Bracknell Forest Council

Biodiversity and Green Infrastructure Supplementary Planning Document

June 2026

Bracknell Forest Council
www.bracknell-forest.gov.uk/biogispd
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1 Introduction

1.1 Purpose

1.1.1 This Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) provides guidance on how to incorporate biodiversity and green infrastructure (GI) requirements into planning proposals within Bracknell Forest. It builds upon and provides more detailed information about the following policies in the Bracknell Forest Local Plan (BFLP) (2024):

- Policy LP 30 Green Infrastructure
- Policy LP 31 Designated nature conservation and geological sites
- Policy LP 53 Biodiversity

1.2 Status

1.2.1 Supplementary planning documents are a material consideration in the determination of planning applications and therefore should be taken into account when deciding on a planning application or an appeal against a decision.

1.2.2 The Government recently undertook a consultation to seek views on proposed reforms to the National Planning Policy Framework which closed on 10th March 2026. In 2025 the Government also carried out a consultation on Improving the implementation of biodiversity net gain for minor, medium and brownfield development and the consultation responses were published in April 2026. It is not considered that the change in approach undermines the content of this supplementary planning document.

1.2.3 This supplementary planning document should be read in conjunction with other Bracknell Forest supplementary planning documents such as:

- Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area Supplementary Planning Document
- Masterplans Supplementary Planning Document
- Streetscene Supplementary Planning Document

1.2.4 This supplementary planning document supersedes the Bracknell Forest Biodiversity Net Gain Requirements and Guidance (2025).

1.3 Scope

1.3.1 This supplementary planning document aims to:

- Guide development proposals in protecting and enhancing biodiversity and green infrastructure
- Support the delivery of Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG)

- Inform applicants of requirements at the different stages of planning permission, to achieve timely, balanced outcomes for the development, residents and the environment

It covers:

Biodiversity – sites, habitats and species

1.3.2 Biodiversity is the variety and abundance of all life, including plants, wildlife and other living things. Biodiversity is protected through a combination of legislation, policies, strategies and guidance. In planning, there is a particular focus on protecting and enhancing:

- Designated sites
- Priority and irreplaceable habitats
- Protected and priority species

Biodiversity net gain

1.3.3 Biodiversity net gain is a way to contribute to the recovery of nature while developing land. It makes sure the habitat for wildlife is in a better state than it was before development.

1.3.4 Biodiversity net gain requires development to be planned and designed in ways that minimise any loss or damage to existing habitats, to compensate for any damage caused by the development and to deliver a positive net gain in biodiversity through enhancements.

Green infrastructure

1.3.5 Green infrastructure is the network of multi-functional green space in both urban and rural locations, which is capable of delivering a wide range of environmental and quality of life benefits for local communities. It includes parks, open spaces, playing fields, woodlands, wetlands, grasslands as well as street trees, allotments and private gardens. It can also include certain built features, such as green roofs and walls, and blue infrastructure, which includes streams, canals and other water bodies.

1.4 Sustainability appraisal

1.4.1 The Local Plan policies which are referred to within this document were subject to a Sustainability Appraisal (SA) process through the Bracknell Forest Local Plan. The Inspector's report (paragraph 23) concluded that the Bracknell Forest Local Plan Sustainability Appraisal is proportionate, objective, underpinned by relevant and up to date evidence, and accords with the relevant legal requirements and national guidance. As such no further Sustainability Appraisal is required for this document.

2 Policy, legislative context and guidance

2.1 Local Plan policies

Table 1 – Local Plan policies

Document	Relevant policies	Description
Bracknell Forest Local Plan (2024)	LP 30 Green Infrastructure	The borough's green infrastructure will be protected and enhanced. Adverse impacts on green infrastructure, including fragmentation, must be proportionately addressed in accordance with the mitigation hierarchy of i. avoidance; ii. mitigation; and iii. compensation. Sets a buffer zone for main rivers and ordinary watercourses. Includes requirements concerning the culverting of watercourses.
	LP 31 Designated nature conservation and geological sites	The borough's designated sites will be safeguarded and enhanced having regard to the specific designation of the site in question. The policy covers international, national and local designations.
	LP 53 Biodiversity	The borough's biodiversity will be protected and enhanced. Adverse impacts of development on biodiversity must be proportionately addressed in accordance with the mitigation hierarchy of i. avoidance; ii. mitigation; and iii. compensation. Development in the borough will be expected to achieve a minimum 10% net gain for biodiversity. Suitable ecological information is to be provided prior to determination of an application.

2.2 National Planning Policy Framework

2.2.1 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) is a document which sets out the government's planning policies for England and how these are expected to be applied. It should be noted that national planning policy and guidance is in the process of being updated, and that Councils will be expected to take account of the most up to date versions of national policy and guidance in the determination of planning applications.

2.3 National legislative context

2.3.1 Sites, habitats, species and green infrastructure are protected by a variety of legislation and regulations. These include:

- Environment Act 2021 – established targets, tools, and requirements for nature recovery, including biodiversity net gain and Local Nature Recovery Strategies (some of which are brought in by amendments to other legislation)
- Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) - the primary mechanism for the protection of wildlife in the UK, bringing in legal protections for a variety of species including nesting birds and reptiles
- Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 (as amended) – also known as the Habitats Regulations this provides protection for European Protected Species (listed in Schedule 2), which includes bats and Great Crested Newts. The regulations also include the designation of special areas of conservation (SAC) and special protection areas (SPA) and requirements for habitats regulation assessments (HRA).
- Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) - amended by the Environment Act 2021 to create a legal provision for biodiversity net gain on applicable development.
- Planning and Infrastructure Act 2025 - enacts major reforms to speed up housing, energy, and infrastructure projects in the UK. Key measures include accelerating development and creating a Nature Restoration Fund to drive nature recovery at a larger scale than seen previously.
- The Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 – includes measures for the management and protection of Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) and strengthened wildlife enforcement legislation.
- Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 (as amended) - also known as the NERC Act and updated by the Environment Act 2021 to bring (through schedule 40) an 'enhanced biodiversity duty' on public bodies in England to conserve and enhance biodiversity. Section 40A brings in associated reporting for public authorities. Section 41 requires the Secretary of State to publish and maintain lists of species and types of habitats to be of "principal importance" for the purposes of conserving biodiversity, known as priority habitats and species.
- Hedgerows Regulations 1997 - establishes the criteria for "important" hedgerows which are to be protected. The requirements of the regulations need to be met to permit the removal of any hedgerow or hedgerow section.

- Protection of Badgers Act 1992 – provides legal protections for Badgers and their setts.
- The Water Environment Regulations 2017 - adopts the use of River Basin Management Plans (RBMPs) with a focus on monitoring, setting environmental objectives, controlling pollution, and promoting sustainable water use.

2.4 National guidance and standing advice

2.4.1 The following provides further guidance on national requirements:

- Biodiversity and geological conservation: circular 06/2005 - clarifies how legal protections for biodiversity and geodiversity should be integrated into the planning and development process. Specifically, it provides:
    - When and why ecological surveys are required.
    - The timing and nature of mitigation, compensation, and licensing within the development lifecycle.
- Protected species and development: advice for local planning authorities - Natural England (NE) provides advice for local planning authorities on assessing applications when there are protected species on or near a development site. This also includes information on when to carry out a particular survey and which habitats and species are likely to be found. The standing advice covers some irreplaceable habitats like ancient woodland and veteran trees. This advice is a material consideration in the determination of applications.
- Green Infrastructure Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) - explains key issues in implementing policy to protect and enhance the natural environment and green infrastructure, including local requirements.

2.5 Regional and local context

Berkshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy

2.5.1 In October 2025 the Berkshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy was published. Introduced under the Environment Act 2021, the Local Nature Recovery Strategy identifies local priorities for nature recovery and maps the best opportunities for habitat creation, restoration and connectivity.

2.5.2 Where land has been identified as having particular potential for habitat creation or nature recovery within the Local Nature Recovery Strategy, development proposals should seek to contribute towards these outcomes. Proposals should take suitable opportunities to connect to and strengthen ecological networks that extend beyond the site, drawing on the measures proposed by the Local Nature Recovery Strategy.

2.5.3 The Berkshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy provides the following components:

- A local habitat map
- A description of the county
- A list of priorities and measures

- A species priorities list

2.5.4 The Local Nature Recovery Strategy also supports and informs the strategic delivery of biodiversity net gain, ensuring developments contribute meaningfully to local biodiversity objectives.

Biodiversity Opportunity Areas (BOAs)

2.5.5 BOAs have been identified by Berkshire Local Nature Partnership and the Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre as areas that offer the greatest opportunities for habitat creation and restoration. There are 29 BOAs in Berkshire. Five of these fall partly within Bracknell Forest:

- 4. Blackwater Valley
- 19. Waltham Woodlands and Parklands
- 21. Chawridge Valley
- 22. Thames Basin Heaths
- 24. Windsor Great Park and Woodlands including Silwood Park

2.5.6 Further information on BOAs is available on the Berkshire Local Nature Partnership website.

Bracknell Forest Biodiversity Action Plan

2.5.7 The Bracknell Forest Biodiversity Action Plan (2024 – 2029) is a partnership plan for conserving and enhancing habitats and species of importance in the borough. It identifies core habitat types and associated species, with a series of 68 targets including monitoring key habitats and sites, improving habitats, and engaging the community through volunteering and wildlife activities.

3 Biodiversity and green infrastructure in Bracknell Forest

3.1 Protected sites

3.1.1 There are a number of protected designated sites in the borough with varying levels of protection from local to international status. Sites may have overlapping designations.

Table 2 – Overview of Protected Sites

Level	Designation	Key information and site(s) in Bracknell Forest
European	**Special protection area (SPA)** These are sites of international importance for rare and migratory birds.	**Thames Basin Heaths** – these are a network of Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) heathland sites which are designated for their ability to provide a habitat for the internationally important bird species of Woodlark, Nightjar and Dartford Warbler. Part of the Thames Basin Heaths SPA lies in Bracknell Forest – Sandhurst to Owlsmoor Bogs and Heaths SSSI and Broadmoor to Bagshot Woods and Heaths SSSI.
	Special area of conservation (SAC) SACs are sites of international importance for rare habitats and wildlife.	**Windsor Forest and Great Park** – This site is designated as a SSSI and SAC as the longest continuous tract of woodland parkland in Berkshire – part of which lies in Bracknell Forest. It provides habitat for a range of rare species of invertebrate including the internationally important Violet Click Beetle (*Limonicus wolaceus*).
National	**Site of special scientific interest (SSSI)** Notified and protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) SSSIs are sites of national importance for specific flora, fauna, geological, geomorphological or physiographical features.	There are 9 SSSIs in Bracknell Forest: • Blackwater Valley SSSI • Broadmoor to Bagshot Woods and Heaths SSSI – part of the SPA • Chawridge Bourne SSSI • Englemere Pond SSSI • Sandhurst to Owlsmoor Bogs and Heaths (Wildmoor Heath) SSSI – part of the SPA • Swinley Park and Brick Pits SSSI

Level	Designation	Key information and site(s) in Bracknell Forest
		• Wellington College Bog SSSI • Windsor Forest and Great Park SSSI – part of the SAC • Wykery Copse SSSI
Local	**Local nature reserve (LNR)** Local nature reserves are designated by local authorities under the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 in the UK. They are intended to protect sites of special local interest for wildlife, geology, or natural features, while also providing opportunities for public enjoyment, education, and community involvement.	Bracknell Forest has 10 designated Local Nature Reserves: • Farley Copse • Temple Copse • Jock's Copse • Tinker's Copse • Piggy Wood • Whitegrove Copse • Hayley Green Wood • Englemere Pond • Ambarrow Court • Edgbarrow Woods
	Local Wildlife Site (LWS) Local wildlife sites are non-statutory sites. They are designated by the local authority to identify areas of high biodiversity value.	There are currently 53 Local Wildlife Sites in Bracknell Forest, including: • Big Wood • Moor Green Lakes • Bill Hill • Shepherd Meadows • Northerhams Wood • Allsmoor Wood

3.1.2 To view the location of protected sites and other biodiversity data, see the Biodiversity and Green Infrastructure Map.

3.2 Priority and irreplaceable habitat

3.2.1 Priority habitats are habitats of principal importance for biodiversity conservation in England, as listed under Section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006. Priority habitats are ecological features as referred to in Bracknell Forest Local Plan Policy LP 53.

3.2.2 These habitats, originally identified through the UK Biodiversity Action Plan, are considered the most threatened or valuable for supporting wildlife and ecosystem services. Public bodies have a legal duty under Section 40 of the Act to consider these habitats in decision-making, and the Section 41 list guides conservation action, planning policy, and biodiversity strategies at national and local levels.

3.2.3 Section 41 habitats found in Bracknell Forest include:

- Lowland Mixed Deciduous Woodland
- Lowland Heathland
- Lowland Meadows
- Traditional Orchard

3.2.4 The borough also has a significant hedgerow resource. All hedges over 20m long with 80% or greater cover of native woody shrubs or trees are classified as 'habitats of principal importance' for biodiversity conservation. Hedgerows are also protected under the Hedgerows Regulations 1997.

3.2.5 Irreplaceable habitats are defined in the National Planning Policy Framework and through the Biodiversity Gain Requirements (Irreplaceable Habitat) Regulations 2024. These are habitats that are so unique, old, or complex that they cannot be recreated within a meaningful timeframe. Two are relevant to Bracknell Forest:

- Ancient Woodland
- Veteran Trees

3.2.6 Ancient woodland is mapped in Natural England's Ancient Woodland Inventory, which can be viewed on Magic Map. Many veteran trees are mapped on the Woodland Trust's Ancient Tree Inventory, however this may not be a complete record.

3.2.7 The National Planning Policy Framework states that development resulting in the loss or deterioration of irreplaceable habitats should be refused unless there are wholly exceptional reasons, and a suitable compensation strategy exists.

3.3 Protected and priority species

3.3.1 Species may be protected by law or may be priorities for conservation as listed under section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act or in the Bracknell Forest Biodiversity Action Plan. Protected and priority species are ecological features as referred to in Bracknell Forest Local Plan Policy LP 53.

3.3.2 Some of these are referred to as European Protected Species (EPS) and are listed under annex IV of the Habitats Directive (implemented through the Habitats Regulations). This includes (but is not limited to) species such as bats and great crested newts.

3.3.3 Badgers and their setts are protected under the Protection of Badgers Act 1992 and the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. It is an offence to kill, injure, disturb Badgers, or damage/destroy their setts even if Badgers are not present.

3.3.4 The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) provides the remaining domestic legal protection for specific plant and animal species in the UK. Offences include killing, injuring, or disturbing protected species and damaging their habitats.

3.3.5 Priority species are those listed under section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act or in the Bracknell Forest Biodiversity Action Plan. These form an important part of Bracknell Forest's local biodiversity.

3.3.6 The following protected and priority species may be found on development sites in Bracknell Forest (the list is not exhaustive):

- Bats – Common Pipistrelle, Soprano Pipistrelle and Brown Long-eared bats are most commonly identified within developments in Bracknell Forest, and the borough is home to many of the UK's bat species
- Badgers
- Great Crested Newts – GCNs use a range of terrestrial and aquatic habitat in the borough
- Nesting birds – including rare and declining species such as Swifts and Barn Owls
- Reptiles – Bracknell Forest supports the four more common reptile species (Slow Worm, Common Lizard, Grass Snake and Adder)
- Hedgehogs

3.4 Invasive non-native species

3.4.1 Schedule 9 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended) outlines non-native invasive species which a landowner is obligated to control. It is an offence to spread or cause to grow these species. Where development sites are likely to result in their spread, development may not be permitted until suitable mitigations are in place.

3.4.2 The following Schedule 9 species may be found in Bracknell Forest (the list is not exhaustive):

- Rhododendron (*Rhododendron ponticum*)
- Japanese Knotweed (*Fallopia japonica*)
- Himalayan Balsam (*Impatiens glandulifera*)
- Variegated Yellow Archangel (*Lamiastrum galeobdolon subsp. argentatum*)

3.4.3 For further information on invasive species, see the GB Non-Native Species Secretariat.

3.5 Green infrastructure

3.5.1 The Bracknell Forest Green Infrastructure Review (2017) identified that Bracknell Forest has few formal green spaces (parks and gardens) but has significant amenity green space. It has significant natural assets, including blue infrastructure; woodlands that are moderately well connected, and grasslands and heathlands that are more fragmented. There is good access to open space, especially some large areas, but it is not well connected. Productive land is dominated by forestry; there is little agriculture, and community opportunities for growing food (orchards, allotments) are few in most towns and parishes. Water and flood management can be a significant issue in some areas. There are opportunities for addressing gaps in provision and connectivity both in enhancing existing assets and in new provision as part of developments. It identified the priorities for green infrastructure in Bracknell Forest focusing on improving connectivity for wildlife and people, water and flood management and opportunities for community food production.

3.5.2 The following types of green infrastructure can be found in Bracknell Forest:

- 15 parks and gardens (formal recreation spaces) including the historic gardens of South Hill Park and Lily Hill Park.
- Approximately 1,520 assets identified as amenity green spaces, from large woodlands in rural areas, to small grasslands in urban areas.
- Approximately 5,430 natural and semi-natural green infrastructure assets however, there is a large degree of duplication as many sites have more than one designation. This includes all statutory and non-statutory designated sites, priority habitat, ancient woodland, urban woodlands and other green spaces.
- Approximately 10,555 assets identified as corridors which include rivers, ditches and streams, roads, cycle paths, Public Rights of Way, hedges, grass verges, linear green spaces and roadside nature reserves.
- Approximately 2,126 blue infrastructure assets including all waterbodies including balancing ponds, flood zones 2 and 3.
- 30 other types of green infrastructure assets which include allotments, cemeteries and churchyards.

4 Overview of the planning process

Table 3 – Biodiversity, biodiversity net gain and green infrastructure in the planning process

Stage and description	Sections for further guidance	Possible outputs / submissions
Initial design and pre-application Applicants are encouraged to seek pre-application advice and where possible, provide ecological assessments and BNG information with the pre-application submission. The more information provided to the Council at this stage, the more detailed advice can be provided in response. Consideration should be given to the ecological surveys likely to be required and the associated timing requirements so they can be planned in ahead of submission of the application.	Mitigation hierarchy Ecological assessment and surveys Overview of biodiversity net gain Biodiversity gain hierarchy Design principles for biodiversity and green infrastructure	Early plans and site layouts Preliminary Ecological Appraisal Biodiversity metric or small sites metric (where possible) Pre-application submission
Application Applications must be supported by suitable ecological information proportionate to the scale and impact of the development. Where biodiversity net gain applies, the national validation requirements must be met.	Ecological assessment and surveys Specialist mitigation schemes Biodiversity net gain national validation requirements Biodiversity net gain recommended submission of further information	Ecological Impact Assessment Specialist mitigation plans for impacts to designated sites, priority or irreplaceable habitats or protected species Biodiversity net gain report (may be in the form of a draft biodiversity gain plan).

Stage and description	Sections for further guidance	Possible outputs / submissions
Ecological Impact Assessments should include a full assessment of the impact of the development, and how the mitigation hierarchy has been considered and accounted for in the proposals.	Consideration of green infrastructure functions Mitigation for habitat losses in the borough Design principles for biodiversity and green infrastructure	Biodiversity metric or small sites metric with: • the baseline complete (essential) • post-development sections complete (recommended) UKHabs Maps: • baseline (essential) • post-development (recommended) Baseline condition assessment sheets A description of how on-site green infrastructure has been designed to provide green infrastructure functions (see table 5 below) Net loss in green infrastructure in the borough resulting from an increase in built footprint and hardstanding (see section 7.3 below)
Conditions and obligations At the point of planning permission being granted, mitigation measures and biodiversity net gain requirements will be secured by conditions and obligations (Section 106 legal agreements).	Construction mitigation Biodiversity enhancements Biodiversity net gain conditions Biodiversity net gain obligations Submission of biodiversity gain plan	Discharge of condition Discharge of obligations

Stage and description	Sections for further guidance	Possible outputs / submissions
Monitoring fees will be applied where relevant. Where further ecology or biodiversity net gain related plans are secured by condition or obligation, they must be submitted to the Council. The documents will be reviewed and approved by Bracknell Forest Council's Biodiversity team. Amendments may be requested before the plans are approved and the conditions or obligations are discharged.	Design principles for biodiversity and green infrastructure Mitigation for habitat losses in the borough	
Construction phase The construction stage is high-risk for biodiversity and is the time when direct impacts are most likely to occur.	Construction mitigation	Construction Environment Management Plan (CEMP) Involvement of an Ecological Clerk of Works Implementation of Habitat Management and Monitoring Plan (HMMP)
Operational phase, monitoring and enforcement	Biodiversity net gain monitoring Enforcement	Monitoring reports

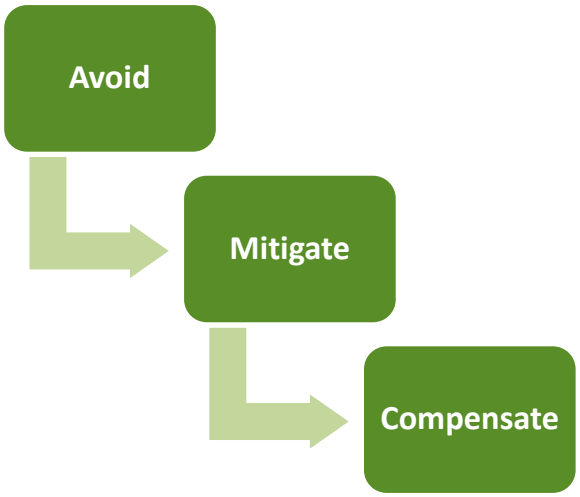
5 Biodiversity – general requirements and guidance

5.1 Mitigation hierarchy

5.1.1 The mitigation hierarchy is laid out in the National Planning Policy Framework, British Standard BS 42020:2013 Biodiversity – Code of practice for planning and development, and Local Plan Policy LP53.

5.1.2 Biodiversity should be considered as early as possible in the development design process. This will allow the mitigation hierarchy to be implemented most effectively. The mitigation hierarchy applies across all planning proposals. The hierarchy is:

Figure 1 – The Mitigation Hierarchy



5.1.3 Avoidance should be considered first, to include:

- Site selection - locating development on sites with the least biodiversity impact
- Development design – designing to avoid impacts to habitats and wildlife
- Buffer – provide buffers around sensitive habitats
- Connectivity – design development to keep habitat connections and allow wildlife to move through the site

5.1.4 Unavoidable impacts should be mitigated as far as possible, through:

- Minimising impacts – avoiding or reducing the scale and duration of impacts through sensitive working practices
- On-site habitat provision, which should include species specific mitigation such as nest boxes or hibernation features
- Habitat management, restoration or creation
- Where on-site provision is not sufficient, translocation may be acceptable for some species, but there will need to be robust ecological justification

5.1.5 As a last resort, compensation may be considered such as:

- Off-site habitat creation or enhancement, as close as possible in location and ecological function as the on-site losses

5.2 Ecological assessment and surveys

5.2.1 Ecological assessments should include a full assessment of the impact of the development, and how the mitigation hierarchy has been considered and accounted for in the proposals. The ecological assessment will need to be proportionate to the potential impacts of the development.

When an ecological assessment is required

5.2.2 An ecological assessment is likely to be required when an application includes:

- Development adjacent, close to or with the potential to impact a designated site (including Local Wildlife Site or proposed Local Wildlife Site)
- Development adjacent, close to or with the potential to impact ancient woodland, ancient trees or veteran trees
- Demolition or major alterations to the roof of a building
- Location within the amber/red risk zone for Great Crested Newts, with ponds within 500m of the site with potential to support Great Crested Newts unless it can be confirmed through a professional ecological consultant and agreement with the Council that there are site-specific circumstances which would indicate the likely absence of Great Crested Newts within a given site even if it is within 500m of a pond or within a risk zone
- Location within an area with records of protected species
- Felling of trees that may support roosting bats or be of biodiversity value in their own right
- Clearance of natural vegetation which may form important habitats or support protected or notable species
- Semi-natural and/or priority habitats (including ponds, rivers, woodland, rough grassland, heathland, parkland, hedgerows, orchards) on, adjacent to or linked to the application site which provide valuable habitat and may support protected species
- Rough grassland and vegetated previously developed sites (brownfield sites) on or adjacent to the application site which provide valuable habitat and may support protected species
- Additional lighting, particularly in rural or semi-rural areas

5.2.3 This list is not exhaustive. In some cases, it is the cumulative risk of more than one of these points which means that an ecological impact assessment and surveys are required.

5.2.4 In future an online map may be provided by Bracknell Forest Council to support decision-making regarding the need for ecological assessments and surveys. The support of a suitably qualified ecologist and/or pre-application advice should be sought if in doubt.

5.2.5 Validation of a planning application does not necessarily mean that sufficient ecological information has been submitted for determination. If the ecological information is insufficient, the Council may advise withdrawal or refuse the application.

Ecological report guidance

5.2.6 The ecological assessment report should be undertaken and report prepared in line with current guidance such as:

- Guidelines for Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (GPEA) | CIEEM
- Guidelines for Ecological Impact Assessment (EcIA) | CIEEM
- Guidelines for Ecological Report Writing | CIEEM
- BS42020:2013 Biodiversity - Code of practice for planning and development

5.2.7 In line with the Guidelines for accessing, using & sharing biodiversity data in the UK (CIEEM, 2023), a desk study, including a data search with the Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre, should be undertaken to support ecological reports.

5.2.8 Surveys must be in date in line with current best practice guidance such as the Advice note on the Lifespan of Ecological Reports and Surveys | CIEEM.

5.2.9 The Council may refute the findings of ecological reports if it has concerns that they are not robust or accurate, including because they have not been carried out by a suitably qualified ecologist.

5.2.10 The results of all necessary surveys must be provided prior to the determination of the planning application. This is because the Council needs to consider the full impact of the proposal before granting planning permission. In some cases, surveys may be secured by condition but only where these surveys update existing information provided during the planning application.

5.2.11 Based on the results of surveys, ecological mitigation requirements must also be outlined prior to determination of the planning application. Full mitigation details may be required as part of the planning application or secured by condition or obligation as appropriate to the scheme.

Degradation

5.2.12 Unauthorised degradation of on-site habitat to reduce the pre-development biodiversity value is not acceptable. For habitats, this could include cutting down trees, clearing scrub or mowing grass which would not usually be managed in that way. For protected species, this could include blocking access to a nesting site or removing habitat.

5.2.13 In ecological assessments, where degradation has taken place, the ecologist should provide an assessment of the likely impacts of the works and suggest mitigation or compensation based on what it is likely to have been in place had the removal or degradation not occurred.

5.3 Specialist mitigation schemes

Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area

5.3.1 Avoidance and mitigation of adverse effects of development on the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area is covered by the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area Supplementary Planning Document.

Licences

5.3.2 When determining planning applications, the Council needs to consider whether a proposed development is likely to impact a European Protected Species as directed by the Habitats Regulations. Where a development will impact upon a European Protected Species, a licence or derogation is required to permit activities which would otherwise be illegal.

5.3.3 Evidence must be provided with the application to demonstrate how the development meets the three tests under regulation 55 (2) and (9) of the Habitats Regulations. The local authority must be satisfied that all three tests are fully met before planning permission can be issued. The three tests are:

- The plan or project is in the overriding public interest, including for social or economic reasons;
- There is no satisfactory alternative; and
- Granting the license will not be detrimental to the favourable conservation status of the species concerned

5.3.4 Licences are also required for impacts on Badger setts.

5.3.5 Natural England is responsible for administering licenses. Licences can only be granted once planning permission is given. Protected species licenses must be in place ahead of licensable works commencing.

District licensing scheme for Great Crested Newts

5.3.6 Great Crested Newts and their habitats are protected under UK and European legislation. The Council must consider the species as part of the planning application process.

5.3.7 Where there may be impacts on Great Crested Newts, developers should obtain a licence to make the activities lawful and mitigate impacts. For developments within Bracknell Forest where there is a risk of impacting Great Crested Newts, there are 3 options available. These are:

- Joining the NatureSpace district licence scheme offered by Bracknell Forest Council
- Applying directly to Natural England for a standard mitigation licence post-planning
- A non-licensed route may be appropriate in some cases

5.3.8 Applications to use the district licence scheme must be made before or during the planning process. For further guidance see District licensing scheme for Great Crested Newts.

Other schemes

5.3.9 Where identified within an appropriate survey, it may be necessary as a last resort to arrange for the translocation of reptiles from habitat which will be rendered unviable due to development. The movement of these animals to a receptor site, and the subsequent management and monitoring of any receptor site(s) for a set period, would be secured through a Section 106 agreement. This will only be pursued where all other efforts to avoid or mitigate harm have first been exhausted.

5.3.10 The Environment Act 2021 establishes new species conservation strategies and protected site strategies. These are under development at the national level.

5.3.11 Bracknell Forest Council is exploring ways of better mitigating the impacts of development on some priority species listed within the list of species of principal importance published under Section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006.

5.3.12 The Planning and Infrastructure Act 2025 creates a Nature Restoration Fund which allows developers to pool contributions for larger environmental mitigations rather than mitigating on a site-by-site basis. The way that this money is spent is dictated through Environmental Delivery Plans. These are under development at the national level.

5.3.13 When new mitigation schemes affecting developments in Bracknell Forest are available, guidance will be provided on the Bracknell Forest Council website.

Biodiversity enhancements

5.3.14 There are many ways to support wildlife and biodiversity in developments and urban areas. This can include creating areas of habitats and managing them in a wildlife friendly way. This is typically delivered through landscaping plans and biodiversity net gain requirements. This section refers to individual features which provide a more specific habitat for wildlife. This can include nest boxes and hibernation features.

5.3.15 Biodiversity enhancements are typically required for all major schemes and minor schemes which need an ecological assessment.

5.3.16 Biodiversity enhancements are secured by condition. A scaled approach is taken to applying conditions, typically:

- developments of 2 dwellings or fewer, or a small non-residential development of less than 200sqm will be required to submit an enhancement plan before starting work, which must be approved and complied with
- developments of 3 to 10 dwellings or larger non-residential developments between 200sqm – 1,000sqm will be required to submit an enhancement plan before starting work and an inspection report following installation

- developments of more than 10 dwellings or over 1,000sqm will be required to submit an enhancement plan before starting work, including details of information to be provided to homeowners, and an inspection report following installation

5.3.17 Alternatively, enhancement plans can be submitted with the planning application. If suitable and approved with the planning permission, this removes the need to supply a further plan by condition. An inspection report may still be required by condition.

5.3.18 Inspection reports should include a plan showing locations where features have been installed and photographic evidence of the features in place. This includes hedgehog gaps provided in fencing.

5.3.19 For further guidance see: Biodiversity enhancements for developments.

5.4 Construction mitigation

5.4.1 The construction stage is high-risk for biodiversity, and many developments will need to implement measures to avoid and minimise impacts from construction on biodiversity.

5.4.2 Where sufficient and clear measures have been specified by a suitably qualified ecologist at planning application stage, adherence to these measures will be secured by condition, with no further information required.

5.4.3 In other cases, a Construction Environment Management Plan may be secured by condition. Ecology considerations may be combined into one condition with other construction matters such as highways matters, or a specific Construction Environment Management Plan for biodiversity may be secured.

5.4.4 Typical construction-phase measures include:

- Timing of work
    - Avoiding disturbance during sensitive periods such as hibernation or breeding seasons
- Toolbox talks and biodiversity champions
    - All those working on-site should be aware of biodiversity protections and who they should contact if wildlife is encountered during works
- Habitat protection:
    - Avoid unnecessary vegetation clearance
    - Fence off retained habitats including root protection areas and allow buffer zones around important areas for wildlife and trees. This is particularly important where habitats are listed for retention or enhancement under biodiversity net gain.
- Species safeguards:
    - Follow requirements of mitigation plans or licencing
    - Avoid work during nesting bird season unless surveys confirm absence

    - Allow escape ramps in trenches for mammals and amphibians.
- Pollution and disturbance control:
    - Manage noise, lighting, and dust
    - Prevent contamination of watercourses
    - Safe storage of materials, chemicals and fuels
- Biosecurity:
    - Prevent spread of invasive species via soil and machinery management
    - Remove and dispose of invasive plants appropriately

5.4.5 Dependent on the scale of the development and recommendations received during the planning process, an Ecological Clerk of Works (ECoW) or similar professional may be required to:

- Monitor biodiversity measures during construction
- Stop works if there is risk of harm to protected species or habitats
- Ensure adaptive management if unexpected impacts occur

5.4.6 Approved plans should be shared with those working on-site and adhered to at all times.

6 Biodiversity net gain

6.1 Overview of biodiversity net gain

6.1.1 Biodiversity net gain applies in addition to existing ecological requirements, such as protection for designated sites and certain species. Biodiversity net gain focuses on habitats as a guide for biodiversity, measured in biodiversity units. Each parcel of habitat will provide a number of units, based on things like its type, condition and location. Biodiversity net gain is based on the calculation of biodiversity value using a standardised methodology (the biodiversity metric).

6.1.2 The general biodiversity gain condition applies to every planning permission granted for the development of land in England (unless exemptions apply). The biodiversity gain objective is for development to deliver at least a 10% increase in biodiversity value relative to the pre-development biodiversity value of the on-site habitat. This objective is a minimum standard; therefore developments are encouraged to exceed the 10% minimum biodiversity net gain requirement where feasible and aligned with wider national policy on biodiversity net gain requirements.

6.1.3 A net gain can be achieved by creating and enhancing habitats on the development site, delivering or purchasing units off-site or by purchasing statutory credits. Developments should demonstrate how they have maximised on-site gain (in line with the biodiversity gain hierarchy) before relying on off-site units and / or credits.

6.1.4 Prior to determination of the application, the Council must consider whether the general biodiversity gain condition is capable of being successfully discharged. The information required to enable the Council to do this is outlined in this document.

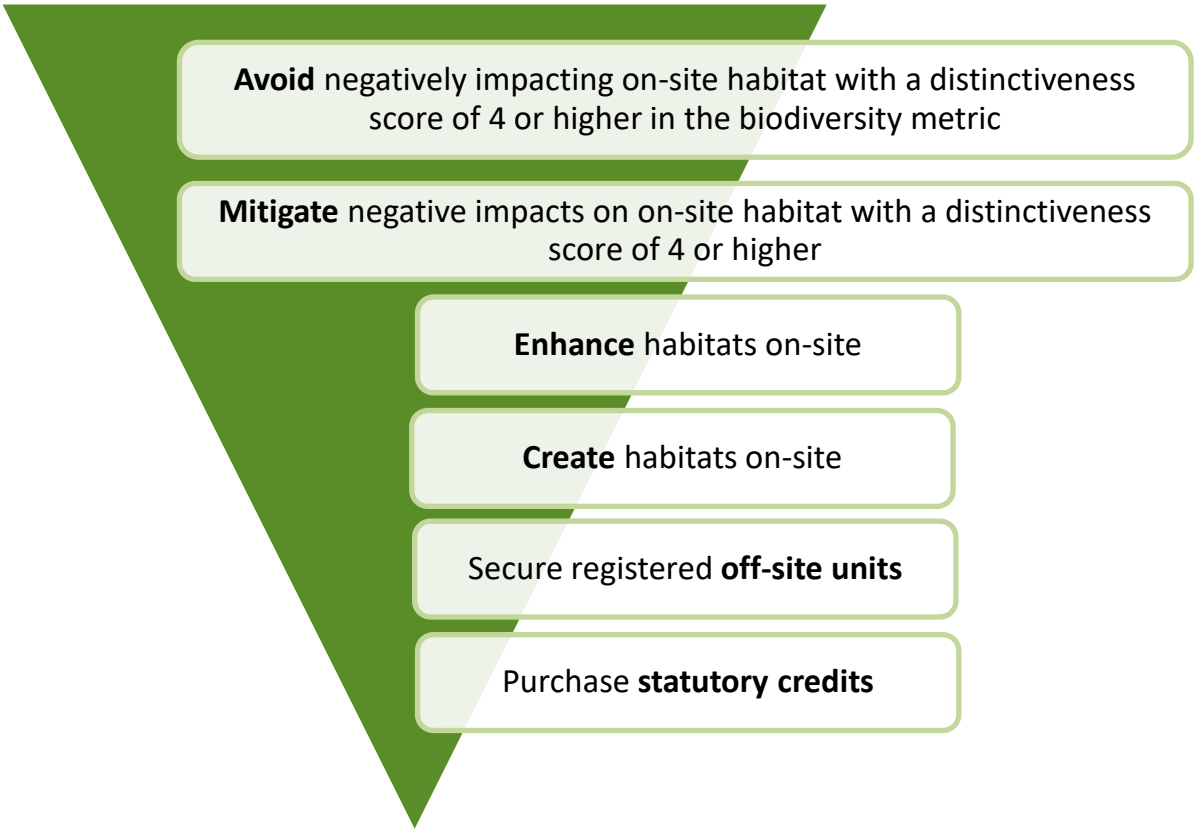
6.1.5 Further information can be found on the Government website Biodiversity net gain. The Future Homes Hub has a useful Biodiversity Net Gain Process Flow Diagram. This provides guidance on the steps required to implement biodiversity net gain on residential projects and outlines information requirements at each stage.

6.1.6 Where this guidance conflicts with expected updates in legislation and national policy in 2026 and beyond, legislation and national policy will take precedence. The supplementary planning document should be read in conjunction with these updates.

6.2 Biodiversity gain hierarchy

6.2.1 In order to deliver a biodiversity net gain of at least 10%, the biodiversity gain hierarchy must be followed in accordance with national guidance.

Figure 2 – The Biodiversity Gain Hierarchy



6.2.2 It is important to consider this hierarchy from the earliest stage possible - from selecting a site and considering development proposals to designing the development.

6.2.3 Consideration of biodiversity net gain at the site selection stage or early in the site design process will help deliver a high-quality development scheme and minimise costs by reducing the need to provide replacement habitats. This should allow for a more economically viable scheme to be developed. Consideration should be taken of what you can count towards a development's biodiversity net gain.

6.3 Measuring biodiversity for biodiversity net gain

Statutory and small sites metrics

6.3.1 Biodiversity units before and after development are calculated using the statutory biodiversity metric.

6.3.2 When submitted to the Council the complete metric must be provided in its original format with the supporting condition assessment sheets. It must have been completed by a competent person, following the rules and guidance in the Statutory Biodiversity Metric User Guide.

6.3.3 Small sites can use a simplified version of the metric, called the small sites metric (SSM). If the SSM is used, an ecologist is not required. There are restrictions on when the

small sites metric can be used, as laid out in government guidance on the biodiversity metrics.

Strategic significance

6.3.4 The Berkshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy was published on 7 October 2025 and provides the framework for applying strategic significance.

6.3.5 For applications validated before 7 October 2025, strategic significance values already applied to baseline habitats in the metric do not need to be adjusted. Post-development values should reflect the Local Nature Recovery Strategy as described below. For applications validated from this date, baseline habitats must be given Low strategic significance.

6.3.6 Post development habitats can be given High strategic significance if they meet the Local Nature Recovery Strategy requirements, otherwise they should remain as Low. Medium strategic significance can no longer be applied.

6.3.7 To apply high strategic significance, refer to the 'Potential Measures Layers' in the Berkshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy Local Habitat Map. High strategic significance can be applied where a measure (action) is being delivered within an area specifically mapped for that measure. High strategic significance can only be applied in the mapped area. Land parcels may need to be divided up by these boundaries and significance applied accordingly.

Spatial risk

6.3.8 The spatial risk multiplier in the biodiversity metric means that fewer biodiversity units need to be purchased if they lie within Bracknell Forest or the National Character Area (NCA) of the development. Bracknell Forest lies within two NCAs:

- Thames Valley (115)
- Thames Basin Heaths (129)

Degradation

6.3.9 There are special provisions for the calculation of the pre-development biodiversity value of on-site habitat when loss or impact to habitats has occurred prior to the submission of a planning application and Biodiversity Gain Plan. This is to discourage the deliberate degradation of existing on-site habitats to reduce the pre-development biodiversity value.

Irreplaceable habitats

6.3.10 Irreplaceable habitats are technically very difficult to recreate once destroyed (or recreation would take a significant amount of time). There are specific provisions for the treatment of irreplaceable habitats within the statutory framework for biodiversity net gain. Irreplaceable habitats must be recorded within the biodiversity metric. See Biodiversity net gain and irreplaceable habitats.

6.4 Biodiversity net gain national validation requirements

6.4.1 Planning applications must be accompanied by minimum information set out in Article 7 of The Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015. Planning application forms must be completed to show that this information has been provided. Where the details have been provided in accompanying documents, applicants are encouraged to refer to these rather than duplicate this information within the application form. If this information has not been provided, the local planning authority must refuse to validate the application.

6.4.2 A number of exemptions are applicable to biodiversity net gain. If applicants believe that their proposed development is exempt, a statement must be provided on the planning application form setting out why this is the case. Exemption claims should be supported by evidence, and the Council may request further information if it is not clear whether the exemption applies.

6.4.3 If not exempt, the application must be accompanied by information set out in the national validation requirements.

6.5 Recommended submission of further biodiversity net gain information

6.5.1 Providing clear information at the application stage on how biodiversity net gain will be achieved helps applicants plan effectively, avoid delays, and enables the Council to confirm that the requirement can be met. It is recommended that the following information is submitted with the planning application. Details can be submitted in a draft biodiversity gain plan.

Table 4 – Recommended submission of further biodiversity net gain information

Biodiversity net gain information recommended to accompany a planning application	Explanation / Notes
Post-development plans for on-site biodiversity net gain	This should include: • UKHab maps. • Statutory biodiversity metric calculations showing the biodiversity value post-development. Where there are significant on-site biodiversity enhancements:

Biodiversity net gain information recommended to accompany a planning application	Explanation / Notes
	• A draft habitat management and monitoring plan (HMMP), preferably using the template suggested by Natural England, which sets out the proposals for long term maintenance of habitats to be secured through planning condition or planning obligation. It should be stated whether there is an excess of on-site biodiversity units that intend to be used for other developments or sold to the market.
Post-development plans for securing registered off-site units (anything outside the red line boundary, even if the land is within the same ownership).	This should include: • Proposals for how the need for off-site biodiversity units will be met. • Draft statutory biodiversity metric calculations.
Justification for using off-site units	With reference to the biodiversity gain hierarchy.
Justification for using statutory credits	With reference to the biodiversity gain hierarchy.
Bespoke mitigation plans	If development affects irreplaceable habitats or if the bespoke compensation option is to be agreed for high or very high distinctiveness habitats these must be agreed with the Council in addition to the biodiversity gain plan. It is strongly recommended to discuss this with the Council at pre-application or application stage.

6.6 Biodiversity net gain conditions

General biodiversity gain condition

6.6.1 The general biodiversity gain condition is deemed to apply to every planning permission granted for the development of land in England (unless exemptions apply). The condition is that the development may not begin unless:

a. a biodiversity gain plan has been submitted to the planning authority and

b. the planning authority has approved the plan

6.6.2 This condition cannot be removed or amended. The gain plan will provide full details of how at least 10% biodiversity net gain will be achieved for the development. It is a pre-commencement condition.

Other conditions

6.6.3 Further conditions are likely to be required (unless exemptions apply) such as for the submission, implementation, completion and monitoring of a Habitat Management and Monitoring Plan.

6.7 Biodiversity net gain obligations

6.7.1 Obligations will be secured by a Section 106 agreement. These obligations are likely to be required for sites with significant on-site biodiversity gains or where off-site units are being delivered.

6.7.2 Only off-site gains and significant on-site gains need to be secured for a minimum of 30 years. What counts as significant depends on the circumstances of each development. It is likely that where all the on-site habitats being created or enhanced are small, of a low distinctiveness and predominantly deliver amenity benefits (such as ornamental planting, mown grass verges and simple gardens) they will not be viewed as significant. The biodiversity value of these habitats will still be counted within the biodiversity metric but will not be secured for the minimum 30 years. They will be secured via landscaping plans.

6.7.3 Depending on the nature of the application, obligations concerning the following may be secured:

- Agreement of completion of habitat works - the applicant will be required to inform the Council that the initial habitat works have been completed and for the Council to agree that it is satisfied that such works have been undertaken in accordance with the Habitat Management and Monitoring Plan. This is when the minimum 30 years maintenance and monitoring period begins.
- Maintenance throughout the minimum 30 years from completion of habitat works - the developer will be required to manage the habitats to reach the target habitat type and condition in line with the Habitat Management and Monitoring Plan over the minimum 30 years.
- Monitoring - there will be an obligation to monitor the habitats in line with the Habitat Management and Monitoring Plan for at least 30 years. Monitoring reports will need to be submitted to the Council at agreed intervals. It is recommended that the Natural England Monitoring Plan Template be used to report progress updates on the delivery of the agreed Habitat Management and Monitoring Plan.
- Monitoring fee - a monitoring fee will be required to cover the costs of reviewing monitoring reports and any subsequent work needed to be undertaken by the Council. These fees and charges may be amended from time to time.

6.8 Providing off-site biodiversity units

6.8.1 Developers can provide off-site units for their own or other developments. Any land outside the red-line boundary, including land within the blue line boundary, is considered 'off-site' within the biodiversity net gain system and is known as a habitat bank.

6.8.2 Guidance to developers needing to secure off-site units is set out in make off-site biodiversity gains as a developer. A legal agreement (S106 agreement or conservation covenant) must be in place to secure off-site habitat enhancements and the units must be registered by the provider on the biodiversity gain sites register.

6.8.3 Multiple credits or units from different nature markets may be used or sold separately from the same activity on a piece of land. This is known as stacking. Furthermore, Natural England has issued advice on delivering biodiversity net gain on Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspaces (SANGs).

6.8.4 The Council is a designated Responsible Body and therefore has the power to set up conservation covenant agreements with landowners in England. This does not need to be part of a planning application. Land managers considering providing biodiversity units on sites in the borough are advised to contact the Council at biodiversity@bracknell-forest.gov.uk to discuss this. The Council will assess a habitat bank proposal and agree a s106 legal agreement or conservation covenant with the landowner, if suitable.

6.8.5 Natural England is responsible for the biodiversity gain sites register. It can take Natural England 6 weeks or more to respond to a request to register a biodiversity gain site. See what land managers have to do for further information.

Purchasing off-site biodiversity units from a habitat bank

6.8.6 If a developer needs to purchase off-site biodiversity units from a habitat bank to meet their mandatory 10% net gain requirement, this involves purchasing created or restored habitat value from landowners who are registered habitat bank providers. Biodiversity units can be purchased from any habitat bank in England as long as it has the right types of units available to mitigate a specific development and these can be seen on the national gain sites register.

6.8.7 The Council has set up its own habitat banks in the borough. Once registered, these will appear on the national gain sites register. Developers should contact the Council at biodiversity@bracknell-forest.gov.uk if they are interested in purchasing units. The cost per biodiversity unit is based on an average cost across several biodiversity gain sites in the borough, considering the requirement to manage them for 30 years. Indexation may be applied. Biodiversity net gain monitoring fees are set separately.

6.8.8 The spatial risk multiplier in the biodiversity metric affects the number of biodiversity units that are required to be purchased. It generally means that fewer biodiversity units are required to be purchased if the habitat is located near to the development site.

Purchasing statutory biodiversity credits

6.8.9 The biodiversity credits scheme allows the government to sell biodiversity credits to developers if the required biodiversity net gains cannot be achieved on-site or through the off-site market. These credits will be invested in habitat creation at sites across the country.

6.8.10 The use of these credits should be a last resort. It should be noted that where fewer than 0.25 units are required, statutory credits can be purchased without having to show evidence that insufficient off-site options are available - see statutory biodiversity credits. The price of statutory biodiversity credits are set higher than prices for equivalent biodiversity units on the market and it is necessary to purchase two statutory credits for every one biodiversity unit that needs to be compensated for.

6.9 Submission of biodiversity gain plan

6.9.1 The final biodiversity gain plan, preferably using Defra's template, must be submitted and approved by the Council (discharging the general biodiversity gain condition) before the commencement of development. Applications for phased developments will need to be supported by an overall biodiversity gain plan and a phase biodiversity gain plan. If Defra's template is not used the applicant must provide all the information required under paragraph 14(2) of Schedule 7A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990. See Environment Act 2021.

6.9.2 Proof of purchase or provision of registered biodiversity units as well as proof of purchase of national credits (if relevant) must be provided in the biodiversity gain plan, at discharge of condition stage.

6.10 Biodiversity net gain monitoring

6.10.1 Monitoring is a core component of biodiversity net gain. Assessing the condition of both on-site and off-site habitats allows the developer and the Council to ensure compliance with a biodiversity net gain scheme.

6.10.2 For sites with significant on-site gains, a monitoring schedule must be laid out in the Habitat Management and Monitoring Plan. The schedule must:

- Be appropriate to the scope of the work and the habitat being monitored
- Outline the frequency of surveys for each habitat
- Identify the reporting format and evidence requirements

6.10.3 Natural England guidance generally suggests having a period of early-stage monitoring such as years 1, 3 and 5 followed by long-term checks at regular 5-year intervals. This is designed to capture important milestones in the development of new habitats. This may not be appropriate for all habitat types which mature at different speeds.

6.10.4 The monitoring reports must be provided at agreed intervals and include:

- Updated metric calculations

- Photographic evidence and GIS mapping
- Details of management actions undertaken

6.10.5 Monitoring reports should build on habitat specific condition criteria and the Habitat Management and Monitoring Plan should be used to establish trigger-based reviews and adaptive management approaches where outcomes fall short of targets.

6.10.6 The Council will secure a monitoring fee as an obligation through a Section 106 agreement. These are set out on the Council's website at Section 106 agreements.

6.10.7 The monitoring fee covers the costs for the Council of:

- Reviewing the monitoring reports
- Undertaking any necessary site visits
- Taking any compliance actions required

7 Green infrastructure

7.1 Overview

7.1.1 Bracknell Forest Local Plan Policy LP 30 Green Infrastructure states 'Where the need for development has been demonstrated and adverse impacts on green infrastructure are identified, including fragmentation, they must be proportionately addressed in accordance with the mitigation hierarchy of:

i. Avoidance;

ii. Mitigation;

iii. Compensation'

7.1.2 'Avoidance' must be fully considered first before moving through the hierarchy. For example, this may mean designing the site to avoid impacts on existing footpaths, habitats and green spaces. The protection and provision of green infrastructure should be built into proposals at an early stage of the design process, particularly on larger sites where proposals should demonstrate how green infrastructure assets are to be incorporated.

7.1.3 The Biodiversity and Green Infrastructure Map shows the green infrastructure assets identified in Bracknell Forest in the 2017 review and helps to identify existing deficits and opportunities within the Bracknell Forest green infrastructure network. Developers should use this map to help meet green infrastructure requirements. The map is not exhaustive and not intended to be prescriptive but shows where some existing green infrastructure and green infrastructure opportunity areas have been identified and can be used as a guide to support decisions on where green infrastructure connections could be made within a wider landscape context.

7.2 Consideration of green infrastructure functions

7.2.1 Bracknell Forest Local Plan Policy LP 30 states 'Where new or improved green infrastructure is proposed, the maximum benefit should be achieved by designing it to serve a variety of functions.' Table 5 will assist in these considerations, in particular for major schemes where on-site green infrastructure provision may be more extensive. It is recommended that a description of how the on-site green infrastructure has been designed to provide some or all of these functions is submitted to support a planning application.

Table 5 – Green infrastructure function considerations

Functions of GI	Possible design and delivery
Access & recreation	Provision of accessible green space, parks and gardens including sports and play and new links to the existing public access networks.
Wildlife habitat and connectivity	Space is allowed on-site for habitats for wildlife. Designing layout so vegetated land spans the site in an unbroken corridor (or where broken, gaps/tunnels are provided) and, where possible, green spaces link together off-site habitat features.
Landscape and visual amenity	Green infrastructure will be appropriately managed for landscape and visual amenity through a landscape management plan.
Water management	Surface-level, vegetated Sustainable Drainage Systems (SUDS) used to manage runoff and water quality.
Cooling and shading	Space is allowed on-site for features such as trees, woodlands, hedgerows, landscaped areas, green roofs and walls, ponds, streams, and other blue infrastructure.
Resilience to climate change impacts	Firebreaks are included in design and water and/or wildfire friendly planting is chosen in areas at high risk from wildfires.
Community cohesion and opportunities for growing	Space is allowed on-site for features such as allotments, community gardens, community orchards.

7.2.2 Development should not fragment green infrastructure assets or create barriers to the movement of people, biodiversity and water through green infrastructure.

7.2.3 In some cases where the Council considers that green infrastructure function has not been adequately addressed, this may result in the site having to be redesigned or a refusal of planning permission.

7.3 Financial mitigation for habitat losses in the borough

7.3.1 The impact of development on some types of green infrastructure is mitigated through several non-strategic Local Plan policies including LP 44 ‘Community Facilities’, LP 45 ‘Play, open space and sports provision’, LP 46 ‘Standards for Open Space of Public Value’, LP 54 ‘Protection and enhancement of trees and hedgerows’ and LP 57 ‘Sustainable Drainage Systems’.

7.3.2 This section seeks to protect against the incremental loss of habitats in the borough in accordance with Local Plan Policy LP 30. Mitigation measures are required to prevent consistent and systematic loss of habitats (as an important element of green infrastructure) in the borough. This can be through the loss of habitats on sites which are not subject to biodiversity net gain or through developments providing mitigation for biodiversity net gain outside of the borough.

7.3.3 To protect the borough's green infrastructure, where there is loss of habitat in the borough as a result of development, mitigation to the equivalent of no net loss will be provided otherwise there will be a local plan policy objection to the scheme. This will not apply to householder applications but will apply to other planning applications including retrospective applications and applications for a change of use of land.

Developments with a statutory biodiversity metric

7.3.4 For developments which provide a statutory biodiversity metric that shows a net loss of biodiversity on-site or where it is unknown that there will be a loss on-site, there will be an objection based on Policy LP30 due to a strategic loss of green infrastructure in the borough. In that instance the Council will require a financial contribution to mitigate the loss of local green infrastructure. The cost will be based on the biodiversity unit loss multiplied by £25,000, which is the assessed strategic cost of replacing and maintaining a range of habitats in Bracknell Forest. To ensure there is no double counting, a formula mechanism will be included in a s106 obligation where the amount to be paid will become £0 in the event the required biodiversity units are purchased from registered habitat banks in Bracknell Forest Borough or provided within the wider development site (within the blue line) as secured by a s106 Agreement. Another option is for the developer to purchase land in the borough and upgrade this in terms of its green infrastructure including providing contractual guarantees on its future protection and maintenance normally for the lifetime of the development.

Developments without a statutory biodiversity metric

7.3.5 Unless otherwise agreed with the Council, for developments which do not provide a statutory biodiversity metric, the net loss of green infrastructure in the borough will be calculated on the increase in built footprint and hardstanding on a development site. A measurement will need to be taken from the submitted plans. A measure should be provided by the applicant and will be checked by the Council. Where this is not provided, it will be based on the professional judgement of the case officer.

7.3.6 For each hectare (pro rata) increase in built footprint and hardstanding resulting in a net loss of green infrastructure in the borough, a financial contribution for green infrastructure compensation of £75,000 will be applied. This contribution has been derived from an average cost of replacing and maintaining a range of habitats in Bracknell Forest. Please note this is a per hectare figure compared to a per unit figure used above. Biodiversity units do not equate to hectares. All on-site provision of green infrastructure including green roofs and walls will be factored into the compensation scheme and will likely result in a discount or removal of the contribution depending on the scale of the provision.

Small net losses of green infrastructure in the borough

7.3.7 For increases in built footprint and hardstanding resulting in a net loss of green infrastructure in the borough between 25sqm (0.0025ha) and 330sqm (0.033ha) a flat rate of £2,500 will be applied. This standard amount is to dis-incentivise small incremental losses of green infrastructure. Where a garden is being extended into a public amenity area this will be considered to be a loss of green infrastructure and treated the same way as a precaution. Developments with an increase in built footprint and hardstanding resulting in a net loss of green infrastructure of less than 25sqm will be exempt from paying a green infrastructure contribution. In the instance that a site can deliver the development needs and on-site green infrastructure improvements, such as applications for new parking spaces where trees can be planted in residual land outside of the parking spaces, the Council will accept this provision in lieu of the green infrastructure contribution. This is on the basis that the green infrastructure improvements are considered as adequate mitigation and that there are guarantees over their future maintenance. The Council will not accept mitigation in private gardens as they cannot be effectively enforced.

Retrospective applications

7.3.8 For retrospective applications the applicant may submit a statutory biodiversity metric, or a calculation of the net loss in green infrastructure as a result of an increase in built footprint and hardstanding post-development. Through either of these methods the applicant will be required to demonstrate whether the development led to a net loss of green infrastructure in the borough. This will be checked and agreed with the Council. Where this is not provided, it will be based on the professional judgement of the case officer. Where there is a net loss of green infrastructure in the borough, the development is required to pay a financial contribution, as described above, towards off-site green infrastructure projects including their on-going maintenance within Bracknell Forest Borough. As an alternative, a retrospective development can provide for the loss of green infrastructure through providing further green infrastructure within the wider development site (within the blue line) as secured by a s106 Agreement. Another option is for the developer to purchase land in the Borough and upgrade this in terms of its green infrastructure including providing contractual guarantees on its future protection and maintenance normally for the lifetime of the development.

Securing the mitigation

7.3.9 All contributions may be timed or phased as a matter of negotiation on a case-by-case basis. The Council may use discretion to remove the fee for development proposals with extremely small impacts on green infrastructure. The Council will ensure that all contributions are fully justified on a case-by-case basis in line with the tests for s106 obligation in the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Regulation 122 and will provide a CIL Regulation 122 Compliance Statement as evidence at any relevant appeal. In some cases, it may be acceptable for mitigation to be secured through a unilateral undertaking rather than a s106 agreement as appropriate. The mitigation required is summarised in Table 6 below:

Table 6 – Overview of mitigation required for a net loss of habitat in the borough

Type of application / development	Impact	Requirement for compensation	Caveats / mitigating circumstances
Householder	Not applicable	None	None
Developments exempt from biodiversity net gain and no metric has been provided Or Retrospective applications which do not provide a metric calculation	<25sqm net loss of green infrastructure in the borough as a result of increase in built footprint and hardstanding	None	None
	25-330sqm net loss of green infrastructure in the borough as a result of increase in built footprint and hardstanding	£2,500	Compensation contribution may be reduced or removed where acceptable green infrastructure is secured within the borough (eg. tree planting, green walls etc.)
	>330sqm net loss of green infrastructure in the borough as a result of increase in built footprint and hardstanding	£75,000 per hectare pro rata net loss of green infrastructure in the borough as a result of increase in built footprint and hardstanding	
Developments not exempt from biodiversity net gain and a metric has been provided	As measured by metric	£25,000 per unit pro rata for loss of units up to no net loss of green infrastructure in the borough	Where units required for no net loss are secured for the application on-site or off-site in the borough ahead of commencement (as shown in the Biodiversity Gain Plan), the compensation figure will no longer be required
Retrospective applications which	As measured by metric	£25,000 per unit pro rata for loss of units up	Where units required for no net loss are secured

Type of application / development	Impact	Requirement for compensation	Caveats / mitigating circumstances
provide a metric calculation		to no net loss in the borough	for the application on-site or off-site in the borough, as agreed with the Council, the compensation figure will no longer be required

7.4 Watercourses and culverting

7.4.1 Bracknell Forest Local Plan Policy LP 30 states that 'where development is proposed adjacent to a main river or an ordinary watercourse a minimum 8 metre wide undeveloped buffer zone should be created or retained between the top of the river bank and the development. A long-term landscape and ecological management plan will be required for this buffer'. Culverting will only be accepted if there is no other means of access and opportunities should be taken to de-culvert where possible.

7.5 Spending financial contributions on green infrastructure

7.5.1 Financial contributions received for green infrastructure losses will be used by the Council to create or enhance green infrastructure elsewhere in the borough including the purchase of land where necessary and to maintain these assets. Consideration will be given to areas which have the poorest access to green infrastructure. This may be implemented through topic plans to enhance or create specific types of green infrastructure across the borough and its ongoing maintenance. Expenditure will be applied to works, administration and maintenance. This will be secured by obligation through a Section 106 agreement.

7.5.2 The Council is required to complete an Annual Infrastructure Funding Statement which will set out green infrastructure contributions secured through s106 agreements and the amount spent each year.

8 Design principles for biodiversity and green infrastructure

8.1 Mitigation and biodiversity gain hierarchies

8.1.1 Developments required to deliver biodiversity net gain must follow the biodiversity gain hierarchy in line with the latest national guidance.

8.1.2 Even where biodiversity net gain is not a requirement, avoiding negative impacts to existing habitats, and the enhancement and creation of habitat on-site should be built into the design of the development.

8.2 Landscape and planting plans

8.2.1 Landscape and planting plans should ensure that design responds appropriately to the site's constraints and opportunities. Species selection should maximise value for wildlife and must be suited to the surrounding land use. Considerations should include:

- Prioritising native species of local provenance, especially for schemes in rural or semi-rural areas
- Selecting species which reflect and are suited to the local landscape character, soil and geology. See Bracknell Forest Borough Landscape Character Assessment 2015
- Selecting plants identified as good for wildlife such as bats and pollinators where the amenity value of ornamental species is required
- Using large and long-lived species in tree planting schemes wherever space allows
- Using hedges in preference to hard landscaping such as fences and walls
- Setting thorny species well back from next to play areas, footways and cycle paths
- Avoiding species which are known to be problematic in the area and are likely to spread into woodlands and green spaces. The London Invasive Species Initiative – Species of Concern provides a useful list, which includes the following:
    - Snowberry *Symphoricarpos albus*
    - Buddleia *Buddleja davidii*
    - Cherry Laurel *Prunus laurocerasus*
    - False-acacia *Robinia pseudoacacia*
    - Spanish Bluebell *Hyacinthoides hispanica & H. x massartiana*
- Selecting species that are climate resilient in anticipation of changes in our climate in the coming decades. This should include tree species and plants that can withstand extreme heat events and are drought tolerant. In areas around the borough at risk from flooding, development should opt for species that can mitigate and withstand prolonged flooding and in areas at risk from wildfire, opt for species that are fire resistant.

- Housing facing onto areas of existing woodland and main rivers, with appropriate buffer zones
- Allowing sufficient space so that the planting can function as intended, be appropriately managed, and grow healthily and reach maturity without conflicting with buildings, highways and other infrastructure
- For larger developments, designing the layout and landscaping so that large growing trees are integrated into areas of open space, rather than being incorporated into private gardens.
- Ensuring that trees do not unduly overhang gardens and, as a general rule, no more than one third of a garden's total useable area (excluding drives and outbuildings etc.) are beneath tree canopy within the lifetime of the development. This is to avoid future pressure to prune or remove trees.

8.2.2 For developments subject to biodiversity net gain requirements, the landscape or planting plan will need to align with the biodiversity gain plan and the Habitat Management and Monitoring Plan. For example, if the biodiversity net gain plans show a native hedgerow is to be planted, the landscaping plans will need to show this hedgerow and only include native species in the planting list.

8.3 Habitat connectivity

8.3.1 Green spaces should be designed within the layout of developments to form a connected network, joining up habitats within the site and with the wider landscape. Boundaries should allow the movement of wildlife. Where close-board fencing is required, gaps must be included to allow wildlife such as Hedgehogs to move between gardens.

8.4 Lighting design

8.4.1 Lighting should be designed to minimise impacts on biodiversity. For further information 'Bats and Artificial Lighting in the UK' Guidance Note GN 08 / 23 is available to download from: Artificial Lighting Guidance - Buildings, planning and development - Bat Conservation Trust. As a minimum, all lighting must be downward facing, ideally at a 90 degree angle to the ground, and avoid light spill onto habitats used by nocturnal wildlife such as trees, hedges and bat boxes. Porch lighting, home security lights and garden lights installed as part of the development should also follow these guidelines. Other nature friendly lighting options include:

- Lights with sensors to keep lights dimmed when not in use and brighten only when a cyclist, pedestrian or car passes
- Matching the brightness of lighting to natural light patterns
- Warmer coloured lights, shielding lights and timers

8.5 Multi-functional features

8.5.1 Wherever possible, landscaping and design choices should deliver multiple benefits including for biodiversity. This should include:

- Maximising use of green sustainable drainage features such as swales and ponds rather than traditional drainage or underground tanks
- Designing in green roofs and walls
- Creating strips of habitat between solar panels
- Biodiversity enhancements such as nest and hibernation features
- Allowing public access to green spaces, where it does not negatively impact important ecological features
- Consideration of opportunities for community growing spaces or orchards

8.5.2 Further guidance is available in Natural England Green Infrastructure Planning and Design Guide 2023.

8.6 Buffer zones

8.6.1 Buffer zones of semi-natural habitat should be provided around sensitive habitats and individual trees to protect the habitat from direct and indirect effects of development. In line with the mitigation hierarchy, buffer zones should be built into development proposals at an early stage of the design process, rather than relying on mitigation after the layout is fixed.

8.6.2 Buffer zones should allow for maintenance access and the natural processes of tree death and decay without unnecessary risk to people or property. The extent of buffer zones is to be determined on a case-by-case basis in line with relevant guidance. Where habitats are particularly valuable or sensitive, the council may expect buffer zones exceeding usual minimum distances as a precaution, especially for major development.

8.6.3 Buffer zones should contribute to wider ecological networks and be part of the green infrastructure of the area. They should not be isolated or residual strips. Accordingly, applicants must demonstrate at layout stage how the proposed buffer zone will connect to and strengthen ecological networks beyond the site, and how it will be protected from later encroachment. This should be supported by a clear plan showing the buffer zone boundary and intended land use on both sides.

8.6.4 Buffer zones should not include:

- private gardens
- hard surfacing such as roads and pavements
- allotments
- formally managed areas, including sports pitches and kick about areas
- parking areas or unwarranted vehicular access which could be utilised for fly tipping

- high level lighting, including flood lighting which would cause disturbance to nocturnal species
- inappropriate planted species, such as non-native species or densely planted species which may shade out an aquatic habitat.

8.6.5 The buffer zone boundary and restrictions must be shown on all relevant drawings and retained for the lifetime of the development. Access should only be permitted where it can be demonstrated that trampling will not harm the buffer zone habitat.

8.7 Designing for long term maintenance

8.7.1 It is important to consider management and maintenance requirements early in the design process. This will create efficiencies in the whole life cycle of the scheme, and enable delivery of landscape-led, resilient schemes which both enhance and create habitats. Considerations should include:

- Planning for and minimising watering requirements
- Mulching to help retain moisture
- Using biodegradable tree guards
- Ensuring stakes, ties and guards are appropriate and there is a plan for their removal
- Appropriate spacing to minimise future replanting or thinning requirements

9 Enforcement

9.1 Overview

9.1.1 Under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, Councils have discretionary powers to act against breaches of planning control, including those affecting biodiversity and green infrastructure. A breach occurs when development is carried out without permission or fails to be implemented in accordance with a planning permission (including conditions or obligations). The Council is also legally obligated under the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act to monitor and report on actions to conserve and enhance biodiversity, including the implementation of biodiversity net gain.

9.1.2 Applicable development without biodiversity gain plan approval or breaching approved gains will be considered a breach of planning control.

9.1.3 The Council is empowered to act under enforcement powers in the Town and County Planning Act, such as:

- Issue enforcement notices requiring:
    - Cessation of unauthorised works
    - Remedial measures to restore or deliver approved biodiversity and green infrastructure features
- Serve stop notices
- Seek injunctions or prosecute non-compliance

9.1.4 If a developer fails to comply, the Council may undertake remedial work and recover costs from the developer, including legal and ecological and/or green infrastructure restoration expenses.

Appendix 1: Glossary and abbreviations

Table 7 – Glossary and abbreviations

Term	Explanation
BFLP	Bracknell Forest Local Plan
Biodiversity gain site	A designated area of land, either within or outside a development boundary (on-site or off-site), used to create, enhance, or restore natural habitats to achieve a measurable increase in biodiversity.
BNG	Biodiversity Net Gain
GI	Green infrastructure
Habitat bank	A piece of land (outside the red line boundary of a development site) where new or enhanced natural habitats are created to increase biodiversity, generating biodiversity units that are then used by a developer or sold to other developers to meet mandatory biodiversity net gain requirements.
Local Plan	A Local Plan forms part of the development plan system set out in the Town and County Planning Act 1990. Local Plans set out a vision and a framework for the future development of an area, addressing housing, the economy, community facilities and infrastructure, the environment, adapting to climate change and securing good design. Local Plans (together with any adopted neighbourhood plans) are the starting point for considering whether planning applications can be approved.
National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)	A document that sets out the government's planning policies for England. It guides planning decisions and sets the framework for the production of planning documents at the local level.
Natural England (NE)	A non-departmental public body that advises the government about the natural environment for England. NE is responsible for ensuring that England's natural environment, including its land, flora and fauna, freshwater and marine environments, geology and soils, are protected and improved. It also has a responsibility to help people enjoy, understand and access the natural environment.
Section 106 agreement	A legal agreement between planning authorities and developers, described at section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended). S106 agreements secure planning obligations (such as financial contributions or infrastructure) that are required to make a development acceptable in planning terms.

Term	Explanation
Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspaces (SANGs)	The provision of alternative recreational land to attract new residents away from the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area (SPA). This is a key part of avoiding the effects of new residential development on the Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area.