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SKYLARK COMPENSATION FIELD MANAGEMENT PLAN

PLANNING APPLICATION NUMBER: 232653

SPENCER'S WOOD SOLAR FARM

Prepared for: Greentech

Date: February 2026

Report Reference: JN00833/D02

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1. INTRODUCTION

Background

- 1.1 This Management Plan has been prepared to discharge the requirements of the third schedule within the s106 agreement attached to planning permission 232653, which permits the construction of Spencer's Wood Solar Farm (the 'site') on Land North of Sheepbridge Court Farm, Basingstoke Road, Swallowfield, RG7 1PT.
- 1.2 According to the Section 106 agreement, the skylark *Alauda arvensis* and lapwing *Vanellus Vanellus* compensation plan is defined as:

"a detailed plan showing the proposed location of the Compensation Fields, providing a baseline survey and detailing measures to be implemented on an annual basis to provide compensation for the loss of Skylark territory and Lapwing territory as a result of the Development and including such other details and information as the Council may reasonably specify".

Purpose of this Document

- 1.3 This Management Plan has been prepared to support the provision of compensatory habitat for breeding skylark (a separate Management Plan has been prepared for lapwing Ref: JN00833/D03). The purpose of this document is to demonstrate how the designated compensation field will be managed, enhanced, and monitored to provide appropriate compensation for the loss of skylark breeding territories as a result of the proposed solar farm.
- 1.4 The plan has been prepared in accordance with relevant best practice conservation advice, including Skylark Conservation: Advice for Farmers.

Skylark Ecology

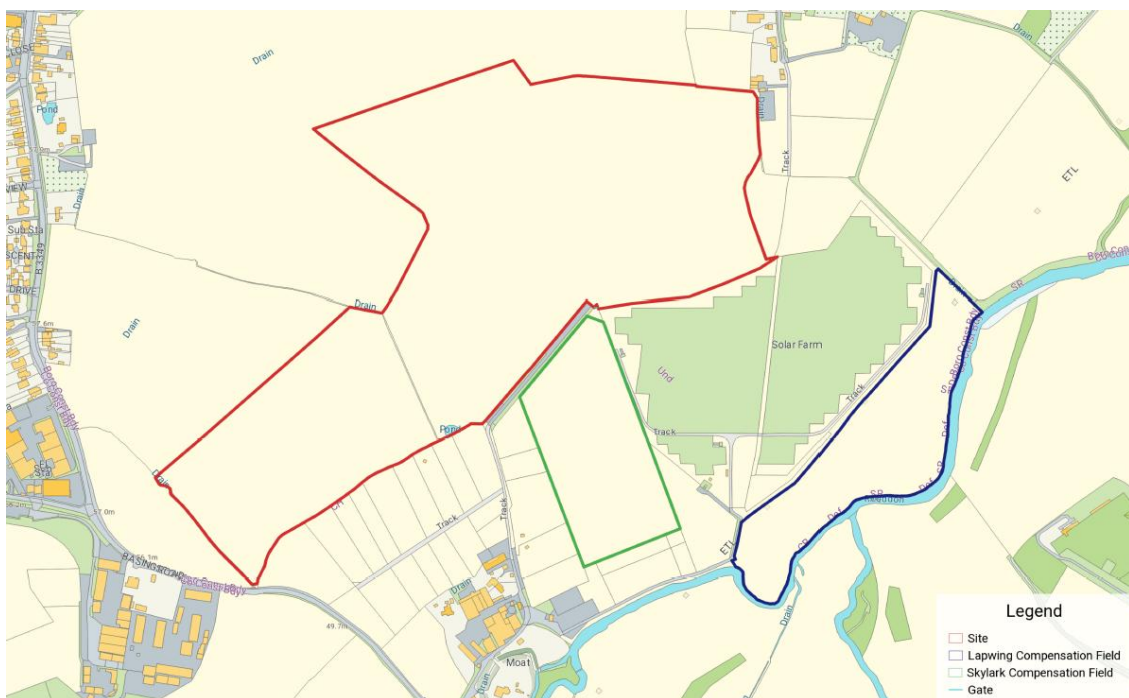
- 1.5 Skylarks are birds of open, unwooded countryside found across moorland, grassland and cropland habitats. Nesting density varies depending on habitat and crop type, although is typically between 0.05 and 0.1 territories per ha within grassland and arable habitats, increasing to 0.3 territories per ha within set-aside land (Donald, P.F. and Vickery, J.A, 2000).
- 1.6 The UK population declined sharply during the late 20th century, dropping by 75% between 1972 and 1996, with concurrent declines seen across north-western Europe. The primary driver of this decline is believed to have been the widespread switch from spring to autumn sown cereal crops. Autumn-sown crops have grown too tall by the breeding season (March to

August) for skylarks to be able to successfully raise the three broods necessary to sustain their populations.

- 1.7 Population decline is also potentially linked to the substantial decrease in invertebrate numbers, shown by the 2023 State of Nature Report among other publications. Research by Mancini *et al.* (2023) indicates invertebrate decline is greatest in regions with high cropland cover. As skylark chicks feed almost exclusively on invertebrates during the spring and summer, a reduction in invertebrate numbers will significantly impact their breeding success. In the winter, adult skylarks rely on the leaves and seeds of crops and grasses/herbs.

Project Description

- 1.8 The project comprises the installation of a ground mounted solar photovoltaic (PV) farm along with ancillary infrastructure, substation, security fencing, landscaping provision, ecological enhancements and associated works.
- 1.9 A field has been designated for skylark compensation and denoted by the green boundary on Figure 1, below.



Skylark Compensation Field – Green Boundary

2. ECOLOGICAL BASELINE

2.3 The Skylark Compensation Field was surveyed to UKHab standard on 03/02/2026. The habitats recorded are shown on Figure 2 below.



Figure 2 – Habitats recorded within the Skylark Mitigation Field

2.4 At the time of survey, the field comprised horse-grazed neutral grassland supporting a tussocky and uneven sward. Areas of locally rank grass growth were present, together with occasional damp patches. The grass component was dominated by cock's-foot *Dactylis glomerata*, perennial ryegrass *Lolium perenne*, Yorkshire fog *Holcus lanatus*, and fescue species *Festuca spp.*

- 2.5 Forbs were frequent across the field and included crane's-bill *Geranium sp.* as a dominant species. Additional species recorded included oxeye daisy *Leucanthemum vulgare*, dandelion *Taraxacum officinale.*, ribwort plantain *Plantago lanceolata*, red clover *Trifolium pratense*, vetch *Vicia sp.*, red deadnettle *Lamium purpureum*, and mouse-ear *Cerastium sp.*
- 2.6 The field is enclosed in places by electric fencing, with a newly planted hedge (H1) along the northern boundary and an established hedge (H2) along the eastern boundary adjacent to the solar farm.
- 2.7 H1 comprises a newly planted native hedgerow. Species recorded include rose *Rosa spp.*, hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna*, and dogwood *Cornus sanguinea*. Early successional ground flora along the hedge base includes cleavers *Galium aparine* and common nettle *Urtica dioica*. The hedgerow is currently low and in its establishment phase.
- 2.8 H2 comprises a more established species-rich hedgerow. Species recorded include hawthorn, hazel *Corylus avellana*, blackthorn *Prunus spinosa*, elder *Sambucus nigra*, with occasional oak *Quercus spp.* and holly *Ilex aquifolium*
- 2.9 The photos below show the skylark compensation field.



- 2.10 The compensation field currently has some suitability for nesting skylark due to its relatively open nature. However, suitability is currently constrained by horse grazing and the tussocky, locally rank sward which may be too dense in places for nesting access and chick movement.

3. HABITAT ENHANCEMENT – SPECIES RICH GRASSLAND ESTABLISHMENT

- 3.3 It is proposed that the skylark compensation field be cultivated and sown with a species rich grassland wildflower mix (Emorsgate EM3 Special General Purpose Meadow Mixture or similar).
- 3.4 The enhancement works will be undertaken when the main site works commence.
- 3.5 The field will be ploughed, in order to establish a clear bed into which the species-rich grassland mix will be sown. Seed is best sown in the autumn or spring but can be sown at other times of the year if there is sufficient warmth and moisture. The ploughing/cultivation works must be undertaken outside of the breeding bird season.
- 3.6 Most of the sown meadow species are perennial and are slow to establish. Soon after sowing there will be a flush of annual weeds, arising from the soil seed bank. These weeds offer shelter to the sown seedlings and provide habitat for invertebrates. The first cut should take place mid to late summer with arisings removed from site. Any residual perennial weeds such as docks should be hand dug out.
- 3.7 Once established, the grassland will be managed by means of a single 'hay-cut', undertaken at the end of August to a height of 50mm. The 'hay' will be left to dry and shed seed for 1-7 days then be removed from site. The grassland can then be maintained at a short sward height up to the start of March. This should ensure a sward height of between 20 and 50cm throughout the breeding season, open enough to provide easy access for the birds and lasting long enough throughout the summer to give opportunity for three skylark broods to be raised. This management will also prevent the encroachment of scrub into the area.
- 3.8 The methodology will allow a species-rich sward to develop as it provides time for grasses and herbs to set seed before the cut takes place. A species-rich sward will help to support diverse invertebrate populations in the area to support developing chicks, as well as providing a winter foraging resource for adult birds.

Post Enhancement

- 3.9 It is possible to estimate the number of skylark territories that may be present within the compensation field post enhancement based on the values in in Table 3.2 of The Skylark (Paul F. Donald, 2004) for the various habitat types as shown in Figure 3, below (only densities for

England and Wales are included). The enhanced grassland habitat is considered to best align with 'set-aside'.

Table 1. Territory densities (territories per ha) of Skylarks in different crop types, the percentage of farmland made up by each crop type and the percentage of total Skylark population found in each crop type. Data for Scotland are presented separately owing to differences in the way agricultural statistics are collected. Crop data from MAFF (1998) and Scottish Office (1998), Skylark data from BTO National Breeding Skylark Survey (Browne *et al.* 2000).

Crop	Density	% area	% of population
England & Wales			
Cereals	0.108	30	40
Improved grass	0.054	47	31
Set-aside	0.296	3	10
Rough grazing	0.059	10	7
Root crops	0.119	3	5
Brassicas	0.095	4	4
Legumes	0.129	2	3

Figure 3 - Skylark nesting densities according to habitat type in England and Wales (Donald, 2004)

- 3.10 The compensation field comprises an area of c.4.1ha. Using the available nesting area of the field and the territory density for set-aside the number of skylark territories supported by the compensation field can be estimated as $4.1 \times 0.296 = 1.12$ territories.

4. HABITAT MANAGEMENT

4.3 There will be no fertiliser and pesticide use within the skylark compensation area.

First year management. (Year 1)

4.4 The skylark compensation area will be ploughed and sown with the species rich meadow mix. Seed is best sown in the autumn or spring but can be sown at other times of the year if there is sufficient warmth and moisture. First cut should take place mid to late summer with arisings removed from site. Any residual perennial weeds such as docks will be removed. The ploughing/cultivation works must be undertaken outside of the breeding bird season.

Management of Established Grassland. Years 2 to 40.

4.5 Once established, this grassland will be managed by means of a single 'hay-cut', undertaken at the end of August to a height of 50mm. The 'hay' will be left to dry and shed seed for 1-7 days then be removed from site. This should ensure a sward height of between 20cm and 50cm throughout the breeding season, open enough to provide easy access for the birds and lasting long enough through the summer to give opportunity for three broods to be raised. This management will also prevent the encroachment of scrub into the area.

Management Schedule

4.6 The following management programme shows possible months in which activities will be undertaken.

Initial Habitat Enhancement Year 1:

Management Activity	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Grassland creation			✓						✓	✓		

Habitat Management Year 2-5:

Management Activity	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Grassland cutting where required	✓	✓	✓					✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Ongoing Management (Year 5 onwards):

Management Activity	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Grassland cutting where required	✓	✓						✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

5. LONG-TERM MONITORING

Habitat Surveys

- 5.1 Habitat surveys will be undertaken in Years 1, 2, 3, 5, 10, 15, 20, 25, 30, 35, 40.
- 5.2 Surveys to be completed in June/July.
- 5.3 The survey will assess species composition against expected (from seed mix) and sward height (should be between 20cm and 50cm) using quadrats and broad habitat type following UKHab survey methodology.
- 5.4 The habitat survey will also check for scrub encroachment. Remedial action will be recommended if scrub encroachment exceeds 5%.
- 5.5 Further remedial measures will be recommended and implemented as necessary based on the results of the monitoring surveys. If remedial measures are required, additional monitoring visits may also be implemented.

Skylark Surveys

- 5.6 It is proposed that monitoring surveys for skylarks be undertaken. The surveys will be undertaken in accordance with British Trust for Ornithology territory mapping methodology. Three survey visits will be carried out between March and July.
- 5.7 Surveys will commence in Year 2 after habitat establishment of the grassland. Two years is considered to be sufficient time for skylarks to begin to utilise the compensation field in the expected numbers.
- 5.8 There after survey will be undertaken in Years 2, 3, 5, 10, 15, 20, 25, 30, 35, 40.
- 5.9 Remedial measures will be recommended and implemented as necessary based on the results of the monitoring surveys. If remedial measures are required, additional monitoring visits may also be implemented.