

Gains in Biodiversity

Biodiversity. That word is being thrown around a lot at the moment. It means species richness, or variety, of a particular habitat or biome.

We can gauge how healthy our environment is by its biodiversity; we know what should be there, how to measure it (most of the time) and how to account for its condition. We can also make it better (most of the time) by doing what we know how to do so well – instigating change in our surroundings.

Recent policies being adopted by separate UK nations mean that it is now a planning requirement to show that any development will leave conditions more ecologically diverse than they were before the project being constructed. In England, this is demonstrated using the DEFRA biodiversity net gain (BNG) metric. The metric produces a number (Biodiversity Units) after inputting the existing area and condition of habitats (i.e. the baseline) and then you input how you plan to enhance, or establish, habitats as part of the project to generate an overall improvement in the assessed biodiversity levels in the years to come. Biodiversity Net Gain.

While in Wales and Scotland there is no established metric (yet), there are metrics out there that are suitable in some circumstances. The Scottish Government are currently consulting on a metric that would be more suited for Scottish conditions. In Scotland and Wales, for planning applications an overall enhancement of biodiversity levels can be demonstrated using quantitative (in the right circumstances) or qualitative assessment to show an overall enhancement of biodiversity.

BNG, as a framework for planning in England, was delayed from going live from its original early November 2023 date until January 2024 due to the secondary legislation still needing ratified. For Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects (NSIPs), this is [now drafted and up for consultation in March 2024](#), but is not expected to be in place until September 2024. Regardless of secondary legislation, for planning purposes biodiversity enhancements are a significant step towards ensuring that all development shall be undertaken in parallel with improving conditions for our flora and fauna.

BNG policy has been a catalyst for a rapidly developed market with a scope including Biodiversity Units that can be generated offsite by organisations and landowners by way of committing to the delivery of further units offsite. This market is early in its development and there are some elements are still to be trialled and tested, both in terms of planning and BNG/biodiversity policies and frameworks. Advice has been issued, and recently updated ([November 2023](#)), by DEFRA outlining the process of how landowners and managers can register and offer biodiversity units to developers and investors for off-site compensation.

Further consideration is still needed in terms of some of the more complex interactions, such as carbon sequestration not always equating to ecological recovery or enhancement and vice versa. However, if suitable monitoring and governance is adopted, it has the potential to play a significant part of an effective, wide-scale ecological recovery that the United Kingdom very badly needs.



Gains in Biodiversity

How ITP Energised can help

ITP Energised's [Ecology](#) team can advise on your site feasibility as well as baseline assessment surveys, assessment of potential for biodiversity enhancements, design enhancement plans and provide the monitoring support needed to ensure objectives are achieved. If you are interested in having an informal discussion or seeking advice on opportunities for biodiversity enhancement then please do get in touch.

Richard King, Associate Ecologist

Biodiversity & Natural Capital

richard.king@itpenergised.com

