

Biodiversity Offsetting in Doncaster

Guidance on the Process

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1. Introduction

1.1 What is biodiversity offsetting?

1.1.1 Biodiversity offsets are conservation activities designed to deliver biodiversity benefits, in compensation for losses, in a measurable way. Good developments incorporate biodiversity considerations into their design, but they can still result in some biodiversity loss when there are impacts that cannot be avoided through design and location, or mitigated by other measures. A biodiversity offsetting scheme allows a developer to achieve sustainable development as required by the National Planning Policy Framework and fulfil the requirement for compensation through working with specialist offset providers who deliver conservation projects. A defined methodology is used to calculate how many 'biodiversity units' need to be paid by a development to satisfy the compensation requirement. Offset providers then offer for sale conservation projects that deliver biodiversity units which a developer can buy.

1.2 Doncaster's role in the biodiversity offsetting pilot

1.2.1 Doncaster has been chosen by Defra as one of six pilot areas that will test biodiversity offsetting during a 2 year project starting in April 2012. During the pilot Doncaster Council will be offering developers the choice of whether they would like to provide compensation through an offsetting scheme or via the traditional negotiations that take place during the planning process.

1.2.2 Defra has developed guidance for the pilot areas setting out how an offsetting scheme could operate. The Council's approach to offsetting will broadly follow that described in the guidance from Defra, however some changes have been made in order to make it locally appropriate for Doncaster. This document sets out how biodiversity offsetting will operate in Doncaster. There is information for both developers and potential offset providers.

1.3 What can offsetting be used for?

1.3.1 It is envisaged that offsetting would be used to compensate for impacts on local wildlife sites and other non designated wildlife habitats. National and local planning policy requires compensation for the losses in biodiversity that results from development. At present the amount of compensation required is determined on a case by case basis through negotiations with the local authority. The biodiversity offsetting approach uses a set method to quantify the amount of biodiversity loss and therefore the amount of compensation required. This replaces the traditional negotiations about compensation that take place, and hence removes the uncertainty faced by developers regarding what is going to be required to satisfy planning.

1.4 What is excluded from offsetting?

1.4.1 Not all types of impact on ecology are suitable for compensation through an offsetting mechanism. In light of this, biodiversity offsetting using the standard methodology set out in this document will not normally be offered for the following situations:

- Where there are licensable impacts on protected species.
- Where there is loss of ancient woodland or lowland raised mire.
- Where there are direct or indirect impacts on Sites of Special Scientific Interest, Special Areas of Conservation or Special Protection Areas.

The rationale behind the above exclusions is explained below.

Protected Species

1.4.2 Some species are protected under legislation which requires activities that impact them to be compensated in a particular way, or under licence from Natural England. The offsetting approach to habitat compensation is not designed to cater for such specific species needs. It is therefore anticipated that impacts on protected species will be dealt with separately to impacts on habitats. Biodiversity offsetting could be used in cases where protected species are impacted by a development but the developer needs to be aware that the habitat losses and species impacts would need to be dealt with separately.

Irreplaceable Habitats

1.4.3 Some types of habitat can take many 100's of years to develop. For example ancient woodland sites are defined as having had woodland cover on since at least 1600AD. The characteristics that these woodlands develop over time can only be recreated with the passage of time and hence true compensation for their loss is not realistically achievable. Similarly, lowland raised mire is a rare habitat that can only be created over many 100's of years and in situations where the correct geological and climatic conditions are present. It is therefore intended that offsetting will not be offered as a mechanism to compensate for the loss of these habitats.

Nationally and Internationally designated sites

1.4.4 Special Areas of Conservation and Special Protection Areas are designated through European legislation. In Doncaster there are two European Sites, Thorne Moor and Hatfield Moor, which are designated for the importance of their lowland raised mire habitat and nightjar populations. The impact of development on these sites will not be dealt with through offsetting but instead using the procedures set out in the legislation that protects these sites.

1.4.5 Similarly, the standard offsetting metric will not be used for impacts on Sites of Special Scientific Interest. There are 15 Sites of Special Scientific Interest in Doncaster, covering a range of habitats. Impacts of these sites may need bespoke compensation, and this will need to be agreed with Natural England in the same way that takes place currently through planning. It may be possible to use an offsetting approach to compensate for impacts on SSSI's, but this would need to be assessed on a case by case basis.

2. How to be involved

2.1 Guidance for Developers

2.1.1 If you are developing a site and are interested in using the offsetting approach, the following section outlines the steps in the process. More information can also be found on the Defra website at the following address <http://www.defra.gov.uk/publications/2012/04/02/pb13743-bio-offset-developers/> .

STEP 1 - Apply the avoid, mitigate, compensate hierarchy

2.1.2 Biodiversity offsetting is designed to be used once the negative impacts of a development on biodiversity have been avoided and minimised as far as possible. The offset process acts as compensation for any residual damage to biodiversity. When designing a scheme the following hierarchy of principles need to be applied:

- **1. Avoid** – Prevent negative impacts on biodiversity from arising by locating development away from features of interest.
- **2. Mitigate** – Reduce any negative impacts on biodiversity as much as possible. This could involve altering the design, timing the works to avoid certain periods or using sensitive working practises.
- **3. Compensate** – Sometimes it is possible to provide some compensation for damage to biodiversity on site. Where this is possible the number of Biodiversity Units that the offsetting scheme will need to deliver will be reduced. To determine if measures implemented on site are acceptable compensation then please contact the local planning authority who will be able to advise.

STEP 2 – Calculate the number of Biodiversity Units required in compensation.

2.1.3 Fill in Table 1 to determine how many Biodiversity Units will be lost as a result of the development.

2.1.4 In Table 1 each habitat needing compensation should be listed, followed by the area of that habitat and an assessment of the habitat’s condition and distinctiveness. The table in Appendix A lists the distinctiveness¹ of habitats that might be found on a site and gives guidance on how to determine the condition of a habitat. This mapping process is the same as a phase 1 habitat survey, while the condition assessments follow the Farm Environment Plan methodology set out by Natural England to assess land on farms going into stewardship agreements. A professional ecologist would have the necessary skills to undertake this work and the Council will be happy to help with any queries about the process.

TABLE 1				
Phase 1 Habitat Type	Area (ha) of each habitat that is lost and requires compensation	Condition of each lost habitat requiring compensation (see Appendix A) Poor = 1 Moderate = 2 Good = 3	Distinctiveness of each lost habitat (see Appendix A) Low = 2 Medium = 4 High = 6	Biodiversity Units
	(A)	(B)	(C)	= A x B x C
Example				
Semi Improved Acid Grassland	0.5	2	6	6
Arable	3	1	2	6
Improved Grassland	1.2	1	2	2.4
Total Biodiversity Units:				14.4

¹ Distinctiveness assessments are based on the paper ‘Biodiversity offsets: possible methods for measuring biodiversity losses and gains for use in the UK’ by Jo Treweek CEnv MIEEM and Bill Butcher, Treweek Environmental Consultants and Helen Temple, The Biodiversity Consultancy.

STEP 3 – Determine which habitats will be required in compensation

- 2.1.5 Some types of habitat are considered particularly special, either nationally or specifically in Doncaster. For these types of habitat an offsetting scheme should deliver like for like replacement of the habitat that is lost. For less rare habitats compensation does not have to be like for like and there will be greater flexibility regarding the types of offset project that can be used as compensation. Tables 2 and 3 show what type of compensation will normally be required when a particular habitat is lost. Approved offset provider projects will be listed on the Council’s website. If there is not an offsetting project listed that exactly meets the needs of a particular development then the Local Planning Authority will be able to provide guidance with respect to which schemes could provide an appropriate alternative.

Phase 1 Habitat	Type of compensation required
All types of Semi Natural Woodland	Like for like
Broadleaved Plantation Woodland	Like for like
All types of Parkland with Scattered Trees	Like for like
Unimproved or Semi Improved Acid Grassland	Like for like
Unimproved or Semi improved Neutral Grassland	Like for like
Unimproved or Semi Improved Calcareous Grassland	Like for like
Marsh/Marshy Grassland	Like for like
All types of Heathland	Like for like
All types of Mire	Like for like
Hedgerows	Like for like
Any type of Pond	Like for like
Any type of Scrub	Any habitat within Table 2

Phase 1 Habitat	Type of compensation required
Coniferous Plantation Woodland	Any habitat within Table 2
Mixed Plantation Woodland	Any habitat within Table 2
Improved or Poor Semi Improved Grassland	Any habitat within Table 2
Continuous or scattered Bracken	Any habitat within Table 2
Tall Ruderal	Any habitat within Table 2
Arable	Any habitat within Table 2
Amenity Grassland	Any habitat within Table 2
Ephemeral/ Short Perennial	Any habitat within Table 2
Introduced Shrubs	Any habitat within Table 2

STEP 4 – Calculate the requirements for any hedgerow compensation

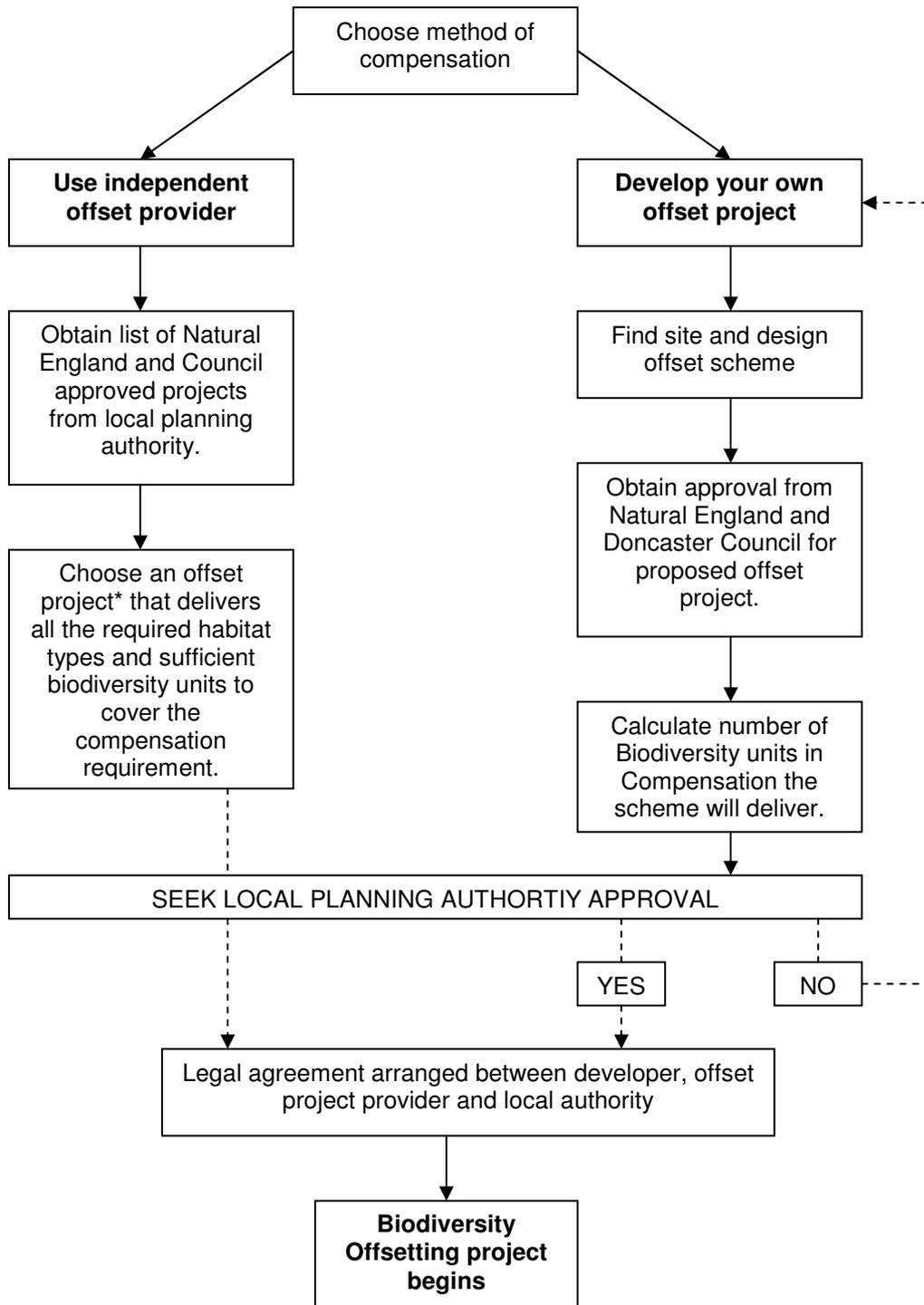
2.1.6 Compensation for hedgerows must be like for like, so lost hedgerows can only be compensated for by planting new hedgerows. If hedgerows on site require compensation then fill in Table 4 to determine the length of replacement hedgerow required.

TABLE 4			
Hedgerow number	Length (m) of each hedgerow that is lost and requires compensation (A)	Condition of each lost hedgerow requiring compensation (See Appendix A) Poor = 1 Moderate = 2 Good = 3 (B)	Length of replacement hedgerow required (m) = A x B
Example			
Hedge 1	120	2	240
Hedge 2	50	3	150
Total:			390 m

STEP 5 – Assess the value of any on site compensation

2.1.7 Steps 1 to 4 calculate the number of biodiversity units lost as a result of a development. In some cases a proportion of the required compensation can be provided on the development site. The number of biodiversity units that this on site compensatory habitat provides should be calculated using the metric approach outlined in section 2.2, 'Guidance for Offset Providers'. Any biodiversity units provided on site can be subtracted from the total lost on the site to give the number of additional units of offsite compensation that are required.

STEP 6 – Decide how to compensate



* There may be an option to deliver a single project, contribute partially to a larger project or contribute to multiple projects.

2.2 Guidance for Offset Providers

- 2.2.1 Doncaster Council will assess possible offset provider projects using the methodology set out in Chapter 3. Throughout the pilot Natural England will be acting as advisers, and quality assuring potential offset projects. It is therefore important that potential offset providers get in touch with Natural England during the early stages of developing possible offset projects. Similarly we would encourage people interested in becoming offset providers to contact the Council to discuss how their proposals may fit in with Doncaster’s proposed approach to Offsetting.
- 2.2.2 An offset provider must be able to demonstrate that they will have long term (normal 100 years) control of the management of the site where they are proposing to provide an offset project. This is important as offsetting projects are designed to compensate for damage to biodiversity for at least the lifetime of the development that is causing the damage.
- 2.2.3 The following section outlines the steps needed to calculate how many Biodiversity units a potential offset project will deliver. Detailed guidance for Offset Providers has been produced by Defra and is available at the following website. <http://www.defra.gov.uk/publications/files/pb13742-bio-guide-offset-providers.pdf>.

STEP 1 – Calculate the baseline value of the offsetting site

- 2.2.4 Map and assess the condition of the existing habitats on the proposed offsetting site. Use this information to fill in Table 5 and calculate the baseline value of the offsetting site.

TABLE 5				
Phase 1 Habitat Type	Area (ha) of each habitat on the offsetting site	Condition of each habitat on the offsetting site (see Appendix A) Poor = 1 Moderate = 2 Good = 3	Distinctiveness of each habitat on the offsetting site (see Appendix A) Low = 2 Medium = 4 High = 6 (C)	Baseline value of the offsetting site in Biodiversity Units
	(A)	(B)	(C)	= A x B x C
Example				
Hard Standing	1	1	0	0
Arable Field	3	1	2	6
Neutral Grassland	2	1	6	12

Baseline Biodiversity Units on the Offsetting Site: 18

STEP 2 – Calculate the number of biodiversity units available on the site

2.2.5 Determine the quantity and condition of the habitats you intend to create or restore and then fill in Table 6 to calculate the number of biodiversity units of each type of habitat that the offsetting site is able to offer. Again Natural England’s Farm Environment Plan methodology is used to assess habitat condition.

TABLE 6							
Habitat	Baseline Units	Target Units	Maximum Units Available (Target – Baseline)	Risk Multiplier (See Appendix B)	Time Multiplier (See Appendix C)	Spatial Multiplier (See Table 7 section 3.3)	Final Units Available
EXAMPLE							
Create 1ha of moderate condition broadleaved woodland on hard standing	0	$(1 \times 2 \times 6) = 12$	12	$12 / 1.5 = 8$	$8 / 1.7 = 4.71$	$4.71 / 1 = 4.71$	4.71
Create 3ha of moderate condition neutral grassland on arable field	6	$(3 \times 2 \times 6) = 36$	30	$30 / 1.5 = 20$	$20 / 1.2 = 16$	$16 / 1 = 16$	16
Restore 2ha of poor condition neutral grassland to moderate condition	12	$(2 \times 2 \times 6) = 24$	12	$12 / 1 = 12$	$12 / 1.2 = 10$	$10 / 1 = 10$	10
Total Biodiversity Units available on Offsetting Site							30.71

2.2.6 The example in Table 6 above delivers 30.71 biodiversity units overall, 26 for neutral grassland and 4.71 for woodland. A series of multipliers are applied to each habitat that is proposed for creation. A risk multiplier has been applied to take into account how hard each habitat is to create or restore (See Appendix B). A time multiplier has been applied to take into account how long the newly created or restored habitat will take to achieve condition (See Appendix C). Finally, a spatial multiplier had been applied to show how well the proposed offset project fits with Doncaster’s Offsetting Assessment Methodology (See Table 7, Chapter 3).

STEP 3 – Calculate the number of metres of hedgerow the offsetting project can provide

- 2.2.7 Offsetting projects that propose to deliver new hedgerow need to provide a plan showing the length, location and species composition of the hedgerow that is intended. Species composition should be guided by the landscape character type for the geographical location where the hedge is proposed. Further guidance about which species of trees and shrubs are appropriate in which areas can be found at the following website:

http://www.doncaster.gov.uk/Images/Planning%20Guidance%20-%20Tree%20and%20Shrub%20Planting_tcm2-57980.pdf

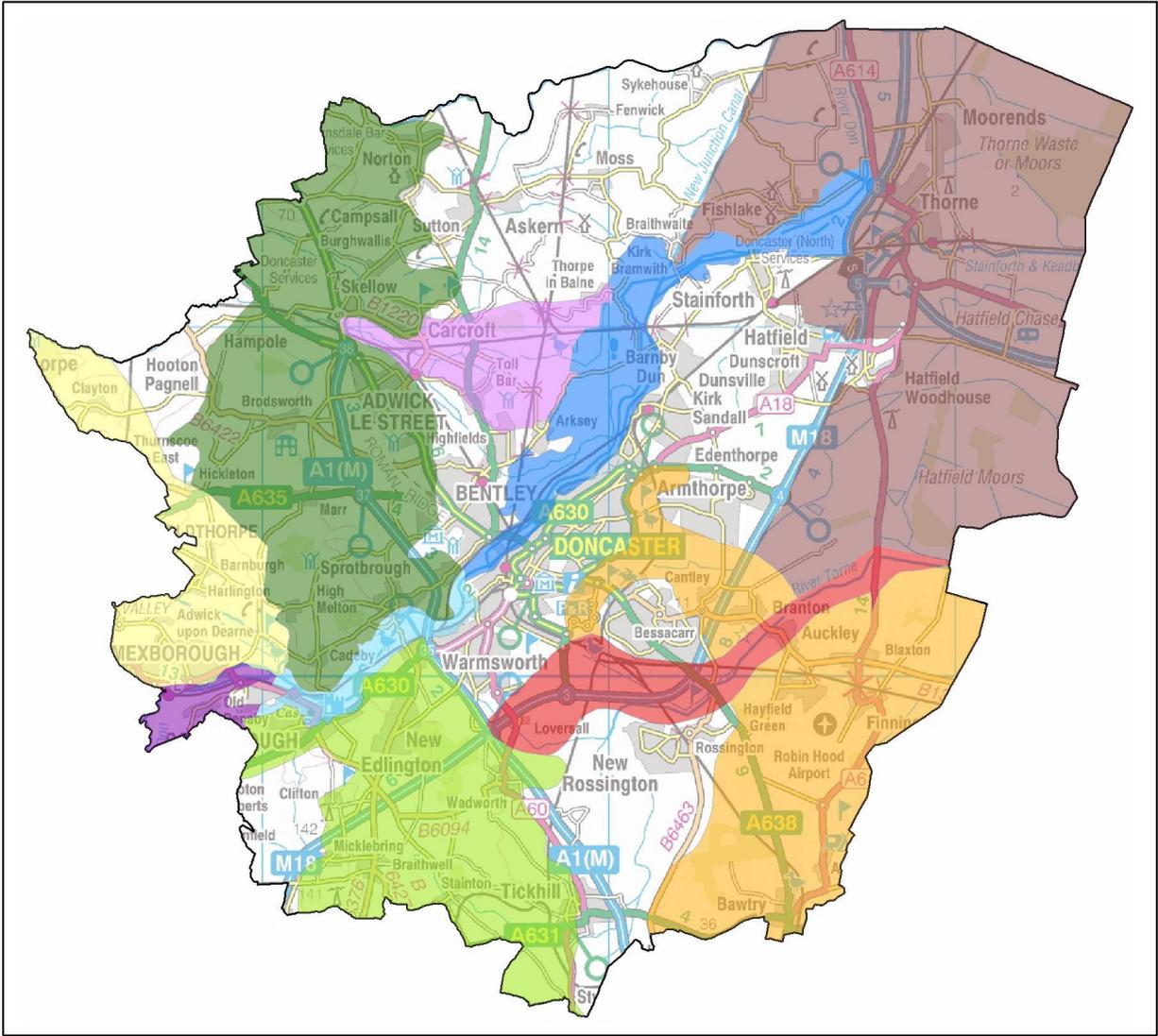
STEP 4 – Complete a Biodiversity Offset Management Plan

- 2.2.8- During the pilot Natural England will be quality assuring offset projects. Offset providers will be required to produce Biodiversity Offset Management Plans in order to demonstrate how they will go about delivering a proposed offset and managing it in the long term. Details of how projects will be assessed can be found in the Defra Guidance for Offset Providers. The Council will hold a register of approved offset provider projects on it's website.

3. Assessment Methodology for Offsetting Projects

3.1 Geographical location of offset projects

- 3.1.1 All potential offset projects must be within the Doncaster Metropolitan Borough boundary. We will prioritise projects located within Doncaster's Biodiversity Opportunity areas and the parts of the Humberhead Levels and Dearne Valley Green Heart Nature Improvement Areas that fall within Doncaster. Within these areas projects will be favoured that can demonstrate that they buffer or expand existing habitats, link existing habitats together or provide stepping stones between existing habitats. Prioritising offset projects in this way is in line with the Natural Environment White Paper and is expected to deliver the greatest gains for biodiversity, by delivering practical improvements to the existing ecological network. The Biodiversity Opportunity Area Map can be seen in figure 1 and in greater detail on our website at <ADDRESS to be confirmed>.



Doncaster Spatial Mapping Partnership

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Legend

- Biodiversity Opportunity Target Areas
- Deane Valley - Doncaster
 - Ea Beck Washlands
 - Finningley Cover Sands
 - Humberhead Peatlands - River Torne
 - Humberhead Peatlands - Thorne and Hatfield Moors
 - Living Don - Don Gorge
 - Living Don - Mexborough and Denaby
 - Living Don - North Doncaster Levels
 - Southern Magnesian Limestone Ridge - North Doncaster
 - Southern Magnesian Limestone Ridge - South Doncaster

Biodiversity Opportunities

3.2 Type of offset project

- 3.2.1 The Council would like to see offset projects developed that seek to deliver particular types of habitat in certain areas of the borough. Details of which habitats are particularly supported in an area can be seen below in Table 7.

TABLE 7	UK BAP Priority Habitat									
	Hedgerows	Lowland Mixed Deciduous Woodland	Wet Woodland	Lowland Calcareous Grassland	Lowland Meadows	Lowland Dry Acid Grassland	Lowland Heathland	Lowland Raised Bog	Lowland Fen and Floodplain Grazing Marsh	Ponds
Landscape Scale Biodiversity Opportunity Area										
Humberhead Peatlands - Thorne and Hatfield Moors	✓					✓	✓	✓		✓
Humberhead Peatlands - River Torne	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
Finningley Cover Sands	✓	✓				✓	✓			
Southern Magnesian -Limestone Ridge North Doncaster	✓	✓		✓						✓
Southern Magnesian -Limestone Ridge South Doncaster	✓	✓		✓						✓
Dearne Valley Doncaster	✓	✓	✓		✓				✓	✓
Ea Beck Washlands	✓	✓	✓		✓				✓	✓
Living Don - Mexborough and Denaby	✓	✓	✓		✓				✓	✓
Living Don - Don Gorge	✓	✓	✓	✓					✓	✓
Living Don - North Doncaster Levels	✓	✓	✓		✓				✓	✓

- 3.2.2 In choosing a site for offsetting a provider should seek to buffer, expand, link and provide stepping stones between existing pockets of BAP habitat.

3.3 Spatial Multipliers

3.3.1 Table 7 below shows the spatial multipliers that will be used to determine how well a proposed offsetting project fits with Doncaster’s assessment methodology for offsetting sites.

TABLE 7	
Location Parameters	Multiplier
Offset project is within a Biodiversity Opportunity Area <i>AND</i> Will help to buffer, link, expand or restore an existing area of BAP habitat.	No multiplier needed
Offset project is within a Biodiversity Opportunity Area but does not specifically buffer, link, expand or restore an existing area of BAP habitat. <i>OR</i> Offset project is located outside a Biodiversity Opportunity Area but can be shown to help buffer, link, expand or restore an existing area of BAP habitat.	2
Offset project is located outside a Biodiversity Opportunity Area and does not buffer, link, expand or restore an existing area of BAP habitat.	3

3.3.3 Importantly, offset projects do not have to be located adjacent to the development site for which they are providing compensation. However, if a development is within a Biodiversity Opportunity Area we would favour an offset project being chosen that is within the same opportunity area.

3.3.4 While we are seeking to target delivery of offset projects within Biodiversity Opportunity Areas and Nature Improvement Areas, we would be happy to discuss potential projects with offset providers that are seeking to develop schemes outside these areas. We will hold a register of projects that have been assessed by Natural England as suitable, and are considered by the council as being in line with the goals of Doncaster’s offsetting assessment methodology. This will be available on the Council’s website.

Appendix A

Assessing Habitat Distinctiveness and Condition in Doncaster

The table below lists the different habitat types that could be found on a site, their distinctiveness and guidance relating to how to assess the condition of each habitat. The distinctiveness scores are based on the paper 'Biodiversity offsets: possible methods for measuring biodiversity losses and gains for use in the UK' by Jo Treweek CEnv MIEEM and Bill Butcher, Treweek Environmental Consultants and Helen Temple, The Biodiversity Consultancy. Condition assessments will be carried out using the Farm Environment Plan guidance by Natural England. The information in the 'Condition Assessment' column indicates which FEP assessment should be used for each habitat.

- In some cases further information is provided where the traditional use of the FEP may not have been considered appropriate.
- Some low quality habitats do not require a condition assessment in which case the condition that should be assigned is indicated.
- In cases where two habitats overlap (e.g. scattered scrub on calcareous grassland) then the habitat with the higher distinctiveness score should be used in the assessment.

Phase 1 Habitat Type	Distinctiveness	Condition Assessment
Broad Leaved Woodland (Semi Natural)	High	T08
Broad Leaved Woodland (Plantation)	High	Use T08 even though this habitat does not meet strict FEP definition for use with T08.
Coniferous Woodland (Semi Natural)	High	Use T08 even though this habitat does not meet strict FEP definition for use with T08.
Coniferous Woodland (Plantation)	Low	Classify as poor condition
Mixed Woodland (Semi Natural)	High	Use T08 even though this habitat does not meet strict FEP definition for use with T08.
Mixed Woodland (Plantation)	Medium	Use T08 even though this habitat does not meet strict FEP definition for use with T08.
Dense or Scattered Scrub	Medium	Use condition assessment V05 for scrub, even if the scrub does not meet the FEP definition of high environmental value scrub.
Parkland Scattered Trees (All types)	High	T03
Unimproved Acid Grassland	High	G05
Semi Improved Acid Grassland	High	G05
Unimproved Neutral Grassland	High	G06
Semi Improved Neutral Grassland	High	G06
Unimproved Calcareous Grassland	High	G04
Semi Improved Calcareous	High	G04

Phase 1 Habitat Type	Distinctiveness	Condition Assessment
Grassland		
Improved Grassland	Low	Classify as poor condition.
Marsh/Marshy Grassland	High	G07
Poor Semi Improved Grassland	Low	Classify as poor condition.
Bracken Continuous or Scattered	Low	Bracken should be classed as condition poor unless it meets the FEP definition of high environmental value bracken in which case its condition should be assessed against V05*.
Tall Ruderal	Low	Classify as poor condition.
Dry Dwarf Shrub Heath Acid or Basic	High	M03
Wet Dwarf Shrub Heath	High	M03
Lichen Bryophyte Heath	High	G05
Dry Heath / Acid Grassland Mosaic	High	Use M03 or G05 depending on whether heath or grassland is considered the dominant habitat type. If it is not possible to decide which habitat is dominant then undertake a condition assessment using each method and choose the one with the higher condition score.
Wet Heath Acid Grassland Mosaic	High	Use M03 or G05 depending on whether heath or grassland is considered the dominant habitat type. If it is not possible to decide which habitat is dominant then undertake a condition assessment using each method and choose the one with the higher condition score.
Fen Habitats	High	W04
Reedbeds	High	W08
Ponds	High	W07
Arable	Low	Classify as poor condition.
Amenity Grassland	Low	Classify as poor condition.
Ephemeral Short Perennial	Low	Classify as poor condition.
Introduced Shrub	Low	Classify as poor condition.
Hedgerow	N/A	Use F02 regardless of whether or not a hedge meets the criteria to be called a high environmental value hedge.

Appendix B

Risk factors for restoring or recreating different habitats

The table below gives an indication of the difficulty of recreating or restoring different types of habitat. These are taken from Defra's Guidance for Offset Providers and are intended as guidance. The specifics of habitat creation on each site need to be taken into consideration when considering how likely a project is to be successful. An offset provider that feels the technical difficulty of the project they are proposing differs from that shown below should contact Natural England and Doncaster Council for further guidance. The table at the bottom of the page details the recommended multipliers.

Habitat	Technical Difficulty of recreating	Technical difficulty of restoration
Calaminarian Grasslands	High	Medium
Coastal and floodplain grazing marsh	Low	Low
Eutrophic Standing Water	Medium	Medium
Lowland beech and yew woodland	Medium	Low
Lowland calcareous grassland	Medium	Low
Lowland dry acid grassland	Medium	Low
Lowland fens	Medium	Low
Lowland heathland	Medium	Medium
Lowland meadows	Medium	Low
Lowland mixed deciduous woodland	Medium	Low
Open mosaic habitats on previously developed land	Low	Low
Ponds	Low	Low
Reedbeds	Low	Low
Wet woodland	Medium	Low
Wet heath	High	High
Wood-pasture & parkland	Medium	Low

Technical difficulty of recreation/restoration	Multiplier
High	3
Medium	1.5
Low	1

Appendix C

Reflecting the passage of time before a habitat reaches target condition

The table below lists the multipliers that need to be used to compensate for the fact that newly created habitat takes time to reach a condition that is adequate compensation for a habitat being lost. For further details see Defra's Guidance for offset providers page 11.

Years to Target Condition	Multiplier
5	1.2
10	1.4
15	1.7
20	2.0
25	2.4
30	2.8
32	3