



Brief guidance on biodiversity net gain for planners and developers

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Achieving more for nature



GLNP
GREATER LINCOLNSHIRE
NATURE PARTNERSHIP

Introduction

Expected to receive royal assent in 2021 the Environment Act requires all development to achieve net gains in biodiversity by leaving the natural environment and the habitats they comprise of in a measurably better state. Biodiversity net gain is not only a condition of planning permission, it is also an opportunity for multiple benefits through the creation of green infrastructure, such as, climate change mitigation and adaptation, flood management and the development of a sense of place.

The Greater Lincolnshire Nature Partnership consulted with a range of stakeholders to understand concerns regarding the introduction of biodiversity net gain and the process that it involved. The following seeks to address some of the most common concerns identified. It is a brief non-technical document which is intended to act as a gateway into further guidance, some of which can be found in Section 3: Further reading.

Biodiversity Net Gain: Defra Metric guidance for Local Planners and conservation officers

1. Does the application include a copy of the Defra Metric spreadsheet?

The full spreadsheet will make it easier to understand how the results were achieved. It will help to highlight any mistakes or miscalculations.

2. Have the correct UK Habitat categories been used?

Do any accompanying reports provide evidence for the habitats included, for example through the description of plant species present? It might also be helpful to look at existing habitat mapping.

3. Has the Strategic significance of habitats been correctly applied?

Is there evidence to support the strategic significance that has been attributed to the habitats recorded? For example is there any reference to existing strategies or explanation for the ecological importance of the location of these habitats? These might include Local Nature Recovery Strategies or Biodiversity Opportunity Mapping. Any such evidence should be found in supporting documents such as ecological or habitat management reports. It is important to confirm that the significance given to a specific area or type of habitat is the same both pre and post development, where relevant, to insure a fair assessment. It is equally as important to ensure that recorded habitats not identified as having strategic importance have been done so correctly.

For further information on how biodiversity opportunity mapping should be considered within planning decisions, refer to the GLNP's BOM Practical Application Principles.

4. Does retained habitat fit with pre development habitat?

All retained habitat must be accounted for in the pre development section. Be cautious of post-development overvaluation and pre-development undervaluation. Retained habitats must be scored consistently in terms of strategic importance and condition. Look for evidence to support any values given. This may be found in supporting documents such as ecological or habitat management reports. In regards to condition of habitat it is important to understand whether the selection of "fairly good" is justified or not.

5. Are the supporting documents, such as, ecological and habitat management reports or biodiversity gain plan fit for purpose?

Documents should include supporting evidence for the metric. They should also expand on the numbers, giving an appropriate account of how retained and created habitat will be managed. Things to look out for are appropriate management techniques and management timelines matching with time to intended condition. Any management must continue for at least the 30 years as required by the Environment Act, this must include plans to monitor and report on progress. Local Authorities will be required to ensure that this is done,



potentially through spot checks. All biodiversity net gain must be included in a register of biodiversity gain sites.

6. Further Evidence

Have maps, illustrating habitat both post- and pre-development, been provided? These may be found in the supporting documents. If so, do they match with the information provided within the metric? Supporting documents should also include photographs which evidence the type and condition of pre-development habitats.

7. Are the proposals of habitat creation ecologically justified?

It is important that habitat created to meet biodiversity net gain requirements is ecologically sound, for example is correct for the type the soils present and contributes to the wider ecological network.

Biodiversity Net Gain: Incorporating it into development, brief guidance for developers

1. What do Local Planning Authorities require?

The Environment Act will require a mandatory 10% biodiversity gain and use of a standard metric to calculate this. However, in some cases Local Government will have greater environmental ambition. It is important to be sure what levels of biodiversity gain the Local Planning Authority requires.

2. Start discussions early

Early conversations should be had with clients focusing on space for the creation and retention of habitats as it will be at a premium on site once development begins.

3. Question your metric calculations

Metric calculations must be transparent and quality standards must be maintained. If the metric projects a net gain in biodiversity for a development, it is important to ensure they do not mask unacceptable losses in terms of important species or habitats.

To avoid this it is important to have an environmental vision from the beginning and set out expectations of what you want to achieve both in terms of the percentage net gain and the habitat types you want to include. This should take into account wider ecological requirements. A good habitat map will help with this.

4. Consider the wider implications of the habitats you include

Any net gains for biodiversity must contribute to the wider ecological network and the wider environmental landscape. Habitats must be appropriate for the site, for example the correct soil type, light levels, water and shelter must be considered. Be aware of local biodiversity strategies such as Biodiversity Opportunity Mapping, Local Nature Recovery Strategies and Biodiversity Action Plans (where still applicable). Consideration of local natural capital strategies could have added benefits for developers in terms of potential revenue and infrastructure needs.

For further information on how biodiversity opportunity mapping should be considered within planning decisions, refer to the GLNP's BOM Practical Application Principles.

5. On site or offsite?

Developers should seek to meet biodiversity net gain targets on site in the first instance. However, some companies have found it difficult to deliver the whole 10% onsite, especially when working on commercial developments. Where offsite habitat creation is required it must be done locally and in line with the local strategy mentioned previously, such as Biodiversity Opportunity Mapping, Local Nature Recovery Strategies and Biodiversity Action Plans (where still applicable).



6. Get an ecologist

Requirements of biodiversity net gain do not replace the mitigation hierarchy or undermine other environmental duties. It is important to engage the services of a qualified ecologist to ensure that these duties are met. They will also be able to help you meet net gains in an ecologically appropriate way.

7. The future

Developers will be required to ensure that any habitat is managed for at least 30 years, where habitat is part of a nature based solution, such as sustainable urban drainage systems, the intended function should also be maintained. This should be taken into account when planning habitat creation. Things to consider will include costs and how to build these into the value of the development. It may also require agreements between developers and buyers, potentially in the form of conservation covenants. All biodiversity net gain must be included in a register of biodiversity gain sites.

Further information

British Standards Institution (2021) BS8683 Process for designing and implementing Biodiversity Net Gain. Available at: <https://shop.bsigroup.com/>.

CIEEM (2019) Biodiversity Net Gain: Good Practice Principles for Development, A Practical Guide. Available at: <https://cieem.net/resource/biodiversity-net-gain-good-practice-principles-for-development-a-practical-guide/>.

CIEEM (2021) Biodiversity Net Gain Report and Audit Templates. Available at: https://cieem.net/resource/biodiversity-net-gain-report-and-audit-templates/?utm_source=GDPR+CIEEM+List&utm_campaign=a6154e8f5e-CIEEM+eNews+-+13+July+202113%2F7%2F21+6%3A11+PM&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_6b23f028b5-a6154e8f5e-148738909.

Greater Lincolnshire Nature Partnership (2019) BOM Practical Application Principles. Available at: <https://glnp.org.uk/knowledge-hub/category/opportunity-mapping>.

HM Government (2019) UK Parliament Post: Net Gain. Available at: <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/POST-PB-0034/POST-PB-0034.pdf>.

Natural England (2021) The Biodiversity Metric 3.0 – Technical Supplement. Available at: <http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/6049804846366720>.

Natural England (2021) The Biodiversity Metric 3.0 – User Guide. Available at: <http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/6049804846366720>.

The Wildlife Trust (2018) Biodiversity Net Gain Briefing. Available at: <https://www.wildlifetrusts.org/sites/default/files/2019-02/Net%20gain%20final%20briefing%20for%20Wildlife%20Trusts.pdf>.

Local Government Association (2021) Biodiversity Net Gain FAQs - Frequently Asked Questions <https://www.local.gov.uk/pas/topics/environment/biodiversity-net-gain/biodiversity-net-gain-faqs-frequently-asked-questions>.



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