



THE COUNTRYSIDE
RESTORATION TRUST
CREATING A LIVING AND WORKING COUNTRYSIDE

MEDIA RELEASE

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Barn Owls Threatened by County Council

Barn Owls – Britain’s most attractive and also most vulnerable owl – are being threatened by work planned by Cambridgeshire County Council. The barn owls concerned nest close to the Haslingfield Road Bridge at Barton, which the CC seems determined to demolish, despite logic, conservation and democracy.

Robin Page, Chairman of the The Countryside Restoration Trust (CRT), which owns land on both sides of the bridge, is appalled: **“What is planned is an act of straight vandalism. If carried out by “hoodies” there would be police involvement. Instead it is being carried out by the County Council – using the money of Council Tax payers”**.

Barn Owls returned to the area seven years ago after a gap of at least forty-five years, following wildlife friendly farming methods used by the Trust’s tenant farmer Tim Scott. One of the methods used has been to allow roadside vegetation and hedgerows to gain height, pushing the birds above the traffic when they cross the road. Britain’s top barn owl specialist, Colin Shawyer, who has advised the CRT says: **“Pushing barn owls high over roads is essential – as large numbers end up as road kills during the course of a year. Barn owls travel along the lowest points of a valley and they will be crossing the Haslingfield Road just where the County Council intends to fell trees and bushes. It will be creating an enormous threat to the owls. A pair of wild barn owls, which are monitored annually, have established themselves within about 300 yards of the bridge. In my view it is essential that the trees and bushes should be left alone”**.

Tim Scott, the CRT’s tenant farmer at Lark Rise Farm, and Vice Chairman of Barton Parish Council says: **“I feel completely outraged and misled. Firstly I don’t want to lose this attractive and historic railway bridge, as the bridge and the surrounding habitat create wonderful habitat for wildlife and the access below the bridge has become something of a wildlife highway. In addition to barn owls - bats, badgers, otters (using the ditch at the base of the bridge) and kestrels all use the area involved. The County Council has now reneged on its promise to**

keep vegetation removal to a minimum – it intends to flatten ALL the trees and bushes on the banks of the bridge. There has been no consultation – no communication – the whole thing is a disgrace and casts a shadow over the phrase “local democracy”. Have you seen the County Council propaganda sheet “Your Cambridgeshire”? What a joke”.

More disturbingly the CRT has discovered that the Conservation Departments at both South Cambs District Council and the County Council are opposed to the demolition of the bridge – but they have been totally ignored too. Incredibly the plan breaks the County Council’s own Structure Plan and goes against South Cambs District Council’s “Biodiversity Strategy” which identifies the site as being within the Countryside Enhancement Area 14 River Bourn Corridor. South Cambs D.C. adds: *“The removal of this green gateway could potentially compromise future initiatives to establish cycleways out of Cambridge and would appear to conflict with the overall aims of the Cambridgeshire Green Infrastructure Strategy”.*

Robin Page says: **“All the County Council’s talk of sustainable development and conservation is shown to be nothing less than a mixture of greenwash and whitewash by its high handed and irrational approach. Long term, we also have hopes of developing a footpath to the National Trust’s Wimpole Hall [Robin is a member of the National Trust Council] when the University no longer needs the railway line. Again the demolition of the bridge will thwart this great opportunity for increasing responsible access and activity when the time is right.**

Being a local charity with a national reputation and support, I do not understand why the County Council is not helping us. There is one simple solution. Think forward; think conservation; think responsible access; think wildlife; think road safety; think landscape – the County Council should bite the bullet and repair the bridge”.

Ends

Notes for Editors:

For further information, please contact The Countryside Restoration Trust office on 01223 262999 or email info@livingcountryside.org.uk.

The Countryside Restoration Trust is a farming and conservation charity which aims to protect and restore Britain's countryside with wildlife-friendly and commercially viable agriculture. The Trust is committed to promoting the importance of a living and working countryside through education, demonstration and community involvement.

The Trust is establishing a network of model farms across Britain which, using sensitive farming methods, will demonstrate how to protect wildlife, produce quality, seasonal food and preserve our countryside for future generations.

The Trust is also using living, working farms as educational centres of expertise to inspire farmers, land managers, the general public and politicians.

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