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On behalf of Vistry Homes Ltd. (East Midlands)

Biodiversity Net Gain Calculation for Land at Mepal Road, Sutton, Cambridgeshire

James Blake Associates Ltd. (JBA) was commissioned by Vistry Homes Limited (East Midlands) to provide a biodiversity net gain assessment for the proposed development on land at Mepal Road, Sutton, Cambridgeshire (East Cambridgeshire Planning Authority).

This statement explains how the net gain calculation was carried out, the assumptions made and the conclusions from the calculation. Only habitats/linear features currently and proposed within the site boundary have been included within the calculations. The detailed soft landscape plans (JBA, 2022) have been used to make the post-development assessment.

Background

A biodiversity net gain calculation has been carried out using Defra Biodiversity Metric 3.0 (updated July 2021). For more information on the metric, please see here .

Defra's Biodiversity Metric 3.0 provides a way of measuring and accounting for biodiversity losses and gains resulting from development or land management change. The metric encompasses both area (e.g. grasslands) and linear habitats (such as hedgerows, rivers and streams). Note that 'material' enhancements for species, such as bat/bird boxes, reptile hibernacula, hedgehog 'highways' etc. cannot currently be factored into the calculation.

The habitats and linear features currently present within the site boundary are used to calculate the baseline biodiversity units; the percentage gain that the proposed development can deliver is calculated using the detailed soft landscape plans (JBA, 2022) for the development.

At present, national policy states '*opportunities to incorporate biodiversity improvements in and around developments should be encouraged, especially where this can secure measurable net gains for biodiversity' (NPPF, 2021).* The figure of 10% net gain is sometimes regarded as the minimum but this has now been highlighted as mandatory with the emerging Environment Bill from late 2023.

Methodology and Rationale

The baseline figures for the metric calculation were based on the Preliminary Ecological Appraisal survey undertaken by RSK ADAS Ltd. (ADAS, 2019). The area measurement for each of the baseline habitat types was made using Defra's MAGIC map: for more information about MAGIC, please see here.

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Baseline habitats consist of arable land, scrub, buildings and hardstand, ruderal vegetation and grassland. The site has several tree lines at the boundaries as well as a section of native hedgerow.

The strategic significance of the location was checked against the 'Local Plan' of Sutton. The location did not appear to be in or near to a locality mentioned in the Strategy. However, this category can be amended accordingly if required.

The areas for habitat to be retained and/or created were taken from the detailed soft landscape plans (JBA, 2022).

None of the arable habitats will be retained; however, the development will provide new habitats in the Public Open Space (POS) area. The POS areas will be seeded with wildflower grassland, wet wildflower grassland (in the SuDS area) with 255 urban street trees. Amenity grassland and turfing will also be used within the POS areas for recreational use, within the playing fields and gardens in the residential areas. Tree planting will also add biodiversity value to the scheme. Native plant species will be used to create the wildflower, wet wildflower grassland and marginal plug planting. Furthermore, an area is proposed to create an orchard habitat at the southern boundary of the site.

All boundary hedgerows and tree lines will be retained, and existing gaps used for access. Additional species-rich native hedgerow and ornamental hedgerows are proposed at suitable locations throughout the development and at residential frontages. A number of ornamental shrubs be used in the residential areas.

In terms of habitat creation, landscape planting schemes do not always translate directly into ecologically relevant habitat types, so the best fit for the landscape plans was selected from the draw-down menu in the metric.

A value of 'moderate' has been ascribed to the potential condition that could be achieved by wildflower grassland (categorised as 'other neutral grassland' in the metric). 'Other neutral grassland' is described in UKHab (2020) classification as species-rich, semi-improved neutral grassland. A condition score of 'moderate' has been ascribed as there is likely to be minor differences between the created grassland and what is described in the relevant habitat classification for priority grassland habitat.

A condition score of 'moderate' has been ascribed to the wet wildflower grassland (also categorised as 'other neutral grassland') as this will be more species-rich; plug-planted with native aquatic emergent species in addition to being sown with a native seed mixture suitable for seasonally wet soils is proposed. Furthermore, emergent species are proposed within small areas of the attenuation basin which has been classified as 'other neutral grassland' with 'moderate' condition.

Evaluation

The overall score is a gain of 14.82% for habitat units and a 401.45% gain for hedgerows/linear features. It is worth noting that these gains are purely from habitats/hedgerows and therefore 'material' enhancements are not included in this calculation. Although, it is recommended the proposed development includes the following enhancements;

- Bird and bat boxes to be erected onto new dwellings and retained mature trees (where possible)

- Hedgehog gaps (13cm x 13cm) to be created in garden fences to ensure small mammal movement is maintained throughout the site.
- In addition, hibernacula to benefit reptiles, amphibians etc.

Note that the final location of enhancements should be determined during construction by an Ecological Clerk of Works (ECoW).

Conclusions

Based on the detailed soft landscape plans (JBA, 2022) and the assessor assumptions, it is concluded that the development can deliver an overall gain of 14.82% for habitat units and a 401.45% gain for hedgerows/linear features. The development is expected to deliver more of a gain when 'material' enhancements are included such as bird and bat boxes. Landscape and ecological management plans may be required to secure the potential benefits for biodiversity in perpetuity.

Yours sincerely,

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References

ASAS (2019) *Preliminary Ecological Appraisal of Land North of the Brook and West of Mepal Road, Sutton-in-the-Ilse.* On behalf of Linden Homes.

JBA (2022) *Soft Detailed Landscape Proposal for Plots and POS of Mepal Road, Sutton, Cambs.* On behalf of Vistry Homes East Midlands.