

Land off Larsen Road, Upper Heyford

Biodiversity Net Gain Assessment

December 2022

Quality Management	
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1 Introduction

1.1 Background and Proposals

- 1.1.1 Aspect Ecology was commissioned by Pye Homes Blenheim Ltd in respect to ecological issues relating to land off Larsen Road, Upper Heyford, proposed for new development.
- 1.1.2 The proposals are for development of the site to currently provide 89 new residential dwellings with associated open space, landscaping and access.
- 1.1.3 To inform the application, Aspect Ecology has undertaken updated habitat survey work and a Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) assessment to determine the level of biodiversity net gain that could be achieved under the scheme. This work is based on the Biodiversity Metric 3.1 tool developed by Natural England and informed by biodiversity net gain guidance developed by CIRIA, CIEEM and IEMA.

1.2 Biodiversity Net Gain

Environment Act

- 1.2.1 The Environment Act establishes a comprehensive legal framework for environmental improvement within the UK, forming one of the key measures to deliver the vision set out under the 25 Year Environment Plan.
- 1.2.2 The Environment Act is intended to establish the structure for long-term environmental governance and accountability and includes key measures to drive improvements for nature. In particular, it lays the foundation for a Nature Recovery Network, and introduces a mandatory requirement for biodiversity net gain in the planning system, to ensure that new developments enhance biodiversity and create new green spaces for local communities to enjoy. This will require developments to deliver a 10% improvement in biodiversity value, albeit this will not be a legal requirement until the legislation is finalised, currently anticipated to be autumn 2023.

Good Practice Principles for Development

- 1.2.3 CIRIA, CIEEM and IEMA have developed a set of principles on good practice to achieve Biodiversity Net Gain¹, accompanied by a practical guide². These principles provide a framework that helps improve the UK's biodiversity by contributing towards strategic priorities to conserve and enhance nature while progressing with sustainable development. They also provide a way for industry to show that projects follow good practice. Ten key principles are identified:

- 1) **Apply the Mitigation Hierarchy.** Do everything possible to first avoid and then minimise impacts on biodiversity. Only as a last resort, and in agreement with external decision-makers where possible, compensate for losses that cannot be avoided. If compensating for losses within the development footprint is not possible or does not generate the most benefits for nature conservation, then offset biodiversity losses by gains elsewhere.

¹ CIEEM, CIRIA, IEMA (2016) *Biodiversity Net Gain: Good practice principles for development.*

² CIEEM, CIRIA, IEMA (2019) *Biodiversity Net Gain: Good practice principles for development. A practical guide.*

- 2) **Avoid losing biodiversity that cannot be offset by gains elsewhere.** Avoid impacts on irreplaceable biodiversity - these impacts cannot be offset to achieve No Net Loss or Net Gain.
- 3) **Be inclusive and equitable.** Engage stakeholders early, and involve them in designing, implementing, monitoring and evaluating the approach to Net Gain. Achieve Net Gain in partnership with stakeholders where possible, and share the benefits fairly among stakeholders.
- 4) **Address risks.** Mitigate difficulty, uncertainty and other risks to achieving Net Gain. Apply well-accepted ways to add contingency when calculating biodiversity losses and gains in order to account for any remaining risks, as well as to compensate for the time between the losses occurring and the gains being fully realised.
- 5) **Make a measurable Net Gain contribution.** Achieve a measurable, overall gain for biodiversity and the services ecosystems provide while directly contributing towards nature conservation priorities.
- 6) **Achieve the best outcomes for biodiversity.** Achieve the best outcomes for biodiversity by using robust, credible evidence and local knowledge to make clearly-justified choices when:
 - Delivering compensation that is ecologically equivalent in type, amount and condition, and that accounts for the location and timing of biodiversity losses
 - Compensating for losses of one type of biodiversity by providing a different type that delivers greater benefits for nature conservation
 - Achieving Net Gain locally to the development while also contributing towards nature conservation priorities at local, regional and national levels
 - Enhancing existing or creating new habitat
 - Enhancing ecological connectivity by creating more, bigger, better and joined areas for biodiversity
- 7) **Be additional.** Achieve nature conservation outcomes that demonstrably exceed existing obligations (i.e. do not deliver something that would occur anyway).
- 8) **Create a Net Gain legacy.** Ensure Net Gain generates long-term benefits by:
 - Engaging stakeholders and jointly agreeing practical solutions that secure Net Gain in perpetuity
 - Planning for adaptive management and securing dedicated funding for long-term management
 - Designing Net Gain for biodiversity to be resilient to external factors, especially climate change
 - Mitigating risks from other land uses
 - Avoiding displacing harmful activities from one location to another
 - Supporting local-level management of Net Gain activities
- 9) **Optimise sustainability.** Prioritise Biodiversity Net Gain and, where possible, optimise the wider environmental benefits for a sustainable society and economy.
- 10) **Be transparent.** Communicate all Net Gain activities in a transparent and timely manner, sharing the learning with all stakeholders.

2 Methodology

2.1 Habitat Survey

- 2.1.1 The site was initially surveyed in April 2021 in order to ascertain the general ecological value of the land contained within the boundaries of the site and to identify the main habitats and ecological features present.
- 2.1.2 The site was surveyed based on standard Phase 1 Habitat Survey methodology³, whereby the habitat types present are identified and mapped, together with an assessment of the species composition of each habitat. The site was classified into areas of similar botanical community types, with a representative species list compiled for each habitat identified. The nomenclature used for plant species is based on the Botanical Society for the British Isles (BSBI) Checklist.
- 2.1.3 Subsequent survey were undertaken in August and November 2022 to gather further detail on habitats and species present, and assess the condition of each habitat type in accordance with the Metric 3.1 guidance (as detailed below).

2.2 Survey Constraints and Limitations

- 2.2.1 All of the species that occur in each habitat would not necessarily be detectable during survey work carried out at any given time of the year, since different species are apparent during different seasons. The initial Phase 1 habitat survey was undertaken outside the optimal season, however the site was revisited in August 2022 which is the optimal season for grassland surveys and a detailed species list was recorded. Specific condition assessments under the biodiversity metric guidance were undertaken in November 2022, such that some criteria (such as species counts) could not accurately be assessed at this time of year. For these criteria, a precautionary assessment has been taken, supported by the detailed species information gathered during the earlier August survey. Accordingly, the calculations are considered to provide a robust assessment of the likely change in biodiversity value under the proposals.

2.3 Biodiversity Net Gain Assessment

- 2.3.1 To quantify the level of biodiversity net gain that can be delivered under the proposed development, the change in biodiversity value resulting from the scheme has been calculated using the Metric 3.1 calculation tool and associated user guide⁴. This takes account of the size, distinctiveness and ecological condition of existing and proposed habitat areas to provide a proxy measure of the present and forecast biodiversity value of a site, and therefore determine the overall change in biodiversity value. These calculations are provided at Appendix 6162/1.
- 2.3.2 To establish the habitat baseline, broad habitat areas have been identified based on the survey work undertaken at the site, with habitat condition assigned based on the guidance set out in the Technical Supplement⁵ and professional judgement.

³ Joint Nature Conservation Committee (2010, as amended) 'Handbook for Phase 1 habitat survey: A technique for environmental audit.'

⁴ Natural England (May 2022) *Natural England Joint Publication JP039. Biodiversity Metric 3.1: auditing and accounting for biodiversity – User Guide.*

⁵ Natural England (May 2022) *Natural England Joint Publication JP039. The Biodiversity Metric 3.1: auditing and accounting for biodiversity – Technical Supplement.*

- 2.3.3 The post-development habitat creation and enhancement is based on the current site plan (Proposed Site Plan, April 21, Job No. 2105, Drawing No. 002 - D). A number of assumptions have been made in terms of the detailed landscaping and management proposals, based on comparative developments and what is realistic and feasible under the proposed land uses and landscape space types. Further details of assumptions made in populating the metric are provided in Chapter 4 below.

3 Habitats and Ecological Features

3.1 Overview

- 3.1.1 The site itself is dominated by semi-improved grassland bounded by a hedgerow to the east and south. Additionally, the site contains small areas of bramble scrub associated with the post and rail fence at the north, a single small area of tall ruderal vegetation to the south-east and a farm track at the south.
- 3.1.2 A full description of habitats is provided in the separate Ecological Appraisal, whilst an updated habitats plan is provided at Plan 6162/BNG1-P1. The results of the habitat condition assessment are set out at Appendix 6162/2. In summary, the grassland is considered to be other neutral grassland due to the species per m² and is assessed as being moderate condition. The small patch of tall ruderal vegetation is assessed as being in poor condition while the bramble scrub and hardstanding do not require a condition assessment.
- 3.1.3 Hedgerows were recorded to pass the majority of condition criteria and therefore are all assessed as being in good condition.

4 Post-development Habitats

4.1 Assumptions

4.1.1 When inputting the post-development habitat areas and condition to the Metric 3.1, the following assumptions have been made:

- Newly created habitat under the proposals will be managed appropriately to reach the assigned target condition (anticipated to be defined by a future management plan).
- Due to likely groundworks required, all grassland areas are assumed as being lost and recreated.
- SuDS will be planted with a suitable wetland tolerant grass mix and marginal species as appropriate.
- Areas of retained 'other neutral' grassland at the site periphery will be subject to a traditional meadow management regime, in order to maintain the presence of a minimum 9 species necessary to qualify as this habitat type.
- New tree planting has been provided as indicated by the proposals, with additional trees added where considered appropriate. The new tree planting will comprise native species.
- It is anticipated that hedgerow H2 can be fully retained under the proposals. Areas of new hedgerow planting will meet the criteria for species rich hedgerows and managed to achieve and maintain a moderate condition.

4.2 Strategic Significance

4.2.1 Strategic significance in the metric is assigned to give extra value to habitats that are located in optimal locations, or are of a type that meet local objectives for biodiversity. No strategic significance has been applied to the habitats pre or post-development of the site, given the site is not located in a specific action area and the nature of the existing habitats and proposals.

4.3 Habitat Type and Condition

4.3.1 A summary of post-development habitat creation is set out in Tables 4.1 below. Post-development habitats are shown at Plan 6162/BNG2-P1.

Table 4.1. Post-development Habitat Creation

Habitat	Target Condition	Condition Rationale
Urban – Developed Land; Sealed Surface	N/A	This includes all roads, parking and buildings within the site. No assessment for the condition of this habitat is required.
Urban – Sustainable urban drainage feature	Moderate	This habitat includes the provision of new drainage and attenuation features. Such features will include a diverse range of new planting and management suitable for this habitat, subject to

		which it is considered that at least a moderate condition will be achieved.
Urban – Vegetated garden	N/A	This includes the gardens of the proposed properties. No assessment for the condition of this habitat is required.
Grassland – Modified Grassland	Poor	Areas of amenity grassland to be created near to the built development. No invasive non-native species would be included and Bracken, scrub and physical damage to be kept to minimum. The grassland would be maintained with a short sward and likely support a low species diversity (under 6-8 species per m ²), such that it automatically qualifies as poor condition.
Grassland – Other neutral grassland	Moderate	Areas of wildflower grassland to be seeded within the grassland strip adjacent to the boundary vegetation at the east. No invasive non-native species would be included and Bracken, scrub and physical damage to be kept to minimum. With appropriate management prescriptions, it is considered that these areas of grassland will achieve at least a moderate condition.
Native species rich hedgerow	Good	Additional hedgerow planting is located on several boundary features. The hedgerow will be planted with a diverse range of native species. Subject to appropriate management, this can achieve a good condition.
Urban – Urban tree	Poor	Native tree to be planted within and adjacent to the built development, considered unlikely to exceed poor condition within 30 years.

5 Biodiversity Net Gain Assessment Results

5.1 Metric calculation

5.1.1 The data from the baseline habitat survey work and the proposed habitat enhancement and creation works have been coded into the Metric.

5.1.2 In summary, the Metric indicates that the development will result in a 19.2 (-75.37%) loss in habitat units for biodiversity. The results are broken down in Table 5.1 below:

Table 5.1 Net gain results

	Change in Units	% Change
Habitats	-19.20	-75.37%
Hedgerows	+3.15	+58.22%

5.1.3 A net gain is also recorded for linear habitats (hedgerows).

5.1.4 As stated in section 1.2.2, the Environment Act will require a 10% net gain. As shown above, the proposed development will deliver a net loss on site. Accordingly, to achieve a 10% net gain, this proposed development (with the current design) will need to provide off-site habitat measures. Table 5.2 below indicates an additional 21.76 units will need to be delivered through off-site measures to achieve the 10% net gain.

Table 5.2 Units required to achieve 10% net gain.

	Baseline units	Baseline units +10%	Post-development units	Additional units required to achieve 10% net gain
Habitats	25.48	28.03	6.27	21.76

5.2 Additional faunal benefits not captured by the Metric

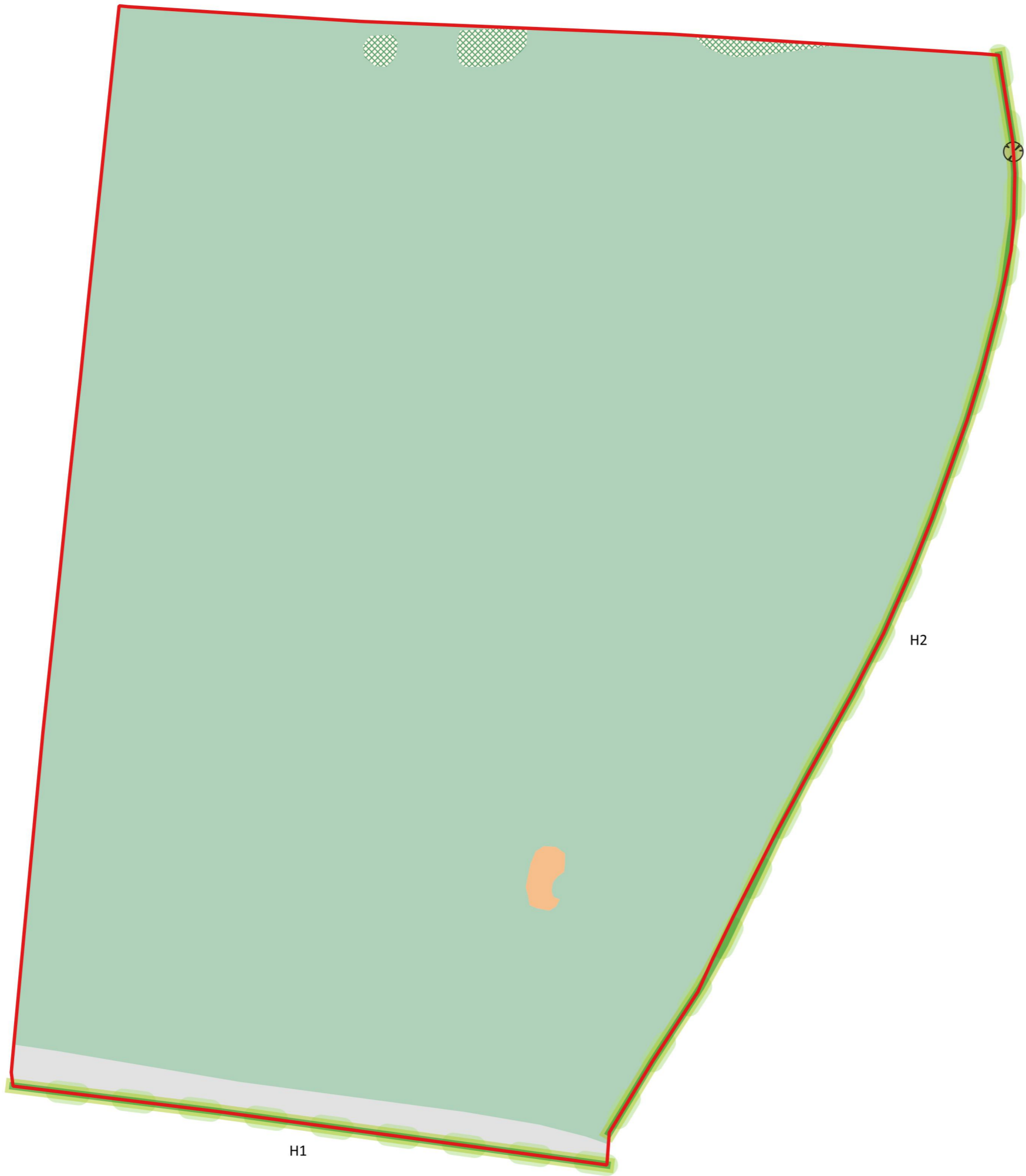
5.2.1 Further biodiversity benefits will be provided by faunal enhancements, for example through the provision of new bat and bird boxes, hedgehog domes and bee bricks (which can be secured via suitably worded planning conditions). Such faunal enhancements are not quantified under the Metric as this deals with habitats alone and does not address faunal benefits.








6 Summary and Conclusions

- 6.1.1 Aspect Ecology was commissioned by Pye Homes Blenheim Ltd in respect to ecological issues relating to land off Larsen Road, Upper Heyford, proposed for new development.
- 6.1.2 To inform the application, Aspect Ecology has undertaken a BNG assessment to determine the level of biodiversity net gain that could be achieved under the scheme, based on the Metric 3.1 calculation tool.
- 6.1.3 The metric demonstrates that a -75.37% biodiversity net loss is achieved in habitat units and a +58.22% net gain in hedgerow units. To achieve a 10% net gain in habitat units an additional 21.76 units will need to be delivered through off-site measures.

Plan 6162/BNG1-P1:

Existing Habitats



- Key:
-  Site Boundary
 -  Other Neutral Grassland (3.17ha)
 -  Developed Land; Sealed Surface (0.07ha)
 -  Bramble Scrub (0.02ha)
 -  Ruderal/Ephemeral (0.01ha)
 -  Native Hedgerow (0.34km)
 -  Existing Tree (1)

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Larson Road, Heyford Park	PROJECT
Pre-development Habitat Measurements	TITLE
6162/BNGA1-P1	DRAWING NO.
A/BG	REV
December 2022	DATE



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Plan 6162/BNG2-P1:

Post-development Habitats



- Key:
- Site Boundary
 - Developed Land; Sealed Surface (1.63ha)
 - Vegetated Garden (0.64ha)
 - Modified Grassland (0.66ha)
 - Other Neutral Grassland (0.3ha)
 - Sustainable Urban Drainage Feature (0.04ha)
 - Proposed Native Hedgerow (0.58Km)
 - Retained Native Hedgerow (0.22Km)
 - Urban Tree (145)

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Larson Road, Heyford Park	PROJECT
Post-development Habitat Measurements	TITLE
6162/BNGA2-P1	DRAWING NO.
A/BG	REV
December 2022	DATE



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Appendix 6162/1:

Habitat Condition Summary

HABITAT CONDITION ASSESSMENT MATRIX

PROJECT NAME: Land off Larsen Road, Upper Heyford

PROJECT NUMBER: 6162 P1



Habitat type/criteria		Feature Reference						
<i>Grassland (medium distinctiveness and above)</i>		P1 F1						
1	Closely matches characteristics of specific habitat type	Pass						
2	Varied sward height (>20% less than 7cm, >20% more than 7cm)	Pass						
3	Cover of bare ground between 1 and 5%	Fail						
4	Less than 20% bracken and 5% scrub	Pass						
5	Absence of Sch9 invasive species and less than 5% combined undesirable species (C Thistle, Sp Thistle, Docks, Nettle, C Buttercup, G Plantain, W Clover, Cow Parsley) or physical damage (excessive poaching, machinery use/storage etc)	Fail						
6	Non-acid grasslands only: Greater than 9 species per m2	Pass						
Condition		Moderate						
<i>Urban / Sparsely vegetated land - ruderal/ephemeral</i>		TR						
1	Varied vegetation structure providing opportunities for insects, birds and bats to live and breed. No more than 80% of area comprises a single ecotone (i.e. scrub, grassland, herbs).	Fail						
2	Diverse range of flowering plant species providing nectar sources for insects. - Above criteria satisfied by native species only.	Fail						
3	Sch9 invasive species cover less than 5% of total vegetated area. - Complete absence of Sch9 invasive species.	Pass						
4a	Open mosaic habitat on previously developed land only: Forms a mosaic of at least four early successional communities (annuals; mosses/liverworts; lichens; ruderals; inundation species; open grassland; flower-rich grassland; heathland) PLUS bare substrate PLUS pools.	N/A						
4b	Bioswale and SUDS only: Water table is at or near the surface throughout the year - forming open water or saturation of the soil at the surface.	N/A						
4c1	Intensive green roofs: Minimum of 50% native and non-native wildflowers, 70% of roof is soil and vegetation (including water features)	N/A						
4c2	Biodiverse green roofs: Varied depth of 80-150mm with at least 50% at 150mm, seeded/pre-prepared with wildflowers and sedums. - Some additional habitat such as sand piles, logs etc are present	N/A						
Condition		Poor						

Appendix 6162/2:

Metric 3.1 Results

6162 -Phase 1

Headline Results

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On-site baseline	<i>Habitat units</i>	25.48
	<i>Hedgerow units</i>	5.41
	<i>River units</i>	0.00
On-site post-intervention <small>(Including habitat retention, creation & enhancement)</small>	<i>Habitat units</i>	6.27
	<i>Hedgerow units</i>	8.56
	<i>River units</i>	0.00
On-site net % change <small>(Including habitat retention, creation & enhancement)</small>	<i>Habitat units</i>	-75.37%
	<i>Hedgerow units</i>	58.22%
	<i>River units</i>	0.00%
Off-site baseline	<i>Habitat units</i>	0.00
	<i>Hedgerow units</i>	0.00
	<i>River units</i>	0.00
Off-site post-intervention <small>(Including habitat retention, creation & enhancement)</small>	<i>Habitat units</i>	0.00
	<i>Hedgerow units</i>	0.00
	<i>River units</i>	0.00
Total net unit change <small>(including all on-site & off-site habitat retention, creation & enhancement)</small>	<i>Habitat units</i>	-19.20
	<i>Hedgerow units</i>	3.15
	<i>River units</i>	0.00
Total on-site net % change plus off-site surplus <small>(including all on-site & off-site habitat retention, creation & enhancement)</small>	<i>Habitat units</i>	-75.37%
	<i>Hedgerow units</i>	58.22%
	<i>River units</i>	0.00%
Trading rules Satisfied?	No - Check Trading Summary ▲	

0102 -Phase 1
A-1 Site Habitat Baseline

Condense / Show Columns Condense / Show Rows

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Ref	Habitats and areas			Distinctiveness	Condition	Strategic significance	Suggested action to address habitat losses	Ecological baseline
	Broad Habitat	Habitat Type	Area (hectares)					
1	Heathland and shrub	Bramble scrub	0.018	Medium	Condition Assessment N/A	Area/compensation not in local strategy/ no local strategy	Same broad habitat or a higher distinctiveness habitat required (2)	0.07
2	Urban	Developed land; sealed surface	0.074	V.Low	N/A - Other	Area/compensation not in local strategy/ no local strategy	Compensation Not Required	0.00
3	Grassland	Other neutral grassland	3.174	Medium	Moderate	Area/compensation not in local strategy/ no local strategy	Same broad habitat or a higher distinctiveness habitat required (2)	25.39
4	Sparsely vegetated land	Ruderal/Ephemeral	0.007	Low	Poor	Area/compensation not in local strategy/ no local strategy	Same distinctiveness or better habitat required ≥	0.01
5								
6								
7								
8								
9								
Total habitat area			3.27					25.48

Retention category biodiversity value						Bespoke compensation agreed for unacceptable losses	Comments	
Area retained	Area enhanced	Baseline units retained	Baseline units enhanced	Area habitat lost	Units lost		Assessor comments	Reviewer comments
0	0	0.00	0.00	0.02	0.07		dense scrub - bramble	
0	0	0.00	0.00	0.07	0.00		hardstanding	
0	0	0.00	0.00	3.17	25.39		improved grassland	
0	0	0.00	0.00	0.01	0.01		all ruderal	
0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	3.27	25.48			

Total area lost (excluding area of Urban trees and Green walls) 3.27

Broad Habitat	Proposed habitat	Area (hectares)	Distinctiveness		Condition		Strategic significance			Post development/ post intervention habitats			Temporal multiplier					Difficulty multipliers			Habitat units delivered	Comments	
			Distinctiveness	Score	Condition	Score	Strategic significance	Strategic position multiplier	Standard time to target condition/years	Habitat created in advance/years	Delay in starting habitat creation/years	Standard or adjusted time to target condition	Final time to target condition/years	Final time to target multiplier	Standard difficulty of creation	Applied difficulty multiplier	Final difficulty of creation	Difficulty multiplier applied	Assessor comments	Reviewer comments			
Urban	Developed land: sealed surface	1.633	V Low	0	N/A - Other	0	Area/compensation not in local strategy/ no local strategy	Low Strategic Significance	1	0				Standard time to target condition applied	0	1.000	Low	Standard difficulty applied	Medium	0.67	0.00	Developed land: sealed surface	
Grassland	Modified grassland	0.66	Low	2	Poor	1	Area/compensation not in local strategy/ no local strategy	Low Strategic Significance	1	1				Standard time to target condition applied	1	0.965	Low	Standard difficulty applied	Low	1	1.27	Modified grassland	
Grassland	Other neutral grassland	0.302	Medium	4	Moderate	2	Area/compensation not in local strategy/ no local strategy	Low Strategic Significance	1	5				Standard time to target condition applied	5	0.837	Low	Standard difficulty applied	Low	1	2.02	Other neutral grassland	
Urban	Sustainable urban drainage feature	0.042	Low	2	Moderate	2	Area/compensation not in local strategy/ no local strategy	Low Strategic Significance	1	3				Standard time to target condition applied	3	0.899	Medium	Standard difficulty applied	Medium	0.67	0.10	Sustainable urban drainage feature	
Urban	Vegetated garden	0.636	Low	2	Condition Assessment N/A	1	Area/compensation not in local strategy/ no local strategy	Low Strategic Significance	1	1				Standard time to target condition applied	1	0.965	Low	Standard difficulty applied	Low	1	1.23	Vegetated garden	
Urban	Urban Tree	0.59	Medium	4	Poor	1	Area/compensation not in local strategy/ no local strategy	Low Strategic Significance	1	10				Standard time to target condition applied	10	0.700	Low	Standard difficulty applied	Low	1	1.65	Urban Tree	
Total habitat area		3.66																					
Site Area (Excluding area of Urban trees and Green walls)		3.27																					
Total Units		6.67																					

B-1 Site Hedge Baseline

Condense / Show Columns

Condense / Show Rows

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Baseline ref	UK Habitats - existing habitats			Habitat distinctiveness		Habitat condition		Strategic significance			Suggested action to address habitat losses	Ecological baseline Total hedgerow units	Retention category biodiversity value						Comments	
	Hedge number	Hedgerow type	Length (km)	Distinctiveness	Score	Condition	Score	Strategic significance	Strategic significance	Strategic position multiplier			Length retained	Length enhanced	Units retained	Units enhanced	Length lost	Units lost	Assessor comments	Reviewer comments
1	H1	Native Species Rich Hedgerow	0.115	Medium	4	Good	3	Area/compensation not in local strategy/ no local strategy	Low Strategic Significance	1	Like for like or better	1.38	0		0.00	0.00	0.12	1.38		
2	H2	Native Species Rich Hedgerow - Associated with bank or ditch	0.224	High	6	Good	3	Area/compensation not in local strategy/ no local strategy	Low Strategic Significance	1	Like for like or better	4.03	0.224		4.03	0.00	0.00	0.00		
3																				
4																				
5																				
6																				
7			0.34									8.41	0.22	0.00	4.03	0.00	0.12	1.38		

B-2 Site Hedge Creation

Condense / Show Columns

Condense / Show Rows

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Instructions

Proposed habitats		Habitat distinctiveness	Habitat condition	Strategic significance		Temporal multiplier		Difficulty risk multipliers	Hedge units delivered	Comments		
Baseline ref	New hedge number	Habitat type	Length (km)	Distinctiveness	Condition	Strategic significance	Standard or adjusted time to target condition	Final time to target condition/years		Final difficulty of creation	Assessor comments	Reviewer comments
1		Native Species Rich Hedgerow	0.579	Medium	Good	Area/compensation not in local strategy/ no local strategy	Standard time to target condition applied	12	Low	4.53		
2												
3												
4												
5												
6			0.58							4.53		

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