



Interim guidance on achieving Biodiversity Net Gain

This document provides interim guidance on implementing and achieving Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) in line with Local Plan policy 43, before BNG becomes a mandatory requirement in November 2023. Policy 43 states:

Development proposals should provide a net increase in biodiversity through the following:

- i. Enhancement of the existing features on the site; or*
- ii. The creation of additional habitats on the site; or*
- iii. The linking of existing habitats to create links between ecological networks and where possible, with adjoining features.*

Thresholds for BNG and use of a biodiversity metric calculator

Defra¹ defines minor developments as:

“(i) for residential: where the number of dwellings to be provided is between one and nine inclusive on a site having an area of less than one hectare, or where the number of dwellings to be provided is not known, a site area of less than 0.5 hectares;

(ii) For non- residential: where the floor space to be created is less than 1,000 square metres OR where the site area is less than one hectare.”

i) Householder and Minor Developments

Householder and minor developments, in line with the above definition, are not required, at this time, to demonstrate BNG unless priority or protected habitats are present. Defra have developed a simplified BNG requirement for minor developments via the Small Sites Biodiversity Metric.

Householder and minor developments will still need to address protected species separately, where relevant, through Bedford Borough Council’s normal planning. There is a free online tool² that provides resources to help applicants consider protected and priority species and statutory designated ‘protected’ sites earlier in the UK planning process.

ii) Major Developments

All major development proposals with some exceptions that are outside of the above definition, are required to demonstrate BNG in line with policy 43. Exemptions exist for specific development types of major infrastructure projects and certain urban brownfield sites, if they do not contain protected or priority habitats (e.g. open mosaic habitat). For all other major developments, where habitat is to be lost, its value should be calculated to ensure any compensatory habitat creation is of greater value. Delivering biodiversity compensation in a measurable way (NPPF, para 175) is essential to demonstrating that a net-gain to biodiversity value is likely to be achieved by a development in line with policy 43. This is best demonstrated through the use of a biodiversity metric calculator and the Council prefer the developer to use the Defra’s Biodiversity Metric version 3.1 or a subsequent revision.

¹ Defra, 2018 and updated 2019, Biodiversity net gain: updating planning requirements.

² <https://www.biodiversityinplanning.org/>





The applicant should aim to demonstrate a minimum 10% BNG in line with requirements laid out in the Environment Act 2021.

Exclusions: the above is not appropriate where:

- The habitat present on site includes habitats and species listed as being of principle importance for biodiversity and/or listed as a habitat of high distinctiveness within the Defra biodiversity metric.
- Include or adjoin a County Wildlife Site (CWS) or nationally designated wildlife site (e.g. SSSI) or irreplaceable habitats (e.g. ancient woodland).

Legally protected species: should continue to be dealt with through the council's normal planning processes.
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Guidance for Bat, Bird and Invertebrate Boxes in Developments

Bird boxes

Design

A lot of the design of a bird box depends on what species you hope to have nesting in it. Some general features across all boxes include:

- The bottom of the entrance hole should be 125mm from the floor of the nest box. This is to prevent baby birds from falling out or being scooped out by a predator.
- Drainage holes should be included on the floor of the box.
- In a garden environment, wooden boxes are frequently used. However, in developments a longer lasting material, such as Woodcrete, Woodstone or Ecostyrocrite, is preferable.
- Bird boxes and bricks which are integrated into buildings are strongly preferred because they last much longer and may provide better thermal properties.

The size of the box and the size and shape of the opening into it will affect which species use the box. Here are some of the options:

- 27mm for blue, coal and marsh tits
- 28mm for tree sparrows
- 30mm for great tits
- 32mm for house sparrows, nuthatches and pied flycatchers
- 45mm for starlings
- Robins prefer boxes with a rectangular open front.
- Swifts like small oval shaped entrances, about 60mm across by 30mm high.
- Swallows and house martins prefer a specific nest shape, which is more like a bowl, rather than a box. Swallows use the gap between the lip of the bowl and the eaves of the building it is placed under to enter and leave. House martins need a hole of 45mm diameter, at the top of the bowl.





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In urban environments swifts, swallows and house martins are particularly good species to target boxes towards.

Location

For most species, the box will need to be high enough to be safe from predators, but low enough to be maintained and cleaned. Above two metres should be sufficient to be safe but accessible.

For some birds, much higher is preferred. Swift boxes/bricks, for example, should be above five metres with a clear flight line into the box. Taller buildings towards the edges of urban developments provide particularly good opportunities for this species. They do not require frequent cleaning.

Position relative to incoming wind and sun is important – too much midday sunlight can cause chicks to overheat and birds do not like strong damp winds blowing into their nests. In the absence of shade provided by trees, the box opening should face north or east to avoid these problems. For birds like swifts that really like height, under eaves is a good location where they are shaded and sheltered from direct sunlight and wind.

The box should not be placed above windows, doors or main walkways. The area in front of the box must be clear of branches, TV aerials or any similar obstruction.

Number

For residential developments, a good standard for bird boxes would be, on average, one per dwelling. For commercial developments, the number of boxes should be in keeping with the scale of the development. As a guide a minimum of 10 boxes for the first 1000m² of floor space should be provided with an additional one box every 100m² on top of this. These can be grouped together for birds which nest as a colony, such as swifts, swallows and house martins. For swifts, it is recommended that anything from two to six boxes are spaced approximately a metre plus apart depending on the size of the building.

They should be integrated bird box features wherever possible, which cover a range of species. In urban areas or larger villages this should include provision for swifts, swallows and house martins. Some bird species are colonial and like to nest together and all the nest box features need to be in suitable locations (see above).

Bat boxes

Design

Bat boxes should have a vertical landing area from which the bat can climb up into the box opening. This surface should be rough, so that bats can easily climb up into the box. Having the opening on the bottom of the box prevents competition with birds that would use a horizontal opening. This also allows bat droppings to simply fall out of the box, removing the need for regular cleaning. The opening should be very small, between 15mm and 20mm, as bats do not like draughts.

In a garden environment, wooden boxes are frequently used. However, in developments a longer lasting material, such as Woodcrete, Woodstone or Ecostyrocete, is preferable. Bat bricks which are





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integrated into buildings are strongly preferred because they last much longer and may provide better thermal properties.

Location

Bat boxes should be as high up, ideally above five metres. The design of the box should mean that cleaning them out is not an issue. Under eaves or gable apexes are good locations.

Multiple boxes facing different directions with different amounts of direct sunlight will allow the bats to pick the best box for the temperature at that time of day and year.

Unlit linear features, such as hedgerows or lines of trees are good for helping the bats navigate to the boxes.

Like with the bird boxes, they should not be placed above windows, doors or main walkways. The area in front of the box must be clear of branches, TV aerials or any similar obstruction.

Number

An average of one bat box per four houses would be a good target. These should be clustered next to suitable foraging features.

Invertebrate boxes

Invertebrate boxes can be a good way to support insect species in developments. Often these are targeted towards solitary bees and wasps. They are typically built from tubes of wood stacked together, or by drilling holes into a block of wood. Both of these can work well. They should be placed in sunny, sheltered locations. Fewer smaller boxes spread out are preferable to one large box, as concentrating them all in one place can make them more easily targeted by predators.

Useful links and references

Bird boxes

[Provide nest boxes for birds - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk)

[Wild birds: advice for making planning decisions - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk)

[How to build a bird box | The Wildlife Trusts](#)

[Swift Conservation Trust](#)

Bat Boxes

[Bats: advice for making planning decisions - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk)

[Bat Boxes - Buildings, planning and development - Bat Conservation Trust \(bats.org.uk\)](http://bats.org.uk)

Invertebrate boxes

[Invertebrates: advice for making planning decisions - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](http://www.gov.uk)

<https://www.bumblebeeconservation.org/bee-nest-boxes/>

