



Biodiversity Net Gain Assessment

Lower Green Farm, Hitchin

February 2026

Prepared by:

Brown & Co

The Fairways
Wyboston Lakes
Great North Road
Bedfordshire
MK44 3AL

Prepared for:

Laura and Andy McKenna

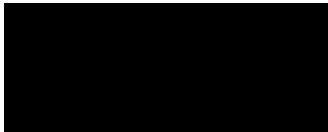
Lower Green Farm
Lower Green
Ickleford
Hitchin
Hertfordshire
SG5 3TW

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Principal Author:



Assistant Ecologist
Megan Carter BSc (Hons) MSc

Authoriser:



Senior Ecologist
Ryan Clark BSc (Hons) MSc ACIEEM

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1. Introduction

1.1 Project Background

Brown & Co was commissioned by Laura and Andy McKenna in October 2025 to undertake a Biodiversity Net Gain Assessment at land adjacent at Lower Green Farm, Lower Green, Ickleford, Hitchin, SG5 3TW (NGR: TL 18648 32511)—hereafter referred to as ‘the Site’

The Site is a flat parcel of land dominated by a floodplain grazing marsh field. A hardstanding roadway, modified grassland and a section of ditch is also present within the vicinity of the Site.

This report sets out the results of a site survey undertaken in November 2025 and a subsequent desk-based assessment. The information, assessment and discussion set out in this report aim to inform the potential for Biodiversity Net Gain on the Site in the context of plans to establish a new dog walking field and proposed glamping site along with associated access features.

1.2 Site Description

The Site was an approximately 1.49 ha flat parcel of land in the northern extent of the town of Hitchin, North Hertfordshire (See Figure 1). The majority of the Site comprised of a floodplain grazing field. A hardstanding track is present within the south of the Site, modified grassland is present within the south of the Site, and a section of ditch is present within the southwest of the Site.

No hedgerow units were present within the Site.



Figure 1 – Site location (redline), showing the wider local landscape (© 2025 Microsoft Corporation, © 2025 Maxar, ©CNES (2025) Distribution Airbus DS).

Imagery taken from Aerial Imagery February 2026.

The wider landscape around the Site was dominated by agricultural field parcels, both arable and pastoral with various hedgerows, woodland blocks, waterbodies, river corridors, ditch and a urban area present within the vicinity of the Site.

An unnamed road lies directly south of the Site. Multiple other public roadways are present in the surrounding landscape, chiefly associated with the urban areas of Ickleford and Hitchin.

The River Hiz, a Statutory Main River, lies within 45 m of the Site boundary.

2. Methods

2.1 Objectives

The aim of this report is to provide an initial assessment of the habitats present within the Site and those included in proposals for the Site with regard to the potential of achieving Biodiversity Net Gain. Plans showing all onsite habitats will be generated.

This report was produced following current best practice guidance, including that set out in BS 8683:2021 Process for designing and implementing Biodiversity Net Gain (British Standards 2021).

2.2 Legislation and Policy

Appendix A sets out the national and local planning policy, as well as environmental and wildlife legislation relevant to the Site. The project must adhere to these documents at all times. The contents of this report are written in part to avoid an offence being committed in regard to this policy and legislation.

2.3 Biodiversity Net Gain Calculation

A survey of the Site was conducted on 17 November 2025 by Assistant Ecologist Megan Carter BSc (Hons) MSc.

The survey area was subject to a walkover by the attending ecologist, where in the onsite habitats were identified and assessed in accordance with the UK Habitat Classification Version 2.0 (UKHab Ltd 2023). Flora species lists were compiled for each habitat and assigned positions on the DAFOR (Dominant, Abundant, Frequent, Occasional, or Rare) scale as laid out in Walker *et al.* (2010). Additionally, the Site was assessed for its suitability for protected and notable species. Any evidence of such species, e.g. Badger setts and signs, was recorded and geo-referenced onsite.

The Statutory Biodiversity metric (Defra 2023) was employed to input the results of the Site survey and the proposed new onsite habitats, thereby generating the value difference between the pre-project and post-project habitats—relative Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG).

The Statutory Biodiversity Metric requires the following site condition data points to generate the BNG associated with the Site and proposed works:

Habitat Type: both the broad habitat, e.g. woodland, and the specific habitat type, e.g. lowland mixed deciduous woodland, as outlined in UKHab Ltd. (2023).

Area: an aerial measurement of total land cover area (in hectares) for each habitat parcel. Recording of habitat extents, both pre and post-works, was conducted using the onsite survey results, readily available online mapping and aerial imagery, and verified land use records. The minimal mapping unit (MMU) was taken at 0.01 ha.

Condition: a measure within Defra's BNG guidance and assessment tools that quantified the relative 'condition' of a habitat parcel based on various physical, composition, and landscape variables dependant on the habitat type, e.g. number of vascular plant species present per square metre. The Statutory Biodiversity Metric Condition Assessment sheets (Defra 2023) were used to assign condition scores to the habitat parcels identified in the onsite survey.

Strategic Significance: a category ascribed to the geographical location of the Site in regard to its position in the context of Local Planning Authority areas and National Character Area profiles.

2.4 Limitations

The survey of the Site was conducted in November 2025, outside the optimal botanical assessment period and habitat survey season (April-September inclusive). Thus, it is considered there was moderate risk of notable plant species, such as invasive non-natives, habitat characteristic species, and protected species, being missed by this survey. However, onsite habitats were common and widespread in Britain and were not considered to present complex ecological communities, such as flora-rich woodland floors or lowland meadow, that would be misidentified outside the optimal botanical assessment period. Thus, it is estimated that a full and complete habitat assessment of the Site was conducted.

Habitats within the Site are relatively small and are estimated to be adjacent or beneath the government-endorsed minimal mappable unit—the smallest habitat area (or length) that can be assigned a primary habitat code. At such scales, small variations in habitat extent in both onsite surveying and desktop mapping are considered unavoidable. However, all reasonable efforts to avoid and minimise such variations have been employed during this assessment.

Habitat mapping is subject to seasonal variations, wherein, ecotones—transitional zones between biological communities—may drift or be relocated at different periods of the year. This can be a natural shift owing to abiotic factors, or a consequence of management, either within the habitat itself or within adjacent communities.

3. Baseline Conditions

3.1 UK Habitat Classification Survey

This section outlines all habitats recorded within the Site on 17 November 2025. A plan depicting the onsite habitats, their extent and location, and relevant target notes are shown in Appendix B; photographs of the Site are shown in Appendix C.

UKHab habitats identified within the Site:

- Modified grassland – g4 (Secondary codes: 19 – coastal and floodplain grazing marsh, 516 – active management)
- Other developed land – ub16 (Secondary codes: 516 – active management)
- Other standing water – r1g (Secondary codes: 50 – ditch, 516 – active management)

3.2.1. Coastal Floodplain Grazing Marsh & Modified Grassland

The majority of the Site is designated as coastal and floodplain grazing marsh CFGM)—a Priority Habitat (Photograph 1). A classification within the Statutory Metric calculation as CFGM is considered appropriate owing to the information laid out in the Statutory User Guide that states:

“Areas should be recorded and assessed as Floodplain Wetland Mosaic (FWM) if they are:

- *cited within habitat inventories”*

The CFGM habitat passes condition criteria A, C, D, and F, therefore achieving a Moderate condition score. This habitat will be partially lost and enhanced under the current proposals.

A section of modified grassland is present within the south of the Site.

The sward was dominated by perennial ryegrass (*Lolium perenne*) with frequent cocksfoot (*Dactylis glomerata*), false oat-grass (*Arrhenatherum elatius*) and yorkshire fog (*Holcus lanatus*) and occasional timothy (*Phleum pratense*). Forbs present includes leavers (*Galium aparine*), common chickweed (*Stellaria media*), common nettle (*Urtica dioica*), common rush (*Juncus effusus*), dove's-foot cranesbill (*Geranium molle*), herb-robert (*Geranium robertianum*), ragwort (*Jacobaea vulgaris*), silverweed (*Potentilla anserina*) and spear thistle (*Cirsium vulgare*).

The number of vascular plant species per square metre was 3 within the non-priority modified grassland habitat. Therefore, this habitat did not pass condition criteria A and achieved a Poor condition score. This habitat will be lost under the current proposals.

3.2.2. *Other Developed Land*

A section of hardstanding track is present within the south of the Site. This habitat will be retained under the current proposals.

3.2.3. *Other Standing Water*

A section of saturated ditch is present within the south of the Site (Photograph 2). This ditch passes condition criteria A, C, D, F and H; therefore, achieving a Poor condition score. This ditch will be enhanced under the current proposals.

4. Feasibility of Biodiversity Net Gain

4.1 Irreplicable Habitat and Other Important Ecological Features Evaluation

No irreplaceable or Priority habitats are present within the Site. No detailed protected species surveys were undertaken as part of this assessment.

4.2 Proposed Habitats

This section outlines all UKHab habitats proposed to be present on the Site post development; as shown in the indicative Site plan (Appendix B).

UKHab habitats proposed to be present after project delivery on the Site:

- Modified grassland – g4 (Secondary codes: 19 – coastal and floodplain grazing marsh, 32 – scattered tree, 516 – active management)
- Other developed land – ub16 (Secondary codes: 516 – active management)
- Buildings – ub15 (Secondary codes: 516 – active management)
- Other standing water – r1g (Secondary codes: 50 – ditch, 516 – active management)
- Other native hedgerow – h2a6 (Secondary codes: 516 – active management)

4.2.1 Coastal Floodplain Grazing Marsh

This includes the retained area of CFGM of Moderate condition. The area of CFGM to the north of the glamping site and the area to the north of the dog walking field will be enhanced under the current proposals. This will be done by sowing of an appropriate seedmix (recommended moisture tolerant and local provenance where possible) throughout the sward to achieve a higher diversity of vascular plants to achieve condition criteria B, along with A, C, D, and F; therefore, achieving Good condition.

34 new small trees are proposed to be planted within the Poor condition grassland habitat (plotted in groups of ~5). These trees should be native species, sourced from local provenance where possible, and to contain species such as black poplar (*Populus nigra*), crab apple (*Malus sylvestris*), English oak (*Quercus robur*), and silver birch (*Betula pendula*). While these trees are plotted on the indicative plan, their location can be adapted to fit in with the proposed scheme without any impact on the Biodiversity Net Gain obligation—trees will remain within the modified grassland habitat. These trees are anticipated to pass condition criteria A, B and F; therefore, achieving Moderate condition.

4.2.2 Other Developed Land

Proposed new roadway and car parking.

4.2.3 Building

Proposed new shepherds' huts.

4.2.4 Other Native Hedgerow

New sections native hedgerow is proposed to be planted adjacent to the new shepherd's hut and around the dog walking field. This habitat is anticipated to fail condition criteria C1, C2, and D2; therefore, achieving Moderate condition.

4.2.5 Other Standing Water

The retained section of ditch within the south of the Site will be enhanced via the planting of a range of emergent, submergent, and floating-leaved plants. Under this condition it is anticipated that condition criteria B will now be passed, along with condition criteria A, C, D, F and H; therefore, achieving Moderate condition.

4.3 Summary of Habitat Change

Tables 4.1 and 4.2 details summary changes in UKHab habitats associated with the proposed project prior to and after the proposed development.

Table 4.1 – summary of UKHab habitat change pre-development

Habitat	Total area	Area retained	Area enhanced	Description
<i>Non-linear habitats (ha)</i>				
Coastal floodplain grazing marsh	1.43	0.54	0.78	Existing coastal floodplain grazing marsh partially enhanced to Good condition
Modified grassland – g4	0.03	0.00	0.00	Existing modified grassland of Poor condition
Other developed land – u1d6	0.023	0.023	0.00	Existing hardstanding roadway
<i>Linear features (km)</i>				
Other standing water – r1g	0.005	0.00	0.005	Existing Poor condition ditch enhanced to Moderate condition

Table 4.2 - summary of non-linear UKHab habitat change post-development

Habitat	Total area	Description
<i>Non-linear habitats (ha)</i>		
Other developed land – u1d6	0.124	Proposed new roadway and car parking
Building – ub15	0.015	Proposed new shepherds' huts
Individual tree (rural)	0.1384	Proposed new 34 small individual trees of Moderate condition
<i>Linear features (km)</i>		
Other native hedgerow – h2a6	0.24	Proposed new native hedgerow of Moderate condition

Figure 2 presents an extract from the completed Statutory Biodiversity Metric completed for the Site.

FINAL RESULTS		
Total net unit change (Including all on-site & off-site habitat retention, creation & enhancement)	<i>Area habitat units</i>	1.74
	<i>Hedgerow units</i>	0.00
	<i>Watercourse units</i>	0.01
Total net % change (Including all on-site & off-site habitat retention, creation & enhancement)	<i>Area habitat units</i>	10.08%
	<i>Hedgerow units</i>	0.00%
	<i>Watercourse units</i>	86.72%
Trading rules satisfied?	Yes ✓	

Figure 2 – extract from a completed Statutory Biodiversity Metric for the Site.

The proposed changes of habitats within the Site result in an increase of habitat units from 17.24 to 18.98—equating to a **Biodiversity Net Gain of 10.08%**.

The proposed changes of habitats within the Site result in an increase of watercourse units from 0.01 to 0.03—equating to a **Biodiversity Net Gain of 86.72%**

No hedgerow units were present within the Site.

5. Conclusion

The proposals for the Site include the establishment of a dog walking field and glamping site.

A baseline dominated by a modified grassland field is proposed to be partially lost to create a new dog walking field glamping site with associated access features. Individual trees will be planted.

The onsite habitat change is estimated to result in a habitat unit uplift of 10.08% and a watercourse uplift of 86.72%. Thus, the project is considered to meet the legal obligation to achieve a minimum of 10% Biodiversity Net Gain in England.

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Methods & Professional Standards

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Species and Habitats Best Practice Guidance

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APPENDIX A: Planning Policy & Legislation

Relevant Planning Policy

National Planning Policy Framework 2024

The NPPF states that:

Para 8

Achieving sustainable development means that the planning system has three overarching objectives, which are interdependent and need to be pursued in mutually supportive ways (so that opportunities can be taken to secure net gains across each of the different objectives).

Para 33

Local plans and spatial development strategies should be informed throughout their preparation by a sustainability appraisal that meets the relevant legal requirements¹⁷. This should demonstrate how the plan has addressed relevant economic, social and environmental objectives (including opportunities for net gains).

Para 187

Planning policies and decisions should contribute and enhance the natural and local environment by:

- 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 192

To protect and enhance biodiversity and geodiversity, plans should:

- 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.
 - Promote the conservation, restoration and enhancement of priority habitats, ecological
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networks and the protection and recovery of priority species; and identify and pursue opportunities for securing measurable net gains for biodiversity

Para 193

When determining planning applications, local planning authorities should apply the following principle:

- if significant harm to biodiversity resulting from a development cannot be avoided (through locating on an alternative site with less harmful impacts), adequately mitigated, or, as a last resort, compensated for, then planning permission should be refused;
- development whose primary objective is to conserve or enhance biodiversity should be supported; while opportunities to improve biodiversity in and around developments should be integrated as part of their design, especially where this can secure measurable net gains for biodiversity or enhance public access to nature where this is appropriate;
- development resulting in the loss or deterioration of irreplaceable habitats (such as ancient woodland and ancient or veteran trees) should be refused, unless there are wholly exceptional reasons and a suitable compensation strategy exists; and
- development whose primary objective is to conserve or enhance biodiversity should be supported; while opportunities to improve biodiversity in and around developments should be integrated as part of their design, especially where this can secure measurable net gains for biodiversity or enhance public access to nature where this is appropriate.

Main Environmental and wildlife Legislation (England)

Environment Act 2021

Schedule 14 of The Environment Act 2021 makes it mandatory for all new developments (with some limited exceptions) to achieve a biodiversity net gain (BNG) of at least 10% by the time the development is completed compared to the pre-development biodiversity value of the onsite habitat.

The outputs and statutory instruments of this legislation may be amended in the future by the Secretary of State.

Conservation of Habitats and Species regulations 2017 (as amended).

Section 43 of Part 3 of this legislation makes it an offence to do any of the following with regards to European Protected Species (animals) as listed on Schedule 2:

- Deliberately capture, injure or kill any wild animal of a European protected species.
- Deliberately disturb wild animals of any such species.
- Deliberately takes or destroy the eggs of such an animal.
- Damage or destroy a breeding site or resting place of such an animal. (*Note: no intentionality is necessary to prosecute this activity*).

Section 43 of Part 3 of this legislation makes it an offence to do any of the following with regards to European Protected Species (plants) as listed on Schedule 5:

- Deliberately pick, collect, cut, uproot or destroy a wild plant of a European Protected Species.
- Be in position of or to transport said plant.

Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act (as amended).

Section 40 of Part 3 of this act compels public bodies (local authorities, police, fire and health authorities, and utility companies) with exercisable functions within England to consider actions to be taken to conserve and enhance biodiversity in England—in particular to have regard to the United Nations Environmental Programme Convention on Biological Diversity of 1992, any relevant local nature recovery strategies, and any relevant species conservation strategy or protected site strategy (prepared by Natural England).

Section 41 of Part 3 of this Act ensures the publishing of a list containing species and habitat types that are of principle importance for the purpose of conserving or enhancing biodiversity in England.

Wild Mammals (Protection) Act 1996.

Under this legislation it is an offence to mutilate, kick, beat, nail or otherwise impale, stab, burn, stone, crush, drown, drag or asphyxiate any wild mammal with the intent to inflict unnecessary suffering.

Protection of Badgers Act 1992

Under this legislation it is an offence to (or intend to, or to be reckless as to whether your actions would have these consequences):

- Wilfully kill, injure or take a badger (or attempts to do so).
- Damage or destroy any part of a badger sett. (Note: no intentionality is necessary to prosecute these activities).
- Obstruct access to a badger sett. (Note: no intentionality is necessary to prosecute these activities).
- Disturb a badger when it is occupying a sett. (Note: no intentionality is necessary to prosecute these activities).

Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended).

Part 1 of this act makes it an offence to intentionally or recklessly kill, injure or take any wild bird, to take, damage or destroy the nest of any wild bird while that nest is in use or being built, and/or to take or destroy an egg of any wild bird.

Part 1 also makes it an offence to intentionally or recklessly disturb any wild bird included in Schedule 1 of the act, and to take, damage, or destroy the nest of any wild bird included in Schedule ZA1.

Schedule 5 list non-avian species that are afforded various protections under Sections 9.1a, 9.1b, 9.2, 9.4a, 9.4a (Whales), 9.4b, 9.4c, 9.5a and 9.5b.

Schedule 8 lists plant species that are protected from intentionally picking, uprooting or destroying under Section 13.

Schedule 9 lists non-native invasive plants for which it is an offence under Section 14 to plant or otherwise cause to grow in the wild any part of said plants. (Note: no intentionality is necessary to prosecute these activities).

Other Legislation (England)

- **The Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Regulations 2017**
- **Anti-social Behaviour Act 2003** (as amended).

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- Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000
 - Hedgerows Regulations 1997.
 - Weeds Act 1959

APPENDIX B: Baseline Habitat Plan & Proposed Habitats Plan

See overleaf.

Plans are indicative approximations of the layout of onsite habitats and are not drawn to measurable scale.





APPENDIX C: Photographs



Photograph 1: existing modified grassland field



Photograph 2: existing ditch within the south of the Site