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Biodiversity Assessment

Ramridge Farm, Kimpton Road, Hitchin, SG4 8HB.

February 2025

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Project: Ramridge Farm, Kimpton Road, Hitchin, SG4 8HB

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Table of Contents

1.0	Executive summary
2.0	Introduction
	Purpose of the report
	General Description
	Development Proposal
	Planning Status
	Aims and Objectives
	Planning Policy and Legislation
3.0	Methodology
	Assessor's Qualifications and Competence
	Desk Study
	Habitat Survey
	Condition Assessment
	Calculating Biodiversity Units
	Assumptions and Limitations
4.0	Results
	Pre-Development Assessment
	Baseline Biodiversity Assessment
	Predicted Post-intervention Assessment
5.0	Conclusion and Recommendation
	Biodiversity Assessment
	 Table 1: Headline results

1.0 Executive summary

1.1 Biodiversity Net Gain is a specific, measurable outcome of project activities that deliver demonstrable and quantifiable benefits to biodiversity compared to the baseline situation. The Small Sites Metric uses habitats to proxy for the broader biodiversity types scored according to their relative biodiversity potential.

1.2 The proposed post-intervention biodiversity score indicates that the biodiversity net gain target has been met with the planting of fifteen small tree and enhancing the hedge (Metric Attached). A total net change of 13.03% habitat and 11.95% hedge is achieved.

1.3 The proposed development site contains local habitats with no irreplaceable, notable, statutory, non-statutory, or priority habitats.

Table 1: Headline results

FINAL RESULTS		
Total net unit change (Including all on-site & off-site habitat retention, creation & enhancement)	<i>Habitat units</i>	0.10
	<i>Hedgerow units</i>	0.02
	<i>Watercourse units</i>	0.00
Total net % change (Including all on-site & off-site habitat retention, creation & enhancement)	<i>Habitat units</i>	13.03%
	<i>Hedgerow units</i>	11.95%
	<i>Watercourse units</i>	0.00%
Trading rules satisfied?	Yes ✓	

2.0 Introduction

Purpose of the report

2.1 The report aims to provide a clear and consistent document with which the developer can demonstrate their net biodiversity gain. In addition, the planning authority can check whether the proposals meet the biodiversity gain objective. The developer is committed to achieving the project's positive biodiversity net gain.

2.2 The report's scope addresses the feasibility of demonstrating Biodiversity Gain by calculating the predicted changes in biodiversity value with the proposed development. A Biodiversity Impact Assessment is required to provide a measurable calculation of the biodiversity units on the site before and after the proposed development. In addition, the report audits the land's biodiversity value and calculates the losses and gains in biodiversity value from changes and actions that affect biodiversity.

2.3 The Small Sites Biodiversity Metric does not explicitly include species and uses habitat as a proxy for broader biodiversity. Different habitats are scored according to their relative biodiversity potential, maintaining the same levels of species protection.

2.4 The British Standard BS 42020:2013¹ a suitable professional ecologist must ensure a rigorous and thorough independent review.

General Description

2.5 The land at Ramridge Farm, Kimpton Road, Hitchin, SG4 8HB.

Development Proposal

2.6 The proposal is for a shed.

Planning Status

2.7 The proposed development will submit a planning application.

Aims and Objectives

2.8 This report addresses the following purposes:

- To determine the predicted post-intervention percent net change in biodiversity value as calculated using the latest Defra calculation tool

Planning Policy and Legislation

2.9 National Planning Policy Framework policy states that planning should provide biodiversity net gains. National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) paragraphs 174(d), 179(b) and 180(d) and the Natural Environment Planning Practice Guidance (PPG) refer to this policy requirement.

3.0 Methodology

Assessor's Qualifications and Competence

3.1 The Ecologist has over 25 years of conservation experience. Founder of a new conservation charity and previously worked as Head of Conservation for a Wildlife Trust, Director of Studies for the Field Studies Council and Course Director and Lecturer for the University of Essex and Cambridge.

3.2 The Ecologist is nationally respected and has been awarded various fellowships for his outstanding or significant contribution to these disciplines, including conservation and biodiversity, for delivering landscape-scale conservation projects.

¹ Biodiversity – Code of practice for planning and development, BS 42020:2013.

3.3 The Ecologist is currently on the external advisory board for the University of Essex. In addition, I represent the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management at the University of Southampton, judge national ecological projects, am an ecological expert for the Southwood Foundation, and serve on the Professional Standards Sub-Committee, which develops biodiversity gain and accreditation/standards.

Desk study

3.4 A desk study assesses the publicly available Open-Source Natural England datasets for Habitats of Principal Importance, irreplaceable habitats such as ancient woodland, and designated sites for nature conservation.

Habitat Survey

3.5 The vegetation and habitat types are classified according to the UK Habitat Classification. The Small-Scale Metric operates on the UK Habitat Classification system. The UK Habitat Classification (UKHab) is a comprehensive habitat classification system for the UK that provides outputs suitable for ecological impact assessment, habitat metrics, and better data integration between organisations.²

Condition Assessment

3.6 The condition of discrete habitat parcels was assessed using specific criteria from the latest Metric from Defra.

Calculating Biodiversity Units

3.7 Defra's Biodiversity Metric represents best practices for auditing the impact of development schemes upon habitats that may have a biodiversity interest. To ensure the proposed compensatory and enhancement measures are 'adequate' and help demonstrate 'no-net-loss' of biodiversity due to the proposed development. This approach is consistent with the National Planning Policy Framework.

3.8 The biodiversity assessment measures are for habitats only and complement protected species surveys. The method uses metrics as surrogates to quantify the biodiversity value for a particular area. Biodiversity units result from various scores, including habitat distinctiveness, habitat condition and size.

² Butcher, B., Carey, P., Edmonds, R., Norton, L. and Treweek, J. (2023) The UK Habitat Bank Classification User Manual Version 1.1.

3.9 Biodiversity values are for the pre-development baseline and predicted post-development habitat and conditions. Any losses or gains are determined as the difference between the two. The Metric accounts for hedgerows and other linear habitats, such as watercourses, separately from different area-based habitat types. This is due to connectivity and other ecological functions, which must be commensurate with physical area cover. Linear habitats are compared before and after development. Habitat areas and linear features must not be summed.

Assumptions and Limitations

3.10 The metric is transparent and used to calculate the biodiversity value of an application site before and after development. It is a proxy measurement to determine whether the development will result in an on-site habitat biodiversity net loss or gain. The biodiversity metric is a tool to help inform design plans and decisions, incentivising actions that benefit biodiversity and discouraging activities that harm biodiversity.

4.0 Results

Pre-Development Assessment

4.1 The proposed development site contains local habitats with no irreplaceable, notable, statutory, non-statutory, or priority habitats.

Building and Hard-Standing

4.2 No buildings were present.

Modified grassland

4.3 The area has little agricultural value and has been previously used for various agricultural uses. Therefore, to address any degradation of habitat it has been classed as a modified grassland. This is similar to the adjacent habitats

Baseline Biodiversity Assessment

Habitat Units

4.4 The on-site baseline biodiversity value is +0.80 Area-based Habitat Units.

Hedgerow Units

4.5 A species poor hedge is present with a baseline value of 0.14 units.

Predicted Post-Biodiversity Assessment

Habitat Units

4.6 The proposed development will create a net gain of +0.90 Area-based Habitat Units with the addition of fifteen small trees.

Hedgerow Units

4.7 A section of the hedge will be enhanced which will provide a +0.16 linear hedgerow unit.

5.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

Biodiversity Assessment

5.1 The proposal indicates that a biodiversity gain in area-based habitat and linear hedgerow units has been achieved.