

River Dearne Active Travel Route Barnsley



Biodiversity Net Gain Assessment (Baseline)

Report Ref. ER-6571-02

24/08/2026

Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council

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Report duration	In accordance with CIEEM (2019), unless otherwise stated the findings of this report remain valid for a period of 18 months. After this period advice should be sought on the scope of any updating work required.



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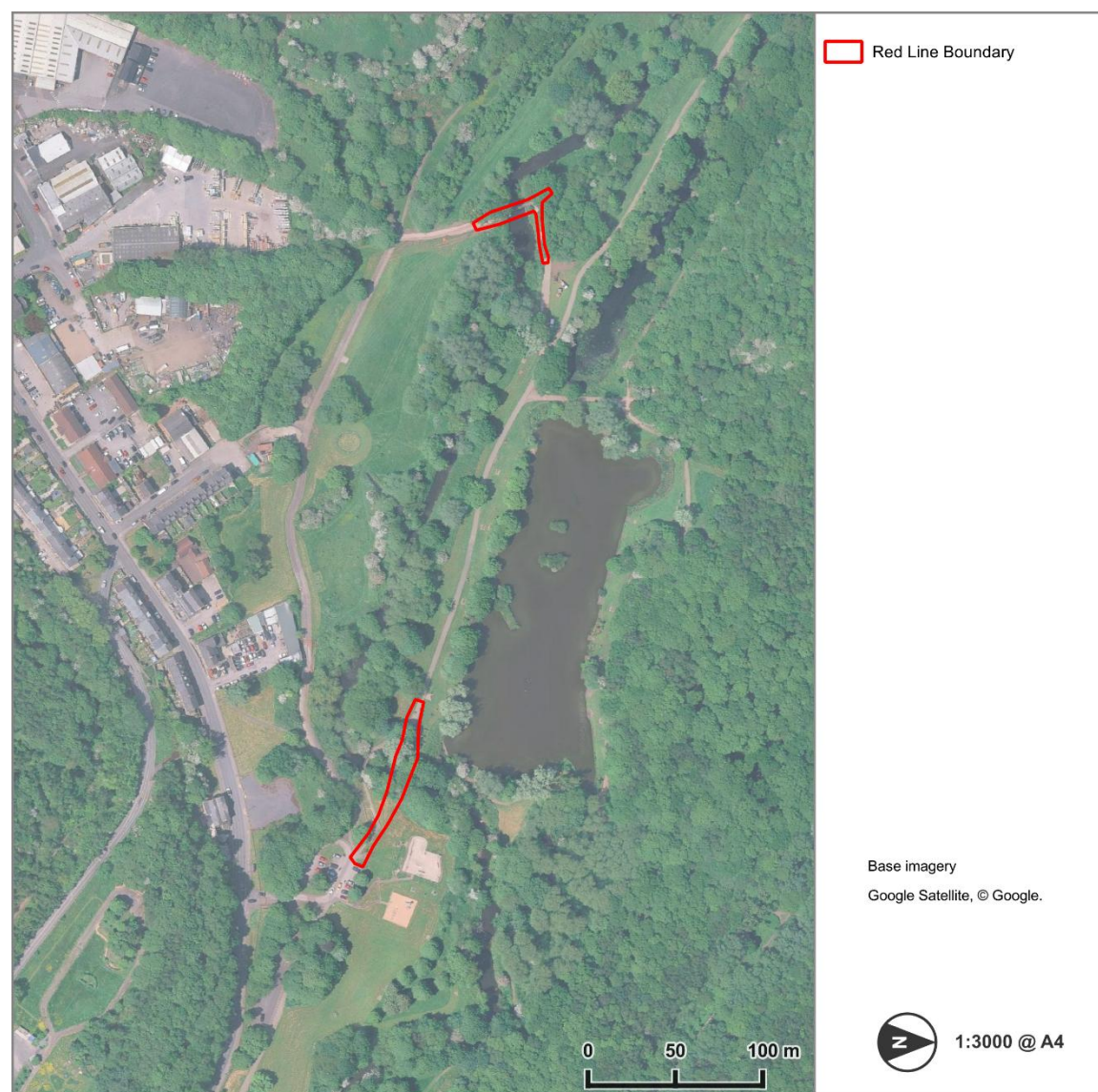
Introduction

1. Brooks Ecological Ltd was commissioned by Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council to carry out a Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) Assessment of the proposed development Site at River Dearne Active Travel Route Barnsley.
2. The assessment applies to the parcel of land shown in Figure 1 opposite.
3. The assessment is informed by a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal Survey of the Site detailed in our report ER-6571-01A.
4. Biodiversity Accounting metrics are used to quantify the value of a site in Biodiversity Units, which helps in assessing the ecological impacts of the proposed development on the Site.
5. Biodiversity Units can help to inform avoidance, or on-Site mitigation levels required; or as a last resort can translate to a direct monetary value where compensation (off-Site) is required.
6. For the purposes of metric calculations, the Site area has been measured using GIS against the provided red line boundary as 0.13ha.

Limitations

7. The red line boundary has been produced through georeferencing the supplied plans to the highest accuracy achievable. Positional accuracy cannot be fully verified; mapped features should be interpreted as spatial estimates rather than exact on-ground locations.

Figure 1 Extent of BNG assessment (red line boundary).



Pre-development baseline

Habitats identified

8. Habitats present on-Site are outlined in Table 1, opposite. These are shown in relation to location and extent in Figure 2 overleaf.

Condition Assessment

9. Habitat condition has been assessed as part of the Preliminary Ecological Appraisal of the Site.
10. Information on condition assessments is provided in the Excel spreadsheet CA-6571-01 provided alongside this report.

Strategic Significance

11. None of the habitats on-Site fall within or close to the Wildlife Habitat Network, and so all are mapped as ‘area/compensation not in local strategy/ no local strategy’.

Irreplaceable Habitat

12. Irreplaceable habitats have not been found on-Site.

Habitat Degradation¹

13. There is no evidence on-Site or in aerial mapping of the Site which suggests that it has been deliberately degraded.

Biodiversity Metric

14. Habitat types, conditions, and areas have been entered into the Statutory Biodiversity Metric Calculation Tool alongside information on their strategic significance.
15. The Statutory Biodiversity Metric Calculation Tool (published 03/07/2025), is provided alongside this assessment, in Excel spreadsheet BM-6571-Baseline 260608_1215 and may be useful in investigating design options for the Site.

¹ See [Appendices](#) for further information on degradation.

Table 1 Habitat Types.

Habitat	Label ref.	Distinctiveness	Condition	See Condition Assessment sheet
Modified grassland	G2,G1,G3	Low	Poor	5B
Developed land; sealed surface	-	V.Low	N/A - Other	-
Watercourse footprint	R1,R2	V.low	N/A - Other	-
Ruderal/Ephemeral	-	Low	Moderate	22
Other woodland; broadleaved	W1,W2	Medium	Moderate	24
Urban tree	T2	Medium	Good	9
Urban tree	T1	Medium	Poor	9
Watercourse				
Other rivers and streams	R2	High	Poor	See River Condition Assessment report (report reference ER-6571-03)
	R1		Poor	

Figure 2 The western section (left) and the eastern section (right) of the Site’s habitats assigned to types used in the Biodiversity Metric. Labelled codes cross-reference to our condition assessment and description in the PEAR, which should be read in conjunction with this report.



Trading Rules

16. As part of delivering a Net Gain for biodiversity, the BNG process requires that trading rules are complied with, such that loss of habitats is compensated for in a like-for-like or like-for-better fashion. This is based on habitat distinctiveness.
17. Once trading rules are complied with, the 'gain' component can come from any distinctiveness category.

Habitat Unit Score

18. The Site has been assessed as having a baseline score of 0.91 Habitat Units. These break down as shown in Table 2, below.

Table 2 Habitat Units broken down by distinctiveness at this Site.

Distinctiveness	Units	Approach to compensation if lost
Very Low	n/a	No compensation required.
Low	0.11	Can be replaced with <u>any</u> habitat of the same distinctiveness (low) or any habitat from a higher distinctiveness (Medium, High or Very High)
Medium	0.80	<u>Can not</u> be replaced with habitats from a lower distinctiveness. Compensation needs to be like for like, or like for better. This means it can only be replaced by habitat from the same broad categories in Medium distinctiveness or any habitat from a higher distinctiveness category (High or Very High).
High	0.00	Can only be replaced with the same habitat.
Very High	0.00	Can only be replaced with the same habitat; bespoke compensation required.

Distinctiveness	Units	Approach to compensation if lost
Irreplaceable	n/a	Bespoke compensation required, outside of BNG.

Watercourse Unit Score

19. The Site has been assessed as having a baseline score of 0.23 Watercourse Units. These break down as shown in Table 4, below.

Table 3 Watercourse Units broken down by distinctiveness at this Site.

Distinctiveness	Units	Approach to compensation if lost
Low	0.00	Can be replaced with any watercourse of Medium or higher distinctiveness.
Medium	0.00	Can only be replaced with the same watercourse type.
High	0.23	Can only be replaced with the same watercourse type.
Very High	0.00	Can only be replaced with the same watercourse type; bespoke compensation required.

Planning your development

20. The Biodiversity Gain Hierarchy of Avoid – Enhance – Create – Offset, as set out in the Planning Practice Guidance, is a material consideration of planning, and as such a project should also be able to illustrate how it has complied with this. Its relevance to this Site is set out in Table 3 below.

Table 4 Biodiversity Gain Hierarchy summary.

Level of Hierarchy	Requirement at this Site
<i>First</i> Avoid	Avoid the loss of woodlands W1 and W2, and trees T1 and T2. Clearance of the Medium-distinctiveness habitats – namely other broadleaved woodland and individual trees (T1 and T2) should be avoided wherever possible, and minimised where it is not avoidable. No works are planned to take place in the watercourse channel.
<i>then</i> Enhance	Retained habitats on-Site should be enhanced where possible as an important source of Habitat Units post-development. The modified grassland areas present the greatest opportunities for enhancement, as all are in Poor condition currently.
<i>then</i> Create	Any residual loss of Units should be made up for with Habitat Units generated through the creation of new habitats on-Site. Units may be generated through specific ecologically targeted habitat creation, such as wildflower grassland, tree planting and standard amenity habitats, such as amenity grassland.
<i>then</i> Offset	If a 10% Net Gain cannot be achieved on-Site, any remaining deficit will need to be compensated for off-Site.

21. Assuming the recommendations set out above can be followed, it seems likely that both the Mitigation Hierarchy and the Biodiversity Gain Hierarchy can be complied with. These recommendations should be a consideration of any design work.
22. It will be essential that the project can evidence engagement with this process in documents presented at the planning stage (e.g. the completed Biodiversity Net

Gain Report). Evidence could also be required as prerequisite for accessing off-Site or statutory biodiversity credits. You will need to:

- **Ensure that biodiversity and BNG are considered at an early stage** of your project design. Look at how you *could* comply with the hierarchy opposite.
- **Keep evidence of early-stage designs** which were considered and record evidence of why these were not appropriate / achievable.
- **Provide information to your ecologist** on the above process - they will need this to complete the next part of BNG reporting.

Summary & Recommendations

Baseline value

23. The Site's baseline value is measured as 0.91 Habitat Units and 0.23 Watercourse Units².

Trading Rules

24. As shown in Table 2, most of the Site's baseline value is accounted for by medium or higher distinctiveness habitat types. Satisfying Trading Rules therefore needs to be a key consideration during the design process.

Recommendations

25. Recommendations are set out in the table opposite.

Biodiversity Offsetting

26. Development of the Site is very likely to result in the requirement to offset losses elsewhere. Potential means of achieving this would be:
- Creating a bespoke offset on land available to the developer, as locally as possible.
 - Making use (through contribution) of any Local Authority habitat banking scheme, if this is available.
 - Purchasing the necessary Units from a broker or habitat banking scheme, again as locally as possible (and ideally within the same Local Authority or National Character area/s as the development).
 - Purchasing Statutory Credits from the UK government scheme. This is the last resort and is deliberately priced to be uncompetitive. Twice as many Credits will be required as there are Units to offset.

² Our report provides an estimate of the Site's value in Biodiversity Units. This is based on thorough assessment at the time of survey and using the information available at this time. In this assessment we have used the latest version of Defra's Biodiversity Metric Tool, the UK Habitats Classification, and relevant guidance. This assessment requires subjective judgments to be made in terms of habitat type and condition

Table 5 Summary of Planning Considerations.

Recommendation	Rationale
Required during the design stage process	
R1 Produce a layout which minimises loss of biodiversity	Engage with the recommendations set out above, involve your ecologist in designs at an early stage, as required. The proposals will need to consider the NPPF hierarchy of Avoid – Mitigate – Compensate in minimising any loss of biodiversity.
R2 Produce a Habitat Retention Plan	Make sure your design team follows ecological advice to and make sure there are no design conflicts. The Habitat Retention Plan should identify areas which can be excluded from <u>any</u> impacts of clearance and construction. In producing the Plan you should consider the need to provide (amongst other things) Site compounds, to store and move materials, to install drainage, flood storage, access and services - all with suitable easements.
R3 Consider your planning boundary	Decide on the extent of red-line vs blue/black-line land. Minimising the extent of your red line can limit exposure to BNG, but can also leave you needing separate legal agreements to use off-Site land for BNG delivery. Work out at an early stage what is right for your project. Your planning consultant should be able to help with this decision.
R4 Biodiversity Gain Strategy (BGS)	Engage an ecologist to work with the design team to maximise available Biodiversity Units on-Site, taking into account Trading rules. Identify opportunities to address any losses off-Site.
R5 Landscape Design	Make sure your landscape architect follows ecological advice or the BGS to maximise Biodiversity Units on-Site and make sure there are no design conflicts.
To be completed once a fixed Site Layout is agreed	
R6 Calculate the final Biodiversity Impact Score	Once the Site Layout is fixed and a Habitat Retention Plan is produced, the Statutory Metric will be used to quantify change in biodiversity unit value at the Site. This report will then be updated to include the post-development scores.

and could be open to other interpretations. Reliance on the Unit Score, or conversion of this into a monetary value, would be at the developer's own risk. Where conversion to monetary value is required, it is always advisable to get calculations checked independently.

Information required at next stages

27. Once a layout is available, we can calculate the post-development BNG value of the Site -this will be required for any planning submission. It is helpful if the layout is as progressed as possible (ideally fixed) as recalculating different plans can be a lengthy process.
28. Establishment of the post development value of the Site will need to be based on several assumptions which we have set out below, please provide the additional information required against each - if this is available:

	Factor	Information Required
1	<u>Timing</u> The BNG metric includes options to identify habitat creation which is deferred (by x years after it is lost) or habitat which is created in advance (elsewhere prior to its loss from Site). These are subject to multipliers and will affect your ultimate BNG score. Unless you have told us otherwise, we have assumed a 2-year build programme and a delay of 2 years between loss of habitat and creation of new. Calculations will need to be re-run if changes to the project plan result in a change to this figure.	Please provide a realistic timescale for the period between loss of habitat (Site clearance) and the completion of new on-Site habitat areas.
2	<u>Phasing</u> Unless you have told us otherwise, we have assumed that development will not be phased (in planning terms) and that habitat will be lost and created in a single phase.	Please confirm whether development will be phased.
3	<u>Habitat Retention</u> Unless you have provided a habitat retention plan showing areas where habitat can be retained un-disturbed, we have assumed that all mapped habitat will be lost from the Site and then replaced.	Please provide a habitat retention plan showing area which can be retained unaffected by clearance, excavation, storage, compounds etc. Identify also any areas of temporary impacts - these may be impacted but can be returned to the same habitat within 2 years.
4	<u>Other limiting factors</u> Ecological conditions are likely to be the primary factors determining the potential of the site to deliver Biodiversity Units, these would normally be established through a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA). Where a PEA has not been carried out, we have assumed that ecological factors are not limiting. Where a PEA has been carried out by a third party, we have assumed that the information provided is suitable and accurate. There are other limiting factors falling outside of the remit of ecological assessment which could also affect delivery, these may not be apparent to us at this stage. As part of any future management plans produced to deliver Biodiversity Units it will be necessary to assess information on (though not limited to) the following factors - any of which could have a bearing on the site's potential: • Designated Sites (these may have been considered if desk-study has been part of the scope) • Protected and Notable Species (these may have been considered if desk-study has been part of the scope) • Invasive and Non-native Species • Land tenure and public access • Climate • Geology / topography	Provide information and reports or references any of the factors which you know will be, or could be, limiting in terms of habitat creation.

	Factor	Information Required
	• Agricultural land status • Soils and substrates • Contaminated Land • Hydrology and Drainage • Flood Risk • Landscape Character and Designations • Historic Environment and Earth Heritage • Services and Infrastructure • Land ownership These factors may be outside of the remit of this report (especially where a PEA has not been produced) and the expertise of an ecologist. We cannot be responsible for the impact of any of these factors on the potential of the site to deliver Biodiversity Units. Where other information is not made available, we have assumed they are not limiting	

References

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Appendices

The following reports/digital documents have been provided alongside this report and should be read in conjunction with it:

- BM-6571-Baseline 260608_1215 – Statutory Biodiversity Metric Calculation Tool
- CA-6571-01 - Statutory Biodiversity Metric Condition Assessments
- ER-6571-01A - Preliminary Ecological Appraisal
- ER-6571-03 – River Condition Assessment

Habitat degradation

Within Schedule 14 of the Environment Act, which sets out the biodiversity gain condition for development, measures are included that allow 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. In order to ascertain the habitats present and their condition on 30th January 2020, aerial imagery or data sets from that time could be used. 30th January 2020 is the relevant date as it was the day the Bill entered Parliament.

In 2023, the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023 (LURA), introduced additional wording further tightening the law regarding degradation by extending the circumstances in which degradation can be addressed. This wording covered both authorised and unauthorised activity on onsite and offsite habitats, on or after **25th August 2023**.