

Response to Policy S/CBC from John Meed

My 15-year study of the arable land adjoining the southern edge of the Cambridge Biomedical Campus (CBC) shows that the area holds remarkable populations of threatened 'red list' farmland birds and other wildlife. My evidence also shows that the encroachment of CBC development into these arable fields has already had an impact on farmland birds, particularly the grey partridge, classified as 'vulnerable to extinction' in the UK. The proposals in S/CBC to release two further fields from Green Belt will further increase the pressures on threatened farmland species.

The latest version of S/CBC is a considerable improvement on earlier drafts. It recognises the importance of the area for wildlife and proposes more realistic mitigation for the loss of the two fields (the 'Strategic Enhancement Area' and three adjoining fields – the 'Landscape Improvement Area'). However, these proposals need strengthening with longer-term protection to ensure that they are not diluted or lost altogether in the detailed planning process. The following 'proposed modifications' should be proposed to the Independent Examiner to strengthen the 'soundness' of the plan:

- Paragraph 31 in S/CBC (page 226, the 'Campus-wide masterplan') contains no reference to enhancing biodiversity. Add a further point 'j' as follows:

31 j Set out a clear plan for biodiversity enhancement in the 'Strategic Enhancement Area' and 'Landscape Improvement Area'

- Paragraph 3.2.38 in S/CBC (page 231) fails to mention enhancing biodiversity and appears to give higher priority to 'outdoor amenity space'. It will be essential that habitat enhancement in the Landscape Improvement Area begins before development to provide space for displaced threatened species. Reword as follows (in italics):

While land identified within the Strategic Enhancement Area may come forward with enhancement works before the Landscape Improvement Area given its proximity to the Campus and opportunities for place shaping and access to outdoor amenity space, it is nonetheless essential that habitat enhancement in the Landscape Improvement Area begins before development to provide space for displaced threatened species.

- Paragraph 17a in S/CBC (page 221) should be reworded to strengthen longer-term protection for farmland wildlife. Noting that Policy BG/BG: Biodiversity and geodiversity, Paragraph 15 (page 512) states that 'To ensure the delivery of BNG measures, the Councils will secure off-site habitat creation and its long-term management (minimum 30 years)' and that 'A Habitat Management Monitoring Plan (HMMP) is required to support off-site land proposals', reword as follows (in italics):

17a Delivery of biodiversity enhancements and longer-term habitat consideration, including restoration, while accommodating appropriate amenity, recreation, and wellbeing functions. Biodiversity enhancements in the SEA and LIA (such as beetle banks, margins and grassland) must be secured through long term management (minimum 30 years) and a Habitat Management Monitoring Plan.

1 Background – the fields around Nine Wells and White Hill

My 15-year ecological study of the farmland wildlife in eight fields around Nine Wells and White Hill, bounded by the Biomedical Campus, the Nine Wells development, Babraham Road, Granham's Road and the railway line draws on my experience as a surveyor for the British Trust for Ornithology (BTO), RSPB and the UK Butterfly Monitoring Scheme.¹

The key focus of my study has been red list farmland birds² which form one of the UK Government's Biodiversity Indicators³ because of their place as consumers in the ecosystem – declines in bird populations indicate wider problems. The State of Nature 2023 report⁴ states that the 'bird species most closely associated with farmland have declined more severely than birds in any other habitat' since 1970'.

This table shows the six species that have been the focus of my study; the populations I have recorded over the last 15 years; and their decline and national importance:

Species	Populations	Decline since 1970; national importance ⁵
Grey partridge	7–18 pairs	–93%; 'vulnerable' to extinction in the UK; red list
Corn bunting	8–11 territories	–87% – 'near threatened' with UK extinction; red list
Yellow wagtail	1–3 pairs	–74%; 'near threatened' with UK extinction; red list
Yellowhammer	10–15 pairs	–65%; red list
Linnet	8–20 pairs	–56%; red list
Skylark	50–60 pairs	–52%; red list

In addition, across my study area I have recorded:

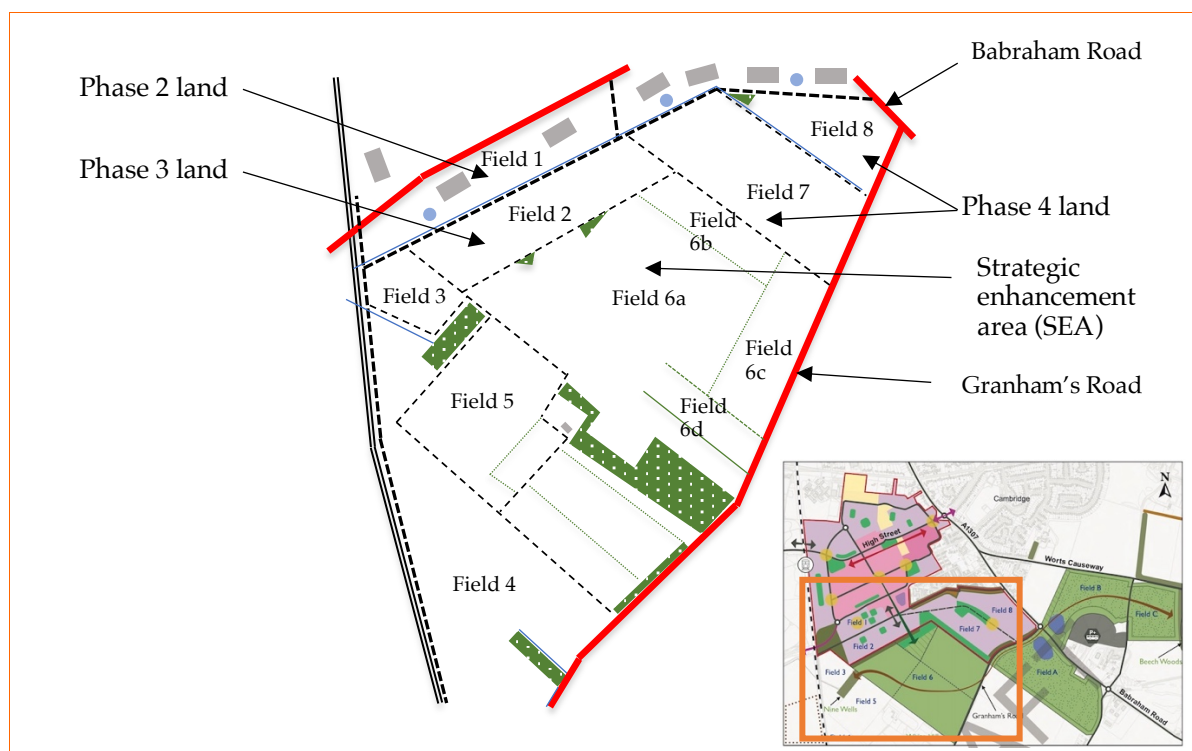
- 108 bird species, including 18 of the 19 farmland bird indicator species, 25 red list species and 34 amber list species; in total 53 species have bred
- 20 mammal species including brown hare, water vole and badger
- 24 butterflies including small colonies of brown argus and small coppers
- 17 dragonflies and damselflies and a range of bees, wasps, moths, grasshoppers, crickets, beetles, flies and ants
- over 40 trees and shrubs including the rare black poplar and over 120 species of flowering plants.

My study and book have been described as 'a model of local natural history writing', 'a passionate study', 'a rallying cry to promote and adopt the nature friendly farming approach', 'meticulous recording of farmland birds' and 'years of careful observation'.⁶

My study is regularly quoted in planning documents including the *Cambridge Biomedical Campus Preliminary Ecological Appraisal* which recommends that 'breeding and wintering bird surveys [should be] kept up to date'.

2 The impact of Phase 2 CBC expansion

This map shows my study area (and below right the S/CBC proposals, Figure 54 on page 228). Phase 2 of the Biomedical Campus Phase 2 began on my Field 1 in 2017 with the construction of ABCAM Building; that of 1000 Discovery Drive began in 2022 and now all the rest of Field 1 is under development.



This has already had a significant impact on farmland birds – this table shows the numbers of pairs of the six red-listed species recorded in Fields 1 and 2 from 2016–2026:

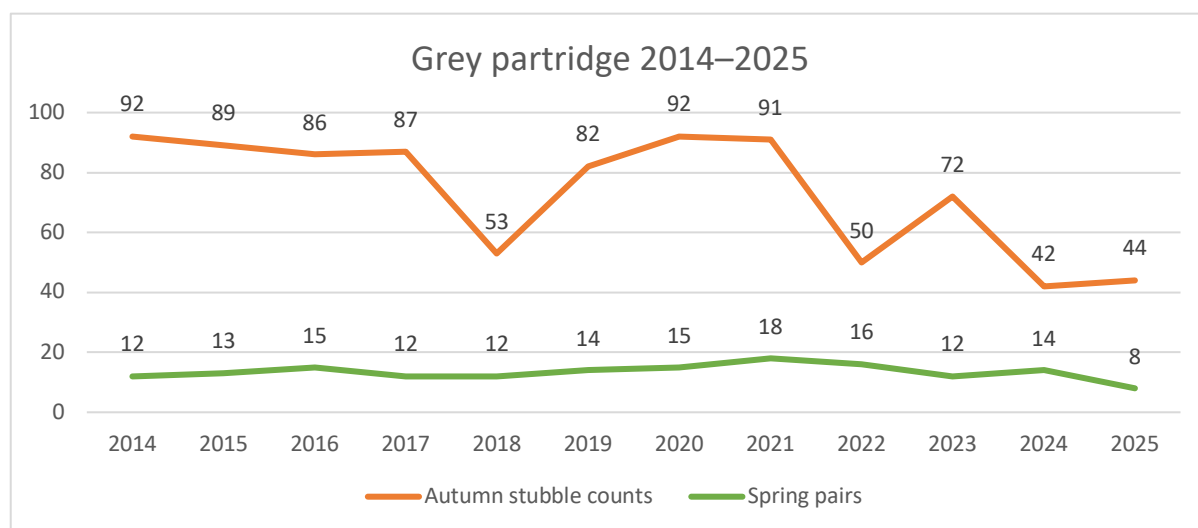
	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026
Grey partridge	6*	1	6	3	–	4	1	–	–	–	–
Corn bunting	2	1	4	1	1	2	1	–	–	–	–
Yellowhammer	6	3	3	2	3	2	4	3	2	3	3
Skylark	8	9	8	7	18	18	10	6	7	3	2
Linnet	5	4	2	3	2	1	3	–	–	–	–
Yellow wagtail	1	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–

*In 2016 Field 1 was a centre for grey partridge pairing, and on 11/2/2016 I recorded 9 pairs there, and 2 more very close by; pairs spread out further across the site later in the spring.

Construction of the ABCAM Building appears to have had limited impact. However, since work on 1000 Discovery Drive began in July 2022 no grey partridge, corn bunting, yellow wagtail or linnet have nested in either field, and far fewer skylark. Loss of habitat explains the declines in Field 1, while disturbance and noise levels may have made Field 2 less attractive. Hedge-nesting yellowhammer were less affected.

Grey partridge

Grey partridge thrive across the square kilometre I study with a population of up to 18 spring pairs and 80–90 autumn birds, far more than is usually the case in Cambridgeshire where it is now a ‘scarce’ breeder and 0–5 pairs/km² in spring and 0–20 birds/km² in the autumn are typical. However numbers, especially in autumn, have been lower since 2022.



This table compares numbers of grey partridge pairs in Fields 1–2 with those in Fields 4–6, the three largest fields:

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026
Fields 1–2	6	1	6	3	–	4	1	–	–	–	–
Fields 4–6	7	9	6	9	13	9	12	11	12	8	7

Bird populations fluctuate in response to factors such as weather, cropping, availability of food and changes in predators. Recent extreme summers may have reduced invertebrates that chicks need and contributed to fewer pairs overall (at the RSPB’s Home Farm on the other side of Cambridge grey partridge pairs decreased from 6 in 2024 to 2 in 2025).

Nonetheless, while there were no grey partridge pairs in Fields 1–2 after 2022, up to 7 pairs remained in Fields 4–6. This suggests that the Field 1 development has not only reduced numbers nearby, but may well have contributed to an overall decline.

Phase 3

In the last local plan my Field 2 was also released from Green Belt as Phase 3 of CBC. Future development of this land can only add to the pressures on threatened species, and to date there has been no meaningful mitigation of these pressures.

3 The likely impact of losing Fields 7 and 8 (Phase 4)

So what is the likely impact of losing Fields 7 and 8 as proposed in S/CBC? The following table shows the number of red list pairs in these two fields between 2016 and 2026:

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026
Grey partridge	–	1	3	2	1	5	3	1	1	–	–
Corn bunting	2	2	3	4	3	4	4	2	2	2	1
Yellowhammer	3	2	2	5	3	1	1	2	–	3	2
Skylark	5	8	7	6	4	7	10	10	9	10	8
Linnet	3	4	5	7	5	3	3	3	2	4	2
Yellow wagtail	–	–	–	1	2	3	2	1	–	–	–

Although there are again fluctuations from year to year, it's clear that both fields make an important contribution to the overall populations in the area. If this habitat is lost there is likely to be an overall decline in populations without suitable mitigation.

It is important that the 2026 proposals include habitat improvement not only to the largest field in my study area (the 'Strategic Enhancement Area') but also to three further fields adjoining my study area (the 'Landscape Improvement Area'). In addition the revised **S/CBC highlights the importance of safeguarding farmland wildlife**, for example:

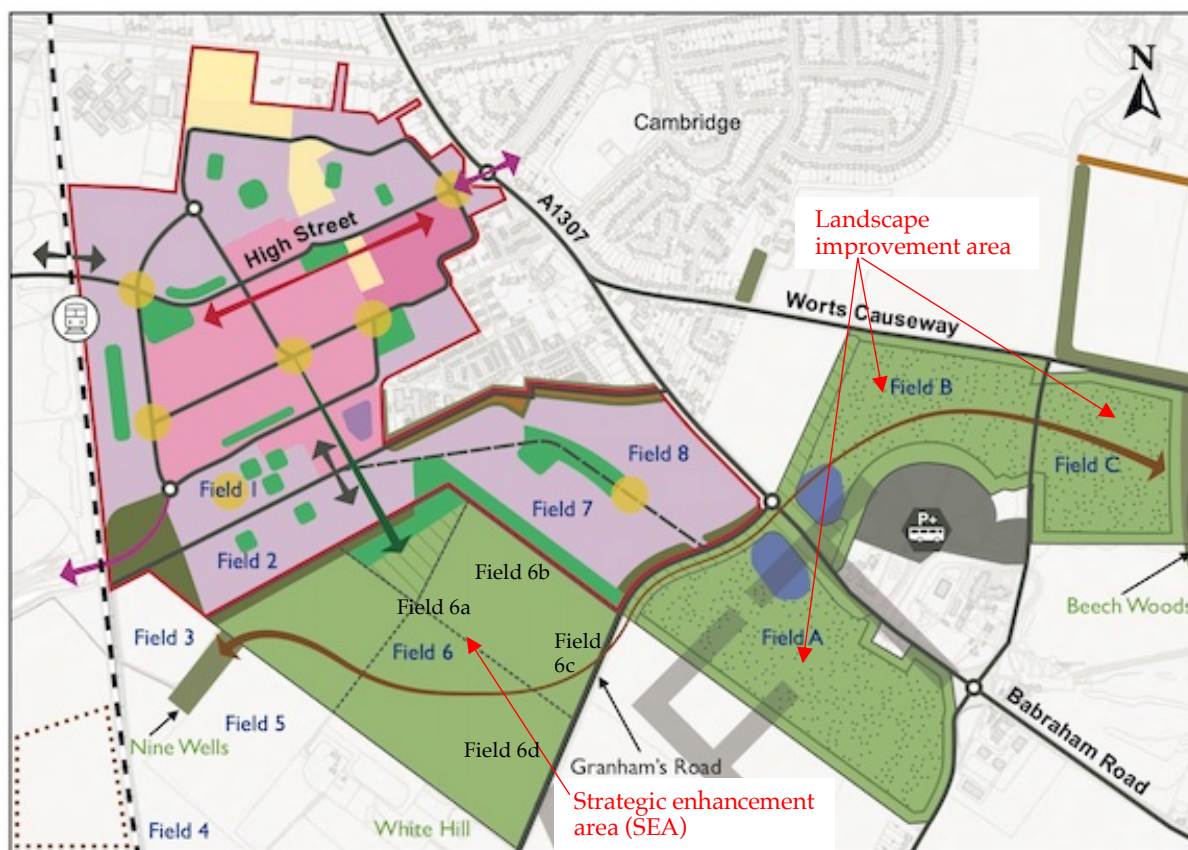
- Page 221, Paragraph 17c: 'existing *arable*, grassland and woodland habitats *are enhanced*, improving ecological links between Nine Wells LNR and Gog Magog Hills' (my italics).
- Page 222, Paragraph d reads (Proposals in the Landscape Improvement Area must) '*Provide enhanced arable habitat for red-listed birds and other farmland species*'
- Page 231, Paragraph 3.2.35 finishes: The enhancement of *arable*, grassland and woodland habitats, the creation of ecological corridors, and the restoration of farmland species *such as grey partridge, corn bunting and brown hare* are essential components of this strategy'

In addition, **the Cambridge Biomedical Campus Preliminary Ecological Appraisal stresses** (Page 23 Para 4.5.24) that '*Farmland birds have declined greatly in the UK and many are species of principal importance*' and the Conclusion Paragraph 5.4.3 states:

'A future biodiversity strategy will need to balance the requirements for quantitative biodiversity net gain against the needs of the current assemblage of species present, in particular species which require large areas of cropland and/or grassland such as ground nesting farmland birds.'

4 Existing farmland wildlife in the SEA and LIA

This map, adapted from S/CBC (Figure 54 on page 228), shows the Strategic Enhancement Area (SEA – my Field 6) and the three fields identified for the Landscape Improvement Area (marked as Fields A–C):



The Strategic Enhancement Area (SEA)

The SEA is already home to good numbers of red list species – this table shows the estimated number of pairs over the last 10 years:

	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026
Grey partridge	4	6	4	4	8	4	5	4	6	3	3
Corn bunting	3	2	1	1	2	1	2	3	5	3	4
Yellowhammer	3	5	2	3	4	4	2	3	5	3	2
Skylark	12	16	19	23	20	16	21	15	26	25	23
Linnet	4	7	4	3	2	3	4	2	3	5	5
Yellow wagtail	–	1	1	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	1?

Although this is by some way the largest field in my study area, there are in practice four owners: the Trumpington Estate owns and farms most of the land (Field 6a); the County Council owns a strip of land along the hedge on the north east side (Field 6b); a strip of land

beside Granham's Road is owned by Keith Naylor (Field 6c); and a 4 hectare area near the top of White Hill is owned by the Sills family (Field 6d).

This patchwork means that different parts of the field may be cropped differently and that two grassy banks and an in-field hedge provide extra nesting habitat. The Sills Field (6d) is planted for the benefit of wildlife, with considerable benefits for farmland species; in early 2021 some 40 grey partridge formed a lek in the field during pairing, an even that only occurs in the few areas where such numbers live – 4 pairs remained there to breed while others spread out further. I had also recorded a smaller-scale lek in Field 6c in early 2020.

Finch flocks are regular across the whole field in winter and in 2025–26 a tree at the top of Field 6c hosted up to 80 linnets. Up to 5 corn buntings sing along Granham's Road and from the bank along Field 6d. Yellow wagtail may have bred in 2026 in or near to Field 7d. Up to 20 brown hare use the field in the early spring.

The latest version of S/CBC recognises the ecological value of the field:

- Paragraph 18 (page 222) that makes very clear that '*Proposals in the Strategic Enhancement Area*' must 'enhance arable habitats' and 'manage recreation pressure on areas of sensitive ecology and habitats, including valued habitats for farmland birds and other species'.
- Paragraph 18d (page 222) states that proposals must 'consider the retention of existing infrastructure features such as overhead lines, including at the Granham's Road realignment, or provide alternatives to support wildlife, particularly birds that use the posts'.

Landscape Improvement Area (LIA)

Three arable fields are included in the Landscape Improvement Area:

- Field A is a long field with hedgerows along the roads but little other margin habitat. It holds skylark – in spring 2025 I recorded 19 singing males and in 2026 10 singing males – also 2 corn buntings and 2 whitethroats. Although partridge and other species sometimes forage in the field, it is unlikely that they breed because of the limited margin areas. Importantly, a small field at the Hinton Way end of the field, also owned by the Sills family, is planted with AB9/CAHL2 *Winter bird food* and attracts yellowhammer, linnet and corn bunting – I have also seen individual grey partridge there.
- Field B was in the past home to several of the red listed farmland birds including grey partridge. However, the combination of house building in the western part, and the increasing height of the woodland around the Park and Ride has had an impact. In two visits in Spring 2026 I recorded 2 skylarks 1 yellowhammer and 1 whitethroat.
- Field C neighbours the Beechwoods LNR. On a visit in Spring 2025 I recorded 2 skylarks, 1 whitethroat and 1 lesser whitethroat; a corn bunting was singing from just across Wort's Causeway. I recorded no red-listed birds in spring 2026.

In the latest version of S/CBC Paragraph 19 (page 222) states that '*Proposals in the Landscape Improvement Area*' must 'create and/or enhance existing ecological networks' and 'provide enhanced arable habitat for red-listed birds and other farmland species'.

5 Enhancing habitat for farmland wildlife

Most farmland birds (and other wildlife such as brown hare) prefer an open habitat. In addition, it is widely agreed that farmland birds have three key requirements:

- A safe place to nest, often on the ground, in wildflower plots, hedgerows, grass margins and beetle banks, but sometimes out in the fields (especially skylark)
- Food in spring and summer for their growing chicks – invertebrates (seeds for linnets) found in wildflower plots, conservation headlands, grassy margins, etc.
- Food and shelter over the winter in wildflower plots, winter bird food mixes, winter stubbles and similar seed-rich areas.

See **Appendix 1** for more detail and individual species requirements.

In 2019 the City Council declared ‘its recognition of the global biodiversity emergency’. The *Environment Act 2021* set a legally binding target to ‘halt the decline in species abundance by 2030’. The following recommendations would contribute to halting the declines of threatened farmland species. See **Appendix 2** for more detailed suggestions.

The Strategic Enhancement Area (SEA)

The SEA close to the Campus (my Field 6) already provides habitat for farmland birds.

- The main area of this field should remain as arable enhanced by at least one more 2m-high hedge and margin habitats to provide additional nest sites, food and cover for farmland birds. The existing area planted with a bird food mix should be retained.
- It will make sense to use an area closest to the Campus for amenity, with clear signage to conserve wildlife using the arable land. There could also be value in extending woodland close to Nine Wells LNR (see **Appendix 2**).

The Landscape Improvement Area

- Of the three fields in the LIA, Field A (immediately across Granham’s Road) is a priority for protection of farmland species as it is closest to the area where these already live. It should remain arable but enhanced with wider field-edge margins, an in-field beetle bank and an area planted with a wildflower mix or winter bird food. New hedges must be planted along the realigned Granham’s Road and hedges maintained at 2m high.
- While Field B (across Babraham Road) could also be similarly managed as enhanced arable, it could also be considered for grassland conversion as long as the grass is grazed or mown after the breeding season and that safe nesting areas, chick food and winter food and shelter are also available eg in a wildflower plot.
- As Field C adjoins the Beech Woods LNR there would be a strong case for natural regeneration of scrub and woodland to extend the LNR and grassland conversion, again with safe nesting areas, chick food and winter food and shelter (see **Appendix 2**).

These changes would create a mosaic of fields and other habitats, while retaining large enough fields for skylarks and yellow wagtails to nest safely among the crops.

- These changes would need to be secured legally, via some form of agreement or covenant such as the conservation covenant suggested in the *Environment Act 2021* that would ‘take account of particular species in a locality that give habitats their local distinctiveness’¹⁰. Regular monitoring of populations should continue. Policy BG/BG: Biodiversity and geodiversity in the Local Plan is helpful here: Paragraph 15 (page 512) states that:

‘To ensure the delivery of BNG measures, the Councils will secure off-site habitat creation and its long-term management (minimum 30 years), through planning obligations, or, where BNG is provided on land outside of the applicant’s control, by obligations. A Habitat Management Monitoring Plan (HMMP) is required to support off- site land proposals and will be reviewed and agreed by the LPA as part of the legal agreement process. Significant on-site enhancements will also require a HMMP to set out how these habitats will be established and managed. The HMMP will be submitted and agreed alongside the Biodiversity Gain Plan to discharge the pre-commencement biodiversity gain planning condition.’

- In addition, a footpath linking Nine Wells and the Campus with the Beech Woods should pass around Fields A, B and C with clear signage and if necessary fencing. A true vision would extend the existing footpath from Nine Wells to Granham’s Road and Hinton Way up to Magog Down, with accompanying habitat enhancements to the large field stretching up the hill from Hinton Way to Magog Down to create a wildlife corridor and improve ecological links. Such enhancements could yield BNG units.
- Because most farmland species prefer open habitat, they generally avoid areas of woodland so any new woodland would best be restricted to land adjoining existing woodland in Nine Wells and the Beech Woods.
- While evidence from the early days of agri-environment schemes suggested that converting arable land to grassland may have reduced numbers of some farmland species, the guidance has evolved over more recent times. Any new grassland can be made more attractive for ground-nesting birds by planting adjacent wildflower plots which provide ideal nesting sites because of their open structure at ground level, combined with vegetation that provides suitable cover and camouflage, as well as winter food and cover.¹¹

Balancing conservation with amenity

Public access can negatively affect wildlife: ‘soils and vegetation can be directly and indirectly affected by trampling, with further impacts on the invertebrates and small mammals’; while disturbance can lead to ‘possible changes in behaviour’ and birds ‘may not settle to breed, may vacate a site, or breed in reduced numbers due to recreational disturbance’¹².

We are fortunate to be able to draw on the experience of a number of local sites:

- My own study area is well used by walkers, cyclists and families for amenity but my study suggests that farmland birds have so far been able to live alongside this – indeed it is possible that human presence may deter predators.¹³
- Locally, Magog Down has good numbers of skylark and some other farmland species despite high amenity use – the combination of a fenced-off dog run, securely-fenced grassland, and signage and clear footpaths across open downland, has helped.¹⁴
- Trumpington Meadows has also had to manage amenity pressures on nesting skylark; The senior ranger comments that ‘We started off with just signs in place but after watching numerous people and dogs wading through the middle of the meadows, flushing skylarks as they went, we decided to take further precautions. We use electric fencing posts connected with one line of old orange baler twine – cheap, easy to install, not intrusive to the birds.’¹⁵
- By contrast, in Hobson’s Park Country Park (just across the railway line), where arable land was also converted to grassland, in the early days grey partridge, corn buntings and other species continued to use the land. However, there was a sharp decline as amenity pressure, especially from dogs, increased.¹⁶

So, managing access will be crucial if farmland birds are to survive in the aftermath of further CBC expansion. Land intended for farming and conservation should be clearly separated from amenity areas and footpaths, where necessary with fencing, and with suitable signs and interpretation.

6 Conclusion

It should be clear from the evidence I have gathered over the last 15 years that Policy S/CBC will place even more pressure on threatened farmland species, and that significant and long-term mitigation on adjoining land will be essential to counter this, let alone achieve biodiversity net gain. Without such mitigation, there will be an unforgivable further loss of species that are already vulnerable to, or near threatened with, extinction in the UK.

Appropriate mitigation can help to reduce the impact as long as it is well planned and that habitat improvement begins early enough to allow space for wildlife displaced by development. And it could also be something for the councils to be proud of, as it may provide a template that other councils could adapt to help to protect species under threat from climate change and human activity.

John Meed, September 2026

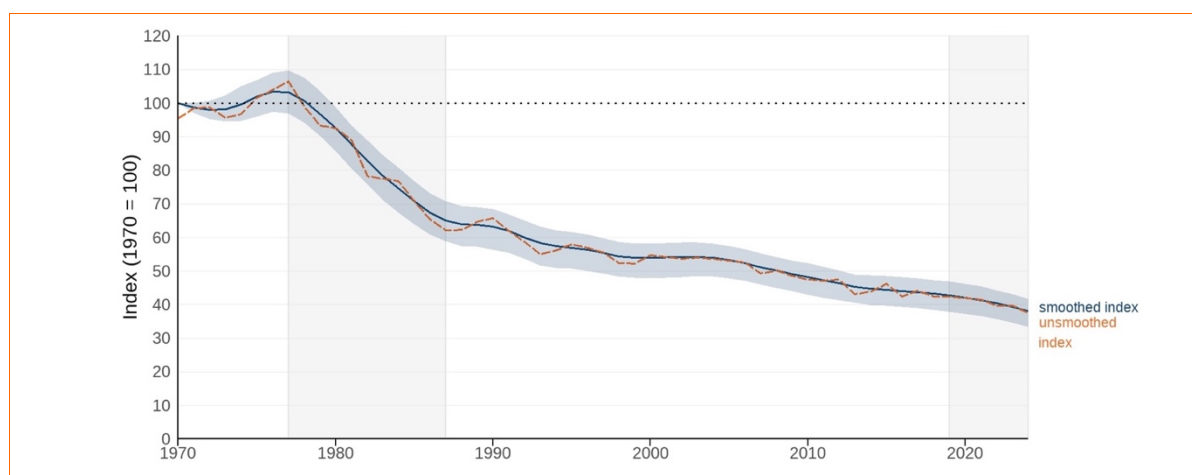
John Meed is a naturalist, researcher and writer who lives in south Cambridge. He conducts regular surveys on behalf of the British Trust for Ornithology, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and the UK Butterfly Monitoring Scheme. More details of his study are contained in his book *A haven for farmland birds*. See johnmeed.net/ecology.

In preparing my submissions to the Local Plan I have consulted with a range of people and organisations to help ensure that my suggestions are as up-to-date, evidence-based and constructive as possible. These include:

- Cambridge Biomedical Campus Ltd; Cambridgeshire County Council and the Trumpington Estate (landowners); and city councillors.
- People working in the conservation field including Francis Buner from the Interreg North Sea PARTRIDGE project; Martin Baker and Rebecca Green from the Wildlife Trust for Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Northamptonshire; Duerden Cormack from the RSPB Hope Farm; Sarah Nicholas, Principal Planning Officer, Cambridge Past, Present and Future; Bryan Davies and John O'Boyle, trustees of the Magog Trust; Guy Belcher, Biodiversity Officer for Cambridge City Council; and Howard Slatter who has recorded bird populations on the land that is now Hobson's Park since 1987.

Appendix 1: Conserving farmland birds

This appendix outlines priorities for conserving farmland birds. The following graph, based on *Wild Bird Populations in the UK 1970–2014*¹⁷, shows how, as the *State of Nature 2023* report puts it, ‘bird species most closely associated with farmland have declined more severely than birds in any other habitat’ since 1970¹⁸. While all birds declined by 18%, farmland birds declined by 62% and farmland specialists by 75%.



The national declines of the red-listed species most affected by S/CBC are as follows:

Grey partridge	-93% (37,000 pairs)	Yellowhammer	-65%
Corn bunting	-87% (11,000 pairs)	Linnet	-56%
Yellow wagtail	-74% (20,000 pairs)	Skylark	-52%

Declines in bird populations indicate much deeper problems – the habitat and foods they depend on have also gone. The *State of the UK's Butterflies 2015* report¹⁹ showed that we lost over half of our farmland butterflies between 1976 and 2014, and other invertebrates including bees have been hit hard. Key factors are changes in farming practices including the loss of mixed farming, a move from spring to autumn sowing of arable crops, changes in grassland management, increased pesticide and fertiliser use, and removal of hedgerows.

Data from the BTO²⁰ shows that grey partridge (below left), corn bunting (centre) and yellow wagtail (right) are increasingly restricted to eastern England. However, even here their distribution is patchy; in Cambridgeshire grey partridge are typically recorded in a fifth of the Breeding Bird Survey squares, and corn bunting and yellow wagtail in a quarter.



Habitat requirements of the six red-listed species

Farmland birds have three key requirements:

- A safe place to nest
- Food in spring and summer for their growing chicks
- Food and shelter over the winter.

The following detailed requirements for the six species are adapted from the latest research²¹.

Grey partridge need:

- *Safe nest sites*: Partridges nest on the ground between the 1st of May and early August in permanent and semi-permanent vegetation such as wildflower plots, hedge bottoms, grass margins and beetle banks. Wildflower plots can provide ideal nesting sites because of their open structure at ground level, combined with vegetation that provides suitable cover and camouflage. Hedgerows, grass margins and ditches in the spring should retain enough dead grass or similar vegetation from the previous year to provide cover for a female grey partridge sitting on a nest.
- *Chick food*: chicks feed on insects, especially caterpillars, beetles, bugs, sawfly larvae, ants and aphids, which they find mainly in crop margins, wildflower plots, conservation headlands and unsprayed crops (or unimproved grasslands).
- *Winter food and cover*: adult partridges eat seeds and shoots such as winter stubbles, harvested root crops, newly-sown crops and weeds in the crop margins. Hedges, grassy and flower-rich margins, beetle banks etc can all also provide cover from predators.

Corn buntings, whose recent extinction in Ireland is being repeated across large parts of this country (the BTO's 2019 Breeding Birds Survey recorded corn buntings in just 148 of the 4,005 squares surveyed) also nest on the ground in crops or grassy margins. They start nesting later – from late May or June – and can have flightless youngsters well into August. Chicks also need insect food, while adults principally eat cereal grains from winter stubbles or cereal-rich wild bird mixes. Corn buntings also use overhead wires and hedgerow bushes as song posts.

Yellow wagtails are summer visitors – they pass the winter in west Africa which means they face threats elsewhere in addition to the habitat loss and degradation they have suffered here. They breed on the ground in arable crops or fringes of grassland. Adults and chicks eat insects and spiders in crops, grazed pasture and near ponds. Measures such as skylark plots would also benefit yellow wagtails.

Skylarks also nest on the ground in larger open arable fields (preferably spring-sown cereals or skylark plots) or unimproved, extensively grazed grassland. Chicks (and adults in summer) eat insects such as sawfly larvae, beetles, ants, spiders and grasshoppers. In autumn and winter adults feed on seeds and shoots such as knotgrass and groundsel, notably in weedy stubbles.

Yellowhammers nest on or close to the ground in short (less than two metres), dense hedgerows, field margins with long grass, scrub and woodland edges. Adults feed in field margins, winter stubbles and wild bird plots on seeds from dead nettles, groundsel, sorrel, cereal grains, millet and annual plant weeds, etc; chicks depend on insects from field margins, fallow land and unimproved grasslands. They sing from hedgerows.

Linnets sing from and nest in thorn hedges and gorse from up to 2 metres. Both adults and chicks rely almost entirely on seeds throughout the year. Chicks feed on weed seeds and unripe oilseed rape grains. During the winter, adults will favour stubbles and field margins or seeds such as dandelion in pasture.

Although there are many aspects of habitat that can benefit all six species such as grassy margins, beetle banks, conservation headlands, wildflower plots, reduced pesticide use, crop variety and unimproved grassland, there are also differences. In particular, while skylark prefer larger, open fields, linnet and yellowhammer need hedgerows to breed; and while grey partridges and corn buntings will use unimproved grassland that meet their requirements, both are principally found in arable land.

Meeting these requirements

The variety or mosaic of habitats around Nine Wells and White Hill helps to meet these requirements. There are arable fields of different sizes including a 4ha area planted with a bird food mix, hedgerows, grassy margins, in-field banks, pasture, water sources, woodland, copses and some unkempt corners. Across the site arable weeds help to 'play an important role in maintaining and restoring invertebrate populations'²².

The fields across Granham's Road and Babraham Road identified in S/CBC for mitigation must be enhanced to meet more of these requirements:

- Existing arable land – notably in the SEA and the field immediately across Granham's Road – can be enhanced by reducing pesticide use, improving or creating hedges, and creating wide margins or wildflower plots. Beetle banks across fields can increase cover, food and nest sites without discouraging skylark. Plots or strips of winter bird food mix would provide winter food and cover.
- New areas of meadow grassland could be made more attractive to farmland birds by fencing off uncut/ungrazed margins around grass fields which would be cut in rotation. Planting wildflower plots would provide additional nest sites, food and cover.
- Hedges should be cut in rotation and kept at 2m in height.
- Ponds would provide a water supply and encourage invertebrates, while bunds could increase habitat for butterflies and other invertebrates

Appendix 2 gives more detailed suggestions. The changes would need to be initiated well in advance of the loss of the existing fields to ensure suitable habitat is ready when needed. They would need to be guaranteed by long-term protection, management and regular surveys to monitor population changes, as suggested in Paragraph 15 of Policy BG/BG: Biodiversity and geodiversity in the Local Plan (page 512).

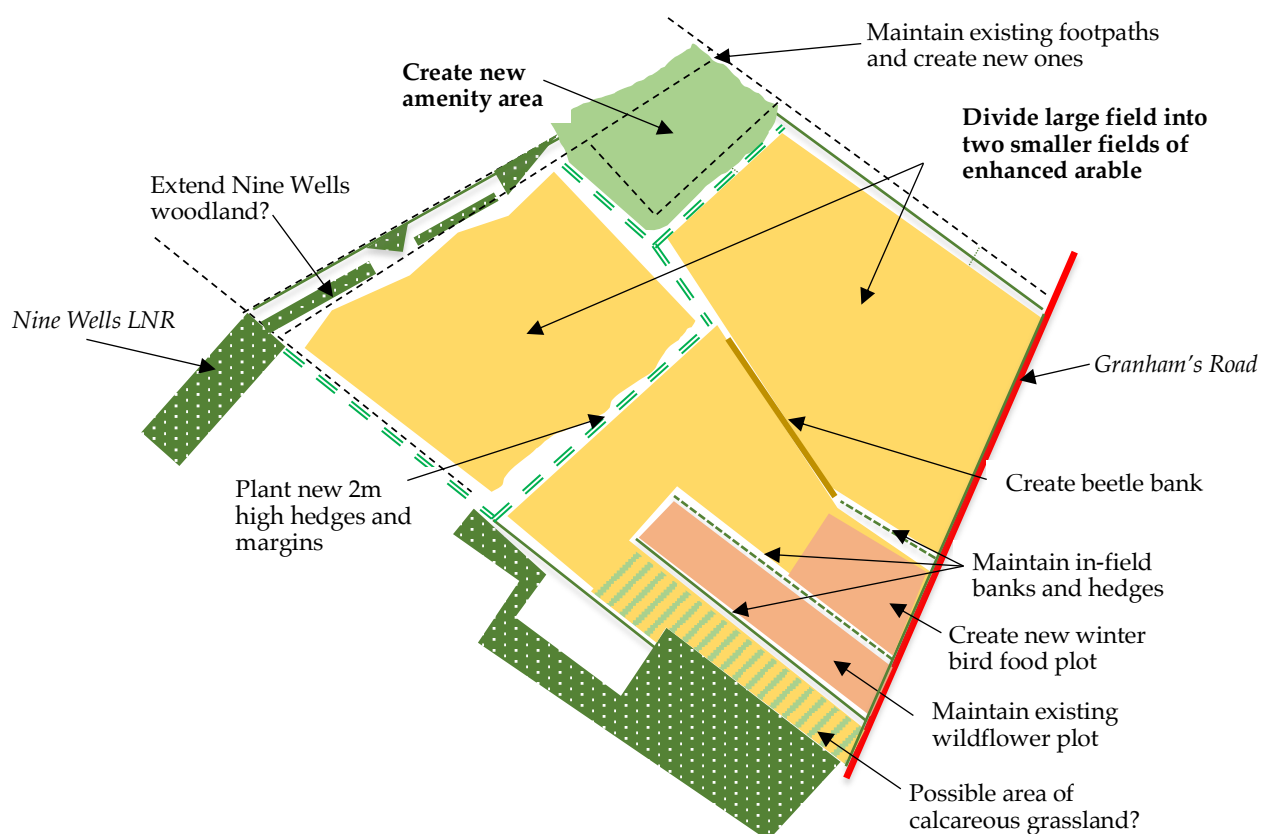
Appendix 2: Possible use of mitigation fields

These are some initial, outline ideas of how the mitigation fields might be managed to improve and create habitat for farmland birds while also meeting needs for other wildlife and amenity. I am keen to discuss these at all stages.

1 The Strategic Enhancement Area

The map below (based on that on page 219 of S/CBC) suggests one way in which the SEA might be managed.

- The area closest to the Campus would be used for amenity, with footpaths eventually linking Nine Wells and the campus to the Beech Woods and Magog Down. Bunds, hedges and signage can separate amenity from conservation and arable land.
- The main area of this field would remain as arable but divided into 2-3 smaller areas separated by an additional 2m-high hedge and margin and a beetle bank, and further enhanced by maintaining and creating wildflower or winter bird food plots to provide additional nest sites, food and cover for farmland birds.
- There could also be value in extending woodland close to Nine Wells LNR to increase the barrier between the campus and the fields; and possibly an area of calcareous grassland near the top of White Hill.

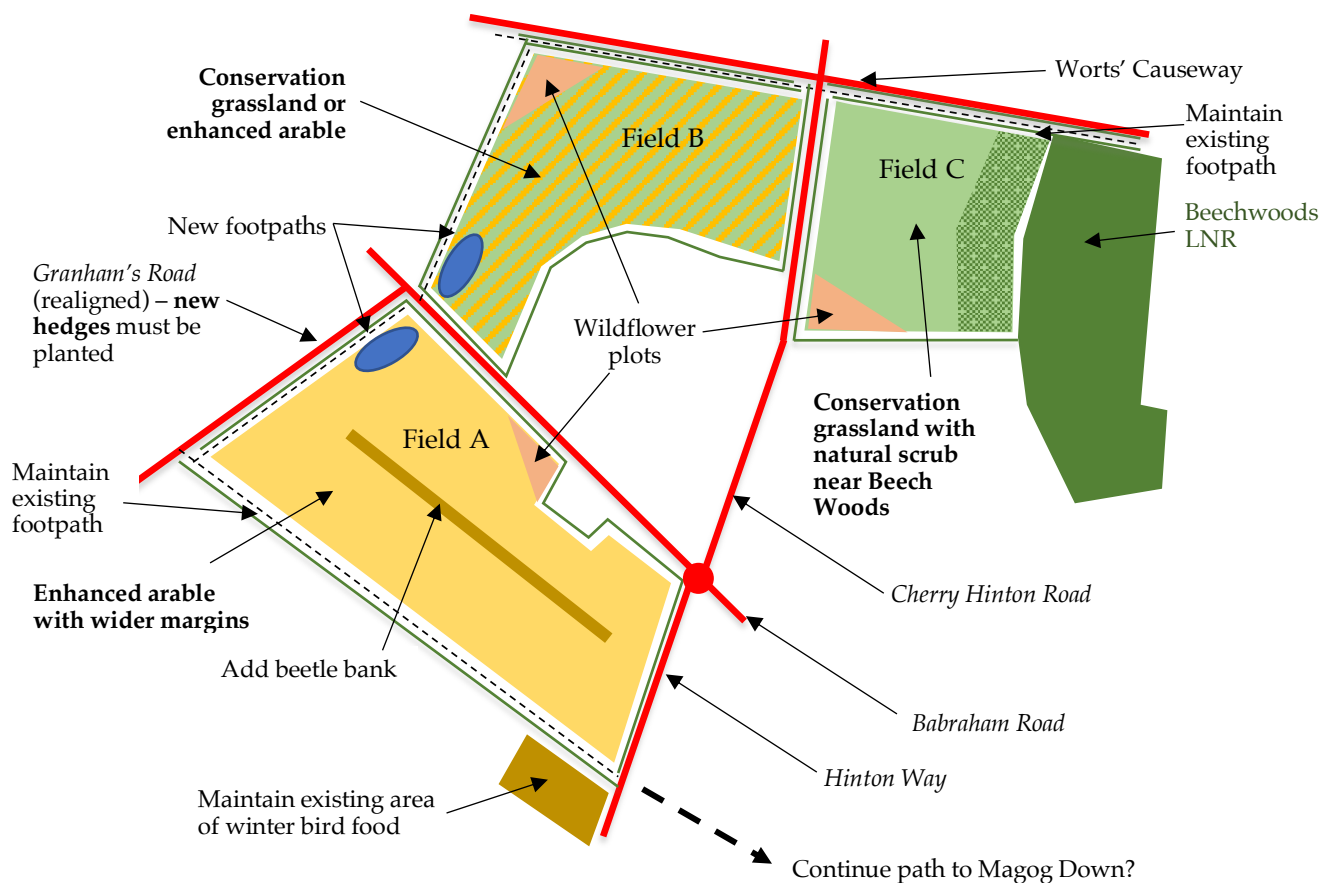


2 The Landscape Improvement Area

This map (based on that on page 219 of S/CBC) suggests options for managing the LIA.

- Of the three fields in the Landscape Improvement Area, **Field A** (between Granham's Road and Hinton Way) is the most likely to offer scope for arable habitats for farmland species. The field can be easily enhanced by hedgerows, wider margins, an in-field beetle bank and wildflower plots to provide additional nest sites, food and cover. A drainage pond and bunds close to Granham's Road would provide additional habitat. *The hedges lost to Granham's Road realignment must be replaced.*
- While **Field B** (across Babraham Road) could also be similarly managed as enhanced arable, it could also be considered for grassland conversion as long as the grass is grazed or mown after the breeding season and that safe nesting areas, chick food and winter food and shelter are also available in a wildflower plot.
- **Field C** adjoins the Beech Woods LNR so there is a strong case for natural regeneration of scrub to extend the LNR (which might suit linnet and yellowhammer) and grassland conversion, again with safe nesting areas, chick food and winter food and shelter.

A combination of existing and new footpaths around the fields would link the campus with the Beech Woods and, with landowner agreement, the existing path from Granham's Road to Hinton Way could be extended to Magog Down.



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- ³ Defra, (2025) *Wild bird populations in the UK and England, 1970 to 2024*. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/wild-bird-populations-in-the-uk/wild-bird-populations-in-the-uk-and-england-1970-to-2024>
- ⁴ Burns, F, Mordue, S, al Fulaij, N, Boersch-Supan, PH, Boswell, J, Boyd, RJ, Bradfer-Lawrence, T, de Ornellas, P, de Palma, A, de Zylva, P, Dennis, EB, Foster, S, Gilbert, G, Halliwell, L, Hawkins, K, Haysom, KA, Holland, MM, Hughes, J, Jackson, AC, Mancini, F, Mathews, F, McQuatters-Gollop, A, Noble, DG, O'Brien, D, Pescott, OL, Purvis, A, Simkin, J, Smith, A, Stanbury, AJ, Villemot, J, Walker, KJ, Walton, P, Webb, TJ, Williams, J, Wilson, R, Gregory, RD, 2023. *State of Nature 2023*, the State of Nature partnership, Available at: www.stateofnature.org.uk
- ⁵ See also Stanbury, A, Brown, A, Eaton, M, Aebischer, N, Gillings, S, Hearn, R, Noble, D, Stroud, D, Gregory, R and Powell, Dan (2017). The risk of extinction for birds in Great Britain. *British Birds*. **11**, 502-517
- ⁶ Comments from Stephen Tomkins (Former Chair of Cam Valley Forum), Cam Valley Forum review, Martin Baker (Wildlife Trust), Cambridge Independent 26/11/24, Nature in Cambridgeshire review 65/2023
- ⁷ Source: BTO Birdfacts at <https://data.bto.org/birdfacts-places/?search=cambridgeshire-bcra>
- ⁸ Email dated 2/12/2025 from Duerden Cormack, Monitoring Assistant at RSPB Hope Farm
- ⁹ See for example <https://www.rspb.org.uk/helping-nature/what-we-do/influence-government-and-business/farming/hope-farm/the-big-three>. More details from Brewin, J, Buner, F and Ewald, J (2020). *Farming with nature – promoting biodiversity across Europe through partridge conservation*. The Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust. See also Feber, R.E. & Macdonald, D.W. (2017). Birds. In: *Wildlife & Farming: Conservation on Lowland Farms*. Pp. 143-150. Wildlife Conservation Research Unit, University of Oxford
- ¹⁰ Defra (2019) *Biodiversity net gain and local nature recovery strategy regulatory impact assessment* (pp 15-16) which also underlines that while 'the metric focuses on habitats' and 'is considered a suitable proxy for widespread species found in typical examples of different habitats', scarce species 'are likely to need separate consideration to the biodiversity metric' and that 'local and special characteristics need to be considered'.
- ¹¹ Brewin, J, Buner, F and Ewald, J (2020). *Farming with nature – promoting biodiversity across Europe through partridge conservation*. The Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust
- ¹² Natural England (2009). *Scientific research into the effects of access on nature conservation*. Natural England Commissioned Report NECR012
- ¹³ Meed, J (2022) *A haven for farmland birds* pp 68–71
- ¹⁴ Notes from meeting on 18/12/2025 with Bryan Davies and John O'Boyle, trustees of the Magog Trust
- ¹⁵ Email dated 17/12/25 from Rebecca Green, Senior Ranger (Trumpington Meadows), The Wildlife Trust for Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire & Northamptonshire
- ¹⁶ Notes from meeting on 3/12/2025 with Howard Slatter who has recorded bird populations on the land that is now Hobson's Park since 1987
- ¹⁷ Defra (2025). *Wild Bird Populations in the UK, 1970–2024*. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/wild-bird-populations-in-the-uk/wild-bird-populations-in-the-uk-and-england-1970-to-2024>
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