

Our ref: 9034 Project Spitfire

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Date: 17/06/26

This technical note provides further information in relation to the potential impact of the development at The Northern Field, High Post, Salisbury on Skylarks (*Alauda arvensis*).

The habitats present on site predominantly comprise cereal crops (8.88 hectares), and modified grassland (1.32 hectares). Skylarks nest in open areas on the ground within areas of short vegetation, typically measuring 10–60 centimetres high and greater than 50 metres away from field boundaries or tall structures (including trees). Whilst some components of these habitats are located within 50 metres of the field boundaries, some habitat is located outside of this area and therefore may be suitable for nesting skylarks.

The proposed development will retain, enhance and create modified grassland, however the cereal crops will be lost to facilitate the development. The majority of this grassland will be located beneath solar panels. Whilst suitable habitat for foraging skylark will be retained within the development it is anticipated that there will be a loss in suitable nesting habitat as the areas of retained grassland under the solar panels will no longer be suitable.

Targeted surveys to confirm the presence/ absence of breeding pairs has not been undertaken. Therefore, an assessment of likely impacts has been made based on available literature and the results of the data search. Records of skylark have been returned within one kilometre of the site, therefore as suitable habitat is present on site it is likely they are present on site.

Nesting density varies depending on habitat and crop type, although is typically considered to be between 0.05 and 0.1 territories per hectare within grassland and arable habitats, increasing to 0.3 territories per hectare within set-aside land (Donald and Vickery 2020). A precautionary approach has been applied assuming all the proposed development (11.28 hectares) could be utilised by skylark, irrespective of the suitability of the habitat or the proximity of the site to the boundary features and tall structures.

Assuming a density of 0.1 per hectare based on the habitats present on site, it is considered that the site may support one breeding pair. The Wiltshire Ornithological Society indicate that this species is a locally common resident/passage/winter visitor in Wiltshire. It is considered that the county hosts a highly significant population, with the Salisbury Plain Training Area alone estimated to support 14,600 skylark pairs, constituting approximately 1.5% of the national figure (Stanbury et al 2000).

Based on the estimate of territories on Salisbury Plain Training Area alone it is anticipated that the loss of the breeding territory on site would account for less than 0.00007% of the Salisbury Plain Training Area skylark population and likely even less when considered at a county level. Therefore, the loss of a nesting site for a nesting pair is considered insignificant in the context of the surrounding area and no mitigation for the loss is required.

During construction mitigation will be required to ensure legal compliance. To mitigate the impact of the proposed development works must be scheduled to avoid peak bird nesting season (1st March to 31st August, although this will vary between species and local conditions) to avoid contravention of protected species legislation; unless inspection by an ecologist concludes that there are no nesting birds present immediately prior to the commencement of works.

References

Donald, P.F. and Vickery, J.A. (2000). 'The importance of cereal fields to breeding and wintering Skylarks *Alauda arvensis* in the UK.' *Ecology and Conservation of Lowland Farmland Birds* p140-150.

Stanbury, Branston, Sheldrake, and Wilson (2000) Breeding Bird Survey of Salisbury Plain Training Area. A Joint Project Between RSPB And Defence Estates

Wiltshire Ornithological Society (2022) The Wiltshire List <https://www.wiltshirebirds.co.uk/records/wiltshire-list.html>

WSBRC (2026). *Data Search – Northern Field, High Post.*