

Greater Manchester Combined Authority

Biodiversity Net Gain

Guidance for Planners & Applicants

February 2024

Purpose of the guidance note

Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) is a process to development which leaves biodiversity in a measurably better state than before. Using habitats as a proxy for biodiversity and a metric to calculate biodiversity losses and gains, it ensures a more consistent approach to accounting for biodiversity within development.

The now mandatory legislation associated with the Environment Act (2021) will apply to the majority of medium and large developments in the UK, requiring them to measurably increase the biodiversity of a site by 10%. This builds upon the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF, 2023) and local policy within Greater Manchester (GM) to strengthen opportunities for nature recovery through the Town and Country Planning System (TCPA).

The new legislation presents opportunities but also poses a challenges to Local Planning Authorities (LPA), their ecologists, and the Greater Manchester Ecology Unit (GMEU), who provide ecological advice (including the review of planning applications where required) to each District where needed. BNG will bring an increased workload to these organisations; therefore, there is a need to establish new processes for planning reviews and determinations to ensure an efficient planning process.

BNG offers one of the most exciting new opportunities for investment into nature within GM, providing a mechanism to restore green spaces in and around development and contribute to new nature rich places for both wildlife and people.

The aims of this guidance note is to:

- Provide **greater clarity on how BNG will work within GM**, building on legislation and national guidance as well as local policy to provide a consistent approach across all districts;
- Provide a **consistent framework** demonstrating how LPA planners and GMEU will validate and review planning applications in relation to BNG;
- In turn, help applicants to **understand submission requirements** related to BNG, explaining the process by which BNG information will be reviewed by the LPA as well as GMEU or the LPA ecologist where in post;
- Provide high level considerations for **reviewing the Statutory Biodiversity Metric** which underpins BNG, aimed at planners and other disciplines who lack ecological expertise.



River Mersey, Didsbury

What this guide includes

1. An introduction to Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG)
2. BNG and the planning system, how requirements differ for different types of planning application and different stages of the Town and Country Planning Act (TCPA).
3. A guide to assessing BNG applications – to ensure applicants submit all necessary information ready for review by GMEU and LPA ecologists

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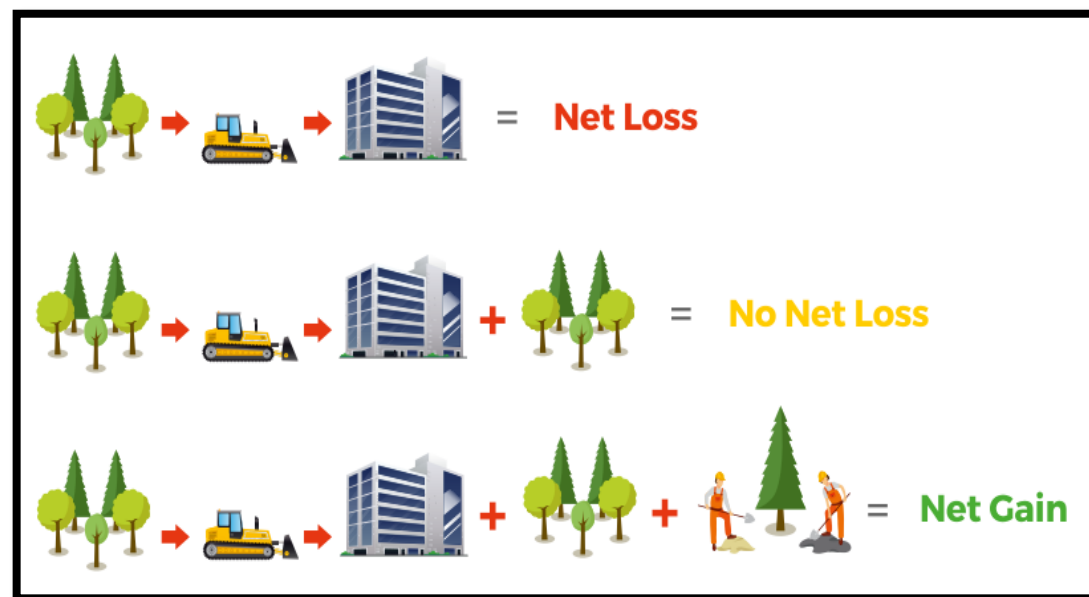
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1. Introduction to biodiversity net gain

What is Biodiversity Net Gain?

“An approach to development that aims to leave the natural environment in a measurably better state than before” (Defra)

It is a quantitative approach relying on a metric which measures the value of different habitats. The biodiversity value of a site is calculated pre and post development to determine the outcome. Where there are residual net losses in biodiversity, then these can be resolved by design changes or compensated for on or off site, to achieve a net gain result.



The Statutory Metric - Assessing the change in biodiversity

The Defra Biodiversity Metric (hereby referred to as 'the Statutory Metric') is the latest iteration of the excel spreadsheet tool used to determine a quantitative measurement of biodiversity gains and losses through development.

It uses a habitat led approach, using the UK Habitat Classification System (UKHab - <https://ukhab.org/>) to determine a proxy of biodiversity value both before (the baseline) and after development. The metric has undergone several iterations, and the final 'Statutory Metric' is now released (see link below).

Given the use of UKHab, the metric is designed to be used by suitably experienced ecologists, using field survey data gathered by surveyors with suitable botanical knowledge. A separate expectation is placed upon watercourse elements of the metric, whereby surveyors are expected to have knowledge of both geomorphology theory and aquatic ecology and therefore require accreditation through 'Modular River Survey' techniques (<https://modularriversurvey.org/morph-rivers/>). A net gain will be required in all three biodiversity unit 'types', Habitat, Hedgerow and River units, where they are present within the baseline of the site.

The metric, together with supporting documents including the user guide and technical appendix can be downloaded from here: [Statutory Biodiversity Metric Tools and Guides](#)

Calculating net gains and losses using the metric

The metric calculates three distinct categories of 'biodiversity units' – Habitat, Hedgerow and Watercourse units. These units cannot be combined and are instead summarised as three distinct outcomes in relation to their net gains or losses.

To calculate the numerical unit value of these, the following factors are considered within the baseline:

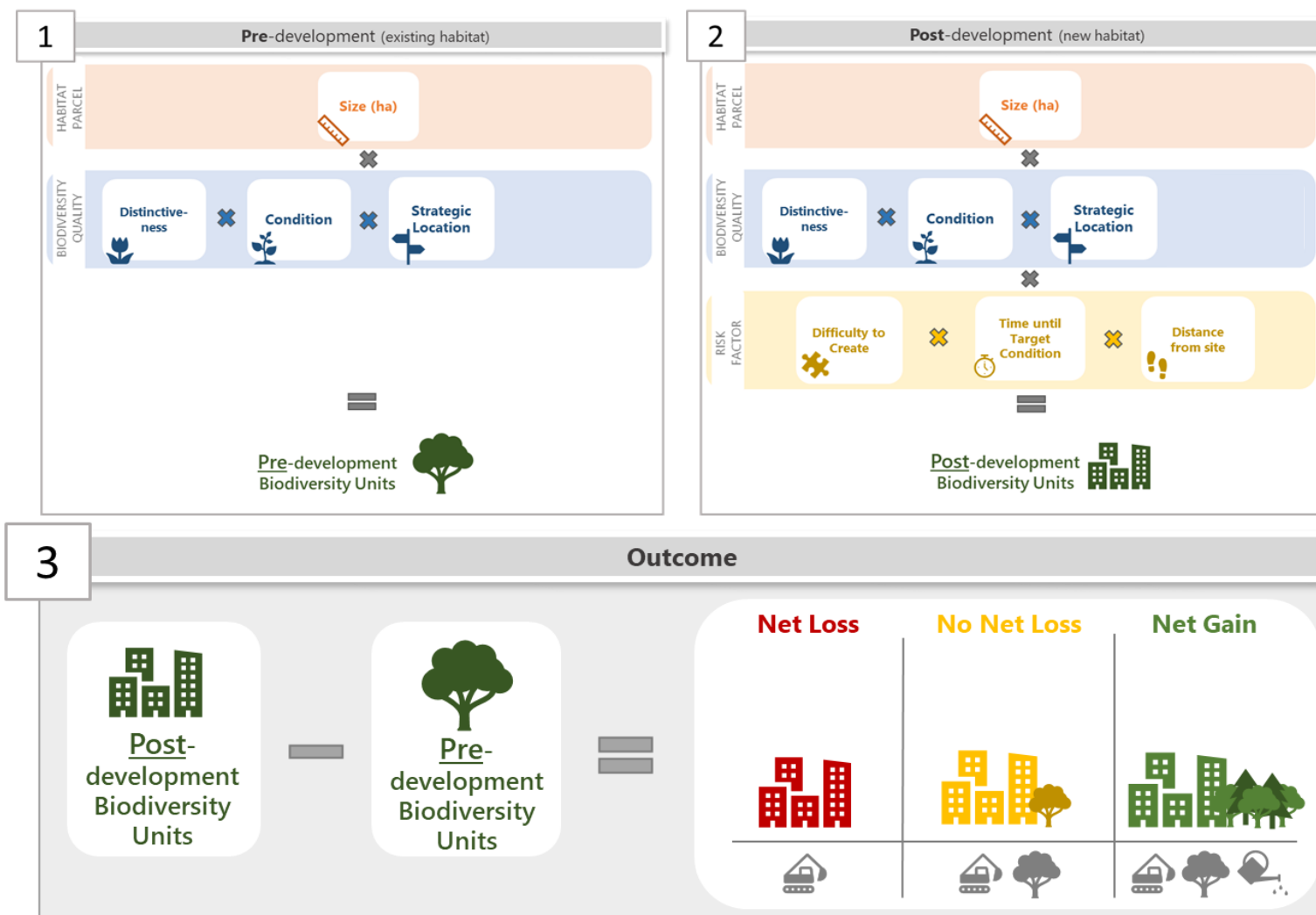
- **Habitat type:** determined through UKHab.
- **Area** in hectares (Habitat) or **length** in km (Hedgerow and River): determined through spatial mapping of extent.
- **Habitat distinctiveness:** automated from habitat type selection based on a set of predetermined values aligned to relative scarcity of the habitat type (ranging from 'very low' (1) to 'very high' (5)).
- **Habitat condition:** determined through condition assessment in the field.
- **Strategic significance:** determined by whether a given habitat parcel is relevant to a local plan, strategy or policy (for example Local Plan ecological maps or Local Nature Recovery Strategies).

For post-development, this aggregates the habitat losses from the baseline together with both the creation and enhancement tabs, which also have the following factors incorporated:

- **Difficulty to create:** automated based on habitat type and proposed condition, which adjusts unit returns based on how likely a given enhancement or creation is likely to succeed.
- **Time to target condition:** automated based on habitat type and condition, which adjusts unit returns based on how long creation/enhancement will take to achieve its full value.
- **Distance from site:** Only relevant for off-site compensation, which lowers unit returns where off site means outside of the LPA boundary or National Character Area (NCA).

The Statutory Metric - Assessing the change in biodiversity

The below graphic illustrates how these factors are combined to produce BNG outcomes.



What Biodiversity Net Gain isn't

BNG is additional to all current legislative requirements associated with habitats and species. This means it does not replace existing policy and legislation for habitats and species. It does not cover irreplaceable habitats (see page 40 of this guidance note for an explanation of these) & certain statutory designated sites including European Protected Sites (notable Special Areas of Conservation, Special Protection Areas & Ramsar sites) and Sites of Special Scientific Importance (SSSI), which should be excluded from the calculations. The statutory metric provides inputs within the start page to provide decision makers clarity on when irreplaceable habitats have been identified on site, and a separate tab is to be infilled by the applicant and their ecologists to detail irreplaceable habitats and any impacts and how these are being compensated for.

Additionally, BNG does not cover indirect impacts to habitats (for example resulting from pollution) or impacts to individual species. As discussed previously, the metric provides a proxy for value based on habitats. Information regarding habitats and species is still required through existing policy and legislation which is separate to BNG.

As with all other ecology matters within GM, LPA planners are not expected to be able to delve into the detail of BNG assessments to assess their robustness and/or validity, and therefore relying on the expertise of LPA ecologists and Greater Manchester Ecology Unit (GMEU) to ensure applicants proposals are sound will be essential throughout the planning process.

BNG isn't just about numbers

Measurable outcomes underpinned by the metric are important, but BNG must be about meaningful ecological outcomes. This is why supporting documentation with additional context and justifications are crucial to ensure robust BNG assessments and good outcomes for biodiversity.

The Mitigation Hierarchy must still be followed, as well as existing good practice or legal compliance. The NPPF (2023) builds in the mitigation hierarchy in Section 15 – Habitats and Biodiversity, stating:

“if significant harm to biodiversity resulting from a development cannot be avoided (through locating on an alternative site with less harmful impacts), adequately mitigated, or, as a last resort, compensated for, then planning permission should be refused” (180, a)

This is further built into BNG Good Practice Guidelines (see page 8) and the metric User Guide ‘rules’ (see page 33).

This means LPAs must encourage development to avoid and retain existing habitats on site and should only allow compensation (on or offsite) where there is robust justification either ecologically or otherwise.

The design of biodiversity compensation must fit within a local and regional context and deliver on wider biodiversity objectives, including that within relevant Local Plans (see pages 10-12 of this guidance note for further information on BNG in relation to local policy).

Ten Guiding Principles



The BNG Good Practice Principles (2016) were developed to help guide BNG assessments away from a numerical-only approach. They are not directly transcribed into the Environment Act or associated mandatory requirements. However, many relate to mandatory rules and principles seen within the metric User Guide and have helped to shape BNG practice and will still be a consideration for LPA ecologists and GMEU when assessing applicants BNG assessments.

Applicants should be encouraged to document how their proposed developments adhere to these principles.

They are summarised below:

Biodiversity Net Gain- 10 good practice principles

1. Apply the Mitigation Hierarchy
2. Avoid losing biodiversity that cannot be offset by gains elsewhere
3. Be inclusive and equitable
4. Address risks
5. Make a measurable Net Gain contribution
6. Achieve the best outcomes for biodiversity
7. Be additional
8. Create a Net Gain legacy
9. Optimise sustainability
10. Be transparent

For further information, see the following link: [Biodiversity-Net-Gain-Principles.pdf \(cieem.net\)](https://cieem.net/Biodiversity-Net-Gain-Principles.pdf)

Biodiversity Net Gain in Greater Manchester

Biodiversity Net Gain is already part of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF, Para 170(d) and Para 175(d)) but the NPPF does not specify a number/percentage for the gain. The Environment Act includes a requirement for all future schemes, including the development of land to deliver a mandatory 10 % Biodiversity Net Gain (exemptions can be found on page 18 of this guidance note).

Within Greater Manchester, existing policies include goals to improve the quality of the natural environment and BNG works towards these goals.

It is important to note that each individual planning authority may have differing policies surrounding Biodiversity Net Gain and what they expect from applications. Consideration of local policies is vital particularly where these add additional requirements on top of the Environment Acts legislative requirements. Under these scenarios, it is important to be clear on the requirements and how these interact with the mandatory nature of the Environment Act. For example, this may mean certain requirements enter the 'planning balance' and can be subject to viability assessments whereas the Environment Act requirements cannot.

At present, no plans for net gain targets above 10% are planned for GM and there is no policy wording which creates substantive changes from that contained within the Environment Act secondary legislation.

'Places for everyone' is a long-term joint development plan for nine Greater Manchester districts (Bolton, Bury, Manchester, Oldham, Rochdale,

Salford, Tameside, Trafford and Wigan), which sets out what kind of development will take place.

Within 'Places for everyone', the following Strategic Objective (number 8) is laid out:

Improve the quality of our natural environment and access to green spaces:

- Enhance special landscapes, green infrastructure, biodiversity and geodiversity;
- Improve access to the natural environment and green spaces including parks;
- Promote the role of green space in climate resilience and reducing flood risk.

Places for everyone can be viewed here: [Places for Everyone \(greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk\)](https://greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk)

The below quotes are key extracts from the plan which relate to BNG.

"The effective conservation of biodiversity will require more than simply the protection of existing designated sites and priority habitats, particularly given the scale of development proposed in this Plan. A wider strategy for Nature Recovery is needed, including habitat restoration and creation, and the transformation of broad landscape areas into a diverse Nature Recovery Network."

"Achieving a major net enhancement of biodiversity value and improving access to nature are key priorities for this Plan and central components of the wider approach to green infrastructure and the natural environment."

"If our overall aims of a major net enhancement of biodiversity value and improved access to nature are to be achieved then all new development will have to play its part, each delivering a net gain in biodiversity. This could involve the protection and improvement of existing habitats, the creation of new ones, and/or the strengthening of connections between them. Recognised metrics will be applied to new development proposals to calculate and demonstrate a measurable net gain in biodiversity of no less than 10%."

Biodiversity Net Gain in Greater Manchester – Places for everyone

'Places for everyone' contains **Policy JP-G9** which is the policy concerning the natural environment which has relevance to BNG.

Policy JP-G 9 'A Net Enhancement of Biodiversity and Geodiversity:

Through local planning and associated activities, a net enhancement of biodiversity resources will be sought, including, where relevant by:

- Increasing the quality, quantity, extent and diversity of habitats, particularly priority habitats identified in national or local biodiversity action plans and those that support priority species;
- Improving connections between habitats, to protect and enhance the provision of corridors, ecological networks (including Nature Recovery Networks) and stepping stones that enable the movement of species, especially as the climate changes;
- Enhancing the management of existing habitats, including through habitat restoration, avoiding habitat fragmentation and combating invasive species;
- Protecting sites designated for their nature conservation and/or geological importance, with the highest level of protection given to international and then national designations;
- Facilitating greater access to nature, particularly within urban areas;
- Supporting the development and implementation of the Great Manchester Wetlands Nature Recovery Network; and
- Safeguarding, restoring and sustainably managing our most valuable soil resources, tackling soil degradation/erosion and recovering soil fertility, particularly to ensure protection of peat-based soils and safeguard 'best and most versatile' agricultural land.

Policy JP-G 9 'A Net Enhancement of Biodiversity and Geodiversity (Continued):

Development will be expected to:

- Follow the mitigation hierarchy of:
 - i. Avoiding significant harm to biodiversity, particularly where it is irreplaceable, through consideration of alternative sites with less harmful impacts where appropriate, then
 - ii. Adequately mitigating any harm to biodiversity, then
 - iii. Adequately compensating for any remaining harm to biodiversity
- Avoid fragmenting or severing connectivity between habitats;
- Achieve a measurable net gain in biodiversity of no less than 10%;
- Make appropriate provision for long-term management of habitats and geological features connected to the development.

Biodiversity Net Gain in Greater Manchester

Further environmental policy within Greater Manchester includes the 5 Year Environment Plan.

The 5 year Environment Plan targets are based on 5 key challenges:

- **Challenge 1:** Mitigating climate change
- **Challenge 2:** Air quality
- **Challenge 3:** Production and consumption of resources
- **Challenge 4:** Natural Environment
- **Challenge 5:** Resilience and adaptation to the impacts of climate change

The implementation of BNG legislation within GM will enable funding for wildlife-rich spaces both inside and outside of development, which can help to overcome these challenges.

The Environment Fund has also been developed which provides a mechanism for biodiversity offset payments to be made. Districts may also develop alternative approaches within Local Plans.

"The Greater Manchester Environment fund is the UK's first regional environmental impact fund benefitting the region socially, environmentally and financially. It is a central funding source for environmental projects that are working to benefit both nature and people. The Environment Fund will be a centralised investment vehicle to provide funding and support to habitat creation and restoration projects across Greater Manchester, taking advantage of the new market arising from emerging biodiversity net gain ("BNG") policy"

[Greater Manchester 5
Year Environment Plan](#)

[Greater Manchester
Environment Fund](#)

Overview of Legislation



Environment Act 2021

The Environment Act achieved Royal Assent through Parliament on 9 November 2021, and whilst there is currently a transition period before mandatory requirements come into force, it will require development to deliver a 10% net gain in biodiversity units for all major development under the Town and Country Planning Act (TCPA) 1990 from the end of January. All new applications will be required to achieve 10% BNG unless they are exempt or qualify as 'small sites' (see pages [20](#) and [21](#) respectively for more details), apart from Reserved Matters applications with previously consented Outline applications prior to when mandatory BNG was introduced.

From April 2024, 'small sites' will also require 10% BNG although these will be able to use the 'Small Sites Metric' (SSM) which is a simplified excel spreadsheet tool.

Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPS) subject to a Development Consent Order (DCO) under the Planning Act (2008) will also require to achieve 10% BNG although the exact requirements are yet to be confirmed by DEFRA.

The headline requirements from the Environment Act are summarised below:

- Schedule 14: Mandatory requirement for all developments under the Town & Country Planning Act to deliver Biodiversity Net Gain
- Schedule 15: Mandatory requirement for all developments in relation to development consent for national significant infrastructure projects to deliver Biodiversity Net Gain
- A minimum of 10% net gain will be required
- There is a Secretary of State (SoS) issued metric which is required to be used in all projects concerning BNG from February 2024.
- There will be a mandatory register of "Biodiversity gain sites" for recording off-site habitats and sites that are being used for compensation
- All habitats used for compensation and off-setting will be required to be maintained and managed for a minimum of 30 years
- It will be possible to purchase statutory biodiversity credits (see page [24](#)) from SoS for the purpose of meeting biodiversity gain but these will be expected to be used only as a last resort.

Summary of Statutory Framework for BNG

In England, BNG is required under a statutory framework introduced by Schedule 7A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (inserted by the Environment Act 2021).

Under the statutory framework for BNG, every grant of planning permission is deemed to have been granted subject to a **general biodiversity gain condition** to secure the biodiversity gain objective.

The general biodiversity net gain condition is a pre-commencement condition: once planning permission has been granted, a Biodiversity Gain Plan must be submitted and approved by the planning authority before commencement of the development.

There are exemptions (as listed on pages 20 and 21) and transitional arrangements which disapply the condition from certain planning permissions, as well as special modifications for planning permissions for phased development and the treatment of irreplaceable habitats.

The statutory framework for biodiversity net gain also includes provisions about information requirements for planning applications and the treatment of the condition on planning decision notices.

The biodiversity net gain regulations most directly relevant to planning are:

- **The Environment Act 2021 (Commencement No. 8 and Transitional Provisions) Regulations [2024]** which commence BNG for most types of new planning applications and provides transitional arrangements for section 73 permissions
- **The Biodiversity Gain Requirements (Exemptions) Regulations [2024]** which prescribes exemptions for categories of development to which BNG does not apply
- **The Biodiversity Gain (Town and Country Planning) (Modifications and Amendments) (England) Regulations [2024]** which includes provisions related to planning applications and the Biodiversity Gain Plan, as well as modifications for phased development
- **The Biodiversity Gain Requirements (Irreplaceable Habitat) Regulations [2024]** which sets out the modifications for irreplaceable habitats.

In addition, there are regulations for the Biodiversity Gain Site register established under section 100 of the Environment Act 2021 for registered offsite biodiversity gains.



Environment Act 2021

BNG and Alignment with Changes to Local Planning Authority Duties

In addition to BNG, the Environment Act underwrites other initiatives for nature recovery which are relevant to LPAs.

Local Nature Recovery Strategies

Sections 104 to 108 of the Environment Act lay out the requirement for Responsible Authorities (RA) to produce Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS). LNRS are designed to establish priorities and proposals for specific actions to drive nature recovery, and to provide wider environmental benefits. BNG is one of the most important mechanisms for delivering LNRS by providing financeable projects to focus resources into habitat creation and enhancement. The responsible authority for LNRS in Greater Manchester is Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA), who are working in partnership with Natural England (NE) and GMEU. A pilot study was undertaken in GM (see here for more details: [mgConvert2PDF.aspx \(greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk\)](https://mgConvert2PDF.aspx(greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk))).

GMCA will seek the involvement of LPAs in the formulation of the final LNRS, including helping to identify priority locations within each of their respective districts.

Biodiversity Duties

The Environment Act also strengthens the 'biodiversity duty' as established in the Natural Environment & Rural Communities Act 2006. The duty now requires public authorities to *'have regard, as far as is consistent with the proper exercise of [their] functions, to the purpose of conserving **and enhancing** biodiversity'*.

The extension of the biodiversity duty requires public authorities to prepare a 5-yearly Biodiversity Report of their actions taken under its provisions. This report will be inspected by the Secretary of State and whilst further guidance on what to include is necessary, implementation and regulation of BNG is likely to be one of the main factors in determining whether LPAs have fulfilled their duty in enhancing the natural environment.

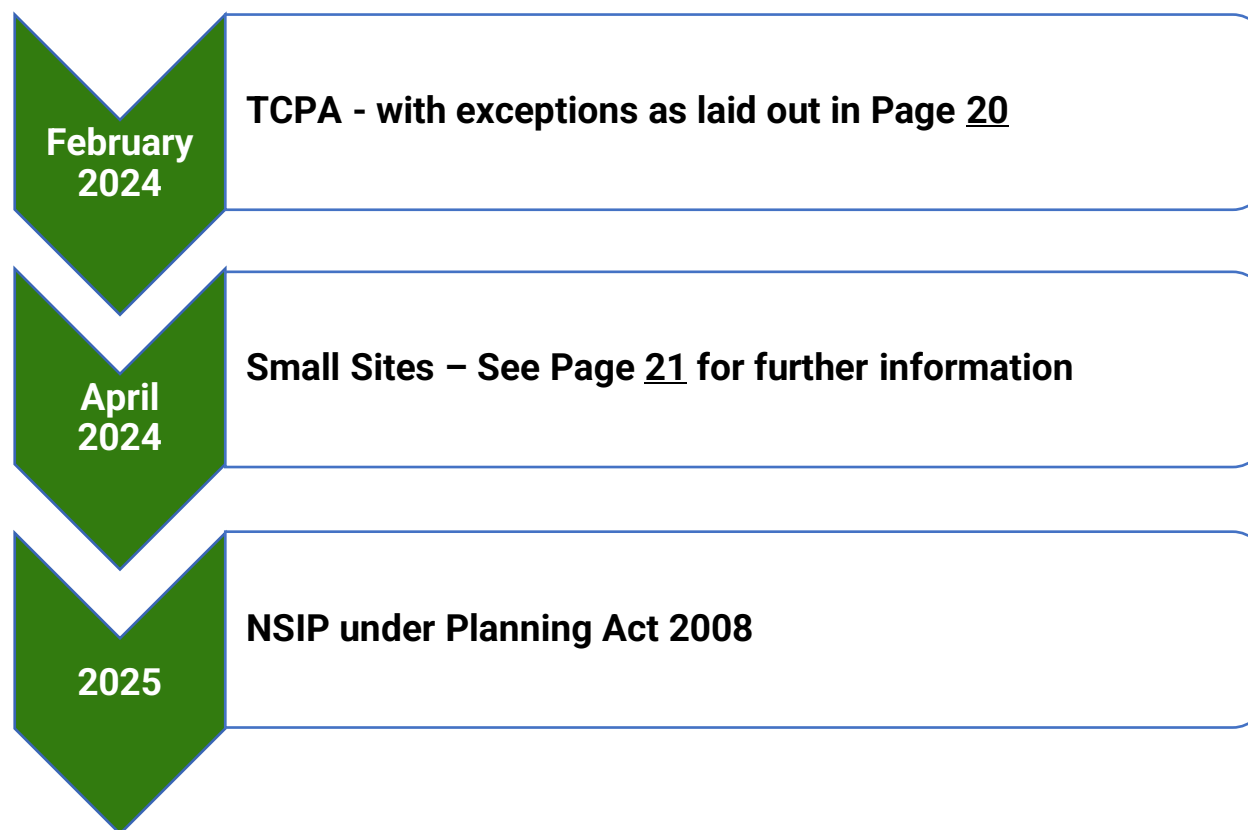


Environment Act 2021

2. Biodiversity net gain and the planning system

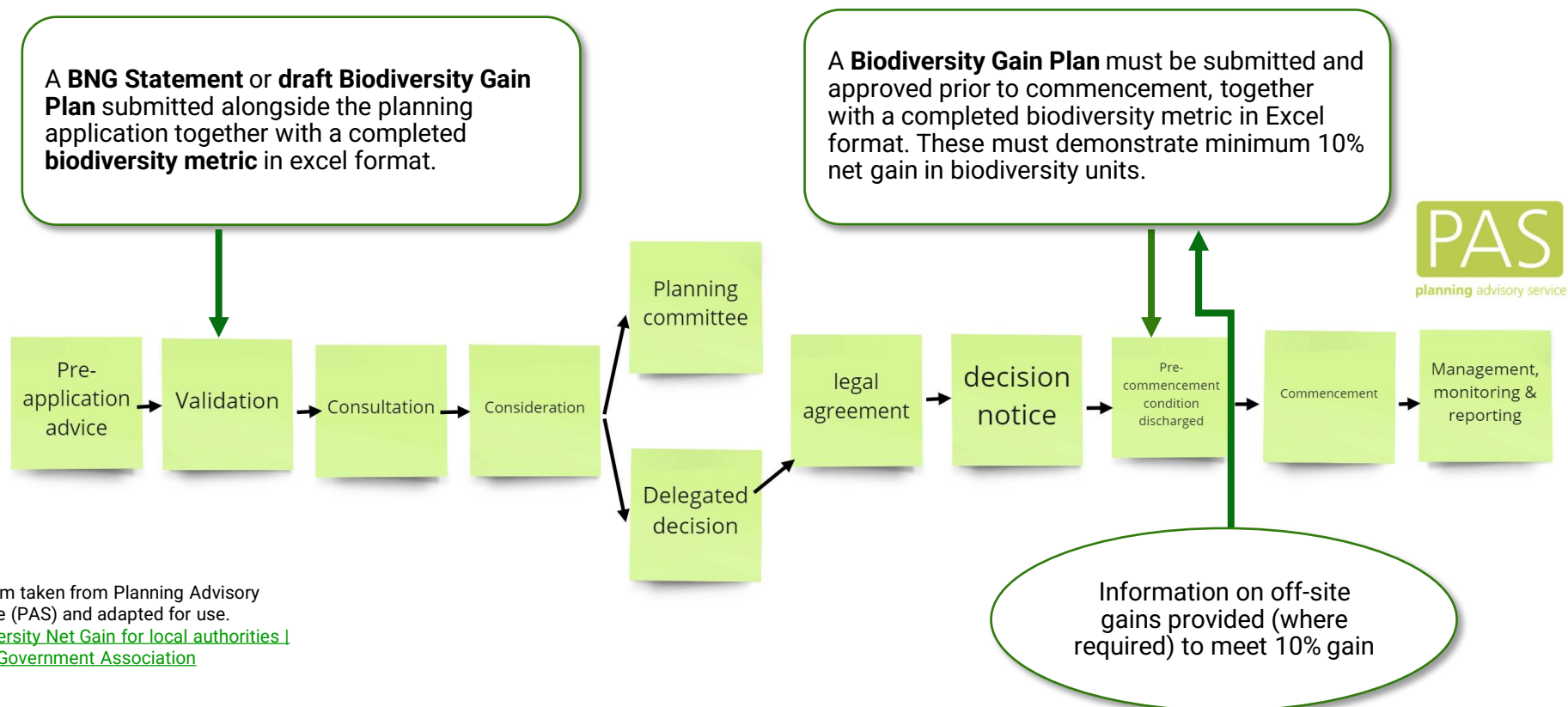
Timeline

As set out earlier, the implementation date of BNG differs depending on the type of scheme that planning is being sought for. The following diagram provides a current summary of when BNG will become mandatory for a given application type. More details are provided in subsequent sections of this Guidance Note.



How the mandatory BNG requirement will work for TCPA 1990 development

The below diagram is designed to provide a high-level overview of what documents should be submitted throughout the planning process with regards to BNG.



Exemptions

Not all development will be required to achieve a 10% net gain in biodiversity units. Defra has provided a list of exemptions associated with mandatory BNG, to keep the policy proportionate.

Exemptions include:

1. Permitted development
2. Urgent crown development
3. Development impacting habitat of an area below a 'de minimis' threshold of 25 m² or 5m for linear habitats such as hedgerows.
4. Householder applications
5. Biodiversity gain sites (where habitats are being enhanced for wildlife)
6. Small scale self-build and custom house building which:
 - consist of no more than 9 dwellings;
 - is an area no larger than 0.5ha;
 - consists of dwellings which are self-build or custom housebuilding
7. Only apply the requirement to Section 73 applications where the original permission was granted after commencement of the mandatory BNG requirement.
8. Development related to the high-speed rail transport network

If exempt – The development should still provide opportunities for biodiversity enhancement.

Which metric should be used and when?

To ensure that developments are assessed fairly, a separate metric for 'small sites' has been developed in addition to the Statutory Metric. The Small Sites Metric (SSM) excludes priority habitat criteria and is aimed at minor development (although not all minor development will be suitable for the SSM as per the criteria set out below). 'Small sites' may also still use the **Statutory Metric** if preferred. The implementation of BNG for sites falling within the small site criteria is not mandatory until April 2024, however from this point a minimum of 10% net gain in biodiversity units will also be expected of small sites. The criteria for using this metric are defined below.

It's important to note that local policy may differ with regards to small sites, particularly in relation to the date in which 10% BNG becomes mandatory for minor development. This should be checked and understood for each individual local planning authority based upon local policy wording and supplementary guidance.

Criteria for using the Small Sites Metric

Small sites are defined for the purpose of the BNG exemption as:

- Residential: Where the number of dwellings to be provided is between one and nine inclusive, on a site having an area of less than one hectare, or where the number of dwellings to be provided is not known, a site area of less than 0.5 hectares.
- Non-residential: Where the floor space to be created is less than 1,000 square metres OR where the site area is less than one hectare
- Where a development meets the above criteria, but has **Priority Habitats** in its baseline, the **Statutory Metric** must be used.
- Similarly, where a development requires **offsite compensation**, the **Statutory Metric** must be used.

Biodiversity Gain Plan (BGP)

The Biodiversity Gain Plan (BGP) is the main document that should accompany an application requiring BNG, alongside the Statutory Metric Excel spreadsheet itself. The draft template for the BGP is now available here: [The biodiversity gain plan: draft template and guidance - Land use: policies and framework \(blog.gov.uk\)](#)

The BGP is an essential requirement to discharge the pre-commencement condition which will automatically be applied to all planning permissions where BNG is not exempt. However, applicants may choose to provide a subset of information (contained within a draft BGP or a 'BNG Statement' – see page 21) provided within this document prior to determination and, depending on the level of information provided at this point, update it to discharge the later condition relating to BNG.

In practice, LPAs should encourage developers to provide as much information as possible prior to determination, and therefore fill out as much of the BGP as possible at the outset rather than waiting for the pre-commencement condition to be set. This will be essential for robust BNG strategies by developers who consider the mitigation hierarchy and BNG Good Practice Principles. Conversations at pre-application stage as well as clear guidance around expectations are therefore crucial to ensure information is provided early in the process.

Defra set out the following process for BGP submission:

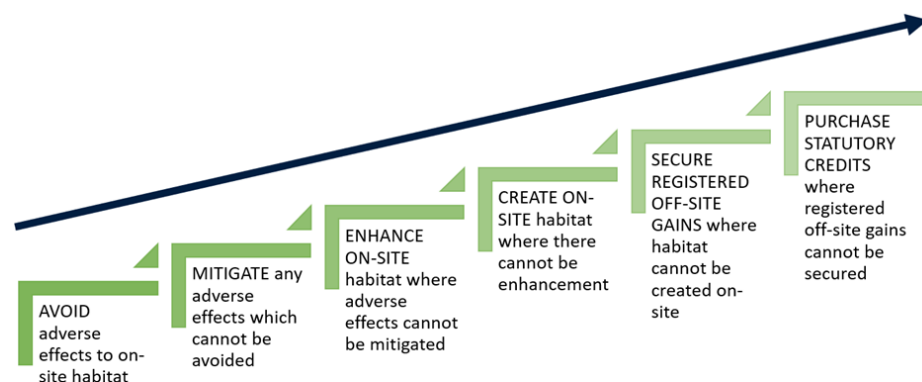
1. The BGP will be submitted as a post-permission document for the approval by the planning authority.
2. The applicant will submit the BGP after the planning permission has been granted to discharge the mandatory biodiversity net gain condition.
3. The BGP must be approved in writing by the planning authority before development can commence.
4. There is a standard BGP template for applicants to complete and planning authorities to assess.
5. The BGP (and the outcome of the determination) will be required to be published on the relevant local planning authority register.

Biodiversity Gain Hierarchy

The Biodiversity Gain Hierarchy (BGH) emphasises the preferred route to be followed for achieving a 10% net gain and should be used by developers as early as possible when selecting a site and considering development proposals.

Local planning authorities must consider the BGH when deciding whether the biodiversity objective has been met and when determining whether to approve the Biodiversity Gain Plan. The BGH is a material consideration in the planning process.

The BGH emphasis that onsite biodiversity gains should be considered firstly, followed by registered offsite biodiversity gains and – as a last resort – biodiversity credits. The BGH is emphasised for Medium distinctiveness habitats and above; however, principles of the mitigation hierarchy still apply and are also of relevance for habitats of lower distinctiveness. The BGH does not replace the mitigation hierarchy and is instead aimed to provide an additional layer of strength to these principles in relation to BNG.



The Biodiversity Gain Hierarchy means the following actions, in the order or priority:

1. Avoid adverse effects of the development on onsite habitats with a **habitat distinctiveness score** (applied by the biodiversity metric) **of 4 or higher**;
2. If adverse effects cannot be avoided, mitigating those effects;
3. So far as those adverse effects cannot be mitigated, habitat enhancement of onsite habitat;
4. Where opportunities for enhancement are exhausted, creation of onsite habitat;
5. Where opportunities for creation are exhausted, the availability of registered offsite biodiversity gain;
6. Where offsite habitat enhancement cannot be secured, purchasing biodiversity credits.



Options for BNG Delivery

Notwithstanding the need to adhere to the BNG and mitigation hierarchy, there are several options that applicants must achieve BNG, and these can ultimately be delivered as a combination:

1. Onsite through design changes/ integration of green infrastructure and soft landscaping. This is the preferred option that needs to be exhausted prior to moving to off-site solutions.
2. Offsite - Habitat creation/enhancement is delivered on another site outside of the submitted proposed development boundary and is registered as a habitat bank.
3. Statutory credits: Government sourced credits which are available to purchase. These are a last resort.

Local offsite units are being created through habitat banks. A habitat bank is a parcel of land where targeted habitat intervention is conducted to generate a biodiversity unit uplift. This can be privately or publicly owned land and will be managed for a minimum of 30 years. This uplift is then sold as biodiversity units to those that need off-site biodiversity net gain.

Local offsetting through habitat banks can be implemented in several ways; however, under each scenario, the land must be tied to a legal agreement prior to it being incorporated into an applicant's BNG strategy for planning. An applicant will require proof of purchase from the habitat bank and a verified reference number to link this habitat bank to the Natural England national off-set register which allows the LPA to check its validity. More information on habitat banks including how they can be registered can be found here: [Sell biodiversity units as a land manager - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/sell-biodiversity-units-as-a-land-manager)

Habitat bank options

1. Developer owns land – this may be directly adjacent to the site (also known as within the 'blue line').
2. LPA owns land – LPA owns habitat bank and may manage and own or own, but the land is managed by a charity or NGO
3. Broker - who liaise between developers and landowners / managers to provide BNG units from land. Some companies lease land sourcing BNG units and landowners agree management for 30 years of agreed habitat types.

Statutory credits

Statutory credits are a provision of last resort by Defra to ensure applicants can achieve 10% net gain irrespective of the local offset market. The costs of statutory credits are significantly higher than local market options and will not direct investment in nature towards GM. GMCA and GMEU are working to ensure a steady and reliable supply of high-integrity biodiversity units locally; therefore, it is not envisaged that statutory credits will be frequently used within GM. An extract of the Defra guidance is provided below (for more info, see here: [Preparing the market for statutory biodiversity credits - Natural England \(blog.gov.uk\)](https://www.blog.gov.uk/2023/05/23/preparing-the-market-for-statutory-biodiversity-credits/)).

"a developer must first look to deliver the mandatory biodiversity net gain of ten per cent either on-site or off-site. If this is not possible – and the developer can provide evidence to the Local Planning Authority that they have been unable to achieve BNG through on-site and off-site options – then they may buy a statutory biodiversity credit."

BNG requirements at validation, prior to determination, and post-determination

The principal mechanism for delivery of BNG within the TCPA is a 'general biodiversity gain condition', which is to be attached to all planning permissions (unless exempt) and must be discharged by the provision and acceptance of a Biodiversity Gain Plan (BGP) prior to commencement of development. Broadly, the BGP will aim to ensure :

- onsite biodiversity gains have been identified through the development's approved plans and drawings are appropriately secured;
- any offsite biodiversity gains have been registered and allocated to the development; and
- biodiversity credits, if they are necessary, have been purchased.

However, **BNG is not just a post-permission matter**, and successful BNG strategies by developers will need to have been considered throughout the planning process. There are strict validation requirements revealed from Defra which must be followed by the LPA; these relate to 'Article 7 of The Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015' and are summarised on the next page, but broadly includes a requirement to provide:

- a baseline biodiversity unit calculation (i.e. what is present within the site prior to development), including a summary of any irreplaceable habitats;

- an associated map showing the baseline habitats.

This information has been stressed as a minimum requirement and it is acknowledged by Defra that additional information may be required to assist the consideration of BNG with a given planning application. Further to this, **LPAs need to consider more broadly whether the general biodiversity condition is capable of being successfully discharged**. It will be essential that additional information is provided to the LPA prior to determination to ensure effective implementation of BNG and reduce the risk of applications being granted permission that then fail to discharge the general biodiversity gain condition. Defra guidance does not provide a definitive list of requirements prior to determination; however, subsequent pages of this guidance note set out **what will be required to determine planning applications which meet criteria for mandatory BNG with GM**.

This has been determined through interpretation of national guidance and liaison with relevant local stakeholders including GMCA, GMEU and LPAs.

BNG requirements at validation, prior to determination, and post-determination

The information which is required prior to determination should ordinarily also be provided at validation, as the consultation period for LPA ecologists or GMEU will initiate upon validation of an application. Information not provided at validation but submitted during the consultation window may result in delays to determination of planning applications.

Such requirements are set consistently across GM to provide clarity to applicants and ensure sufficient information is received prior to a development being consented or refused so that LPA ecologists or GMEU can give due consideration to the information provided and advise LPAs whether a minimum 10% net gain together with all BNG principles and rules will be met.

What happens if an applicant fails to provide information required and explained within this document?

If the information requirements as stipulated within this Guidance Note are not met by an applicant, then the following actions will occur depending on the stage of planning permission:

Validation – Failure to adhere to the minimum ‘National Validation Requirements’ as set out on Page 27 will result in validation not being accepted.

Prior to determination – the application is likely to be refused, or significantly delayed whilst the LPA request further information.

Note – this information should be submitted at validation to allow GMEU and the LPA to review this information in sufficient timescales.

Condition discharge – the application to discharge the planning condition will be rejected.

National validation requirements

The below text comprises a direct quote from the 'Biodiversity Net Gain Planning Practice Guidance' provided by Defra. This includes the minimum requirements for validating a planning application, therefore failure to provide this information results in an application not being validated. This also includes information on how applicants should provide transparency regarding on-going land use which may be impacting the existing biodiversity unit value of a site. More information can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/draft-biodiversity-net-gain-planning-practice-guidance>. A flow-chart of validation requirements for GM can be found within section 4 later in this guidance note.

"Where development would be subject to the general biodiversity gain condition, the application must be accompanied by minimum information set out in Article 7 of The Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015:

- a statement as to whether the applicant believes that planning permission, if granted, would be subject to the biodiversity gain condition;
- the pre-development biodiversity value of the onsite habitat on the date of application (or an earlier date) including the completed metric calculation tool used showing the calculations, the publication date and version of the biodiversity metric used to calculate that value;
- where the applicant wishes to use an earlier date, the proposed earlier date and the reasons for proposing that date;
- a statement confirming whether the biodiversity value of the onsite habitat is lower on the date of application (or an earlier date) because of the

carrying on of activities ('degradation') in which case the value is to be taken as immediately before the carrying on of the activities, and if degradation has taken place supporting evidence of this;

- a description of any irreplaceable habitat (as set out in column 1 of the Schedule to the Biodiversity Gain Requirements (Irreplaceable Habitat) Regulations [2024]) on the land to which the application relates, that exists on the date of application, (or an earlier date); and
- a plan, drawn to an identified scale which must show the direction of North, showing onsite habitat existing on the date of application (or an earlier date), including any irreplaceable habitat.

If this information has not been provided, the local planning authority **must refuse to validate** the application."

Requirements prior to determination

The next page sets out requirements of what each LPA and GMEU will expect prior to determination, to ensure sufficient information is provided to allow a robust evaluation of whether the applicant is likely to be able to discharge the general biodiversity gain condition should the application be approved and given planning permission. This does not repeat the national validation requirements detailed on the previous page but lists additional information which an applicant **should** provide to the LPA. If this information is not presented at validation, then this may result in delays to appropriate consultation with LPA ecologists or GMEU and subsequent delays to planning determination.

Therefore, an additional layer of recommended requirements for validation within GM also reflect the same requirements prior to determination. This is to **provide alignment between what is submitted at validation and what information can reasonably be expected to determine the application.**

The flow charts at Section 4 of this Guidance Note present relevant questions relevant to the minimum national requirements and additional GM requirements in a logical flow process to aid applicants into submitting the correct information.

Failure to provide information that address these questions will risk insufficient information leading to refusal of the application as the LPA ecologists or GMEU will not have enough information to reasonably determine the soundness/robustness of the BNG assessment.

LPA districts are consulting on what measures need to be taken to incorporate the additional GM requirements into their local validation lists to strengthen this system.

This process is recommended within the National Guidance and is being tailored at a local level to ensure BNG works best for Greater Manchester's nature and residents.

Requirements prior to determination

A completed biodiversity metric indicating the level of biodiversity net gain or loss is likely to be achieved by the scheme. It is not essential for the metric to display a 10% net gain result at this stage; however, this should be discussed within the BNG statement or draft BGP (see below). The metric should have the habitat loss, creation and/or enhancement tabs filled out to provide an indication of losses and gains expected as a result of the development. This does not need to have off-site tabs completed at this stage, therefore where off-site compensation is proposed the metric prior to determination may show a significant net loss. However, further context for this must be provided within written documentation (see text on BNG Statement or draft BGP). More information on expectations relating to completing the biodiversity metric including illustrative screenshots are provided within sections 3 and 4 of this guidance note.

At this stage, the metric does not need to incorporate a final landscape plan but should be consistent with other plans provided within accompanying documentation (e.g. site layout plans and masterplans). Whilst this will typically need to be updated post-determination to capture a final landscape layout, it will inform LPA ecologists or GMEU of the scale and types of gains and losses which will need to be overcome post-determination.

A written BNG Statement or draft BGP, providing detail on how BNG has been considered and will continue to be dealt with through the planning

process. This will add context to the above metric calculation and explain how a result less favourable than the 10% net gain requirement will be overcome post-determination. This will seek to address whether the mitigation hierarchy been followed; whether the trading summary is likely to be met; any irreplaceable habitat impacts and proposed mitigation; whether additional on-site habitat measures are being investigated (for e.g. where soil sampling is being undertaken to establish the value of grassland which can be created in a landscaped area of a site); whether off-site compensation is being sought (including proposed use of statutory credits) and any correspondence to date.

Raw baseline habitat data in UKHab survey format, with condition assessment data. This may be presented within accompanying documents (e.g. a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal) or a separate habitat report.

Pre- and post-development habitat maps showing areas of habitat retention and loss etc. These should again be consistent with corresponding layout plans / masterplans submitted. The post-development plan can at this stage be indicative in relation to the habitats to be provided, pending further justification/context within the submitted BNG statement or draft BGP. However, the general layout of habitat 'blocks' (including building and other infrastructure location) must correspond to other submitted plans to ensure no obvious inconsistencies have arisen.

Prior to commencement of development

At this stage, the general biodiversity gain condition will need to be discharged in order for development to be able to commence.

At post-determination but pre-commencement, the following information is required:

A completed Statutory Metric detailing the level of biodiversity net gain that **will** be achieved by the scheme. Where off-site compensation is being used (including use of statutory credits), this must now be confirmed and must be included within the ‘off-site’ tabs of the metric. Sufficient details of the offsets including proof of purchase will also need to be provided (see below), and all off-site land will need to have been registered on the national off-site register overseen by Natural England. **The Statutory Metric must now reveal a minimum 10% net gain in biodiversity units for the planning condition to be discharged.** Additionally, rules and principles (see pages [35](#) and [36](#)) of this guidance note for further details) should have been met, which should be evident within the biodiversity metric.

A completed Biodiversity Gain Plan (BGP)* containing detailed information on how the 10% biodiversity net gain will be achieved. Supporting information such as soil sampling may need to be provided where high or very high distinctiveness habitats are proposed on-site, and additional context / justification of how habitats are intended to reach their target condition will often need to be reviewed by the LPA ecologists or GMEU for their appropriateness given the site context.

Furthermore, evidence that the mitigation hierarchy and BNG Hierarchy has been followed will be essential to discharging the condition, which means that the BGP should demonstrate how: preferably 1) avoidance of habitats, secondly 2) appropriate on-site enhancement/creation measures, and lastly 3) local off-site measures within GM have been exhausted prior to seeking to use statutory credits from Defra.

Together with the above, the following should be submitted as part of the BGP:

- Baseline habitat data, preferably in UKHab survey format, with condition assessment data (note this is likely to have been provided prior to determination in a similar ecology document).
- Pre-development and post-development plans, showing the location of onsite habitat and drawn to an identified scale and showing the direction of North. The post development plan must now accurately reflect finalised landscape and layout proposals for the development.
- Approved off-site compensation details (if applicable)
- Register reference number(s) for off-site biodiversity units (if applicable).
- Local habitat bank or statutory biodiversity credits proof of purchase (if applicable).

**Natural England 2023 The biodiversity gain plan: draft template and guidance - Land use: policies and framework ([The biodiversity gain plan: draft template and guidance - Land use: policies and framework \(blog.gov.uk\)](#)).*

Total net % change <small>(Including all on-site & off-site habitat retention, creation & enhancement)</small>	Habitat units	11.34%
	Hedgerow units	0.00%
	Watercourse units	0.00%

Above: a biodiversity metric above showing a net gain above 10% for Habitat units. No change is illustrated for Hedgerow and Watercourse units. In this example, this is acceptable because no Hedgerow or Watercourse units are present within the baseline (resulting in grey boxes). If they were present, then a 0% net gain would result in red flags within the boxes to illustrate non-compliance with legislation, which would result in the applicant having planning discharge refused.

Prior to commencement of development

Habitat Management and Monitoring Plan

As well as the BGP itself and associated Statutory Metric, a Habitat Management and Monitoring Plan (HMMP) will also be required prior to commencement of development. This may be appended to the BGP itself or may be a standalone document. The HMMP will need to detail management and monitoring proposals for all 'significant' gains on site, for a period of at least 30 years. For an explanation of what qualifies as a 'significant gain', please see the subsequent section.

Natural England have published a template HMMP which applicants should use across GM to ensure consistency of approach. This contains necessary information to give LPA ecologists or GMEU confidence that 'significant' on site habitats will be appropriately managed and maintained for at least 30 years once works are complete. Natural England have also published guidance related to this document (see <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/creating-a-habitat-management-and-monitoring-plan-for-biodiversity-net-gain#what-to-include-in-an-hmmp>, as well as further guidance, see <https://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/5813530037846016>).

A condition separate to the 'general biodiversity gain condition' will be applied to any planning application approval not exempt from mandatory BNG, which sets out what should be provided as a robust management plan and when monitoring reports need to be presented to the LPA to pass onto ecologists or GMEU for their review. It is essential to ensure appropriate responsibilities for management and monitoring are defined within the document. In some cases, a planning obligation (S106 agreement) may be deemed more appropriate than condition by the LPA, particularly where large numbers of units are

proposed on-site, and S106 agreements are already being drawn up relating to separate matters.

Example condition

'Prior to any works on the proposed development, a written 30-year Habitat Management and Maintenance Plan (HMMP) for the Site in question shall be submitted to and approved in writing by the LPA. The approved HMMP shall relate to all 'significant' biodiversity gains on site and will be strictly adhered to and implemented in full for its duration and shall contain:

- A) Aims, objectives and targets for management, including habitat target conditions matching the associated Biodiversity Metric submitted with the application.
- B) Descriptions of the management operations necessary to achieving aims and objectives.
- C) Preparation of a works schedule, including timescales for habitat clearance and habitat creation and/or enhancement.
- D) Details of monitoring needed to measure the effectiveness of management.
- E) Details of the persons responsible for the implementation and monitoring.
- F) Mechanisms of adaptive management and remedial measures to account for changes in the work schedule to achieve required targets.
- G) Reporting on years 1, 2, 5, 10, 20 and 30'.

Significant gains, management & monitoring

What is meant by 'significant' on-site gains?

Where biodiversity gains on development sites are deemed significant, they must be subjected to 30 years management and monitoring, and therefore fall within the remit of the HMMP requirement. Biodiversity gains come about as a result of proposed habitat interventions on site which are associated with approved plans such as a landscape plan. These can account for new greenspace such as parks or even Sustainable Urban Drainage (SUDS) within a site. It can also be a result of a change in management of existing natural habitats on site, such as a change in mowing regime of an existing grassland parcel. Defra have produced guidance on which habitat interventions could be classed as 'significant' (see <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/make-on-site-biodiversity-gains-as-a-developer>). Within GM, **each LPA district has set a consistent approach to defining a minimum threshold for 'significant gains' which is set out below:**

- Any habitat change in distinctiveness and/or condition which results in a habitat of **medium distinctiveness or above** within the **post-development tabs of the biodiversity metric** (i.e. creation or enhancement), which has arisen as a result of the proposed development.
- The condition for a HMMP imposed on planning approvals must cover **all habitats on-site meeting the above criteria**.

The link between significant gains and determination of an application

Because significant gains needs to be secured by either a condition or planning obligation, these need to be evaluated, agreed and secured prior to determination of the application, so that the relevant securing mechanism (such as the example condition shown on Page 31) can be set.

Duty to report on monitoring for 30 years

Provided the applicants post-determination BGP and biodiversity metric are considered acceptable, then the general biodiversity gain condition can be discharged. As part of this, a minimum of 30 years management and monitoring will need to be complied with as a requirement of the condition. Where the LPA or GMEU find that habitats are not being managed appropriately and/or monitoring is not taking place, appropriate enforcement action may be recommended to ensure action is taken to address predicted biodiversity unit deficiencies against the approved BGP (see Page 68), therefore it is crucial for applicants to engage their own ecological expertise and produce credible landscape proposals and management plans which take into account pressures such as human disturbance and ground conditions. Each monitoring report submitted in the relevant years subsequent to development completion will be reviewed by LPA ecologists or GMEU to assess the progress towards biodiversity gains, matched against the approved BGP document submitted to discharge the general biodiversity gain condition.

Requirements for Outline and Phase Development Planning Permission

The statutory framework for BNG includes specific modifications for planning permissions (including some outline planning permissions) that have the effect of permitting development in phases. This reflects phased developments where full details of all phases may not be known at the time of planning permission.

For the purposes of BNG a phased development is:

- *'a grant of outline planning permission where the reservation of matters for subsequent approval has the effect of requiring or permitting development to proceed in phases'; or*
- *'a grant of any kind of planning permission, where the grant is subject to conditions (whether requiring the subsequent approval of any matters or otherwise) having that effect'.*

To note: not all outline planning permissions will meet this different definition. For instance, an outline permission for a small-scale residential development where appearance and landscaping were the only reserved matters for later determination is unlikely to do so, and it would be subject to the standard provisions for biodiversity net gain.

For applications for outline planning permission and permission which have the effect of permitting development in phases, there will be additional requirements for the biodiversity gain information to be submitted with the application.

What are the modifications for phased developments?

The Biodiversity Gain (Town and Country Planning) (Modifications and Amendments) (England) Regulations 2024 modify the general biodiversity condition for planning permissions which are phased development. Instead of the standard approach for the Biodiversity Gain Plan:

An **Overall Biodiversity Gain Plan** must be submitted to and approved by the planning authority before any development can be begun and a **Phase**

Biodiversity Gain Plan for each phase must be submitted to and approved by the planning authority before the development of that phase can be begun

- The **Overall Biodiversity Gain Plan** is to set out upfront how the biodiversity net gain objective will be achieved.

The content of an Overall Biodiversity Gain Plan is different in several ways from a standard Biodiversity Gain Plan reflecting that there is unlikely to be detailed proposals agreed for significant onsite habitat enhancements, especially for later phases, and offsite gains and credits allocated or purchased for the development immediately.

The post-development biodiversity value of the onsite habitat for the entire development and each phase is a projection of the biodiversity value at the completion of the entire development (not the completion of each phase.)

For each phase, a **Phase Biodiversity Gain Plan** must be submitted to and approved by the planning authority before the development of that phase can be begun. Each Phase Biodiversity Gain Plan will set out a phase's contribution to BNG and track the progress to the overall BNG objective.

The content of a Phase Biodiversity Gain Plan is intended to be more limited than an Overall Biodiversity Gain Plan focusing on a phase's contribution to biodiversity net gain and tracking progress towards the overall biodiversity gain objective for the entire development.

For an outline planning permission for phased development, the Phase Biodiversity Gain Plan would be prepared alongside the application for reserve matter approvals for a phase.

Other planning application types

Minerals & Waste

Minerals and waste planning applications are also subject to BNG requirements. All minerals and waste applications are major applications and therefore the national requirement for full minerals and waste applications to deliver at least 10% BNG will align to all other major development under the Environment Act.

Reviews of Old Minerals Permissions (ROMPs) are expected to be exempt from the requirement to deliver national mandatory BNG.

Minerals (and some waste) developments differ in nature from other forms of major development in that they are often long-term, phased and temporary in nature. These are often restored at the end of their life which can result in significant opportunities for greater than 10% net gains, noting restoration and aftercare.

The National Planning Practice Guidance states that:

“there are no special provisions set out in regulations for minerals applications, although there are specific provisions for planning permissions (including outline permission) that have the effect of permitting development in phases which may be relevant for many minerals applications”.

Retrospective applications

The Environment Act 2021 contains a clause to prevent land degradation prior to planning applications being submitted. This includes allowing an LPA to take an earlier baseline value of the biodiversity present within a development site prior to that degradation taking place. This is particularly applicable to retrospective applications whereby existing habitats have been cleared to facilitate development activities.

Where activities to clear habitats have been undertaken for the purposes of development after the 30th of January 2020 and a retrospective planning application is required, a ‘reasonable worst case scenario’ following the pre-cautionary principle will be used to determine what the biodiversity value of the site was prior to those activities taking place.

Once a baseline habitat value has been determined, at least 10% BNG will need to be provided above the value of the habitat baseline prior to unauthorised activities taking place. Habitat provisions must be provided within a reasonable time frame of the retrospective planning permission being granted.

Use of Pre-app service

BNG brings a host of new requirements to applicants relating to nature and drives a greater focus on careful consideration of site suitability from as early in the development process as possible. Avoidance of high value habitats is an essential part of planning for a development opportunity, and BNG strengthens the requirements to follow the mitigation hierarchy and increases the risk to not fully considering constraints. Within GM, GMEU offer a pre-application service for BNG which can be used to discuss the BNG strategy for a site and give an applicant confidence that the proposed scheme will be viewed as acceptable. It is recommended that all major development requiring BNG engages with this pre-application service to 'front-load' technical discussions over BNG to avoid risks of planning delays and/or refusal.

The following bullet points detail points that should be addressed from an early stage, and these can be used by applicants and their ecologists to focus early BNG strategy discussions. The earlier the discussions start, the more likely it is that BNG rules and good practice principles are followed, project risks are avoided, and a better outcome for biodiversity and people is achieved.

- **The BNG rules must be followed throughout the project lifecycle.** Details of these rules can be found on Page 34.
- If the applicant, through consultation with their ecologists, thinks that 'rule 4' may apply, then this should be disclosed to the LPA at the earliest opportunity so the appropriateness of this can be evaluated and collaboratively determined. **Application of rule 4 should, wherever possible, be introduced to the LPA through a pre-app request prior to submission of an application.**
- Good practice principles, as found within the BNG guidance document, should be adhered to and evidenced.
- The developer should have already consulted with relevant professionals

to assist with BNG, including a suitably qualified ecologist to assist with habitat surveys and completion of a biodiversity metric baseline. This should be undertaken prior to a pre-app meeting to ensure the applicant gets the most out of this service.

- The applicant needs to consider the wider context of the site and its surroundings. Does the site have any of the following which may cause issues if not highlighted at an early stage:
 - Habitats of Principle Importance (HPI);
 - Irreplaceable habitats;
 - Statutory designated sites;
 - Non-statutory designated sites; and/or
 - Waterbodies within 10m of, or within the site itself.
- If yes, can the red line boundary be adjusted to avoid these features? If no, then the applicant must ensure that bespoke compensation is proposed for impacts to irreplaceable habitats. Applicants must also be aware that an additional river condition assessment will be needed where rivers are present within the site or within 10m of its boundary.
- Is the developer following the mitigation and BNG hierarchy to avoid habitats of importance and design around/with biodiversity from the outset? Evidence of this should be provided.
- If offsite compensation is likely to be needed, then LPA ecologists or GMEU can advise on suitable opportunities within the local market.
- The BNG 'flow charts' are introduced in subsequent pages of this Guidance Note and can be used by applicants and their ecologists as a decision-making tool at each stage of the planning process. These flow charts will be directly referred to by GMEU and GM LPA ecologists and planners when deciding how to determine a planning application.

3. A guide for submitting and assessing BNG applications

Introduction

The purpose of this section is to provide a high-level summary of how planning applications will be assessed with respect to BNG, so that both applicants and LPA Planners understand the BNG basics and any obvious errors or rule breaches which indicate non-compliance. The content within this section does not go into technical detail of how to assess BNG information, as this will be covered by LPA ecologists and GMEU who will be formally consulted: 1) upon application validation, 2) once the final BGP is submitted to discharge the 'general biodiversity gain condition', and 3) when monitoring reports are submitted throughout the 30-year period. During these phases, LPA ecologists and GMEU will undertake a comprehensive technical review of all information; however, the application should have already worked through all content within this section to ensure the application is ready for the LPA ecologists or GMEU, and to reduce risks of refusal due to insufficient or incomplete information being submitted.

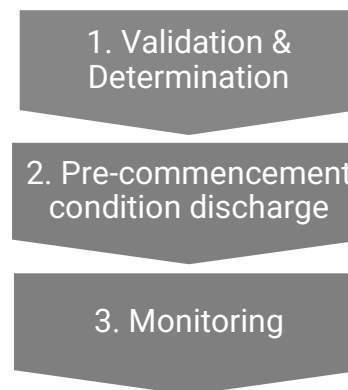
The following pages split the guide into different stages of the planning process and cover the key requirements of that planning stage. A set of four 'flowcharts' are also provided which summarise a set of questions which applicants should ensure they address prior to submitting information to each stage. The following page includes a table which details each planning stage and summarises the intended aims of the corresponding flowchart. The flowcharts are presented at **Appendix A**.

Validation through to determination of an application is grouped together because information submitted at validation will generally be the same information which is assessed to determine the application.

However, minimum validation requirements set by Defra (see Page 26) are combined with information which **should** be submitted to ensure determination of an application, and applicants are encouraged to follow the flow charts past the essential requirements through all of the 'shoulds', to ensure they give their application the best chance of approval.

The LPA must have confidence that the eventual biodiversity gain condition can be met; therefore, following these flow charts as an applicant provides a systematic way of ensuring all aspects of BNG delivery have been considered prior to submission.

The content is equally valuable for LPA planners and applicants who wish to ensure they have broadly considered the biodiversity metric best practice. However, this section is not a substitute for applicants engaging qualified and experienced ecological expertise, which must be undertaken to ensure appropriate BNG strategies are submitted for review.



Introduction

Planning stage	Aims
Validation & Determination	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To ensure applicants have provided all information necessary to validate the application, with respect to Defra's minimum national requirements. 2. To ensure applicants provide sufficient information to give confidence that the eventual 'general biodiversity gain condition' is capable of being met, to enable determination of the application. <p>To provide a framework specific to Greater Manchester to ensure applicants submit all of the documents and information likely to be required to evidence BNG can be achieved for a development proposal, thereby providing greater clarity to applicants by interpreting national guidance at the local level.</p>
Pre-commencement planning discharge	<p>To ensure the correct and complete information is provided by applicants:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensuring information demonstrates at least 10% net gain with no outstanding breaches in rules or principles. • Ensuring the BNG hierarchy has been met and where off-site or statutory credits are proposed, these are suitably evidenced. • Ensuring details of management and monitoring for at least 30 years are provided and ready for technical review by LPA ecologists or GMEU.
Management and monitoring	<p>To enable planners to manage information provided by developers over the 30 years and pass to LPA ecologists or GMEU when required.</p>

BNG Statutory Metric Rules

These rules as set out below must be followed within applicants BNG strategies and should be evidenced within the Statutory Metric and/or submitted BNG statements and BGP's.

Rule 1 – The trading rules of the Statutory Metric must be followed. See page 49 of this guidance note for more information.

Rule 2 – The three types of biodiversity units generated by this metric (area, hedgerow and watercourse) cannot be summed, traded or converted between modules.

Rule 3 – To accurately apply the biodiversity metric formula, you must use the Statutory Metric calculation tool or small sites biodiversity metric tool (SSM) for small sites. The tools remove the need for a user to manually calculate the change in biodiversity units. The tool will summarise the results of the calculation and inform a user whether the biodiversity net gain objective has been met.

Rule 4 – In exceptional ecological circumstances, deviation from this metric methodology may be permitted by the relevant consenting body or planning authority. Any deviation must be fully justified and evidenced (Further information provided on [page 55](#)).

BNG Statutory Metric Principles

These principles as set out below are in addition to the 10 guiding principles (see page 10) and should be used to inform applicants BNG strategies. They are derived from the Statutory Metric User Guide. If there is insufficient evidence that these principles have been followed within submitted documents, this may lead to further information being requested by the LPA or refusal of a planning application.

Principle 1 – Competency requirements must be complied with.

Principle 2 – The use of this biodiversity metric does not override existing biodiversity protections, statutory obligations, policy requirements, ecological mitigation hierarchy or any other requirements. This includes consenting or licensing processes, for example woodlands.

Principle 3 – This biodiversity metric should be used in accordance with established good practice guidance and professional codes.

Principle 4 – This biodiversity metric is not a complex or comprehensive ecological model and is not a substitute for expert ecological advice.

Principle 5 – Biodiversity Units are a proxy for biodiversity and should be treated as relative values.

Principle 6 - This biodiversity metric is designed to inform decisions in conjunction with locally relevant evidence, expert input, or guidance.

Principle 7 - Habitat interventions need to be realistic and deliverable within a relevant project timeframe.

Principle 8 - Created and enhanced habitats should be, where practical and reasonable, local to any impact and deliver strategically important outcomes for nature conservation.

Principle 9 - This biodiversity metric does not enforce a minimum habitat size ratio for compensation of losses. Proposals should aim to:

- maintain habitat extent - supporting more, bigger, better and more joined up ecological networks.
- ensure that proposed or retained habitat parcels are of sufficient size for ecological function.

4. A guide for submitting and assessing BNG applications

Validation & determination

1. Validation & Determination

2. Pre-commencement condition discharge

3. Monitoring

Validation and determination – flow charts

A series of flow charts have been created to **aid applicants towards considering the correct information when formulating their BNG strategy**, ready for providing this information at various stages of the planning process.

These flow charts are of use for applicants and planners, and will be referred to by LPAs when determining planning applications.

They are not a substitute for suitably qualified ecological advice and expertise, however, which should be engaged for planning submissions. Ecological expertise will also be engaged by LPAs through the use of GMEU (or by LPA ecologists where in post, e.g. Stockport) when reviewing applicants submitted information. The flow charts cover broad requirements of BNG and there is substantially more detailed information which ecologists will need to prepare prior to evidencing a robust BNG strategy for development.

For more detailed guidance, see [The Statutory Biodiversity Metric - Draft User Guide.pdf \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#)

The following section introduces these flow charts and provides screenshots of the statutory metric to illustrate certain requirements as set out within the flow chart process. These can be used to help understand how Statutory Metric rules and principles relate to the flow charts and requirements set by GM at validation and prior to determination. The full flow charts are provided at **Appendix A** at the end of this Guidance Note.



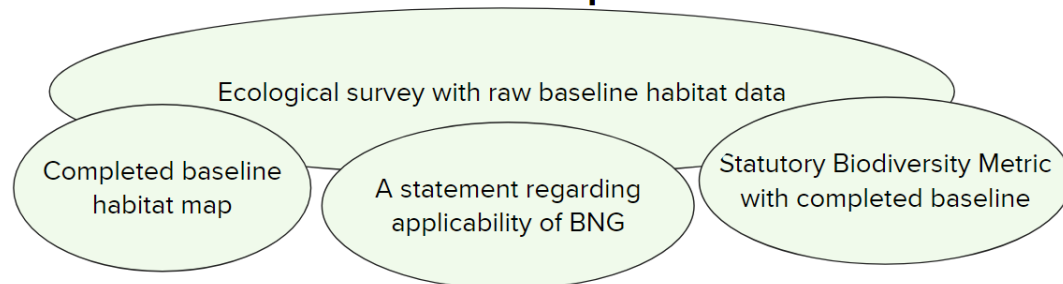
The Statutory Biodiversity Metric User Guide (draft)

Date: November 2023

Validation and determination – essential minimum requirements

- The flow chart is separated into minimum essential requirements (white) and additional GM recommended requirements (blue).
- The flow chart explains the implications of not meeting these requirements.
- A summary of information to submit is provided at the top of the flow chart. The relevant aspects to consider are introduced in more detail as the user follows the flowchart. The summary of essential minimum submission requirements (as per Defra national guidance) are shown below.

Submission requirements



Key

Essential to validate the application

Should be provided to reduce risk of refusal, as this information is likely to be required to determine the application

Validation

The Essential Minimum Requirements

The following provides context into assessing whether an applicant has submitted the minimum national validation requirements which are summarised on [Page 27](#).

Step 1: Does the application qualify for BNG ? See guidance on [page 20](#) for BNG exemptions.

Step 2: Has the appropriate metric been selected? For metric choice see [page 21](#).

Step 3: Has the front 'Start Page' tab been completed?

All red and white boxes should have an input. This includes 'completed by' and 'date of metric completion' cells which must be filled in to avoid error messages popping up within the metric. However, a named individual should also be provided for 'reviewer' to ensure the work by the applicant (or supporting ecological consultant) has been quality assured.

'Completed by' and 'Date of metric completion' fields must be filled in ▲			
Project details			
Planning authority:			
Project name:			
Applicant:			
Application type:			
Planning application reference:			
Completed by:			
Date of metric completion:			
Reviewer:			
Calculation iteration:			
Planning authority reviewer:			
Date of planning authority review:			
Target % net gain:	10%		
Irreplaceable habitat present at baseline:	No ✓		
Total site area - including irreplaceable habitat area (hectares):	0.00	Irreplaceable habitat site area (hectares):	0.00
Total off-site area - including irreplaceable habitat area (hectares):	N/A	Irreplaceable habitat area off-site (hectares):	N/A

Validation

The Essential Minimum Requirements

Step 4: Are irreplaceable habitats present on site, and if so, are they appropriately recorded?

- For an explanation of irreplaceable habitats, see the next page of this guidance note.
- When baseline habitats have been entered into the metric, has the appropriate column been completed which indicates presence of irreplaceable habitat (see below)?

Existing area habitats			
Broad Habitat	Habitat Type	Irreplaceable habitat	Area (hectares)
Wetland	Fens (upland and lowland)		

- Failure to complete this column will result in the following errors both within the baseline habitat tab (left) and on the Headline Results tab (right).

Ecological baseline
Total habitat units
Confirm irreplaceable habitat status ▲

Input errors/rule breaks present in metric ▲

- When the column has been completed, presence of an irreplaceable habitat will automatically result in information generating in the 'Irreplaceable Habitats' tab of the metric (see below).

Irreplaceable Habitats	A-1 On-Site Habitat Baseline
------------------------	------------------------------

- The only additional column within this tab which needs to be completed by the applicant is the 'Irreplaceable habitat name' cell shown below.

Metric habitat type	Irreplaceable habitat name
Woodland and forest - Lowland mixed deciduous woodland	Ancient Woodland

Validation

The Essential Minimum Requirements

Irreplaceable Habitats – Explained

[Irreplaceable habitats and BNG: what you need to know - Land use: policies and framework \(blog.gov.uk\)](https://blog.gov.uk/irreplaceable-habitats-and-bng-what-you-need-to-know-land-use-policies-and-framework/)

- Irreplaceable habitats are habitats that have a high biodiversity value that are so difficult to recreate, that it would be impossible to achieve the requirement to increase biodiversity on top of no net loss.
- The list of irreplaceable habitats currently broadly mirrors the list of examples already incorporated in the National Planning Policy Framework.
- The list is designed to protect England’s most valuable habitats and ensure that any impacts on these habitats from developments have a strong justification.
- With regards to BNG, the 10% net gain requirement cannot be applied to irreplaceable habitats because they cannot be easily recreated.
- Irreplaceable habitats should still be included in the Statutory Metric within the ‘Irreplaceable habitats’ tab but impacts to these habitats must be considered separately. Bespoke compensation must be agreed for their loss.
- It is possible for a development to enhance and improve an irreplaceable habitat and for that enhancement to count towards their BNG requirement.
- A consultation will take place in 2024 which further explores irreplaceable habitats and which habitats apply.
- **For any impacts to irreplaceable habitats, LPA ecologists or GMEU will need to be consulted early in the process to determine whether the bespoke compensation strategy put forward by the applicant is acceptable. This should ideally be done through the pre-application service prior to planning submission.**

For now, in mandatory BNG, the list of irreplaceable habitats are:

- Ancient woodland
- Ancient and veteran trees
- Blanket bog
- Limestone pavements
- Coastal sand dunes
- Spartina saltmarsh swards
- Mediterranean saltmarsh scrub
- Lowland fens

Validation

The Essential Minimum Requirements

Step 5: Is a map showing the baseline habitats (including irreplaceable habitats if present) attached within the Statutory Metric or present in statement/plan?

- A plan showing baseline habitats is an essential requirement for validating an application which is not exempt from BNG. This plan will often traditionally be provided as a figure within a submitted document such as a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA), Ecological Impact Assessment (EclA) or a BNG document such as the BNG Statement or draft Biodiversity Gain Plan (BGP – see [page 22](#)).
- However, it can also be attached to the Statutory Metric via the 'Start' tab (see right).
- Regardless of the plan's location, this should be clearly signposted by the applicant to allow the initial validation team to check for its inclusion. It should also provide a key which clearly distinguishes:
 - ✓ The habitat types in alignment with UK Habitat Classification and additionally (where these deviate) the metric habitat types.
 - ✓ Presence of irreplaceable habitats
- This will allow specific habitat types on site to be clearly shown spatially to aid review and decision making by LPA ecologists or GMEU once they are consulted.

On-site baseline map

Insert

On-site baseline map reference number

UKHab Classification

- f2e - reedbeds
- g3c - other neutral grassland
- g4 - modified grassland
- h3f - hawthorn scrub
- h3h - mixed scrub
- t2d - intertidal mudflats
- u 1160 - urban, introduced shrub
- u1b - developed land, sealed surface
- w1f - lowland mixed deciduous woodland
- r1e - canal or ditch
- w1g6 - line of trees
- h2a - hedgerow (priority habitat)
 - Urban Tree

Validation

The Essential Minimum Requirements

Step 6: When checking the Statutory Metric, it's important to remember that different types of biodiversity units aren't interchangeable.

- All relevant baseline tabs must be filled in before an application is validated. The Statutory Metric user guide provides a comprehensive list of what habitat types fall under the 3 broad categories for biodiversity unit types: 1. Area Habitat, 2. Hedgerow and 3. Watercourse. This guidance must be followed.
- The results displayed in the Statutory Metric are individual to that habitat type, for example you can achieve a 10% net gain in area-based habitats but get a net loss in hedgerow habitats.
- The overall result for the development is the lowest scoring of the three results (area-based habitats, hedgerow habitats and watercourse habitats).
- The units cannot be interchanged between the habitat types.
- The Headline Results tab always summarises the net gain score by these three unit types (see below).

Total net % change <small>(Including all on-site & off-site habitat retention, creation & enhancement)</small>	<i>Habitat units</i>	0.00%
	<i>Hedgerow units</i>	0.00%
	<i>Watercourse units</i>	0.00%



Validation

Beyond the essential minimum requirements – additional GM wide requirements

- The flow chart is separated into minimum essential requirements (pale green) and additional GM recommended requirements (blue).
- The flow chart explains the implications of not meeting these requirements.
- A summary of information to submit is provided at the top of the flow chart. The relevant aspects to consider are introduced in more detail as the user follows the flowchart. The additional GM recommended requirements are now added to the summary of submission requirements shown below.

Submission requirements

Ecological survey with raw baseline habitat data

Completed baseline
habitat map

A statement regarding
applicability of BNG

Statutory Biodiversity Metric
with completed baseline

Completed post-
development habitat map

A BNG statement or draft
Biodiversity Gain Plan setting out
the BNG strategy

Statutory Biodiversity Metric
with completed post-
development

Key

Essential to validate the application

Should be provided to reduce risk of
refusal, as this information is likely to be
required to determine the application

Validation

Beyond the minimum requirements – what’s required for determination?

The remaining sections of the Validation and Determination phase relate to aspects of BNG which are additional to the minimum essential requirements set by DEFRA. However, these aspects are considered crucial to be able to produce a robust and evidence based BNG strategy which can meet a minimum of 10% BNG and adhering to all metric rules and principles. Failure to correctly follow through the remaining aspects of this section is likely to significantly increase the risk of refusal based on either insufficient information, or an inappropriate BNG strategy which is reasonably unlikely to be capable of discharging any future general biodiversity gain condition.

Step 1: Has a BNG Statement or draft Biodiversity Gain Plan (BGP) been submitted to accompany the Statutory Biodiversity Metric?

- See [page 28](#) for further information on what should be provided at this stage of planning and follow this in full. However, a high-level checklist of what to cover at this stage is provided below:
 1. Has UK Habitat Classification (UKHab) and condition assessment data been included? If not, then this must be included within a separate document.
 2. Is commentary about the 10 good practice principles and how they’ve been met included (see [page 10](#)).
 3. Is there evidence that the mitigation hierarchy has been applied – have there been efforts to avoid impacts on existing habitats of value.
 4. Is there evidence that the Biodiversity Gain Hierarchy (see [page 23](#)) has been appropriately applied?
 5. Where irreplaceable or VHDH habitats are being lost, is there a robust explanation and is bespoke compensation proposed – This will ultimately be checked and approved by LPA ecologists or GMEU.
 6. Have significant on-site enhancements been proposed and if so, is there justification regarding how these are achievable? This may include an outline of management and monitoring, details of which will be required through a later planning condition or obligation attached to the planning permission.
 7. If any of the above points are not addressed or information is missing, does the document include an assessment of the applicability of ‘Rule 4’ (see [pages 39 and 60](#)).
 8. It’s important to note that Rule 4 should only be enacted in exceptional ecological circumstances.
Developers should liaise with GMEU early through the pre-application service if they think this may apply to their application.

Validation

Beyond the minimum requirements – what's required for determination?

Step 2: Is there a watercourse present on-site or within 10m of the application boundary?

- If a habitat type is present within the boundary (area-based, hedgerow or watercourse) then a 10% gain is required on that habitat type.
- For watercourses, they should be included within a BNG assessment if the top of the bank is located within 10m of the site boundary.
- If watercourses are present, additional information in the form of a River Condition Assessment (RCA) should be provided alongside the baseline habitat data.
- Different watercourse habitat types use a different condition assessment methodologies:
 - Culverts – do not require a condition assessment and are automatically assigned as 'poor' condition;
 - Ditches – use Technical Annex 1: Condition Assessment Sheets and Methodology
 - All other watercourses (including canals) – use the river condition assessment (RCA) methodology. To undertake an RCA the competent person must be trained and Accredited (see: [River Condition Assessment for appraisals & Biodiversity Net Gain calculations – Modular River Survey](#)).



Validation

Beyond the minimum requirements – what's required for determination?

Step 3: Is the work Quality Assured? Have the relevant QA fields been completed within the Start Tab of the metric?

Step 4: Have the post-development tabs in the metric been filled out?

- Are the calculations based upon the latest masterplan/landscape proposals? They should reflect other submitted plans and figures so they reflect the latest designs.
- Is there a post-development habitat map to illustrate the location of retained, enhanced and created habitats? This should follow UKHab symbology and have a key which shows this clearly.



'Completed by' and 'Date of metric completion' fields must be filled in ▲

Project details			
Planning authority:			
Project name:			
Applicant:			
Application type:			
Planning application reference:			
Completed by:			
Date of metric completion:			
Reviewer:			
Calculation iteration:			
Planning authority reviewer:			
Date of planning authority review:			
Target % net gain:	10%		
Irreplaceable habitat present at baseline:	No ✓		
Total site area - including irreplaceable habitat area (hectares):	0.00	Irreplaceable habitat site area (hectares):	0.00
Total off-site area - including irreplaceable habitat area (hectares):	N/A	Irreplaceable habitat area off-site (hectares):	N/A

Validation

Beyond the minimum requirements – what's required for determination?

The Statutory Metric has a 'flagging system' built within it which colour codes certain rule breaks or identified errors in **red**. LPAs will review submitted metrics to establish whether there are any obvious errors or issues with the development which have not been adequately resolved. This section provides you with a step-by-step guide on how to undertake some quick and easy checks of the toolkit to ensure no errors are present when submitting a metric into planning. Note that the errors should also be interpreted by ecological expertise in many cases, and a metric without any identified 'red flags' does not automatically result in an acceptable BNG strategy, which will ultimately be determined by LPAs in conjunction with LPA ecologists or GMEU who will undertake a comprehensive technical review.

Step 5: Does the spreadsheet contain any automatically identified errors?

- Check each individual tab of the metric for any red boxes identifying problems with the metric.
- Red boxes indicate an input error, or that the rules and principles have not been met.
- At validation, it is not essential to have all red flags resolved so that the metric shows no rule breaks.
- However, if errors are identified within the metric that are not justified within the accompanying BNG statement or within the 'User comments' box of the toolkit, then this will risk refusal of the application following validation.

At this stage, check for any errors in calculated areas. The total area of habitats lost within the baseline tab of the metric must match with the total areas of created habitat within the creation tab. The total area of 'retained or enhanced habitat + created habitat' should = the total area of the application red line boundary footprint.

Area habitat summary	
Total Net Unit Change	0.00
Total Net % Change	0.00%
Trading Rules Satisfied	Yes ✓
Area Check (excluding individual trees and green walls)	Error - Area created does not equal area lost ▲

Area habitat summary	
Total Net Unit Change	0.00
Total Net % Change	0.00%
Trading Rules Satisfied	Yes ✓

Validation

Beyond the minimum requirements – what’s required for determination?

Step 6: Are there any errors relating to the rules and principles?

- See pages [39](#) and [40](#) for detailed information on what the rules and principles of BNG are. They are required to be followed in order to achieve a biodiversity net gain.
- The Target % net gain box within the ‘Start’ tab should have a target of 10%
- Where irreplaceable habitats are noted as present on site, has the separate ‘Irreplaceable habitat’ tab been completed?
- Where ‘Very High’ distinctiveness or irreplaceable habitats are present on site, are they being retained or enhanced?
- If they’re being lost, has bespoke compensation been agreed?
- If an irreplaceable or very high distinctiveness habitat is lost without agreed compensation or further information, this will not be deemed acceptable.
- Red ‘error’ messages will appear in the metric where these habitats are being lost (see image to the right).

Retention category biodiversity value					
Area retained	Area enhanced	Baseline units retained	Baseline units enhanced	Area habitat lost	Units lost
		0.00	0.00	0.10	Any Loss Unacceptable ▲

The image above shows the red flag presented in the baseline results tab where an irreplaceable habitat is to be lost to development.

Validation

Very High Distinctiveness Habitats – Explained

Very High Distinctiveness Habitats (VHDH) differ slightly to irreplaceable habitats, and they incorporate the following:

- Priority Habitats as defined in Section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act that are highly threatened, internationally scarce and require conservation action, for example blanket bog.
- Small amount of remaining habitat with a high proportion unprotected by designation.
- Critically Endangered European Red List habitats.

It should be noted that some VHDH will meet the definition of irreplaceable habitats, but not all irreplaceable habitats are VHDH.

Losses of VHDH are treated similarly to irreplaceable habitats, in that they should be avoided wherever possible and bespoke compensation for losses to VHDH will be required.

Validation

Beyond the minimum requirements – what's required for determination?

Step 7: Check the 'Headline results' tab.

- **It is not mandatory to provide evidence of a 10% net gain at Validation stage.** This means that red boxes in the Headline results tab can be acceptable, **provided additional information is provided within the accompanying draft Biodiversity Gain Plan and/or Biodiversity Net Gain Statement document.**
- This additional information must demonstrate how the applicant aims to achieve BNG and ultimately discharge the general biodiversity gain condition.
- The Biodiversity Net Gain Statement that is submitted with the application should provide information on how they aim to achieve a 10% gain further on in the planning process. This should be able to provide the planning authority with confidence that a 10% net gain is achievable.
- If off-site compensation is proposed, there should be information on an off-site location(s) and any 3rd parties involved in this.
- Where a 10% net gain is not achieved within the current biodiversity metric which has been submitted, then provided there is information regarding how a 10% net gain will be achieved prior to commencement, then LPA ecologists or GMEU will be able to comprehensively review the information provided.
- However, if the existing biodiversity metric shows less than the required 10% and there is no supporting information regarding how this result will be improved, **the LPA will likely refuse the application.**

The image below shows an example where the minimum 10% net gain is not currently met, denoted by a 'red flag'. This is only acceptable where further written supporting information is provided.

FINAL RESULTS		
Total net unit change <small>(Including all on-site & off-site habitat retention, creation & enhancement)</small>	Habitat units	-0.06
	Hedgerow units	0.00
	Watercourse units	0.00
Total net % change <small>(Including all on-site & off-site habitat retention, creation & enhancement)</small>	Habitat units	-6.88%
	Hedgerow units	0.00%
	Watercourse units	0.00%
Trading rules satisfied?	No - Check Trading Summaries ▲	



Total net gain achieved is less than target net ▲

Validation

Beyond the minimum requirements – what's required for determination?

Step 8: An important step prior to submitting an application for validation is to check the 'Trading Summary'

1. The Trading Summary is a tab of the Statutory Metric which indicates whether habitats are being replaced on a like-for-like basis or if they are being 'traded down'.
2. The distinctiveness of a habitat type is pre-assigned by the metric and each distinctiveness group is summarised based on whether that habitat type is being replaced appropriately.
3. For example, if a medium distinctiveness grassland is being lost to a development, this shouldn't be replaced by medium distinctiveness woodland. Habitats should be compensated for within the same broad habitat type and distinctiveness level.
4. To confirm if these trading rules have been satisfied, check the headline results tab. It will state whether they have been satisfied or not.
5. If they are not being met – is there text to justify how it will be overcome, either within the metric user comments, submitted BNG Statement or Draft BGP? If not, then more information will need to be provided by the applicant.
6. If there is a justification or the trading rules are satisfied, then it can be submitted to LPA ecologists or GMEU for further review.

FINAL RESULTS		
Total net unit change <small>(Including all on-site & off-site habitat retention, creation & enhancement)</small>	<i>Habitat units</i>	-1.88
	<i>Hedgerow units</i>	0.04
	<i>Watercourse units</i>	0.24
Total net % change <small>(Including all on-site & off-site habitat retention, creation & enhancement)</small>	<i>Habitat units</i>	-12.91%
	<i>Hedgerow units</i>	5.04%
	<i>Watercourse units</i>	10.17%
Trading rules satisfied?	No - Check Trading Summaries ▲	

The image below shows an example where the trading summary has not been met, denoted by a 'red flag'.

Validation

Beyond the minimum requirements – what’s required for determination?

Step 8 continued: Trading summary and links to the metric ‘principles’

With a strategy for meeting the trading summary needing to be provided, it is important to refer to the metric principles to ensure these are followed when deciding on what habitats to propose within the development masterplan (and therefore the habitat creation or enhancement tabs of the Statutory Metric).

“Principle 7 - Habitat interventions need to be realistic and deliverable within a relevant project timeframe.”

Significant gains

Significant gains will be secured at the determination stage, usually by way of condition (see [Page 31](#)). In order for the LPA and GMEU to appropriately evaluate these significant gains, it is imperative that the additional requirements (denoted in blue on [Page 49](#)) are provided. In scenarios where significant gains are proposed on-site (see [Page 32](#) for definitions of significant), this information must be provided to determine the planning application. Also note that application of the Biodiversity Gain Hierarchy is a material consideration that the LPA and GMEU must assess.

Ultimately the decision of what habitats can reasonably be targeted on-site within development sites will vary dependant on several factors, and this should be agreed with suitable ecological expertise. LPA ecologists or GMEU will review these proposals in depth and generally additional information will be required for proposed ‘significant’ on site gains, particularly where:

1. These include large areas of medium distinctiveness habitats in moderate condition or any areas of medium distinctiveness habitats in good condition;
2. These include proposed high or very high distinctiveness habitats;
3. These are proposed in areas of the site that also interface with other land uses (for example Public Open Space (POS)).

In these instances, it is advised that submitted documents face these nuances head on and provide justification up front, prior to determination. This could be supplemented by additional data collection on soil nutrients, where deemed applicable by a suitably qualified ecologist. It may also include an outline of proposed management over 30 years, a more detailed presentation of which would be required as a pre-commencement condition as part of the Habitat Management and Monitoring Plan (HMMP) (see [Page 32](#)). This can take the form of showing predicted condition criteria passes and supporting justification.

Validation

Beyond the minimum requirements – what’s required for determination?

Step 9: Check the habitat tabs of the Statutory Metric

- Is information provided in both the baseline and post-development tabs for the relevant habitat types?
- Do the baseline and post-development habitats in each of the tabs align with the pre-and post-development maps that are provided? Do these also align to other submitted layout plans for the proposed development?
- For example, does the post-development map display a lot of ‘developed land; sealed surface’, but the metric post-development tabs show a lot of habitats providing a net gain?
- LPA ecologists or GMEU will be consulted to review habitat proposals in detail, but this step is designed to ensure that the metric doesn’t contain any obvious errors or mistakes which will prevent them from doing a deep dive into habitat proposals.
- Has ‘**Strategic Significance**’ been inputted appropriately? The Local Nature Recovery Strategy (see [Page 16](#)) will be used to determine the strategic significance in conjunction with the [Statutory Metric User Guide](#). Individual LPA Districts also have Wildlife Corridor policies within their Local Plan’s which may be used to give greater local granularity to Strategic Significance, and therefore should also be considered. Where these are identified as overlapping with a habitat parcel, the name of the overlapping feature should be provided within the User Comments cell of the metric.

Existing area habitats		
Broad Habitat	Habitat Type	Area (hectares)
Grassland	Other neutral grassland	1.2
Lakes	Ponds (priority habitat)	0.04
Woodland and forest	Other woodland; broadleaved	0.56
Urban	Developed land; sealed surface	1.03

Validation – Rule 4

Rule 4 allows for deviation from the Statutory Metric methodology in **exceptional ecological circumstances**.

- Its use is not appropriate for most projects.
- The use of Rule 4 is permitted only through prior agreement with the relevant consenting body or planning authority. How Rule 4 is applied is dependent on the specifics of a project.
- An applicant must provide:
 - evidence of specific ecological expertise relevant to the site.
 - robust justification for the decision to apply the rule.
 - robust evidence demonstrating the ecological **benefits** of the intervention.
- Rule 4 should only be used if there are **rare and exceptional ecological circumstances**, and the Statutory Metric does not fully reflect the ecological benefit provided by a specific intervention. For example, it may be used where a site has optimal conditions for restoration of a wildlife-rich habitat or historic natural habitat, and the project team has the expertise and resource to deliver the habitat with low risk of failure.
- **It cannot be used to justify a planning proposal as acceptable if the ecological outcomes of that proposal are otherwise unacceptable or detrimental to the natural environment.**
- LPA ecologists or GMEU will always review the acceptability of these proposals when Rule 4 is triggered, and it is **expected that applicants will engage at the pre-application stage** where this rule may apply.

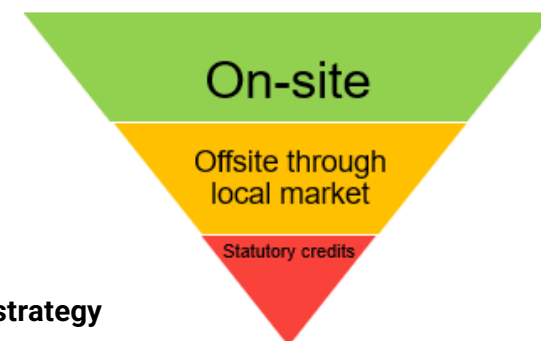
Validation

Beyond the minimum requirements – what's required for determination?

Offsetting

Step 10: Is offsetting considered in the submitted documents if it is proposed to be used as part of the strategy for achieving BNG?

- Has the Biodiversity Gain Hierarchy been adhered to (see Page [23](#) & [24](#))?
- On-site options for BNG delivery should be exhausted first and foremost.
- If the strategy includes provision of a local offset site (habitat bank), is there evidence of liaison, including 3rd party documentation and an agreement in principle that the necessary BU are available?
- The Statutory Metric does not need to have the off-site tab completed at this stage; however, the location and/or name of the habitat bank provider(s) which have been engaged should be detailed within other submitted documentation
- Does the developer indicate they plan on using Statutory Biodiversity Credits?
- Is there a local alternative to offsetting which the LPA or GEMU is aware, which could provide the necessary BU within Greater Manchester? If so, the decision to use Statutory Credits should be re-visited



4. A guide for submitting and assessing BNG applications

Pre-commencement planning discharge

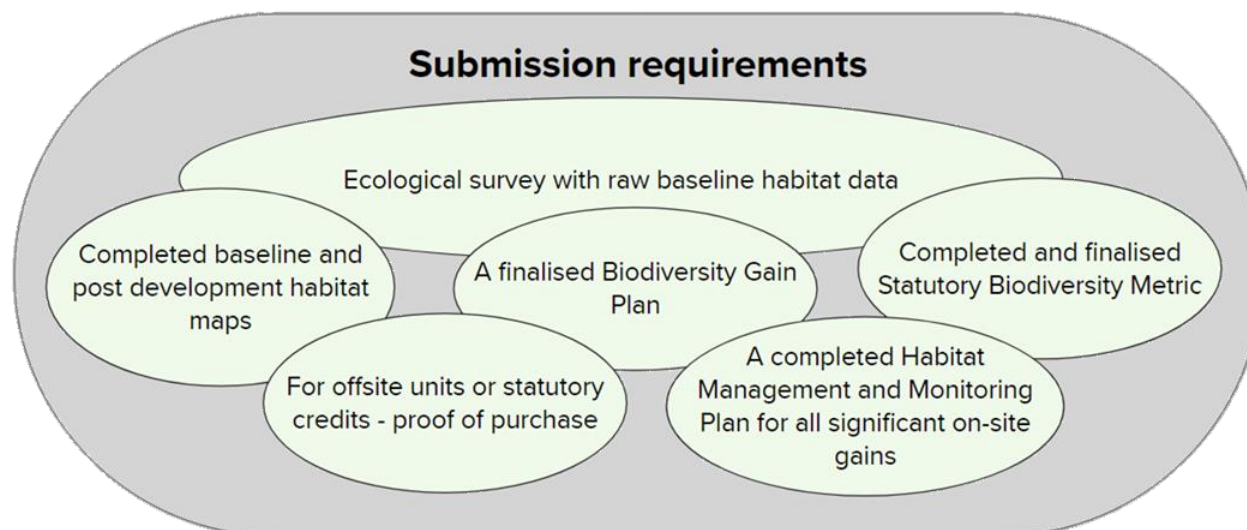
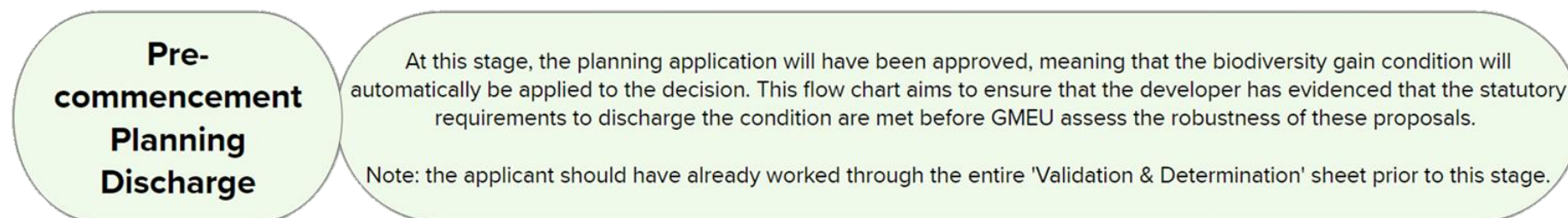
1. Validation & Determination

2. Pre-commencement condition discharge

3. Monitoring

Pre-commencement Planning Discharge

- The aim of the Pre-commencement planning discharge flowchart is to guide applicants through the process of ensuring documents submitted (including the Statutory Metric and completed Biodiversity Gain Plan) to explain their BNG strategy are robust and able to discharge the general biodiversity gain condition.
- At this stage, all submission requirements are essential to be able to discharge the general biodiversity gain condition.



Pre-commencement Planning Discharge

At this stage, the planning application will have been approved but this means that the biodiversity gain condition will automatically be applied to the decision. An applicant must have evidenced at this stage that the statutory requirements to discharge the condition are met, before LPA ecologists or GMEU assess the robustness of these proposals. LPA ecologist or GMEU should only be consulted when the submitted biodiversity metric and BGP show at least a 10% net gain in all relevant biodiversity unit types. If GMEU and the LPA agree the information is acceptable then the condition will discharge and the development can commence, provided the condition requirements are adhered to.

Has a final Biodiversity Plan been submitted, alongside a final biodiversity metric?

Step 1: Check the 'Headline results' tab.

- Does the final Statutory Metric display at least a 10% net gain in all 3 biodiversity unit habitat types (if they are located within the site)?
- Have the trading rules been satisfied?
- In order to achieve BNG, all three habitat types must achieve a 10% net gain, and the trading rules must be satisfied.
- If this is not the case and it hasn't been justified or agreed separately, go back to the developer for more information.

Whilst habitat and watercourse units are showing a 10% net gain, and trading rules are met (denoted by green flags), the hedgerow units are currently not showing the minimum 10% net gain required. In this scenario, the BGP could not be approved.

FINAL RESULTS		
Total net unit change <small>(Including all on-site & off-site habitat retention, creation & enhancement)</small>	Habitat units	0.08
	Hedgerow units	0.46
	Watercourse units	0.42
Total net % change <small>(Including all on-site & off-site habitat retention, creation & enhancement)</small>	Habitat units	10.35%
	Hedgerow units	6.71%
	Watercourse units	10.56%
Trading rules satisfied?	Yes ✓	

Total net gain achieved is less than target set ▲

Pre-commencement Planning Discharge

Is a habitat bank being used to deliver off-site biodiversity units to achieve the required net gains?

Step 2: Check the 'off-site' tabs.

- Is the 'spatial risk category' and 'off-site reference' been provided. This should enable the LPA to link the habitat bank to the NE national offset register.
- The offset site should be within the same district of the application site where possible. If this is not possible, for example due to the required unit types not being available, then the site should be within GM as close to the district as possible. These factors will also influence the spatial risk multiplier to incentivise habitat banks being used in close proximity of the application site.
- As previously stated, only as a last resort will statutory credits be agreed by the LPA, where on site and local off-site options have been exhausted.

Whilst habitat and watercourse units are showing a 10% net gain, and trading rules are met (denoted by green flags), the hedgerow units are currently not showing the minimum 10% net gain required. In this scenario, the BGP could not be approved.

Spatial risk multiplier	Habitat units delivered	Comments				
Spatial risk category		User comments	Planning authority comments	Habitat reference	Off-site reference	Baseline Ref
Compensation inside LPA boundary or NCA of impact site	0.05				Habitat bank 1	
Compensation inside LPA boundary or NCA of impact site	0.42				Habitat bank 1	
Compensation inside LPA boundary or NCA of impact site	6.64				Habitat bank 1	

Pre-commencement Planning Discharge

The Biodiversity Net Gain Plan

Step 3: Checking the Biodiversity Gain Plan

The following Natural England guidance document should be used: [Biodiversity-gain-plan-template-draft-guidance-for-submission](#): The following details should be included within the

[LPAs-1.pdf \(blog.gov.uk\)](#)

The following should be submitted as part of the biodiversity gain plan:

- Pre-development and post-development plans, showing the location of onsite habitat and drawn to an identified scale and showing the direction of North
- Approved compensation plan (if applicable)
- NE national offset register reference number(s) (if applicable)
- Statutory biodiversity credits eligibility evidence in the form of correspondence from habitat providers (if applicable)
- Statutory biodiversity credits proof of purchase (if applicable) • Habitat management and monitoring plan (if applicable)
- Date of submission – The submission date should be entered. Any resubmission date should also be recorded for version control purposes.
- Planning application reference number
- Local planning authority – Details of the lead Local Planning Authority who is determining the application
- Development site address or site description – If the site does not have an address or postcode, the developer should have included a description of the site and the OS grid reference.
- Description of development to which the biodiversity gain plan relates – A description of the proposed development and any changes of use should be entered. Check that the information matches the details on the application form.

The screenshot shows the 'Biodiversity gain plan' form. It includes sections for submission details, development site address, and developer details. The form is titled 'Biodiversity gain plan' and has a subtitle 'Submit a biodiversity gain plan to show how your development will achieve biodiversity net gain.' It also includes a 'When to use this form' section and a '1. Submission details' section with fields for date, planning application reference number, local planning authority (LPA), development site address, and developer details.

Biodiversity gain plan

Submit a biodiversity gain plan to show how your development will achieve biodiversity net gain.

When to use this form
A biodiversity gain plan shows how a development will achieve 10% biodiversity net gain (BNG). Submit this form to your local planning authority after they approve your planning application.

Unless your development is exempt, you cannot start the development until the LPA approves your biodiversity gain plan and biodiversity metric calculation tool.

1. Submission details

1.1 Date
For example, 3/11/2023

1.2 Planning application reference number

1.3 Local planning authority (LPA)

1.4 Development site address
If the site does not have an address, enter the OS grid reference.

1.5 Describe the development
Tell us about the proposed development and any changes of use (250 words).

2. Developer details

2.1 Applicant name

2.2 Company name

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Pre-commencement Planning Discharge

Management and monitoring

For on-site compensation, a Habitat Management and Monitoring Plan (HMMP) should be submitted for 'significant gains'. For off-site compensation, the landowner will agree the HMMP with the LPA.

When a management and monitoring plan is submitted, the following criteria should be checked before submitting to LPA ecologists or GMEU for further review.

- Does it cover 30 years of management and monitoring?
- Has it been made clear who is responsible for the management? For example, is the responsibility being taken on by a management company who is clearly identified?
- Does the plan demonstrate when the monitoring will occur? Occurrence of monitoring visits will depend on the size of the site, but DEFRA has advised that a "medium sized habitat creation project might result in reports for years 2, 5, 10, 20 and 30".



Habitat Management and Monitoring Plan

Site Name:	<input type="text"/>
Date:	<input type="text" value="Click or tap to enter a date."/>
Version:	<input type="text"/>

4. A guide for submitting and assessing BNG applications

Monitoring

1. Validation & Determination

2. Pre-commencement condition discharge

3. Monitoring

Management and monitoring

- Management of habitats is an on-going responsibility for 30 years post development, and this responsibility together with regular monitoring of habitats will have been set out within the Habitat Management and Monitoring Plan (HMMP) submitted with the application in order to discharge the general biodiversity gain condition.
- This flowchart aims to ensure applicants are providing monitoring reports on the years that the condition requires them to do so and are disclosing any failings and remedial action associated with adaptive management to ensure habitat creation and enhancement stays on track.
- Ensuring the monitoring of habitats is undertaken and presented to the LPA at the agreed timescales is the essential to ensure enforcement action will not be taken.

Management and Monitoring

Post construction and in the operational phase of the development, habitats must be managed to ensure they continue to meet the desired condition to achieve a biodiversity net gain. Habitats must managed and monitored, with their condition recorded over a period of at least 30 years.

Management and monitoring

After construction and in the operational phase of the development, habitats must be managed to ensure they continue to meet desired condition to achieve a biodiversity net gain.

Habitats must be managed and monitored, with their condition recorded over a period of at least 30 years.

1. The applicant is responsible for ensuring a monitoring report is sent to the LPA at the necessary timescale, on years 1, 2, 5, 10, 20 or 30 following completion of the development. The LPA will track planning consents and the required monitoring, including on what years information will be due, and can take enforcement action where information is not submitted on time, or is incomplete.
2. The monitoring report must identify any significant failings in establishment and management and detail remedial action which needs to be undertaken to correct for any failings.
3. The report must also detail who is responsible for the management including any adaptive management and remedial action which is proposed to correct for any habitat establishment failings.

LPA ecologists or GMEU will be consulted for thorough review of monitoring reports and to establish where enforcement action is required.

Management and monitoring will be secured through either a planning condition, or less frequently a planning obligation (S106 agreement).

If the latter is chosen by the LPA, then fees for the LPA to audit the monitoring reports required to be submitted by the applicant will be charged. This will typically only be required in some cases where large numbers of biodiversity units are proposed within the applicants red line boundary, and where S106 agreements are already being drawn up for other planning matters.

The fees obtained through this mechanism can help LPA ecologists or GMEU resource necessary checks to ensure the requirements for management and monitoring of significant gains is being complied with in complex cases.

Glossary

- **Distinctiveness** - A measure based on the type of habitat and its distinguishing features. This includes consideration of species richness, rarity, the extent to which the habitat is protected by designations and the degree to which a habitat supports species rarely found in other habitats.
- **Condition** - A measure of the habitat against its ecological optimum state. Condition is a way of measuring variation in the quality of patches of the same habitat type
- **Biodiversity unit** - Biodiversity units are a proxy to describe biodiversity. There are three types of biodiversity units: area units, hedgerow units and watercourse units. These are calculated in separate 'modules' of the metric.
- **On-site** - On-site sheets of the metric are for all land within the boundary of a project. In a planning context, this usually means within the red line boundary of a planning application.
- **Off-site** - Off-site sheets of the metric are for interventions on land outside of the on-site boundary, regardless of proximity or ownership.
- **Condition Assessment** - The process of assigning habitat condition, to be undertaken by a competent person.
- **Linear habitat** - Habitats recorded in the metric according to length (kilometres) rather than area (hectares). This includes habitats in the hedgerow and watercourse modules and is taken as a centre line measurement along the length of the feature.
- **Area habitat** - Habitats recorded in the metric in area (hectares).
- **Strategic Significance** - Describes the local significance of the habitat based on its location and the habitat type.
- **Difficulty** - A measure which represents the uncertainty in the effectiveness of management techniques used to enhance or create habitat.
- **Time to target Condition** - The average time taken between starting creation or enhancement of habitats and that habitat reaching its target condition and or distinctiveness.
- **Spatial risk** - Spatial risk represents the relationship between the location of biodiversity loss (on-site) and where the off-site habitat is being delivered. This is applied to off-site interventions only.

APPENDIX A – BNG Flowcharts

