



## **POSITION STATEMENT No. 12**

### **BIODIVERSITY NET GAIN WITH NEW DEVELOPMENT**

#### **Introduction**

The purposes of AONB designation are conserving and enhancing natural beauty. Conserving and enhancing the natural elements of the environment of the AONB are therefore fundamental to the designation.

For a long time, there have been concerns about the loss of biodiversity and, more recently, significant aspirations to ensure there are environmental net gains from new development. Work has been ongoing in the preparation of a 'metric' that would provide a calculation that would enable planning authorities and developers to agree that defined levels of biodiversity gain are achieved. The passing of the Environment Act has encapsulated this approach into legislation.

However, the recent Government's consultation on Biodiversity Net Gain contains a substantial section on exceptions to providing net gains. It seems likely that consultations and discussions could further delay implementation of a laudable aspiration, namely the regular and consistent provision of biodiversity net gains in all developments.

Not only because of the statutory purpose of AONB designation but also the Colchester Declaration 2019 there is a national expectation that AONBs will contribute significantly to nature recovery and biodiversity net gain in the immediate future. This AONB has been doing work on a 'state of nature report' and an outline 'nature recovery strategy'.

However, it is clear that within the special landscapes of this AONB there is a case for finding a simple, easily understood, mechanism for achieving biodiversity net gain without either recourse to complex calculations or waiting for further national directives.

#### **A Simple Approach**

Development has to comply with Building Regulations to ensure that construction works are carried out properly and to appropriate standards. That means items such as insulation need to be installed, and a similar approach could be adopted within this AONB for items that contribute to biodiversity net gain.

Put simply, wildlife needs breeding places, summer food, and winter food / hibernation places. Common features to encourage wildlife include bird boxes (in all of their forms), bat boxes, and bee bricks. Variations on the latter include log piles and insect hotels, and hedgehog boxes have proved useful.



**Cranborne Chase**  
Area of Outstanding  
Natural Beauty

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This AONB Partnership is of the view that making provision for biodiversity in all new development within this Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty should automatically include features to encourage wildlife and hence facilitate biodiversity net gain. Basically, any new dwelling, or extension to a dwelling, should automatically include, built into the structure, at least one bird box, one bat box, and one bee brick. In multiple developments then the provision would be simply the relevant multiple of the three items.

For agricultural and business / industry / institutional development the provision would be one each of those three items for each 150 square metres of new floor space.

To allow some flexibility and to incorporate larger items, the approach set out in Annex A to this Position Statement, which covers such items as owl boxes, can be operated. Indeed, it seems likely that farming or business developments may well have opportunities to include those larger features which are unlikely to be readily accommodated in a domestic extension or new houses. Larger features, such as Owl boxes, could be the equivalent of a triple Sparrow box, and a bespoke Bat 'hotel' in a dwelling roof space could be equivalent to the three basic boxes.

**Recommendation**

The Cranborne Chase Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Partnership **strongly recommends** to all of its partner local authorities that the provision of facilities to enable biodiversity net gain should automatically be applied to all new developments in this AONB in the scale set out in this Position Statement with immediate effect.

RB 24 May 2022

Approved and endorsed by the Cranborne Chase AONB Partnership Board at its meeting on 30<sup>th</sup> May 2022



## **ANNEX A**

### **Guide to providing Wildlife Homes – Bat, bird and bee boxes etc**

Providing bat and bird boxes in your property can provide a much-needed safe nesting and resting space for their inhabitants.

By far the best material for bird and bat boxes is a mix of wood shavings and concrete, also known as woodcrete. Although it is heavier and more expensive than wood, it is far more durable; even marine ply boxes can fail after five years, and predators such as squirrels and woodpeckers can gnaw around entrance holes to reach occupants. Saturated wooden nest boxes can also leak in very wet summers.

Most boxes need annual maintenance – clearing out of droppings, nests made by other non-target species such as wasps, woodmice and tree bees so they do need seasonal care.

According to the Wiltshire County Bat Recorder this sort of box shown below is self-cleaning as the droppings fall out of the bottom. Birds, bees and wood mice tend to avoid it due to its narrow profile.

It is designed for larger species and is sufficiently large enough for female bat colonies and their young, as well as groups of common noctule bats. Ideally used as a bat roost site from spring to late autumn. Species inhabiting crevices, such as the Natterer's and Nathusius' pipistrelle bat, can use the small cavities of the forward compartment as a safe daytime sleeping area. The narrow entrance hole provides sleeping bats with extra protection against predators and disturbances. These boxes can be installed on trees, masts, towers and flat surfaces.

All illustrations are examples of units that are available on the open market, and they do not constitute a recommendation or a preferred choice. Any feature for incorporation into a building does, however, need to be more long lived and more robust than a wooden bird box.



**Schwegler Universal Bat Box 1FFH**



On a larger scale, bat 'hotels' can be provided in roof spaces.

Bird boxes come in numerous different designs. Some species like blue tit and great tit like a box with a hole, below left whilst others like robin prefer an open front, shown below, left.



**The size of the entry hole will dictate what species use the box.**

House and tree sparrows like to nest in groups (they are 'colonial nesters').

There are also swallow / martin cups, and swift boxes.

**Siting**

These features should be sited where they are out of reach of cats, under eaves, and above head height but not so high that they cannot be seasonally 'serviced'.

Bat boxes should be sited away from external lights.



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**Bee boxes/bricks**



Alternatively, you can buy a planter with a built-in bee hotel – make sure you plant it with a bee friendly plant like English lavender, chives or thyme.

Owl / kestrel boxes, hedgehog boxes, and larger features are more likely to be specifically designed for the particular location; the AONB team is happy to assist.

**V1 CCAONB 24 May 2022**