Halnaker Hill
Farm



Understanding Biodiversity Net Gain:

A guide for developers, businesses and individuals

Halnakerhill.co.uk/bng

How a BNG habitat is established

A BNG habitat is created by first establishing the land's existing biodiversity value through ecological surveys and the Statutory Biodiversity Metric. A habitat enhancement plan is then developed to increase biodiversity by creating or improving habitats, with expected gains calculated in the metric. To generate biodiversity units, the habitat must be legally secured and managed for at least 30 years through a conservation covenant or Section 106 agreement. The site is registered on the national Biodiversity Gain Site Register, enabling biodiversity units to be sold to developers.



How is a BNG unit calculated?

A biodiversity unit is calculated using Natural England's statutory biodiversity metric, which assesses the ecological value of habitats based on four key factors:

Size:
The area or length of the habitat

Distinctiveness:
How rare or valuable a habitat is

Condition:
The quality of the habitat (defined as poor, moderate, or good)

Strategic significance:
Whether the habitat is located in an area identified for nature recovery in a Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS), which can increase its unit value

---

Who can purchase BNG units?

There are three main markets for BNG units:

Mandatory: for developers

The Environment Act 2021 made BNG a legal requirement for most new developments in England. Developers must achieve at least 10% measurable biodiversity net gain, although some local planning authorities may also have policies requiring more.

Planning permission is contingent on the submission and approval of a Biodiversity Gain Plan by the Local Planning Authority, outlining how the BNG requirement will be met.

Voluntary: for businesses and organisations

Created by fractionalising Defra's BNG Units into 9 sq m parcels, Voluntary Biodiversity Credits are a way for businesses to contribute to nature recovery at a scale and budget that suits them, as part of their ESG strategies.

Every credit is recorded on an independent ledger and the purchaser's positive impact is added to a personalised Impact Dashboard. Credits are legally secured and managed for at least 30 years through a conservation covenant or Section 106 agreement. Credit transactions are managed by Earthly.

Voluntary: for individuals

There is a growing market for biodiversity credits to be purchased by individuals to invest directly in large-scale nature restoration, safe in the knowledge that the credits are trackable, approved and monitored.
For people who care about the environment, this market provides a powerful way to leave a personal, lasting legacy for generations to come.



Calculating and purchasing mandatory BNG units

01 Identify the off-site unit requirement

02 Explore on-site mitigation measures

03 Enquire about units from a habitat bank registered with Natural England, or purchase statutory credits as a last resort

04 Secure the purchase through an allocation agreement

05 The habitat bank registers the allocation with Natural England

What are the metric risk factors?

The metric accounts for three risk factors:

- Delivery difficulty – how difficult the habitat is to create or restore/enhance
- Temporal risk – how long it takes to reach its target condition
- Spatial risk – the distance between the habitat lost and the habitat created or enhanced

The higher the risk, the more biodiversity units may be required.

Where can I source BNG units?

BNG units can only be purchased from habitat banks registered on the biodiversity gain sites register. For off-site units, you may engage with brokers or directly approach habitat bank providers like Halnaker Hill Farm.

For BNG unit enquiries, see halnakerhill.co.uk/bng

How are BNG units purchased?

- Initial enquiry – give a provider your project details and biodiversity requirements, usually supported by the biodiversity metric and an ecological report
- Proposal – the BNG provider outlines the number and type of units required, costs, timescales and recommendations
- Allocation agreement – a legal agreement secures the purchase and sets out the units, costs and obligations of both parties
- Final agreement – once this is signed and payment made, the habitat bank registers the units with Natural England. The BNG provider then takes responsibility for their long-term management, monitoring and compliance

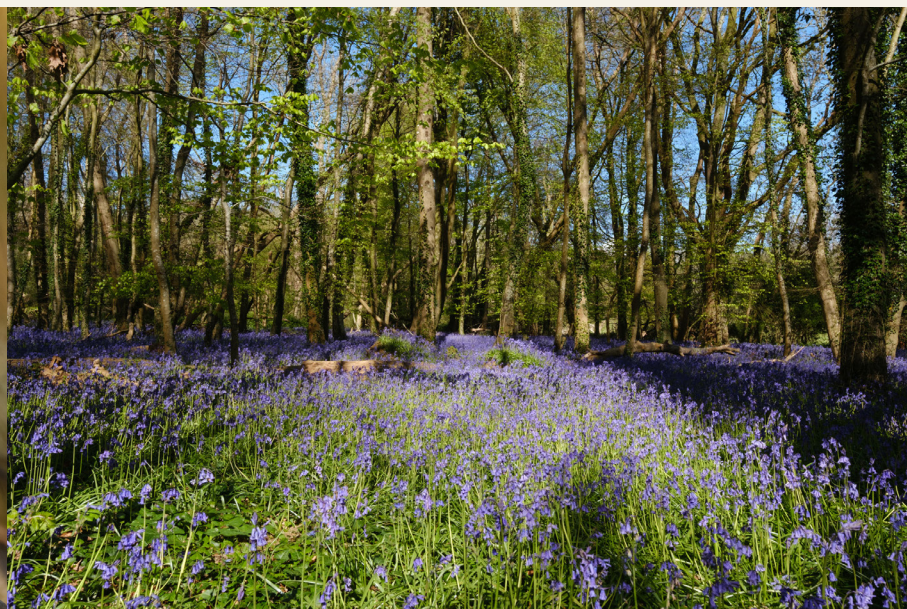


Can you reserve BNG units?

Yes. Units can be secured in advance, for example before a planning application is submitted. Halnaker Hill Farm can enter into a purchase agreement, with a deposit securing the units for an agreed period.

Once planning permission is granted, the final balance is paid and the units are formally allocated to the development through the national register.

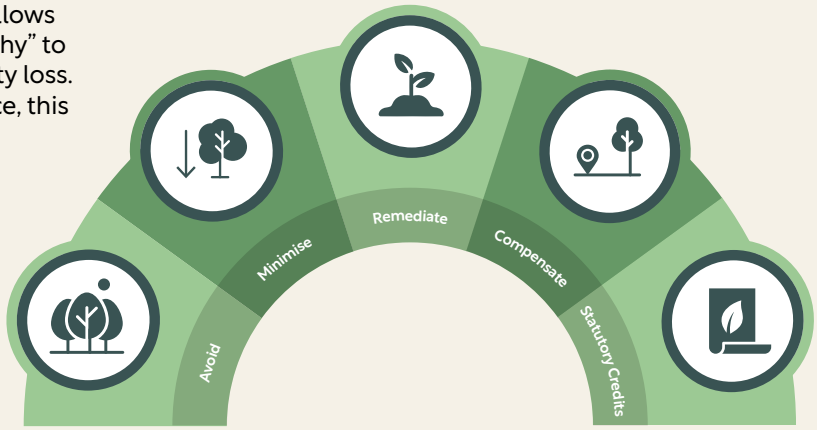




What is the BNG mitigation hierarchy for developers?

When evaluating BNG units for mandatory purposes, a qualified ecologist will first assess the ecological baseline of your site using a biodiversity metric to calculate the number and type of units required for your project to achieve 10% BNG.

The process then follows a "mitigation hierarchy" to minimise biodiversity loss. In order of preference, this hierarchy is:



Avoid: Design development to avoid impacts on biodiversity as much as possible

Minimise: Reduce unavoidable impacts

Remediate: Increase biodiversity on-site

Compensate: By purchasing off-site BNG credits

Statutory credits: If BNG cannot be achieved on-site or through the off-site market, developers can purchase statutory biodiversity credits from Natural England. These are intentionally priced higher to encourage on-site and local off-site market solutions.

What is a Biodiversity Gain Plan?

As part of your planning application, a Biodiversity Gain Plan is submitted to the Local Planning Authority (LPA), detailing how BNG will be achieved, including any off-site unit purchases and their registration numbers. This plan must be approved before development can commence.

How are BNG units recorded?

Off-site BNG sites and allocated units* are listed on the public Biodiversity Gain Sites Register. This enables users to:

- Verify registered biodiversity gain sites
- Confirm that units have been allocated to a specific development

The register provides transparency and accountability and helps track BNG delivery across the country.

*The register only accepts allocations made using the statutory metric.

What is a Habitat Management and Monitoring Plan (HMMP)?

A HMMP sets out how a habitat creation or enhancement project will be managed and monitored over the minimum 30-year BNG period. It outlines:

- Management activities, such as planting, weeding or grazing
- Ecological targets
- A monitoring schedule
- Contingency plans if targets are not met

The HMMP forms part of the Section 106 legal agreement securing the BNG units.

How long do BNG units last?

Off-site BNG units must be legally secured for at least 30 years through a Section 106 Agreement or Conservation Covenant, ensuring long-term habitat management and monitoring.

Who is responsible for reporting on the BNG scheme?

The habitat bank provider monitors the habitat and reports to the relevant authority throughout the scheme. At Halnaker Hill Farm, this is the South Downs National Park Authority.

The provider is also responsible for registering allocations of biodiversity units with Natural England.

Halnaker Hill Farm BNG landbank

Halnaker Hill Farm is a 330-acre site within the South Downs National Park and forms one of the largest Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) landbanks in the UK.

Formerly managed as intensive arable farmland, the site is being transformed into a landscape focused on nature recovery, restoring species-rich calcareous grassland, improving soil health through regenerative farming, and creating a sustainable model that delivers benefits for biodiversity, carbon capture and food production. The farm has already established 7 km of native hedgerows and 7 hectares of woodland to reconnect habitats and support wildlife.

The landbank is secured through a Section 106 Agreement with the South Downs National Park Authority and has generated more than 850 measurable BNG units. Commercially managed by Kingsbridge, the project plays an important role in supporting wider regional and national nature recovery ambitions, including the South Downs National Park's target to renature 33% of the National Park by 2030.

A return to nature

The majority of the land at Halnaker was intensively farmed for wheat since the 1970s, with the use of chemicals and pesticides leaving poor soil quality and low levels of biodiversity. Now it is changing, under the stewardship of Halnaker Hill Natural Capital (HHNC).

Working with expert ecologists, in a project inspired by maps created by cartographers Yeakell & Gardener in the late 18th century, we are using regenerative agriculture techniques to restore the land to its former natural peak.

Since HHNC acquired the farm in 2024, our team has planted over 20,000 trees, sown 7 km of hedgerow, seeded wildflower meadows and created dew ponds to set the scene for a renaissance of nature in the decades to come. New wildlife corridors will be created to encourage birds, bats, insects and mammals to take up residence.

The land will be actively managed by our teams, so it becomes a naturally evolving, living, breathing environment teeming with life. Its legacy will remain for generations to come.

Ecology

We are already seeing the ecological impact of our work. Corn buntings, which have declined heavily across the UK, reappeared within a couple of months of restoration work beginning, and a few breeding pairs are now settled on the site.

The endangered small blue butterfly, the size of a fingernail, has been observed on the farm. We have also seen nightjars, yellowhammers, stonechats, linnets, and skylarks – all positive indicators that wildlife is thriving in the conditions we are creating.

In addition, 30 grey partridges were reintroduced to the land by our team. Once known as the native partridge of the UK, numbers of this threatened species have fallen sharply due to the loss of insects and weed seeds in modern farming.

More than 850 BNG units for purchase today

A biodiversity unit is a measurable, trackable, standard unit representing a positive outcome for nature. Unlike carbon credits, which only focus on greenhouse gas emissions, biodiversity units specifically address nature loss.

A habitat will contain a number of units, depending on specifics such as its size, quality, location, type and the kinds of flora and fauna present – its 'natural capital'.

We have various habitats of medium and high distinctiveness including hedgerows, lowland calcareous (chalky) grassland, other neutral grassland, mixed scrub, ponds, individual trees, and woodland.

Units are available to:

Developers who need to meet mandatory legal requirements for biodiversity when building

Corporates to help fulfil their ESG (Environmental, Social and Governance) goals

Individuals who are passionate about the environment and want to make a meaningful, personal contribution to nature recovery





Find out more: halnakerhill.co.uk/bng



Purchasing BNG units from Halnaker Hill Farm

Whether you are purchasing for a development or company, or investing as an individual, we would be pleased to hear about your requirements.

GET IN TOUCH

Greg Lukasiewicz
Sales & Marketing Director, Natural Capital

07739 061699
greg@halnakerhill.co.uk

John Yeend
Business Development Director, Natural Capital

07891 852149
john@halnakerhill.co.uk

Halnaker Hill Farm

Halnaker, West Sussex, PO18 0NF

Halnakerhill.co.uk/bng