

Annex - Generic advice for local planning authorities from Natural England on the natural environment impacts and opportunities of development proposals

This advice may also be useful for neighbourhood planning bodies and developers.

Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs)

Local authorities have responsibilities for the conservation of SSSIs under s28G of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). The [National Planning Policy Framework \(NPPF\)](#) (paragraph 175c) states that development likely to have an adverse effect on SSSIs should not normally be permitted. Natural England's SSSI Impact Risk Zones are a GIS dataset designed to be used during the planning application validation process to help local planning authorities decide when to consult Natural England on developments likely to affect a SSSI. The dataset and user guidance can be accessed from the [Natural England Open Data Geoportal](#).

Biodiversity duty

The local planning authority has a duty to have regard to conserving biodiversity as part of planning decision making. Conserving biodiversity can also include restoration or enhancement to a population or habitat. Further information is [available](#) here.

Biodiversity Net Gain

Development provides opportunities to secure a net gain for biodiversity, in line with the NPPF (paragraphs 174 and 175) and Planning Practice Guidance. Biodiversity net gain can be calculated using the biodiversity metric. We advise local planning authorities to follow the mitigation hierarchy, as set out in paragraph 175 of the NPPF, and firstly consider what existing environmental features on and around the site can be retained or enhanced or what new features could be incorporated into the development proposal. This may include creating new ponds, planting native trees and plants and incorporating green roofs into the design of new buildings. Where onsite measures are not possible, consideration should be given to off-site measures.

Protected Species

Natural England has produced standing advice to help local planning authorities understand the impact of particular developments on protected species. Natural England will only provide bespoke advice on protected species where they form part of a SSSI or in exceptional circumstances.

Local sites and priority habitats and species

Local planning authorities should consider the impacts of the proposed development on any local wildlife or geodiversity sites, in line with paragraphs 171 and 174 of the NPPF and any relevant development plan policy. There may also be opportunities to enhance local sites and improve their connectivity. Natural England does not hold locally specific information on local sites and recommends further information is obtained from appropriate bodies such as the local records centre, wildlife trust, geo-conservation groups or recording societies.

Priority habitats and Species are of particular importance for nature conservation and included in the England Biodiversity List published under section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006. Most priority habitats will be mapped either as Sites of Special Scientific Interest, on the Magic website or as Local Wildlife Sites. The list of priority habitats and species can be found [here](#). Natural

England does not routinely hold species data, such data should be collected when impacts on priority habitats or species are considered likely. Consideration should also be given to the potential environmental value of brownfield sites, often found in urban areas and former industrial land- see further information in the [open mosaic habitats inventory](#).

Ancient woodland, ancient and veteran trees

Local planning authorities should consider any impacts on ancient woodland and ancient and veteran trees in line with paragraph 175 of the NPPF. Natural England maintains the Ancient Woodland [Inventory](#) which can help identify ancient woodland. Natural England and the Forestry Commission have produced [standing advice](#) for planning authorities in relation to ancient woodland and ancient and veteran trees. It should be taken into account by planning authorities when determining relevant planning applications. Natural England will only provide bespoke advice on ancient woodland, ancient and veteran trees where they form part of a SSSI or in exceptional circumstances.

Protected landscapes

For developments within or within the setting of a National Park or Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), we advise local planning authorities to apply national and local policies, together with local landscape expertise and information to determine the proposal. The NPPF (paragraph 172) provides the highest status of protection for the landscape and scenic beauty of National Parks and AONBs. It also sets out a 'major developments test' to determine whether major developments should be exceptionally be permitted within the designated landscape. We advise local planning authorities to consult the relevant AONB Partnership or Conservation Board or relevant National Park landscape or other advisor who will have local knowledge and information to assist in the determination of the proposal. The statutory management plan and any local landscape character assessments may also provide valuable information.

Public bodies have a duty to have regard to the statutory purposes of designation in carrying out their functions (under (section 11 A(2) of the National Parks and Access to the Countryside Act 1949 (as amended) for National Parks and S85 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act, 2000 for AONBs). The Planning Practice Guidance confirms that this duty also applies to proposals outside the designated area but impacting on its natural beauty.

Heritage Coasts are protected under paragraph 173 of the NPPF. Development should be consistent the special character of Heritage Coasts and the importance of its conservation.

Landscape

Paragraph 170 of the NPPF highlights the need to protect and enhance valued landscapes through the planning system. This application may present opportunities to protect and enhance locally valued landscapes, including any local landscape designations. Local planning authorities may want to consider whether any local landscape features or characteristics (such as ponds, woodland or dry stone walls) could be incorporated into the development in order to respect and enhance local landscape character and distinctiveness, in line with any local landscape character assessments. Where the impacts of development are likely to be significant, a Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment should be provided with the proposal to inform decision making. Please see the [Landscape Institute](#) Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment for further guidance.

Best and most versatile agricultural land and soils

Local planning authorities are responsible for ensuring that they have sufficient detailed agricultural land classification (ALC) information to apply NPPF policies (Paragraphs 170 and 171). This is the case regardless of whether the proposed development is sufficiently large to consult Natural England. Further information is contained in [GOV.UK guidance](#). Agricultural Land Classification information is available on the [Magic](#) website on the [Data.Gov.uk](#) website.

Guidance on soil protection is available in the Defra *[Construction Code of Practice for the Sustainable Use of Soils on Construction Sites](#)*, and we recommend its use in the design and construction of development, including any planning conditions. Should the development proceed, we advise that the developer uses an appropriately experienced soil specialist to advise on, and supervise soil handling, including identifying when soils are dry enough to be handled and how to make the best use of soils on site.

Access and Recreation

Natural England encourages any proposal to incorporate measures to help improve people's access to the natural environment. Measures such as reinstating existing footpaths together with the creation of new footpaths and bridleways should be considered. Links to other green networks and, where appropriate, urban fringe areas should also be explored to help promote the creation of wider green infrastructure. Relevant aspects of local authority green infrastructure strategies should be delivered where appropriate.

Rights of Way, Access land, Coastal access and National Trails

Paragraphs 98 and 170 of the NPPF highlights the important of public rights of way and access. Development should consider potential impacts on access land, common land, rights of way, coastal access routes and coastal margin in the vicinity of the development and the scope to mitigate any adverse impacts. Consideration should also be given to the potential impacts on any nearby National Trails, including the England Coast Path. The National Trails website www.nationaltrail.co.uk provides information including contact details for the National Trail Officer.

Environmental gains

The NPPF (paragraphs 72, 102, 118 and 170) encourages developments to seek wider environmental gains, in addition to biodiversity net gain. Developers and local planning authorities could consider how the proposed development can enhance the wider environment, help adapt to the impacts of climate change and implement elements of any Landscape, Green Infrastructure or Biodiversity Strategy in place in the area. Opportunities for environmental gains, including nature based solutions to help adapt to climate change, might include:

- Identifying opportunities for new multi-functional green and blue infrastructure
- Managing existing and new public spaces to be more wildlife friendly (e.g. by sowing wild flower strips) and climate resilient
- Planting trees, including street trees, characteristic to the local area to make a positive contribution to the local landscape
- Improving access and links to existing greenspace, identifying improvements to the existing public right of way network or extending the network to create missing footpath or cycleway links
- Restoring neglected environmental features (e.g. a hedgerow or stone wall or clearing away an eyesore)
- Designing lighting to encourage wildlife