

Biodiversity Net Gain Assessment

Holcombe Brook Sports Club

Hazel Hall Lane, Tottington, Bury

September 2024 Rev B

Prepared for: Holcombe Brook Sports Club

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This document is to be read in conjunction with:

- The Statutory Biodiversity Metric Calculation Tool– Holcombe Brook excel tool
- Habitat Condition Sheets – Holcombe Brook excel sheet



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- On 17th September 2024 an Ecological Survey to inform the Biodiversity Net Gain Assessment was undertaken at Holcombe Brook Sports Club, Bury in respect of the proposed court development.
- The survey site encompasses developed land (courts), modified grassland (horse-grazed) and mixed scrub.
- The development will result in the loss of 0.0062ha of mixed scrub and 0.0085ha of modified grassland to allow for enhancement.
- Enhancement comprises creation of 0.0220ha of mixed scrub to the northeast of the proposed courts.
- The Statutory Biodiversity Metric shows that following development there will be an overall net gain in biodiversity. The proposals will result in a 12.01% net gain in Area/Habitat Units

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1. Introduction

1.1 Application Site

1.1.1 This report details a Biodiversity Net Gain Assessment of Holcombe Brook Sports Club, Hazel Hall Lane, Tottington, Bury, BL0 9FS. Ordnance Survey grid reference (centre of site): SD78581417.

1.1.2 Holcombe Brook Sports Club commissioned Verity Webster Ltd to undertake a Biodiversity Net Gain Assessment in order to inform the proposals for the site.

1.2 Objectives

1.2.1 The objectives of the Biodiversity Net Gain Assessment are to determine:

- Potential for enhancement or compensation (offsetting) on the site for protected species, habitats of conservation interest and overall biodiversity with the aim of achieving 10% net gain in biodiversity.

1.3 Proposals

1.3.1 The proposals comprise the alteration to existing tennis court to create 2 no. padel courts.

1.4 Ecologist

1.4.1 The Ecological Assessment was undertaken by Verity Webster. Verity is a Chartered Ecologist and a full member of the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management.

1.4.2 Verity has worked as an ecological consultant since 2007. She has undertaken Ecological Assessments and protected species surveys for a large variety of projects and schemes, producing the required impact assessment and subsequent mitigation schemes and method statements when necessary.



2. Site Location and Description

2.1 Site Location

- 2.1.1 The survey site is located in a semi-rural location to the south of Summerseat, approximately 3km northwest of Bury town centre. The survey site lies approximately 80m south of the residential area, divided by an area of grassland.
- 2.1.2 The landscape to the east and south, and beyond Longsight Road to the west comprises open countryside encompassing grassland, woodland, tree lines, hedgerows and scattered waterbodies. The River Irwell weaves north to south approximately 900m to the east. See Figures 1 and 2.

Figure 1: Ordnance survey map showing the location of the proposed development site.





Figure 2: Aerial image showing the proposed development site and immediate surroundings





2.2 Site Description

2.2.1 The survey site encompasses the developed land;sealed surface (tennis court), mixed scrub located to the northeast of the court, modified grassland and ornamental shrubs (leylandii).

2.2.2 See UK Habitat Classification Plan, Figure 3.

2.2.3 Habitats present on site comprise:

- Modified grassland g4, 103 (horse grazed)
- Mixed scrub h3h
- Developed land/sealed surface, u1b6
- Introduced shrubs (leylandii)

Habitat descriptions

Modified grassland g4, 103 (horse grazed)

2.2.4 The modified grassland on site is composed of rye-grass (*Lolium prene*), Cock's-foot grass (*Dactylus glomerata*), Yorkshire fog (*Holcus lanatus*) and sparse herbs including creeping buttercup (*Ranunculus repens*), broad-leaved dock (*Rumex obtusifolius*) and ragwort (*Senecio jacobaea*). Soft rush (*Juncus effusus*) is rare. The grass cover is over 75%.

Mixed scrub h3h

2.2.5 The mixed scrub comprises hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*) with bramble (*Rubus fruticosus*) and tall herbs including creeping thistle (*Cirsium arvense*) and rosebay willowherb (*Chamaerion angustifolium*).

Introduced shrubs

2.2.6 The planted leylandii on the northeast boundary of the site is categorised as introduced shrub.

Developed land/sealed surface, u1b

2.2.7 The developed land encompasses the existing tennis court.



Mixed scrub to the northwest of the tennis court



Mixed scrub to the northwest of the tennis court



Developed land; sealed surface (tennis court)



Introduced shrub (leylandii) along the northeast edge of the tennis court



Modified, horse-grazed grassland



Location of proposed mixed scrub planting to the northeast of the introduced shrub



3. Legislation

3.1 Planning Policy and Legislation

- 3.1.1 In England, biodiversity net gain is required under a statutory framework introduced by Schedule 7A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (inserted by the Environment Act 2021). This is referred to as biodiversity net gain in Planning Practice Guidance to distinguish it from other or more general biodiversity gains.
- 3.1.2 Under the statutory framework for biodiversity net gain, every grant of planning permission is deemed to have been granted subject to a general biodiversity gain condition to secure the biodiversity gain objective. This objective is to deliver at least a 10% increase in relation to the pre-development biodiversity value of the development granted permission. This increase can be achieved through onsite biodiversity gains, registered offsite biodiversity gains or statutory biodiversity credits (Gov.Uk Biodiversity Net Gain, 2023).
- 3.1.3 Under the NERC Act 2006, planning authorities are obliged to make sure that they have all the information on the presence of protected species on site before they make a decision on the planning permission.
- 3.1.4 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF, 2021) encourages Local Planning Authorities to conserve and enhance biodiversity.

Chapter 15, Para 180 of NPPF states: *"The planning system should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by:*

- a) protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, sites of biodiversity or geological value and soils....*
- d) minimising impacts on and providing net gains for biodiversity, including by establishing coherent ecological networks that are more resilient to current and future pressures".*

Para 181 states: *"Plans should: distinguish between the hierarchy of international, national and locally designated sites; allocate land with the least environmental or amenity value, where consistent with other policies in this Framework; take a strategic approach to maintaining and enhancing networks of habitats and green infrastructure; and plan for the enhancement of natural capital at a catchment or landscape scale across local authority boundaries."*

Para 185 identifies that plans should do the following to protect and enhance biodiversity and geodiversity:

- a) "Identify, map and safeguard components of local wildlife-rich habitats and wider ecological networks, including the hierarchy of international, national and locally designated sites of importance for biodiversity; wildlife corridors and stepping stones that connect them; and areas identified by national and local partnerships for habitat management, enhancement, restoration or creation; and*
- b) Promote the conservation, restoration and enhancement of priority habitats, ecological networks and the protection and recovery of priority species; and identify and peruse opportunities for securing measurable net gains for biodiversity."*

Para 186 states that *"when determining planning applications, local authorities should apply the following principles:*

- a) if significant harm to biodiversity from a development cannot be avoided...,adequately mitigated, or, as a last resort compensated for, then planning permission should be refused"*

- 3.1.5 The local planning authority has a responsibility, therefore, to obtain all information regarding the potential for protected species on a site prior to making a decision about a proposal.



4. Methodology

4.1 Biodiversity Net Gain Assessment

- 4.1.1 Biodiversity Offsetting was developed by Defra. The pilots of the study were first published in 2012.
- 4.1.2 The Biodiversity Calculator is a system created by Defra to quantify change in biodiversity of a site in biodiversity units.
- 4.1.3 *The Biodiversity Offsetting Pilots: Guidance for Developers* (Defra, 2012) details the original metric for calculating biodiversity loss or gain as a result of development proposal.
- 4.1.4 *The Statutory Biodiversity Metric* (Natural England, 2023) and the associated guidance was used to assess the habitat condition and calculate potential change in biodiversity within the survey site.
- 4.1.5 The calculation of change in biodiversity units has been based upon areas provided by Rae Connell Associates, Proposed alteration to existing courts to provide 2 padel tennis courts. Dwg no. HBSC-22-06-24.



5. Biodiversity Net Gain Assessment

5.1 Baseline condition and potential impacts on Biodiversity

Offsetting and the Biodiversity Calculator

5.1.1 The baseline condition of the habitat and the predicted change as a result of the proposals has been assessed with the use of the Biodiversity Offset principals.

5.1.2 Biodiversity offsetting principal: What is it?

“Using the biodiversity offsetting approach means that an offset provider delivers quantifiable amount of biodiversity benefit to offset the loss of the biodiversity resulting from the development. The losses and gains are measured in the same way, even if the habitats concerned are different. In the biodiversity offsetting pilot, the measurement is done in ‘**biodiversity units**’, which are the product of the **size of an area**, **the distinctiveness** and **the condition** of the habitat it comprises. The assessment of biodiversity units lost and gained can be calculated” (Defra, 2012).

5.1.3 The Biodiversity Calculator is a system created by Defra to quantify change in biodiversity of a site in biodiversity units. The current calculator is known as Statutory Biodiversity Metric (Gov.UK Statutory Biodiversity Metric Tool, 2023).

5.1.4 This quantitative assessment will be considered in relation to the other qualitative ecological functions of the site in order to assess the impact (i.e. functionality for protected species), but is a useful tool to show predicted or potential loss of habitat, change in condition and enhancement (net gain).

Habitat Types

5.1.5 For the purposes of the Statutory Metric there are five baseline habitat types on site:

- Modified grassland g4, 103 (horse grazed)
- Mixed scrub h3h
- Developed land/sealed surface, u1b6
- Introduced shrubs (leylandii)

Figure 3: The Survey Site – UK Habitat Classification Plan



Distinctiveness of the Habitat

- 5.1.6 Under the Biodiversity Calculator principals each habitat is categorised into a distinctiveness band.
- 5.1.7 The distinctiveness of the habitat is based upon parameters such as species richness, diversity, rarity (at local, regional, national and international scales) and the degree to which a habitat supports species rarely found in other habitats (Treweek *et al*, 2010)
- **Modified Grassland is considered to have LOW distinctiveness** as the habitat is common, widespread and of low conservation value.
 - **Mixed Scrub is considered to have MEDIUM distinctiveness** as a habitat due to the functionality of the habitat for wildlife.
 - **Introduced shrubs are considered to have LOW distinctiveness.** This is because they are non-native and will not support native species.
- 5.1.8 Habitats of moderate distinctiveness, such as the mixed scrub on site, if lost must be compensated for with the same broad habitat type.

Habitat Condition Assessment

- 5.1.9 The condition the habitat on site can be categorised as low, moderate or good and is based upon the Habitat Condition Assessment Sheets within the Statutory Biodiversity Metric. See excel condition assessment.
- The Modified Grassland on site, including the tall forb vegetation is considered to be of poor condition as it is species poor.
 - The Mixed Scrub is considered to be of poor condition as there are only two woody species and there is no evidence of regeneration with young shrubs or sapling trees.
 - Introduced Shrubs do not require a condition assessment.

Strategic Significance

- 5.1.10 The strategic significance of the habitat present is based upon the value of the habitat in the wider landscape. Consideration is given to local and neighbourhood plans, priority habitats, local nature reserves and local ecological networks.
- 5.1.11 In this case, at baseline, the mixed scrub is considered to be ecologically desirable, but not in the local strategy. It is considered ecologically desirable as it provides functionality as a linear habitat in the wider locality.
- 5.1.12 At baseline the modified grassland is also considered ecologically desirable, but not in the local strategy as the field is part of the wider countryside network on the outskirts of the town, providing buffer-habitat from more ecologically valuable land further into the countryside to the southeast and southwest.
- 5.1.13 The created mixed scrub is also considered to be ecologically desirable, but not in the local strategy.



5.2 Achieving Biodiversity Net Gain

- 5.2.1 The EU is committed to halt the loss of biodiversity and the degradation of ecosystem services by 2020. The Biodiversity Strategy sets out 6 targets and 20 specific actions geared towards this overall objective. Action 7 is to ensure no net loss of biodiversity and ecosystem services.
- 5.2.2 The 'mitigation hierarchy' is included with current planning policy, aiming to halt the loss of biodiversity. The National Planning Policy Framework, consolidating planning guidance states that '*if significant harm cannot be avoided, adequately mitigated, or as a last resort, compensated for, planning permission should be refused*'.
- 5.2.3 Defra's biodiversity offsetting pilot was developed to address this requirement and ensure development, economic growth and biodiversity conservation are compatible (British Ecological Society, 2013).
- 5.2.4 Biodiversity net gain, as a good practice principal, has been developed by Ciria, CIEEM and IEMA (BNG, 2016). At the very least developments should aim for no net loss as part of the proposals.
- 5.2.5 The Statutory Biodiversity Metric shows the distinctiveness and condition of the habitats on site at baseline (prior to development).
- 5.2.6 The Headline Results in the Statutory Biodiversity Metric show the overall net change in Biodiversity Units as a result of the development and creation of new habitat.

Habitat Lost and Trading Rules

- 5.2.7 62m² of mixed scrub will be lost as a result of the extension of the court. Since mixed scrub is a habitat of moderate distinctiveness the same broad habitat must be created in order to satisfy the trading rules of the metric.
- 5.2.8 150m² of modified grassland, a habitat of low distinctiveness, will be lost in order to allow for the habitat enhancement, that is, creation of mixed scrub.

Area habitats to be created

- 5.2.9 The following habitats are to be created on site:
- **85m² of Mixed Scrub.**
- 5.2.10 A mix of shrubs will be planted including hawthorn and hazel, allowing natural herbs and bramble to colonise. Poor condition is considered attainable since the field where the habitat creation is located will be grazed at times by horses. Management to achieve moderate condition is recommended, however, to maximise the benefit of the habitat creation.
- 5.2.11 A suitable habitat management plan to facilitate this development will be necessary.



5.2.12 To achieve mixed scrub of poor - moderate condition the following must be achieved:

- At least 80% of the scrub habitat is composed of native species
- There are at least three woody species.
- No single species comprises more than 75% of the cover.
- Where possible long grassland is left around the boundaries of the scrubland. This may not be attainable with horse grazing.

Figure 4: Showing the development area and proposed habitat creation



5.3 Percentage Change in Biodiversity Units

- 5.3.1 The Statutory Biodiversity Metric shows there will be an 12.01% increase in area/habitat units. There is no requirement for linear hedgerow units or watercourse units as there are no linear habitats on site, nor any watercourse on or within 10m of the site.

5.4 Biodiversity Net Gain Conclusion

- 5.4.1 If the proposals are implemented it is evident that there will be an overall net gain in biodiversity at Holcombe Brook Sports Club which is considered likely to be of benefit to the local flora and fauna at a site level and at a landscape level given the connectivity to natural habitats adjacent to the northeast.
- 5.4.2 The new habitats will take between 1-27 years to establish, however, and so it will be necessary for the areas to be appropriately managed during this time.



6. References

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