

SMITHY BRIDGE ROAD, ROCHDALE – BIODIVERSITY NET GAIN BRIEFING NOTE

This technical note summarises the work undertaken to produce a biodiversity net gain (BNG) assessment for the Full planning application at Smithy Bridge Road, Rochdale and demonstrates how biodiversity has been maximised on the site. Full details are presented in the Design Stage BNG Assessment (TEP Report Ref: 8776.009).

The Site covers an approximate area of 14ha and is located to the east of the town of Smallbridge, Rochdale. It comprises a large area of semi-improved neutral grazed grassland, populated by common grasses, tall ruderal and scrub species. A number of scattered broad-leaved trees are present around the site boundary. Two defunct hedgerows are present in the west of the site. The southern boundary is bordered by the River Roch corridor.

The proposals are for the erection of 199 dwellings and the first phase of a residential relief road, associated public open space, internal highways, car parking, gardens and landscaping with access to be taken from Smithy Bridge Road and pedestrian / cycle access from Brooklyn Avenue. Two areas of more formal public open space (POS) will comprise a combination of amenity grassland and wildflower meadow within and adjacent to the built areas, with an extensive area of semi-natural POS along the River Roch floodplain.

The assessment of the proposals is based on the development proposals shown within the Proposed Site Layout (P21-2628_003R), the earthworks plan (30329_105_1D_Proposed Regrade Contours) and the Landscape Masterplan (P21-2628.100A Landscape Masterplan 070922).

Relevant Policy

Paragraph 174(d) of the revised NPPF (2021) states that *"Planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by [...] minimising impacts on and providing net gains for biodiversity [...]"* The Government 25-year Environment Plan states that government will *"[...] embed environmental net gain principle for development"*.

The Environment Act 2021 received Royal Assent on 9th November 2021 and includes a mandatory 10% biodiversity net gain on all Town and Country Planning Act 1990 developments. The 10% requirement will not become mandated across England until statutory instruments and regulations have been agreed and the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 has been amended. Mandatory 10% net gain is currently anticipated to become law in Autumn 2023.

Policy G7 - Increasing the value of biodiversity and geodiversity of the Rochdale Core Strategy (adopted 19th October 2016) states development in the borough should result in net gain.

Places for Everyone, the draft Joint Development Plan for nine Greater Manchester councils including Rochdale Council, is currently in the consultation stage and Policy JP-G 9: A Net Enhancement for Biodiversity and Geodiversity states the aim that developments should deliver a minimum 10% biodiversity net gain in section 8.52.

Biodiversity Net Gain Design

Habitat Baseline

The majority of habitats within the site comprise semi-improved neutral grassland in moderate condition. This is augmented by smaller areas of poor semi-improved grassland, tall ruderal, scrub, pond and swamp habitats as well as several scattered trees and two defunct hedgerows.

During site design, every effort has been made to maximise biodiversity value in both the enhanced and created habitats. These are summarised below.

Habitat Enhancements

Approximately one quarter of the habitats within the site, along the River Roch corridor, will be retained and enhanced in line with best practice and what is reasonably achievable with respect to the number of criteria required to be passed to meet target condition. Enhancements will include the following:

- Modified grassland (low distinctiveness habitat) in Good condition enhanced to Other neutral grassland (medium distinctiveness habitat) in Good condition;
- Modified grassland (low distinctiveness habitat) in Moderate condition enhanced to Other neutral grassland (medium distinctiveness habitat) in Good condition;
- Other lowland acid grassland enhanced from Moderate to Good condition;
- Other neutral grassland enhanced from Moderate to Good condition;
- Other neutral grassland enhanced from Poor to Moderate condition;
- Bramble scrub (medium distinctiveness habitat), which automatically scores as Poor condition enhanced to mixed scrub (medium distinctiveness habitat) in Moderate condition;
- Pond habitat enhanced from Poor to Moderate condition; and
- Reedbeds enhanced from Poor to Moderate condition.

Reasons why habitats may not be targeted at Good condition include the best practice approach to only increase condition by one level e.g. Poor to Moderate, or Moderate to Good to ensure it is achievable and the number of criteria required to achieve Good condition may not be possible; for example the enhanced mixed scrub requires all five criteria to be met in order to achieve Good condition but because of its small area, this scrub would fail on the criterion requiring provision of glades and therefore can only achieve Moderate condition.

Created Habitats

A significant swathe of public open space will be created along the River Roch valley which will link up with the enhanced habitats adjacent to the northern banks of the river. These habitats will comprise:

- Wildflower meadow using Emorsgate EM1 Basic General Purpose Meadow Mixture or similar and in wetter areas/ attenuation basins Emorsgate EM8 meadow Mixture for Wetlands or similar to create Other neutral grassland in Good condition;
- Amenity, short mown grassland to create Modified grassland in Moderate condition;
- Native shrub planting to create Mixed scrub in Moderate condition;

- Permanently wet areas, planted up aquatic and marginal species which align with a pond habitat within the SUDS basin to create Pond (non-priority) habitat in Moderate condition; and
- A range of trees predicted to achieve small or moderate size and Moderate condition.

Within the built development, two green wedges of more formal public open space will comprise a combination of amenity grassland and wildflower meadow within and adjacent to the built areas. Habitats will include:

- Wildflower meadow using Emorsgate EM1 Basic General Purpose Meadow Mixture or similar to create Other neutral grassland in Good condition;
- Amenity, short mown grassland with bulb planting to create Modified grassland in Moderate condition;
- Native shrub planting to create Mixed scrub in Moderate condition;
- Ornamental shrubs to create Introduced shrub (set condition); and
- A range of trees predicted to achieve small or moderate size and Moderate condition.

Native species-rich hedgerows and non-native ornamental hedgerows are also included within the design and lead to a net gain in hedgerows section of the Biodiversity Metric 3.1 for the site design.

Other Net Gain Options

Comments received from the Local Planning Authority have suggested that further efforts could be made to increase BNG on-site and that options such as grasscrete and green roofs could be considered.

Further consideration has been given to these options as described below:

- While grasscrete can be useful in certain situations, when this was reviewed against the most appropriate habitat type to allocate it to in the metric, it would be allocated to the 'artificial unvegetated, unsealed surface' habitat category. This category has no value within the metric as it has a score of zero, being a 'very low distinctiveness' habitat, so wouldn't add to biodiversity net gain.
- Green roofs can add biodiversity value to a development. However in the context of residential development, it would not be possible to ensure that residents maintained these roofs appropriately for the 30 year management period or that they retained this roof type on any part of their property. For this reason it is not appropriate to include green roofs within the range of habitats created on site.
- Similarly, green walls are also not an appropriate habitat type to include on residential properties because there would be no guarantee that residents would retain and maintain them for the 30 year management period.

Summary

It is our belief that all options for BNG have been explored for the Smithy Bridge Road development proposals and that the most applicable and achievable opportunities for habitat enhancement and creation have been designed into the scheme and included in the BNG assessment.

Additional suggestions for net gain within residential property design have been considered. However, due to lack of a value within the metric or the inability to ensure these features would be retained and enhanced for 30 years by residents, these are not viable options for delivery of net gain.