



BIODIVERSITY NET GAIN

Following recent revision, the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) has been strengthened to make biodiversity net gain (BNG) mandatory as part of all planning applications. This has also recently been written into many Local Planning Authority's (LPAs) policies. LPAs are already asking for developers to ensure that their proposed developments comply with these policies and achieve BNG.

A list of LPAs currently known to be asking developers to prove their proposed development achieves BNG include:

- Ashfield District Council
- Aylesbury Vale District Council
- Calderdale Council
- Cheshire East Council
- Cornwall Council
- Coventry City Council
- Darlington Borough Council
- Derby City Council
- Durham Council
- East Riding of Yorkshire Council
- Huntingdon District Council
- Kent County Council
- Kirklees Council
- Litchfield Council
- Maldon District Council
- Milton Keynes Council
- New Forest District Council
- Norfolk County Council
- North Devon Council
- Leeds City Council
- Litchfield Council
- Rugby Borough Council
- Rushcliffe Borough Council
- Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council
- South Hams District Council
- South Lakeland District Council
- South Oxfordshire District Council
- South Somerset Council
- Stevenage Council
- Stockport Metropolitan District Council
- Stratford-upon-Avon District Council
- Tewkesbury Borough Council
- Torridge Council
- Tunbridge Wells Council
- Vale of White Horse District Council
- Warwick County Council
- Warwick District Council
- West Devon Council
- Wokingham Borough Council
- Wolverhampton Council

This list is not exhaustive and is increasing more and more as local planning policies are updated.

What is Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG)?

BNG is essentially leaving a site in a better ecological condition than it was in prior to development.

Achieving BNG is independent from other ecological legislation and planning policies regarding priority habitats and protected species, which will still need to be considered as part of a planning application. E.g. the removal of priority habitats such as a pond or a woodland will still require these habitats to be compensated for and re-created as part of the proposed development.

How do I prove my development is achieving BNG?

A proposed development can be shown to achieve BNG through the use of the Department for Environment, food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) net gain metric. This is a calculator that quantifies biodiversity gains and losses. The requirement for a completed version of this calculator will become more commonplace as the legislation is further implemented into local planning policies.

The metric attributes a baseline value to the existing site in “biodiversity units”, based on the habitat types, areas and their condition. It also calculates an anticipated biodiversity value for the developed site, based on the landscaping proposals. It then calculates the difference between these values to assess whether or not you have achieved BNG.

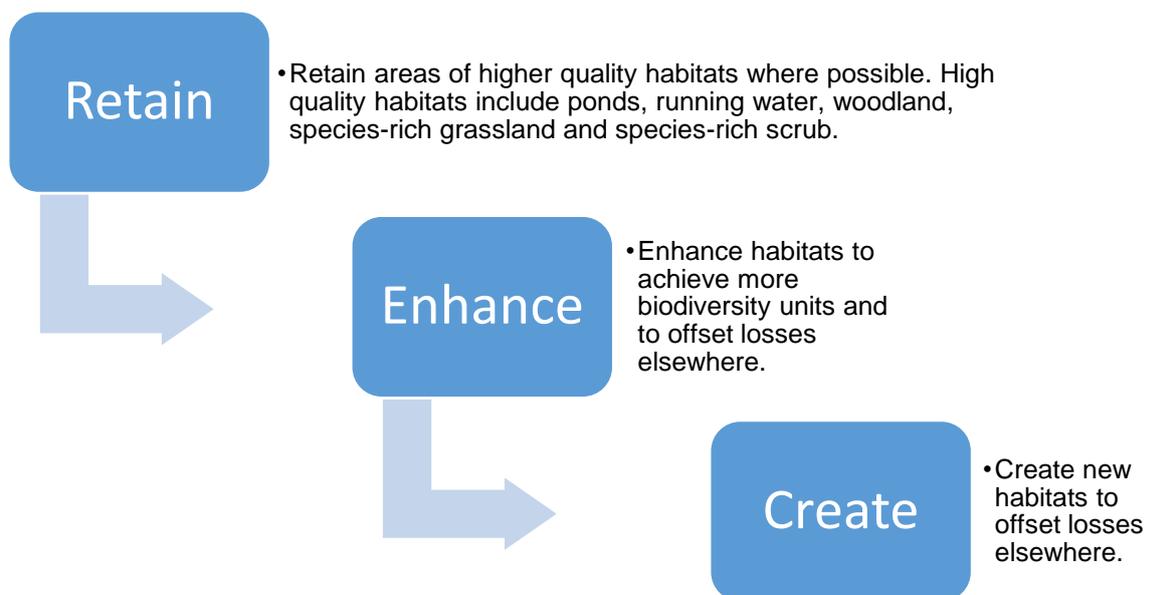
When is the metric required?

The use of the metric will not be required for all planning applications. Small home-owner applications, such as extensions or demolition and construction of a replacement dwelling, are unlikely to be required to evidence BNG.

We have found that it is mostly requested for larger applications and those that will be impacting upon semi-natural habitats such as woodland, grassland, or scrub.

How do I achieve BNG?

The DEFRA metric awards greater value when applying the following hierarchy:



The following principles will help to ensure BNG, and should be considered in the early stages of designing the site masterplan:

- Set aside an area of the site for ecology. In some cases, this can double up as public open space, sustainable drainage systems or screening/buffers. The size required for this will depend on the value (type, area and condition) of the habitats to be lost.
- Prioritise the creation of high-quality habitats. Habitats that provide the most biodiversity units in descending order are: ponds / lakes, mixed native scrub, urban allotments, species-rich grassland, green & brown roofs, urban orchards and woodland.
- Incorporating green and brown roofs into a development is a good way of gaining biodiversity units without having to compromise additional land.

If the retention, enhancement or creation of habitats on site is not possible and BNG cannot be ensured, an alternative is to provide BNG off site. This is known as biodiversity offsetting and can be done on land within the developer's ownership outside of the development boundary, or on third party land through a conservation body such as a local wildlife trust. Any habitats created offsite will need to be retained and managed in the long-term.

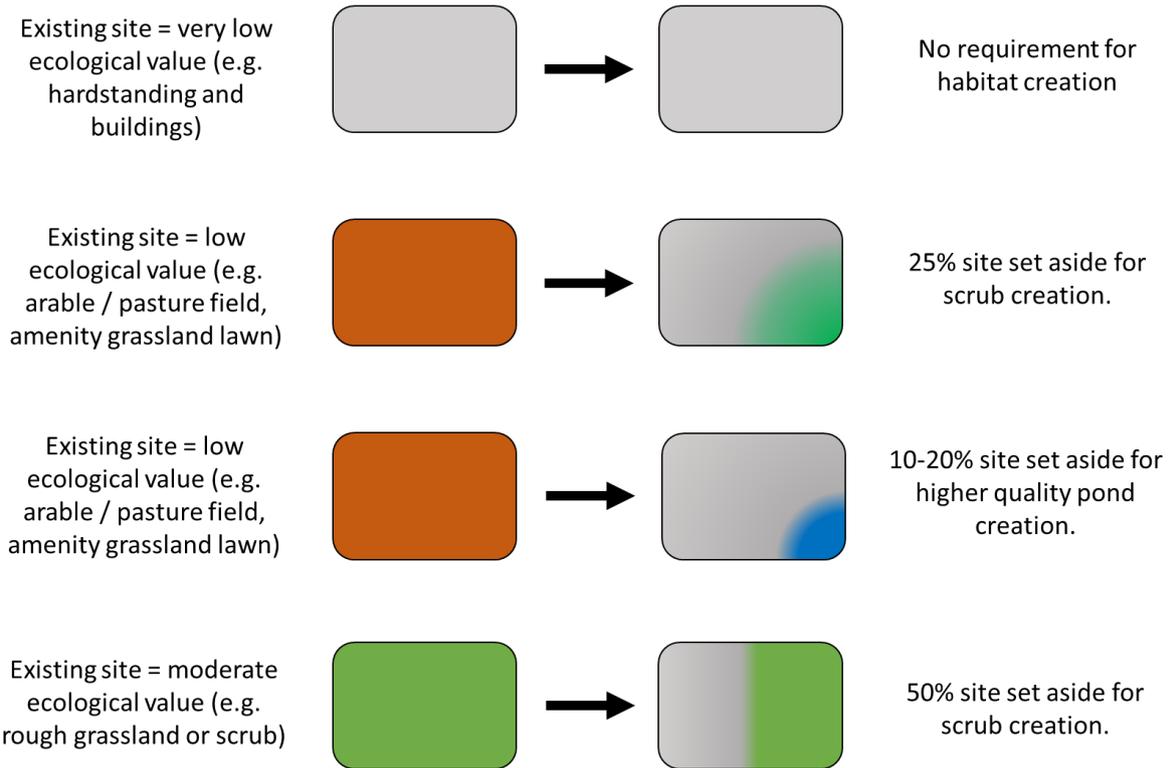
Are there any problems with the DEFRA metric?

Yes. UES has identified a number of issues with the metric and its use in planning applications. Relatively larger areas of a proposed development site will need to be set aside as ecology areas to ensure that the development can provide BNG according to the metric. Whilst this is to be expected, we are finding that the area required in order to achieve BNG is sometimes not practicable to implement, whilst also ensuring the development can feasibly proceed. There are also issues in the specific values attributed to different types of habitats, some of which should be rewarded more so than they currently are.

The metric is currently in its beta test phase and consultation is ongoing. UES is feeding back these issues to hopefully see them resolved in the final version of the metric. Until then, the use of this metric is currently what is expected by LPAs for planning, as well as for BREEAM (2018) Land Use and Ecology credit assessments.

Examples of achieving BNG

In the below examples, we are using the scenario of a developer who wants to turn a 1ha plot of land into a completely urban development (e.g. an industrial site, a retail site or a car park). No habitat enhancements are included here, only habitat creation. It should be noted that if habitats are retained and *enhanced*, this would lower the % of site required to offset development losses.



If you require any further information or wish to discuss this matter further, please do not hesitate to contact a member of the UES team and we can advise further. If you require BNG calculations to be carried out using the DEFRA metric, please let us know and we can provide a quote for this work.