Biodiversity Net Gain Report

Kings Meadow View

November 2025

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Contents

Executive Summary 1
1 Introduction 2
1.1 Overview 2
1.2 Site Location and description 2
1.3 Proposed Development 2
1.4 Biodiversity Net Gain Background 2
1.5 Relevant Legislation and Policy 3
1.6 Report Objectives 4
1.7 Report Qualification 4
2 Approach to BNG Assessment 5
2.1 Overview 5
2.2 Site Boundary 5
2.3 Guidance 5
2.4 Biodiversity Data 7
2.5 Delay to Habitat creation 8
2.6 Enhancement of Retained Habitats 8
3 Biodiversity Net Gain Metric Outcome 9
3.2 BNG Delivery 9
4 Conclusion 10
4.2 Next Steps and Risk Management 10
5 Figures 11

Tables

Table 1: Habitat Creation and Enhancement Summary 8

Appendices

Appendix A Illustrative Masterplan
Appendix B The Statutory Biodiversity Metric Key Rules and Principles
Appendix C Statutory Metric Calculation

Executive Summary

Stantec was appointed by abrdn to undertake a Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) assessment in relation to the proposed Kings Meadow View development located within Reading, Berkshire at Forbury Retail Park (hereafter referred to as ‘the Site’).

The proposals are to be subject of a new outline planning application and as such will be required to deliver 10% BNG. The purpose of the BNG report is to determine the baseline habitat value currently present on the Site and the likely post-development habitat value, which is achievable post construction, through the completion of the relevant sections of the Statutory Metric.

The illustrative masterplan which this BNG assessment has been based on has been produced in accordance with the BNG Mitigation hierarchy, with input from a suitably qualified ecologist. When undertaking the BNG assessment, several assumptions have been made regarding the type of habitats which are to be created and their achievable condition score. These assumptions have been based on published guidance as well as the professional opinion of the ecologist and have been detailed within this report.

This BNG assessment has identified that the Proposed Development can deliver the following a habitat BNG of 176.42%.

1 Introduction

1.1 Overview

1.1.1 Stantec UK Limited was commissioned by abrdn to undertake a Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) assessment of the proposed Kings Meadow View development located within Reading, Berkshire at Forbury Retail Park (hereafter referred to as 'the Site'). This BNG assessment is to inform the submission of updated information for a new outline planning application for a mixed-use, residential led development and the provision of Class E floorspace (hereafter, the Proposed Development').

1.1.2 The purpose of this BNG report is to provide key information on the ecological baseline and how the Proposed Development will deliver a 10% BNG.

1.2 Site Location and description

1.2.1 The Site is located at approximate Ordnance Survey grid reference SU721737 and covers approximately 2.65 ha, comprising buildings and hardstanding associated with the existing Forbury Retail Park. Running alongside the northern boundary is the Great Western Railway, to the south and to the west of the Site is Forbury Road (A329), and to the east is Kenavon Drive. Beyond these areas are buildings and areas of hardstanding associated with the wider urban area of Reading. Within the Site boundary there are small areas of shrub, modified grassland and occasional trees.

1.2.2 A Baseline habitat plan which also shows the extent of the Site is provided at **Figure 1,**

1.3 Proposed Development

1.3.1 The Proposed Development is to be subject of an outline application with all matters reserved with the exception of access, for Site redevelopment involving the demolition of all existing structures and a residential-led mixed use proposal for up to 700 residential units (Class C3) and up to 3,000 sqm (of commercial uses (Class E). The Proposed Development also includes various associated works including replacement pedestrian and vehicle access routes, open spaces, hard and soft landscaping. The proposed general arrangement of the Site is provided as **Appendix A.**

1.4 Biodiversity Net Gain Background

1.4.1 Biodiversity is complex and therefore to simplify the quantification, metrics have been developed. Biodiversity metrics use habitat features as a proxy measure for biodiversity. Metrics use a simple calculation that takes into account the importance of these habitats' features for nature, using criteria such as their size, distinctiveness, and ecological condition. Biodiversity metrics enable assessments to be made of the present and forecast future biodiversity value of a site by calculating biodiversity gains and losses.

1.4.2 Biodiversity metrics enable developers to better understand and quantify the current biodiversity value of a site, and how proposed changes will impact on that value. Biodiversity metrics enable developers to see how they might be able to design a site in a way that increases its biodiversity value over time, i.e., achieving biodiversity net gain.

The use of a biodiversity metric assumes the principles of the mitigation hierarchy have been adopted and used when developing measures to address impacts on biodiversity receptors. The principles of the mitigation hierarchy are that, in order of preference, impacts on biodiversity should be subject to avoidance, mitigation, and compensation

1.5 Relevant Legislation and Policy

National legislation and Policy

1.5.1 The statutory framework for BNG is principally set out under Schedule 7A (Biodiversity Gain in England) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990. This schedule was inserted into the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 by Schedule 14 of the Environment Act 2021 and was amended by the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023.

1.5.2 Under the legislation, developments which require planning consent under the provisions of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, except in the case of exemptions defined by the Biodiversity Gain Requirements (Exemptions) Regulations 2024, are required to achieve a minimum 10% BNG, as measured using the Statutory BNG Metric and in accordance with the Biodiversity Gain Hierarchy. All significant habitat creation measures being delivered to achieve Biodiversity Net Gain must be managed for at least 30 years as detailed in a Habitat Management and Monitoring Plan (HMMP), to accompany the Biodiversity Gain Plan.

1.5.3 In addition to the Environment Act, Section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act, 2006 places duties on public bodies to have regard to the conservation of biodiversity in the exercise of their normal functions. Section 41 of the NERC Act 2006 defines Habitats and Species of Principal Importance to nature conservation in England which should be considered by all public bodies, including Local Planning Authorities (LPAs), when carrying out their Section 40 duties.

1.5.4 The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) (2024) sets out the Government's planning policies for England and how these are expected to be applied. Underpinning the NPPF is the principal aim of 'sustainable development' which is to be pursued through the fulfilment of interdependent economic, social and environmental objectives.

1.5.5 Chapter 15 of the NPPF details core policy principles with respect to conserving and enhancing the natural environment. Securing 'net gains' for biodiversity, in accordance with the Government's paper 'A Green Future; Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment' , is a key theme running through the chapter, whereby planning decisions are required to contribute to and enhance the natural environment by 'minimising impacts on and providing net gains for biodiversity', and plans should 'identify and pursue opportunities for securing measurable net gains for biodiversity'. The chapter also places planning decisions in the context of the mitigation hierarchy where, if impacts on biodiversity cannot be avoided, mitigated, or as a last resort compensated for, then planning permission should be refused.

Local Planning Policy

Reading Borough Council Local Plan, Policy EN12

1.5.6 Policy EN12 of the adopted Reading Borough Local Plan states the following;

On all sites, development should not result in a net loss of biodiversity and geodiversity and should provide a net gain for biodiversity wherever possible. Development should:

- *Protect and wherever possible enhance features of biodiversity interest on and adjacent to the application site, incorporating and integrating them into development proposals wherever practicable; and*
- *Provide new tree planting, wildlife friendly landscaping and ecological enhancements (such as wildlife ponds, bird and bat boxes) wherever practicable.*

In exceptional circumstances where the need for development clearly outweighs the need to protect the value of the site, and it is demonstrated that the impacts cannot be: 1) avoided; 2) mitigated or; 3) compensated for on-site; then new development will provide off-site compensation to ensure that there is "no net loss" of biodiversity. Provision of off-site compensation shall be calculated in accordance with nationally or locally recognised guidance

and metrics. It should not replace existing alternative habitats and should be provided prior to development.

Berkshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy

1.5.7 Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS) define priorities for nature recovery and propose actions in the locations where it would make a particular contribution to achieving those priorities and are of relevance when implementing biodiversity enhancement and creations measures as part of delivering BNG. The Berkshire LNRS was published on 7th October 2025 with no part of the Site identified as being within or part of any local strategy.

1.6 Report Objectives

1.6.1 This report sets out the BNG baseline and post-development BNG score. As such, the objectives of this report are to provide:

i. an outline of the approach to BNG delivery for the proposals, following the Biodiversity Gain Hierarchy;

ii. methodologies, assumptions, and relevant guidance in undertaking the BNG calculation;

iii. a description of the relevant baseline,

iv. evidence that the expected pre-commencement BNG planning condition is capable of being discharged i.e. that at least 10% BNG will be achieved in line with applicable ecological legislation/ planning policy.

1.7 Report Qualification

1.7.1 The survey, assessment and BNG calculation described in this report was undertaken in accordance with the best practice methodologies current at the time of commissioning. Site circumstances, scientific knowledge or methodology can change during the course of a project, and these external factors may impact on the scope of subsequent work requirements.

1.7.2 All survey work and reporting were undertaken by experienced and qualified ecologists, in accordance with the Code of Professional Conduct of the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM)[1].

1.7.3 All ecological surveys have an expected validity period owing to the tendency of the natural environment to change over time. This validity period varies from receptor to receptor and is also dependent on the degree of change in a site's management and overall landscape ecology. Where the potential for change is considered to be relevant to the Site, this is highlighted in the appropriate section.

1.7.4 This report does not purport to provide detailed, specialist legal advice. Where legislation is referenced, the reader should consult the original legal text, and/or the advice of a qualified environmental lawyer.

[1] CIEEM (2022) Code of Professional Conduct. Winchester. Code-of-Professional-Conduct-fEB-2022.pdf (cieem.net)

2 Approach to BNG Assessment

2.1 Overview

2.1.1 The section below sets out the approach to delivering BNG as part of the Proposed Development and describes the methodology used to calculate the expected level (%) of BNG for habitats, hedgerows and watercourses, where appropriate. This includes mapping and condition assessment of baseline habitats; identification of retained habitats; and definitions and target conditions for enhanced and created habitats.

2.2 Site Boundary

2.2.1 The Site Boundary for the BNG calculation is the Site as defined by the red line boundary shown in **Figure 1**. This is the planning application boundary for the Proposed Development.

2.3 Guidance

2.3.1 The following guidance has been used when undertaking the Biodiversity Metric calculations, and during development of the Scheme to ensure it delivers BNG:

- Biodiversity Net Gain. Good practice principles for development: a practical guide[2] (CIEEM, CIRIA, IEMA, 2019);
- UK Habitat Classification Version 2.0[3]
- The Statutory Biodiversity Metric User Guide[4]
- The Statutory Biodiversity Metric Technical Annex 1[5]

2.3.2 The Statutory Metric tool has been used to undertake the biodiversity metric calculations. This was published by Natural England in 2024, alongside a User Guide and Technical Annex.

2.3.3 The metric calculates the biodiversity value of each parcel of habitat within the Site (measured as biodiversity units). Habitat area is used, except for linear habitats, where length is used (i.e. for hedgerows and watercourses). The value of each habitat type is adjusted to site specific circumstances, taking into account distinctiveness, condition and if the habitat parcel is located in an area identified as being of significance for nature within the published LNRS.

2.3.4 A score is applied to each component, which when multiplied with the habitat area produces a score which represents the number of Biodiversity Units associated with each habitat parcel. The sum of these scores across the whole Site represents the overall baseline or 'pre-development' value in biodiversity units.

2.3.5 The predicted post-intervention (or 'post-development') unit value is calculated in the same way, but with the addition of factors to take into account risks associated with creating, enhancing or restoring habitats.

[2] Biodiversity Net Gain. Good practice principles for development: a practical guide[2] (CIEEM, CIRIA, IEMA, (2019) Biodiversity net gain. Good practice principles for development. A practical guide (cieem.net)

[3] Butcher, B., Edmonds, B., Norton, L. and Treweek J. (2018-2024) UK Habitat Classification. ukhab – UK Habitat Classification

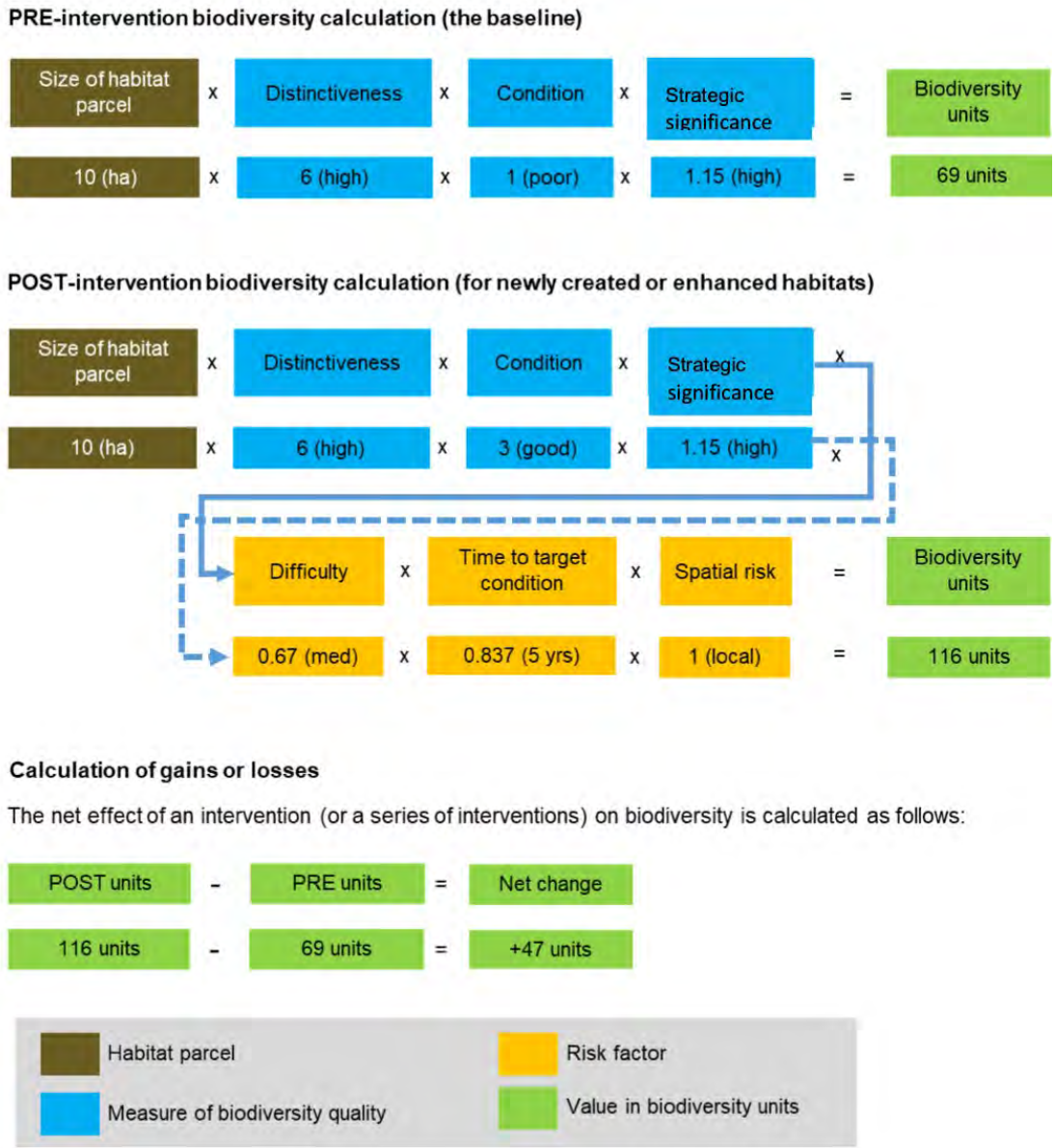
[4] DEFRA (2024) The Statutory Biodiversity User Guide. The_Statutory_Biodiversity_Metric_-_User_Guide_.pdf (publishing.service.gov.uk)

[5] DEFRA (2024) The Statutory Biodiversity Metric Technical Annex 1 - Condition Assessment Sheets and Methodology. Statutory_Biodiversity_Metric_Condition_Assessments23.07.24.xlsx (live.com)

2.3.6 The calculated value of the 'post-development' biodiversity units is then deducted from the calculated value of the 'pre-development' biodiversity units to give a predicted net change biodiversity unit value. The complete calculation is summarised in Plate 1.

2.3.7 Within the Statutory Metric User Guide there are a number of rules and key principles which apply to Biodiversity Net Gain assessment, with these further detailed within **Appendix B.**

Plate 1. Summary of Biodiversity Net Gain Calculation (taken from The Biodiversity Metric 3.0: User Guide, Natural England 2021).



2.3.8 Where BNG is not achievable within the desired design on-site, then off-site compensation areas can be used, and the same calculation undertaken. The biodiversity unit value of the off-site habitats is calculated for the 'pre-intervention' and 'post-intervention' stages. The 'pre-intervention' units are then subtracted from the 'post-intervention' units to work out how many predicted biodiversity units will result from that habitat change.

2.4 Biodiversity Data

2.4.1 The BNG baseline was determined via a UKHab survey completed in September 2025[6]. A Habitat Condition Assessment was undertaken in conjunction with the UKHAB survey following the condition assessment methodology associated with the statutory metric[7]. All habitats were digitised using a Geographic Information System (GIS) to provide area and length measurements for input into the metric. Tree areas for the baseline and post-intervention were calculated using the statutory biodiversity metric tool's "tree helper".

2.4.2 Baseline habitat types, extent and condition have been inputted into the Statutory metric provided at **Appendix C**

2.4.3 Full details of the baseline survey work, including methodology, results and completed habitat condition sheets are presented within the Ecological Assessment Report (Stantec 2025. Ecological Assessment Report Ref 332110588 November 2025).

2.4.4 Strategic Significance

2.4.5 The statutory biodiversity metric requires strategic significance of all baseline and post-intervention habitats to be defined. Strategic significance is the local significance of the habitats based on its location and habitat type and typically identified with a LNRS where published.

2.4.6 The Berkshire LNRS was published on 7th October 2025 with no part of the Site identified as being within or part of any local strategy. On this basis all habitats within the Site have been entered within the metric as 'Area/compensation not in local strategy/ no local strategy'.

2.4.7 Mitigation Hierarchy

2.4.8 The Biodiversity Gain Hierarchy is a list of priority actions for developments to follow to achieve BNG, including:

- Avoiding adverse effects to very high, high and medium 'distinctiveness' habitats;
- Mitigating these effects where they cannot be avoided; and
- Compensating for adverse effects on on-site habitats by, in order of priority: enhancing on-site habitat, creating new on-site habitats, securing local off-site BNG provision via the allocation of registered off-site gain and finally, as the last resort, the purchase of statutory credits.

2.4.9 The Proposed Development has where possible avoided adverse impacts to high and medium distinctiveness habitats including existing semi-mature trees. However, some loss of these trees was unavoidable.

2.4.10 In the basis of the above it is considered that the Biodiversity Gain Hierarchy has been correctly applied in relation to the Proposed Development and the BNG Assessment detailed within this report.

2.4.11 Post-development Assumptions

2.4.12 The BNG Assessment is based on the indicative illustrative masterplan shown in **Appendix A** with the habitats proposed translated into a best fit to the habitat definitions used for input into the BNG metric. This translation between the landscape design and the BNG metric is

[6] Defra (2024) The Statutory Biodiversity Metric -Technical Annex 1: Condition Assessment Sheets and Methodology, February 2024

summarised in Table 1 below, with the location and extent of the translated habitats shown on the Post Development Habitat plan, provided as **Figure 2**.

2.4.13 The likely achievable target condition for each habitat which is to be created has been chosen taking into account the Statutory Biodiversity Metric Technical Supplement condition assessment. The required habitat creation measures and management to achieve the target condition score will be detailed within a separate HMMP secured through condition at the Reserved Matters (RM) stage. The target condition for each habitat and justification for the selection of this target condition is presented within **Table 1** below.

Table 1: Habitat Creation and Enhancement Summary

Proposed Landscape Area/Planting	Habitat as entered into BNG Metric and proposed target condition
Habitats	
Soft landscaping and Rain Garden The soft landscape ground cover planting will be a mix of native and non-native species including ferns, perennials and grasses	Entered as 'introduced shrub'- Condition N/A The soft landscape ground cover planting will be a mix of native and non-native species including ferns, perennials and grasses. Given the uncertainty of where rain gardens are to be located they have also been entered as introduced shrub, on a precautionary basis.
Lawn	Modified grassland- Moderate condition. No significant constraints to establishment are envisaged and achieving moderate condition is considered.
Biodiversity roof	Other green roof- Condition N/A Building tenure unknown at this stage and so entered as 'other green roof on a precautionary basis.
Individual trees	Individual tree- moderate condition. Entered into the tree helper calculation tool within the metric as Small trees-moderate condition
Hedgerows	
Hedgerows	Entered as 'species rich native hedgerow - moderate condition' The proposed hedges on the northern, western and eastern boundaries will be a mixed native hedge with native wildflower plug planting at the base of the hedge.

2.5 Delay to Habitat creation

2.5.1 In the absence of any detailed construction timetable a delay in starting habitat creation of two years has been applied on a precautionary basis.

2.6 Enhancement of Retained Habitats

2.6.1 Retained habitats will not be enhanced as part of the proposals.

3 Biodiversity Net Gain Metric Outcome

3.1.1 This section contains the headline results of the Biodiversity Net Gain calculation for the Proposed Development. The completed Statutory Biodiversity Metric is provided in full at **Appendix C**.

3.1.2 The baseline value of the Site is **1.46** units. As shown below, the Proposed Development results in an increase in habitat units of **176.42**%.

3.1.3 Whilst hedgerows are being planted there are no hedgerows present at the baseline, as such the percentage gain for hedgerows cannot be calculated/ is not applicable.

Plate 1. BNG Metric headline results.

FINAL RESULTS		
Total net unit change (Including all on-site & off-site habitat retention, creation & enhancement)	*Habitat units*	2.58
	Hedgerow units	4.03
	Watercourse units	0.00
Total net % change (Including all on-site & off-site habitat retention, creation & enhancement)	*Habitat units*	176.42%
	Hedgerow units	N/A
	Watercourse units	0.00%
Trading rules satisfied?	Yes ✓	

3.2 BNG Delivery

3.2.1 A final version of the BNG metric, based on the detailed landscape design will be submitted at the RM stage. On-site gains and the required 30-year management for habitat and hedgerows will be secured via planning condition and the creation and management of these habitats will be detailed within a HMMP submitted as part of the RM submission.

3.2.2 It should be noted that the calculations presented within report have assumed that habitat creation and enhancement will be delayed by 2 years post construction. The BNG unit gain can be decreased or increased where habitat creation is further delayed or undertaken in advance of construction works. The final version of the metric submitted with the RM application will be informed by the detailed construction timetable and as a result the BNG score presented above may change.

4 Conclusion

4.1.1 The Biodiversity Net Gain assessment has been completed using the Statutory version of the Biodiversity Metric and based on the Illustrative Masterplan **Appendix A.**

4.1.2 The project and landscape design has been produced in accordance with the BNG Mitigation Hierarchy, with input from a suitably qualified ecologist. In undertaking this assessment, several assumptions have been made regarding the type of habitats which are to be created and their achievable condition score. These assumptions have been based on published guidance as well as the professional opinion of an ecologist and have been detailed within this report.

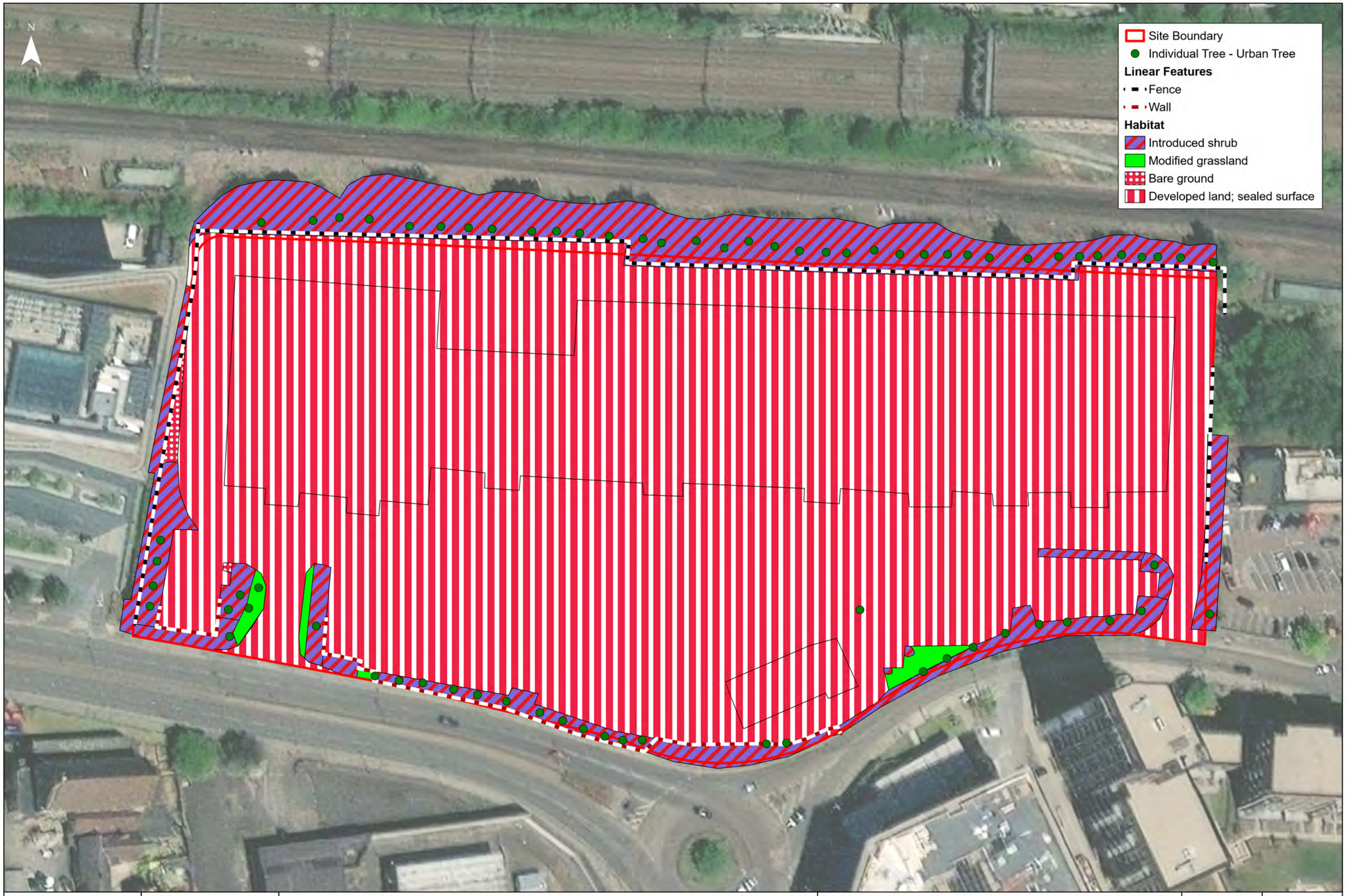
4.1.3 In consideration of the above the BNG assessment has identified that the Proposed Development will deliver the a Habitat BNG of 176.%

4.2 Next Steps and Risk Management

4.2.1 It is important that the Site is maintained in its current condition (i.e. the current management regime is continued) to maintain the “status quo” between now and project implementation and so as to avoid increase or decrease in baseline habitat value.

5 Figures

Figure 1: BNG Baseline Habitats
Figure 2: Post-development Habitats



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KINGS MEADOW VIEW

UK Habitat Survey Results

0 40 80 m

World Imagery: Microsoft, Vantor

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Figure: 01	Rev: A

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KINGS MEADOW VIEW

BNG - Proposed Habitat Plan

0 40 80 m

Google Satellite: Imagery ©2024 Google, Imagery ©2024 Airbus, Imagery ©2024 TerraMetrica, Imagery ©2024 Landsat / Copernicus, Maxar Technologies, Map Data ©2024

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Appendix A Illustrative Masterplan

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Illustrative Masterplan

1. Plummery Gardens
2. Existing TPO London Plane Trees
3. Shared Cycle Pedestrian Route
4. Eastern Square
5. Green Streets
6. Western Courtyard
7. Central Woodland Garden
8. Green Links
9. Biodiversity Roof
10. Vehicular Access
11. Existing Pedestrian Crossing
12. Infrastructure Landscape
13. Opportunity for new connections
14. Plummery Wall
15. Service yard
16. Car club spaces

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Appendix B The Statutory Biodiversity Metric Key Rules and Principles

B.1 Statutory Biodiversity Metric Key Rules

The statutory biodiversity metric user guide details the BNG Key Rules. This assessment has been undertaken with regard to these rules, as presented in Table B1.

Table B1: Statutory biodiversity metric key rules and justification on how the assessment has abided to the rules

Statutory Biodiversity Metric Key Rules	Justification on how the Assessment has abided to the Rules
Rule 1: The trading rules of this biodiversity metric must be followed.	Trading rules have been met.
Rule 2: Biodiversity unit outputs, for each type of unit, must not be summed, traded, or converted between types. The requirement to deliver at least a 10% net gain applies to each type of unit.	Biodiversity unit outputs have not been summed traded or converted between types.
Rule 3: To accurately apply the biodiversity metric formula, you must use the statutory biodiversity metric calculation tool or small sites biodiversity metric tool (SSM) for small sites. ▪ *The tools remove the need for a user to manually calculate the change in biodiversity value.* ▪ *The tool will summarise the results of the calculation and inform a user whether the biodiversity net gain objective has been met.*	The statutory biodiversity metric tool has been used to calculate the biodiversity net gain.
Rule 4: In exceptional ecological circumstances, deviation from this biodiversity metric methodology may be permitted by the relevant planning authority.	There have been no deviations from the published methodology.

B.2 Statutory Biodiversity Metric Key Principles

The statutory metric user guide details the BNG Key Principles. These Key Principles have been taken into account for this assessment as presented at Table B2.

Table B2: Statutory biodiversity metric key principals and justification on how the assessment has considered the principles

Statutory Biodiversity Metric Key Principles	Justification on how the Assessment has considered the principles
***Principle 1**: The metric assessment should be completed by a competent person.*	The metric has been undertaken by suitably qualified and experienced ecologist.
***Principle 2**: The use of this biodiversity metric does not override existing biodiversity protections, statutory obligations, policy requirements, ecological mitigation hierarchy or any other requirements. This includes consenting or licensing processes, for example woodlands.*	Legislative and policy requirements for protected and notable habitats and species, aside from BNG, are covered within the supporting Ecological Appraisal Report.
***Principle 3:** This biodiversity metric should be used in accordance with established good practice guidance and professional codes.*	The biodiversity metric was used in accordance with the guidance.

Statutory Biodiversity Metric Key Principles	Justification on how the Assessment has considered the principles
Principal 4: *This biodiversity metric is not a complex or comprehensive ecological model and is not a substitute for expert ecological advice.*	The metric has been undertaken by suitably qualified and experienced ecologist.
Principle 5*: Biodiversity units are a proxy for biodiversity and should be treated as relative values.*	The biodiversity units will only be used as a method for measuring potential net gains in biodiversity on the Site and has been used in combination with expert ecological advice to take into account wider ecological considerations, and other relevant legislation and planning policy.
Principle 6: *This biodiversity metric is designed to inform decisions in conjunction with locally relevant evidence, expert input, or guidance.*	The biodiversity metric has been used as a tool to aid recommendations for the Proposed Development.
Principle 7: *Habitat interventions need to be realistic and deliverable within a relevant project timeframe.*	An appropriate delay of 2 years has been allowed for in the metric.
Principle 8: *Created and enhanced habitats should be, where practical and reasonable, local to any impact and deliver strategically important outcomes for nature conservation.*	The landscape design has taken account of the landscape character area.
Principle 9: *This biodiversity metric does not enforce a minimum habitat size ratio for compensation of losses. Proposals should aim to:* • *maintain habitat extent - supporting more, bigger, better and more joined up ecological networks;* • *ensure that proposed or retained habitat parcels are of sufficient size for ecological function.*	Areas of propose habitat have a degree of ecological connectivity via the rail line to the north.

Appendix C Statutory Metric Calculation

(provided as a separate Excel file)