
Development Management Advice

Note 7: Supporting biodiversity and encouraging nature in development

Introduction

This Advice Note provides local advice in relation to supporting biodiversity and encouraging nature in development within Elmbridge Borough. Its aim is to encourage an ecology-led approach to development sites.

It is primarily targeted at those involved in making and determining planning applications but, could also be of interest to a wider audience such as landowners interested in supporting and encouraging biodiversity and nature on their land; community groups interested in understanding more about biodiversity and nature and whether there could be opportunities in their area; or our residents wanting to see biodiversity and nature thrive in Elmbridge.

Elmbridge Borough Council is committed to boosting biodiversity and our natural environment throughout the borough, and beyond, and this Advice Note is just one of the many initiatives to help make that happen.

What is meant by biodiversity & nature and why is it important?

Biodiversity is the variety of natural life and habitats around us; it effectively is nature.

An environment rich in biodiversity is essential for supporting human life. Due to an ever-increasing population, the demand for food and energy production is also increasing, leading to a degradation; fragmentation; and loss of natural habitats. With this decrease in biodiversity and degradation of ecosystems, the natural environment becomes less productive, less resilient, and adaptable, and is at real risk of sustaining long-term damage or collapse together with the potential loss of protected species.

Nature also plays a significant role in reducing the effect of climate change. Many human processes such as energy production, manufacturing and transport all release carbon dioxide into the atmosphere. There are various natural processes that store carbon naturally, in plants and trees. The degradation of natural habitats would hinder these processes and then accelerate the effect of climate change.

In recent years there have been more and more documented examples of economic and environmental benefits that have been demonstrated when we take into consideration the natural environment, working and living alongside nature instead of simply using it for our own gains.

It is therefore critical that we encourage and support biodiversity and nature within the Borough.

Local & National Policy Context

The starting point for assessing planning applications in Elmbridge Borough is the current Local Plan policies as set out in the Elmbridge [Core Strategy 2011](#) and the [Development Management Plan 2015](#).

In regard to supporting nature and biodiversity, relevant policies¹ require **all** developments across the Borough to preserve, manage and where possible enhance biodiversity by conserving existing wildlife habitats, creating new habitats, and providing links to the green infrastructure network. This reflects the Council's duty to have regard to biodiversity conservation when exercising all public functions and to consider how a development might affect protected and priority sites, species, and habitats.

Specifically, Policy CS15 'Biodiversity' of the Core Strategy seeks to ensure new development ***does not result in a net loss of biodiversity and where feasible contributes to a net gain.***

As part of its new Local Plan, the Council will require development proposals to lead to a net gain in biodiversity of a minimum of 20% on all sites², unless an exemption applies (draft Policy ENV6 - protecting, enhancing, and recovering biodiversity). This is in line with the Government's aspirations and general approach to Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) but exceeds the 10% mandatory requirement on applicable sites.

The Government's approach to deliver BNG is already in place, albeit we are currently in a transition phase from BNG being a national policy ***expectation*** to BNG becoming a national ***mandatory*** requirement.

The Government's mandatory requirement is for developments (subject to certain exemptions) to demonstrate a minimum 10% net gain for biodiversity when the requirements of the [Environment Act 2021](#) come into effect, in November 2023. Although, for small sites³,

¹ The relevant adopted policies consist of Core Strategy Policy CS12 - The River Thames Corridor and its tributaries, CS13 – Thames Basin Heaths Special Protection Area, CS14 – Green Infrastructure, CS15 – Biodiversity; Development Management Policy DM6 – Landscape and Trees, DM13 – Riverside development and uses, DM20 – Open space and views, DM21 – Nature conservation and biodiversity, DM22 – Recreational use of waterways.

² Policy ENV6 of the draft Local Plan sets out a BNG requirement of 10%. However, following further consideration and a review of the viability of providing a higher percentage, the Council has proposed as part of its modifications submitted to the Planning Inspector (10 August 2023), that the percentage be increased to 20%. This proposed amendment will be considered by the Planning Inspector as part of the examination of the Local Plan.

³ Small sites are defined for the purpose of the BNG exemption as:

- (i) For residential: where the number of dwellings to be provided is between one and nine inclusive on a site having an area of less than one hectare, or where the number of dwellings to be provided is not known, a site area of less than 0.5 hectares.
- (ii) For non-residential: where the floor space to be created is less than 1,000 square metres OR where the site area is less than one hectare.

the Government has extended the transition period until April 2024. Nevertheless, during this period of transition, the Government's expectation in regard to BNG is set out in its [National Planning Policy Framework \(NPPF, 2021\)](#).

Whilst national policy is not mandatory, it still has considerable weight in the planning decision making process as a material consideration in the determination of planning applications. In simple terms, national policy expects new development to result in a net gain for biodiversity.

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) 2021

"Planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by... minimising impacts on and providing net gains in biodiversity" (paragraph 174)

"... opportunities to improve biodiversity in and around developments should be integrated as part of their design, especially where this can secure measurable net gains for biodiversity and enhance public access to nature where this is appropriate" (paragraph 180)

Purpose of this Advice Note

This Advice Note is to help developers and decision makers on what is expected by the Council when considering nature conservation and biodiversity proposals, especially in the period prior to the adoption of the new Local Plan / the Government's mandatory BNG targets being introduced from November 2023⁴.

This note is not formal planning policy. It does not establish new planning policy, nor does it supersede any existing formally made planning policy. Instead, as set out, its purpose is to explain how the Council intends to implement existing policies (local and national).

What development does this Advice apply to?

Local Plan Policy CS15 requires that **all** new development does not result in a net loss of biodiversity and where feasible contributes to a net gain through the incorporation of biodiversity features. For example, this includes householder development (extensions, alterations, and outbuildings within the curtilage of a residential dwelling).

As set out in this Advice Note, applicants are encouraged to use the latest DEFRA Metric Calculation Tool / Small Sites Metric to calculate this which is discussed below. The Metric cannot, however, be applied to all types of development in order to establish the pre- and post-development biodiversity value of a site. In addition, there will be exemptions to BNG requirements including householder development and permitted development under the General Permitted Development Order (GPDO).

As such, the Council will continue to take a pragmatic and proportionate approach to such developments and the requirements of Policy CS15.

⁴ At the latest, for small sites (see footnote 2 for definition) BNG targets will become mandatory in April 2024. However, should the new Local Plan be adopted prior to this, small sites will be required to demonstrate a 20% BNG in accordance with Policy ENV6 - Protecting, enhancing, and recovering biodiversity.

Householder applications will therefore continue to be strongly encouraged to support and enhance nature as part of this type of developments. Advice on the enhancement of biodiversity for householders can be found at the end of this document.

What is Biodiversity Net Gain?

BNG is a national initiative linked to the planning system and / or land management. The basic idea is that we make space for nature in development and leave the natural environment in a measurably better state than beforehand.

This means that if a developer wants to build new homes on a parcel of land, they will have to calculate what level of biodiversity exists before development takes place, and then demonstrate how habitats will be created to increase biodiversity after the development has finished. This does not necessarily mean the same type of biodiversity or habitats are created as currently exists or, created in exactly the same place. It's about an overall increase / enhancement in habitats and biodiversity, once a proposal has been adjusted for what biodiversity will be lost and what will be gained.

Ensuring the protection and enhancement of biodiversity through the Development Management process to secure no net loss

In the interim period before a 10% increase in BNG becomes mandatory through the implementation of the Environment Act or, the Council adopts its new Local Plan (whichever occurs first), the Council's approach is to implement its existing Local Plan policy (Policy CS15 of the Core Strategy) in a way which matches best practices and is as closely aligned as possible to how mandatory BNG will operate. This is considered essential to ensure that the Council focuses on the protection and enhancement of biodiversity at the earliest opportunity to help secure the future of Elmbridge's ecological network. It is also considered as a good opportunity to help both developers and decision makers to become familiar with what BNG is and how it should be applied.

Building biodiversity protection and enhancement into the initial stages of the development management process will help to achieve better outcomes for biodiversity and will avoid the need to retrofit biodiversity measures at a late stage resulting in costly changes to design proposals and extra consultation fees with ecologists. This is what is considered to be an ecology led approach to development.

Establishing the baseline site ecology

Survey Work

At the very start of a development project it is essential that the baseline site ecology is established before any works or site clearance commences. Several surveys and reports will be needed to inform how biodiversity is factored into the design. These may include:

- Phase 1 Habitat Survey – This is a walkover survey and can be undertaken year-round, though it is important to note that the survey season is considered to be April to September (inclusive) for most habitat types. The optimal survey season varies between habitats; therefore, the timing of botanical surveys should be discussed with your appointed ecologist. Surveys outside of the survey period between April to September should use a precautionary approach to assessing condition criteria which are not measurable at the time of year when the survey is undertaken. If the limitation of the survey being undertaken outside of this survey season cannot be overcome through a precautionary approach, then an update or repeat survey within the optimal botanical survey season will be required.
- UK Habitat Classification Survey – This is a comprehensive approach to classifying habitats, designed to provide a simple and robust approach to survey and monitoring for the 21st century⁵. The Biodiversity Metric Calculation Tools are based on the UK Habitat Classification survey methodology and habitat definitions.

This is a walkover survey and can be undertaken year-round, though it is important to note that the survey season is considered to be April to September (inclusive) for most habitat types. The optimal survey season varies between habitats; therefore, the timing of botanical surveys should be discussed with your appointed ecologist. Surveys outside of the survey period between April to September should use a precautionary approach to assessing condition criteria which are not measurable at the time of year the survey is undertaken. If the limitation of the survey being undertaken outside of this survey season cannot be overcome through a precautionary approach, then an update or repeat survey within the optimal botanical survey season will be required.

To enable the calculation of biodiversity units, data must be collected for both existing and proposed habitats, in accordance with the User Guide for the Biodiversity Metric to be used (for Biodiversity Metric 4.0 this is currently [Natural England Joint Publication JP039 User Guide](#)). It is important that habitat areas are measured as precisely as possible in order to ensure that an accurate calculation can be made. During the walk over survey, signs which might mean that more detailed habitat or species surveys could be required, would be collected.

- Preliminary Ecological Appraisal – this is a consolidation of desk study work and initial survey works. It is to be produced in accordance with the CIEEM guidelines for a [Preliminary Ecological Appraisal](#) and will contain recommendations with regards to its findings. If further surveys are required, these will need to be undertaken to inform design.
- Topographical surveys – this allows further accurate surveys to be conducted and plans produced.
- Soil surveys - informs decisions on the types of habitats which can be (and would be most appropriate to be) created on site.

⁵ UK Habitat Classification (UK Hab) <https://ukhab.org/> accessed on the 02/06/2023.

Pre-emptive site clearance

Schedule 12 of the Environment Act (2021) deters against site clearance ahead of a planning application by allowing planning authorities to recognise any habitat degradation since 30th January 2020 and to take the earlier habitat state as the baseline for the purposes of biodiversity net gain.

This approach will also be taken by the Council in our approach to ensuring no net loss of biodiversity on application sites. If it is clear that habitats on the site have been recently changed to their detriment, it will be necessary to make an informed assessment of what the best condition and distinctiveness of that habitat would have been, prior to the change. This will need to be justified to the Local Planning Authority and agreed by them.

Measuring biodiversity to ensure no net loss

The metric

The Council encourages that biodiversity is measured, both before and after development, using the most up to date DEFRA Biodiversity Metric Calculation Tool⁶. This allows a quantitative assessment of habitats on the site which enables the user to score different habitat types in “biodiversity units” according to predetermined relative biodiversity values⁷. By first measuring and scoring the site in its pre-development state, the Metric provides a baseline biodiversity unit score to be used in the subsequent design of the development. Defra have developed two Biodiversity Metric Calculation Tools one which is to be used for major developments and the other for small sites.

The [User Guide](#) describes how to gather the information needed for the Metric calculations. You can use the Biodiversity Metric Calculation Tool to calculate how a development, or a change in land use, will change the biodiversity value of a site. For example, building houses, planting a woodland, or sowing a wildflower meadow. You can use the Metric to:

- assess the biodiversity unit value of an area of land; and
- demonstrate biodiversity losses (and net gains) in a consistent way.

The final net gain unit score is then determined by subtracting the number of baseline biodiversity units from the number of future development units (i.e., those projected to be provided). Figure 1 sets out an overview of the Metric calculation, full details are provided within the [User Guides](#).

Who can use the Metric

⁶ Government have been trialling versions of a national metric, and the latest version at the time of publication of this Advice Note is [biodiversity metric 4.0 calculation tool \(March 2023\) and user guide](#) which is published on Natural England’s Access to Evidence website. A [Small Sites Metric](#) has also been published. This is a simplified version of the Biodiversity Metric 3.1. It has specifically been designed for use on small development sites, as defined, where the project chooses to do so.

⁷ If a project has already begun using a previous version of the Biodiversity Metric we do not recommend changing metrics mid-project, as this may result discrepancies between calculations.

For larger sites the DEFRA Metric calculations must be made by a competent person. Competency is aligned with the British Standard ‘Process for designing and implementing biodiversity net gain: BS 8683:2021’. A competent person is someone who can demonstrate they have acquired through training, qualifications or experience, or a combination of these, the knowledge and skills enabling that person to perform specified tasks in completing and reviewing metric calculations.

The requirements for smaller sites differ slightly from those for larger sites. The metric is a simplified version which has been designed for use by non-ecologists on smaller sites with little pre-existing value. However, it is still recommended that they are carried out by a qualified ecologist to ensure the approach taken is correct. Further details for who can use the Metric are included in the Metric Users Guides.

Pre-Development Baseline Biodiversity Value

$$\text{Size of habitat parcel} \times \text{Habitat distinctiveness} \times \text{Habitat condition} \times \text{Strategic location} = \text{Baseline biodiversity units}$$

Post-Development Biodiversity Value

$$\text{Size of habitat parcel} \times \text{Habitat distinctiveness} \times \text{Habitat condition} \times \text{Strategic location} \times \text{Difficulty} \times \text{Time to target condition} \times \text{Spatial link} = \text{Future biodiversity units}$$

$$\text{Future biodiversity units} - \text{Baseline biodiversity units} = \text{Net loss (-) or gain (+)}$$

Applying the Mitigation Hierarchy

The mitigation hierarchy constitutes a fundamental approach to development and is a prerequisite when considering the future for biodiversity on a site. Developers should demonstrate their efforts to follow the mitigation hierarchy within the biodiversity plan. Each step down the hierarchy must be valid and necessary. The mitigation hierarchy already exists as a guiding principle to development in paragraph 180 of the NPPF.

The principles of the mitigation hierarchy

Avoid: Site layouts should avoid impacts on existing biodiversity habitats through site selection, by designing buildings and infrastructure around them and retaining as much as possible. Biodiversity net gain is easier to achieve where habitat impacts are avoided due to the way that risks associated with habitat creation or enhancement are accounted for in the Biodiversity Metric.

Mitigate: Where it is not possible to avoid impacts, the developer should explore ways of reducing or minimising the impact on the site layout.

Compensate: This would see any lost habitat areas recreated. This approach sits at the bottom of the mitigation hierarchy and is the least favoured approach. It must also be

recognised that not all habitats can be re-created, such as ancient woodland, which are considered to be irreplaceable.

On-site habitat provision

All new development should seek to ensure no net loss of biodiversity within the red line application boundary in the first instance. This means if offsetting is required, it is provided on the application site. Considering biodiversity net gain at the early stages of the design process will help to achieve better outcomes for biodiversity and will avoid the need to retrofit biodiversity net gain measures at a late stage resulting in costly changes to design proposals.

The Biodiversity Metric can be used early in the design process, to quantify and evaluate the impacts of different design options. To make a meaningful contribution to nature recovery, development should ideally not only ensure no net loss of biodiversity but go above this to ensure net gain. Developments should seek to support bigger, better, and more joined up habitat, safeguarding and enhancing habitat connectivity locally and at a wider landscape scale. Recommendations for enhancing biodiversity can be found at the end of this document.

Off-site Habitat Provision

All Local Planning Authorities are waiting for the Government to set out the details of how certain factors such as conservation covenants, biodiversity credits schemes and other mechanism mentioned below will be set up, regulated and managed so this must be considered as an interim position, pending the publication of further government regulations. We believe, however, that the principles set out below are sound but it is likely that there may be some changes, revisions and explanations as and when the guidance is fully available.

In the meantime, it is clear that off-setting or any other off-site mitigation, compensation and enhancement will be the very last resort for an applicant.

It expected that, in the first instance, a developer will explore all options to avoid harm to biodiversity on the site in question.

Only once all options to reduce loss, harm or damage of existing biodiversity on site have been considered (it is recommended that this is thoroughly reviewed and agreed with the LPA at preapplication stage) should a developer consider off-site biodiversity delivery to ensure no net loss overall.

Nothing set out in this section diminishes the requirement to have regard to all existing legislation relating to wildlife and habitats.

Key principles for ensuring no net loss of biodiversity:

- In the first instance, developers should ensure that the development site itself provides the required habitat to deliver no net loss in biodiversity.
- If this is impossible (which is only decided after consultation with the Local Planning Authority) the developer may find a local landowner willing and able to provide suitable land in perpetuity (a minimum of thirty years) and agrees suitable payment with that land provider.
- Developers may be able to approach a facilitator (such as a local Wildlife Trust) or broker but the mechanisms for doing this have not yet been put in place.
- It is possible that a Local Planning Authority may be able to take a payment to deliver biodiversity net gain on land owned or managed by them (for example, a country park or some other habitat that requires investment to deliver wildlife benefits commensurate with the biodiversity net gain identified and required).
- When mechanisms are in place, it may be possible (subject to agreement with the Local Planning Authority) for a developer to buy biodiversity units to provide for the creation and enhancement of biodiversity in Surrey through the Local Nature Recovery Strategy.
- As a likely last resort, a developer may be required to buy biodiversity units from the National Biodiversity Credits Scheme. This has not yet been set up, but it is warned that such purchases will be more expensive than other options.

In every case, the agreements to deliver no net loss of biodiversity will be approved by the Local Planning Authority and must be secured by a suitable legal agreement (such as for example, S. 106 Agreements or conservation covenants) in perpetuity (considered a minimum of thirty years).

In determining sites for off-site biodiversity net gain delivery, regard must be given to the following:

- Has the site been fully and appropriately surveyed to understand the existing biodiversity
- Does the site deliver the potential for Priority Habitat restoration or creation?
- Will the site reinforce the existing network of wildlife corridors?
- Will public access be permitted?

Early engagement with the Local Planning Authority is essential to ensure that the proposal meets the current legislation, regulations and guidance.

Local Nature Recovery Strategy

Surrey County Council are currently producing a Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) for Surrey, covering all boroughs and districts in the county. They are currently working with a wide range of partners to develop a strategy that focuses on the environmental outcomes that are most needed in local areas.

The primary focus will be what is needed for protecting and restoring nature to benefit the biodiversity of habitats and species, however we will also be considering other environmental benefits, such as flood regulation, water quality, resilience to wildfires, carbon sequestration and access to green space for health and wellbeing.

The LNRS will link up with the delivery mechanisms for Biodiversity Net Gain in the long run but could be used for offsetting to reach no net loss of biodiversity in the interim. Further details of the LNRS can be found on the [Surrey County Council website](#).

What is required to support a planning application?

For all developments (excluding householder planning applications), all of the following should be submitted prior to the validation of a planning application.

Biodiversity Offsetting/Gain Plan

The principle of a Biodiversity Gain Plan is set out in the Environment Act 2021. The Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM) has published Biodiversity Net Gain Report and Audit Templates which are intended to provide a framework for writing reports for projects that are aiming to achieve biodiversity net gain in the interim period ahead of the mandatory requirement. The general principals of this can be applied to demonstrating no net loss of biodiversity.

It is essential the submitted plan should cover the following:

- Information about how adverse effects have been minimised
- Pre-development biodiversity value of on-site habitats
- Post-development biodiversity value of on-site habitat
- Any off-site biodiversity and its value
- Any credits purchased for offsetting
- Appropriate mapping.

The Biodiversity Metric Calculation Tool will provide information required for the Biodiversity Gain/Offsetting Plan requirements (b) to (d).

The completed relevant Biodiversity Metric

The completed relevant Biodiversity Metric Calculation Tool in excel and .pdf format. Excel is the format which will enable officers to most practically review the proposals set out in the Metric. The .pdf version will be uploaded for the public view.

A biodiversity baseline/ecological study

This should meet the requirements of the relevant Biodiversity Metric Calculation Tool used.

A map showing habitat retained, lost, enhanced and created

This plan should clearly show where the habitat units occur both pre-development (baseline) and post-development (habitat retained, enhanced, and created) values.

In addition to the above to determine submitted planning applications, suitable information regarding the following is required.

Information about how the habitats will be implemented, managed and monitored for a minimum of 30 years

This should be provided to demonstrate that the biodiversity offsetting proposal are deliverable and achievable. For smaller applications this may be incorporated into the Biodiversity Plan. For larger more complex proposals a Landscape and Ecological Management Plan (LEMP) is likely to be required. Advice can be given regarding the level of information required in the preapplication process.

Explanation of how the approach taken to ensuring no net loss of biodiversity chosen makes a meaningful contribution to nature recovery

The purpose of ensuring no net loss of biodiversity is ultimately about contributing to nature recovery. To succeed in this, it is essential that biodiversity proposals must be meaningful, respond to contextual evidence, maximise opportunities for nature, and follow best practice principles. For further information on best practice principles which can be applied to a no net loss approach see [Biodiversity Net Gain: Good Practice Principles for Development](#).

Outline planning applications

Outline applications may not have the layout finalised. Here, a Biodiversity Plan and the biodiversity metric can be based upon a realistic scenario and / or a feasibility assessment, taken from a parameters plan and/or an illustrative masterplan or landscape scheme. It is important that the requirements for allotments, sports pitches, play areas, natural green spaces, etc. are taken into account so that proposals are achievable.

Demonstrating the net biodiversity condition within the planning application enables the council to assess whether offsetting can be achieved on-site. Where this is not possible, the council may require the applicant to secure off setting with long-term management and monitoring through a legal agreement and, where relevant, secure further details and associated updated biodiversity metric calculations through reserved matters applications.

Where a development is to be phased, a biodiversity offsetting strategy must be submitted at the outline stage, which shows how individual phases deliver a predetermined proportion of the biodiversity value. Reserved matters applications will then be required to demonstrate exactly how each phase will meet its biodiversity requirements.

Householder planning applications

Householder planning applications will not be expected to follow the same approach as larger developments. In the case of householder development a pragmatic and proportionate

approach will be taken. Householders will be encouraged to consider the existing biodiversity value of their site and how this may be impacted by the proposed development. If it is clear during the determination of a planning application that there has or will be a clear loss of biodiversity on the application site, (for example through the loss of trees, hedges, wildflower/grass land areas or ponds) the LPA will ask the applicant to demonstrate how this will be offset as part of the development proposal through replacement planting and additional habitat mitigation if required.

Nothing set out in this section diminishes the requirement to have regard to all existing legislation relating to wildlife and habitats. It may therefore be necessary to carry out relevant ecological surveys for relevant protected species. The local validation checklist sets out when this will be required for a householder application.

Biodiversity Net Gain Monitoring

Councils are working towards a situation where habitats created as part of biodiversity net gain will be maintained for a minimum of 30 years and secured at the planning permission stage. The requirements for biodiversity net gain do not replace or undermine existing habitat and species protection for protected sites or irreplaceable habitats, or for existing requirements for ecological assessments and species surveys. Decisions relating to habitats or species subject to statutory protection under national legislation and local policy remain subject to those requirements. Similarly, impacts to irreplaceable habitats shall be considered outside the biodiversity offsetting system.

During construction and for a 30-year period following this, monitoring will be implemented to ensure that all on and/or off-site biodiversity net gain is delivered to the required condition. Reporting of findings to the Local Planning Authority will be required. Monitoring and reporting is the responsibility of the developer and should be set out in the biodiversity plan.

The monitoring will be secured through the grant of planning permission through planning conditions and obligations. As a minimum, monitoring reports should include a summary of habitat type, extent, and condition (with a comparison where applicable against the expected condition proposed in the biodiversity gain plan).

It is expected as a minimum, that a '5 year aftercare' report focusing on the establishment of the habitat in years 1-5 will be submitted alongside monitoring assessments submitted in years 2, 5, 10, 20 and 30. A monitoring fee may need to be secured. Where this is with the developer it may likely be through a Section 106 agreement. Where it is with an offset provider it may be through a Section 39 agreement of the Wildlife and Countryside Act, or a conservation covenant. If it is with a broker a different type of legal contract may be required.

A summary of what you should be doing now

What developers should be doing now

- Establish baseline biodiversity levels on site using the Natural England Biodiversity Metric Calculation Tool, version 4
- Take photos of existing site

- Baseline should take into account any recent tree felling or landscaping works which may have reduced biodiversity on site however it is strongly advised that this is not carried out until after the grant of planning permission.
- Carry out ecology surveys at correct time
- Pre application advice with Elmbridge and Surrey Wildlife Trust
- Use hierarchy approach – Avoid, Mitigate, Compensate. Start off by avoiding the loss of biodiversity on site. If it can't be avoided, then mitigate within the site through new planting or other measures. Only as last resort should compensation through delivery of biodiversity improvements off site be explored. This should be as close to the site as possible and using quantifiable project (NE Metric v4) and maintained in perpetuity (30 years)

A quick summary of what householders should be doing now

- Consider the types of habitats that are present in your garden, for example trees and hedges, wildflower/grass land area and ponds.
- Take photos of the existing site
- When considering the biodiversity value of your site it should take into account any recent tree felling or landscape works which may have reduced biodiversity on site however it is strongly that you do not carry out any site clearance until after the grant of planning permission.
- Where necessary carry out ecological surveys at the correct time (see local validation checklist for when this is required for a householder application)

Tips for supporting nature within small scale householder developments

1. Retain existing plants, hedges, trees and ponds in your scheme.
 - Would an alternative layout have less harm on biodiversity?
 - Can you relocate plants rather than lose them?
2. Plant a variety of flowering native plants, shrubs, climbers and trees to attract a variety of insects and birds.

Choose native species in landscaping and pollinators. See [RHS Plants for Pollinators](#).

The right tree in the right place:

- Small height – 5-12m (Cherry, Field Maple, Crab Apple, Hawthorn Chinese Privet, Hazel)
 - Medium height – 12-17m – (Pride of India, Ornamental Pear, Wild Cherry)
 - Large height – 17m+ (Birch, Beech, Sycamore, Alder)
3. Minimise hard surfacing and avoid artificial grass

- Artificial grass has no wildlife benefit and can kill the soil beneath it which helps to provide a habitat for insects; protects root systems for trees and helps with flood mitigation. It also uses a huge amount of plastic that cannot be recycled and has a big carbon footprint from manufacture, transport and installation.
4. Leave a gap in fence for wildlife.
 - A hole 13cm wide and tall can allow hedgehogs and other animals to move between properties.
 5. Maintain / create a green corridor for wildlife.
 - Rather than just a hard fence, consider softer boundary treatment such as hedges, flowering shrubs, and trees.
 - Native hedge species: Alder buckthorn, blackthorn, broom, buckthorn, dog-rose, dogwood, elder, guelder-rose, hawthorn, spindle.
 - Don't cut hedges between March to August due to nesting season.
 - Repair missing links in hedgerows to enhance green corridors
 6. Create a pond.
 7. Install an area for composting.
 - [Surrey Environment Partnership](#) and getcomposting.com offer reduced priced environmental products including home compost bins.
 8. Leave an area of the garden wild and naturalise areas by leaving piles of dead wood, dead hedge or grass clippings.
 9. Install bee and swift bricks, bird, and bat boxes, or build an insect hotel.
 10. Sensitively choose and position external lights to minimise light encroachment and create dark corridors for bats (also, security lighting can be annoying to neighbours)!
 11. Install living roofs/walls on outbuildings or bin stores. Or simply planting suitable climbers against trellis can be a cost effective and / or smaller scale alternative to a full living wall system. Ongoing maintenance of living wall systems is essential. The provider usually offers a maintenance service package when quoting for install.
 12. Use water butts to save rainwater and use for garden watering.

Tips for supporting nature within new housing developments

1. Include a variety of bee and swift bricks, bat and bird boxes.
2. Allow for access points for bats in roof voids.
3. Sensitively choose and position external lights to minimise light encroachment.
4. Create dark corridors for bats (also, security lighting can be annoying to neighbours)!
5. Incorporate sustainable drainage systems (SuDS) / flood mitigation and create a rain garden.
6. Plant a variety of flowering plants, shrubs, climbers, and trees to attract a variety of insects and birds. Choose native species in landscaping and pollinators. See [RHS Plants for Pollinators](#).
7. Provide areas of long grass / wildflowers.
8. Remove invasive species, e.g., Japanese knotweed or Himalayan Balsam. You may require experts to carry out removal of Japanese knotweed.
9. Link into wider Green Infrastructure and local nature designations e.g., green corridors, Biodiversity Opportunity Areas, Sites of Nature Conservation Importance. Repair missing links in hedgerows to enhance green corridors.
10. Consider the impact of new access point. Does it minimise harm to hedges/trees, can it be narrower?
11. Consider [Building with Nature](#), [Building for a Healthy Life](#) accreditation.
12. Submit a Local Environmental Management Plan to demonstrate how the development will minimise environmental impacts through the construction phase.

Tips for supporting nature within non-residential development

1. Include a variety of bat and bird boxes.
2. Allow for access points for bats in roof voids and brickwork.
3. Wildlife friendly lighting. Minimise lighting of signs, security lighting.
4. Incorporate sustainable drainage systems (SuDS) / flood mitigation.

5. Choose native species in landscaping and pollinators. See [RHS Plants for Pollinators](#).
6. Replace amenity grassland with suitably managed species rich grassland, wildflowers. Meadows require specific annual maintenance, cutting at the correct time and removal of the arisings to keep soil nutrient levels low. Some sites may be able to contribute to local [B-Lines which Surrey Wildlife Trust](#) are working with [Buglife](#) to map.
7. Prepare a Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP) to address how potentially adverse impacts associated with development and construction sites will be avoided, minimised or mitigated.
8. Link into wider Green Infrastructure and local nature designations e.g. green corridors, Biodiversity Opportunity Areas, Sites of Nature Conservation Importance.
9. Consider a green wall – e.g., Dukes Court in neighbouring Woking Borough.

Tips for supporting nature on development near rivers

1. Enhance water body by reprofiling bank and maintaining suitable undeveloped buffers on advice of your ecologist.
2. Create a new water body.
3. Create habitat suitable for amphibians.
4. Create bat access to roof voids and cavity walls.
5. Create green walls and roofs.

Ecological surveys

A common issue and delay with planning applications is that surveys have not been carried out at the correct time of year. Use the table below to check the appropriate times to survey protected species in Elmbridge.

Species	Optimal survey time	Sub-optimal survey time
Badgers	February to April or October to November	May to September
Bats (hibernation roosts)	December to mid-March	
Bats (summer roosts)	May to August	April or end of September
Bats (foraging or commuting)	May to September	April or October
Birds (breeding)	March to August	
Birds (overwintering)	January to February or November to December	
Dormice (nest tube surveys)	April to November	
Dormice (nut surveys)	September to December	
Great crested newts (terrestrial habitats)	March to October	
Great crested newts (aquatic habitats)	March to mid-June	
Invertebrates	April to September	
Otters	Any time of year	
Reptiles	Mid-March to June or September	
Water voles	March to September	February or October
White clawed crayfish	July to September	
Extended Phase 1/Habitats/Vegetation	April to September	

Useful links:

General links:

Surrey Wildlife Trust - surreywildlifetrust.org

Natural England - gov.uk/government/organisations/natural-england

RSPB - rspb.org.uk/

Environment Agency - gov.uk/government/organisations/environment-agency

NHBC – Biodiversity in new housing developments: creating wildlife friendly communities (2021) - nhbcfoundation.org/publication/biodiversity-in-new-housing-developments-creating-wildlife-friendly-communities/

Natural Woking ‘supporting information document’ has more advice and links - woking.gov.uk/nature-and-sustainability/natural-woking

Planting:

RHS Plants for Pollinators - rhs.org.uk/science/conservation-biodiversity/wildlife/plants-for-pollinators

The Wildlife Trust’s Guide to Wildlife Gardening - surreywildlifetrust.org/wildlife-gardening-guide

The Wildlife Trusts – Homes for people and wildlife - wildlifetrusts.org/sites/default/files/2018-05/homes_for_people_and_wildlife_lr_-_spreads.pdf

RSPB Gardening for Wildlife - rspb.org.uk/birds-and-wildlife/advice/gardening-for-wildlife/

Government advice on removing Japanese knotweed - gov.uk/guidance/prevent-japanese-knotweed-from-spreading

Green wall example – Dukes Court, Woking - ansgroupglobal.com/learn/case-studies/exterior-living-wall/dukes-court

Green corridors:

Hedgelink - hedgelink.org.uk

Plantlife - plantlife.org.uk/uk

Plantlife road verge campaign
plantlife.love-wildflowers.org.uk/roadvergecampaign

London Borough of Southwark – Guidance on creating habitat and biodiversity features for parks and open spaces in Southwark - [southwark.gov.uk/assets/attach/2359/Guidance on creating habitat and biodiversity features for parks and open spaces.pdf](https://southwark.gov.uk/assets/attach/2359/Guidance_on_creating_habitat_and_biodiversity_features_for_parks_and_open_spaces.pdf)

Trees:

Surrey County Council Tree Strategy - surreycc.gov.uk/people-and-community/climate-change/what-are-we-doing/new-tree-strategy

Trees & Design Action Group - Trees, Planning and Development: A Guide for Delivery - tdag.org.uk/trees-planning-and-development.html

Woodland Trust - woodlandtrust.org.uk

Ponds:

Freshwater Habitats Trust Pond Creation Toolkit
www.freshwaterhabitats.org.uk/projects/million-ponds/pond-creation-toolkit/

Sustainable Drainage Systems:

Woking Council guidance on creating a rain garden for flood prevention which also benefits wildlife - woking.gov.uk/raingardens

Composting:

Surrey Environment Partnership – Buy a discounted compost bin - surreyep.org.uk

RHS advice on creating habitats from dead wood and compost heaps - rhs.org.uk/advice/garden-health/wildlife/dead-wood-compost-heap-habitats

Birds:

Swift Conservation has a dedicated section for architects, developers and builders - swift-conservation.org

Insects:

Buglife - buglife.org.uk

Woking Environment Action Guide to benefit of deadwood to stag beetles
wokingenvironmentaction.com/2020/05/02/arrival-of-stag-beetles-in-may

Articles on B-Lines -

surreywildlifetrust.org/blog/marcus-wehrle/its-all-about-bees-bugs-butterflies
buglife.org.uk/news/buglifes-b-lines-will-put-a-buzz-back-into-surreys-towns-and-countryside/

Bats:

Bat Conservation Trust – Bat Boxes -

bats.org.uk/our-work/buildings-planning-and-development/bat-boxes

Bat Conservation Trust – Artificial Lighting Guidance -

bats.org.uk/our-work/buildings-planning-and-development/lighting

Standards:

Building with Nature Standards - buildingwithnature.org.uk

Building for a Healthy Life -

udg.org.uk/publications/othermanuals/building-healthy-life