

Ecosystems Knowledge Network Forum Webinar 15/01/2019 – Q&A

Question	Response
<p>Who would you see making the definitive evaluation of how much habitat would be lost in the process of development? For example ecological consultants.</p>	<p>Yes. Under the current EIA process, a development is assessed by survey by the developers ecological consultants. The Environment Bank then uses their published reports and data to run the Defra metric to calculate the biodiversity units lost. This takes into account any retained on site through the application of the mitigation hierarchy (though most evidence shows that on-site provision delivers little for biodiversity and is really just landscaping and planting rather than proper effective biodiversity restoration). That loss statistics is presented by EB to the planning authority with a report showing how many conservation credits need to be purchased by the developer to deliver net gain, using a net gain uplift of 10-25% of the biodiversity unit loss.</p>
<p>Can I clarify that the 80% of gain off site refers to 80% of the 10% additional habitat suggested in the net gain consultation paper, not 80% of the overall habitat area on site before development.</p>	<p>No it is actually the 80% of the total biodiversity unit loss inclusive of the eg.10% net gain figure. If you think of a housing estate, it would not be possible to create BNG to that level <u>as well as</u> do the development. I'm currently working out for an average scheme given x residential units per ha, how much biodiversity unit loss would take place and how much land would be consumed by BNG delivery at different levels of development. This will show that we will only be able to deliver BNG if most of it is off-site. I don't think that has been recognised quantitatively. Though the Defra consultation does refer in many places to offsite delivery, bespoke sites and use of habitat banks, so they must have started to recognise the limitations of onsite delivery.</p>
<p>Can David explain what he means by LPAs 'not caring' about net gain, surely not specifically reference to whether or not they subscribe to EB?</p>	<p>No. Our experience has shown, in many cases, the woeful weight given to biodiversity in the planning system. Where a local authority does have an ecologist (and I think now its less than 31% that do), they are at least showing some interest in biodiversity, but the ecologist is often (and not to offend!) seen as lower in the pecking order than the planners. In the senior planners don't have an interest in wildlife (and very many don't) then the ecologist really struggles to get their concerns heard. And one only has to look at the level of inspection and enforcement on existing developments (or lack of it) to realise the current approach doesn't work and biodiversity doesn't get a say. This is actually in direct contradiction to what the NPPF requires, but the chief planners don't see ecology, generally, as a material factor in planning. Only if BNG is made mandatory will this change and the voice of the ecologist will be given equal weight to the highways planner, the strategic planner etc. And with the NatureSpace Partnership we have established to deliver District Licence based conservation of great crested newts, we are able to pay the local authority for a member of staff to do all the ecological evaluations of development in respect of their impacts on newts. Suddenly, we are seeing much greater engagement by the planning authorities and developers are properly having to account for their impacts and compensate for them. Under a mandatory system we think such an approach could work for habitat impacts and biodiversity unit loss.</p>
<p>What % does the broker get of the cost of the conservation credit deal?</p>	<p>Brokerage is usually 5-10% of the deal. Small offset sites can take a disproportionately long time to negotiate and are hence less cost effective than habitat banks.</p>