

Biodiversity Net Gain Assessment

The Kirkby Centre



ENVIROPASS

Quality Assurance			
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Client:	Knowsley Council		
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Report conditions:	The content is provided in accordance with the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management's Code of Professional Conduct. The methods and recommendations in this report are based on the following: • CIEEM Guidelines for Ecological Report Writing (CIEEM, 2017) • Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) Report & Audit Templates Version 1 (CIEEM, July 2021) • Natural England (2025). The Statutory Biodiversity Metric User Guide.		

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1. Executive Summary

This Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) assessment appraises the site known as the Kirkby Centre, Kirkby L32 8XY, in accordance with the Statutory Metric (2025), the National Planning Policy Framework (2024), and the Environment Act (2021), which mandates a minimum 10% net gain in biodiversity.

The site contains 1.16 Habitat Units. The site currently consists of buildings, developed land and amenity areas of modified grassland and introduced shrubs, with a number of small and a single medium tree.

The proposed development will result in a net loss of 0.24 Habitat Units (-21.07%) on-site. The site therefore does not meet the 10% minimum to be compliant with the Environment Act (2021). To be compliant, at least 0.36 units must be purchased off-site, of which at least 0.1 units must be tree units.

No watercourse or hedgerow habitats are present, so no Watercourse Unit or Hedgerow Unit calculations are required.

The on-site BNG is non-significant and will be secured by a planning condition, considered sufficient for this application.

2. Introduction

2.1 Background and Site Description

The applicant Knowsley Council has commissioned a Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) Assessment for proposals for change of use and alterations to the Kirkby Centre to create a 6th form SEND School.

The habitats on-site consist of buildings, developed land and amenity areas of modified grassland and introduced shrubs, with a number of small and a single medium tree.

The site is not within any priority habitats, designated sites, or Biodiversity Opportunity Areas (BOAs). The nearest priority habitat and the only one within 500.0 m is deciduous woodland on the opposite side of the Hall Road. The site is within a mixed use area, on the western end of a large retail park in the centre of the built-up area of Kirkby. No irreplaceable habitats are present on-site or directly adjacent to the site, and no degradation has occurred prior to this application.

2.2 Proposals

The proposals involve the change of use of the site to a 6th form SEND School. This requires alterations to landscaping and additional parking.

2.3 Scope of Assessment

This BNG Assessment is valid for a maximum of one year. If there are any alterations to the site conditions, BNG methodologies, or the proposals, the calculations are likely to become invalid, an ecologist should be contacted for advice.

3. Legislation and Policy

3.1 Legislation

The Environment Act 2021 requires developments to deliver a minimum of 10% BNG. The requirement applies to most non-householder planning applications that result in the loss of more than 25m² of vegetated habitat. Developers must calculate BNG using the Biodiversity Metric and secure it for a minimum of 30 years. Options for achieving BNG include on-site measures, off-site enhancements recorded in a national biodiversity gain site register, or the purchase of statutory Biodiversity Credits. Secondary legislation under the Act sets out the procedural and technical requirements, including Habitat Condition Assessments using the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (DEFRA) methodology and the submission of a completed Statutory BNG Metric. Long-term management of BNG must be secured, e.g. through Section 106 agreements or Conservation Covenants.

3.2 National Policy

Paragraphs 187 - 195 of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF, 2024) states the need for planning policies and decisions to enhance the natural and local environment. The NPPF highlights the importance of minimising impacts of development on wildlife and providing net gains for biodiversity.

3.3 Local Policy

The site is located within Knowsley District. Within the current Knowsley Local Plan Adopted Core Strategy (2016) is the following policy.

Policy CS8: Green Infrastructure - Maintenance and Enhancement of Knowsley's Existing Green Infrastructure, which states:

1) Knowsley's existing Green Infrastructure and its beneficial functions will be protected, managed and/or enhanced, primarily to:

- a) Ensure more attractive and cleaner residential neighbourhoods;
- b) Sustain and promote biodiversity (including designated sites, priority habitats and protected and endangered species) in accordance with importance and contribution to ecological networks;
- c) Preserve the character and function of historic environments and valued landscapes;
- d) Mitigate the effects of climate change and flood risk;
- e) Mitigate air, water and noise pollution;
- f) Provide local opportunities for sport, recreation and allotments; and
- g) Provide sustainable transport linkages between residential neighbourhoods and easy access to employment and services.

2) To achieve the above, planning powers and other interventions will be used to:

- a) Protect and enhance strategically important areas of greenspace;
- b) Ensure an appropriate quantity and improved quality of locally important open spaces, including outdoor sports provision (and ancillary facilities of appropriate scale);
- c) Promote effective movement of wildlife through a network of strategic green links, by protecting, maintaining and improving existing and new open spaces, water courses (including water quality) and biodiversity assets;
- d) Protect, enhance and/or introduce biodiversity into existing areas of Green Infrastructure, through integration into the design of new development and public realm projects;
- e) Improve accessibility for communities to greenspace offering leisure and recreation opportunities;
- f) Protect and where possible improve green paths and cycleways linking residential areas, existing strategic areas of greenspace, employment locations, local community services and leisure facilities;
- g) Work in partnership with other districts and relevant bodies at a landscape scale to minimise the impact of development upon Knowsley's existing biodiversity and geological assets, and sustain the protection afforded to internationally important sites, including supporting habitat, for biodiversity outside of the borough; and

h) Deliver new integrated and functional Green Infrastructure that helps to mitigate and adapt to climate change, such as sustainable drainage systems, carbon capture and storage, soft landscaping and green roofs.

3) Site allocations for greenspace will be identified in the Local Plan: Site Allocations and Development Policies document, with further guidance set out in the Developer Contributions Supplementary Planning Document or future Supplementary Planning Document as appropriate.

Strategic Green Links

4) Knowsley's strategically important green links are:

a) Alt Corridor (Huyton) – stretching from Huyton Village through South Alt Park, Alt Park, Alt Meadows and into Stockbridge Village;

b) Valley Corridor (Kirkby) – stretching through Valley Meadow, St. Chad's Park, Millbrook Park, Millennium Green and Mill Dam;

c) Whiston to Cronton Corridor – stretching through Cronton, Stadt Moers Park and Whiston Greenway;

d) Halewood Triangle – Halewood Park linkage with the Trans-Pennine Trail and to the national cycle network;

e) M57 Green Belt Corridor; and

f) Knowsley Hall Estate – including Knowsley Safari Park and Local Wildlife Sites.

Green Infrastructure within the Liverpool City Region

5) Knowsley Council will work with partners to help deliver local and sub-regional programmes, initiatives and strategies to enhance Green Infrastructure.

Approach to Green Infrastructure and New Development

6) New development must be served by Green Infrastructure to meet the needs of residents and the local environment, in a manner which will:

a) Contribute to the creation of a high quality residential environment; b) Provide access to high quality open space for leisure and recreational purposes;

c) Seek to protect, maintain and where possible enhance biodiversity within and around new developments according to their designation and significance to provide space for nature; and

d) Provide adequate mitigation and/or, as a last resort, compensation for Green Infrastructure or biodiversity loss, in circumstances where harm resulting from the development is otherwise unavoidable.

4. Methods

4.1 Desk Study

The Multi-Agency Geographic Information for the Countryside (MAGIC) online resource was accessed on 28th October 2025 to search for Protected and Priority Habitats, or Habitats of Principal Importance listed under the NERC Act on-site or within 500.0m.

4.2 Site Assessments

A site visit was conducted prior to the application by a representative of the applicant in March 2025. High-resolution photographs along with existing and proposed site maps and drawings were provided to George Sayer (MCIEEM, MArborA). George is an experienced Senior Lead Ecologist and a Full member of the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM). He has been undertaking ecology surveys and botanical assessments since 2016.

The habitat classification and assessments were completed using existing site drawings and photographs, in combination with digital resources, including aerial imagery from Google Earth and mapping from magic.gov.uk. Given the nature of the site, it is extremely unlikely that any changes have occurred on-site since the initial walkover was undertaken.

Habitats were classified in accordance with the UK Habitat Classification System v2.01 (UKHab Ltd 2023) and assessed using Defra's Statutory Metric (2025). The classifications are illustrated on the Site Baseline Habitat Plan, produced using AutoCAD. See Figure 5.1. Condition assessment of the various habitat types was undertaken using the Statutory Condition Assessment Sheets (2025).

4.3 Biodiversity Metric

Defra's Statutory Metric (2025) was used to quantify the proposed changes in biodiversity by comparing the baseline habitats with proposed habitats in terms of their extent, condition, and distinctiveness. Accurate habitat measurements were taken using AutoCAD.

Proposed habitat changes were reviewed against the Metric's risk multipliers, which account for the difficulty of habitat creation or enhancement, the time required to reach the target condition, and spatial risk factors. These multipliers ensure that the compensation for habitat loss is proportional and reflects the ecological value of the affected area. The output of the Metric provides a robust calculation of BNG, guiding the proposed development to meet statutory requirements and align with local planning policies.

Biodiversity Metric calculations were double checked following the calculations to avoid errors. Habitat calculations were performed to the nearest 5sqm for habitats, which is appropriate given the site's scale. Measurements have been accurately transposed into the Site Baseline Habitat Plan and Site Proposed Habitat Plan, both created using AutoCAD. Where uncertainty remained, habitats were measured using Google Earth Pro.

The completed Statutory BNG Metric is provided separately in Excel format and shows the full calculation breakdown for the site.

5. Results

The site is not situated within any Biodiversity Opportunity Areas (BOAs), strategic wildlife corridors, or designated enhancement network zones. Whilst there are designated sites within close proximity, the site lies within and is surrounded by an urban area. Consequently, all habitats on-site are classified as having low strategic significance.

No degradation has taken place and no irreplaceable habitats are present on-site.

5.1 Area Habitats

Baseline Habitats		
The site is composed of the following habitats: - o 0.3835 ha of developed land, sealed surface - o 0.12 ha of modified grassland, poor condition - o 0.0204 ha of urban tree, poor condition (5 small trees) - o 0.0489 ha of urban tree, moderate condition (12 small trees) - o 0.0163 ha of urban tree, good condition (1 medium tree) - o 0.0045 ha of introduced shrub (small areas of shrubs in beds, too short to be considered hedges)		
Retained Habitats		
- o 0.34 ha of developed land, sealed surface - o 0.055 ha of modified grassland, poor condition - o 0.0204 ha of urban tree, poor condition (5 small trees) - o 0.0244 ha of urban tree, moderate condition (6 small trees) - o 0.0163 ha of urban tree, good condition (1 medium tree) - o 0.001 ha of introduced shrub		
Proposed On-Site Habitats		
The following habitats are proposed as part of the development: - o 0.0775ha of developed land, sealed surface - o 0.03 ha of modified grassland, moderate condition assumed - o 0.0326 ha of urban trees (8 small trees), moderate condition - o 0.008 ha of introduced shrub		
Habitats Summary		
On-site - o The existing site has a baseline of 1.16 Habitat Units. See Figure 5.1. - o The proposals on-site will result in a loss of 0.24 Habitat Units (-21.07%). Therefore, it does not achieve the mandatory +10%.		
Total Net Unit Change		Total Net % Change
-0.24 Habitat Units		-21.07%

To achieve a compliant gain, there is a deficit of 0.36 units which must be made up through further enhancements on-site, off-site purchase of units or purchase of statutory credits. At least 0.1 units must be tree or higher distinctiveness units. An example is given in the metric, whereby 0.06 ha of cropland within the district is converted to moderate-condition neutral grassland, and 10 small trees planted, which would achieve a 14.02% gain.

Figure 5.1: Site Baseline Habitat Plan



Figure 5.2: Proposed Site Plan

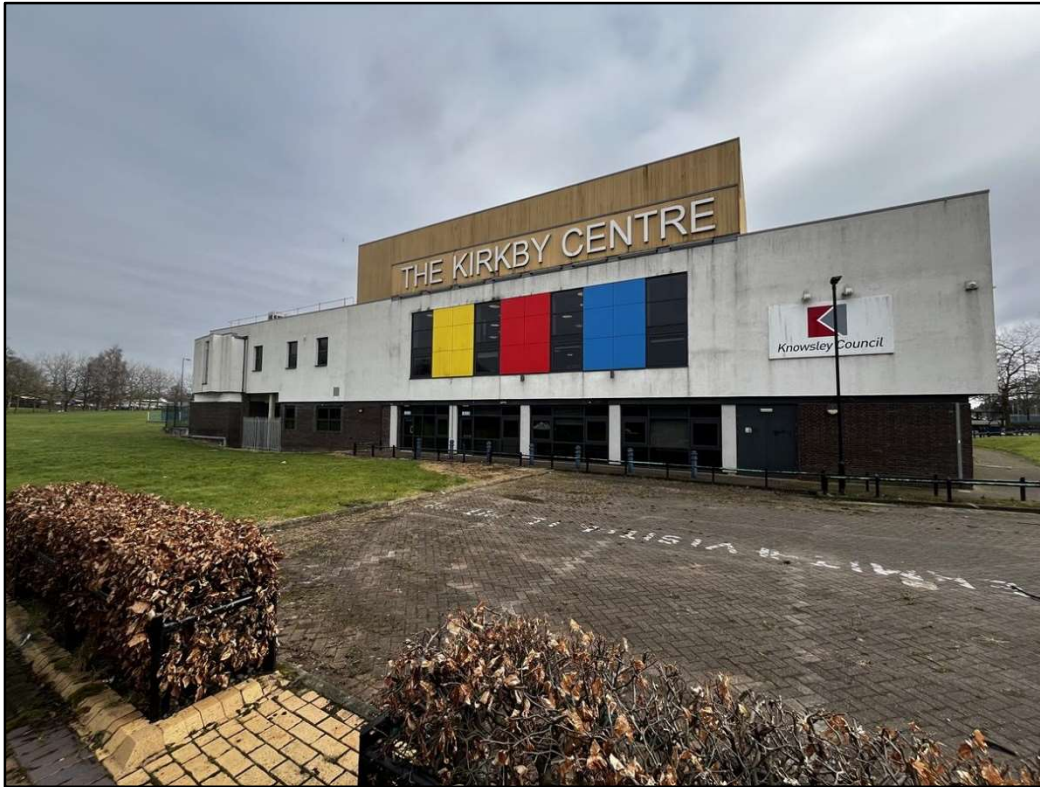


Figure 5.3: Site Proposals



6. Site Photos

View looking east to building. Small areas of introduced shrub visible.



Looking west across grassland to south of the building.



Medium tree and smaller trees beyond. Note the small hedge to left is too short and not considered a hedge but rather an area of introduced shrub. Small patch of shrubs in the centre have been classified as part of the grassland.



Carpark to the north.



7. Habitat Creation, Management and Monitoring

7.1 On-site

Habitats to be provided include developed land (buildings and parking areas), areas of moderate condition modified grassland and urban trees. All habitats other than urban trees are of low distinctiveness, and the overall gain is 0.22 units.

New trees should be native trees suited to the location. Species might include spindle, crab apple, rowan, whitebeam, holly or yew (among others). These shall be planted into pre-dug tree pits, 20% larger on all sides than the rootball. The rootball shall be teased out, placed into the hole and backfilled to the original root collar. The tree shall be gently heeled-in and staked with appropriate stakes and ties. The trees should require no significant ongoing management over the 30 year period.

The Habitat creation is not considered 'significant'. As such, a detailed habitat management and monitoring plan is not expected to be required, and designs can be secured by condition alone. No enhancements within private gardens are legally able to be secured but as a church, modified grassland can be created and would be equal to vegetated garden.

The proposals must achieve a gain by use of off-site units. Proof of purchase shall be supplied as a condition of planning.

8. Conclusion

This BNG assessment demonstrates that the proposed development at Kirkby Centre does not meet the statutory requirements for a minimum 10% net gain in biodiversity. A 0.36 unit deficit including a 0.1 unit tree deficit must be offset off-site. Providing this is carried out, the BNG trading rules will be satisfied. A planning condition is sufficient to secure the gain on-site.

9. References

Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM). (2017). *Guidelines for Ecological Report Writing*.

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