

WHEATLEY FARMS, FOUR ACRE LANE,
LONGRIDGE

RETROSPECTIVE BIODIVERSITY NET GAIN
ASSESSMENT

FEBRUARY 10, 2026

project ecology

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Contents

- 1 Executive Summary
- 2 Introduction
- 3 Survey Methodology
- 4 Results
- 5 Evaluation
- 6 Conclusion and Recommendations
- 7 Appendix A: Planning Policy and Legislation
- 8 Appendix B: Habitat Map – Pre-development
Appendix B: Habitat Map – Post-development
- 9 Appendix C: Target Notes and Photographs
- 10 Appendix D: Calculation Tool, Headline Results Extract

1 Executive Summary

- 1.1.1 The site is the subject of a planning application with Ribble Valley Borough Council for the construction of a poultry shed and associated access works.
- 1.1.2 The retrospective baseline habitats are judged to consist of modified grassland only.
- 1.1.3 The site proposals and mitigation demonstrate the scheme provides >10% in habitat and hedgerow units and is therefore compliant with current policy and law regarding biodiversity net gain.

2 Introduction

2.1 Site Location

- 2.1.1 The site is located at Wheatley Farm, Four Acre Lane, Longridge (OS grid reference: SD 61944 39734).



Figure 1: Site Location Courtesy of Open Street Maps

2.2 Background

- 2.2.1 The site will be the subject of a planning application for the construction of a poultry shed and associated access works.

2.3 Scope of Work

- 2.3.1 Farmplus Constructions Ltd has commissioned Project Ecology to:

- Conduct a retrospective BNG Assessment for the application site.

2.4 Aims and Objectives

- 2.4.1 Calculate the retrospective baseline and post-development biodiversity units.
- 2.4.2 Provide mitigation to comply with current planning policy relating to Biodiversity Net Gain.

2.5 Site Visit

- 2.5.1 A site appraisal was undertaken on the 3rd February 2026. This was conducted to inform the baseline of the site, based on the retained parts of the wider field.
- 2.5.2 The site survey and this assessment has been conducted by Ben Crossthwaite MCIEEM. Ben has 10 years' professional experience of undertaking UK Habitat Classification surveys and JNCC Phase 1 Habitat Surveys across the UK and Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) Assessments.

3 Survey Methodology

3.1 Biodiversity Net Gain

- 3.1.1 The baseline habitat conditions have been taken primarily from the site appraisal and historic aerial imagery, via various online sources.
- 3.1.2 Habitat data including type, area (or length), condition and strategic location were uploaded to the Defra Statutory Biodiversity Metric Calculator spreadsheet to determine the baseline value of the site.
- 3.1.3 The post-development masterplan was interrogated to determine areas of hard standing, buildings, and associated infrastructure. New habitats were classified and allocated a target condition, based on habitat type, location and management input. This information was uploaded to the metric spreadsheet to obtain a post-development value.
- 3.1.4 The pre- and post-development values were compared to determine whether the yield of biodiversity units achieved a deficit or gain.

3.2 Survey Limitations and Constraints

- 3.2.1 As this assessment is being undertaken retrospectively, a thorough characterisation of the sites baseline habitats could not be undertaken. However, the site appraisal informs the site is likely to have comprised modified grassland pre-clearance.
- 3.2.2 The baseline assessment has been assessed using the methods stated and professional judgement, resulting in a subjective verdict.

4 Results

4.1 Habitat Survey

4.1.1 The habitat maps can be seen in Appendix B. Target notes and photographs are contained in Appendix C.

Modified Grassland

4.1.2 The sites redline boundary is located within a pastoral field, sloping downwards, east to west.

4.1.3 Historic imagery and the site appraisal of the wider field, informs the application site comprised modified grassland, with a history of intensive agricultural use. Due to this historic agricultural use, the sites soils are eutrophic resulting in a species-poor composition, dominated by competitive grass and herbaceous species.

4.1.4 The grassland appears to have been intensively managed, as it continues to be so, largely by livestock grazing, resulting in a short sward height and lack of structural diversity.

4.2 Biodiversity Net Gain

4.2.1 The results of the Biodiversity Net Gain baseline should be read in conjunction with the Statutory Metric Condition Assessment and Calculation Tool documents¹.

4.2.2 A watercourse is located to the north of the application site. As the bank top is located over 10m from the applications redline boundary, this does not have to be considered within the BNG Assessment.

4.2.3 A summary of the baseline unit scores on site can be seen in Table 1.

Habitat	Size/Length	Unit Type (Habitat, Hedgerow, River)	Condition	Unit Total
Modified Grassland (building and surrounding footprint)	0.3712ha	Habitat	Poor	0.74
Modified Grassland (access track)	0.1044ha	Habitat	Poor	0.21
Modified Grassland (mitigation area)	0.0405ha	Habitat	Poor	0.08
Total				1.03

Table 1 showing the base unit totals for each unit/habitat type on site

¹ Both documents will be provided separately.

5 Evaluation

5.1 Impact on Habitats

- 5.1.1 The assessment of the baseline habitats has been informed by the site appraisal of the wider field and historic imagery, informing there has been a loss of modified grassland only.
- 5.1.2 This habitat is considered to be of low ecological value. The grassland provides little sources of pollen and nectar for invertebrates and no foraging habitat for small mammals and amphibians. Potential impacts to this habitat are to be at level only.
- 5.1.3 The baseline habitats have been identified as accurately as possible, with obvious reliance on species and management practices of the wider field.

5.2 Biodiversity Net Gain

- 5.2.1 Proposed habitats, post-development are listed below.
Developed Land; Sealed Surface
- 5.2.2 This habitat comprises the proposed access track and building.
Artificial Unvegetated, Unsealed Surface
- 5.2.3 This habitat comprised the area of unsealed surface around the proposed building.
Modified Grassland
- 5.2.4 This comprises the area of wildflower grassland (enhanced - good condition) in the 'mitigation area' and the retained area of grassland to the west of the building (moderate condition).
Rural Tree
- 5.2.5 28 native, rural trees are proposed on site. These have a target size of small and condition of poor.

Mixed Scrub

- 5.2.6 This linear area of mixed scrub habitat is proposed along the front of the building, providing connectivity across the site.

Native Hedgerow with Trees

- 5.2.7 Native hedgerows with tree run parallel to the access track from Four Acre Lane, up to the proposed poultry shed.

- 5.2.8 The evaluation of the Biodiversity Net Gain Assessment should be read in conjunction with the Statutory Condition Assessment and Metric Calculation Tool documents.

- 5.2.9 Within the application site the baseline unit values are as follows:

- Habitat units are 1.03
- Hedgerow units are zero

- 5.2.10 The post-development calculations for each unit category are summarised in Table 2. See Appendix B for the post-development habitat map.

Habitat	Size/Length	Unit Type (Habitat, Hedgerow, River)	Condition	Unit Total
Modified grassland - enhanced	0.0405ha	Habitat	poor – good	0.08 – 0.18
Developed land; sealed surface	0.1044ha	Habitat	N/A - Other	Zero
Developed land; sealed surface	0.147ha	Habitat	N/A - Other	Zero
Artificial unvegetated, unsealed surface	0.1ha	Habitat	N/A - Other	Zero
Modified grassland	0.0586ha	Habitat	Moderate	0.20
Rural tree	0.0692ha	Habitat	Poor	0.19
Mixed scrub	0.0656ha	Habitat	Moderate	0.44
Rural tree	0.0448ha	Habitat	Poor	0.13
Total				1.14
Native hedgerow with trees	0.144km	Hedgerow	Poor	0.56
Native hedgerow with trees	0.15km	Hedgerow	Poor	0.58
Total				1.13

Table 2 showing a summary of post-development biodiversity net gain calculations

5.2.11 The net change in biodiversity units is as follows:

- Habitat units is 0.11 (10.22%)
- Hedgerow units is 1.13 (N/A%)

5.2.12 An extract of the headline results, from the Statutory Defra Metric Calculation Tool result, can be seen in Appendix D.

5.2.13 The trading rules have been satisfied within the metric calculation.

5.3 Mitigation Hierarchy

5.3.1 The mitigation hierarchy is a widely used tool that guides users towards limiting as far as possible the negative impacts on biodiversity from development projects.

5.3.2 The mitigation hierarchy steps are as follows:

- Avoid - Project proposals must give the highest priority to 'avoidance' strategies in accordance with the mitigation hierarchy.
- Minimise - Where avoidance is not feasible, it is essential to minimise negative impact by modifying the project design/strategy. All sensitive habitats must be avoided at all costs.
- Mitigate - All non-avoidable ecological damage must be compensated.
- Offset - Final resort after all options have been exhausted: the most expensive, complex, and high-risk approach.

5.3.3 As this assessment is being conducted retrospectively, it is fair to state the mitigation hierarchy has not been considered from a design stage.

5.3.4 The site has mitigated the loss of modified grassland by the creation of modified grassland (good condition), mixed scrub and tree planting.

6 Conclusion and Recommendations

6.1 Further Survey Work

- 6.1.1 Due to the retrospective nature of this assessment and report, further survey work is not possible or required.

6.2 Mitigation and Enhancement Measures

Biodiversity Net Gain

- 6.2.1 The site proposals and mitigation demonstrate the proposal provides >10% in habitat and hedgerow units and is therefore compliant with current policy and law regarding biodiversity net gain.

7 Appendix A: Planning Policy and Legislation

National Policy

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF 2025) describes the Government's planning policy for England and how it should be applied. Within this framework, the requirements in relation to biodiversity are included within several policies. The two most relevant to individual planning decisions are Paragraphs 187 and 193, shown below:

- 187. Planning policies and decisions should contribute to and enhance the natural and local environment by:
 - a) protecting and enhancing valued landscapes, sites of biodiversity or geological value and soils (in a manner commensurate with their statutory status or identified quality in the development plan);
 - b) recognising the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside, and the wider benefits from natural capital and ecosystem services – including the economic and other benefits of the best and most versatile agricultural land, and of trees and woodland;
 - c) maintaining the character of the undeveloped coast, while improving public access to it where appropriate;
 - d) minimising impacts on and providing net gains for biodiversity, including by establishing coherent ecological networks that are more resilient to current and future pressures;
 - e) preventing new and existing development from contributing to, being put at unacceptable risk from, or being adversely affected by, unacceptable levels of soil, air, water or noise pollution or land instability. Development should, wherever possible, help to improve local environmental conditions such as air and water quality, taking into account relevant information such as river basin management plans; and
 - f) remediating and mitigating despoiled, degraded, derelict, contaminated and unstable land, where appropriate.
- 193. When determining planning applications, local planning authorities should apply the following principles:
 - a. if significant harm to biodiversity resulting from a development cannot be avoided (through locating on an alternative site with less harmful impacts), adequately mitigated, or, as a last resort, compensated for, then planning permission should be refused;

- b. development on land within or outside a Site of Special Scientific Interest, and which is likely to have an adverse effect on it (either individually or in combination with other developments), should not normally be permitted. The only exception is where the benefits of the development in the location proposed clearly outweigh both its likely impact on the features of the site that make it of special scientific interest, and any broader impacts on the national network of Sites of Special Scientific Interest;
- c. development resulting in the loss or deterioration of irreplaceable habitats (such as ancient woodland and ancient or veteran trees) should be refused, unless there are wholly exceptional reasons and a suitable compensation strategy exists; and
- d. development whose primary objective is to conserve or enhance biodiversity should be supported; while opportunities to improve biodiversity in and around developments should be integrated as part of their design, especially where this can secure measurable net gains for biodiversity or enhance public access to nature where this is appropriate.

Legislation

The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended by the CRoW Act 2000) includes the notification and confirmation of Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs). SSSIs can be notified for their floral, faunal, geological, or physiographical features. Protection against damaging operations and management of SSSIs is also included within the Act. Impact Risk Zones (IRZs) are zones around an SSSI account for the particular sensitivities of the features for which it is notified and identify development proposal which could have adverse impacts.

The Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended by the CRoW Act 2000) protects native animals, plants and habitats. Under the Act it is an offence to intentionally kill, injure or take any wild animal listed on Schedule 5 and it is an offence to interfere with places used for shelter or protection, or intentionally disturb animals occupying such places. The Act prohibits picking, uprooting or destroy any wild plant (or any attached seed or spore) listed in Schedule 8.

European Protected Species (EPS) such as bats, Hazel Dormouse, Otter, Natterjack Toad, Smooth Snake, Sand Lizard and Great Crested Newt are protected by the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended by the CRoW Act 2000) and the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017. The Acts make it an offence to:

- a. Deliberately capture, injure or kill an EPS;
- b. Deliberately impair an EPS's ability to survive, breed, reproduce, rear or nurture young; to hibernate or migrate; or significantly affect the local distribution or abundance of the EPS.
- c. Possess or control live or dead EPS or any part of, or anything derived from a EPS;
- d. Damage or destroy a breeding site or resting place of an EPS;
- e. Intentionally or recklessly obstruct access to any place that is used for shelter or protection by an EPS;
- f. Intentionally or recklessly disturb a structure or place that it uses for shelter or protection that is occupied by an EPS.

All common herptiles are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended by the CRoW Act 2000). Grass Snake, Slow Worm, Common Lizard, Adder are protected against intentional killing or injury. Common Frog, Common Toad, Smooth Newt and Palmate Newt is protected against sale. In addition, all British reptiles, Common toad and Great Crested Newt are listed as Species of Principal Importance.

All nesting birds are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended). It is an offence to intentionally kill, injure or take any wild bird or take, damage, or destroy its nest whilst in use or being built, or take or destroy its eggs. It is an offence to intentionally or recklessly disturb a species listed on Schedule 1 of the Act while they are nest building or at or near a nest with eggs or young, or to disturb the dependent young.

The Protection of Badgers Act 1992 makes it an offence to wilfully, or to attempt to kill, injure, take, possess or cruelly ill-treat a Badger, or intentionally or recklessly interfere with a sett. Interference of a sett includes disturbing badgers during occupation of a sett, or damaging or destroying a sett, or obstructing access to the sett.

Section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006 places a duty on every public authority to have regard to conserving biodiversity. Section 41 of the same Act requires the Secretary of State to publish a list of the living organisms and types of habitats that are of 'Principal Importance' for the purpose of conserving biodiversity. The Secretary of State must take steps, as appear reasonably practicable, to further the conservation of those living organisms and habitats in any list published under this section. The list of species and habitats of principal importance currently includes 943 species and 56 habitats. These are the species and habitats found in England which are regarded as conservation priorities under the UK Post-2010 Biodiversity Framework.

The Hedgerows Regulations 1997 protect 'important' hedgerows from destruction or damage. A hedgerow is 'important' if it (a) has existed for 30 years or more; and (b) satisfies at least one of the criteria listed in Part II of Schedule 1 of the Regulations. Under the Regulations, it is against the law to remove or destroy 'important' hedgerows unless permitted by the local planning authority.

The Environment Act 2023 makes it mandatory for housing and development, subject to some narrow exemptions, to achieve at least a 10% net gain in value for biodiversity – a requirement that habitats for wildlife must be left in a measurably better state than before the development. Developers must submit a 'biodiversity gain plan' alongside usual planning application documents. The local authority must assess whether the 10% net gain requirement is met in order to approve the biodiversity gain plan.

The Environment Act 2023 strengthens the duty on public authorities (NERC Act, 2006) to have regard to the conservation of biodiversity.

The Environment Act 2023 amends the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 to introduce an additional purpose for granting a protected species licence in relation to development, 'for reasons of overriding public interest', and two additional tests for the granting of such licences: that there is 'no other

satisfactory solution' and that granting the licence is 'not detrimental to the survival of any the population of the species concerned'. These changes will reduce the scope for unlicensed activities to provide clear safeguards before licences can be granted, providing legal certainty and clarity to developers about their environmental obligations.

8 Appendix B: Habitat Map – Pre-development



Appendix B: Habitat Map – Post-development



9 Appendix C: Target Notes and Photographs

Target Notes		
Reference No.	Habitat/Feature/Species	Photograph
	Site and wider field present day	 <p>The 'Photograph' column contains three images. The top-left image shows a wide, flat green field under a cloudy sky. The top-right image shows a muddy, rutted track leading through a green field towards a farm building. The bottom image shows a muddy track with a stone wall in the foreground and a large puddle reflecting the sky.</p>

Target Notes		
Reference No.	Habitat/Feature/Species	Photograph
	Modified Grassland – pre habitat degradation (04/2025)	

