Grassland management on Botley West Solar Farm

TL: 30 July 2026

There are two contradictory aims, posing different questions to be addressed. Vegetation management or ground nesting bird habitats.

There are many pages of documents relating to mitigation for skylarks in the published plans for Botley West Solar Farm.[1][2]

1. Ecology and Land Management

Outline Skylark Compensation Strategy June 2026 states that

- Ensure grass/crop height across the majority of the field is between 20–30 cm in March to enable skylark nesting and multiple broods to be raised.
- Ensure a variety of other sward heights are present (shorter sward/bareground, longer grasses, tussocky grassland).
- Grassland grazing will be shut up between April and July to maximise skylark nesting opportunities.

Grazing with sheep

Grasses growing on roadside verges this hot summer (2026) are now 1m tall, dry and dead. Without grazing by sheep between April and July, as is likely to be the case on any solar farm, grasses are likely to be in a similar dry state by July. From a land management point of view, it will mean a choice between having skylarks or having sheep graze the avenues between panels to keep vegetation in check so that grasses are not 1m tall, dry, and dead by July. For most lowland sheep flocks lambing takes place in March and April. The lambs grow "fatten" and are marketable for meat from August which will represent significant income to the value of the whole scheme. Lambs will not fatten on tall, dry, dead grass.

2. Fire Risk

Without grazing the 1m tall, dry, and dead grasses and the scrub growing under the panels is a serious fire risk. How is a fire to be tackled in such circumstances?

- There is like to be an access problem for fire appliances
- Can water be sprayed onto any such fire with nearby solar panels producing electricity?

[1] Document Ref: EN010147/APP/7.6.3 Revision 8 APFP Regulation 5(2)(q); Planning Act 2008; and Infrastructure Planning (Applications: Prescribed Forms and Procedure) Regulations

[2] Outline Skylark Compensation Strategy June 2026
Document Ref: EN010147/APP/20.4 Revision 0 APFP Regulation 5(2)(q); Planning Act 2008; and Infrastructure Planning (Applications: Prescribed Forms and Procedure) Regulations