

# A better natural environment in Berkshire

## Through Biodiversity Net Gain, Natural Capital and Local Nature Recovery Strategy Executive Summary

The Berkshire Local Nature Partnership, chaired by the Berks, Bucks, and Oxon Wildlife Trust, organised a series of three online workshops on Biodiversity Net Gain, Natural Capital and Local Nature Recovery Strategies for Berkshire's six unitary authorities. The purpose was to inform, engage, and facilitate dialogue among local authority leaders about the essential elements required for successful natural environment planning in the near term. The workshops each involved expert presentations followed by interactive Q&A with speakers and facilitated discussion among local authority attendees. Key learnings are summarised below.

### New Policy

The 25-Year Environment Plan sets out this government's aim to leave the environment in a better state than it found it and to recover nature. It aims to achieve this by creating a national Nature Recovery Network, delivered locally through Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS), to be devised and owned by top tier local government. In parallel, development will be required to deliver a Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG). LNRS and mandatory 10% BNG are expected to be introduced with the Environment Bill.

LNRS will agree local priorities for nature's recovery and the wider environment, and be the means of driving more coordinated, practical, focused action and investment to help nature and people thrive, and deliver wider environmental benefits. BNG is development that leaves biodiversity in a better state than before, measured by habitats (not species), using Defra's approved biodiversity metric. Local authorities will need to prepare for both in the near future.

### Berkshire Workshops

The workshop speakers were from a BNG consultancy, a neighbouring authority, a statutory agency, the local Wildlife Trust, and a neighbouring LNP. All six Berkshire unitary authorities were represented, with attendees comprising Councillors, senior managers, and technical staff. Interactive polls during each workshop revealed that the majority of participants supported:

- ✓ A jointly-developed Biodiversity Net Gain strategy for Berkshire
- ✓ A jointly-developed Natural Capital Investment Strategy for Berkshire
- ✓ A joined-up and jointly-developed Local Nature Recovery Strategy for Berkshire

There are clear benefits to a joined-up county-wide approach. Resources and expertise are pooled, a single consistent system of governance, delivery, and monitoring is established, duplication of effort is avoided, and efficient targeting of resources is ensured to maximise environmental benefits throughout Berkshire.

### Recommended Next Steps

1. Secure political buy-in for collaboration across all six authorities; gain support from Chief Executives, Leaders and members.
2. Confirm an independent body to work across local authorities; there is a clear opportunity here for Berkshire Local Nature Partnership.
3. Allocate resources and funding in local authority budgets to enable this work to proceed.
4. Compile data and complete mapping.
5. Establish shared information, processes and governance.
6. Train planning teams in Biodiversity Net Gain.
7. Map all stakeholders and devise stakeholder engagement strategy.
8. Set the price for off-site Biodiversity Units in Berkshire.
9. Produce Biodiversity Net Gain SPD and link to existing Local Plans and strategies.

With these steps achieved, there is then a real opportunity to develop an effective Berkshire LNRS that shows where best to protect and restore habitats to provide the environmental benefits we all depend on, guide where development should be located and how it can contribute to nature's recovery through BNG, and together be in position to strategically target future investment in the natural environment.

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