

Use of the Small Sites Metric (SSM) in planning applications

The SSM calculation tool and its corresponding Small Sites Metric User Guide can be found here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/statutory-biodiversity-metric-tools-and-guides>

The following local clarification has been provided, in addition to the SSM User Guide:

A competent person

A competent person referenced in the User Guide is through the British Standard 8683:2021 as follows:

“a person who can demonstrate they have acquired through training, qualifications or experience, or a combination of these, the knowledge and skills enabling that person to perform a specified task” (British Standard 8683:2021)

The knowledge and skills in the User Guide are:

- Competent in identifying habitats present on site (pre-development)
- Management requirements for habitats to be created or enhanced within the landscape design (post-development)

An example of an appropriately qualified professional (other than an ecologist) might be a land surveyor or landscape architect. It is recommended that additional training or experience should be obtained, which would allow a basic assessment of habitat identification, assessment and management to be carried out.

Examples of additional training might include

- A postgraduate qualification in ecology or related subject; and/or
- Specific training sessions, such as those offered by UK Hab or CIEEM in: Habitat Identification using UK Hab; Habitat Mapping with UK Hab; use of the DEFRA metric and UK Hab; and UK Hab Condition Assessment.

It is recommended that this competency information should be submitted, either alongside the SSM or upon request of the Local Planning Authority.

An applicant completing an SMM

An applicant is not deemed to be a competent person unless they can demonstrate that they meet the definition of a competent person described above, upon request of the Local Planning Authority.

Use of an ecologist

It is recommended that an ecologist should be used where there is uncertainty in relation to habitat identification or mapping; or where more complex habitats are likely present.

Please note that an ecologist is required in all cases when assessing priority or protected species or habitats; and when completing the statutory metric.

Switching across to the statutory metric tool

Where habitat identification has been carried out and any priority or protected habitats or species have been identified in the SSM, the information should be transferred across to the statutory metric.

Clarification regarding garden habitat descriptions

A garden habitat should be recorded as either vegetated or un-vegetated.

A “vegetated garden” (secondary code 231) is defined in the UK Hab definitions as:
“garden that is principally vegetated, for example with large areas of grass and flower beds”.

An “un-vegetated garden” (secondary code 232) and defines as:
“garden that is principally un-vegetated, for example with large areas of paving or decking”.

If a garden contains other habitat types, these should be recorded as individual parcels of habitat. In this scenario it is recommended that an ecologist is consulted to assist in the habitat identification, assessment and management options, including alternative design options, to provide the uplift necessary to meet mandatory 10% BNG requirements.

Please note that a garden habitat cannot be uplifted post-development with the addition of individual trees or other habitat creation. The SSM does not allow for this. It is recommended that in this scenario, an ecologist is consulted to assist in the habitat identification, assessment and management options, including design options to provide the uplift required to meet BNG requirements. Where there is overall biodiversity net loss, and the post-development on-site habitat is located within private garden, off-site units are likely to be required.