



**Securing positive
effects for
biodiversity in new
development**

**Planning advice
PA2023-10**

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Purpose of this Planning Advice

This Planning Advice has been designed to provide stakeholders, developers, landowners and communities with details of the requirements for biodiversity enhancement as outlined in Policy P1 Layout, Siting and Design of the Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan 2023 (LDP).

This guidance sets out good practice in relation to the assessment of the biodiversity value of a site before and after development by using an agreed methodology. This will result in a clear and transparent calculation of the biodiversity losses and gains resulting from a development, with the requirement to show that positive effects for biodiversity are being delivered.

Contents

1. Introduction.....	1
2. How to calculate biodiversity losses and gains.....	3
3. Methods to be used for differing scales of development.....	5
4. Delivery of biodiversity gains	6
Appendix 1	10

1. Introduction

The Planning (Scotland) Act 2019 has introduced a requirement to consider how development and the planning system can contribute to the enhancement of biodiversity. This is not only important in relation to the climate crisis and biodiversity loss, but will also contribute to the quality of new developments and deliver wider societal benefits. National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4) sets out in Policy 3 *Biodiversity* the intent to protect biodiversity, reverse biodiversity loss, deliver positive effects from development and strengthen nature networks. Policy 3 requires all developments to contribute to the enhancement of biodiversity proportionate to the scale of the development and to secure lasting and ambitious outcomes for biodiversity. Householder developments (such as extensions and sheds) are excluded from this requirement.

This guidance aims set out in more detail how development can contribute to securing positive effects for biodiversity from new developments, by compensating for any biodiversity loss, and securing enhancement through the development process that is proportionate to the scale of development, and to secure lasting and ambitious outcomes for biodiversity.

It is important to note that assessing residual biodiversity loss and securing positive effects is **additional** to any mitigation and compensation required in relation to those habitats and species covered by legislation and other local development plan policies that protect certain species and important sites, and does not replace them.

Any avoidance and mitigation measures required for protected sites (of international, national and regional importance) or for habitats and species covered by the LDP 2023 Policy E1 Natural Heritage, would need to be addressed in the first instance. The aim of these policies is to avoid harm to irreplaceable habitats and to species of conservation concern.

The protection of other species, areas of semi-natural habitat and/or geological features within proposed development sites is the default position. Only where exceptional circumstances can be demonstrated, will the loss of these features be acceptable. Wildlife habitats develop over long periods of time and are dependent on a particular set of environmental factors which cannot simply be recreated in the short-term.

The key to protecting biodiversity within any development is to consider it very early in the planning process so that existing habitats can be incorporated into the site design and layout. As well as helping to ensure protection and enhancements for biodiversity, this will also result in a more attractive development for the future residents or users of the site. It also makes good business sense, avoiding the costs and time delays associated with considering compensatory habitat provision later in the process. Undertaking a Preliminary Ecological Assessment, as outlined in Aberdeenshire Council Planning Advice PA2023-17, Baseline Ecological Survey, will continue to be important in highlighting at an early stage what is present on site and detailing further survey work required.

In addition to conserving important species and areas of habitat as outlined above, the wider ecological impact on lower value habitats such as intensive farmland and

improved grassland should be calculated and compensated for. To assess the impact on biodiversity both before and after development **there is a need for a simple quantitative and qualitative system for assessing biodiversity losses and gains that is transparent, consistent and gives confidence that positive effects are being delivered.**

2. How to calculate biodiversity losses and gains

The recommended method for calculating this is the English Nature Biodiversity Metric which has been tried and tested over several years and is in widespread use in England and by some organisations in Scotland. Other metrics or means of assessment can be used, but must be fully justified and the methodology agreed with Aberdeenshire Council at the pre-application stage prior to undertaking survey and assessment of a site. It is important that any method of valuing habitats takes into account all important biodiversity criteria, including the type of habitat, its importance at both a national and local level, its quality, connectivity and potential for enhancement or restoration through improved management, and its size. A precautionary approach should be taken when evaluating a site, and in particular when calculating the biodiversity gains, to allow for any risk attached to the success of the measures proposed and to allow for the time for new or enhanced habitats to mature. The method of assessment and evaluation agreed should be quantifiable and measurable and must be used throughout the development process to provide consistency. Use of an established metric makes good business sense, helping to streamline the decision-making process.

A Biodiversity Metric is a proxy for recognising the negative impacts on habitats arising from development, and calculating how much restored or new habitat, and of what types, is required to deliver sufficient positive effect for biodiversity.

The only metric in widespread use in the UK is the Natural England biodiversity metric details of which can be found at here: [The Biodiversity Metric 4.0 - JP039 \(naturalengland.org.uk\)](https://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/6049804846366720)¹. This metric is suitable for use on the majority of development sites although a simplified version is under development for use on very small sites (less than 0.5ha).

¹ <https://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/6049804846366720>

The metric is based on UK Habitat Classification [ukhab – UK Habitat Classification²](#) but there is a conversion from Phase 1 Habitat data which is widely used in habitat survey. The metric is set out in a spreadsheet and as well as habitat classification, it requires information on:-

- The size of habitat parcel in hectares, or for linear habitats a length in kilometres
- The distinctiveness of a habitat type – values are provided for various habitat types
- The condition of each parcel, which can be based on a look-up table provided
- How ecologically connected the sites are; and
- The strategic significance which gives a score based on whether the site is of particular value within a local/regional context.

This information is then used to calculate the baseline biodiversity units, and the baseline linear units for the site.

Distinctiveness x condition x area (ha) = baseline biodiversity units

For linear habitats length (km) x condition = baseline linear habitat units

The impact of the proposed development will then need to be assessed using this data. The number of biodiversity units that will be lost is deducted from the baseline to show the biodiversity loss resulting from the development. Mitigation may be proposed, and for any residual loss habitat restoration, enhancement or creation will be required to make up the loss and to deliver an overall material improvement of the biodiversity value of the site. There is a strong presumption in favour of any biodiversity gains being delivered on site for all types of development including residential, commercial and energy. Only where it can be clearly demonstrated that on-site delivery is not possible, should this be delivered off-site.

The requirement within the ALDP for 40% open space within residential developments will provide opportunities for the delivery of ambitious biodiversity enhancement on site which should include a variety of habitats such as woodlands,

² <https://ukhab.org/>

wildflower grasslands and wetlands. The creation of linear features and measures to benefit groups of species or individual species will be given weight by Aberdeenshire Council where it is marginal as to whether a development can deliver sufficient biodiversity units to gain an overall biodiversity enhancement. These measures could include new or extended hedgerows of locally native species, hedgehog highways, beetle banks and swift boxes.

Details of ecological mitigation and enhancement can then be calculated using the metric to provide a figure for post development biodiversity units. This calculation is similar to that used for the base line units but also takes into account various factors, including risk factors associated with the level of difficulty and time it takes for a certain habitat to be restored or established and the distance of any enhancement from the development site, the further from the site the greater the risk.

$$\text{Distinctiveness} \times \text{Condition} \times \text{Area (ha)} / \text{Delivery Risk} \times \text{Spatial Risk} \times \text{Temporal Risk} = \text{Post-Development Biodiversity Units}$$

To calculate the overall change in biodiversity the baseline units are subtracted from the post-development units and the resulting figure should demonstrate an overall gain. This can be augmented by additional measures to benefit individual species.

3. Methods to be used for differing scales of development

Aberdeenshire Council's development plan policies requires that **all** development enhance biodiversity in proportion to the scale of the development.

- For all major development (50+ houses), those which require the production of a Masterplan or Delivery Framework and for certain waste, water, transport and energy related developments and larger retail developments the Council strongly encourages the use of a metric such as the Natural England Biodiversity Metric 4.0 to clearly document the biodiversity losses and gains on a site.
- For other developments of 9- 49 homes and other similar scaled development the Council also encourages the use of the Natural England or other appropriate metric, or an alternative methodology of calculating biodiversity losses and gains that fully reflects the complex nature of habitats and their

value. This methodology must be agreed at the pre-application stage and the calculations must demonstrate an overall gain for biodiversity.

- For very small developments biodiversity enhancement proportionate to the scale of the development should be discussed and agreed with Aberdeenshire Council. This could include hedgerow or tree planting, or erecting bird or bat boxes.
- A Small Sites Metric [The Small Sites Metric \(Biodiversity Metric 4.0\) - JP040 \(nepubprod.appspot.com\)](#)³ is under development for use on residential developments of up to 9 houses, or sites that are less than 0.5ha in size **and** where no priority habitats are present. This metric may not require detailed ecological assessment and could make use of existing data where available. Discussion is encouraged at the pre-application stage on the methodology to be used for site assessment and the biodiversity enhancement requirements.

Regardless of the method used on a particular site, it should be clear that future assessments of biodiversity losses and gains on development sites will follow the principles of the metric. This means that all habitats, including lower value habitats such as pasture and arable land will be given a value which has to be compensated for through biodiversity gain, and that when assessing the biodiversity enhancement proposed, the risk factors in delivering this will be taken into account.

4. Delivery of biodiversity gains

The way in which the proposed biodiversity enhancement is documented will depend on the size and nature of the development but is likely to be within either a Biodiversity Enhancement Plan, a Habitat Management Plan, a Species Protection Plan, a Species Action Plan **or** a Green Infrastructure Plan as applicable, or for smaller developments may form part of a Landscape Plan. An implementation plan will be required to provide the necessary detailed design of all habitat restoration, enhancement or creation works including methods to be used, timescales and who will undertake the work. Supporting maps and plans should be provided to illustrate the location and scale of the proposed works, with levels if these are to be altered.

³ <https://nepubprod.appspot.com/publication/6047259574927360>

For large multi phased developments it is likely that a Masterplan will provide the mechanism for illustrating the ecological constraints and opportunities of a site. The Masterplan will be informed by ecological survey, document habitat losses and confirm that a realistic solution in terms of habitat restoration, enhancement and creation exists to compensate for these losses, with the detail to be provided in future planning applications.

The long-term management of any habitats that have been restored, enhanced or created is vital to ensure that the compensation and gains for biodiversity that have been established are maintained in the future. To demonstrate how this will be undertaken a 20 year Habitat Management Plan must be submitted for all sites which should include the following information:-

- Detailed habitat management to be undertaken for each area of restored, enhanced or newly established habitat together with a programme of review and monitoring to allow for adaptive management of habitats.
- Who will be responsible for undertaking this work?
- Who will be responsible for monitoring the work and reviewing habitat management requirements?
- Details of reporting on the outcome of the monitoring programme and any updates on the Habitat Management Plan to be reported to Aberdeenshire Council within 3 years of the completion of the development and every 5 years thereafter.
- Details of how the work will be funded for the 20 year life of the Management Plan.

If the habitat enhancement is delivered off-site on land not under the control of the applicant, a Section 75 Agreement will be needed. If delivery of biodiversity enhancements is undertaken through community groups, charities or trusts, a formal agreement will be required.

For major developments where multiple developers will be involved and development will take place over an extended period of time, it is important that the positive benefits for biodiversity are delivered in a comprehensive and timely manner. Where a Masterplan is required or planning permission is granted, the biodiversity calculations must be carried out for the whole site and it must be

demonstrated that adequate biodiversity enhancement can be delivered and how it will be implemented in relation to individual elements of the larger development. The detail of biodiversity enhancement will be agreed as part of detailed planning permissions for individual elements of the larger development, but must tie in with the overall objectives for the whole site.

There are considerable benefits to biodiversity enhancements being delivered early in the development. This provides time for habitats to recover and develop, provides a refuge for wildlife during the development phase and creates a more attractive area for the new residents or users of a site. In all cases the opportunity to implement biodiversity enhancements very early in the development of a site should be exploited.

The delivery of gains for biodiversity must be over and above what should be delivered as part of any development in order to comply with the broader environmental policies outlined in the Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan. This means that compensatory planting required as a result of loss of land to forestry, landscaping requirements, SuDS and the need for buffer strips will not, in general, count towards biodiversity gains unless it can be clearly demonstrated that they have been significantly enhanced or designed to incorporate long-term benefits for biodiversity or climate change mitigation.

This document aims to provide a summary of the process of considering how positive effects for biodiversity can be secured on development sites. Further information is available from the links below and should be read in conjunction with this document.

[Biodiversity net gain. Good practice principles for development. A practical guide \(cieem.net\)](#)

[CIEEM-Good-Practice-Requirements-for-Delivering-Biodiversity-Net-Gain-On-and-Off-Site-July2021.pdf](#)

[Biodiversity Net Gain in Scotland \(cieem.net\)](#)

[CIEEM-BNG-Report-and-Audit-templates2.pdf](#)

[Biodiversity offsets metrics and mechanisms.pdf \(europa.eu\)](#)

British Standard BS 8683:2021 Process for designing and implementing Biodiversity
Net Gain [bsi.shop \(bsigroup.com\)](https://bsi.shop/bsigroup.com)

Appendix 1

Securing positive effects for biodiversity

