

Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG): Using the Small Sites Metric for ecologically low risk sites in the East Midlands



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BNG makes sure development has a measurably positive impact on biodiversity.

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Introduction

What is Biodiversity Net Gain?

Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) requires development to create and enhance habitats to leave a positive impact on biodiversity.

Unless exemptions can be applied, developers must deliver 10% BNG. This means a development will result in at least 10% better quality natural habitat than there was before development.

This information leaflet explains the BNG process for applicants of small development sites.

For full details on how to find the information you need to use the SSM and how to use it, read the SSM user guide.

<https://tinyurl.com/5dbbm5w9>



The SSM has been designed for use with selected habitat types, and not others. Some of the SSM habitats are visible in the picture above.

10%

The **minimum 10% increase** in biodiversity units for BNG must be achieved for each habitat module independently, and in ways that meet the trading rules of the SSM.

When can the small sites metric be used?

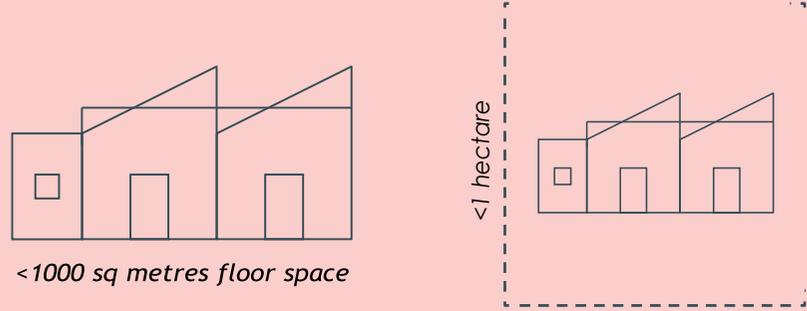
Residential development



Where the number of dwellings is between **1 and 9** on a site of an area **1 hectare or less**

or if the number of dwellings is **unknown**, the site area is **less than 0.5 hectares**

Commercial development



Where floor space created is **less than 1,000 square metres**

or total site area is **less than 1 hectare**

Exemptions



25 sq metres

AREA HABITATS

Developments that do not impact a priority habitat and impact less than 25 square metres of on-site habitat

— less than 5m —



HEDGEROWS AND LINES OF TREES

not developments that impact no more than 5 metres of on-site linear habitats such as hedgerow.

Exclusions



PRIORITY HABITATS

Sites which contain priority habitats like heathland or chalk grassland cannot use the SSM.



EUROPEAN PROTECTED SPECIES

Sites which contain European Protected Species such as bats or reptiles cannot use the SSM.

Biodiversity gain hierarchy

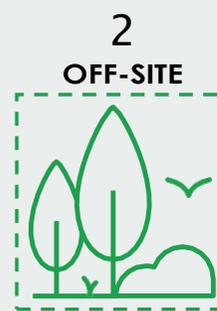
Development should firstly avoid adversely impacting on-site habitats and mitigate those that can't be avoided.

If developers cannot achieve 10% BNG on-site, they can deliver through a mixture of on-site and off-site. Off-site refers to land outside the red line boundary. Developers can either make off-site biodiversity gains on their own land outside the development site, or buy off-site biodiversity units. As a last resort, statutory credits can be purchased from the government.

Apply the Biodiversity Gain Hierarchy by following the order of priority



Enhance or create habitats to deliver BNG



Deliver BNG elsewhere within your own land holdings or buy BNG units



If no suitable off-site units are available in England, purchase statutory credits as a last resort, and only under special circumstances.

For guidance visit: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/make-off-site-biodiversity-gains-as-a-developer>

When to use the SSM

Unless a site is exempt from BNG, the SSM can be used if the following conditions apply.

- Size of parcel is less than 1 hectare
- You intend to build less than 10 dwellings
- You intend to build 1000 m² of employment land
- No priority habitats are present.

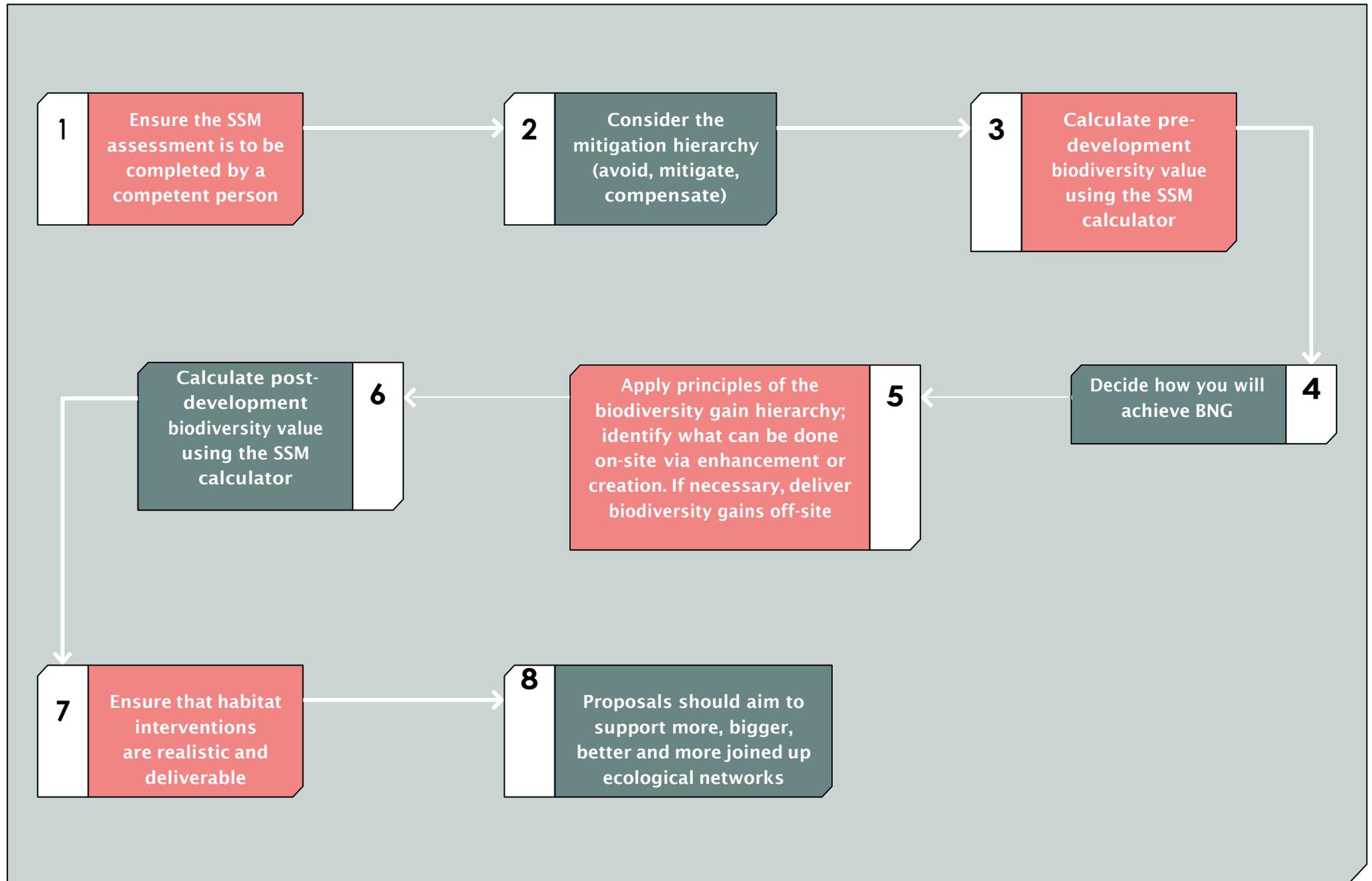
Why should I use the SSM?

The SSM is quick and easy to use, and avoids the requirement for a condition survey by a professional ecologist. Preparation times are likely to cost less in terms of time and money.

Who can prepare a BNG assessment?

A competent person with the knowledge and skills to undertake SSM calculations. Competent people have appropriate training and qualifications. They include architects, arboriculturists, planners, but especially professional ecologists.

Pre-application (before you submit your planning application)



Post-application

Submission and Validation

All planning applications will need to include the following information as part of the submission stage:

- 🌱 **A short report to justify your approach to BNG**
- 🌱 **A draft indicative version of the SSM calculation**
- 🌱 **Any validation requirements that the local planning authority has specified.**

Validation is the early stage of evaluating the planning application. When a BNG planning application is submitted, the LPA will review it to ensure that all required documents and information are provided.

Determination

Following successful validation, the LPA will then move forward with reviewing the application for its merits. The LPA is allowed an eight week statutory determination period in which it will undertake both processes of validation and determination. Determination can result in planning permission and planning conditions. A legal agreement may be required to help secure BNG proposals.

Pre-commencement

If the LPA grants planning permission, it is then necessary to create a **biodiversity gain plan** that shows how the BNG will be achieved. The plan should include evidence that justifies the enclosed BNG decisions.

The biodiversity gain plan, including the SSM calculation that shows how the mandatory BNG will be met, must be submitted to the LPA to approve or refuse (allow 8 weeks). The LPA must approve the biodiversity gain plan before development can commence. It may also be helpful to prepare a Habitat Management and Monitoring Plan.

Commencement and monitoring

It is necessary to manage and maintain BNG for 30 years, starting from when the development is complete. This includes completion of habitat creation or enhancement (for example, after one year of tree planting, pond digging or seeding).

LPAs will monitor any BNG agreement. If the BNG requirements established in the Biodiversity Gain Plan and any conditions agreed with the LPA are not met and upheld, then a breach of planning conditions, planning obligations or legal agreement will have taken place. Under these circumstances, the LPA could take enforcement action.

Small site case studies

Community Garden, Derby

Local authority: Derby City Council **Date:** June 2024

Planning application: erection of four sheds, a dome and ancillary features for use as a community garden and outdoor education area

Site/baseline land: vacant or derelict land with an existing large tree

Post-development habitats: allotments, built linear features, artificial unvegetated, unsealed surface and small trees

BNG results (using SSM)

Baseline habitat units	0.8
Post-development habitat units	2.0
The total net unit change	1.2
Total net % change	148.6%



Equestrian development, NE Derbyshire

Local authority: North East Derbyshire District Council **Date:** July 2024

Planning application: riding arena, hay barn and stable building

Site/baseline land: an arable field which has been sown with a grass mix suitable for horse grazing

Post-development habitats: trees, hedgerows, a bird box, a swallow feature and bat box

BNG results (using SSM)

Baseline habitat units	1.6	Baseline hedgerow units	0.5
Post-development habitat units	1.7	Post-development hedgerow units	0.8
The total net unit change	0.2	The total net unit change	0.3
Total net % change	10.6%	Total net % change	65.6%

Small site case studies

Farming/livestock development, Firsby

Local authority: East Lindsey District Council **Date:** August 2024
Planning application: development of two new cow sheds at farm
Site/baseline land: field of modified grassland
Post-development habitats: modified grassland converted to neutral grassland, planting of 20 small native trees and a pond

BNG results (using SSM)

Baseline habitat units	1.98
Post-development habitat units	3.47
The total net unit change	1.49
Total net % change	75.1%



Residential dwellings, Wrangle, Lincolnshire

Local authority: Boston Borough Council **Date:** August 2024
Planning application: demolition of existing agricultural buildings and development of 3 dwellings with associated vehicular access
Site/baseline land: existing agricultural building, associated yard and storage areas, small amount of ruderal vegetation
Post-development habitats: vegetated garden and modified grassland including individual trees

BNG results (using SSM)

Baseline habitat units	0.6
Post-development habitat units	0.66
The total net unit change	0.06
Total net % change	10.7%

Glossary

Area habitat:	Habitats recorded in the SSM in area (m ²).
Biodiversity units:	‘Biodiversity units’ are used to describe relative biodiversity value. There are three types of biodiversity units: area habitat units, hedgerow units and watercourse units. Each of these are calculated in separate ‘modules’ of the SSM.
Competent person:	A person with the knowledge and skills to perform specified tasks to complete and review SSM calculations through training, qualifications and/or experience. This may include architects, arboriculturists, planners and ecologists.
Habitat Management and Monitoring Plan:	An HMMP is a detailed plan outlining how land will be managed over at least 30 years to create, enhance, and monitor habitats for BNG
Mitigation:	Reducing adverse impacts.
Parcel:	A linked area of habitat of the same distinctiveness, condition and strategic significance.
Priority habitat:	A range of semi-natural habitat types identified as being the most threatened and requiring conservation (under the UK Biodiversity Action Plan (UK BAP)).
Size:	The size of the habitat parcel to be retained, enhanced, created, or lost. Size is measured in metres squared for area features and in metres for linear features. The SSM accepts size measurements to any number of decimal places.
Strategic significance:	Describes the local significance of the habitat based on its location and habitat type.
Watercourses:	Habitats recorded in the SSM in length (m). Three watercourse habitats are available in the SSM.

