

SKYLARK MITIGATION STRATEGY Rev A

Bellway Homes Ltd.

Land South of Desford, Leicestershire

June 2026

1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The following has been prepared by FPCR Environment & Design Ltd. on behalf of Bellway Homes Ltd. for a site located on land south of Desford, Leicestershire (central grid reference: SK 484 029) hereafter referred to as 'the Site'.
- 1.2 This document should be read in conjunction with the other ecological documents prepared for this application, primarily the Ecological Appraisal with appended Breeding Bird Survey Report.

2.0 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Site spans c.42ha of agricultural land on the southern edge of Desford, with Merrylees Industrial Estate bounding the southern section of the Site, and residential Desford bordering the northern Site boundary. Agricultural land dominates the landscape east and southeast of the Site, with the outer limits of Leicester located 3-3.5km east of the Site.
- 2.2 Fields within the Site were mostly agricultural and divided by established hedgerows with mature trees. Breeding bird surveys undertaken Apr - June 2024 and a single update survey undertaken in June 2026 identified skylark as a probable breeder within the Site.
- 2.3 Skylark were observed displaying and holding territories in arable fields throughout the Site. A peak count of 27 skylark were recorded. Analysis of the distribution and behaviour of the skylark recorded suggests 8 or 9 probable breeding territories were held across the Site in 2024. The result of the June 2026 survey was consistent with this, recording 13 skylark across the Site, which is consistent with the usage of the Site recorded in 2024.
- 2.4 Probable breeder in this context relates to the EOAC Criteria for Categorisation of Breeding Status, meaning evidence was accumulated during the surveys which indicated that the skylark were breeding within the Site based on the following observation:
 - Pair in suitable nesting habitat (P)
 - Permanent territory, defended over at least 2 survey occasions (T)
 - Courtship and display (D)
 - Visiting probable nest site (N)
 - Agitated behaviour (A)
 - Brood patch of incubating bird, from bird in hand (I)
 - Nest building or excavating nest-hole (B)
- 2.5 Confirmed breeder relates to actual observations of nest, fledglings, egg shell or includes adults carrying food etc.
- 2.6 The survey effort undertaken is proportionate and the findings of the surveys carried out are considered to present an accurate representation of the number of skylark utilising the Site and

also the likely maximum number of skylark the Site is capable of supporting given the Site area, field sizes and crop types, such that the number of skylark recorded would not be exceeded by additional surveys.

- 2.7 Skylark are a species listed as a Species of Principal Importance (SPI) under Section 41 of the NERC Act 2006 (NERC S.41). The S.41 list is used to guide decision-makers such as public bodies, including local and regional authorities, in implementing their duty under Section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006, to have regard to the conservation of biodiversity in England, when carrying out their normal functions.
- 2.8 Skylark are also classified as a Red listed species of Birds of Conservation Concern (BoCC) in the UK. Skylark are noted as a common resident breeder in Leicestershire and one of the most common farmland birds with an estimated 1.6 million territories nationally in 2016, however have experienced significant declines since the 1960s due to changes in farming practices including intensification of grassland livestock management and shifts in arable farming from spring to winter cereals, not from development, which has led to their classification. Skylark populations in the arable environment occur at far lower density than in natural habitats due to limited invertebrate and seed availability being the limiting factor. In this instance, the presence of similar agricultural habitats in the locality, means it is not considered that the Site presents an isolated or exceptional instance of foraging and breeding habitat for skylark.
- 2.9 This density of skylark records obtained in suitable arable habitat throughout the Site mirrored the national average density for the respective habitats^{1 2}, it is apparent that these habitats then were of average suitability for skylark. The skylark associated with these habitats within the Site are likely to be able to instead utilise suitable arable habitat in the locality to breed, however the availability of foraging habitat, unmitigated it is likely that the loss of these arable fields will to some extent impact the local population of breeding skylark. However, the fact that the on-Site fields only form a fraction of agricultural land somewhat reduces this impact.
- 2.10 Development of these field compartments will therefore result in the loss or displacement of the nesting territories from the Site to alternative agricultural land in the locality, with the surrounding fields east and southeast of the Site as well as the wider landscape surrounding Desford dominated by agricultural land.
- 2.11 It is therefore intended that though the Sites suitability to support nesting skylark is removed / reduced, that the green infrastructure and grassland habitat provided would offer enhanced foraging resources to be utilised by nesting skylarks in the locality.
- 2.12 The inclusion of long-term compensatory measures along the southwestern boundary designed to improve food availability and reduce foraging distances, will provide additional high-value foraging habitat. These enhancements are expected to support the nearby breeding and adult population and minimise the effect on the local population.
- 2.13 Evidence from Kuiper et. al. (2013) indicates that when foraging, field margins are the preferred habitat type for skylark with dependant young, travelling away from the nest at distances dependant on crop type etc., though they show preference for foraging habitats located within

¹ S. Browne, J. Vickery, D. Chamberlain (2000) 'Densities and population estimates of breeding skylarks *Alauda arvensis* in Britain in 1997'

² CIEEM, 2022. Bryophytes, Lichens and Fungi: InPractice Issue 117 September 2022, Published by CIEEM

100m of their nest³. Research also shows⁴ that skylark have been observed using solar farms (therefore with heavily obstructed sightlines) as a foraging resource for adjacent fields, and that though not used for nesting, provide a valuable supporting habitat for nesting. Currently the fields within the Site have very narrow margins, lacking management, offering limited skylark foraging resources.

3.0 CONSERVATION OBJECTIVES

- 3.1 The overarching objectives of this Skylark Mitigation Strategy is to:
- a) to provide long-term high-value foraging opportunities for the locally present assemblage of farmland birds; and
 - b) improve the ability of surrounding fields to support breeding, non-breeding and adult skylark in proximity to the scheme.

4.0 HABITAT CREATION MEASURES

- 4.1 A large proportion of the Proposed Development layout is green infrastructure. The central corridors of green space through the site will need to be multifunctional with its primary use being amenity value for residents and thus levels of human disturbance will render this space unappealing for farmland specialist birds. However, other elements of the proposed green infrastructure provide opportunities to create enhanced foraging opportunities for farmland birds including skylark.
- 4.2 Where attenuation features will have fluctuating water levels, these will allow of exposed mud banks in the spring / summer which are favoured by a range of invertebrates, increasing the available foraging, including for skylark. Less formal areas of open space will incorporate species rich grassland mixes (Emorsgate EM3, Emorsgate EM8 and Emorsgate EM5) that will be managed less intensively offering the appropriate structure and species mix to provide seed resources and serve the same purpose as agricultural beetle banks to enhance the foraging resources for both adult and fledgling skylark and other farmland bird species. In particular a field compartment on the eastern edge of the Site will predominantly comprise this informally managed tussock grassland will be provided and on the southeastern edge of the site some will have uninterrupted access to the offsite retained cropland so that onsite foraging opportunity will be provided adjacent to offsite suitable nesting habitat with open sight lines. Due to the disadvantages of offsite skylark plot mitigation, provision of onsite foraging resource is considered a more secure mitigation. Fencing will screen these areas from public access and with the provision of managed alternative footpaths routes elsewhere through the Site it is intended that these areas would not be disturbed.
- 4.3 The green corridor along the northern edge of the site will provide value to wildlife, however its position between the Bosworth Academy and residential land to the north and the proposed development whilst being over 250m from arable habitats suitable for nesting, its value to farmland specialists, particularly foraging skylark is less measurable. However, foraging and nesting opportunities for generalist species will be provided by additional planting incorporated into the green infrastructure with priority given to the use of native fruit and seed-

³ Kuiper, M.W. *et al* (2013) Field margins as foraging habitats for skylarks (*Alauda arvensis*) in the breeding season

⁴ Lancaster EPrints, The diversity and behaviour of farmland birds on solar parks in the UK
<https://eprints.lancs.ac.uk/id/eprint/225514/>

bearing species of local origin to provide an optimal foraging resource for a range of bird species recorded.

Methodology for Delivery of Measures

- 4.4 By seeding this arable edge, south facing bund and SuDS features along the southwestern edge of the Site with a favourable mix, (eg. Boston Seeds: Wild Bird Seed Wildflower Meadow Seed BS14M 80/20) suitable to support skylark and other breeding birds, this will essentially act as a series of beetle bank directly adjacent to suitable skylark nesting habitat. This increases the availability of high value foraging opportunities for breeding skylark, supplying seeds and invertebrate habitat within 100m of nests and supporting both breeding and adult skylark in the local area.
- 4.5 The remainder of the proposed meadow grassland areas will be sown with a general meadow mix (Emorsgate EM3) and include non intensively managed areas, offering further additional habitat. Public access to these areas will be managed by design of physical barriers including new planting and fences to shelter the skylark habitat from human disturbance, whilst maintaining maintenance access. All non-privately owned green space around the development will be passed across to a management company with its long-term management secured in a 30-year Habitat Management and Monitoring Plan (HMMP). Specifications within the agreed HMMP ensure appropriate timing of management to align with farmland bird lifecycles and ensure control of adverse factors including public access and avoidance of pesticides in these areas.
- 4.6 The locations of the proposed measures described above are indicated at the Indicative Landscape Strategy Plan (Figure 1).

Implementation & Monitoring

- 4.7 As described above, the long term management of all non-privately owned green space around the development will be secured in a 30-year HMMP. The HMMP will also set out the monitoring regime for this period with target habitat type and condition stipulated at intervals across that 30 year period. The secured delivery of the proposed habitat management would in turn provide assurance to the long-term delivery of skylark foraging resource.



- Application Boundary
- Development area
- Existing Vegetation to be Retained
- Existing Vegetation to be Removed
- Proposed Tree
- Proposed Woodland with understorey planting
- Proposed Amenity Grass Mix (Emorsgate EG22)
- Proposed Species Rich Meadow Mixture (Emorsgate EM3)
- Proposed Meadow Mixture for Wetlands (Emorsgate EM8)
- Proposed Meadow Mixture for Loamy Soils (Emorsgate EM5)
- Proposed Native Shrub
- Proposed Marginal Planting
- Proposed Playing Field
- Proposed Thicket/Scrub Area
- Indicative SuDS Basin
- Existing Contours
- Indicative Location for Play
- Indicative Location for Allotments
- Proposed footpath in POS
- Proposed native hedgerow
- Existing Public Right of Way
- Proposed Recreational Route
- Proposed Mown Path
- Proposed Path Tree Line
- Proposed POS Route
- Indicative Skylark Mitigation Tussock grass with bund

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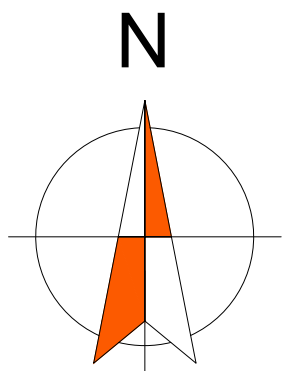
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- 1.7 Information to be read in coordination with Structural Engineer & M&E Engineer drawings & spec; Where any conflict or inconsistency occurs between IDPL and Engineers drawing and specification information the Contractor is to immediately notify IDPL prior to continuing working.
- 1.8 For soft landscape proposals please refer to LAXXXX...



SKETCH DRAWING

project: Land South East of Desford

title: Indicative Landscape Strategy Plan

scale @ a1: 1:2000

date: 19-06-2026

dwg no: IDPL LA5569-SK-001

rev: X