
Guidance notes for applicants and developers:

Ecology information needed to support planning applications in Blaby, Hinckley & Bosworth, Harborough, Melton, North West Leicestershire, Oadby & Wigston and Rutland

What information is needed?

If the request for information has come from a local authorities' ecologist, they will specify what the ecology survey should include. If the planners have asked you to provide the ecology report, **please check the scope with our Ecology team** by emailing planningecology@leics.gov.uk. This will prevent you wasting time and money doing surveys that aren't needed.

Ecology surveys could include the following elements, depending on your scoping advice:

- **A Preliminary Ecology Assessment (PEA)**

This is **useful on large sites** as it will help to scope out what detailed surveys are needed as a second phase of survey.

On smaller sites it can be a waste of time and money – it's best to go straight to the detailed surveys, after taking advice on the scope from the Ecology team.

- **An extended Phase 1 Habitat survey**

A PEA should include this. On smaller sites that don't need a PEA, it may be requested if there is permanent grassland or another good habitat on site. It **should be done between April and mid-October** – surveys done outside this season may be rejected.

An Extended Habitat survey should include 'target notes', and should identify any habitats that meet Local Wildlife Site criteria; further information can be found on the [Habitat survey protocol](#) document.

When you are commissioning the survey, make sure this is part of the brief - it should save you time when the application is being considered, and will smooth the process.

- **Biodiversity Net-gain Assessment (BNG)**

Demonstrating a 10% gain in biodiversity value as a result of development becomes mandatory in Autumn 2023. Until then, net-gain (with no specified percentage increase) is covered by the [National Planning Policy Framework](#).

BNG covers most kinds of development, apart from householders.

It is a standard methodology, using a metric developed by Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA).

A BNG assessment involves an ecologist surveying the development site to establish a baseline biodiversity value, and then assessing the biodiversity value after development. Any shortfall in biodiversity value may need to be made up by enhancing land outside your development site.

We recommend that you ensure that the ecologist has experience in BNG assessments as it requires a high-level of technical expertise.

Find out more on the [biodiversity net-gain](#) document produced by Natural England.

Download the [technical guidance and metric](#)

- **Protected and priority species survey(s)**

Surveys are usually requested for bats, badgers, and great crested newts, but they are also sometimes needed for otters, water voles, white-clawed crayfishes, barn owls, swifts, or other species. **There are restricted survey seasons for bats, swifts, and great crested newts** - guidance is in the Local Validation Criteria.

Beware of survey reports that don't give you answers - if they are inconclusive and recommend further surveys, they are liable to be rejected.

We recommend you ensure that your ecologists have completed all the surveys needed before you submit your application. It may be some time before the local authority ecologist is consulted on your application; if you need more surveys, this delay can cause you to miss the survey season and for your application to be refused or deferred.

Bat and great crested newt surveys should be carried out to national guidelines - make sure you ask for this in the brief.

Further information can be found on the [Leicestershire and Rutland Environmental Records \(LRERC\)](#) page.

- **Great crested newts: District-level Licensing (DLL)**

Natural England have a different option to 'traditional' on-site surveys and mitigation for great crested newts. With very few exceptions, you will not need to do on-site surveys and mitigation if you decide to use this option. Instead, you can register with DLL - this will involve you making a conservation payment to invest in great crested newts' conservation locally. The exceptions are in 'Red Risk' zones where important great crested newts' colonies are known to exist.

Find more information about the [great crested newts district level licensing schemes](#) and on the LRERC guidance notes – see link above.

Ecology reports should include **impact assessment, mitigation, and enhancement proposals**.

The extent of this will depend on the survey findings. If there are impacts on significant habitats and species, the report should include recommendations for mitigation. These recommendations should be incorporated into the development plans – for instance, if a bat loft is needed, your planning drawings should show this.

Planning authorities should ensure that developments provide enhancement and net-gain for biodiversity.

For developments that fall into the BNG criteria, the report should have a biodiversity impact assessment and provide evidence of net-gain.

Who does the surveys?

You will need to commission it from an independent ecological consultant. We strongly recommend you ensure that the ecologists are [members of the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management \(CIEEM\)](#)

Our Ecology team can send you a local list of consultants but cannot recommend any.

We recommend you prepare a brief and give your ecologist clear information about the development you are planning, and that you ensure the ecologists have full and safe access to the site, including any buildings.

Do I need a data search?

A data search is:

- **needed for large sites and major developments.** Usually this will be an area covering 1-2 kilometres buffer outside the site boundary, depending on the size of development, and it should cover protected and priority species and designated sites. Some developments with potentially high indirect impacts - e.g. wind farms, major road and rail, industry, minerals and very large development - will need larger areas of data search.
- **possibly needed for smaller sites**, if there are good habitats on site or close by - 1 kilometre buffer around the site should be adequate.
- **rarely needed for a householder application**, unless the property is very large.

Ways to search data

Usually the ecology consultant will commission the search, and it will carry a fee. The search should be from the [Leicestershire and Rutland Environmental Records Centre \(LRERC\)](#) which has further information, including costs of standard searches.

Searches of the [NBN](#) or [Magic](#) are free, but can't be used for commercial purposes, and they don't produce adequate results. If your site is close to the county boundary, you may also need to commission a search from the neighbouring record centre.

The Ecology team will not reject your application if it doesn't have a data search. It will provide useful information to your ecologists. For most developments (apart from householders), it would be negligent of them not to commission one without discussing it with a local authority ecologist first.

Contacts

Leicestershire County Council's Ecology team gives ecology advice to Leicestershire, Blaby, Harborough, Hinckley & Bosworth, Melton, North West Leicestershire, Oadby & Wigston and Rutland planning authorities

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