

NEWS

Nest box replacement project may need to be 'put on hold'

More funding required for owl charity's work

By James Jeune

jjeune@jerseyeveningpost.com

A PROJECT to install hundreds of new nest boxes for barn owls could soon be put on hold unless additional funding is secured.

Bob Tompkins, chairman of the Jersey Barn Owl Conservation Network, has called for public donations to help replace the existing 260 boxes stationed across the Island.

The group – which records barn owl activity and also looks after injured or sick owls – has already replaced more than half of the ageing boxes, and is hoping to complete the process by the end of next year.

However, Mr Tompkins, who also writes the JEP's Nature column, said the price of timber and other materials had risen significantly and that unless further funding was received, the work would need to be 'put on hold'.

He said: 'We are trying to get all of the boxes up to a really good condition so that we can focus more on looking after the owls themselves. We are getting there – these are very high-quality boxes, which we hope will last 20 years, but the funds at the moment are very tight.'

He noted that the group did not receive financial support from the government and relied entirely on donations.

'Unless we can get the funding for more materials, that side of the project will be put on hold. What really



■ The Jersey Barn Owl Conservation teams have been installing new replacement owl boxes across the Island but say they need more money for the project. Picture: BOB TOMPKINS

upsets me is that people will expect you to put a box up because you are a charity, but do not offer any financial assistance – or very little.'

Those interested in donating can contact Mr Tompkins by email-

ing bobtompkins@live.co.uk, or by searching for the Jersey Barn Owl Conservation Network on Facebook.

● Mr Tompkins's Nature column can be read on page 16 and 17.

Planning staff needed to clear backlog

By Tom Innes

tinnes@jerseyeveningpost.com

A 'DESPERATE' problem in recruiting permanent staff to deal with a backlog of planning applications may result in interim officers being employed, according to the Environment Minister.

Deputy John Young said that the current caseload for planning officers was double the department's target figure and that recruitment efforts had not succeeded so far.

Responding to a question from Senator Tracey Vallois during this week's States sitting, the minister said it was 'no secret' that there was a backlog in dealing with applications.

About 500 were outstanding for a department with ten officers, he said, with the caseload for each employee being double the target figure of 25, creating 'intense pressure' to recruit additional staff.

Deputy Young added: 'So far I don't think we've been able to succeed in that and I have heard from officers who lead the department

that there is considerable frustration with the People Hub processes [for recruitment], which I have advised the chief executive about.'

'Permanent recruitment is not the only option. We may have to contract in some arrangements for planning officers, as it's desperate, as we aren't able to deal with the volume of applications and there will only be more as a result of the Island Plan.'

Deputy Young said he hoped that Members would support the Government Plan, due to be debated next month, which included £750,000 in funding for regulatory improvements which, he said, could help ease the situation slightly.

Senator Vallois asked Deputy Young whether he thought it would be possible to clear the backlog so that efforts to provide a greater supply of housing for the Island's needs would not be frustrated. He said that he had originally asked for £1.5 million for regulatory improvements, but that the proposed Government Plan funding would be a step in the right direction.

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