

Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG)
Teams Meeting 6.11.25.

Report by Michael Hanley

Presentation by Victoria Handby, Planning Ecologist (Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority).

In England BNG is mandatory due to an insertion to the 1990 Planning Act added in 2021. It became mandatory in 2024. Any affected development must deliver at least 10% BNG. It applies to all developments except those with exemptions.

An online tool is used to assess whether the development has reached the 10% BNG. This tool is called the biodiversity metric. Whether the site is in an LNRS (Local Nature Recovery Strategy) area is taken into account. The baseline habitat is assessed, the habitat site and condition.

There are two site types: small and large. Small sites are 1-9 dwellings and less than 0.5 hectares. No protected sites. These don't need an ecologist to assess, just someone who is competent.

For larger sites, a qualified ecologist is needed. The biodiversity metric tool will advise what is needed.

Habitat losses have to be compensated for, like for like. Once the site has been assessed with the online tool, you get the number of biodiversity units. For example, if you are taking away grassland with buildings, the metric will give the number of biodiversity units (that have to be compensated for). The metric (online tool) will work out whether the 10% BNG has been achieved.

Highly distinctive habitats such as native woodlands, blanket bogs are considered irreplaceable and to be avoided.

There are three ways that BNG can be achieved:

- (a) On-site: eg: planting trees, improving grassland to a higher quality.
- (b) Off-site: On land owned by the developer or from a Habitat Bank.
- (c) The developer can buy statutory credits from the government.

The developer should sort out the off-site BNG before making the planning application. There is also an extra planning department charge for assessing the off-site BNG (£600 in YDNPA).

There are three habitat banks in the YDNPA area totalling about 25 hectares. Developers can purchase BNG from these habitat banks (HB) which are parcels of land on which to increase biodiversity. To be a habitat bank you have to be assessed and registered. The first of these HBs are upland grassland and broadleaf woodlands (127 units for sale). The second is 17.5 hectares of rush pastures to be enhanced to good condition (97 biodiversity units for sale). The third is an area to be modified to good quality grassland (30 BNG units for sale). The sites are assessed by an ecologist and have yearly monitoring reports.

BNG is very unlikely to be a cause for refusal as there are ways to get BNG. Some applications will not have done the baseline work.

Biodiversity units cost about £20k each.

Exemptions: De minimis: Site less than 25 square metres and does not impact a priority habitat. Development to an existing house.

Self build no more than 9 dwellings on a site less than 0.5 hectares.

Common Pitfalls

Biodiversity enhancement and BMG are different. Biodiversity enhancement are things like bird and bat boxes.

Competency: Some people are not competent and the BMG assessment is challenged, causing delays in the processing of the application.

Questions

M Hanley: Is 25 hectares of HB enough for the YDNP area?

VH: Yes. HBs tend to be small scale. At the moment the provision is adequate.

R Graham (RG, Head of Planning Dept): We could develop this (HBs) in the future to allow developers outside YDNP to buy BNG units in this area. The BNG obligation can form part of the Section 106 agreement (usually where big developments contribute funds to local infrastructure such as schools). If there is no S106 then the planning dept can come to a separate agreement with the applicant.

D Twine (Chair of YDNPA): Is this not causing delays in application approvals?

RG: It is an added layer of bureaucracy. The government introduced a very complex system. It is adding an extra time delay in dealing with applications.