

Land at Foxhole Farm, Bolney

## **Biodiversity Net Gain Assessment**

April 2025

Quality Management	
<b>Client:</b>	Wates Developments
<b>Project:</b>	Land at Foxhole Farm, Bolney
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## Plans:

Plan 6481/BNGA1	Pre-development Habitat Mapping
Plan 6481/BNGA2	Post-development Habitat Mapping

# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Background and Proposals

- 1.1.1 Aspect Ecology is advising Wates Development in respect of the land at Land at Foxhole Farm, Bolney (hereafter referred to as ‘the site’) with the description of development as follows:

*“Outline planning application (appearance, landscaping, layout and scale reserved), for the erection of up to 200 dwellings; a community building (use class F1) encompassing land for education provision, together with associated access, ancillary parking and landscaping; the creation of a vehicular access point from the A272 Cowfold Road, and pedestrian and cycle only access to The Street; and creation of a network of roads, footways, and cycleways through the site; together with the provision of countryside open space, children’s play areas, community orchard, and allotments; sustainable drainage systems and landscape buffers)”*

- 1.1.2 To inform the planning application, Aspect Ecology has undertaken a Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) assessment to determine the level of BNG that can be achieved under the scheme. This work is based on the Statutory Biodiversity Metric tool<sup>1</sup> issued by Defra and informed by associated guidance issued by Defra, in combination with guidance developed by CIRIA, CIEEM and IEMA.

## 1.2 Biodiversity Net Gain Legislation, Policy and Best Practice

### Legislation

- 1.2.1 In England, Biodiversity Net Gain has been mandatory since 12<sup>th</sup> February 2024 under Schedule 7A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) (as inserted by Schedule 14 of the Environment Act 2021).
- 1.2.2 Schedule 7A identifies (Part 2) that planning permissions in England (with certain exceptions) are deemed to have been granted subject to a condition requiring the submission of a *Biodiversity Gain Plan* prior to commencement of development. The Biodiversity Gain Plan must include details in regard to Biodiversity Net Gain, demonstrating how the development will achieve a gain in calculated biodiversity value of at least 10%.
- 1.2.3 Government advice<sup>2</sup> sets out the information LPAs require in order to consider BNG as part of a planning application, in line with Section 7(1A) of The Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure)(England) Order 2015 (as amended). In particular, this sets out that planning applications should be accompanied by the following information (alongside references to where this can be located in this report):
- A statement confirming whether the applicant believes that planning permission, if granted, would be subject to the biodiversity gain condition (see section 1.3 of this report);
  - In cases where the applicant believes that planning permission, if granted, would be subject to the biodiversity gain condition;

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<sup>1</sup> Statutory Biodiversity Metric – Auditing and Accounting for Biodiversity – Calculation Tool. 23 July 2024

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/biodiversity-net-gain-what-local-planning-authorities-should-do> (updated 08/05/24)

- i. the pre-development ('baseline') biodiversity value of the on-site habitat on the date of application (or an earlier date) including the completed Metric calculation tool (showing the calculations, the publication date and version of the Metric used to calculate that value) (see section 3 of this report);
- ii. where the applicant wishes to use an earlier date, the proposed earlier date and the reasons for that date;
- iii. a statement confirming whether the biodiversity value of the on-site habitat is lower on the date of application (or an earlier date) because of the carrying on of activities ('degradation') (see section 3.2 of this report);
- iv. where unauthorised degradation has taken place between 30<sup>th</sup> January 2020 and the submission of the planning application, the relevant date should be immediately before these activities were carried out;
- v. a description of any irreplaceable habitat on the land, that exists on the date of application (or an earlier date) (see section 3.3 of this report); and
- vi. a plan drawn to an identified scale (including the direction of north), showing on-site habitat existing on the date of application (or an earlier date), and any irreplaceable habitat (see Plan 6481/BNGA1).

#### Good Practice Principles for Development

1.2.4 CIRIA, CIEEM and IEMA have developed a set of principles on good practice to achieve Biodiversity Net Gain<sup>3</sup>, accompanied by a practical guide<sup>4</sup>. These principles provide a framework that helps improve the UK's biodiversity by contributing towards strategic priorities to conserve and enhance nature while progressing with sustainable development. They also provide a way for industry to show that projects follow good practice. Ten key principles are identified:

- 1) **Apply the Mitigation Hierarchy.** Do everything possible to first avoid and then minimise impacts on biodiversity. Only as a last resort, and in agreement with external decision-makers where possible, compensate for losses that cannot be avoided. If compensating for losses within the development footprint is not possible or does not generate the most benefits for nature conservation, then offset biodiversity losses by gains elsewhere.
- 2) **Avoid losing biodiversity that cannot be offset by gains elsewhere.** Avoid impacts on irreplaceable biodiversity - these impacts cannot be offset to achieve No Net Loss or Net Gain.
- 3) **Be inclusive and equitable.** Engage stakeholders early, and involve them in designing, implementing, monitoring and evaluating the approach to Net Gain. Achieve Net Gain in partnership with stakeholders where possible, and share the benefits fairly among stakeholders.
- 4) **Address risks.** Mitigate difficulty, uncertainty and other risks to achieving Net Gain. Apply well-accepted ways to add contingency when calculating biodiversity losses and gains in order to account for any remaining risks, as well as to compensate for the time between the losses occurring and the gains being fully realised.

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<sup>3</sup> CIEEM, CIRIA, IEMA (2016) *Biodiversity Net Gain: Good practice principles for development*.

<sup>4</sup> CIEEM, CIRIA, IEMA (2019) *Biodiversity Net Gain: Good practice principles for development. A practical guide*.

- 5) **Make a measurable Net Gain contribution.** Achieve a measurable, overall gain for biodiversity and the services ecosystems provide while directly contributing towards nature conservation priorities.
- 6) **Achieve the best outcomes for biodiversity.** Achieve the best outcomes for biodiversity by using robust, credible evidence and local knowledge to make clearly-justified choices when:
  - Delivering compensation that is ecologically equivalent in type, amount and condition, and that accounts for the location and timing of biodiversity losses
  - Compensating for losses of one type of biodiversity by providing a different type that delivers greater benefits for nature conservation
  - Achieving Net Gain locally to the development while also contributing towards nature conservation priorities at local, regional and national levels
  - Enhancing existing or creating new habitat
  - Enhancing ecological connectivity by creating more, bigger, better and joined areas for biodiversity
- 7) **Be additional.** Achieve nature conservation outcomes that demonstrably exceed existing obligations (i.e. do not deliver something that would occur anyway).
- 8) **Create a Net Gain legacy.** Ensure Net Gain generates long-term benefits by:
  - Engaging stakeholders and jointly agreeing practical solutions that secure Net Gain in perpetuity
  - Planning for adaptive management and securing dedicated funding for long-term management
  - Designing Net Gain for biodiversity to be resilient to external factors, especially climate change
  - Mitigating risks from other land uses
  - Avoiding displacing harmful activities from one location to another
  - Supporting local-level management of Net Gain activities
- 9) **Optimise sustainability.** Prioritise Biodiversity Net Gain and, where possible, optimise the wider environmental benefits for a sustainable society and economy.
- 10) **Be transparent.** Communicate all Net Gain activities in a transparent and timely manner, sharing the learning with all stakeholders.

### 1.3 Statement on Whether Biodiversity Gain Condition Applies and Purpose of this Report

- 1.3.1 Based on the site proposals and habitats present, it is considered that a planning permission, if granted in respect of the proposals, would be subject to the Biodiversity Gain planning condition under the legislation. Accordingly, this report provides a BNG assessment, including details of the existing calculated biodiversity value(s) and associated information, accompanied by a completed Metric calculation tool (Excel workbook) in line with the legislative requirements. In addition, going beyond the scope of the statutory BNG requirements, this report provides an initial assessment of the likely net change in

biodiversity value under the proposed development, and a high level consideration of how a 10% gain can be delivered.

## 2 Methodology

### 2.1 Baseline Habitat Survey

2.1.1 The site was initially surveyed in April 2022 in order to ascertain the general ecological value of the land contained within the boundaries of the site and to identify the main habitats and ecological features present. Subsequent survey visits were made in September 2022, and July 2024 to collect condition assessment data and conduct specific grassland habitat surveys based on the approach set out in the Farm Environment Plan (FEP) Manual<sup>5</sup>.

2.1.2 The survey was informed by standard Phase 1 Habitat Survey methodology<sup>6</sup>, whereby the habitat types present are identified and mapped, together with an assessment of the species composition of each habitat. The site was classified into areas of similar botanical community types, with a representative species list compiled for each habitat identified. Habitats were classified in accordance with the UK Habitat Classification system, version 2.0<sup>7</sup>, and condition assessed in accordance with the methodology set out in the Metric Technical Annex<sup>8</sup> and using professional judgement. In line with guidance<sup>9</sup>, the fine scale minimum mapping unit (MMU) of 25sqm or 5m in length has been used where possible / relevant.

### 2.2 Survey Constraints and Limitations

2.2.1 All of the species that occur in each habitat would not necessarily be detectable during survey work carried out at any given time of the year, since different species are apparent during different seasons. The Phase 1 habitat survey was undertaken outside the optimal season, albeit the nature of the habitats within the site allowed for the broad habitat types to be identified and for an adequate assessment of the intrinsic ecological interest of the site to be made. Additional information on the habitats present within the survey area was collected during September 2022 and July 2024 allowing a robust assessment of habitats and botanical interest within the survey area to be made.

### 2.3 Biodiversity Net Gain Assessment

2.3.1 To quantify the level of BNG that can be delivered under the proposed development, the change in biodiversity value resulting from the scheme has been calculated using the Metric calculation tool, as informed by the associated User Guide<sup>10</sup>. This takes account of the size, distinctiveness and ecological condition of existing and proposed habitat areas to provide a proxy measure of the present and forecast biodiversity value of a site, and therefore determine the overall change in biodiversity value.

2.3.2 In line with the 'information that LPA's require' (see paragraph 1.2.3 above), the pre-development ('baseline') biodiversity value of the on-site habitat has been calculated based on the habitat survey information collected during the baseline habitat survey (see 2.1 above).

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<sup>5</sup> Natural England (2010) Higher Level Stewardship – Farm Environment Plan (FEP) Manual, 3rd Edition

<sup>6</sup> Joint Nature Conservation Committee (2010, as amended) 'Handbook for Phase 1 habitat survey: A technique for environmental audit.'

<sup>7</sup> UKHab Ltd (2023). UK Habitat Classification Version 2.0 (at <https://www.ukhab.org>)

<sup>8</sup> Statutory Biodiversity Metric - Technical Annex 1 - Condition Assessment Sheets and Methodology

<sup>9</sup> The UK Habitat classification User Manual. Version 1.1. 2020

<sup>10</sup> Defra (Feb 2024) The Statutory Biodiversity Metric – User Guide

2.3.3 Going beyond the minimum statutory requirements (which only require the baseline habitat value to be defined at the planning application stage – see paragraph 1.2.3 above), the post-development biodiversity value has also been calculated, based on the broad habitat areas indicated on drawing ‘P20074 – RFT – 0101 – P06 – Illustrative Masterplan’. A number of assumptions have been made in terms of the landscaping and management proposals, based on comparative developments and what is realistic and feasible under the proposed land uses and landscape space types. Further details of assumptions made in populating the metric are provided in Chapter 4 below.

## 2.4 Strategic Significance

2.4.1 Strategic significance refers to the local significance of habitat parcels based on their location and the habitat type. The Metric gives additional unit value to habitat parcels that are mapped within a published Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) or, where no LNRS has been published, to habitats mapped / listed in alternative documents specified by the Local Planning Authority (e.g. Draft LNRS, Local Plans, Biodiversity Action Plans, Green Infrastructure Strategies, etc.). Strategic significance has been assigned to the pre- and post-development habitats in accordance with the methodology set out in Tables 7 and 8 of the User Guide, as follows:

- High (formally identified in local strategy);
- Medium (location ecologically desirable but not in local strategy);
- Low (area / compensation not in local strategy).

## 3 Pre-development ('Baseline') Habitats

### 3.1 Overview

3.1.1 Descriptions of the pre-development ('baseline') habitats are set out within the Ecological Appraisal prepared by Aspect Ecology, dated January 2025, together with habitat condition assessments. Habitat locations are depicted on Plan 6481/BNGA1.

### 3.2 Degradation

3.2.1 During the survey work undertaken between 2022 and 2024, no evidence was recorded to suggest that any activities of the type mentioned in paragraph 6 or 6A of Schedule 7A to the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended) have occurred since 30<sup>th</sup> January 2020. Accordingly, the baseline habitat value is considered to be as recorded during the survey work, which remains up to date at the current time in line with standard guidance<sup>11</sup>.

### 3.3 Irreplaceable Habitats

3.3.1 No irreplaceable habitats are present within the site.

### 3.4 Strategic Significance

3.4.1 None of the habitats within the site are mapped within a published LNRS or any specified alternative documents. Therefore, in accordance with the User Guide, low strategic significance has been applied to the pre-development habitats.

### 3.5 Pre-development Biodiversity Value of On-site Habitats

3.5.1 The pre-development biodiversity value of the on-site habitat has been calculated using the Statutory Biodiversity Metric (version 1.0.3 dated 23 July 2024), with the assessment completed on 17 December 2024. A full copy of the Metric is provided as a separate Excel workbook. The overall pre-development biodiversity value of the on-site habitat is set out within Table 3.1 (below).

**Table 3.1.** Pre-development ('baseline') biodiversity value of the on-site habitat based on the Statutory Biodiversity Metric (version 1.0.3 dated 23 July 2024)

Onsite baseline	Overall Units
Habitats	35.97
Hedgerows	25.86
Watercourse	N/A

<sup>11</sup> CIEEM (April 2019) On the lifespan of ecological reports and surveys

## 4 Post-development Habitats and BNG Assessment Result (Preliminary Assessment)

### 4.1 Introduction

4.1.1 The BNG legislation places a duty on Local Planning Authorities to request the pre-development biodiversity value of the on-site habitat on the date of application (or an earlier date) as part of qualifying planning applications. This information is provided in the previous chapter of this report. Going beyond the scope of the statutory requirements, this chapter considers the likely change in biodiversity value as a result of the proposed development. Such information is not required under the legislation until planning has been approved (to be set out within a Biodiversity Gain Plan), but this information is provided now in order to provide the LPA with a guide as to how a 10% gain in biodiversity can be delivered.

### 4.2 Assumptions

4.2.1 When inputting the post-development habitat areas and condition to the Metric, the following assumptions have been made:

- Newly created habitat under the proposals will be managed appropriately to reach the assigned target condition (anticipated to be defined by a future management plan);
- Woodland W1, W2 and W3 and pond P1 will be fully retained under the proposals;
- Due to likely groundworks and relandscaping works required, all other habitats within the site are assumed as being lost and recreated;
- *Other neutral grassland* - areas of 'other neutral' grassland will be subject to a traditional meadow management regime, in order to maintain the presence of a minimum nine species necessary to qualify as this habitat type, and will achieve moderate condition;
- *Trees* – New tree planting has been provided as indicated by the Illustrative Masterplan as described above. It is anticipated the proposal will accommodate at least 257 (not including a large number of trees within the proposed developed land) newly planted trees. All newly planted trees are assumed to be of small size; and
- *Hedgerows* - It is anticipated that the majority of the hedgerows apart from hedgerow H5 will be retained apart from access. Additionally, it is anticipated that at least 0.76km of new species-rich native hedgerows planting will be incorporated within the detailed landscape plans.

### 4.3 Strategic Significance

4.3.1 No strategic significance has been applied to the post-development habitats within the site.

### 4.4 Habitat Type and Condition

4.4.1 Summaries of the proposed post-development habitat creation / enhancement are set out in Tables 4.1 to 4.2 below. Post-development habitat locations are shown on Plan 6481/BNGA2.

**Table 4.1. Post-development onsite Habitat Creation**

Habitat	Target Condition	Condition Rationale
Developed land; sealed surface	N/A	This includes all roads, parking and buildings within the site. No assessment for the condition of this habitat is required.
Vegetated garden	N/A	This includes the gardens of the proposed properties. No assessment for the condition of this habitat is required.
Sustainable drainage system	Moderate	Proposed drainage areas to form basins and swales, planted with a range of native species. With appropriate management these areas are expected to achieve moderate condition.
Other neutral grassland	Moderate	Open space within the central area of the site will be established as wildflower grassland. These areas will be seeded with a wildflower grassland mix, using an appropriate general meadow mixture (Emorsgate EM2 or similar). No invasive non-native species would be included and Bracken, scrub and physical damage to be kept to minimum. With appropriate management prescriptions such as an annual meadow cut, it is considered that these areas of grassland will achieve at least a moderate condition.
Modified grassland	Moderate	Amenity / recreational spaces adjacent to the residential development will be established as flowering lawn, supporting a moderate species diversity. With appropriate management these are expected to achieve moderate condition.
Traditional orchards	Moderate	Community orchard areas. With appropriate management these areas are expected to achieve moderate condition.
Allotments	Poor	Allotments are to be created within the west of the site. Given the individuality of allotments there is no guarantee how they will be managed and therefore a poor condition has been assigned on a precautionary basis, however, they are likely to provide additional ecological benefits not captured within this BNG assessment.
Other woodland; broadleaved	Moderate	Woodland planting is proposed at the north-western boundary of the site to provide a significant buffer. With suitable management the woodland can be expected to achieve a moderate condition within the timeframe for BNG to be delivered.
Urban Trees	Poor	Native trees to be planted throughout the site within areas of open space and adjacent the built development, expected to achieve poor condition within 30 years with suitable management.

Habitat	Target Condition	Condition Rationale
Mixed scrub	Moderate	Native shrub planting is proposed within areas of open space. With suitable management the scrub can be expected to achieve a moderate condition.
Introduced shrub	N/A	This includes non-native and ornamental planting to be created within the site. No assessment for the condition of this habitat is required.

**Table 4.2.** Post-development onsite Hedgerow Creation.

Habitat	Target Condition	Condition Rationale
Species-rich Native Hedgerow	Moderate	Approximately 0.76km of species-rich native hedgerow will be provided at the built development boundary. Through suitable management this habitat would be expected to reach moderate condition within 5 years.

## 4.5 Anticipated Change in Biodiversity

4.5.1 The anticipated change in biodiversity value as a result of the proposals has been calculated using the Statutory Biodiversity Metric, based on the assumptions and considerations set out above. A copy of the Metric is provided separately as an Excel workbook.

4.5.2 When considering the current proposals, the Metric calculates that the development will likely result in the following changes in biodiversity, summarised in Table 4.3 (below):

**Table 4.3.** Anticipated change in biodiversity

	Change in Units	% Change
<b>Onsite Habitats</b>	+17.64	+49.05%
<b>Onsite Hedgerows</b>	+4.46	+17.24%
<b>Onsite Watercourses</b>	N/A	N/A

4.5.3 Accordingly, subject to appropriate implementation in line with the measures set out above, the proposals are anticipated to achieve calculated gains in excess of 10% for habitats and hedgerows in line with the relevant legislative and policy requirements.

## 4.6 Biodiversity Gain Hierarchy

4.6.1 The Biodiversity Gain Hierarchy and its effect for the purpose of the statutory framework for BNG is set out in Articles 37A and 37D of the Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015. This hierarchy (which does not apply to irreplaceable habitats) sets out a list of priority actions:

- i. firstly, in relation to on-site habitats which have a medium, high and very high distinctiveness (a score of four or more according to the Statutory Biodiversity Metric), the avoidance of adverse effects from the development and, if they cannot be avoided, the mitigation of those effects; and
- ii. secondly, in relation to all on-site habitats which are adversely affected by the development, the adverse effect should be compensated by prioritising in order, where possible, the enhancement of existing onsite habitats, creation of new on-site habitats, allocation of registered offsite gains and finally the purchase of biodiversity credits.

4.6.2 In relation to point (i), the proposed development has sought to retain medium and high distinctiveness habitats in the form of Bramble scrub, mixed scrub, ponds, rural tree, species-rich native hedgerow, hedgerow with trees and lowland mixed deciduous woodland, species-rich native hedgerows – associated with bank or ditch, species-rich native hedgerows with trees – associated with bank or ditch respectively. No losses of high distinctiveness habitats or hedgerows are encountered.

4.6.3 In relation to point (ii), adverse effects have been compensated by creating new on-site habitats.

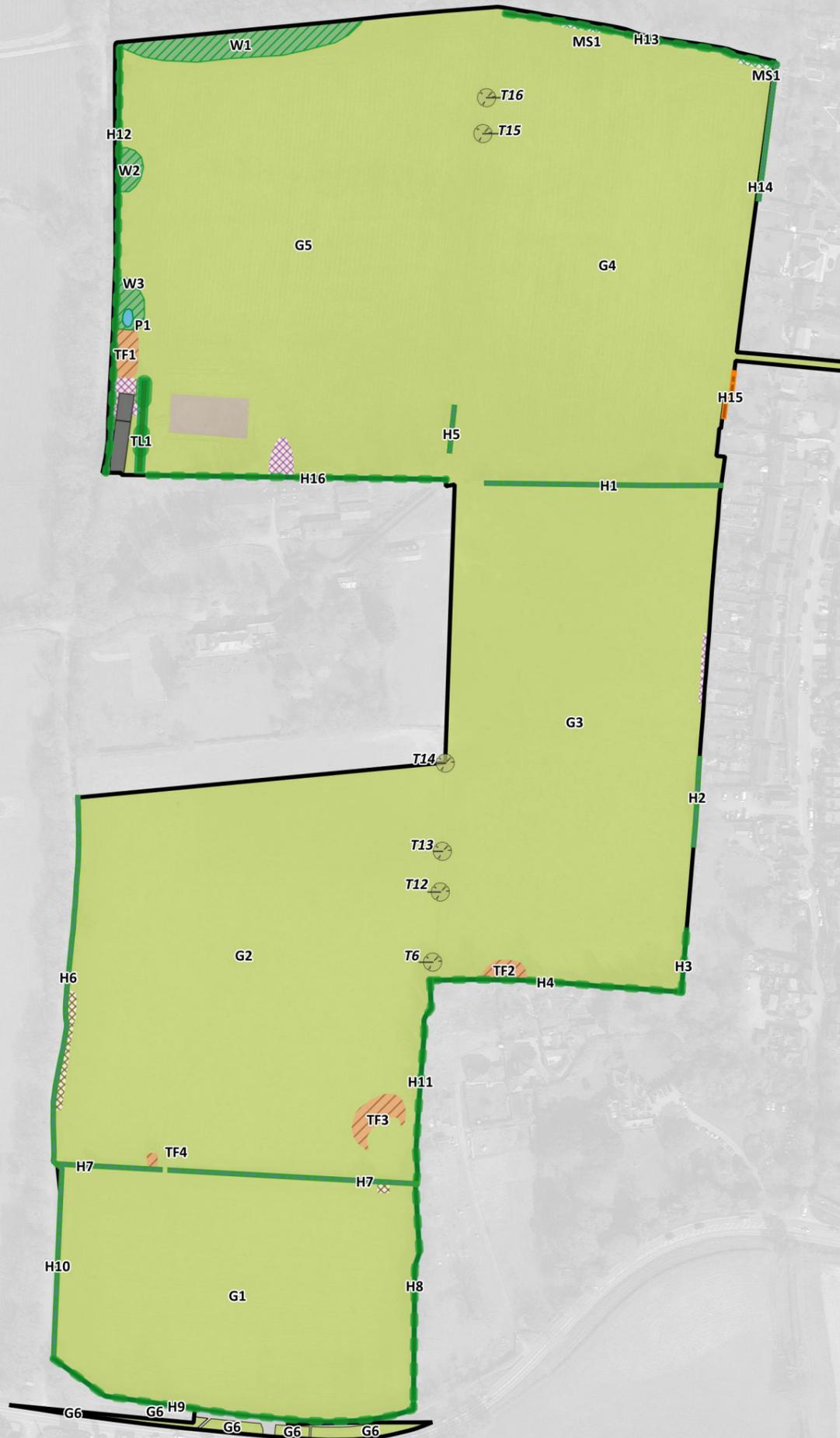
## 5 Summary and Conclusions

- 5.1 Aspect Ecology is advising Wates Developments in respect of Land at Foxhole Farm, Bolney. This report provides a BNG Assessment to accompany a planning application for residential development.
- 5.2 BNG is a process that is considered both during the determination of planning applications, and then post planning via a number of set documents (including a Biodiversity Gain Plan and, where required, a Habitat Management and Monitoring Plan). Following on from the amendments to Schedule 7A of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, government advice has been published which sets out the information that LPAs require in order to consider BNG as part of a planning application. The necessary information is included within this report, therefore the LPA's statutory requirements under the BNG legislation have been satisfied.
- 5.3 In addition, going beyond the scope of the statutory requirements (which only require the baseline habitat value to be defined at the planning application stage – see paragraph 1.2.3 above), a preliminary BNG assessment of the post-development value has been undertaken. As such, the proposals will deliver habitat and hedgerow units within the site boundary which are in excess of the relevant figure of 10%.

## **Plan 6481/BNGA1:**

Pre-development Habitat Mapping

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**Key:**

-  Site Boundary
-  Developed land; sealed surface: Building (0.0325ha)
-  Developed land; sealed surface: Hardstanding (0.0500ha)
-  Artificial unvegetated, unsealed surface (0.0800ha)
-  Modified grassland (16.2550ha)
-  Bracken (0.0300ha)
-  Bramble scrub (0.0650ha)
-  Mixed scrub (0.0200ha)
-  Tall forbs (0.0975ha)
-  Lowland mixed deciduous woodland (0.2050ha)
-  Ponds (non-priority habitat) (0.0050ha)
-  Line of trees - Moderate Condition (0.045km)
-  Native hedgerow - Good Condition (0.795km)
-  Native hedgerow with trees - Good Condition (1.08km)
-  Non-native and ornamental hedgerow - Poor Condition (0.025km)
-  Rural Tree [6]



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Land at Foxhole Farm, Bolney PROJECT

Pre-development Habitat Mapping TITLE

6481/BNGA1 DRAWING NO.

I/DO REV

April 2025 DATE



## **Plan 6481/BNGA2:**

Post-development Habitat Mapping

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- Key:**
-  Site Boundary
  -  Proposed Allotments (0.1525ha)
  -  Proposed Artificial unvegetated, unsealed surface (0.2225ha)
  -  Proposed Developed land; sealed surface: Building (1.2850ha)
  -  Proposed Developed land; sealed surface: Hardstanding (3.2350ha)
  -  Proposed Introduced shrub (0.0975ha)
  -  Proposed Mixed scrub (0.0550ha)
  -  Proposed Modified grassland (3.8975ha)
  -  Proposed Other neutral grassland (2.9600ha)
  -  Proposed Other woodland; broadleaved (0.5750ha)
  -  Proposed Sustainable drainage system (0.8000ha)
  -  Proposed Traditional orchards (0.7750ha)
  -  Retained Lowland mixed deciduous woodland (0.2050ha)
  -  Retained Ponds (non-priority habitat) (0.0050ha)
  -  Vegetated garden (2.5750ha)
  -  Proposed Native hedgerow (0.76km)
  -  Retained Line of trees - Moderate Condition (0.045km)
  -  Retained Native hedgerow - Good Condition (0.74km)
  -  Retained Native hedgerow with trees - Good Condition (1.06km)
  -  Retained Non-native and ornamental hedgerow - Poor Condition (0.025km)
  -  Proposed Urban Tree [257]



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