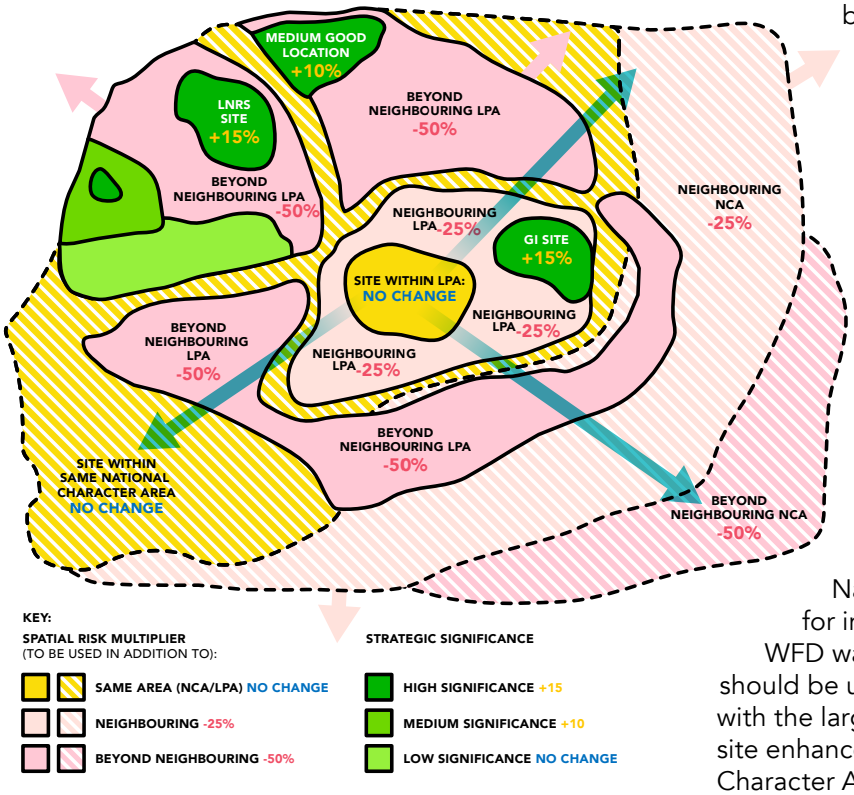
The voice of our sustainable built environment

THE PROXIMITY PRINCIPLE, ON-SITE AND OFF-SITE MEASURES

STRATEGY



The Proximity Principle:

Biodiversity net gain follows the **proximity principle** or **spatial hierarchy**. This means that if biodiversity net gain (BNG) cannot be achieved on-site after consulting the mitigation hierarchy, off-site opportunities should be identified, giving priority to local enhancements. Statutory credits may be purchased only as a final option.

The metric **penalises** proposals where the off-site habitats are far away from the site of impact. This is done to avoid reducing biodiversity in the local areas, recognising the importance of ecosystem services provided to the local community.

The spatial risk multiplier is used for off-site habitats outside the local planning authority area or the same National Character Area/Marine Plan Area for inter-tidal habitats. For rivers and streams, WFD water body and catchment boundaries should be used. Apply the multiplier once, in line with the larger of the two designations the off-site enhancement is within, typically the National Character Area. If the off-site enhancement is in a neighboring LPA but the same National Character Area, use the relevant NCA multiplier.

BNG STRATEGIC SIGNIFICANCE SCORING

To align with **local nature priorities**, a multiplier is proposed and incentivised by the **Biodiversity Metric's strategic significance score**, as seen in nature recovery networks. This would make use of published local strategies that identify local priorities, such as:

- Local Nature Recovery Strategies
- Local Biodiversity Plans
- National Character Areas Objectives
- Local Planning Authority Local Ecological Networks
- Shoreline Management Plans
- Estuary Strategies
- Green Infrastructure Strategies

Multiplier scores apply across all pre- and post-intervention and on- and off-site calculations. This is based on the habitat type and its location, depending on their status in a local plan, strategy, or policy. These apply to all habitats except rivers and streams. When either high or medium strategic significance is used the user should complete the 'assessor comments' section of the metric calculation tool to justify why a habitat in a particular location warrants that level of strategic significance.

Medium strategic significance can be used where professional judgement is applied and the location is deemed ecologically desirable for a particular habitat type, whether recorded in the site baseline, being created, or enhanced. Where professional judgement is applied in this way, the decision should be justified, and evidence provided 'to the relevant local authority' (determined in original legal agreements).

Available **datasets** can be used to identify the relevance of a specific location for certain habitat types.

VARIATION IN SPATIAL RISK CATEGORIES BETWEEN HABITAT GROUPS

SCORE	Area habitats (excluding intertidal habitats) Including **Hedgegrows and lines of trees**	Intertidal habitats	Rivers and streams habitats
1.0	Compensation inside LPA or NCA of impact site	Compensation inside same Marine Plan Area, or deemed to be sufficiently local, to site of biodiversity.	Within waterbody
0.75	Compensation outside LPA or NCA of impact site but in neighbouring LPA or NCA	Compensation outside same Marine Plan Area but in neighbouring Marine Plan Area	Within catchment
0.5	Compensation outside LPA or NCA of impact site beyond neighbouring LPA or NCA	Compensation outside Marine Plan Area of impact site and beyond neighbouring Marine Plan Area	Outside catchment

STRATEGIC SIGNIFICANCE CATEGORIES	SCORE
HIGH strategic significance • High potential – area/action formally identified within a local plan, strategy or policy.	**1.15**
MEDIUM strategic significance • Good potential – location ecologically desirable but area/action not identified in local plan,strategy or policy.	**1.1**
LOW strategic significance • Low potential – area/action not identified in any local plan, strategy or policy; or. • No local strategy in place.	**1**

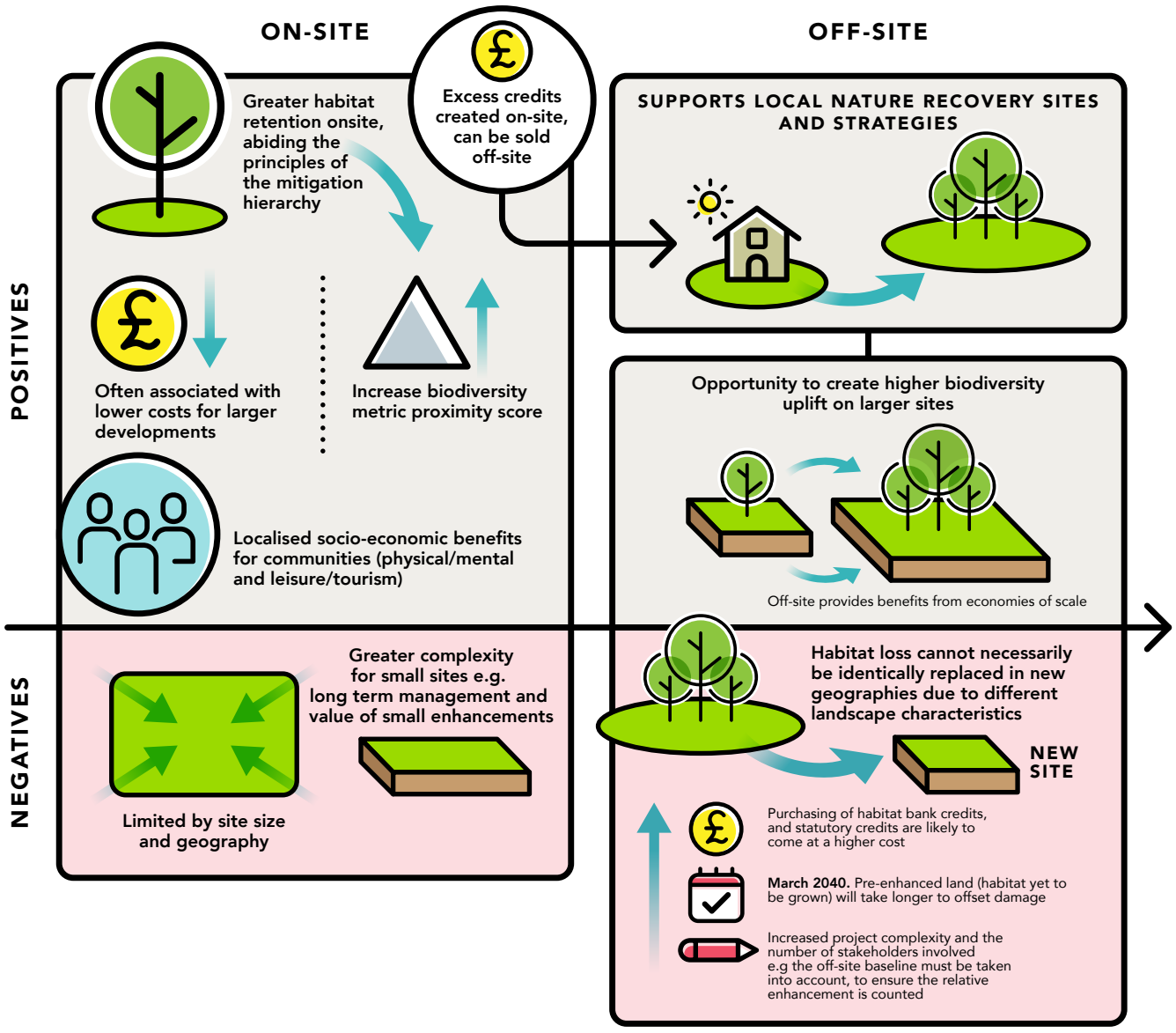
ON-SITE & OFF-SITE MEASURES: WHAT TO CONSIDER

The term **on-site** refers to all the land that falls within the boundary of a project. The Biodiversity Metric states this 'usually means within a red line boundary', leaving flexibility in the exact boundary definition subject to context. **Off-site** is all land outside of the on-site boundary, regardless of ownership. Where a project is linked to a planning application, the baseline will encompass all habitat features present within the development's red line boundary. The concerned decision maker should mutually agree upon the red line boundary.

Information on off-site and on-site measures will need to be included in the core BNG information at application and BNG planning application to be submitted pre-commencement. Any land delivering BNG will need to be managed, monitored, and reported on for the duration of the net gain agreement (a minimum of 30-years).

During site selection and the pre-application stage, it is important to consult the following:

1. **The mitigation hierarchy:** this should be the first point of reference to ensure a nature-first approach is prioritised in decision making.
2. **The Defra/Biodiversity Metric:** can help identify a site that won't harm nearby habitats. It also tells you how much BNG enhancement is needed, and helps you decide whether to enhance on-site or off-site.
3. The **spatial risk multiplier** and proximity principle must be considered to determine the value of site proximity.



BNG ON-SITE & OFF-SITE – PLANNING AHEAD

On-site biodiversity gains should be secured for delivery within 12 months of the development being commenced or, where not possible, before occupation. A clear timeframe for delivery should be reflected in any planning conditions, obligations or covenants which secure on-site gains. Any longer delay in creation must be reflected in the biodiversity metric calculation, meaning that a lower number of biodiversity units is generated. There may also be an opportunity to sell or bank surplus biodiversity units for other schemes.

Land used to deliver BNG **off-site** will need to be secured for a minimum of 30 years and will need to be formally registered on the Biodiversity Gain Site Register. To count towards a development's net gain requirement, off-site biodiversity gains will need to be secured through a Conservation Covenant or planning obligation and registered prior to final approval of the Biodiversity Gain Plan. Off-site habitat creation or enhancement does not need to be completed prior to its registration or the sale and allocation of biodiversity units to a development.

The Government are considering a whether to require off-site works to commence as soon as is feasible, and no more than 12 months after the discharge of the mandatory pre-commencement biodiversity net gain condition through off-site eligibility criteria or as a consideration for Biodiversity Gain Plan approval.

When an off-site assessment is linked to an on-site project the correct spatial risk multiplier must be entered into the off-site section of the biodiversity metric.

If you are a: Local Authority
It is advised that local authorities seek the advice and guidance of local nature groups, NGO's and non-statutory bodies whose expertise lie in ecological development. Leaning on the knowledge of such stakeholders will allow LA's to set higher, more ambitious targets.

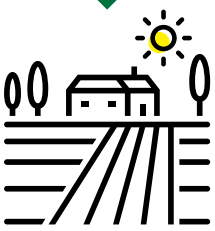
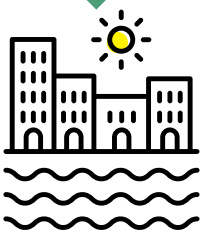
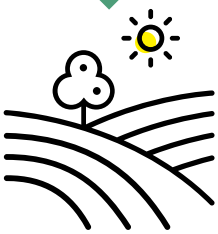
If you are a: Landowner and/or Developer
Developers and landowners are encouraged to prioritise exploring on-site strategies, with reference to the mitigation hierarchy. Biodiversity strategies are best created with the consultation of a trained ecologist and/or landscape architects who can ensure design is appropriate to the local ecological makeup.

If you are an: Investor

- Financially, on-site strategies can present a more cost-effective method of providing the greatest long-term economic return.
- Biodiversity net gain offsetting through statutory credits are typically high cost as a non-exhaustible asset; are likely to be inflated through statutory measures to promote on-site BNG.
- In the long-term, the wider, indirect socio-economic returns resulting from localised nature enhancements (i.e. lakes, ponds, meadows), will spread through the local economy if BNG enhancements are kept adjacent to the development.

ON-SITE & OFF-SITE BY SITE TYPE

Research by The Land Trust indicates that 75% of BNG enhancements will be on-site. However, the most cost-effective and strategic approach for on-site or off-site may vary depending on the site type and location. The following table illustrates key principles relevant to key types of development, derived from case studies, industry and guidance.

	RURAL	URBAN	BROWNFIELD	GREENFIELD
				
SMALL (25 units or less [add hectares])	• To keep costs down. Use of the mitigation hierarchy is maximised (on-site) with highest value features on-site retained where possible. • Off-site enhancements may offer better value & can support local strategic priorities.	• On-site enhancements may be small but will still require management; urban, built sites likely to have low baseline values. • Local green-space deprivation should be considered. • Off-site opportunities may be required. Locally, these may be limited (use of green/brown roofs and walls etc common in cities).	• Small brownfield sites may offer low metric scores due to previous development or high scores due to ecological diversity; brownfield sites have the potential to be highly ecologically rich. • For small sites, small on-site interventions may be advisable.	• Undeveloped sites, which include agricultural land, may still be ecologically degraded and the surface area change from even arable to built can be difficult to adequately address on site (small sites are typically more spatially constrained in post-development plans). • To keep costs down, the mitigation hierarchy should be closely followed, and strategic off-site solutions sought where necessary.
LARGE	• Large sites will likely have a significant ecological and landscape impact so on-site is preferred. • Additional opportunities may be available to sell surplus credits.	• Large urban sites should, and have largely, prioritised on-site measures to deliver social value.	• Large brownfield sites should still prioritise on-site measures due to significant local impact. • Additional, cost-effective opportunities may be available to sell surplus credits.	• Large greenfield sites should still prioritise on-site due to significant local impact. • Impacts on local nature priorities should be considered through the strategic multiplier.

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