



Durham  
**Biodiversity  
Partnership**

Action for wildlife in Gateshead, South Tyneside,  
Sunderland, Darlington & County Durham

## **Management of Land and Buildings**

Local and Public authorities own and manage a wide variety of sites, land, buildings and structures. In addition they are involved in the development of new buildings, housing and infrastructure, either for their own use or, for example, as part of a large development project (see the planning, regeneration & economy guidance note in conjunction with this note). The way on-going management of land and buildings is carried out and how new developments are delivered can have major implications for biodiversity both in providing habitats for wildlife and in reducing any environmental impact.

The impacts of these activities on the environment, including biodiversity, can be wide ranging and include issues such as energy, water use, land take, noise, air & light pollution, chemical use, waste/recycling, and procurement. Consideration of these issues at an early stage can ensure any adverse impacts are minimised and opportunities can be pursued.



Ferryhill Carrs Local Nature Reserve © Durham County Council

### **Taking positive action**

**Invest in in-house expertise.** Use the skills and knowledge of ecological staff or access other ecological expertise. The Association of Local Government Ecologists (ALGE) state that “easy access to professional ecological expertise of its own, is essential for a competent authority if it is to ensure that it is fully compliant with all of its statutory obligations for biodiversity and nature conservation, and thereby be capable of achieving higher levels of competency and performance.”

**Undertake a survey or audit.** This is needed to assess the biodiversity resource present. The type of survey or audit needed will depend on the type and extent of land holdings. It may include undertaking habitat or species surveys, taking expert advice from an in-house ecology officer, Durham Wildlife Trust or Natural England. Durham Biodiversity Data Service can be contacted for information on existing data, and this may identify the need for further survey work to fill gaps in knowledge. Surveys help to identify important species and habitats, including those prioritised by national and local biodiversity action plans and the presence of any invasive non-native species. Depending on the number of sites and area of land involved, this may require a process of prioritisation, focusing on sites considered most likely to be of high importance.

**Locate development away from important biodiversity sites.** Survey information can be used to ensure that sensitive species and habitats are not adversely affected and that enhancement measures are taken where appropriate.

**Design sites and buildings to provide benefits for biodiversity.** Careful design can provide benefits for biodiversity and help comply with the NERC Biodiversity Duty. Examples of designing in biodiversity include:

- Providing nesting and roosting sites, such as bird and bat boxes.
- Conserving and integrating existing habitats

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- Providing new areas of habitats, specifically using native plants and seeds
- ‘Green walls’ and ‘green’ roofs can minimise visual and landscape impacts, reduce energy consumption and provide small-scale habitats for wildlife.
- SUDS (Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems), can help alleviate flooding and pollution whilst providing habitat for a range of species



Habitat creation associated with a new development ©Gateshead Council

**Plant native species.** Any planting of trees, shrubs, or wildflowers should be of varieties that are locally distinctive. This maximises the benefits for biodiversity and minimises the risk of introducing invasive non-native species.

**Write management plans and amend management practices.** Biodiversity benefits from appropriate management of land. Examples of positive management includes; less frequent cutting regimes of vegetation or allowing staggered heights of vegetation, reducing application of chemicals and appropriately timing maintenance work.

Taking these issues into account when drawing up specifications for grounds maintenance contracts and developing site management plans that account for wildlife are a means of bringing these different activities together to form a coherent plan for particular sites.

**Link sites with other natural areas and people.** This helps to reduce habitat fragmentation and can contribute towards biodiversity targets. New greenspaces, created as part of a wider green infrastructure network, can bring considerable benefits for both people and wildlife. Many sites are used as a recreational and educational resource by the public, and have an important role to play in raising public awareness of biodiversity issues. By involving the community in projects it is possible to build stronger links between the community and their local natural areas.

**Lead by example.** Well-managed sites can demonstrate the positive role of site management to the wider community including businesses, other organisations and the general public. Land managers can work towards environmental management systems such as ISO 14001, EMAS or the Wildlife Trusts Biodiversity Benchmark for Business. Promotion of certification schemes such as the Building Research Establishment's Environmental Assessment Method (BREEAM) demonstrates that buildings meet recognised environmental standards and all new-build houses in England must now be rated against the Code for Sustainable Homes.

### ***Opportunities for enhancing biodiversity***

**Greenspace management.** The wide variety of greenspaces owned and managed by Councils, if managed sympathetically, can provide important habitats for wildlife as well as offering opportunities for people to get close to nature, with resulting benefits for health and well-being. Management objectives may appear to be in conflict, however opportunities to encourage wildlife can still be present.

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For example, the most common maintenance operation is the close mowing of amenity grassland necessary for sporting activities. Regimes that favour biodiversity include letting the grass grow longer at certain times of year and in certain places e.g. the edges of a field to provide a more varied structure, encouraging wild flowers and benefiting insects, small mammals and birds.

Some sites will inevitably be more suitable for enhancing biodiversity than others, but parts of many sites will offer opportunities for biodiversity conservation with an added advantage of potential cost savings. There are also significant opportunities for community involvement, helping to raise awareness, promote appreciation of the site, provide valuable labour and promote community capacity and social inclusion.

**Management of Road verges.** Road verges provide some of the last remaining areas of unimproved grassland as well as other habitats such as ditches and hedgerows and a refuge for locally scarce species. This important wildlife resource acts as a wildlife corridor linking other habitats. Threats to road verge habitats include inappropriate or lack of management, inappropriate planting, reseeding, erosion by car parking or road widening and disturbance through laying of services or material storage. Changes in management practices present challenges that need to be overcome, but less frequent cutting of road verges can result in cost savings and the removal of cuttings encourages floristic diversity.

In Durham, so far surveyors have identified 177 Road Verges of Conservation Importance. Having appropriate management regimes for these verges will help to ensure their value is protected and enhanced.

**Farms and tenanted land.** Many important habitats and species depend on sympathetic management. Local Authorities can encourage and support their tenants to enhance the management of land for biodiversity through tenancy agreements.

Opportunities also exist to protect and enhance landscape and archaeology and promote public access to the countryside, which benefits people's health and well-being.

**School Grounds.** All school grounds have the potential to contribute to the conservation of biodiversity. The creation of wildlife areas introduces children to the natural environment and biodiversity in a safe and practical way that can complement classroom-based activities. Projects that may benefit biodiversity include the:

- Planting of native hedgerows, trees, shrubs and other plants;
- Creation of wildlife features such as gardens, meadows and ponds;
- Sympathetic management of grass areas;
- Construction and siting of nest boxes for birds and bats and homes for insects.



Creating a Wildlife Garden ©Brighton and Hove Biodiversity Partnership

Biodiversity projects in school grounds are encouraged under the Eco-schools programme, which seeks to provide a simple framework to enable schools to analyse their operations and become more sustainable. An awards scheme acknowledges progress and raises the profile of participating schools in the wider community.

### **Important sites and species**

**Sites of nature conservation value.** A number of sites owned or managed by Local Authorities are protected by statutory conservation designations such as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs). SSSIs are nationally important and protected under legislation. In England, the Government has a Public Service Agreement target to ensure that 95% of SSSIs are in favourable condition by 2010. As owners, Local and Public Authorities have a key role in contributing to the achievement of this target as well as ensuring reasonable steps are taken to further the conservation and enhancement of other sites through the planning system and in all spheres of decision-making.

Other important sites include Local Wildlife Sites (also known as SNCI's - 'Sites of Nature Conservation Interest' and County Wildlife Sites) and Local Nature Reserves (LNR's). By managing these non-statutory sites for wildlife a contribution will be made to national, regional and local biodiversity targets, and the new Local Site national performance indicator (NI197). These sites contain wildlife or geological features that are of local special interest and offer people opportunities to learn about or simply enjoy nature, which contributes to their well-being and quality of life.

**Important species.** Many of Britain's wild plants and animals are legally protected under international, European and national legislation. Furthermore, the UK Biodiversity Action Plan identifies particular species as priorities for conservation action, while others are identified locally for action under the Durham Biodiversity Action Plan. Local and Public Authorities can ensure the protection of these species on their land by using site surveys to identify the presence of species and take positive action through appropriate site management. Identifying the presence of protected species is especially important where major development works or management changes are proposed on sites and appropriate professional advice must be sought.

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These notes were adapted from those prepared by the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Biodiversity Partnership and the South Yorkshire Biodiversity Forum

**Guidance notes are also available on:** Education, Advice and Awareness, Planning, Regeneration and Economy, and Policy, Strategy and Procurement, from [www.durhambiodiversity.org.uk](http://www.durhambiodiversity.org.uk)

#### References and Further Information

'Guidance for Local Authorities on implementing the Biodiversity Duty' (Defra 2007) and 'Guidance for Public Authorities on implementing the Biodiversity Duty' (Defra 2007) [www.defra.gov.uk/wildlife-countryside/biodiversity/index.htm](http://www.defra.gov.uk/wildlife-countryside/biodiversity/index.htm)  
'Local Sites – Guidance on their Identification, Selection and Management' (Defra 2006) <http://www.defra.gov.uk/wildlife-countryside/pdf/protected-areas/localsites.pdf>  
'Defra guidance on the improved Local Biodiversity Indicator (NI197)' (Defra 2008) <http://www.defra.gov.uk/environment/localgovindicators/documents/ni197-guidance-revised.pdf>  
'From Parks to Larks – A Biodiversity Friendly Grounds Maintenance Protocol for Chester-le-Street District Council' (Durham Biodiversity Partnership 2003) [http://www.chester-le-street.gov.uk/media/pdf/4/3/Parks to Larks 1.pdf](http://www.chester-le-street.gov.uk/media/pdf/4/3/Parks_to_Larks_1.pdf)

Durham Biodiversity Partnership [www.durhambiodiversity.org.uk](http://www.durhambiodiversity.org.uk) Durham Wildlife Trust [www.durhamwt.co.uk](http://www.durhamwt.co.uk)  
Association of Local Government Ecologists [www.alge.org.uk](http://www.alge.org.uk) Durham Biodiversity Data Service [www.dbds.org](http://www.dbds.org)  
Eco Schools [www.eco-schools.org.uk](http://www.eco-schools.org.uk) Flora Locale [www.floralocale.org](http://www.floralocale.org) Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group [www.fwag.org.uk](http://www.fwag.org.uk)