



# Building homes for people and wildlife

How housing developments can be nature-friendly



**BARRATT**  
DEVELOPMENTS PLC



Together towards homes and  
communities where nature thrives



# Welcome to Kingsbrook

**In 2014, Barratt Developments PLC, Buckinghamshire County Council and the RSPB began working together to create a large, exemplary wildlife-friendly housing development.**

The Kingsbrook development, on the edge of Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire, aims to demonstrate how building houses can provide homes for wildlife, as well as benefit the people who live there.

This document summarises how wildlife has fared during the first five years of construction, between 2016 and 2021, and what the lessons are for other new developments.

The results show that building homes with wildlife in mind can provide a vital refuge to struggling local wildlife.

# A bird's eye view

Nearly 60% of the Kingsbrook site is greenspace. We know that not every housing development can be so generous with swathes of greenery, so lots of wildlife features are incorporated into the built environment (see illustration right).

These include cost-effective options such as integrating swift nest bricks into the walls of houses, planting fruit trees in gardens, and constructing sustainable drainage system ponds and wetlands. The designs also protect existing wildlife habitats and create new ones, including new orchards, planting native trees and hedgerows, and sowing wildflower meadows.





# Breeding bird species increase at Kingsbrook

**At the Kingsbrook development in Buckinghamshire, detailed wildlife surveys were carried out in 2015, just before construction began, and then again in 2021 after the first 600 houses had been built.**

The results are very encouraging. For example, you might imagine that turning green fields into housing would mean a drop in the number of bird species, but the total recorded remained the same, and the number breeding increased by one.

House sparrows and starlings, which are both on the Red List of birds of conservation concern nationally, increased impressively. The estimated number of pairs of house sparrows increased from two to 147 and the number of individual starlings recorded almost doubled.

It is clear that integrating simple, cost-effective measures to help wildlife from the beginning of the planning process can allow urban wildlife to flourish.

## Going up

Surveys carried out in 2021 (when 600 homes had been built) showed the following increases in the numbers of individuals recorded of the following species, compared with 2015 data (before building commenced).



House sparrow



Collared dove



Ben Andrew (rspb-images.com)

More than 900 nest boxes for swifts (above) are being installed at Kingsbrook, with over 400 already in.



Starling



Pied wagtail



Goldfinch



Whitethroat



Sedge warbler



Reed bunting



## More results

Other successes post-construction included barn owls and red kites being recorded as breeding for the first time. Wetland birds also did well and numbers of bumblebees increased by over 50%, possibly owing to the flower-rich habitats created for them.

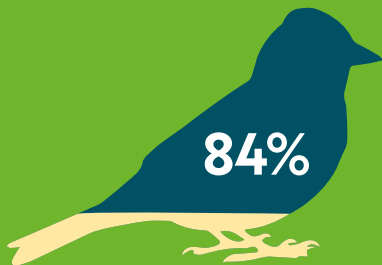
While it was mostly good news, a few bird species did decline, including the chaffinch (down 84%), which is experiencing declines nationally, and linnet (down 83%). Some woodland birds declined slightly, possibly because new habitats are yet to mature.

A report on the findings also recommended creating larger areas of scrub for nesting birds, more plants for pollinators and improving wetlands to encourage more reed buntings and waterfowl.

Butterfly numbers were down slightly (16%) between 2015 and 2021, but it was encouraging how many were present given that many of the new habitats created were still developing. As the habitats mature, we are hopeful butterfly numbers will increase by the next survey.

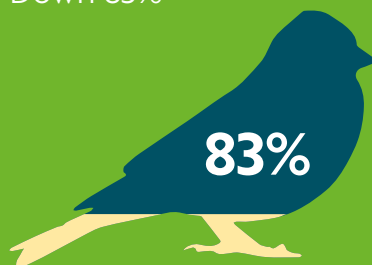
### Chaffinch

Down 84%



### Linnet

Down 83%




# Conclusion

**These results from Kingsbrook offer an encouraging indication that building with nature in mind, including on large-scale conventional housing developments, can provide a genuine and vital refuge for wildlife.**

Many of the measures that Barratt Developments PLC adopted at Kingsbrook are low-cost or no-cost and can be incorporated into any new or existing development. Barratt Developments PLC is now working to roll out the low-cost features nationwide. We are encouraging other developers to do the same.

We know from research that greening our local spaces can have benefits for us all, such as improving health and wellbeing through connections with nature, reducing flood risk, absorbing pollution and helping cool local heat island effects.

The findings from Kingsbrook come at a critical time when nature is in crisis, with many previously familiar garden species in decline. Adopting a nature-positive approach is a win-win for all.



Hedgehog highways are a no-cost measure to incorporate into any development. Leaving a small hole in the bottom of fences allows them to move from garden to garden and find plenty of food.



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The Kingsbrook project is part of a wider partnership between the RSPB and Barratt Developments PLC. Together we are on a journey to help build homes in a nature-friendly way and inspire homeowners to help wildlife thrive, while demonstrating to decision-makers what is needed to respond to the nature and climate emergencies.

To find out more, visit

[rspb.org.uk/barratt-developments](https://rspb.org.uk/barratt-developments)

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