

GREENFIELD SERVICE STATION

A505 Baldock Road, ROYSTON, SG8 9NN

Biodiversity Net Gain Assessment

Prepared by:

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Report Reference: GSS-IS-SJ-001_BNG

Issue Date: August 2024

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Table of Contents

Table of Contents	2
Report Information.....	3
Executive Summary.....	4
Introduction	5
Aims and Methodology	6
Survey Results and Evaluation	10
Recommendations and Conclusions.....	17
Bibliography.....	18
Appendix 1 – Baseline Habitat Map.....	20
Appendix 2 – Future Habitat Map.....	21
Appendix 3 – Biodiversity Net Gain Calculation Summary	22
Appendix 4 – Condition Assessments for Baseline Habitats	23
Appendix 5 – Condition Assessments for Proposed Habitats	27
Appendix 6 – North Herts Ecological Maps.....	28

Report Information

Site Address:	GREENFIELD SERVICE STATION A505 Baldock Road, ROYSTON, SG8 9NN
Central Grid Reference:	TL 30897 38863
Report Revisions:	<i>V1 – 21/08/2024</i>

Executive Summary

Indigo Surveys was commissioned by C+A Design to undertake a Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) Assessment of Greenfield service station, A505 Baldock Road, Royston, SG8 9NN. Planning consent is to be sought from North Herts Council to replace the existing canopy, reconfiguration of forecourt pumps to create additional HGV lane and changes to parking arrangements on site. The Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) assessment was completed using the 'Statutory Biodiversity Metric' (Natural England, 2024) based on the Proposed Site Plan (Drawing Number: 23067GF-CA-S1-00-DR-A-210_02-S4-A-ProposedSitePlan) by C+A Design (August, 2024).

The baseline value of the site is 0.96 habitat units and 0.55 hedgerow units. The post-development future value of the site is expected to be 0.57 habitat units and 0.32 hedgerow units. This will result in a total net loss of -40.47% for habitat units and -40.95% for hedgerow units. It also does not pass the trading rules of the DEFRA metric (Natural England, 2023).

The full calculation summary can be found in Appendix 3 and the metric will be submitted with the planning application for full review by the Local Planning Authority. The net gain achieved does not exceed the 10% net gain in habitat value advocated by the Environment Act 2021 and this demonstrates that the proposal does not meet national standards and is not compliant with planning policy.

Amendments to the report and calculations must be made in the event of any design changes. A Landscape and Ecological Management Plan (LEMP) will be required to ensure the successful establishment and long-term management of retained and newly created habitats and hedgerows. This can be secured as a planning condition.

Introduction

Background to the Development

The red line boundary is approximately 0.45 hectares and comprises of mixed scrub (*refer to assumptions section*), buildings, hardstanding, bioswale and modified grassland (see Appendix 2). The Site is bordered by mature trees lines mainly on the western and southern boundaries. Beyond this the Site is bordered by arable land, tree lines and hedgerows that are well-connected to the wider landscape.

It was noted during the survey that areas of habitat had been recently felled. To verify this, Google Street View was checked, showing areas of habitat that had recently been removed. According to the biodiversity net gain user guide, retrospective habitats that have been removed should use a pre-degradation habitat type as the site's baseline. This means that if a habitat was cleared, destroyed, or degraded, the baseline should reflect the type of habitat that existed before the degradation. This baseline is then recorded as lost within the biodiversity metric tool. The guide specifies that this backdating applies to situations where evidence of the pre-degradation habitat type and condition can be established and documented. The habitats have been retrospectively recorded based on this guidance.

Proposed Development and Reference Documents

Planning consent is to be sought from North Herts Council. The proposals detailed above will be referred to throughout this report at the 'Proposed Development'. The Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) assessment was completed using the 'Statutory Biodiversity Metric' (Natural England, 2024) based on the Proposed Site Plan (Drawing Number: 23067GF-CA-S1-00-DR-A-210_02-S4-A-ProposedSitePlan) by C+A Design (August, 2024).

Aims and Methodology

Assessment Aims

The purpose and aims of the assessment were to:

- Establish the baseline biodiversity value of the habitats on site according to preliminary survey information to calculate a pre-development value.
- Establish the post-development value of the habitats on the site according to development plans to calculate a post-development value.
- Identify the requirement for further survey / assessment work, mitigation, compensation and / or assessment where necessary and propose solutions to meeting BNG targets.

Good Practice Principles

Biodiversity net gain has been defined as 'development that leaves biodiversity in a better state than before, and an approach where developers work with local governments, wildlife grounds, landowners and other stakeholders in order to support their priorities for nature conservation (Baker, 2016). Good practice principles for developments should be applied to a development where possible including:

- Applying the mitigation hierarchy and being additional by achieving outcomes that exceed existing obligations.
- Avoiding biodiversity loss which cannot be offset elsewhere (e.g., irreplaceable habitats).
- Quantifying risk appropriately – e.g., is there a difficulty creating or enhancing specific habitats according to the site?
- Making a measurable net gain contribution that is calculated using an appropriate metric and ensuring that the calculation are consistent and transparent with limitations and assumptions clearly identified.

- Ensure that the net gain design achieves the best outcome for biodiversity – this may require quantitative and qualitative assessment – and create a net gain legacy for long-term benefits.

Methodology

The BNG calculation tool used for this assessment is the ‘Statutory Biodiversity Metric’ (SBC) published in February 2024 by Natural England (Natural England, 2024). This tool objectively calculates the biodiversity losses and gains for habitats in relation to the proposed development. The SBC requires all habitat data to be categorised according to the UK Habitat Classification (Butcher *et al.*, 2020) and this was most recently completed in August 2024.

All condition assessments were carried out at suitable times of the year. The habitats were then mapped into a digital map using QGIS coordinate reference systems OSGB 1936/National Grid and a baseline habitat map can be viewed in Appendix 1. Habitats recorded on site were measured using the derived areas (Ellipsoidal – EPSG 7001) with habitat areas provided in hectares and hedgerow areas provided in kilometres.

The type and condition of the habitats were assessed during the site survey. The distinctiveness of the habitats is pre-defined by the SBC. The following plans, policies and/or strategies were also viewed to determine whether the habitat has formally been identified in a strategy, the North Herts Ecological Maps (see Appendix 6), and UK Biodiversity Action Plans and Green Infrastructure Strategies. All calculations were inserted into the BNG calculator using the technical data.

Trading Summaries

The term trading up is a concept which requires conserving through offset components of biodiversity that are of a higher conservation priority (for example, they tend to be more irreplaceable and vulnerable and are harder to recreate) than those affected by the development project for which the offset is envisaged. For example, should non-irreplaceable habitats be lost or impacted as a result of the proposed development, it will be necessary to create or enhance habitats that are of the same or higher distinctiveness.

Assessment Limitations and Assumptions

A small number of limitations were noted but it is considered that an accurate assessment of the site's ecological value has been obtained:

- BNG assessments and calculations can only provide a proxy measure for the real long-term biodiversity changes that occur on any given site.
- The assessment does not give credit, in terms of a score / biodiversity units, to any actions that are taken as part of the development that add features to the site such as bird and bat boxes which support certain species groups. Such measures are beyond the scope of this report.
- It was noted during the survey that areas of habitat had been recently felled. To verify this, Google Street View was checked, revealing areas of habitat that had recently been removed. According to the user guide, retrospective habitats that have been removed should use a pre-degradation habitat type as the site's baseline. This means that if a habitat was cleared, destroyed, or degraded, the baseline should reflect the type of habitat that existed before the degradation. This baseline is then recorded as lost within the biodiversity metric tool. The guide specifies that this backdating applies to situations where evidence of the pre-degradation habitat type and condition can be established and documented. The habitats noted below have been retrospectively recorded based on this guidance.

Report Lifespan

Given the transient nature of the subject, the survey results are considered valid for up to 12 months.

Survey Results and Evaluation

Site Habitat Baseline

The red line boundary is approximately 0.45 hectares and comprises of mixed scrub, buildings, hardstanding, bioswale and modified grassland (see Appendix 2). The Site is bordered by mature trees lines mainly on the western and southern boundaries. Beyond this the Site is bordered by arable land, tree lines and hedgerows that are well-connected to the wider landscape. A plan of the existing habitats can be viewed in Appendix 1 and the condition assessments for these habitats are provided in Appendix 4, where applicable. The location of the baseline trees and corresponding with the Tree Constraints Plan provided by Indigo Surveys.

The baseline value totals 0.96 Habitat Units and 0.55 Hedgerow Units.

Table 1. Baseline Habitats and Corresponding Information. *Numbers are based on rounded figures, check the associated metric calculator for more information.

UK Habitat	Area (ha)	Description (distinctiveness, condition, connectivity and strategic significance)	Value (units)*
Area Based Habitats			
Developed land; sealed surface	0.3045	Habitat automatically very low distinctiveness, n/a condition and area not in local strategy.	0.00
Mixed Scrub	0.0798	Habitat automatically medium distinctiveness, classed as poor condition and area is formally identified in the local strategy (Appendix 6)	0.37
Bioswale	0.0202	Habitat automatically low distinctiveness, classed as poor condition and area not in local strategy	0.04
Modified Grassland	0.0457	Habitat automatically low distinctiveness, classed as poor condition and area not in local strategy	0.09
Bare Ground	0.004	Habitat automatically low distinctiveness classed as poor condition and area not in local strategy.	0.01
Urban Tree (Medium)	0.0163	Habitat automatically medium distinctiveness, classed as moderate condition and area not in local strategy	0.13
Urban Tree (Small)	0.081	Habitat automatically medium distinctiveness, classed as poor condition and area not in local strategy	0.32
Linear Based Habitats			

Line of Trees	0.121	Habitat automatically low distinctiveness, classed as moderate condition and area not in local strategy	0.48
Non-native Hedgerow	0.063	Habitat automatically very low distinctiveness, classed as poor condition and area not in local strategy	0.06
Total Area (ha)	0.45 Without trees / 0.55 With trees	Total Baseline Value (Habitat Units)	0.96

Future Baseline

The post-development habitats and corresponding future values are set out in the proposed habitat map (see Appendix 2). The condition assessments for the future habitats and hedgerows are provided in Appendix 5, where applicable. This has been based on the Proposed Site Plan (Drawing Number: 23067GF-CA-S1-00-DR-A-210_02-S4-A-ProposedSitePlan) by C+A Design (August, 2024).

Table 2 outlines the value of the retained habitats and proposed habitat / hedgerow creation as per the development proposals.

Table 2. Future Baseline and Corresponding Habitats

UK Habitat	Area (ha)	Description (distinctiveness, condition, connectivity and strategic significance)	Value (units)*
Area Based Habitats – Retained			
Developed land; sealed surface	0.3045	Habitat automatically very low distinctiveness, n/a condition and area not in local strategy.	0.00
Bioswale	0.0202	Habitat automatically low distinctiveness, classed as poor condition and area not in local strategy	0.04
Modified Grassland	0.0457	Habitat automatically low distinctiveness, classed as poor condition and area not in local strategy	0.09
Bare Ground	0.004	Habitat automatically low distinctiveness classed as poor condition and area not in local strategy.	0.01
Urban Tree (Medium)	0.0163	Habitat automatically medium distinctiveness, classed as moderate condition and area not in local strategy	0.13
Urban Tree (Small)	0.041	Habitat automatically medium distinctiveness, classed as poor condition and area not in local strategy	0.16
Area Based Habitats – Created			
Developed land; sealed surface	0.0414	Habitat automatically very low distinctiveness, n/a condition and area not in local strategy.	0.00

Bare Ground	0.0384	Habitat automatically low distinctiveness classed as moderate condition and area not in local strategy.	0.14
Total Area (ha)	0.45 Without trees / 0.55 With trees	Total Proposed Value (Habitat Units)	0.34
Linear Based Habitats – Retained			
Line of Trees	0.121	Habitat automatically low distinctiveness, classed as moderate condition and area not in local strategy	0.065
Non-native Hedgerow	0.063	Habitat automatically very low distinctiveness, classed as poor condition and area not in local strategy	0.063
Linear Based Habitats – Created			
–	–	–	–
Total Length (km)	0.13	Total Proposed Value (Habitat Units)	0.57

Habitat Trading Requirements

The site fails the habitat trading requirements to provide the “same broad habitat or higher distinctiveness habitat” required by the trading standards of the SBC (Natural England, 2023). It fails for the loss of medium distinctiveness habitats, Mixed Scrub and Urban Trees.

Assessment Results

The baseline value of the site is 0.96 habitat units and 0.55 hedgerow units (see Table 3). The post-development future value of the site is expected to be 0.57 habitat units and 0.32 hedgerow units. This will result in a -40.47% loss in habitat units and a -40.95% loss in hedgerow units. It also does not pass the trading standards of the DEFRA metric (Natural England, 2023). The full calculation summary can be found in Appendix 3. The post-development habitats and corresponding future baseline are set out in the proposed habitat map (see Appendix 2). This has been based on the Proposed Site Plan (Drawing Number: 23067GF-CA-S1-00-DR-A-210_02-S4-A-ProposedSitePlan) by C+A Design (August, 2024).

Table 3. Assessment Results

	Habitat Value (Units)	Hedgerow Value (Units)
Baseline value	0.96	0.55
Future value	0.57	0.32
Total net % change	-40.47%	-40.95%
Trading standards	Not passed	Not passed

Recommendations and Conclusions

Indigo Surveys was commissioned by C+A Design to undertake a Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) Assessment of Greenfield service station, A505 Baldock Road, Royston, SG8 9NN. Planning consent is to be sought from North Herts Council to replace the existing canopy, reconfiguration of forecourt pumps to create additional HGV lane and changes to parking arrangements on site. The Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) assessment was completed using the 'Statutory Biodiversity Metric' (Natural England, 2024) based on the Proposed Site Plan (Drawing Number: 23067GF-CA-S1-00-DR-A-210_02-S4-A-ProposedSitePlan) by C+A Design (August, 2024).

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The proposed development will require appropriate design alterations or an appropriate offsetting scheme (either via off-site habitat creation, purchase of units, or purchase of credits).

The full calculation summary can be found in Appendix 3 and the metric will be submitted with the planning application for full review by the Local Planning Authority. Amendments to the report and calculations must be made in the event of any design changes. A Landscape and Ecological Management Plan (LEMP) will be required to ensure the successful establishment and long-term management of retained and newly created habitats and hedgerows. This can be secured as a planning condition.

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Appendix 1 – Baseline Habitat Map



Appendix 2 – Future Habitat Map



Appendix 3 – Biodiversity Net Gain Calculation Summary

Greenfields Service Station

Headline Results

Scroll down for final results ▲

Return to results menu

On-site baseline	Habitat units	0.96		
	Hedgerow units	0.55		
	Watercourse units	0.00		
On-site post-intervention (Including habitat retention, creation & enhancement)	Habitat units	0.57		
	Hedgerow units	0.32		
	Watercourse units	0.00		
On-site net change (units & percentage)	Habitat units	-0.39	-40.47%	On-site net gain is less than target set ▲
	Hedgerow units	-0.22	-40.95%	On-site net gain is less than target set ▲
	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	-0.39		
	Hedgerow units	-0.22		
	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	-0.39	
	Hedgerow units	-0.22	
	Watercourse units	0.00	
Total net % change (Including all on-site & off-site habitat retention, creation & enhancement)	Habitat units	-40.47%	Total net gain achieved is less than target set ▲
	Hedgerow units	-40.95%	Total net gain achieved is less than target set ▲
	Watercourse units	0.00%	
Trading rules satisfied?	No - Check Trading Summaries ▲		

Appendix 4 – Condition Assessments for Baseline Habitats

Developed land; sealed surfaced do not require a condition assessment.

Condition Assessment Criteria for Modified Grassland

<i>Condition Assessment Criteria</i>		<i>Pass or Fail</i>
A	There are 6–8 vascular plant species per m² present, including at least 2 forbs. Note – this criterion is essential for achieving Moderate or Good condition. Where the vascular plant species present are characteristic of medium, high or very high distinctiveness grassland, or there are 9 or more of these characteristic species per m², please review the full UKHab description to assess whether the grassland should instead be classified as a higher distinctiveness grassland. Where a grassland is classed as medium, high, or very high distinctiveness, please use the relevant condition sheet.	F
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 vertebrates and invertebrates to live and breed.	F
C	Some scattered scrub (including bramble <i>Rubus fruticosus</i> agg.) may be present, but scrub accounts for less than 20% of total grassland area. <i>Note – patches of scrub with continuous (more than 90%) cover should be classified as the relevant scrub habitat type.</i>	P
D	Physical damage is evident in less than 5% of total grassland area. Examples of physical damage include excessive poaching, damage from machinery use or storage, erosion caused by high levels of access, or any other damaging management activities.	P
E	Cover of bare ground is between 1% and 10%, including localised areas (for example, a concentration of rabbit warrens).	P
F	Cover of bracken <i>Pteridium aquilinum</i> is less than 20%.	P
G	There is an absence of invasive non-native plant species (as listed on Schedule 9 of WCA4).	P
Final Condition (Passes on 5 but not on Criteria A)		Poor

Condition Assessment Criteria for Bioswale

Condition Assessment Criteria		Pass or Fail
A	Vegetation structure is varied, providing opportunities for vertebrates and invertebrates to live, eat and breed. A single structural habitat component or vegetation type does not account for more than 80% of the total habitat area.	F
B	The habitat parcel contains different plant species that are beneficial for wildlife, for example flowering species providing nectar sources for a range of invertebrates at different times of year.	F
C	Invasive non-native plant species (listed on Schedule 9 of WCA1) and others which are to the detriment of native wildlife (using professional judgement) ² cover less than 5% of the total vegetated area ³ . <i>Note – to achieve Good condition, this criterion must be satisfied by a complete absence of invasive non-native species (rather than <5% cover)."</i>	P
E1	Plant species are mostly native. If non-native species are present, they should not be detrimental to the habitat or native wildlife ⁴ .	P
E2	The vegetation is comprised of plant species suited to wetland or riparian situations.	F
Final Condition (Passes on 2 but not on Criteria C, E1 & E2)		Poor

Condition Assessment Criteria for Bareground

Condition Assessment Criteria		Pass or Fail
A	Vegetation structure is varied, providing opportunities for vertebrates and invertebrates to live, eat and breed. A single structural habitat component or vegetation type does not account for more than 80% of the total habitat area.	F
B	The habitat parcel contains different plant species that are beneficial for wildlife, for example flowering species providing nectar sources for a range of invertebrates at different times of year.	F
C	Invasive non-native plant species (listed on Schedule 9 of WCA1) and others which are to the detriment of native wildlife	F

	(using professional judgement) 2 cover less than 5% of the total vegetated area. <i>Note – to achieve Good condition, this criterion must be satisfied by a complete absence of invasive non-native species (rather than <5% cover).</i>	
Final Condition (Passes on 0)		Poor

Condition Assessment Criteria for Urban Trees (Moderate)

<i>Condition Assessment Criteria</i>		<i>Pass or Fail</i>
A	The tree is a native species (or at least 70% within the block are native species).	P
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).	P
C	The tree is mature (or more than 50% within the block are mature).	P
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.	F
E	Natural ecological niches for vertebrates and invertebrates are present, such as presence of deadwood, cavities, ivy or loose bark.	F
F	More than 20% of the tree canopy area is oversailing vegetation beneath.	F
Final Condition (Passes on 3 but not on Criteria D, E & F)		Moderate

Condition Assessment Criteria for Urban Trees (Poor)

<i>Condition Assessment Criteria</i>		<i>Pass or Fail</i>
A	The tree is a native species (or at least 70% within the block are native species).	P
B	The tree canopy is predominantly continuous, with gaps in canopy cover making up <10% of total area and no individual	F

	gap being >5 m wide (individual trees automatically pass this criterion).	
C	The tree is mature (or more than 50% within the block are mature).	P
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.	F
E	Natural ecological niches for vertebrates and invertebrates are present, such as presence of deadwood, cavities, ivy or loose bark.	F
F	More than 20% of the tree canopy area is oversailing vegetation beneath.	F
Final Condition (Passes on 2 but not on Criteria B, D, E & F)		Poor

Appendix 5 – Condition Assessments for Proposed Habitats

Developed land; sealed surfaced do not require a condition assessment.

Condition Assessment Criteria for Bareground

<i>Condition Assessment Criteria</i>		<i>Pass or Fail</i>
A	Vegetation structure is varied, providing opportunities for vertebrates and invertebrates to live, eat and breed. A single structural habitat component or vegetation type does not account for more than 80% of the total habitat area.	F
B	The habitat parcel contains different plant species that are beneficial for wildlife, for example flowering species providing nectar sources for a range of invertebrates at different times of year.	P
C	Invasive non-native plant species (listed on Schedule 9 of WCA1) and others which are to the detriment of native wildlife (using professional judgement)² cover less than 5% of the total vegetated area³. <i>Note – to achieve Good condition, this criterion must be satisfied by a complete absence of invasive non-native species (rather than <5% cover).</i>	P
Final Condition (Passes on 2 but not on Criteria A)		Moderate

END OF REPORT

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