites / not occupied.

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Barn Owl Activity Survey

The barn owl survey was based on methods recommended in the RSPB Bird Monitoring Methods guidance (Gilbert *et al.*, 1998). The ideal strategy to confirm barn owl breeding is to record all potential nest sites during the winter, followed by a summer survey to assess barn owl activity at each of the sites. Activity surveys are best carried out on cloudless still nights and are not suitable in heavy rain or wind.

The most recent barn owl activity surveys were undertaken on two visits by two surveyors on 21st June and 9th July 2018, each surveyor covered half of the site so that overall the site was surveyed twice. Timings and weather conditions are shown in Table 1. The survey involved a walkover of the survey area over at least four hours. The survey focussed on potential nest sites and optimal foraging habitat. During the surveys, the surveyors monitored the site for flying or calling barn owls. Any barn owls recorded would be observed to see if they returned to a nest site.

Table 1: dates and weather conditions of field surveys

Date	Start	Finish	Temperature (ºC)	Wind (Beaufort)	Cloud cover (%)	Precipitation
21.06.2018	20:26	23:00	14	0	15	None
09.07.2018	20:21	22:55	24	1	0	None

Results

Barn Owl Nest Check

During the 2017 survey, one tree appeared to have evidence of barn owls nesting, whilst a further three trees were found to have evidence of roosting barn owls (Figure 1). A summary of the findings of each tree surveyed (including the tree reference numbers as stated within the associated Tree Protection Plan – 14281-BT7) is provided below:

- T1 (T158) - Large cavity present with evidence of a barn owls nesting being present during 2017. Multiple pellets and feathers present. In addition to this a barn owl was seen to leave another cavity higher up from the nesting cavity.
- T2 (T159) – Low number of pellets indicating occasional roosting
- T3 (T160) – No evidence of roosting barn owl presence but roosting cavities present
- T4 (T127) – No evidence of roosting barn owls present, evidence of breeding kestrels in 2017
- T5 (T173) – No evidence of roosting or nesting barn owls but potential roosting cavities present
- T6 (T34) – Barn owl seen leaving roost – no evidence of nesting

An update bat roost hibernation survey completed in February 2018 confirmed that the barn owl roost within T158 still showed signs of recent occupation.

Barn Owl Activity Survey

21st June 2018

Three instances of barn owl activity were recorded on site during the survey. The first barn owl was recorded at 21:00; foraging along the northern boundary of Waterleaze Copse at the south eastern extent of the site. A second barn owl was noted foraging along the stream running between Dirty Ground Copse and High Wood traveling north west at 22:00. A barn owl was then noted at 22:01 assumed to be the same barn owl as described above traveling south east before landing on the ground.

9th July 2018

A single barn owl was noted traveling south towards Waterleaze Copse in the vicinity of the cluster of trees comprised of T1-T3 within the south eastern extent of the site. The calls of barn owl chicks were also noted emanating from tree T1.

All activity noted during the surveys described below and which were recorded previously in 2015 are illustrated within Figure 2.

Impacts/Recommendations

No confirmed barn owl nest sites will be directly impacted as a result of the proposed development however three of the trees onsite considered to have features which have the potential to be utilised as roosting sites (T4, T5 and T6) are to be impacted either directly or indirectly by the proposed development. The calls of barn owl chicks were also noted emanating from tree T1 during the survey conducted on 9th July 2018.

As the development is expected to reduce the suitability of at least one potential nest site, Tree T6 (T34), it is recommended that the site is enhanced for nesting barn owls by the addition of nest boxes. One nest box is recommended to be installed on the edge of each of the eight woodland blocks. Please see the Ecological Mitigation and Management Plan (Appendix F18) for the proposed locations of barn owl nest boxes. Nest boxes should be installed post-construction, to avoid disturbance impacts to any barn owls roosting on-site.

The trees T1 (T158), T2 (T159) and T3 (T160) are situated within an open field close to a 'footpath', it is recommended that a fence is installed, at the appropriate time outside of the breeding season, along the edge of the 'footpath' so as to dissuade members of the public from crossing the field to investigate the trees and thus causing disturbance to barn owls.

Trees T4 (T127) and T5 (T173) have been recommended for felling or pollarding for management purposes within the arboricultural report. In the event that felling or works are required on these trees, further surveys would be necessary to confirm the continued absence of nesting barn owls.

Noise and vibration

As nesting barn owls are protected from disturbance, it is recommended that construction works should not commence during the nesting period (March to September inclusive) near any trees or buildings occupied by barn owls. If nests are identified, a buffer zone will be set up inside which no construction work may be undertaken until the young have fledged and cease to return to the nest. The size of the buffer will depend on the nature of the disturbance, and should be advised by a suitably qualified ecologist. Published research (Ruddock and Whitfield, 2007) suggests that barn owls may be disturbed by activity at a maximum of 250m from the nest. For moderate disturbance levels, however, a smaller buffer distance is likely to be appropriate. To avoid this constraint, it is recommended that construction works are not commenced during the bird nesting season. If disturbing works are already underway when the nesting season starts, and birds choose to nest nearby, then it may be assumed that the disturbance is not detrimental to them, but works should not encroach upon the nest site. In addition, it is recommended a watching brief is established to monitor the nest for roosting activity and construction works are restricted to daylight hours. Ideally a buffer of at least 30m from a known nest site would be observed even during the winter, to avoid roosting birds being disturbed, although this is not a legal requirement.

Recreational impact

The proposed development is likely to increase the number of people using the site for recreational purposes. This would be expected to increase the likelihood of disturbance to barn owls, for instance by dog-walkers or children playing. To minimise this risk footpaths across the site will be clearly marked, and access to woodland areas controlled.

Foraging habitat

As the entire optimal barn owl foraging habitat on-site is due to be retained (which comprises several field compartments at the eastern extent of the site and the centre of the site in conjunction with the central area of marshy grassland, see Figure 1), it is considered that the development will not have a significant detrimental effect on the value of the site to foraging barn owls. However, this relies on the valuable habitat (tussocky rank grassland) being maintained outside of the development footprint. The future management of the site will be guided by the Ecological Mitigation and Management Plan (Appendix F19) and will avoid creating large areas of amenity grassland, retaining habitats currently present wherever possible.

Lighting

Lighting within the development has been designed so that no vegetated boundary including hedgerow, woodland or the central valley area will exceed 1 lux and hence it is unlikely to impact foraging barn owls. Lighting mitigation comprising the installation of cowls, hoods or louvers into those lamps located close to hedgerows (Lighting Strategy, Appendix F20). Tall trees will be retained and / or planted on either side where proposed roads cross hedgerows to guide species such as bats and barn owls over the road.

Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any queries or require any further information,

Yours faithfully,

John Simper MCIEEM
Senior Ecologist

Alexander Baldwin MCIEEM
Senior Ecologist
(NE Barn Owl Licence no: CL29/00324)

Updated to current proposals by:

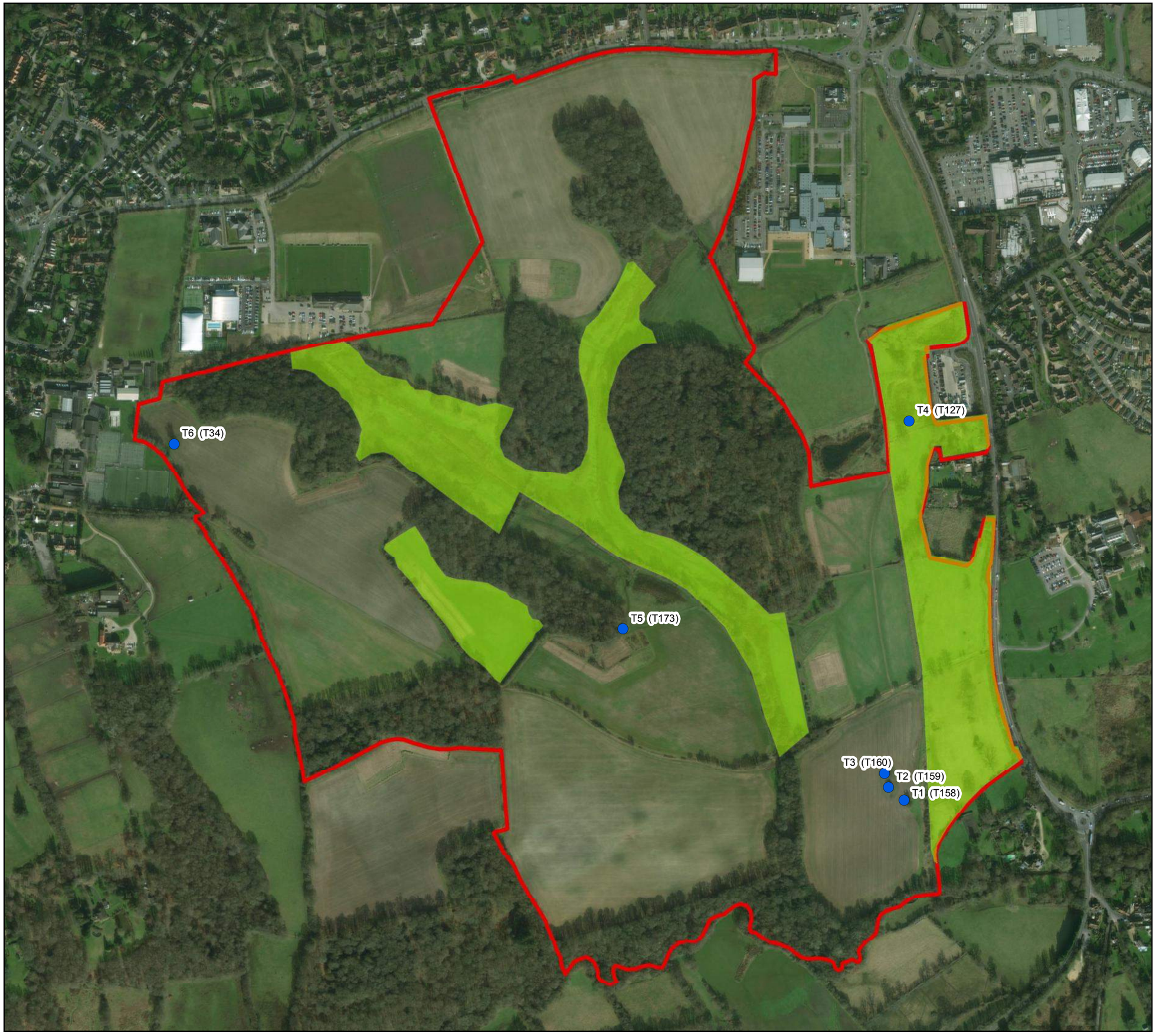
Tamsin Clark MCIEEM
Associate Ecologist

References

Barn Owl Trust (2012). Barn Owl Conservation Handbook: A comprehensive guide for ecologists, surveyors, land managers and ornithologists. Pelagic Publishing.

Ruddock M. & Whitfield, D.P. (2007). A review of disturbance distances in selected bird species. Natural Research Projects Ltd. Scottish Natural Heritage.

Figure 1 – Barn Owl Roost Assessment – 27.11.2017
Figure 2 – Barn Owl Activity Survey 2018



Rev	Date	Notes
A	DD/MM/YY	Initial map production

Legend

- Tree with Barn Owl Roosting Potential
- Optimal Foraging Habitat
- SiteBoundary

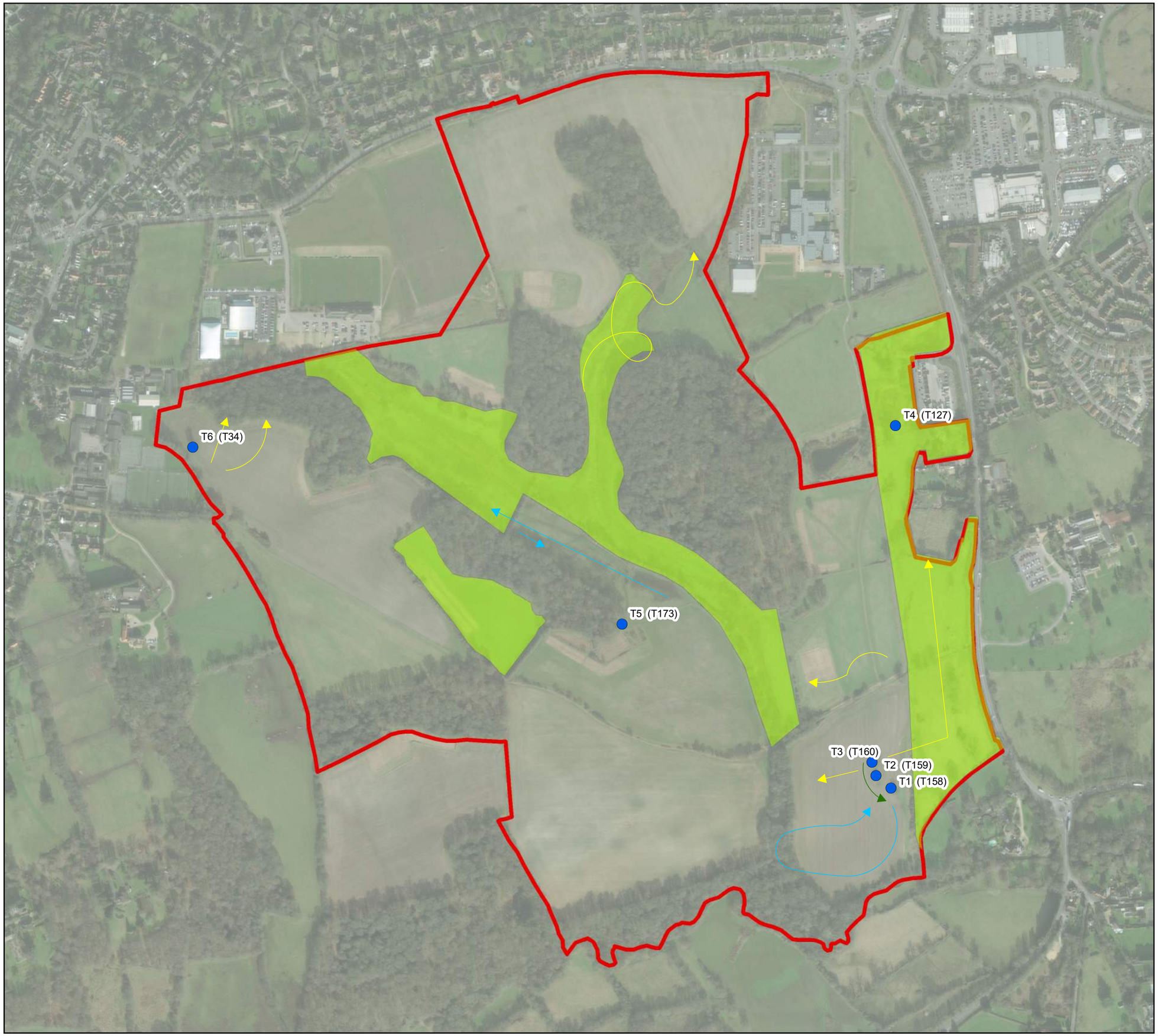
0 50 100 200 300 400 Metres

Barn Owl Roost Assessment - 27.11.2017

Sandleford Park, Newbury
Bloor Homes & Sandleford Farm Partnership

Scale at A3:	Project No:	Drawing No:	Revision:
1:5,725		Figure 1	A

Drawn by:	Drawn date:	Approved by:
Ben Blowers	30/01/2018	



Rev	Date	Notes
A	26/09/18	Initial map production

Legend

- Tree with Barn Owl Roosting Potential
- Barn Owl Activity 2015
- Barn Owl Activity 21.06.2018
- Barn Owl Activity 09.07.2018
- Optimal Foraging Habitat
- SiteBoundary

0 50 100 200 300 400 Metres

N

Barn Owl Activity Survey 2018

Sandleford Park, Newbury
Bloor Homes & Sandleford Farm Partnership

Scale at A3:	Project No:	Drawing No:	Revision:
1:6,000	A070660-23	Figure 1	A

Drawn by:	Drawn date:	Approved by:
Ben Cooke	27/09/2018	