NET BENEFIT FOR BIODIVERSITY: HOUSEHOLDERS

Who is this guidance note for?

This guidance note is primarily for planning applicants with applications that fall into the *Householder* category which can include proposals such as extensions. It may also be useful for other minor planning applications such as conversions, renovations, and rebuilds.

Why do we need this guidance note?

The State of Nature 2023 report[1], Evidences how the United Kingdom is one of the most nature-depleted countries on Earth. The latest findings show that one in six species in Wales are at risk of extinction. These include iconic species which were once widespread in Wales and now restricted to only a few sites, like red squirrels and water voles.
Wales' natural resources are under pressure and face challenges such as habitat fragmentation, pollution, and climate change. These pressures cause damage to ecosystems that provide us with the things we need, like food, fresh water, and clean air. The impacts on our natural resources are the accumulative result of the choices we make every day. They present a risk to the resilience of our ecosystems, which will impact on people's well-being both now and in the future.

Action for nature can make a real difference in reversing this trend. Primarily driven by large increases in two species recovering from a historic decline, bats have shown an average increase in numbers of 76% since 1998 thanks to increased protection of the places they live and conservation efforts that often directly relate to building development works. It is the responsibility of everyone to ensure the positive future of the state of nature in Wales, and the planning system has shown to make a significant contribution to nature recovery.

The Policy and Legislation

Planning Policy Wales[2] states that planning authorities must maintain and enhance biodiversity and promote the resilience of ecosystems through the planning process as part of compliance with the Environment (Wales) Act 2016. Biodiversity enhancements which are proportionate to the scale and nature of development must be provided to ensure a Net Benefit for Biodiversity is delivered. Significant weight will be given to the absence of enhancements which could lead to the refusal of a planning application.

Local planning policy also support the principle of protecting and enhancing biodiversity within the plan area[3].

For more information on policy and legislation see the Wales Biodiversity Partnership website[4].

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What can I do to provide a Net Benefit for Biodiversity?

Implementing one or more of the enhancements described over the next pages would constitute a Net Benefit for Biodiversity with most householder and other smaller planning applications.

Creating and enhancing semi-natural habitats such as wildflower strips, hedges and cloddiau can improve ecosystem diversity, extent, connectivity, and condition for all kinds of biodiversity; from bats, birds, hedgehogs, amphibians and reptiles, to invertebrates, plants, and fungi.

Artificial habitat provision can also be considered where appropriate. You could consider providing boxes for use by bats, birds, pollinators such as bees and other insects, or hedgehogs (including providing hedgehog gaps). Where the development proposals do not offer appropriate locations to consider integrated nest or roost provision, then boxes mounted to trees or walls could be considered. We advise that woodcrete type nest/roost boxes are used, as these are made from long lasting, durable materials and are more likely to last throughout the lifespan of the building in comparison to wooden boxes and often provide a better internal environment for potential inhabitants.

If you consider this option, then it is important to site boxes in appropriate areas and position them so as best to appeal to that species.

Considering biodiversity in your design

Where there is a reasonable likelihood that your planning proposal will adversely affect important existing biodiversity features, the planning authority will require ecological information about the species/habitats present and the extent that they may be affected by the proposal before issuing a decision. The type of assessment needed can vary and is dependent on consultation with the council's biodiversity service.

Even if your planning proposal is unlikely to adversely affect existing biodiversity, the local planning authority still have a duty to be pro-active in promoting biodiversity enhancements such as those described here.

Green Infrastructure Statement

Planning Policy Wales states that a Green Infrastructure Statement (GIS) should be provided with all planning applications. A GIS must provide a brief assessment of what impact a planning application will have to existing biodiversity and describe what and how green infrastructure will be provisioned into the design. To achieve this, A GIS must outline how the **'stepwise approach'** has been applied and describe what **biodiversity enhancements** will be provided (examples of which are described in this guidance note) – for further advice on GISs please contact the council's biodiversity service: bioamrywiaeth@gwynedd.llyw.cymru or refer to Planning Policy Wales[2].

[1] State of Nature https://stateofnature.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/TP25999-State-of-Nature-main-report_2023_FULL-DOC-v12.pdf

[2] Planning Policy Wales (Edition 12, 2024) gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2024-02/planning-policy-wales-edition-12_1.pdf

[3] Anglesey and Gwynedd Joint Local Development Plan (July 2017)

[4] Information on legislation and guidance https://www.biodiversitywales.org.uk/Legislation-Guidance

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Wildflower & pollinator planting

As well as providing shelter and access to your garden for wildlife, using the right plants can provide benefits for biodiversity too.

Plant native shrubs for their flowers and berries – these will attract butterflies, moths, bees, and birds. Evergreen shrubs provide winter foliage and shelter during colder months.

Encourage bats into your garden by planting flowers that attract insects, for example, night-scented stock, evening primrose and lavender. One bat can consume up to 3000 midges a night!

For smaller gardens, planting climbers such as honeysuckle, clematis, sweetpeas and roses provide resources for pollinators without the need for large spaces.

Useful links - Nature Isn't Neat - Monmouthshire

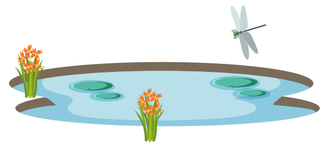
Lists of Ornamental garden plants perfect for pollinators. - Monmouthshire

Hedgerow planting

Planting a new hedgerow containing native shrub and small tree species provides a valuable food and shelter resource for a variety of species including birds, insects and small mammals.

Useful link - NE HEDGEROW PLANTING (5639) (hedge-link.org.uk)

Pond creation



A shallow freshwater pond creates habitat for a wide variety of species including insects, amphibians and plants; as well as providing an important water resource for birds and mammals

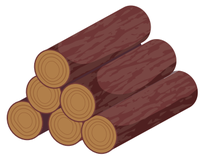
Useful links - How to build a pond | The Wildlife Trusts
Creating-Garden-Ponds-for-Wildlife.pdf (freshwaterhabitats.org.uk)
Gardens & ponds | Amphibian and Reptile Conservation (arc-trust.org)

Bug hotels

Insects and other minibeasts need safe spaces to shelter, hide from predators and raise their young. You can help them by building a bug hotel in your garden or encourage solitary bees (such as leafcutter and mason bees) by providing a suitable house for them.

Useful link -
How to Build a Bug Hotel - Woodland Trust
Solitary Bee Houses – ArkWildlife
Guide to Bee Homes - Friends of the Earth

Refugia creation



Use old, dead, logs to create an inviting home and feeding ground for insects, toads, newts and reptiles. All the rotting wood, flaking bark and maze of little gaps between the logs is heaven for a wide range of wildlife.

Useful link - Create a log pile for wildlife | The RSPB
Dragons in your Garden | Amphibian and Reptile Conservation (arc-trust.org)

Tree planting

Trees can provide food, shelter and nesting sites for a whole range of animals- from insects that make their home inside the tree, to the woodpeckers that hammer their way inside to eat them.

If you have the space, you might decide to manage trees in a small group, otherwise you may choose to stick with a single tree in a border, hedge or lawn.

Coniferous and deciduous trees can bring different features to your garden and if it's possible having both can be a great benefit. Evergreen coniferous trees will give foliage and greenery all year round, whilst deciduous ones will give a huge variety of leaf shape and colours as well as a seasonal bounty of fruits and seeds.

Plant trees With an understanding of how big they will grow in 15, 20 or even 100 years! Keep away from utilities and retain a good distance from buildings.

Useful link - Planting Garden Trees - The RSPB
Arboricultural Association - Young Tree Establishment (trees.org.uk)

Lawns for wildlife

Reducing mowing to just once or twice a year provides more flowers for pollinators, allows plants to set seed and creates better habitats for other animals.

Useful link - Nature Isn't Neat - Monmouthshire
How to grow a lawn that's better for wildlife | Natural History Museum (nhm.ac.uk)

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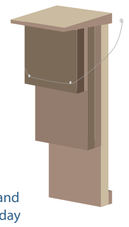
Bat boxes



Bat Boxes can provide roosting opportunities for bats where access to tree roosts and suitable buildings is limited.

Locate boxes:

- Where bats are known to feed and navigate (close to hedges and tree lines);
- Ideally at least 4m above the ground (where safe installation is possible);
- Away from artificial light sources (to protect them from predation); and
- Sheltered from strong winds and exposed to the sun for part of the day (usually south, south-east or south-west).
- Consider boxes that are open at the bottom to avoid the need to clean out.

Bats need time to find and explore new homes, and it may be several months or even years before boxes have residents – be patient! Once bats find a place they want to live they can return over and over again.

Please note, as bats are vulnerable to disturbance and fully protected under UK law, boxes must only be opened by a licensed bat worker.

Useful link - Putting up your box - Bat Boxes - Bat Conservation Trust (bats.org.uk)

Bird boxes

Bird boxes are an easy and effective way of providing habitat for a variety of bird species.

- Nest boxes for tits, sparrows or starlings should be fixed two to four metres up a tree or a wall.
- Unless there are trees or buildings which shade the box during the day, face the box between north and east, thus avoiding strong sunlight and the wettest winds.
- Make sure that the birds have a clear flight path to the nest without any clutter directly infront of the entrance. Tilt the box forward slightly so that any driving rain will hit the roof and bounce clear.

Swift nest bricks / boxes and swallow and house martin nest cups can be fitted under the eaves of a building to provide shelter for these species.
A swift nest brick could be integrated into the walls of your house and must be at least 5m above ground.

Useful link - Where To Put A Bird Box | Nestboxes – The RSPB

Nest cups – House Martin Conservation UK & Ireland

Bat access points

Creating bat access gaps when carrying out work is one of the simplest ways to protect existing bat roosts in the long-term. This is often a requirement for carrying out work within the strict legislation that protects bats and you should always get personalised advice for your project from a specialist before going ahead.

An easy way to create access under a roof tile is to raise the tile slightly with a timber batten or small piece of tile.

Roof access points for bats should avoid breathable roofing membranes, the long fibres in these materials can be pulled out by roosting bats and cause an entanglement threat to the bats. Bituminous roofing felt is recommended for use instead, as it is dark-coloured, with a rough surface that bats can grip onto and will help maintain a suitable and safe environment for bats within the roof void/structure

Useful link - Creating access for bats - Things to consider when planning works - Bat Conservation Trust

Bee bricks

Bee bricks provide homes for cavity nesting species of bees such as red mason bees and leafcutter bees. These bees don't bother humans and rarely sting and are often solitary, unlike honeybees.

A bee brick could be in the form of integral provision within the fabric of the development, an integrated box is a self-contained box capable of being integrated into the structure of a wall/building.

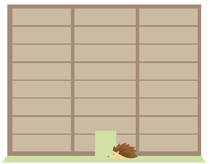
Useful link - Bee Brick | Research Projects | Falmouth University

Cloddiau

Cloddiau are particularly valuable in terms of flora and fauna compared to most other forms of boundary. The earth core can be a haven for small mammals, reptiles, amphibians and invertebrates - more so than a dry-stone wall. Insects can abound between the stones, and the stone/soil combination supports a diverse flora. They often have hedges on top, and sometimes an associated ditch. This range of habitats can create mini nature reserves within an otherwise barren landscape.

Useful link - Drystone Walling

Hedgehog access



Hedgehogs can travel around one mile each night in search of food and shelter. A hedgehog highway is a series of holes in fences and walls that allow hedgehogs to pass freely between gardens, parks and allotments. Hedgehog highways allow hogs to move around without having to use human roads and risk being hurt or killed by cars.

To retain habitat connectivity for hedgehogs and other wildlife, boundary treatments should not be flush to the ground, or suitably sized gaps 13 x 13 cm should be left at points away from roads, connecting with neighbouring gardens or land.

Useful link - How to create a hedgehog hole | The Wildlife Trusts