



Biodiversity Net Gain Assessment

Our Lady & St Andrews Church, 16 Nightingale Road, Hitchin, Hertfordshire, SG5 1QS

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Industry Guidelines and Standards

This report has been written with due consideration to:

- British Standard 42020 (2013). Biodiversity – Code of Practice for Planning and Development.
- British Standard 8683:2021 (2021). Process for Designing and Implementing Biodiversity Net Gain.
- Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (2017). Guidelines for Preliminary Ecological Appraisal. 2nd edition. Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management, Winchester.
- Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (2017). Guidelines on Ecological Report Writing. Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management, Winchester.
- Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (2018). Guidelines for Ecological Impact Assessment in the UK and Ireland: Terrestrial, Freshwater, Coastal and Marine. Version 1.1. Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management, Winchester.
- Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (2020). Guidelines for Accessing, Using and Sharing Biodiversity Data in the UK. 2nd Edition. Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management, Winchester.
- Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management, Construction Industry Research and Information Association & Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment (2019). Biodiversity Net Gain – Good Practice Principles for Development.

Proportionality

The work involved in preparing and implementing all ecological surveys, impact assessments and measures for avoidance, mitigation, compensation and enhancement should be proportionate to the predicted degree of risk to biodiversity and to the nature and scale of the proposed development. Consequently, the decision-maker should only request supporting information and conservation measures that are relevant, necessary and material to the application in question. Similarly, the decision-maker and their consultees should ensure that any comments and advice made over an application are also proportionate.

The desk studies and field surveys undertaken to provide a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA) might in some cases be all that is necessary.

(BS 42020, 2013)

Executive Summary

Arbtech Consulting Limited was instructed by Laura Watson to undertake a Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) Assessment at Our Lady & St Andrews Church, 16 Nightingale Road, Hitchin, Hertfordshire, SG5 1QS (hereafter referred to as “the site”). The assessment was required to inform a planning application for the demolition of the existing scout hut and new building of a church hall (hereafter referred to as “the proposed development”).

The current proposed plan, with the addition of grassland and scattered trees, results in an 11.69% net gain in habitat units and a 22.81% net gain in hedgerow units. This is more than the 10% target of biodiversity net gain. A Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) Management Plan must be produced for the site. This should include recommendations for the implementation, management and monitoring of the site for at least 30 years to ensure that biodiversity net gain is delivered.

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1.0 Introduction and Context

1.1 Background

Arbtech Consulting Limited was instructed by Laura Watson to undertake a Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) Assessment at Our Lady & St Andrews Church, 16 Nightingale Road, Hitchin, Hertfordshire, SG5 1QS (hereafter referred to as “the site”). The assessment was required to inform a planning application for the demolition of the existing scout hut and new building of a church hall (hereafter referred to as “the proposed development”). A plan showing the proposed development is provided in Appendix 1.

This report should be read in conjunction with the following documents:

- Defra Statutory Biodiversity Metric.
- Preliminary Ecological Appraisal and Roost Assessment of Our Lady & St Andrews Church, 16 Nightingale Road, Hitchin, Hertfordshire, SG5 1QS

1.2 Site Location, Geology and Landscape Context

The site is located at National Grid Reference TL 18756 29829 and has an area of approximately 0.1ha comprising one building currently used as a scout hut and one shipping container, with an associated area of hardstanding used as a carpark with a small area of grass. It sits within the wider site ownership of Our Lady & St Andrews Church, which is directly to the east, south and west of the site. It is in an urban area surrounded by the town of Hitchin, which has residential dwellings to the north, east, and west, as well as a police station and road directly to the north. The wider landscape comprises residential dwellings with their associated gardens, scattered trees and several recreation grounds, with the River Hiz approximately 40m to the east. This is culverted under the road and a railway line runs approximately 590m to the east. The site has a principal aquifer (bedrock) and secondary A and undifferentiated aquifer (superficial drift) present. The soil within the site is slightly acid. A site location plan is provided in Appendix 2.

1.3 BNG Informative

BNG is a specific, measurable outcome of project activities that deliver demonstrable and quantifiable benefits to biodiversity compared to the baseline situation. In order to achieve BNG, a project must be able to demonstrate that it has followed all 10 of the Principles of Biodiversity Net Gain (as outlined in the *British Standard 8683:2021 Process for Designing and Implementing Biodiversity Net Gain*).

The legalised Environment Act 2021 (Commencement No. 6) Regulations 2023 requires developments in England to demonstrate a measurable net gain in biodiversity and sets a target of a minimum of 10% BNG for all developments. It also stipulates that a management plan with a minimum 30-year term, should be adopted to ensure biodiversity net gain can be delivered. The requirement for biodiversity net gain is enshrined within the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF, 2021).

The DEFRA Statutory Biodiversity Metric is the widely accepted tool used to calculate BNG. It enables the calculation of habitat value pre- and post-development in order to determine the overall change in biodiversity value as a result of the proposed development. The Biodiversity Metric has separate BNG assessments for areas of habitat, hedgerows and watercourses.

The biodiversity value of a site should be maximised. However, it may not always be possible to achieve a 10% biodiversity net gain within a site and therefore the Statutory Biodiversity Metric can also account for offsite habitat creation, where land is available. Alternatively, developers can seek to provide an agreed financial contribution to an appropriate third party (such as the Local Authority, the UK Government or another landowner) to deliver the required biodiversity net gain elsewhere on their behalf.

2.0 Methodology

2.1 Baseline Biodiversity Value

The baseline BNG Calculation was informed by Preliminary Ecological Appraisal and Roost Assessment of Our Lady & St Andrews Church, 16 Nightingale Road, Hitchin, Hertfordshire, SG5 1QS (Arbtech, 2024). A baseline habitat plan is provided in Appendix 3.

Habitat Classification

The Preliminary Ecological Appraisal and Roost Assessment of Our Lady & St Andrews Church, 16 Nightingale Road, Hitchin, Hertfordshire, SG5 1QS classified the habitats on site according to The UK Habitat Classification Habitat Definitions Version 2.0 (The UK Habitat Classification Working Group, July 2023).

Habitat Area/Length

The area or length of each habitat was calculated using qGIS software. In calculating the area or length of each habitat, habitats which occur as two or more isolated parcels across the site were combined, where they were deemed to be of a similar composition and condition. Distinctions were made between habitats to be retained (i.e. left as found in baseline), enhanced (i.e. improved condition) or lost (i.e. destroyed by proposed development).

Areas of scattered trees were calculated using the Tree Helper tool within the Statutory Biodiversity Metric. Class sizes for urban trees are set out in the Statutory Biodiversity Metric User Guide (Natural England, 2024).

Habitat Condition

Habitat condition was assessed using the relevant condition assessment sheets found in the Statutory Biodiversity Metric User Guide (Natural England, 2024).

Strategic Significance

Strategic significance was assigned for each habitat based upon a review of the following:

- Ecological value
- Function within the landscape

2.2 Post Development Biodiversity Value

The post development BNG Calculation was informed by 'PL.001 Site Location & Proposed Site Plan' which is included in Appendix 1. A post development habitat plan is provided in Appendix 4.

Habitat Classification

Proposed habitats were translated to their equivalents in the UK Habitat Classification using The UK Habitat Classification Habitat Definitions Version 2.0 (The UK Habitat Classification Working Group, July 2023) and the information provided within the 'PL.001 Site Location & Proposed Site Plan'.

Habitat Area/Length

The area or length of each proposed habitat was calculated using qGIS software. In calculating the area or length of each habitat, habitats which occur as two or more isolated parcels across the site were combined, where they were deemed to be of similar composition and condition. Distinctions were made between habitats to be retained (i.e. left as found in baseline), enhanced (i.e. improved condition) or newly created.

Areas of scattered trees were calculated using the Tree Helper tool within the Statutory Biodiversity Metric. Class sizes for urban trees are set out in the Statutory Biodiversity Metric User Guide (Natural England, 2024).

Habitat Condition

Target habitat condition for each proposed habitat was determined assessed using the Temporal Multipliers Tool and the Enhancement Temporal Multipliers Tool included in the Statutory Biodiversity Metric spreadsheet as well as the relevant condition assessment sheets found in the Statutory Biodiversity Metric User Guide (Natural England, 2024). This is based on the assumption that a 30-year management plan will be adopted for the site.

Strategic Significance

Strategic significance was assigned for each proposed habitat based upon a review of the following:

- Likely ecological value
- Function within the landscape

2.3 Limitations

No site-specific limitations were identified.

3.0 Results

3.1 Baseline Habitats

Table 1 details the baseline habitats present within the site along with their area/length, condition and strategic significance. A full condition assessment for each habitat (where relevant) is provided in Appendix 5a.

Table 1: Baseline Biodiversity Value

Habitat	Area / Length	Description	Condition Assessment	Strategic Significance
Developed land sealed surface	0.0894 ha	The site largely comprises of a hardstanding tarmac parking area. There is one building and one shipping container within the site boundary, with the wider ownership boundary containing a church.	Condition Assessment N/A Developed land and sealed surfaces are excluded from habitat condition assessments.	Low strategic significance Area/compensation not in local strategy/no local strategy and no evidence to suggest that the habitat is of medium strategic significance (not part of a habitat corridor or steppingstone).
Other neutral grassland	0.0092 ha	There is an area of grassland at the northeastern end of the site and a strip running along the northern elevation of B1 that is regularly mown and maintained with a sward height of 5cm. This comprises of; Dominant perennial rye Abundant smooth meadow grass and wall barley Frequent common nettle, daisy, ragwort, dandelion and white clover Occasional Yorkshire fog, ivy, ribwort plantain, herb robert, cleaver sp., common dog-violet and green alkanet Rare creeping buttercup, elder sapling, forget me not and common nipplewort There are patches of bare ground around the eastern side of B1 where the entrance to the building is, totalling approximately 30% of the area and there is a planted ornamental border at the eastern end, against the wall of the neighbouring church.	Poor The condition assessment was assessed as poor due to being a poor representation of the grassland type, short sward height and large areas of bare ground.	Low strategic significance Area/compensation not in local strategy/no local strategy and no evidence to suggest that the habitat is of medium strategic significance (not part of a habitat corridor or steppingstone).
Non-native and ornamental hedgerow	0.024 km	There is an ornamental hedgerow located at the southern boundary of the site. It is surrounded by the hardstanding carpark to the north and the	Condition Assessment N/A	Low strategic significance

		church to the south. It comprises of holly, viburnum and other ornamental shrubs.	Non-native and ornamental hedgerow are excluded from habitat condition assessments.	Area/compensation not in local strategy/no local strategy and no evidence to suggest that the habitat is of medium strategic significance (not part of a habitat corridor or steppingstone).
Individual trees	0.0163 ha	There is one conifer tree, a cypress sp. (T1), located to the northeast of the site. There is a lack of decay or damage features.	Moderate The condition assessment was assessed as moderate due to being a non-native species and having no ecological niches.	Low strategic significance Area/compensation not in local strategy/no local strategy and no evidence to suggest that the habitat is of medium strategic significance (not part of a habitat corridor or steppingstone).

3.2 Post Development Habitats

Table 2 details the post development habitats present within the site along with their area/length, condition and strategic significance. An assessment of the anticipated condition for each habitat (where relevant) is provided in Appendix 5b, which is based on the assumption that a 30 year management plan will be implemented for the site. The proposed development will result in the loss of other neutral grassland, some hedgerow, an individual tree and developed land.

Table 2: Post Development Biodiversity Value

Habitat	Area / Length	Description	Target Condition	Strategic Significance
Other neutral grassland	0.01 ha created	Due to the loss of other neutral grassland from machinery impact during the construction phase, new areas of other neutral grassland will be created.	Poor To achieve a poor condition, the criteria must include <20% bracken/scrub and no invasive species or excessive management.	Low strategic significance Area/compensation not in local strategy/no local strategy and no evidence to suggest that the habitat is of medium strategic significance (not part of a habitat corridor or steppingstone).
Developed land sealed surface	0.0886 ha created	Creation of new buildings with associated parking and walkways.	Condition Assessment N/A Developed land and sealed surfaces are excluded from habitat condition assessments.	Low strategic significance Area/compensation not in local strategy/no local strategy and no evidence to suggest that the

				habitat is of medium strategic significance (not part of a habitat corridor or steppingstone).
Individual trees	0.0489 ha created	12 x small native (moderate condition) trees will be planted. Species composition should include alder, wild cherry, bird cherry, silver birch, crab apple, dog rose and dogwood.	Moderate To achieve to condition of moderate, the criteria must include native species, no canopy gaps, diverse ground flora species and no invasive species.	Low strategic significance Area/compensation not in local strategy/no local strategy and no evidence to suggest that the habitat is of medium strategic significance (not part of a habitat corridor or steppingstone).
Non-native and ornamental hedgerow	0.015 km created	To compensate for the loss of some of the existing hedgerows, a length of native hedgerows will be created.	Condition Assessment N/A Non-native and ornamental hedgerow are excluded from habitat condition assessments.	Low strategic significance Area/compensation not in local strategy/no local strategy and no evidence to suggest that the habitat is of medium strategic significance (not part of a habitat corridor or steppingstone).
Non-native and ornamental hedgerow	0.015 km retained	A length of 0.15km will be retained.	Condition Assessment N/A Non-native and ornamental hedgerow are excluded from habitat condition assessments.	Low strategic significance Area/compensation not in local strategy/no local strategy and no evidence to suggest that the habitat is of medium strategic significance (not part of a habitat corridor or steppingstone).

3.3 Change in Biodiversity Value of the Site

Full details are provided in the Defra Statutory Biodiversity Metric. The headline results are presented in Appendix 6.

Areas of Habitat

The baseline habitat value of the site is 0.17 units, comprising 0.04 units of other neutral grassland, 0.13 units of individual trees and developed land (no value).

The post development habitat value of the site is 0.19 units, comprising the creation of buildings and hardstanding (no value), other neutral grassland (0.04 units), and urban trees (0.15 units).

This results in a net change in biodiversity of 11.69% (i.e. a net gain).

Hedgerows

The baseline hedgerow value of the site is 0.02 units, comprising 1.07 units non-native and ornamental hedgerow.

The post development habitat value of the site is 0.03 units, comprising the retention of some of the existing non-native and ornamental hedgerow (0.02 units) and the creation of 0.01 units new non-native and ornamental hedgerow.

This results in a net change in biodiversity of 22.81% (i.e. a net gain).

4.0 Recommendations to Deliver BNG

4.1 Discussion

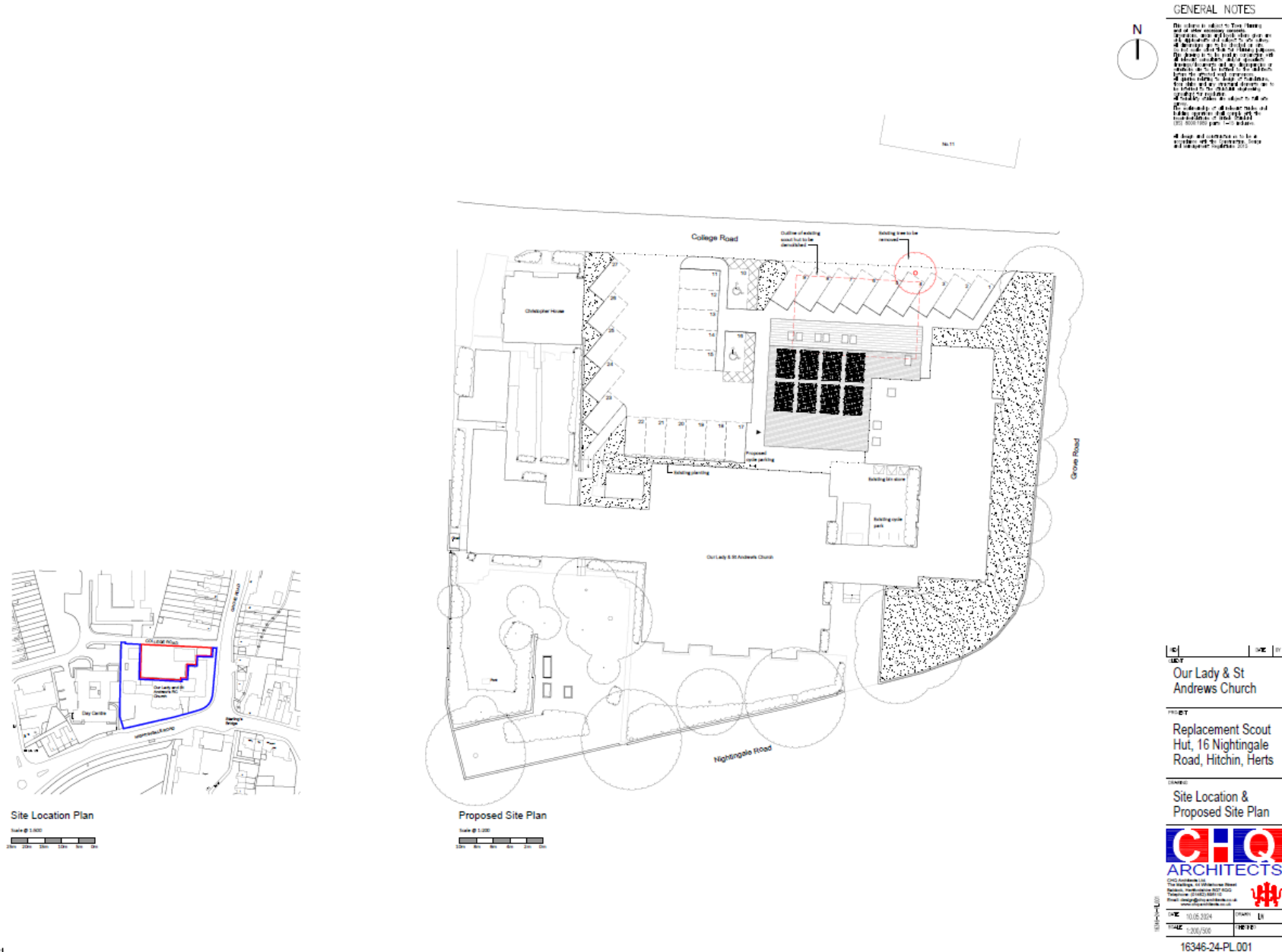
The current proposed plan, with the addition of grassland and scattered trees, results in an 11.69% net gain in habitat units and a 22.81% net gain in hedgerow units. This is more than the 10% target of biodiversity net gain.

A Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) Management Plan must be produced for the site. This should include recommendations for the implementation, management and monitoring of the site for at least 30 years to ensure that biodiversity net gain is delivered.

5.0 Bibliography

- Arbtech (2024). Preliminary Ecological Appraisal and Roost Assessment of Our Lady & St Andrews Church, 16 Nightingale Road, Hitchin, Hertfordshire, SG5 1QS.
- British Standard 8683:2021 (2021). Process for Designing and Implementing Biodiversity Net Gain.
- CIEEM-CIRIA-IEMA (2019) Biodiversity Net Gain – Good Practice Principles for Development.
- Joint Nature Conservation Committee (2010). Handbook for Phase 1 habitat survey a technique for environmental audit.
http://jncc.defra.gov.uk/PDF/pub10_handbookforphase1habitatsurvey.pdf
- Natural England (2024). The Statutory Biodiversity Metric. Natural England (2024).
- Natural England (2024). The Statutory Biodiversity Metric User Guide.
- The UK Habitat Classification Habitat Definitions Version 2.0 (The UK Habitat Classification Working Group, July 2023)

Appendix 1: Proposed Development Plan



Appendix 2: Site Location Plan



Appendix 3: Baseline Habitat Plan



Appendix 4: Post Development Habitat Plan



Appendix 5a: Habitat Condition Assessment Sheets - Baseline

Other neutral grassland; assessed using the 'Grassland medium, high and very high distinctiveness' habitat condition assessment sheet:

Condition Assessment Criteria		Criterion passed (Yes or No)
A	The parcel represents a good example of its habitat type, with a consistently high proportion of characteristic indicator species present relevant to the specific habitat type (and relative to Footnote 3 suboptimal species which may be listed in the UKHab description).¹ Note - this criterion is essential for achieving Moderate or Good condition for non-acid grassland types only.	N
B	Sward height is varied (at least 20% of the sward is less than 7 cm and at least 20% is more than 7 cm) creating microclimates which provide opportunities for insects, birds and small mammals to live and breed.	N
C	Cover of bare ground is between 1% and 5%, including localised areas, for example, rabbit warrens ² .	N
D	Cover of bracken <i>Pteridium aquilinum</i> is less than 20% and cover of scrub (including bramble <i>Rubus fruticosus</i> agg.) is less than 5%.	Y

E	Combined cover of species indicative of suboptimal condition³ and physical damage (such as excessive poaching, damage from machinery use or storage, damaging levels of access, or any other damaging management activities) accounts for less than 5% of total area. If any invasive non-native plant species⁴ (as listed on Schedule 9 of WCA⁵) are present, this criterion is automatically failed.	Y
Additional Criterion - must be assessed for all non-acid grassland types		
F	There are 10 or more vascular plant species per m² present, including forbs that are characteristic of the habitat type (species referenced in Footnote 3 and 5 cannot contribute towards this count). Note - this criterion is essential for achieving Good condition for non-acid grassland types only.	N/A slightly acidic
Essential criterion for Good condition achieved (for non-acid grassland) (Yes or No)		N
Number of criteria passed		2
Condition Assessment Result	Condition Assessment Score	Score Achieved ×/√
Acid grassland types (Result out of 5 criteria)		
Passes 5 criteria	Good (3)	
Passes 3 or 4 criteria	Moderate (2)	
Passes 2 or fewer criteria	Poor (1)	X

Individual tree; assessed using the 'Individual tree' habitat condition assessment sheet:

Condition Assessment Criteria	Criterion passed
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		(Yes or No)
A	The tree is a native species (or at least 70% within the block are native species).	N
B	The tree canopy is predominantly continuous, with gaps in canopy cover making up <10% of total area and no individual gap being >5 m wide (individual trees automatically pass this criterion).	Y
C	The tree is mature (or more than 50% within the block are mature) ¹ .	Y
D	There is little or no evidence of an adverse impact on tree health by human activities (such as vandalism, herbicide or detrimental agricultural activity). And there is no current regular pruning regime, so the trees retain >75% of expected canopy for their age range and height.	Y
E	Natural ecological niches for vertebrates and invertebrates are present, such as presence of deadwood, cavities, ivy or loose bark.	N
F	More than 20% of the tree canopy area is oversailing vegetation beneath.	N
Number of criteria passed		3
Condition Assessment Result (out of 6 criteria)	Condition Assessment Score	Score Achieved x/√
Passes 5 or 6 criteria	Good (3)	
Passes 3 or 4 criteria	Moderate (2)	X

Passes 2 or fewer criteria	Poor (1)	
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Appendix 5b: Habitat Condition Assessment Sheets - Proposed

Other neutral grassland; assessed using the 'Grassland medium, high and very high distinctiveness' habitat condition assessment sheet:

Condition Assessment Criteria		Criterion passed (Yes or No)
A	The parcel represents a good example of its habitat type, with a consistently high proportion of characteristic indicator species present relevant to the specific habitat type (and relative to Footnote 3 suboptimal species which may be listed in the UKHab description).¹ Note - this criterion is essential for achieving Moderate or Good condition for non-acid grassland types only.	N
B	Sward height is varied (at least 20% of the sward is less than 7 cm and at least 20% is more than 7 cm) creating microclimates which provide opportunities for insects, birds and small mammals to live and breed.	N
C	Cover of bare ground is between 1% and 5%, including localised areas, for example, rabbit warrens ² .	N
D	Cover of bracken <i>Pteridium aquilinum</i> is less than 20% and cover of scrub (including bramble <i>Rubus fruticosus</i> agg.) is less than 5%.	Y

E	Combined cover of species indicative of suboptimal condition³ and physical damage (such as excessive poaching, damage from machinery use or storage, damaging levels of access, or any other damaging management activities) accounts for less than 5% of total area. If any invasive non-native plant species⁴ (as listed on Schedule 9 of WCA⁵) are present, this criterion is automatically failed.	Y
Additional Criterion - must be assessed for all non-acid grassland types		
F	There are 10 or more vascular plant species per m² present, including forbs that are characteristic of the habitat type (species referenced in Footnote 3 and 5 cannot contribute towards this count). Note - this criterion is essential for achieving Good condition for non-acid grassland types only.	N/A slightly acidic
Essential criterion for Good condition achieved (for non-acid grassland) (Yes or No)		N
Number of criteria passed		2
Condition Assessment Result	Condition Assessment Score	Score Achieved x/√
Acid grassland types (Result out of 5 criteria)		
Passes 5 criteria	Good (3)	
Passes 3 or 4 criteria	Moderate (2)	
Passes 2 or fewer criteria	Poor (1)	X

Individual tree; assessed using the 'Individual tree' habitat condition assessment sheet:

Condition Assessment Criteria	Criterion passed
--------------------------------------	-------------------------

		(Yes or No)
A	The tree is a native species (or at least 70% within the block are native species).	Y
B	The tree canopy is predominantly continuous, with gaps in canopy cover making up <10% of total area and no individual gap being >5 m wide (individual trees automatically pass this criterion).	Y
C	The tree is mature (or more than 50% within the block are mature) ¹ .	N
D	There is little or no evidence of an adverse impact on tree health by human activities (such as vandalism, herbicide or detrimental agricultural activity). And there is no current regular pruning regime, so the trees retain >75% of expected canopy for their age range and height.	N
E	Natural ecological niches for vertebrates and invertebrates are present, such as presence of deadwood, cavities, ivy or loose bark.	N
F	More than 20% of the tree canopy area is oversailing vegetation beneath.	Y
Number of criteria passed		3
Condition Assessment Result (out of 6 criteria)	Condition Assessment Score	Score Achieved x/√
Passes 5 or 6 criteria	Good (3)	
Passes 3 or 4 criteria	Moderate (2)	X

Passes 2 or fewer criteria	Poor (1)	
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Appendix 6: Headline BNG Results

The Defra Statutory Biodiversity Metric is provided as a separate excel spreadsheet.

Our Lady & St. Andrews Church, 16 Nightingale Road, Hitchin, Hertfordshire, SG5 1QS		Return to results menu	
Headline Results			
Scroll down for final results ▲			
On-site baseline	Habitat units	0.17	
	Hedgerow units	0.02	
	Watercourse units	0.00	
On-site post-intervention (Including habitat retention, creation & enhancement)	Habitat units	0.19	
	Hedgerow units	0.03	
	Watercourse units	0.00	
On-site net change (units & percentage)	Habitat units	0.02	11.69%
	Hedgerow units	0.01	22.81%
	Watercourse units	0.00	0.00%
Off-site baseline	Habitat units	0.00	
	Hedgerow units	0.00	
	Watercourse units	0.00	
Off-site post-intervention (Including habitat retention, creation & enhancement)	Habitat units	0.00	
	Hedgerow units	0.00	
	Watercourse units	0.00	
Off-site net change (units & percentage)	Habitat units	0.00	0.00%
	Hedgerow units	0.00	0.00%
	Watercourse units	0.00	0.00%
Combined net unit change (Including all on-site & off-site habitat retention, creation & enhancement)	Habitat units	0.02	
	Hedgerow units	0.01	
	Watercourse units	0.00	
Spatial risk multiplier (SRM) deductions	Habitat units	0.00	
	Hedgerow units	0.00	
	Watercourse units	0.00	
FINAL RESULTS			
Total net unit change (Including all on-site & off-site habitat retention, creation & enhancement)	Habitat units	0.02	
	Hedgerow units	0.01	
	Watercourse units	0.00	
Total net % change (Including all on-site & off-site habitat retention, creation & enhancement)	Habitat units	11.69%	
	Hedgerow units	22.81%	
	Watercourse units	0.00%	
Trading rules satisfied?	Yes ✓		