

Agenda Item IMD3

INDIVIDUAL EXECUTIVE MEMBER DECISION

REFERENCE IMD: IMD 2019/03

TITLE	Department for Environment Food & Rural Affairs Consultation Proposals on Net Gain
DECISION TO BE MADE BY	Executive Member for Environment, Leisure and Libraries - John Halsall
DATE, MEETING ROOM and TIME	18 February 2019 FF12 at 14:05
WARD	None Specific;
DIRECTOR	Deputy Chief Executive - Graham Ebers

OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY

To ensure that the mechanism for achieving biodiversity net gain has minimal negative impacts upon Wokingham Borough and that any positive benefits are maximised.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Executive Member for Environment, Leisure and Libraries agrees that Wokingham Borough Council submit the comments contained in Appendix A as this council's response to the governments consultation 'Net Gain consultation proposals, December 2018'.

SUMMARY OF REPORT

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (hereafter referred to as Defra) has published a consultation on [biodiversity net gain](#) (hereafter referred to as the consultation). The consultation closes on 10th February 2019.

The principal of securing measurable biodiversity net gains as part of the development process is already set out in the National Planning Policy Framework¹. The consultation seeks to supplement the principle by establishing a mandatory approach to how the system is measured and applied.

The issues covered in the consultation include;

- Whether a standardised national approach to biodiversity net gain should be introduced
- Whether net gain should be a mandatory requirement
- How to implement the net gain approach
- How the net gain approach should be measured and monitored.

Defra are seeking evidence on how they could also include other environmental improvements.

¹ See NPPF, paragraph 170, 174 and 175.

Background

Biodiversity net gain is an approach which aims to leave the natural environment in a measurably better state after development than what existed before. This is achieved by requiring enhancements to habitats.

The principal of securing measurable biodiversity net gains as part of the development process is already set out in the National Planning Policy Framework². The consultation seeks to supplement the principle by establishing a mandatory approach to how the system is measured and applied.

Due to the timing of the consultation and council procedures, a holding response based on this report has been submitted to government within the consultation period. Following formal consideration of this report, a final response will be provided incorporating any necessary updates.

Analysis of Issues

The recommended response to the questions set out in the consultation is provided in Appendix A to this report. A supporting analysis of main issues is set out below.

The principle of biodiversity net gain provides wider benefits than simply beneficial to wildlife. Through the provision of mitigations, new developments will create more pleasant and healthier places to live and work, with associated social, health and economic benefits.

The proposal includes a mandatory requirement for developers to demonstrate they are achieving biodiversity net gain. This is through a new standardised approach to that is designed to be simpler and clearer for all stakeholders, while delivering measurable and verifiable net gains for wildlife and habitats. The process would include;

- Developers carrying out a detailed survey that identifies habitats and their condition within a site.
- Establishes a mitigation hierarchy which prioritises options that avoid harm to biodiversity.
- Compensation for any biodiversity loss is provided through new habitat creation or enhancement, which is preferably part of the same development scheme or nearby.
- Where there are no suitable local compensation opportunities, a tariff can be paid to fund habitats for biodiversity priorities elsewhere as part of a wider strategic approach.

The introduction of a standardised biodiversity net gain approach is welcomed as this will provide greater clarity, reducing areas of challenge through the planning process. However, it is imperative that the metric has local flexibility for local rare habitats that may be less rare nationally (for instance, where at the edge of a range), this could be important for a long term approach to adapting to climate change and allowing range shift.

If adopted, a mandatory requirement for biodiversity net gain could help protect existing habitats and ensure that the loss or degradation of environmental features is

² See NPPF, paragraph 170, 174 and 175.

compensated by restoring or creating environmental features that are of greater value to wildlife and people

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

The Council faces severe financial challenges over the coming years as a result of the austerity measures implemented by the Government and subsequent reductions to public sector funding. It is estimated that Wokingham Borough Council will be required to make budget reductions in excess of £20m over the next three years and all Executive decisions should be made in this context.

	How much will it Cost/ (Save)	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1)	Nil	Not relevant	Not relevant
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	Nil	Not relevant	Not relevant
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	Nil	Not relevant	Not relevant

Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision

None anticipated.

Cross-Council Implications

No cross council implications have been identified.

SUMMARY OF CONSULTATION RESPONSES

Director – Corporate Services	No comments received
Monitoring Officer	No comment
Leader of the Council	No comments received

Reasons for considering the report in Part 2

N/A

List of Background Papers

Net gain Consultation proposals Document:

https://consult.defra.gov.uk/land-use/net-gain/supporting_documents/netgainconsultationdocument.pdf

NPPF:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/740441/National_Planning_Policy_Framework_web_accessible_version.pdf

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