

# Press release: Gove sets out proposals for greener developments

Government proposals to place the environment at the heart of new development have been unveiled by Environment Secretary Michael Gove.

In plans published today (2 December 2018) for consultation, developers could be required to deliver a [‘biodiversity net gain’](#) when building new housing or commercial development – meaning habitats for wildlife must be enhanced and left in a measurably better state than they were pre-development.

The proposed new rules require developers to assess the type of habitat and its condition before submitting plans. Car parks and industrial sites would usually come lower on this scale, while more natural grasslands and woodlands would be given a much higher ranking for their environmental importance.

Developers would then be required to demonstrate how they are improving biodiversity – such as through the creation of green corridors, planting more trees, or forming local nature spaces. Green improvements on site would be encouraged, but in the rare circumstances where they are not possible the consultation proposes to charge developers a levy to pay for habitat creation or improvement elsewhere.

These proposals would help to achieve better outcomes for nature and people with the millions of pounds invested in environmental impact mitigation by developers every year.

While some developers have already been following a biodiversity net gain approach voluntarily, the proposed standardised, mandatory approach would give them clarity and certainty on how to improve the environment through development, while also considering whether any sites – such as small and brownfield sites – should be exempt from the rules. It will still deliver the homes the country needs – making the Government’s vision of delivering 300,000 new homes a year by the mid-2020s a reality – at the same time as contributing to the goal of passing on our environment in a better condition.

## **Net gain**

Today’s action is the first step in the government’s ambition to embed the wider principle of ‘environmental net gain’ in development, to drive measurable improvements for all aspects of the environment such as air quality, flood defences and clean water.

The government will now work collaboratively with developers, water companies, tourism services, energy providers and waste specialists to better understand how profitable development can be a driving force of environmental improvement.

Environment Secretary, Michael Gove, said:

Our commitment to protecting and enhancing our natural world can go hand in hand with our ambition to build more high quality homes.

Mandating biodiversity net gain puts the environment at the heart of planning and development. This will not only create better places for people to live and work, but ensure we leave our environment in a better state for future generations.

In addition to upholding planning protections for sensitive sites such as ancient woodland and sites of special scientific interest, the consultation builds on the experiences of local authorities and developers who have already adopted net gain approaches.

This includes the [Berkley Group](#) who have committed to creating a net biodiversity gain within all their development sites and are currently working with London Wildlife Trust to build Kidbrooke Village in East London – a new 4,800 home village development that contains 20 hectares of parkland.

### **Biodiversity impact assessment**

Elsewhere, [Warwickshire County Council](#) have trialled and implemented a system to ensure all developments lead to no net loss of biodiversity, with each development preparing a Biodiversity Impact Assessment prior to building.

Dr Julia Baker, Biodiversity Technical Specialist for Balfour Beatty, said:

Balfour Beatty strongly support the concept of Biodiversity Net Gain and the government's 25 Year Environment Plan for sustainable use of land. We are leading the way in developing new standards, continually seeking ways for our construction projects to generate Net Gains in Biodiversity, in ways that leave wider social and environmental benefits.

Early planning allows for Biodiversity Net Gain measures to be integrated into the design, programme and budget of schemes, reducing the cost and ultimately generating long-term benefits for nature and society.

The consultation launched today plays a vital role in helping the government fulfil its aim to use and manage land sustainably, as outlined in the [25 Year Environment Plan](#).

It follows the launch of the revised [National Planning Policy Framework](#) in July which outlined stronger protection for the environment, ensuring wildlife thrives at the same time as addressing the need for new homes

Andrew Sells, Chairman of Natural England which has given extensive advice to Government on Net Gain, said:

Net Gain is an ambitious idea that has the potential to bring significant benefits for our declining wildlife and the environment as a whole. If Net Gain succeeds for nature then it will also be succeeding for people, because it means that they are living and working with a thriving natural environment all around them.

I am delighted that Natural England's scientific expertise has helped to shape the concept of Net Gain and the principles that will gauge its success. We can also play an important role in helping developers and local authorities achieve Net Gain on the ground – securing a better environment for future generations.

The [consultation opens on 2 December](#) and will run until 10 February.