

**Robin Lodge Nursery
Part Lane
Swallowfield
Berkshire
RG7 1TB**

Biodiversity Net Gain Report

Report ref.: R2623_BNG_b

Report Quality Control Information	
<i>Author</i>	<i>Meghan Porter (Qualifying member of CIEEM)</i>
<i>Reviewer</i>	<i>Sarah Foot (MCIEEM)</i>

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1 Diesel House, Honey Hill, Wokingham, Berkshire RG40 3BL
Telephone: 0118 327 1810 Mobile: 07979 403099 E-mail: info@wenman-ecology.co.uk
www.wenman-ecology.co.uk

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Registered office: 100 New Wokingham Road, Crowthorne, Berkshire RG45 6JP where you may look at a list of members' names.

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1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1.1** John Wenman Ecological Consultancy LLP was commissioned by John Ayres to produce a Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) report for Robin Lodge Nursery, Swallowfield. The BNG report was commissioned to accompany a new planning application to Wokingham Borough Council seeking consent for the development of two office buildings, an open log store, associated parking, access, landscaping and acoustic screen following the demolition of the existing greenhouses.
- 1.1.2** The application site covers an approximate area of 1.2ha to the west of Part Lane, to the south of Swallowfield village, with mixed scrub, scattered trees and a stream around the site boundary (OS grid reference: SU 72755 64576).
- 1.1.3** The following UK Habitat Classification (UKHab) habitats were observed during the site walkover: Grassland - Ruderal or ephemeral (g 81), Mixed scrub (h3h), Bramble scrub (h3d), Other standing water (r1g) and Sparsely vegetated urban land (u1f). The proposed habitats were derived from the proposed site layout to include: Mixed scrub (h3h), Modified grassland (g4), Other standing water - pond (non-priority) (r1g 41), Developed land; sealed surface (u1b) and Buildings (u1b5).
- 1.1.4** The Statutory Biodiversity Metric calculation tool demonstrates that a net gain in biodiversity can be achieved as part of the proposed redevelopment on site. The '*Headline Results*' section taken from the Metric spreadsheet shows a total on-site net change of 37.57% has been calculated for the proposed design. The '*Robin Lodge Nursery, Swallowfield – Statutory Biodiversity Metric Calculation Tool (R2623_BNG_b)*' document should be referred to separately for the full calculation. The Baseline Habitats and Proposed Habitats are presented separately in **Appendices 2 & 3**.
- 1.1.5** Project implementation and management proposals are detailed in **Section 7.2**. Due to the higher significance of the mixed scrub and non-priority pond to be created within the proposals, a S106 agreement may be required to secure the management of the new habitats.

2 INTRODUCTION

2.1 Project Background

- 2.1.1** John Wenman Ecological Consultancy LLP was commissioned by John Ayres to produce a Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) report for Robin Lodge Nursery, Swallowfield.
- 2.1.2** The BNG report was commissioned to accompany a new planning application to Wokingham Borough Council seeking consent for the development of two office buildings, an open log store, associated parking, access, landscaping and acoustic screen following the demolition of the existing greenhouses (see Proposed Site Layout in **Appendix 1**).
- 2.1.3** This report follows a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal produced by John Wenman Ecological Consultancy in February 2024 (Ref: JWEC; February 2024; R2623_PEA_a).

2.2 Site Location and Context

- 2.2.1** The application site covers an approximate area of 1.2ha to the west of Part Lane, to the south of Swallowfield village, with mixed scrub, scattered trees and a stream around the site boundary (OS grid reference: SU 72755 64576).
- 2.2.2** The site is located on the western side of Part Lane and is set within a semi-rural area with suburban housing to the northwest, grazing pasture to the west and east, and a farmyard to the south. The northern and western boundaries are lined by a small tributary flowing into the Long River, situated 230m to the east.

2.3 Objectives

- 2.3.1** The aim of the BNG report is to demonstrate that a quantifiable on-site net gain in biodiversity can be achieved as part of the proposed redevelopment. The key objectives are to:
- detail the approach taken for the BNG calculation;
 - describe and map the baseline habitats and important ecological features on site;
 - describe and map the proposed habitats based on post-development design;

- complete a Biodiversity Metric calculation; and
- outline the implementation of the design concepts and the long-term management to deliver BNG.

3 RELEVANT PLANNING POLICY

3.1 National Planning Policy

3.1.1 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (December 2024) makes reference to BNG in the following ‘*Section 15. Conserving and enhancing the natural environment*’ paragraphs:

- *‘Paragraph 187. Planning policies and decisions should contribute and enhance the natural and local environment by: [...] 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 and incorporating features which support priority or threatened species such as swifts, bats and hedgehogs [...].’*
- *‘Paragraph 192. To protect and enhance biodiversity and geodiversity, plans should: [...] b) promote the conservation, restoration and enhancement of priority habitats, ecological networks and the protection and recovery of priority species; and identify and pursue opportunities for securing measurable net gains for biodiversity [...].’*
- *‘Paragraph 193. When determining planning applications, local planning authorities should apply the following principles: d) 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.’*

3.1.2 In England, BNG became mandatory for major development from the 12th February 2024 and for minor development (small sites) from the 2nd April 2024 under Schedule 7A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1999 (as inserted by Schedule 14 of the Environment Act 2021).

3.2 Local Planning Policy

3.2.1 Wokingham Borough Council website states that once planning permission is granted, a plan to create at least a 10% improvement of biodiversity, from the baseline assessment, will need to be provided, as follows:

‘Information about the existing biodiversity on site, sometimes called a baseline assessment, will need to be submitted by applicants. If planning

permission is granted, a plan to create at least a 10% improvement of biodiversity, from the baseline assessment, will need to be provided. The biodiversity net gain requirement has been agreed by the Government and is additional to existing local and national policy and guidance. If permission is granted then a statutory condition, called the General Biodiversity Gain Condition, is applied – this condition cannot be changed or removed.

A metric has been developed by the Government that will allow all the relevant information to be submitted. The metric tool will help work out the value of the biodiversity on the site and measure this in 'units'. This will mean the 10% increase in 'units' can be shown as part of a planning application. The metric will need to be supported with other information including whether if the increase in biodiversity will be provided on or off site and/or if there is an exceptional ecological reason to not follow the metric. Where the improvement to biodiversity is provided on the site, it is expected this will be in place for a minimum of 30 years and will be monitored over this time. The Council will likely use planning conditions or a legal agreement to make sure this is the case. The Council will also have to provide a report on the status of biodiversity net gain at least every five years.

Where the improvement to biodiversity is provided off the site, a legal agreement will be required to secure this, and the improvement will need to be registered with Natural England. If it isn't possible to provide biodiversity improvement on or off the site, it will be possible to purchase 'credits' from the government.'

4 METHODOLOGY

4.1 Baseline Information

Desk Study

- 4.1.1** A Preliminary Ecological Survey (PEA) was carried out by John Wenman Ecological Consultancy in February 2024. This report included a desktop study of data from Thames Valley Environmental Record Centre (TVERC) for designated sites and records of rare and protected species within a 2km radius of the application site.

UK Habitat Classification

- 4.1.2** A site walkover was undertaken on the 6th February 2024 by ecologist Meghan Porter – a qualifying member of the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM) and assistant ecologist Jake Morgan – a qualifying member of CIEEM. The site was surveyed using the UK Habitat Classification (UKHab) system (Butcher *et al.* 2020) in accordance with the CIEEM Guidelines for Preliminary Ecological Appraisal 2nd Edition (CIEEM 2017). Particular attention was given to evidence of protected and priority species (NERC Act 2006 Section 41 species of principal importance) and the site's potential to support such species. Habitat condition assessments were carried out in accordance with the Statutory Biodiversity Metric (February 2024).

4.2 Biodiversity Net Gain Approach

- 4.2.1** The BNG assessment uses the Statutory Biodiversity Metric to calculate the losses and gains in biodiversity unit value resulting from the proposed redevelopment. The Metric has been used to guide the proposed site layout and landscaping in order to deliver a minimum 10% net gain for biodiversity.

- 4.2.2** The key principles of the Statutory Biodiversity Metric are as follows:

Principle 1 - *The metric assessment should be completed by a competent person.*

Principle 2 - *The use of this biodiversity metric does not override existing biodiversity protections, statutory obligations, policy requirements, ecological mitigation hierarchy or any other requirements. This includes*

consenting or licensing processes, for example woodlands.

Principle 3 - *This biodiversity metric should be used in accordance with established good practice guidance and professional codes.*

Principle 4 - *This biodiversity metric is not a complex or comprehensive ecological model and is not a substitute for expert ecological advice.*

Principle 5 - *Biodiversity units are a proxy for biodiversity and should be treated as relative values.*

Principle 6 - *This biodiversity metric is designed to inform decisions in conjunction with locally relevant evidence, expert input, or guidance.*

Principle 7 - *Habitat interventions need to be realistic and deliverable within a relevant project timeframe.*

Principle 8 - *Created and enhanced habitats should be, where practical and reasonable, local to any impact and deliver strategically important outcomes for nature conservation.*

Principle 9 - *This biodiversity metric does not enforce a minimum habitat size ratio for compensation of losses. Proposals should aim to:*

- *maintain habitat extent - supporting more, bigger, better and more joined up ecological networks.*
- *ensure that proposed or retained habitat parcels are of sufficient size for ecological function.*

4.3 Strategic Significance

4.3.1 As defined in the user guide for the statutory Biodiversity Metric, strategic significance is '*the local significance of the habitat based on its location and habitat type*' and assessments of significance should be made based on the Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS). The LNRS for Wokingham Borough Council has not yet been completed and in the meantime, existing local biodiversity policy and guidance should be used to inform proposals and decisions.

5 BASELINE INFORMATION

5.1 Important Ecological Features

Designated Sites and Habitats

- 5.1.1** The PEA report concluded that the proposals will not have any adverse impacts on statutorily or non-statutorily designated sites.
- 5.1.2** The following UK Habitat Classification (UKHab) habitats were observed during a site walkover on the 16th May 2024: g Grassland; h3h Mixed scrub; h3d Bramble scrub; r1g Other standing water; and u1f Sparsely vegetated urban land. Secondary codes observed included: 10 Scattered scrub, 14 Scattered rushes, 32 Scattered trees, 81 Ruderal or ephemeral, 112 Earth bank, 510 Bare ground, 518 Neglected, 612 Fence, 825 Ruined building and 839 Track. The habitats within the site are relatively common, widespread and limited in extent and are considered to be of ecological value within context of a site level only.

Protected Species

- 5.1.3** The PEA report concluded that bats are likely to forage and commute along the tree-lined eastern and western boundaries, with the mature oak tree and oak monolith present within the mixed scrub on the eastern side of the site both having moderate bat roost potential. There are some opportunities for reptiles, hedgehog and nesting birds to be present on site, with potential for nesting birds within the bramble and mixed scrub within the site and foraging and commuting opportunities within the mixed scrub along the boundary of the site. From this initial assessment, the site is considered to be of some ecological value at site level as there is limited potential for protected and notable species within the site.

5.2 Baseline Habitats

- 5.2.1** The application site comprises 1.2 hectares of land, and is currently unmanaged, with two derelict greenhouses that are overgrown with bramble scrub, surrounded by a log yard and urban land, with scattered trees.
- 5.2.2** The UK Habitat Classification (UKHab) habitats observed during the site walkover and their assigned condition are listed in **Table 1** below. A plan of

the baseline habitats for the Statutory Biodiversity Metric calculation is presented separately in **Appendix 2** and the completed habitat condition assessment sheets are reported separately ('Robin Lodge Nursery, Swallowfield – Condition Assessment Sheets (R2623_BNG_b)').

Table 1. Baseline habitats for the Statutory Biodiversity Metric calculation.

Habitat Type (UKHab code)	Distinctiveness	Condition	Strategic Significance	Area (m ²)
Grassland – ruderal or ephemeral (g 81)	Low	Poor	Low	5973
Mixed scrub	Medium	Poor	Low	900
Bramble scrub (h3d)	Medium	N/A	Low	988
Standing water – pond (non-priority) (r1g 41)	Medium	Poor	Low	9
Sparsely vegetated urban land (u1f)	Very Low	N/A	Low	4700
Individual tree - small (32)	Medium	Good	Medium	204
Individual tree - medium (32)	Medium	Good	Medium	1303
Individual tree - large (32)	Medium	Good	Medium	1466
Total area (excluding individual trees)				12570

Grassland – Ruderal/ephemeral (g 81)

- 5.2.3** The majority of the site around the former greenhouses was typical of unmanaged land, with grassland and ruderal/ephemeral species present. The low distinctiveness grassland is defined to be in poor habitat condition and of low strategic significance by the metric (this is due to no designated sites being present on/or adjacent to the site).

Mixed scrub (h3b)

- 5.2.4** The eastern boundary along Part lane featured a bank with mixed scrub species growing amongst scattered mature trees. The medium distinctiveness habitat is defined to be in poor habitat condition and of low strategic significance by the metric.

Bramble scrub (h3d)

- 5.2.5** The two greenhouses were grown over with dense brambles (*Rubus fruticosus*) with scattered occasional young ash trees (all less than 5m in height) and bramble scrub was also present along the southern boundary of the site. The medium distinctiveness habitat cannot be assigned a habitat condition and was of low strategic significance.

Standing water – pond (non-priority) (r1g 41)

- 5.2.6** A small pond was present to the rear of the western greenhouse, with some vegetation present within the water. The pond was assessed to be in a poor condition and of low strategic significance.

Scattered trees (32)

- 5.2.7** Scattered medium and large trees were present along the eastern boundary along the lane and on the western side along the stream on the western boundary, with small and medium trees scattered within the site and adjacent to the dilapidated greenhouses. The trees are a medium distinctiveness habitat and were defined to be of moderate and good condition and of low strategic significance.

Sparsely vegetated urban land (u1f)

- 5.2.8** Access onto the site and up to the two greenhouses was by a gravel area, which had occasional vegetation present. This urban habitat cannot be assigned a habitat condition.

6 POST-DEVELOPMENT DESIGN

6.1 Proposed Habitats

- 6.1.1** The proposed habitats are derived from the site layout for the proposed new development (refer to proposed site layout in **Appendix 1**) – see **Table 3** below. A plan of the proposed habitats for the Statutory Biodiversity Metric calculation is presented separately in **Appendix 3**.

Table 3. Proposed habitats for the Statutory Biodiversity Metric calculation.

Habitat Type (UKHab code)	Retention, Creation or Enhancement	Condition	Strategic Significance	Area (m ²) or length (m)
Modified grassland (g4)	Creation	Moderate	Low	2703
Modified grassland (g4)	Enhancement	Moderate	Low	5518
Mixed scrub (h3h)	Creation	Moderate	Low	45
Mixed scrub (h3h)	Enhancement	Moderate	Low	1028
Standing water – pond (non-priority) (r1g 41)	Creation	Moderate	Low	200
Standing water – pond (non-priority) (r1g 41)	Retention	Low	Low	9
Developed land sealed surface (u1b)	Creation	N/A	N/A	2659
Building (u1b5)	Creation	N/A	N/A	408
Individual tree (32)	Retained	Good	Medium	163
Individual tree (32)	Creation	Poor	Medium	1710
Total area (excluding individual trees)				12570

Modified grassland (g4)

- 6.1.2** 2703 m² of modified grassland will be created where the artificially unvegetated land is currently, with 5518 m² of existing grassland enhanced to moderate condition grassland. A species rich seed mix, or turf such as Wildflower Turf ‘WFT-Species-Rich-26’ (or an approved equivalent), should be used to create the habitat type and is expected to reach a ‘moderate’ condition.

Mixed scrub (h3h)

- 6.1.3** 45 m² of mixed scrub will be created along the eastern boundary and the existing mixed scrub along the eastern boundary and the bramble scrub along the southern boundary of the site will be enhanced to be 'moderate' condition mixed scrub. This will be achieved by clearing areas of the dense bramble, creating clearings and planting of native scrub species such as hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*), blackthorn (*Prunus spinosa*) and hazel (*Corylus avellana*).

Standing water – pond (non-priority) (r1g 41)

- 6.1.4** The existing small pond to the rear of the western greenhouse building will be retained and a 200 m² pond will be created within the grassland towards the north-western corner of the site. Vegetation should be allowed to grow taller and less managed around the pond to encourage use by wildlife with no stocking of fish allowed. The pond is expected to reach a 'moderate' condition.

Developed land sealed surface (u1b) and building (u1b5)

- 6.1.5** 408 m² of bramble scrub and 2297m² of unvegetated land will be removed to create the two office buildings and the developed land created to provide the access from Part Lane, parking and walkways.

Scattered trees (32)

- 6.1.6** One of the existing medium sized trees growing beside the eastern greenhouse will be removed during the proposals, with the remaining scattered trees within and around the boundary of the site to be retained and protected during the works. There is a plan for 42 new small trees to be planted across the site. The trees are expected to reach 'poor' condition based on the use of the site and requirement for regular pruning/management.

7 BIODIVERSITY NET GAIN METRIC

7.1 Biodiversity Net Gain Result

7.1.1 The Statutory Biodiversity Metric calculation tool demonstrates that a net gain in biodiversity can be achieved as part of the proposed redevelopment on site and the trading rules are all satisfied. The 'Headline Results' section taken from the Metric spreadsheet shows a total on-site net change of 37.57% in habitat units has been calculated for the proposed design –

Figure 1 below.

Robin Lodge Nursery, Swallowfield		Return to results menu	
Headline Results			
Scroll down for final results 			
On-site baseline	Habitat units	5.52	
	Hedgerow units	0.00	
	Watercourse units	0.00	
On-site post-intervention (Including habitat retention, creation & enhancement)	Habitat units	7.60	
	Hedgerow units	0.00	
	Watercourse units	0.00	
On-site net change (units & percentage)	Habitat units	2.07	37.57%
	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	2.07	
	Hedgerow units	0.00	
	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	2.07	
	Hedgerow units	0.00	
	Watercourse units	0.00	
Total net % change (Including all on-site & off-site habitat retention, creation & enhancement)	Habitat units	37.57%	
	Hedgerow units	0.00%	
	Watercourse units	0.00%	
Trading rules satisfied?	Yes ✓		

Figure 1. Statutory Biodiversity Metric Headline Results.

7.1.2 The 'Robin Lodge Nursery, Swallowfield – Statutory Biodiversity Metric Calculation (R2623_BNG_b)' document should be referred to separately for the full calculation.

7.2 Project Implementation and Management

7.2.1 The mixed scrub will be created by enhancing areas of existing 'poor' condition mixed scrub and bramble scrub to achieve a moderate condition by the planting of native shrub species, for example hazel, hawthorn or blackthorn to occur within the bramble scrub to encourage a variety of

planting. Where possible, an area of vegetation should be left between the modified grassland, urban habitats and the mixed scrub to create a well-developed edge with tall forbs and grasses. The area of bramble scrub to be enhanced is currently species poor and the habitats will be enhanced to 'moderate' condition through additional native scrub species planting and management.

- 7.2.2** To create the 'moderate' condition modified grassland around the site, the land should be seeded with a species rich mix and infilling with a species rich turf, such as Wildflower Turf '*WFT-Species-Rich-26*' (or an approved equivalent) where required, and the grassland should have a less intensive management program to encourage species diversity. The grassland should be cut 2-3 times per year.
- 7.2.3** There is an offsite ditch along the northern and western boundary, which is seasonally dry, and does not hold water for more than 4 months of the year and therefore does not qualify for a watercourse assessment. Ditches have a riparian zone of 5m from the top of the bank, and therefore the proposed acoustic barrier will be offset 5m from the top of the bank to protect the ditch and riparian zone. There will be one hedgehog gap included on the northern boundary and a minimum of three on the western boundary. This will allow movement of small mammals and other species through the site and to provide access the proposed onsite pond, as well as to maintain connectivity with the adjacent farmland and tree-lines.

8 REFERENCES

CIEEM (2021). *Biodiversity Net Gain Report and Audit Templates*.
Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management, Winchester,
UK.

DEFRA (2024) *The Statutory Biodiversity Metric User Guide*. Updated July
2024.

UKHab Ltd (2023). *UK Habitat Classification Version 2.0* (at
<https://www.ukhab.org>).

APPENDIX 1 – PROPOSED SITE LAYOUT

