

## Newsletter – Autumn 2017

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### A word from the Chairman

I recently visited one of the large Wildlife Trusts at one of their major wetland reserves that they are looking to extend. Their chief executive expressed great concern that the planning authority based in a nearby town has not embraced no net loss/net gain principles and as a result all the substantial amounts of development that the area is subjected to, is simply not compensating for its impacts on biodiversity. What a lost opportunity. Planning authorities across the UK have the policy basis, the mechanisms and the delivery model through us, the Environment Bank, to leverage significant amounts of investment into the natural environment and compensate for all unavoidable biodiversity impacts. They just need to engage with us - we do the leg-work and can support the authority in being progressive both in terms of protecting and enhancing the environment and delivering better development. You will read below that a rapidly growing number of authorities are now doing so - there is nothing to lose and everything to gain. Our March workshop for planning authorities opened our eyes to the



growing desire for more information and support in introducing this policy.

It is heartening to see net gain principles starting to gain traction in local plans, with supplementary guidance eventually providing the framework for proper biodiversity compensation. There is general acceptance that development should pay for the true cost of the use of land in return for providing developers with a solution that removes business risk, provides a quicker process and ensures certainty. This represents a win-win for development and the natural environment, especially important at a time of shrinking public funds and far greater competition for grants from the likes of countryside stewardship and the Heritage Lottery Fund. We are also receiving an increase in interest directly from developers and their planning consultants who see the reputational and business value in demonstrating net gain through biodiversity compensation schemes.

Environment Bank provides all the support for end-to-end solutions; from measuring the impacts, finding the site based on strategic and local criteria, designing the offset, implementing the legal framework, paying the offset provider and monitoring. We are also creating Habitat Banks that provide cost and time efficient conservation credits for multiple developments and large-scale habitat for wildlife. **Join us** in our quest for a national system of habitat creation, management and endowment.

Professor David Hill CBE

## Our activity

We've been especially busy in 2017 as we continue to work with developers, local planning authorities (LPAs), Wildlife Trusts and landowners to avoid, mitigate and compensate for the damaging effects of development on the UK's declining biodiversity.

All our work is underpinned by the need for better accounting of biodiversity with the aim of achieving No Net Loss (NNL) and Net Gain (NG) of biodiversity in the UK. The government metric has now become a standard requirement in planning decisions in numerous LPAs, as a means of quantifying and accounting for losses and gains in biodiversity. We continue to provide assessment and training in its use.

The mitigation hierarchy is an underpinning feature of NNL and NG policies, but when avoidance and mitigation cannot compensate for the loss of biodiversity on site, an offset site can be prepared. This year we have begun working in new areas across the UK, adding more sites to our registry and forging new contacts to enable quick identification of suitable options. We currently have 24 offset schemes in the pipeline with many more running successfully on the ground. With ongoing monitoring and appropriate management adaptations, our schemes provide long-term value to biodiversity.

We also continue to support and partner LPAs across the UK in policy development and with active planning. Our resources have expanded both on our website and through further guidance and caselaw on all aspects of the process from policy to implementation, available on request.

We held a workshop earlier this year in which over 70 representatives from different planning authorities attended to learn more about implementing a successful accounting and compensation system; from policy and local

strategies to compensation approaches and development assessment.

## Our resources

Go to our website ([www.environmentbank.com](http://www.environmentbank.com)) for a copy of our public resources. Here you can access the toolkits for planning authorities in England, Wales and Scotland on Biodiversity Accounting, and information sheets that provide an introduction for planning authorities, developers and potential offset providers.



Our national biodiversity impact calculator, which facilitates standardised assessments using the Defra metric, is available on request. Currently being updated in response to feedback from government and consultant ecologists, this will soon be available on our website.

## Our services

1. Consultancy support to developers on meeting NNL/NG requirements.
2. Development of **biodiversity impact assessments**.
3. Advice and solutions to developers and LPAs on appropriate compensation approaches and **delivery options**.
4. Identification and preparation of **biodiversity compensation schemes** (offsets) – From identification of sites to meet county strategies on habitat and connectivity targets, to working with landowners to generate the best biodiversity gains and

providing the long-term legal, fiscal and monitoring solutions to remove risk for developers and LPAs.

5. **Support to LPAs** on policy and individual planning applications.
6. **Guidance on local plan policies**, supplementary planning documents and county strategies.
7. **Training** and advice on biodiversity impact calculations.
8. Working with LPAs and Wildlife Trusts to develop **locally tailored calculators**.
9. Working with all stakeholders to pursue the creation of **habitat banks** for time and cost efficient, biodiversity rich and strategically important sites.

## Recent case studies

One of our recent compensation projects is for Northstowe - a proposed new town in South Cambridgeshire which will provide up to 10,000 new homes.

The proposed development site is c.216 hectares in size and primarily consists of arable land and improved grassland with some remnant semi-improved grassland together with pockets of plantation woodland. The proposal is phase 2 of a new town that will have interconnecting wildlife corridors and green buffers, including retained landscape features, parks, ponds, grasslands and scrub. Despite these mitigation efforts, the residual biodiversity impact will still need to be accounted for with a nearby offset.

Due to the presence of five range-restricted declining farmland birds plus declining generalists, a Farmland Bird Mitigation Package of offsite compensation is being designed, with support from the RSPB. These farmland specialists include red listed Birds of Conservation Concern and the offset is being tailored to provide valuable habitat for these species.

The associated compensation parcels will provide priority habitat field margins, cultivated fallow and rough grassland, all of which will provide essential resources for farmland birds with a focus on year-round food and shelter to allow successful breeding and winter survival.

A network of lowland meadows also forms a significant element within the offset to compensate the biodiversity loss on site. The offset site is within 6 km of the development and provides an estimated total gain of 430 biodiversity units.



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Another recent project is a multi-development offset in Rugby, Warwickshire restoring scrub, semi-improved and amenity grassland to species-rich lowland meadow, rough wet grassland and wet woodland. The offset site is close to the centre of Rugby and provides a connective feature, as part of an extensive green network linking the city centre to the rural environment.

The reintroduction of traditional meadow management in the area will have many benefits for conservation; the site provides habitat for several UK and local BAP targets and benefits several priority species. The site is also entirely accessible to the public who can enjoy the enhanced aesthetic and biodiversity value of the area.

## Partnership with AB Sustain

Alongside our sites registry and network of contacts we have a long-term partnership with

AB sustain that allows us to actively and efficiently search for land that can offset the potential loss of biodiversity at development sites. The following quote from Simon Phelps (UK General Manager) describes why our model provides a valuable opportunity for landowners:

“The Environment Bank and their model of biodiversity offsetting provides an exciting opportunity for UK landowners. Biodiversity offsetting offers farmers the prospect of long-term income in return for conservation-based land management without affecting access and ownership of the land. Landowners can manage selected parcels of their land for the benefit of wildlife and help reduce residual loss of biodiversity from development while benefiting from a commercially viable long-term income that can be scaled according to the amount of land available and the activity being undertaken.”

### Great crested newt pilot

This year we have been working on developing an innovative approach to Great crested newt conservation. We have set up a consortium of private companies and environmental NGOs (backed by Natural England policy) to pilot a scheme in Beds, Bucks, Oxon and Milton Keynes, that will deliver ‘favourable conservation status’ for newts at a population level. Natural England intends to roll-out the policy nationally next year (2018).

The current approach to Great crested newts is based on protecting individual animals and has so far failed to deliver conservation aims - despite best endeavours, mitigation interventions often fail and studies show a widespread and significant decline in newts, even at mitigation sites. On top of this, surveying and mitigation is costly, time-limited and causes significant delays with very limited outcomes for newt conservation.

The new approach is based on understanding newt distribution across the landscape and

delivering targeted conservation strategies that achieve meaningful long-term mitigation and compensation whilst reducing the burden on developers. The new system will involve local authorities granting planning permission and newt authorisation at the same time under a District Licence secured for them from Natural England by the Environment Bank consortium, thereby avoiding the need for a separate licensing process and hence delivering a quicker and more effective system.



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### UK news

The number of LPAs implementing NNL/NG policies continues to increase with >30 LPAs actively engaged in biodiversity accounting and compensation to great success. Many more beginning to introduce the standards and processes. Quantifying the biodiversity units impacted by a development at the impact assessment stage enables offsetting measures to be deployed thereby achieving net gains in biodiversity.

Research into, and evaluation of, biodiversity accounting and offsetting, continues to develop since the publication of the Natural Environment White Paper (2011) and subsequent government offsetting pilots (2012). A new net gain paper, released in September last year, concluded that the time has come for a net gain approach in the UK (something we are already working towards

with numerous LPAs). The paper drew on the practical experiences of offsetting from around the world to make six recommendations:

1. Biodiversity net gain and the use of the DEFRA metric should be an obligatory part of the National Planning Policy Framework.
2. Biodiversity net gain should be incorporated into DEFRA's forthcoming 25-year environment plan.
3. The most recent DEFRA guidance for biodiversity offsetting should be revised, with the offsetting metric used to measure biodiversity net gain tightened, whilst maintaining simplicity.
4. Creating a consistent understanding of guidance at a local level would create a level playing field for developers.
5. Biodiversity net gain could be incorporated at a corporate level and in private sector developments.
6. Collaboration to build an evidence base of the long-term performance of biodiversity net gain developments.

A link to the paper and more detailed review can be found on [our website](#).



In late 2016 CIRIA, CIEEM and IEMA collectively published good practice principles on biodiversity net gain in development. Work is currently underway to expand these into guidance and case-studies. The principles are available on our website resources page.

## International news

There are 40 offsetting systems working around the world and we are in communication with or monitor a number of these systems to apply their findings and successes to the UK.

France has been implementing a similar system to the UK for the last ten years and recently made adherence to the mitigation hierarchy and off-site compensation a **legal requirement**. If a developer is non-compliant with the new law, an authority can mandate that offsets are executed through a third-party operator. However, more and more developers see the system as a positive way to navigate risks in their projects and gain greater clarity and increased reputation.

The success of biodiversity offsetting in France shows the system can be viable even without the large land masses in countries such as the US and Australia. More information can be found on [our website](#). Examples of approaches to offsetting in a number of other countries are described in our [international examples](#) info sheet.

## EB staff news:

We are delighted to welcome Sarah Garratt to our team as a new project officer who, among her other responsibilities, is managing the Great crested newt project. We also welcome Katie Gowers as a new project assistant who is supporting the delivery of a number of projects. Cara Marshall continues to support the team as an Associate of Environment Bank.

## Contact us

For advice or further information on our updates or biodiversity accounting and offsetting you can contact us at:

[www.environmentbank.com/contact](http://www.environmentbank.com/contact) or directly at [admin@environmentbank.com](mailto:admin@environmentbank.com).

Alternatively, call Louise Martland, our national programme manager for a chat, on 07710192295