



LAND36+

FOR HOUSING  
DEVELOPERS

UNDERPINNED BY **R&D** | POWERED BY **TECHNOLOGY** | DRIVEN BY **DATA** | INFORMED BY **SCIENCE**



# LAND360+: YOUR PARTNER IN BUILDING A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE FOR UK HOUSING



## Overview

THE MOST RECENT **STATE OF NATURE REPORT (2021-2022)** SHOWED EVIDENCE THAT

**41%** OF ALL UK SPECIES SURVEYED

HAVE DECLINED IN THE PAST FIVE DECADES AND

**15%** OF UK SPECIES

ARE NOW SAID TO BE THREATENED WITH EXTINCTION.

Climate change and land management changes have resulted in habitat loss and biodiversity decline at unprecedented rates, however, through urgent transformative change, the trend of continued biodiversity loss can be reversed.

Technological advancements have allowed environmental data to be captured in a greater quantity and detail than ever before, enabling scientists to tap into more in-depth assessments of our ecosystem to identify areas most at risk and highlight opportunities for action.

Public awareness of the issue has also grown – there’s now a much greater understanding of why a thriving natural environment and access to nature, close to home, is so important for society, personal wellbeing, and our food chain.

Therefore, a collaborative effort to achieve ‘biodiversity net gain’ (BNG) – where biodiversity is left in a better state than it was before – has never been more important.

## A role for developers

**HOUSING DEVELOPERS ARE UNIQUELY PLACED TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE TO NATURE RECOVERY.**

By prioritising BNG in development plans, the sector has a huge opportunity to help create greener, more sustainable new communities, as well as complying with government legislation.



# THE CHALLENGES FACING UK HOUSING DEVELOPERS



## GOVERNMENT POLICY

The Environment Act 2021 aims to make 10% biodiversity net gain on all Town and Country Planning Act (TCPA) 1990 developments (with a few exemptions) mandatory.

From February 2024 most new developments agreed under the TCPA will be required to meet BNG targets. This will require biodiversity to be left in a 10% better state than it was pre-development.

At a local level, the minimum 10% requirement may be increased by local authorities following implementation to allow margin for error.

BNG will be measured using Defra's Biodiversity Metric 4.0 (current version).

Habitats created or improved will be secured via Section 106 agreement or Conservation Covenant and will need to be managed and monitored for at least 30 years.

Developers will need to assess if BNG can be delivered offsite or onsite. If it is not possible to achieve 10% onsite and no offsite BNG units are available to the developer, as a last resort they can purchase statutory BNG credits from the Government.

A national register for biodiversity unit exchanges will be available once the legislation comes into effect for any offsite BNG unit transactions.



## METRICS & TOOLS

The Biodiversity Metric 4.0, developed by Defra and Natural England, is a statutory tool developers must use to quantify biodiversity levels and prove net gain is being achieved.

The tool enables the type, condition and extent of onsite biodiversity to be calculated, before and after development, to show the impact made.

However, applying and interpreting these tools requires expertise from qualified people, such as knowledge of the UKHab classification system.

Staying up to date with the Biodiversity Metric is also crucial – Natural England are continuing to work behind the scenes on technical improvements and confirmed that major updates will take place every 3-5 years.



# THE CHALLENGES FACING UK HOUSING DEVELOPERS



## COST IMPLICATIONS OF BNG

While the principle of BNG is generally supported in the UK, there have been concerns about the cost implications, especially for affordable housing projects.

Incorporating BNG into development plans may require redesigning some elements of a project or considering alternative construction methods. This could result in additional architectural or planning consultancy fees.

Where onsite mitigation isn't feasible, developers might need to invest in offsite habitats, either through the acquisition or leasing of land, forging relationships with local landowners who are creating habitat or via habitat banks.

The acquisition or leasing of land, however, can be a significant cost, especially in areas where land prices are high.

Statutory biodiversity credits – which will be a last-resort compulsory purchase from the government, if developers cannot deliver BNG through onsite or offsite projects –

have purposely been priced higher than the market BNG unit going-rate to emphasise that they are a last resort.

BNG must be maintained for 30 years, so the ongoing costs for habitat management, monitoring, and potentially corrective measures if the desired biodiversity levels aren't being met, will need to be considered.

If BNG considerations are not factored in from the project's inception, developers will face planning permission delays, having significant cost implications due to extended project timelines.



## EXISTING AND VARIED LANDSCAPES

In many parts of the UK, especially in historic cities, the existing urban fabric might limit the interventions possible for biodiversity enhancement.

The UK has a varied ecological landscape, from heathlands to wetlands.

This diversity means that developers need to adopt a site-specific approach to net gain, considering mitigation hierarchy, which can complicate the planning process.

Working through a mitigation hierarchy is essential to help limit biodiversity loss as far as possible.



In an effort to lead a more sustainable lifestyle, 40% of UK consumers reported they had chosen to purchase from a brand based on its environmentally sustainable practices or values<sup>1</sup>.

However, more than half of global consumers say they are sceptical of corporate sustainability claims – so proving sustainable development initiatives are actioned is vital.

1. YouGov, 2023



# LAND360+: A SCIENCE-BASED SOLUTION FOR HOUSING DEVELOPERS



**WHILE BNG CAN INVOLVE UPFRONT COSTS AND CHALLENGES, THE LONG-TERM BENEFITS, BOTH TANGIBLE AND INTANGIBLE, OFFER VALUABLE RESULTS FOR HOUSING DEVELOPERS IN THE UK.**

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## THE BENEFITS OF USING LAND360+



### INFORMED DECISION MAKING

With LAND360, housing developers can tap into Fera's extensive scientific expertise. Our team encompasses ecologists, economists, and remote sensing specialists, who are experienced in translating science and data into actionable plans.

With the detailed insights provided by LAND360, developers are empowered to make more informed decisions, specifically at the strategic land phase, that cater to both sustainable development and biodiversity enhancement.



### TAILORED SOLUTION

LAND360, which originally catered to the agricultural and land management sectors, has been specifically adapted to address the unique needs of housing developers, supporting biodiversity enhancement on their sites.

LAND360's trusted science-based approach provides a combination of habitat baselining, ecological surveys, and biodiversity uplift estimates. The integration of cutting-edge technologies, including remote sensing and GIS (Geographic Information Systems), ensures detailed data gathering.



### REGULATORY COMPLIANCE

Given the upcoming mandatory implementation of BNG regulations in February 2024, developers can utilise LAND360 to ensure compliance.

The service helps developers calculate and ensure a net increase of 10% in biodiversity, in time for the legislation launch date.



### RISK MITIGATION

Using LAND360, developers can effectively map and benchmark site biodiversity, potentially avoiding regulatory delays or rejections of their development applications.

As the push towards biodiversity and sustainability becomes more stringent, using LAND360 offers developers a proactive approach to understanding and addressing the long-term impacts of their projects on the environment.



### SUSTAINABILITY ALIGNMENT

The service allows developers to align BNG planning with their sustainability objectives, driving environmentally friendly development practices and leaving a positive footprint on nature.

By leveraging scientific data and expert insights provided by LAND360, developers can craft living spaces that are beneficial to both humans and wildlife, fostering community wellbeing and resilience.





# LAND360+ CASE STUDY

THIS PILOT PROVIDES AN ELEMENT OF FUTURE PROOFING FOR THE DEVELOPER.

## TURNING SUSTAINABILITY INTO REALITY: LAND360 AND UK HOUSING DEVELOPER'S BNG JOURNEY



In 2022, one of the leading housing developers in the UK approached Fera for support with designing and implementing an effective pilot BNG plan across a sample of their nationwide development sites.



Fera, along with their collaborator TEP, designed a holistic approach to the adoption of BNG policy, evaluating the impact of the legislation and seeking to adopt a geospatial methodology which was aligned to the organisation's aims and objectives. This aimed to give the developer confidence in achieving a positive outcome with the adoption of BNG.

The proposal was agreed, and in August 2022, Fera and TEP were commissioned to develop a science-led, GIS desk-based assessment of baseline habitats for a BNG assessment on a selection of pilot sites.



The high accuracy of the habitat maps produced via this desk-based approach removed the need for initial onsite surveys, which would be carried out at the planning application phase, resulting in a quicker assessment process.

This method was extremely valuable at the strategic land phase of the project, as the BNG uplift potential for each site could be assessed from the start without being labour and time intensive.

The site assessment results were disseminated via an online application, integrated into the developer's GIS systems, allowing updates to be continuously uploaded, as and when required.

The project applied expert advice from ecological specialists, onsite verification surveys completed by trained ecologists and technical input from GIS specialists, to enable the developer to prioritise, measure, and monitor BNG now and in the future.



Following this pilot, the methodology will be rolled out across all sites within the developers' estate, providing a logical tiered approach to habitat modelling, defining varying requirements of sites.

This pilot provides an element of future proofing for the developer. The expert insights will support longer term strategic decision-making, especially when prospective development sites are reviewed before being acquired into the business portfolio.



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# CREATING A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE FOR HOUSING DEVELOPMENTS

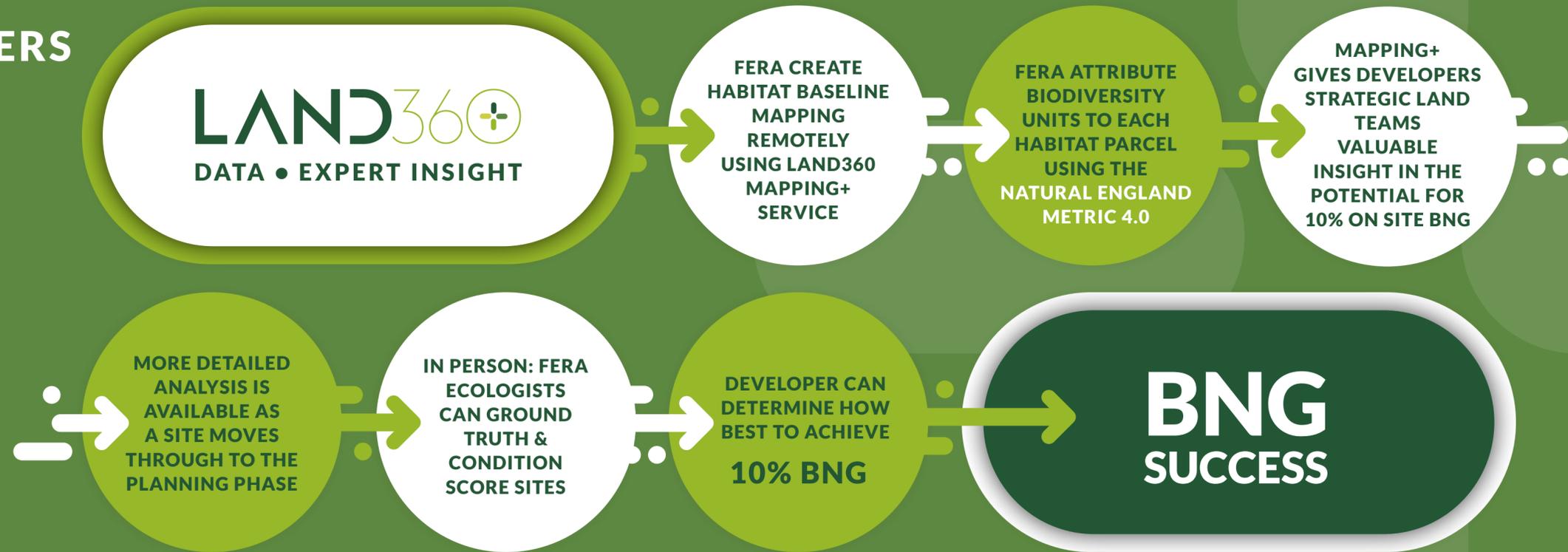


## BNG OFFERS UK HOUSING DEVELOPERS NUMEROUS ADVANTAGES.

By enhancing properties with biodiverse environments, developers can boost market appeal and simplify the planning process with local authorities.

Over time, green infrastructure can lead to cost savings and reduced environmental risks. Implementation of a considered BNG plan not only helps elevate a developer's reputation, opening doors to financial incentives, it can also strengthen community ties and pre-empt future regulatory challenges.

By utilising Fera's LAND360 service, housing developers will be able to tap into all of this and help achieve their goals through a trusted science-based approach.



All in all, **BNG** is a **strategic investment**, offering a **myriad of rewards** for **developers**.



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