

EEL786 Land South of Cricklade – Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) Assessment

Ellendale Environmental Limited was commissioned by Plainview Planning Ltd., on behalf of their client, to undertake a Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) assessment for an area of land to the south of Cricklade, Wiltshire, SN6 6HZ ('the site'). It is proposed to develop the site to provide agricultural buildings and an associated yard area ('the proposed development').

The site, which is approximately 2,187m² or 0.2187 hectares in size, is located on Hayes Knoll Road in north Wiltshire, north-west of Swindon and south of Cricklade, and is dominated by neutral grassland with patches of marshy grassland surrounded by hedgerows.

Using current information on the proposed development, this assessment estimates the BNG anticipated to be achieved through the proposed plans and has been undertaken with reference to the DEFRA Statutory Biodiversity Metric 4.0 Calculation Tool. This is a biodiversity accounting tool used for the purposes of calculating biodiversity net gain for a site and is based on 'biodiversity units' calculated according to the habitats present and their size, distinctiveness and condition. This enables the quantitative calculation of the predicted change in biodiversity value as a result of the proposed development, with the objective of achieving a net gain in biodiversity.

BNG is an approach to development, and/or land management, that aims to leave the natural environment in a measurably better state than it was beforehand. For the assessment of the site, the Statutory Biodiversity Metric calculation tool has been used. The metric is designed to provide ecologists, developers, planners and other interested parties with a means of assessing changes in biodiversity value (losses or gains) brought about by development or changes in land management and has therefore been used as an example of a best practice mechanism to achieve 'positive effects for biodiversity'.

A Phase 1 Habitat survey of the site was undertaken by Ellendale Environmental in March 2024¹, and the habitats present on the site were mapped following the Phase 1 survey methodology (JNCC, 2010), listing the plant species associated with each habitat.

The majority of the site is dominated by neutral grassland that is managed through seasonal cutting and was species-poor at the time of the survey, dominated by perennial rye-grass *Lolium perenne* with occasional herbs such as clover *Trifolium sp.* present. Other areas within the site had been recently reseeded to grassland and were dominated by perennial rye-grass, with some early coloniser species such as ribwort plantain *Plantago lanceolata* and clover also present. Spear thistle *Cirsium vulgare* was noted around the site boundaries where the ground was often wetter and more shaded.

Photograph 1: showing a view of the neutral grassland



¹ EEL786R241204 Land South of Cricklade Preliminary Ecological Assessment (PEA) CIC v1.2

The dominant habitat within the site is thus identified as species-poor semi-improved neutral grassland, equating to modified grassland in UKHabs. This habitat type is identified due to the species-poor vegetation with <9 species per m². The dominant species present are fast-growing grasses such as rye-grasses *Lolium spp.* and white clover *Trifolium repens*. This site is also used for intensive agricultural production which this habitat is commonly found in and, within the fertile but wet areas of the site, soft rush *Juncus effusus* was noted to be present which is also common within this habitat type.

The baseline ecological results for the site and the statutory biodiversity metric condition assessment tool have been used to provide an assessment of the baseline habitats (and units) as follows:

- **Habitat Condition: Modified Grassland** – This habitat was assessed as being moderate condition, based on its passing of five of the criteria, including passing essential criterion A.

The post-development site habitat units have been determined using the Biodiversity Metric 4.0 calculation tool and this is summarised in **Table 1**.

Table 1: Site habitat creation (post-development)

BROAD HABITAT	HABITAT TYPE	AREA (HA)	CONDITION	TOTAL HABITAT UNITS	COMMENTS
Urban	Developed land; sealed surface	0.02285	V.Low	0.00	Access road into the site.
Urban	Developed land; sealed surface	0.11470	V.Low	0.00	Hardstanding and buildings (hay store, machine store and potting shed).
Grassland	Modified grassland	0.08115	Moderate	0.28	Remaining area of grassland.
Individual trees	Rural tree	0.30750	Moderate	0.94	75 trees planted within the area to the south of the redline within the camping area.

Based on this, the Statutory Biodiversity Metric calculation tool indicates that the proposed development will result in a net gain of **39.64%** for non-linear habitats. The site therefore meets a desired net gain of 10% and an increase in biodiversity is met.

No existing linear habitats are impacted by the proposed development, as the proposed access is through an existing farm access, and no additional linear habitats are being created as part of the development.

In addition, the installation of bird and bat boxes will provide suitable nesting and roosting habitat and will also increase biodiversity within the site; however, these are not included in the Biodiversity Metric calculation tool and cannot therefore be counted toward the post-development site habitat units.