

Summary - Interim Strategic Significance Guidance for Biodiversity Net Gain in Kent

- 1.1. This Planning Process note (hereafter referred to as ‘guidance’) has been produced by Kent County Council (KCC), under consultation with the Kent Nature Partnership (KNP). It has been developed to help planning applicants and potential Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) offset providers complete the strategic significance elements of The Biodiversity Metric 4.0 for area habitats and linear habitats (hedgerows and watercourses).
- 1.2. The strategic significance multiplier within the [Biodiversity Metric](#) seeks to promote the delivery of habitat creation and enhancement within areas which are strategically important for nature’s recovery.
- 1.3. The [Biodiversity Metric 4.0 User Guide](#) sets out that strategic significance should be defined by a Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS). However, “*if an LNRS has not been published, the relevant consenting body or planning authority may specify alternative plans, policies or strategies to use*”. Until a LNRS for Kent is published, this guidance sets out a standardised approach for applying strategic significance in Kent and Medway. This guidance will be reviewed periodically and will eventually be replaced by a published LNRS for Kent.
- 1.4. BNG assessors should use Tables 1, 2 and 3 to assign high, medium or low strategic significance for each habitat parcel (each row of the metric spreadsheet) both for the habitat baseline, creation and enhancement tabs. Where a habitat parcel spans multiple strategic significance categories then that habitat parcel should be split, with the relevant categories assigned accordingly.
- 1.5. Table 1 sets out how strategic significance should be assigned for area-based habitats. The criteria are based on existing published strategies for Kent and Medway, which are evidence led and have previously gone through public consultation.

High (1.15)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kent Biodiversity Strategy priority habitats (see Appendix B) located within a Biodiversity Opportunity Area • Habitats of importance identified within Biodiversity Opportunity Area descriptions (see Appendix A) • Widely dispersed habitats of importance identified within Biodiversity Opportunity Area descriptions located across the whole of Kent and Medway¹ • National and International statutory protected sites (Ramsar, SAC, SPA, SSSI, NNR)* • Local Nature Reserves (LNRs) (including Roadside Nature Reserves (RNRs))* • Local Wildlife Sites (LWSs)* • Irreplaceable habitats^{2*}
Medium (1.1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kent Biodiversity Strategy priority habitats outside of the Biodiversity Opportunity Areas • Any Section 41 priority habitat that do not meet the criteria for high strategic significance
Low (1.0)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All other area-based habitats

Table 1: Interim definition of strategic significance for area-based habitat units in Kent and Medway.

¹ Ponds and traditional orchards.

² As defined in the National Planning Policy Framework (2021).

* The deterioration in quality of statutory protected sites, LNRs, RNRs, LWSs and irreplaceable habitats below the condition recorded at the time of designation should not be used as justification for downgrading of strategic significance. This includes where deterioration in quality occurred prior to the relevant date as specified in the Environment Act 2021. Exceptions apply where it can be demonstrated that activities leading to the deterioration of habitats was carried out in accordance with a planning permission or any other permission of a kind specified by the Secretary of State by regulations.

1.6. Table 2 sets out how strategic significance should be assigned for hedgerows units. Hedgerows are identified as a priority habitat by the Kent Biodiversity Strategy 2020 – 2045. Hedgerows are a widely distributed habitat across Kent and Medway, and therefore it is not deemed appropriate to assign spatial constraints for strategic significance. Instead, the strategic significance of hedgerows is defined by their distinctiveness, as defined by The Biodiversity Metric 4.0.

High (1.15)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All very high and high distinctiveness hedgerows as defined by The Biodiversity Metric 4.0
Medium (1.1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All medium distinctiveness hedgerows as defined by The Biodiversity Metric 4.0
Low (1.0)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All low and very low distinctiveness hedgerows as defined by The Biodiversity Metric 4.0

Table 2: Interim definition of strategic significance for hedgerow units in Kent and Medway.

1.7. Table 3 sets out how strategic significance should be assigned for watercourse units. Rivers and chalk streams are identified as priority habitats by the Kent Biodiversity Strategy 2020-2045. Several statutory and non-statutory designated wildlife sites are defined by, or include, features of natural, semi-natural and manmade watercourses.

High (1.15)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rivers (priority habitat) All other rivers and streams (including all ephemeral streams) Ditches/Canals within statutory and non-statutory designated sites and priority habitats All culverts, channels or mill leats that link high priority rivers, streams, ditches and canals
Medium (1.1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ditches and canals without designations
Low (1.0)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All other flow paths and dry drainage channels

Table 3: Interim definition of strategic significance for watercourse units in Kent and Medway. Habitats as defined by the Biodiversity Metric 4.0 user guide.

High Weald		x	x		x	x	x	x	x				x										x	
Low Weald Woodlands		x	x		x	x																		
Lower Stour wetlands		x	x		x		x	x			x	x	x		x		x	x	x					
Medway and Low Weald Wetlands and Grasslands		x	x		x	x					x	x					x		x					
Medway Gap and North Kent Downs	x	x	x	x	x	x				x	x	x			x					x				
Mid Kent Downs, Woods and Scarp	x	x	x	x	x	x																		x
Mid Kent Greensand and Gault		x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x					x						x	x
North Kent Marshes		x	x		x	x					x	x		x	x						x		x	
Romney Marshes and Rye Bay					x	x	x	x			x	x		x						x		x	x	
Thames-side Green Corridors		x	x	x			x	x	x	x	x	x												
Thanet Cliffs and Shore		x	x		x	x															x		x	
The Blean		x	x		x	x	x	x	x															

**Action for naturally widely dispersed habitats (ponds, traditional orchards), wildlife associated with arable farmland, and widely dispersed species such as great crested newt will need to focus across the whole of the area and not just within the Biodiversity Opportunity Area boundary