

Biodiversity and Geodiversity

- 9.60 Biodiversity (the variety of living organisms) and geodiversity (the range of rocks, minerals, fossils, soils and landforms) underpin the value of the natural environment and its ability to provide a wide range of important benefits, including supporting human health and quality of life.
- 9.61 In conjunction with the statutory requirement for biodiversity net gain, this policy sets out how development should protect and enhance existing biodiversity (including geodiversity and soils) and support nature recovery.

Policy G7 – Biodiversity and Geodiversity

Protecting and enhancing biodiversity and geodiversity

The council will apply the mitigation hierarchy to all proposals for development. This means that development resulting in significant harm to biodiversity will not be permitted. Harm to biodiversity must always first be avoided and minimised. Where avoidance of harm is not possible, mitigation measures will be required. As a last resort, compensation must be provided for the remaining adverse impacts. In addition to avoiding loss or harm, development is also expected to provide a net enhancement of biodiversity resources.

International, national and local sites designated for nature conservation and geodiversity will be protected in accordance with national policy.

Proposals should demonstrate, through a supporting statement, how the development will protect and enhance biodiversity, geodiversity, and the conservation value of its natural environment assets, having regard not only to its immediate location but its surroundings and context.

Where the council considers it necessary, to protect the natural environment, developers will be required to provide an appropriate ecological assessment report to enable the Council to properly assess and determine the merits or otherwise of the development proposal. All planning applications submitted for development within, in close proximity to, or likely to have an impact on any designated sites, priority habitat, or protected species, must be supported by such a report.

Developers must implement measures to prevent any harm to ecological features during the construction phase. Where appropriate, this includes the preparation of Landscape and Ecological Management Plans (LEMP), which will outline clear protocols for protecting biodiversity and soils, managing pollution risks and mitigating disturbance, as well as the monitoring of these measures, throughout the construction phase and post-development.

The peat soils of the uplands are important for addressing multiple green infrastructure priorities and enhancing biodiversity. The Council will work with partners and stakeholders to protect existing areas and seek opportunities for the positive restoration of degraded areas of peat. Where development would adversely affect peat, an assessment will need to be made

regarding its value and whether a scheme could safeguard the resource, or whether there is an acceptable type and level of mitigation that could be provided should loss be unavoidable.

Nature recovery

Development should seek to support and deliver on the priorities and actions for nature recovery that are set out in the Greater Manchester Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS).

The core areas for nature recovery are the designated sites listed above and development likely to have an adverse impact on land within or adjacent to these areas will need to protect and enhance the integrity of these sites by applying the mitigation hierarchy.

The areas of opportunity for nature recovery are priority locations which offer the greatest potential to expand and better connect the core sites, thereby helping to create a functioning and resilient nature network.

Development within or adjacent to areas of opportunity for nature recovery should seek to:

- a) create, restore and enhance habitats to improve biodiversity value and expansion of these areas;
- b) improve habitat connectivity within the development site and beyond, especially any core areas nearby, and mitigate any physical barriers that could be detrimental to achieving enhanced biodiversity connectivity;
- c) incorporate the relevant priorities and measures set out in the Greater Manchester LNRS.

Where biodiversity opportunity areas coincide with areas of strategic green and blue infrastructure, there will be a presumption against development which would undermine or compromise nature positive outcomes.

Biodiversity Net Gain

Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) proposals should support the priorities and actions set out in the Greater Manchester LNRS and where possible expand areas of habitat and ecological connectivity. Local priorities for green and blue infrastructure should also be used to inform BNG proposals to secure multiple benefits for people and nature.

Developers must follow the biodiversity gain hierarchy. As far as possible, BNG must be provided on site. Full justification for any off-site provision will need to be submitted to and agreed by the council. Where possible, the Greater Manchester LNRS should be used to guide the locations of any offsite provision in accordance with the following locational hierarchy:

- 1. Within the borough;
- 2. Within Greater Manchester;
- 3. Within the Southern Pennines or Manchester Pennine Fringe National Character Areas;
- 4. Elsewhere in England.

The purchase of statutory credits should only be used as a last resort.

Places for Everyone Links:

Policy JP-G8 A Net Enhancement of Biodiversity and Geodiversity

Reasoned justification

- 9.62 The requirement for development to contribute to this policy will generally not be relevant for householder applications, applications for change of use, listed building consent and advertising. The council will exercise discretion and take a proportionate approach where there are potential impacts and opportunities.
- 9.63 The Greater Manchester State of the Environment Report (2024) provides important evidence on the state of biodiversity. Key bird and mammal species have declined by up to 40% over the last 30 – 40 years. Only 5% of the city region’s protected sites are in favourable condition; none of our rivers are in good ecological condition; and our woodlands are poorly managed and threatened by invasive species.
- 9.64 The plan area contains a wide range of important sites designated for their high nature conservation value, including the internationally designated South Pennine Moors and Rochdale Canal, 3 Local Nature Reserves, and 26 locally designated Sites of Biological Importance and Regionally Important Geological Sites. These are shown on the policies map. The council will support the designation of additional local sites, such as Local Nature Reserves, to help meet the Greater Manchester LNRS headline targets to safeguard and restore wildlife rich space.
- 9.65 These sites are important in their own right as places where biodiversity must be protected and enhanced. However, the council will also seek opportunities to expand and connect these core sites to create a functioning and resilient green and blue network which supports nature recovery.
- 9.66 The areas of opportunity set out in the GM LNRS have the greatest potential for enhancing, enlarging and providing connections between core sites. They do not prohibit development, but consideration must be given to how habitats can be enhanced and connections provided for wildlife. More detail on the Core Sites and Opportunity Areas can be found in the Greater Manchester Local Nature Recovery Strategy. Developers would be expected to consider enhancements to those habitats relevant to their site.
- 9.67 It is also important to note that areas of biodiversity value exist beyond the mapped LNRS network, and actions to enhance and extend nature can be implemented almost anywhere in Rochdale.