

Representation from John Meed: the CSET busway between Francis Crick Avenue and Granham's Road

This representation is in response to the proposed *Cambridge South East Transport* project (CSET) put forward by the Greater Cambridge Partnership, and in particular the impact on biodiversity of the section from Francis Crick Avenue to Granham's Road (as shown in Figure 3.5 on Page 31 of the *Environmental Statement Volume 2: Main Report*). I have for the last thirteen years conducted ecological surveys of the arable fields around Nine Wells and White Hill, including the two fields that will be crossed by the busway in the stretch from Francis Crick Avenue to Granham's Road.

My study has shown that the fields support unusually good populations of farmland birds, in particular 12–18 pairs of grey partridge (which declined by 93% between 1970 and 2018 and are now classified as 'vulnerable to extinction' in the UK); 8–11 pairs of corn bunting and 1–3 yellow wagtail (which have declined respectively by 89% and 68% and are now classified as 'near threatened'); as well as yellowhammer, skylark and linnet, also red-listed. There are also good populations of brown hare and water vole, and small colonies of brown argus and small copper butterflies.

This short paper suggests some small changes to the plans that would provide benefits to the arable wildlife that uses the area and help mitigate the impact of the busway:

- The hedgerow
- The rabbit fence
- The planting mix for the enhanced grass margin

The hedgerow

While I recognise the importance of tree planting, this has to be in the right place. Page 10 of *Appendix 2.2 LEMP* offers two hedgerow options: 'New hedgerow' and 'New hedgerow with trees' which includes large trees such as oak. Then Pages 23 and 24 (also in the *Proposed Site Plans – Volume 2* Pages 3 and 4), which cover the stretch from Francis Crick Avenue to Granham's Road, indicate the 'New hedgerow with trees' option. This standard option should be reconsidered.

The evidence and guidance from key organisations all underlines that it would definitely be better for the arable birds – and especially grey partridge – to plant a hedgerow without, or with fewer, smaller, trees:

- The RSPB guidance *Farming for Birds: Grey Partridge* states 'Avoid planting trees and do not increase the height of hedgerows above 2 metres in areas used by nesting partridge.'
- The GWCT guidance *Providing nesting cover for wild grey partridges* states 'Hedges with more than 10 trees per kilometre of hedge are avoided because they contain too many look-out posts for birds of prey, crows and magpies.'

- The Working for Wildlife guidance *Conserving the Grey Partridge* states ‘Keep the hedge trimmed (preferably after the berry crop has finished) to under six foot in height to avoid them being used as lookout posts by avian predators.’
- Francis Buner, Head of the Interreg North Sea PARTRIDGE project, and one of Europe’s leading grey partridge experts commented: ‘I would not recommend planting any trees’.

My own observations also suggest that the grey partridge prefer 2 metre hedgerows – most notably the one that runs along the field that will be crossed by the busway. So the ‘New hedgerow’ option is much preferable and large trees such as oak should be avoided – species such as crab apple, wild pear, walnut or service tree would be preferable.

The rabbit fence

It is difficult to be certain about the impact of a busway on farmland wildlife as research is limited. However, infrastructure projects can disrupt movement and lead to habitat fragmentation, and it is important to avoid increasing these risks. The diagram on Page 24 of *Appendix 2.2 LEMP* specifies a rabbit fence for this section of the busway (and for that between Granham’s Road and Hinton Way), rather than a timber post and rail fence.

A good population of brown hare and other farmland wildlife regularly move between these fields and neighbouring fields raising the question of whether a rabbit fence might create an obstacle to this movement. It would reduce impact of the busway if the fence (if necessary) can be crossed, in particular by brown hare.

The planting mix for the enhanced grass margin

I am confident that the proposed enhanced grass margin will be positive for the wildlife in the area. The *HF02: Wild bird seed mixture* is good but I’m conscious that it is again the standard option across the project. It may be worth considering other options; for example, *AB9: Winter bird food* has been used with success on a 4 hectare plot on White Hill where the mixes have included cereals (such as millet, barley or oats), brassicas (such as kale, which provides good cover), and other seed-bearing plants. In the winter of 2020-21 it held almost 40 grey partridge, and in late 2023 attracted up to 60 linnets as well as yellowhammers, meadow pipits and larks.

Francis Buner also recommends the *Advanced partridge mix* from the local seed producer (just outside Huntingdon) Oakbank (<https://oakbankgc.co.uk/products/gwct-mixes/> – picture right) which is long-lasting and good for invertebrates and pollinators as well as farmland birds.



I would be happy to discuss any of these comments in more detail.

John Meed, March 2025

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