

Hartlepool Borough Council and Environment Bank partner to unlock housing growth and restore local biodiversity

20 March 2025: Environment Bank, the leading off-site Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) provider, and Hartlepool Borough Council, announce today the creation of a local Habitat Bank¹ that will unlock sustainable housing growth in the region, ensuring environmental planning requirements are met.

With almost 400 new homes needed every year in Hartlepool, the council recognised the importance of securing a ready supply of Biodiversity Units to support development demand for local BNG compliance solutions.

BNG legislation requires all development to account for any harm done to habitats and achieve an overall biodiversity uplift (or net gain) of 10%. They can do this by purchasing Biodiversity Units from local BNG Habitat Banks. A ready supply of Biodiversity Units is therefore crucial to unlocking housing development.

Instead of creating a BNG Habitat Bank independently, the council has partnered with Environment Bank who will fund, establish, monitor, and oversee the long-term management of Hartlepool Habitat Bank as it generates Biodiversity Units to support house building in the borough.

Securing housing growth while enhancing nature

Housing projects are already underway in the area –from developers like Bellway, Miller Homes, and Keepmoat – and Hartlepool Habitat Bank gives developers immediate access to high-quality local Biodiversity Units to help meet BNG planning requirements.

A collaborative public-private approach to BNG delivery

This partnership serves as a model for how local planning authorities (LPAs) can work with the private sector to deliver both homes and meaningful environmental improvements. With the recent Planning and Infrastructure Bill laying out its plans to accelerate development, this partnership approach becomes even more critical – both to LPAs and to nature.

Catherine Spitzer, CEO of Environment Bank said: *“Hartlepool Council’s approach demonstrates that meeting housing targets and investing in nature can, and should, go hand in hand. While developers are required to prioritise on-site BNG, in many cases, space constraints make this unfeasible and ineffective, particularly when building at scale. By partnering with Hartlepool Council to create a local BNG Habitat Bank, we’ve generated Biodiversity Units that developers can purchase to meet their BNG obligations off-site.*

¹ Habitat Banks are nature sites where habitats are created, secured and managed long-term.

“Having a BNG provision within the LPA area means developers won’t need to source Biodiversity Units that aren’t local – which would be more expensive for the developer– and this ensures that biodiversity gains are delivered close to where the impact occurs. This approach supports the local environment, reduces costs for developers, and ultimately helps accelerate housing growth, so we’re proud to be partnering with Hartlepool Council to create a local BNG Habitat Bank.”

Philip Timmins, Principal Estates Surveyor, Hartlepool Borough Council said:

“Ensuring a ready supply of local off-site Biodiversity Units is crucial for unlocking development in Hartlepool. Partnering with Environment Bank allows us to meet our housing growth targets while delivering significant environmental benefits – without adding administrative burdens to the council.”

Hartlepool Habitat Bank, located in the village of Hart, spans nearly 35 acres of previously low-productivity farmland. The land is being transformed into habitats that encourage biodiversity, including wildflower meadows, native hedgerows, mixed scrubland, and new ponds.

These enhancements will support a variety of native species, such as lapwings, skylarks, great crested newts, brown hares, and pollinating butterflies. Environment Bank will also be creating a traditional orchard – featuring locally characteristic fruit trees – and establishing seven new ponds amongst the vast grassland to increase the resilience of the land and support natural flood management.

Thomas Dodds, Ecologist, Environment Bank commented: *“Hartlepool Habitat Bank will provide great opportunities for pollinating butterflies and nesting birds. It will also add to the unique mix of biodiversity in Teesside and bring nature closer to those in the community while also retaining the character of the land.”*

Hartlepool Habitat Bank is secured under a conservation covenant, a legal mechanism that ensures the land is used to deliver BNG for the mandatory 30-year period², to ensure that the project has an oversight by an independent third party.

More recently, Environment Bank was involved in a vital transport infrastructure development linked to Everton Football Club’s new Bramley-Moore Dock stadium in Liverpool. By supplying Everton FC with Biodiversity Units, Environment Bank enabled the planning approval for this important transport project, supporting the development of a crowd management zone and staff welfare building at Sandhills Station.

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² The annual habitat management payments are funded in advance for the full 30-year project using an evergreen bond provided to Environment Bank by the Gresham House British Sustainable Infrastructure Fund.