



The
Wildlife
Trusts

A New Era for Nature Positive Development

Biodiversity Net Gain and The Wildlife Trusts

Summary

The UK is in the grip of interlinked nature and climate crises and we cannot tackle one without addressing the other – the two are inseparable. These are a threat to wildlife and wild places, people, communities and businesses, all of which need a stable and resilient world to thrive and survive; we cannot solve one crisis without tackling the other. Nature's recovery is a vital step in fighting the climate crisis.

The Wildlife Trusts are committed to reversing the huge declines in nature and working with others to ensure at least 30% of land and seas are actively managed for nature's recovery by 2030¹. That is why we support the principle of Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG). Done well, BNG could make a positive contribution towards nature's recovery.

The Wildlife Trusts in England have been influencing the evolution of BNG for well over a decade – from the very early thinking and piloting in 2012 around measuring and offsetting the losses of nature to development, to testing and contributing to the multiple iterations of the Defra metric and advocating for clear commitments on BNG in legislation. Locally, Wildlife Trusts have been influencing the inclusion of BNG policy in local plans and advocating for voluntary BNG for many years. More recently, many have been readying themselves as high quality habitat providers for BNG.

However, The Wildlife Trusts are concerned that BNG is not currently on track to play its part in addressing the severity of the continuing nature crisis – and that current ambition is set too low. The Wildlife Trusts wants to see:

- Developers and local authorities go beyond the minimum requirements and aim for at least a 20% gain for nature
- Government to change policy and guidance so the sale of excess biodiversity units is prevented
- No further broadening of permitted development rules and government to provide policy guidance to ensure BNG for permitted development is made a matter for local consideration rather than a blanket exemption
- Local Planning Authorities to be resourced with the right level of skills and capacity across departments to oversee the BNG process to ensure it is properly implemented, monitored and enforced
- BNG to be 'additional' to existing mechanisms for nature conservation and enhancement
- BNG to be considered only once the planning mitigation hierarchy of 'avoid, reduce, mitigate and compensate'² has been fully and sequentially followed at both strategic and site-based level
- Development and nature to be spatially planned
- BNG targeted where it delivers the best outcomes for nature in line with the Local Nature Recovery Strategy or equivalent
- All development to have a positive impact on wildlife

Pages 8 to 11 of this briefing provide Wildlife Trust best practice case studies illustrating BNG delivery via nature positive developments, off-site habitat provision, and support for third party strategic delivery of off-site gains.



1. Introduction

We are amid two escalating and inextricably linked crises – the climate emergency and the alarming decline in nature. These are a threat to wildlife and wild places, people, communities and businesses, all of which need a stable and resilient world to thrive and survive; we cannot solve one crisis without tackling the other.

UK Government has committed to securing nature's recovery and protecting 30% of the UK's land by 2030. But the yawning gap between these goals and the current, dire health of our natural world was evidenced in the State of Nature in September 2023, which revealed the UK to be one of the most nature-depleted countries on Earth, with one in six species now at risk of being lost from Great Britain altogether.

For decades, building development has been a significant cause of nature loss. But the new legal requirement in England, known as Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) offers the potential for developers to take a more positive approach. Put simply, this new duty³ will require developers to deliver measurably more for nature than is lost through development.

These new obligations do not replace existing requirements to avoid impacts to wildlife. Nor do they give developers free rein to damage habitats on a promise that harm can be rectified elsewhere. But where, as a last resort, damage to habitats cannot be avoided, developers will be legally required to ensure an increase of at least 10% more biodiversity in addition to the required compensation. This will be achieved through the enhancement, restoration or creation of new habitats with an obligation to ensure these gains are managed and maintained for at least 30 years.

2. The Wildlife Trusts' view of Biodiversity Net Gain

The Wildlife Trusts support the mandatory requirement for the development sector to contribute to nature's recovery, whereby all new development⁴ must deliver a net gain for biodiversity. However, for the requirement to succeed, and not be a 'charter to build anywhere', it must be applied ambitiously and with care, and be effectively monitored and enforced. In the context of the ecological crisis, developments should be required to go beyond 10% BNG and strive to deliver at least 20%, and gains should be strategically targeted through Local Nature Recovery Strategies, secured in perpetuity and be additional to existing mechanisms, funding and initiatives in place to protect and enhance nature and support its recovery.

3. The Wildlife Trusts' role in influencing Biodiversity Net Gain

The Wildlife Trusts have been influencing the evolution of BNG for well over a decade. This has taken many forms, from the very early thinking and piloting in 2012 around measuring and offsetting the losses of nature to development; testing and contributing to the multiple iterations of the Defra metric; and advocating for clear commitments on BNG in the 25 Year Environment Plan and the stronger legislation and policy that followed (in the form of the Environment Act and National Planning Policy Framework respectively)⁵. Locally, Wildlife Trusts have been influencing the inclusion of BNG policy in local plans and advocating for voluntary BNG for many years through effective policy and decision making – providing advice, support and scrutiny/critique to developers, landowners and local planning authorities. And more recently, many have been readying themselves as high quality habitat providers for BNG.

4. Getting it right

The Wildlife Trusts very much support the need for new development to deliver green infrastructure and positive nature enhancements for both wildlife and people and believe this should be a given of good, multifunctional design of all developments, so that people have access to natural green space and features close to where they live.

If done well, BNG offers a positive step forward in the way we think about development and nature in a more integrated way. However, much of the success of BNG will depend on the finer details of the regulations and guidance and fundamentally how well these are implemented and enforced. We will keep a watching eye on whether the regulations and guidance offer the clarity and strength needed to ensure BNG is meeting its goals; and on those responsible for ensuring it happens⁶. We will also continue to work closely with national and local policy and decision-makers, using evidence and practice to inform improved policy, guidance and delivery where necessary.

► Spatial planning and the mitigation hierarchy

Really ambitious nature recovery should be central to all local development plans. As part of this, we need to ensure that development and nature are spatially planned, so that impacts on wildlife are avoided in the first place. Where this is not possible, any unavoidable impacts should be sequentially minimised (by retaining natural features within the development design), mitigated and compensated for, before BNG can be applied⁷. Compensation and BNG delivery should always be targeted in a way that delivers the best outcomes for nature in line with the Local Nature Recovery Strategy or equivalent – these are the plans to be drawn up in every area, setting out what needs to be done to stop nature's decline and help nature recover⁸. Therefore, securing genuine long-term gains for biodiversity through BNG may not always be best achieved within the boundary of the development. Expert ecological advice at the outset to inform the Biodiversity Gain plan and the design of the development will be vital.

IN SUMMARY, THE WILDLIFE TRUSTS WANT:

- Development and nature to be spatially planned
- Biodiversity Net Gain to be considered only once the planning mitigation hierarchy of avoid, reduce, mitigate and compensate² has been fully and sequentially followed at both strategic and site base level
- BNG targeted where it delivers the best outcomes for nature in line with the Local Nature Recovery Strategy or equivalent

► 10% Biodiversity Net Gain is not ambitious enough – this should be viewed as the bare minimum not the ceiling

The majority of the habitat a developer is required to enhance, create or restore (measured by the number of biodiversity units⁹) is to compensate and offset losses elsewhere, as a last resort measure in applying the planning mitigation hierarchy. BNG does not ensure improved compensation, particularly for lower level impacts (not previously addressed by the planning system) e.g. compensation for loss of biodiversity from arable land. However, only 10% (minimum) of the biodiversity units required by developers will provide 'additional' new habitat for nature (the Biodiversity Net Gain). Given the uncertainties surrounding habitat creation, 10% will at best hold the tide and provide a contingency against lost habitat to ensure no net loss of biodiversity. So BNG is by no means a silver bullet to secure nature's recovery.

Given the biodiversity crisis we face, and the fact that any net gain takes time to deliver, it is fundamentally important that 10% gain is not viewed as the ceiling for achievement. We want to see developers (and local authorities in their local plan policies) go beyond the minimum requirements and aim for at least a 20% gain for nature, with all development having a positive impact on wildlife. Furthermore, to effectively contribute to nature's recovery, BNG must be additional to existing mechanisms for nature conservation and enhancement. And it must be clearly accounted for in terms of other funding mechanisms.

Some local authorities and developers are already going beyond the minimum requirement, and we will continue to encourage this. However, The Wildlife Trusts are concerned that current Government guidance makes this difficult, as it allows developers to sell excess gains created for one development (i.e. gains over and above the 10%) to meet obligations for another development. This approach is unacceptable and could effectively cap BNG at 10% and stifle local ambition. We want to see guidance to ensure this does not happen. This policy is especially worrying for solar and minerals sites. For example, many of The Wildlife Trusts' iconic nature reserves are former minerals sites, which under current planning rules have delivered much higher gains for nature through planning agreements. There is a significant risk in some areas, that permitting the sale of excess gains for minerals and solar development could mean little (if any) additional gains for nature when compared to the current situation.

IN SUMMARY, THE WILDLIFE TRUSTS WANT:

- Developers and local authorities go beyond the minimum requirements and aim for at least a 20% gain for nature
- All development to have a positive impact on wildlife
- BNG to be 'additional' to existing mechanisms for nature conservation and enhancement
- Government to change policy and guidance so the sale of excess biodiversity units is prevented

► Local Planning Authorities should be given the right support and resources.

Mandatory Biodiversity Net Gain places new requirements on local planning authorities at a time when they are already under-resourced and lack capacity and skills. For example, only 1 in 5 councils¹⁰ currently have in-house ecological expertise. The Government has committed £15.76 million to mitigate the obligations on local authorities of delivering BNG.

This is welcome but will not be sufficient to address the shortfalls in skills and capacity across England's local planning authorities.

We want to see them adequately resourced with the right skills and capacity across departments to oversee the BNG process – from scrutinising BNG assessments, developing and overseeing legal and financial agreements, to monitoring and enforcing delivery to ensure the gains for biodiversity are delivered as agreed, sustained over time and protected from future allocation and development. This includes clear and comprehensive guidance and support, for example, on enforcement, so they can effectively carry out their responsibilities.

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- Local Planning Authorities to be resourced with the right level of skills and capacity across departments to oversee the BNG process to ensure it is properly implemented, monitored and enforced

IN SUMMARY, THE WILDLIFE TRUSTS WANT:

- No further broadening of permitted development rules
- Government to provide policy guidance to ensure BNG for permitted development is made a matter for local consideration rather than a blanket exemption

► Permitted development rights should not be extended

In addition to some of the finer details of BNG policy, The Wildlife Trusts are concerned that further changes to development rules like extending and introducing new permitted development rights (PDR)¹¹ will undermine the genuine potential of BNG to support nature's recovery. For example expanding the rules which allow change of use of Commercial, Business and Service use properties to residential could lead to a building of significant size being converted to residential dwellings without going through a full planning application. And without considering the potentially significant indirect environmental effects of the conversion, placing existing nature spaces under pressure. PDR also enables the expansion or change of use of development without new green spaces which are vital for local communities. New residents could miss out on access to nature, and the health and wellbeing benefits this brings. Because permitted development is exempt from BNG, any broadening of these rights also reduces the potential for development to contribute to nature recovery. The Wildlife Trusts do not support PDRs being exempt from BNG. There are examples of permitted development across the country that have impacted priority/notable wildlife habitat. For example, in Cheshire, permitted development has impacted reedbed, wetland mosaics and species rich grasslands. Biodiversity Net Gain was not delivered on any of these applications, with no net loss only being sought on a few. Government should provide clear policy guidance to ensure both Green Infrastructure and BNG are a matter for local consideration for PDR.

5. Biodiversity Net Gain delivery – The Wildlife Trusts’ engagement

If BNG is to be effective it is really important that it is delivered well, taking all the above into account. The Wildlife Trusts are committed to reversing the declines in nature and working with others to ensure at least 30% of land and seas are actively managed for nature’s recovery by 2030¹². That is why we support the principle of BNG. Done well, BNG could make a positive contribution towards nature’s recovery. So, whether providing advice, scrutiny or off-site habitat provision, The Wildlife Trusts will be setting the bar high for BNG.

When it comes to protecting, restoring and managing the natural environment The Wildlife Trusts are already on the front line. Operating across the country, we have decades of experience, knowledge and expertise in the delivery of high-quality natural habitats, both on our own reserves and working within communities to advise, support and empower others to achieve the same. Whether working at a site-based scale advising developers or landowners, or as a key delivery partner in a multi-landowner, landscape-scale nature restoration programme (e.g the Great Fen and our Atlantic rainforest restoration), our goal is to secure nature recovery through the highest of delivery standards.

As exemplar providers of BNG habitat, The Wildlife Trusts offer high quality habitat delivery that offers genuinely additional and permanent gains in biodiversity. We are uniquely placed to provide this to a gold standard because as providers and protectors of wildlife across the UK, we believe we have a moral obligation to ensure that schemes, such as Biodiversity Net Gain in England, do not simply result in greenwashing but deliver the most effective solutions for society and nature. As a ‘go-to’ provider we have:

- the integrity, knowledge and experience to enhance, create and maintain high quality habitats for nature
- a trusted and reliable track record in the delivery of green finance schemes both on our own land and through third party relationships with landowners, management companies and local planning authorities
- longevity to ensure Trust-acquired land for the purposes of BNG will remain in secure long-term custodianship
- established local partnerships and credibility
- experience of working with developers and local planning authorities to provide specialist advice and consulting services to ensure the best

outcomes for nature in the planning and design of developments

- strong connections with local communities and proven ability to facilitate, engage and empower others to take action for nature through community action, new volunteering and employment opportunities; and health and wellbeing programmes
- nature conservation as our primary purpose as charities – so all funding and any surplus are reinvested into this primary purpose to deliver more for biodiversity. This reinvestment of any surplus into nature conservation, distinguishes The Wildlife Trusts, and other environmental NGOs, from other habitat providers in the market place

Other roles undertaken by Wildlife Trusts (or in some cases their consultancies) can include influencing local plan policy and scrutinising and responding to planning applications; advising local authorities, landowners and developers on BNG; undertaking site surveys and BNG assessments; informing the local nature recovery strategy and associated strategic targeting of BNG; developing tools (for example the [Net Gain Staffordshire web platform](#)); or becoming a Responsible Body to enter conservation covenant agreements¹³ with third party landowners delivering BNG.

6. End notes

The Legal requirement for BNG was established in [Environment Act 2021](#) with draft Secondary legislation issued in 2023 and to be finalised by 12 February 2024 see [here](#) for links to drafts.

Start dates for mandatory BNG: For nearly all terrestrial and intertidal development in England approved through the Town and Country Planning Act (TCP Act) 1990 this will be from 12 February 2024, for small sites approved through the TCP Act (1990) this will be from 2 April 2024; and for Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects approved through the Planning Act 2008, this will be from November 2025. Planning applications submitted before the start dates in February 2024, April 2024 and November 2025 will not be legally subject to BNG.

Exemptions from BNG – Some developments are exempt from BNG. See Defra Guidance [here](#) and Defra land use planning blog [here](#). In summary, these include small sites (until April 2024, after which time the requirement kicks in), development below a defined threshold, householder applications, self-build and custom build applications, Biodiversity Gain Sites, High Speed rail transport network.

Legal Agreements Once BNG becomes mandatory, significant on-site gains and off-site BNG delivery will need to be secured for at least 30 years. For off-site gains this will either be through a planning obligation (e.g. Section 106 Agreement) with a local planning authority or a conservation covenant with a responsible body. For significant on-site gains this will be through a legal agreement or a planning condition.

- **Section 106 Agreements** are [planning obligations](#) under Section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended)
- **Conservation Covenants** are private voluntary legal agreements between a responsible body and a landowner to ensure the natural or heritage features of an area of land are conserved

A responsible body is the Secretary of State or anybody that the Secretary of State appoints as a responsible body following application. Those eligible to apply to be a responsible body include: local authorities; any public body or charity where at least some of its main purposes or functions relate to conservation; or a private sector organisation where at least some of its main activities relate to conservation. Once designated, responsible bodies can decide when and when not to enter into conservation covenant agreements with landowners.

The Biodiversity Gain Register will be a publicly available register administered by Natural England. It will only record [off-site biodiversity gains](#) and will show how and where developments are improving biodiversity [off-site](#). On-site gains will not be recorded on the national register and there is no mandate for this under the Environment Act. The Wildlife Trusts believe there is a need to include both on site and off site BNG on a register to provide transparency and help with the monitoring and enforcement of on-site delivery.

Monitoring and Enforcement of BNG delivery. Habitat monitoring and reporting will usually be the responsibility of the developer or provider of BNG habitat. An ecological monitoring report will need to be prepared in accordance with the legal agreements and BNG documents (Biodiversity Gain Plan and Habitat Management and Monitoring Plan) and submitted to the Local Planning Authority in the case of Section 106 agreements. Or in the case of Conservation Covenants to the Responsible Body. The LPAs and Responsible Bodies will be responsible for reviewing the reports and monitoring compliance with delivery, as well as resolving and enforcing any

breaches with the agreement and associated plan. The frequency of monitoring must be agreed with the LPA or relevant Responsible Body and should align with the requirements of secondary legislation. Frequency will depend on the habitat being created and the complexity of the management plan but will typically be annually from year one to five and every five years thereafter.

Monitoring and Reporting on BNG under the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act. It should be noted that monitoring and reporting of habitat delivery is separate to the requirement on local planning authorities to monitor and report on BNG more generally. LPAs have duties to report on BNG delivery under the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act. Government has published [guidance on complying with the NERC duty and reporting on actions](#), including BNG. This requires:

- a summary of the actions carried out to meet BNG obligations
- details of biodiversity gains resulting, or expected to result, from biodiversity gain plans approved
- a summary of how the authority plans to meet BNG obligations in the next reporting period

Wildlife Trust engagement in BNG delivery

At the current time (January 2024) the type and extent of Trust engagement in BNG varies across the country. Of the 35 English Trusts that responded to a recent survey, it is clear that most are engaged to some degree:

- 32 are actively engaged with BNG
- 15 of those actively engaged have at least one confirmed delivery site
- 34 of the Trusts that responded are/plan to/are interested in delivering BNG on their own land (including acquired land) and 24 will also deliver on land owned by others
- 25 are/will be providing advice to other landowners on how to deliver BNG
- 10 are/will be involved in brokering sales for BNG on land owned by others
- 13 have said BNG forms part of a landscape-scale landowner aggregation model that the Trust either runs or is part of

7. Case Studies

Nature positive developments

The following are good examples of nature-positive developments. But it should be noted these were designed, approved and delivered prior to the required use of the Defra metric, so are illustrative examples of good nature positive developments rather than developments that have formally applied BNG policy and legislation.

▶ TRUMPINGTON MEADOWS The Wildlife Trust of Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Northamptonshire

© MARTIN BAKER, WILDLIFE TRUST BCN



Trumpington Meadows, once arable land belonging to the Plant Breeding Institute, is now a flourishing blend of housing estate, country park and nature reserve on the edge of Cambridge. It pre-dates mandatory BNG, but is a commendable example of the biodiversity gains for people and wildlife that can be achieved alongside housing developments.

A development partnership Trumpington Meadows Land Company purchased the land for housing and engaged The Wildlife Trust for Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Northamptonshire before the development was little more than a concept, seeking an organisation to manage the green spaces of their new project. The Trust agreed, but insisted on being involved in the design process, too. If they were going to manage this country park and nature reserve, they would engage with the landscape architect that created it. This would help limit future management issues and ensure continuity in the preservation of these vital green spaces. They were even able to bring in trusted local suppliers and contractors, resulting in significant financial savings.

Through thorough and advanced consultations with the local community, major objections were kept to a minimum. The support of the Trust was invaluable, their reputation for conservation a solid foundation for a development that would benefit nature, the community and the city as a whole. When the time for action finally arrived, habitat creation began long before construction, giving the wild spaces chance to mature. Meadows were sown first, launching five

years of landscape transformation that resulted in 40 hectares of new species-rich meadows, hedgerows and woodland.

But Trumpington Meadows is also a site for people to grow alongside nature. Play areas, paths and benches invite residents and visitors to enter the wild, with natural zoning providing space for culture, activities and wildlife to exist side-by-side. Community engagement, through events ranging from nature walks to arts performances, helps to integrate all aspects of this diverse site, immersing visitors in the value of the development. Like the city itself, Trumpington Meadows' popularity is growing, used more and more by the people of Cambridge, not just the new residents of the housing development.

Careful management even helped reduce the risk of flooding down-stream, with new houses kept back from the river and floodplains reconnected to provide relief during heavy rains. A balancing pond and open drainage ditches further this effect, keeping run-off at pre-development levels, with the added benefit of increasing the biodiversity of the site. Trumpington Meadows is an excellent example of how nature can be incorporated into development plans.

▶ CAMBOURNE The Wildlife Trust of Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Northamptonshire



© BRIAN EVERSHAM

The new settlement of Cambourne was conceived in the 1990s as a series of three interlinked villages and comprises 4,200 dwellings. The settlement's design respected the existing landscape character, identifying and preserving existing habitat features and using them as the building blocks for the network of green spaces. The green spaces framed, joined and permeated each of the three villages - giving residents and wildlife easy access to the whole network. This consideration to design has made Cambourne a safe and attractive place where people want to live and engage with their local environment and where wildlife can thrive.

Green space makes up 60% of the settlement and includes pre-existing and new woodlands, meadows, lakes, amenity grasslands, playing fields, allotments and formal play areas. There are 12 miles of new footpaths, cycleways and bridleways and 10 miles of new

hedgerows. The new grassland areas are rich in ground nesting birds such as skylarks and meadow pipits which have had great breeding success over the years. The lakes and ponds that serve to prevent flooding also provide great habitat for wildfowl and dragonflies.

Management of the green spaces is undertaken by Cambourne Parish Council and The Wildlife Trust for Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire & Northamptonshire. The land will eventually be transferred to each of these organisations. Negotiations between The Wildlife Trust, developers and the local authorities secured an agreement that the Trust would manage the green spaces in return for office premises, initially rent free, with full ownership after ten years. Cambourne is nearing completion and The Trust continues to work closely with the developer until the official handover date.

▶ **WOODBERRY WETLANDS** London Wildlife Trust

© JAMIE GRIER, LONDON WILDLIFE TRUST



Woodberry Wetlands was created around a reservoir in Manor House, Hackney, its genesis being shaped by and, in turn, influencing the regeneration of the Woodberry Down estate. It has enhanced the biodiversity of the area and has rapidly become a go-to destination in the neighbourhood.

The reservoir is one of two constructed in 1833 to serve the New River water supply for London. Owned by Thames Water, permission was given to London Wildlife Trust in 2007 to establish a community project on its northern side, the rest of the reservoir being closed to the public. The Trust quickly engaged with the communities living in and nearby Woodberry Down, which was undergoing the initial stages of redevelopment (from 1,900 homes to more than 5,000 homes planned by 2031). Working with Berkeley Homes (the developers), Thames Water and Hackney Council, the Trust developed a vision for the site in 2010. Securing resources from the partners and Heritage Lottery Fund (now the National Lottery Heritage Fund), works began in 2013 and the first phase was completed in 2016, opened by Sir David Attenborough.

The works have involved the reprofiling of silts and the creation of new reedbeds and species-rich grassland, the construction of a boardwalk and access bridge, and

the restoration of an 'at risk' Grade II listed building converted into a popular café. Many volunteers assisted in these works and continue to be engaged in the management of the wetlands, bringing additional health and social benefits to local people. The Wetlands has been a recipient of the Green Flag Award since 2018.

London Wildlife Trust has also influenced the landscaping of the Woodberry Down estate, resulting in swales and other ecologically-informed features, and assisted Berkeley Homes with other of their residential schemes in London.

Off-Site – habitat provision

▶ **DUXFORD OLD RIVER FLOODPLAIN RESTORATION PROJECT AND HABITAT BANK** Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust (BBOWT)



Duxford Old River is a 45-ha floodplain site lying adjacent to Chimney Meadows Nature Reserve, Berkshire Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust's (BBOWT) largest nature reserve whose fields form part of an ancient landscape, created by the river Thames and shaped through centuries of farming. This Oxfordshire site presents a significant addition to BBOWT's Upper Thames Living Landscape Scheme which is at the heart of the Upper Thames Conservation Target Area (CTA) and therefore strategically important for landscape scale conservation.

Previously, as commercial pasture for cattle, one of the main concepts behind this project is the idea of nature-led management, or the restoration of functioning natural ecological processes which will create and enhance a variety of habitats including floodplain wetland mosaic, mixed scrub and woodland. The wetland habitats will make it a haven for wildlife including wildfowl, waders, songbirds and specialist invertebrates, complementing the landscape-scale conservation work the Trust has already undertaken at Chimney Meadows since 2003.

In 2022 BBOWT were able to deliver an Environment Agency Water Environment Grant (WEG) project which included the creation of a new river, or by-pass channel, to enable fish passage into the upper reaches of the old river Thames. Whilst this is a significant new habitat

within Duxford, this area has been excluded from subsequent metric calculations for Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG).

In early 2023, BBOWT commenced the management of the other area habitats at Duxford as a minimum 30 year project to generate incremental income through the emerging market for BNG. BBOWT agreed an initial transaction of biodiversity units being sold upfront or ‘pre-enhancement’ with Trust for Oxfordshire’s Environment who engaged with the Local Planning Authority (LPA) to administer BNG funding for responsible development ahead of the mandatory legislation taking effect in 2024.

BBOWT is now registering Duxford with the LPA through a Section 106 agreement and will be providing biodiversity units directly to local developers wanting to achieve a minimum of 10% BNG for their new developments. Whilst we anticipate that some of these units will be sold “pre-enhancement” we also intend to sell units in later years, ‘post-enhancement’ once the habitat has been created and there is a measurable biodiversity uplift established.

► **SALTERSFORD FARM**
Cheshire Wildlife Trust



© RACHEL BRADSHAW

Saltersford Farm is Cheshire Wildlife Trust’s newest nature reserve, located in Holmes Chapel on the banks of the River Dane. It is a former agricultural site comprising of 19 hectares of cropland and modified grassland alongside some existing priority and ancient woodland habitat. The site is strategically located within the Cheshire East Ecological Network and is immediately adjacent to a Local Wildlife Site and additional ancient woodland.

The site was identified as a strategic acquisition that could be used to pilot the creation and ongoing management of a new nature reserve using various sources of green finance. The site is being restored to a mosaic of hay meadow, ponds, woodland and mixed scrub. The restoration plans have to date involved 80 volunteers, helped reduce pollution in the River Dane, and created space for great crested newts, farmland birds and pollinators.

The Trust took a bundled approach to funding each intervention across the site with no stacking of payments. Habitats created for BNG were funded solely by payments for BNG units to ensure additionality. BNG units were not sold from other interventions on the site, such as the woodland created for carbon mitigation or the ponds created for district level licensing to protect great crested newts.

Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) is an essential element of the Saltersford Farm business plan, with off-site unit sales driven through Cheshire East’s Local Plan BNG Policy. Through a land-banking approach to unit sales (creating the habitat to order) the Trust has generated approximately 47 BNG Units from 12 ha (60%) of the site. Units have been sold through five separate BNG deals: three of the five deals are with private developers prior to planning permission being granted; and the remaining two are with the Local Authority, paid with commuted sum funds from planning applications already granted. Through this project, the team at Cheshire Wildlife Trust have established themselves in the nature-based solutions market and will take the skills and lessons learned forward to new locations.

► **WILD WHITTINGTON**
Derbyshire Wildlife Trust



© KAYLEIGH WRIGHT

Wild Whittington is a new 24-hectare site acquired in March 2023 by Derbyshire Wildlife Trust (DWT) and will be used to deliver more space for nature through their ecological consultancy, Wild Solutions. The former arable land is on a south-facing slope above Old Whittington in Chesterfield. It comprises five field compartments separated by native hedgerows, along with a pond in the north-west corner.

The management of the site will prioritise rewilding principles and restoration of natural processes to create, enhance and maintain habitats. This will include natural succession of scrub, the encouragement of new woodland colonisation, and the introduction of a nature-based grazing regime to promote a mosaic of habitats at the site.

Central to the funding strategy for Wild Whittington will be the sale of BNG habitat units from the proposed biodiversity uplift generated by habitat creation, providing high quality habitat for developers

who need to meet their BNG requirements off-site. Over the last two years, DWT has invested in a team to develop solutions to ensure that the delivery of BNG and other vital ecosystem services in the county make more high-quality space for nature. Their approach to BNG delivery is nature-led and underpinned by the latest research and evidence. The Wildlife Trust has created a strategic roadmap, prioritising where to focus habitat creation to support nature recovery networks and maximise other ecosystem services. A pipeline of BNG delivery sites is coming soon online.

Supporting third party strategic delivery of off-site gains

▶ STAFFORDSHIRE BNG DELIVERY PORTAL AND LANDOWNER ADVICE



For the county’s 10 local planning authorities, Staffordshire Wildlife Trust has developed Net Gain Staffordshire, a portal of land available for off-site BNG delivery. Landowners can upload their land onto the local registry and see where it fits on the Local Nature Recovery Network (LNRN), helping guide restoration decisions to benefit nature. Developers and local planning authorities will be able to search the portal to locate sites, and the portal will facilitate monitoring information to show the delivery of BNG.

Underpinning the portal is the LNRN and an interactive map. Uploaded land available for BNG delivery will be visible against the map. This will help inform the type of habitat that landowners should be creating on their land for BNG and allow developers to easily find landowners offering the right types of habitat in the right locations. Eventually, the portal will track what biodiversity units have been sold and to whom. It will allow a landowner to consider the development before agreeing to sell units. And it will also enable monitoring data to be uploaded so that unit delivery can be tracked.

Staffordshire Wildlife Trust is also liaising with landowners and representative organisations to discuss collaborative opportunities regarding BNG and provide advice. The Wildlife Trust is able to assist landowners and managers with site assessments, baseline reports and land management advice to achieve BNG. It also provides outreach through events such as the county show.

Net Gain Staffordshire can be found at Biodiversity Net Gain & Nature Recovery Map - Staffordshire (netgainstaffs.com) – the site is a partnership between Staffordshire Wildlife Trust, local authorities, developers and landowners and aims to make the BNG process simple and transparent.



8. References

1. The Wildlife Trusts (2022) Bringing Nature Back, The Wildlife Trusts' Strategy
2. [National Planning Policy Framework](#) (Para 180a) and [National Planning Practice Guidance](#) (Paragraph: 019 Reference ID: 8-019-20190721)
3. Note: the duty comes into force for different types of developments at different times and there are exemptions (see End Notes)
4. Development projects or components of projects in England, as far as the low-water mark for which
 - a) planning permission is granted under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (from 12 Feb 2024 for most sites and from 2 April 2024 for small sites)
 - b) Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects consented under the Planning Act 2008 (from Nov 2025). Currently, there is no formal requirement for BNG from marine developments or for NSIPs in the marine environment, although provisions in the Environment Act provide options for introducing such a requirement.
5. The 25 year Environment Plan (2018): Committed to 1) strengthen net gain for Biodiversity in national planning policy (which happened later in 2018 following an NPPF consultation) and 2) consult on mandating net gain. In 2019, following consultation, Government committed to making BNG a legal requirement for developments approved through the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 – this legal requirement was set out in the Environment Act 2021.
6. Primarily local planning authorities and developers. But also habitat providers and responsible bodies.
7. This is known as the planning mitigation hierarchy of avoid, reduce, mitigate and compensate, which must be fully and sequentially followed before BNG can be applied (as per: National Planning Policy Framework (Para 180a) and National Planning Practice Guidance (Paragraph: 019 Reference ID: 8-019-20190721))
8. Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS) are a system of spatial strategies for nature and environmental improvement required by [law under the Environment Act 2021](#). [LNRS will help map out the action needed to restore nature](#), working closely with local stakeholders, especially farmers and land managers. There will be a new duty on all public authorities to have regard to relevant local nature recovery strategies.
9. A biodiversity unit is the unit of measurement used by the Statutory Biodiversity Metric. Biodiversity units are calculated using the size, type, quality and location of a habitat.
10. BBC Countryfile 2021 The 1 in 5 figure is based on 247 out of 333 English councils that responded to Countryfile's FOI request. This is equivalent to 17.4% of the respondents (74% of English councils) having access to a chartered ecologist inhouse.
11. Permitted Development Rights (PDRs) allow for certain types of development to be carried out without the need for formal planning consent through a simplified planning process known as Prior Approval. This is in contrast to the standard planning application process, where applications are assessed against the policies set out in the Local Plan. The local plan is prepared by the local planning authority with broad and extensive stakeholder and local community consultation. A properly-resourced Local Plan-led approach to planning enables local democratic oversight, strategic planning in the local area, and the assessment of any potential acute or cumulative environmental impacts
12. The Wildlife Trusts (2022) Bringing Nature Back, The Wildlife Trusts' Strategy
13. Conservation covenants are one of two ways to secure off-site biodiversity net gains (the other being a section 106 agreement. A conservation covenant is a private voluntary agreement between a landowner and a responsible body. Some Trusts are applying to be responsible bodies.

The Wildlife Trusts are on a mission to restore a **third of the UK's land and seas** for nature by 2030. We believe **everyone, everywhere, should have access to nature** and the joy and health benefits it brings.

No matter where you are in the UK, there is a Wildlife Trust inspiring people about nature and **standing up for wildlife and wild places**. Each Wildlife Trust is an independent charity formed by people getting together to make a positive difference for wildlife, climate and future generations. Together we care for 2,300 diverse and beautiful nature reserves and work with others to manage their land for nature, too.



The Wildlife Trusts

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