

How can good practice for Biodiversity Net Gain incorporate people's wellbeing?

Core Messages & Recommendations

Biodiversity Net Gain and People's Wellbeing / October 2021

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1. Introduction

Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) could transform how we finance, design, build and operate development, with the UK's Good Practice Principles providing an approach that supports developers to generate long-term, measurable, and meaningful net benefits for biodiversity¹. But while we are making progress towards this goal, focussed on the conservation of biodiversity both for its own sake and for the benefit of society, it is important to remain mindful of the connection between biodiversity and the wellbeing of individual people.

Spending time in the natural environment can improve mental health and feelings of wellbeing, for example by reducing stress and fatigue, combatting loneliness and binding communities together². So, change in biodiversity under BNG can affect people's wellbeing in positive but also negative ways.

BNG can benefit people's wellbeing directly through creating high quality natural surroundings when BNG is achieved within the development footprint or when a biodiversity offset increases people's access to, or views of, nature. Indirectly, BNG has a wider societal benefit of enhancing the natural environment for everyone, and people can benefit from simply knowing there has been a net gain of biodiversity from a development. However, poorly designed BNG can be detrimental to people's wellbeing, for example by restricting access to nature within a development site without adequate alternative provision.

In 2018, principles were published to give guidance on how to assess the social impacts of No Net Loss (NNL) and BNG in depth and ensure that people are not left worse off by BNG interventions (Bull et al, 2018³). These set an outcome for NNL/BNG projects to achieve, in which:

"People perceive the components of their wellbeing affected by biodiversity losses and gains to be at least as good as a result of the development project and associated biodiversity NNL/NG activities, than if the development had not been implemented."

Wellbeing is defined as a positive physical, social, and mental state. There are many elements to wellbeing including objective elements such as health and access to material assets, and subjective elements such as life satisfaction, happiness and people's connections with others⁴.

When linking BNG and wellbeing, the focus is only on the elements of wellbeing that are related to biodiversity. In this report, when we refer to BNG and people's wellbeing, we are only referring to elements of wellbeing related to biodiversity. We also use the phrases "biodiversity-related elements of wellbeing" and "people's enjoyment and use of biodiversity" to summarise the many and varied aspects of wellbeing that are related to biodiversity.

1.1. This Scoping Study

The UK's BNG Good Practice Principles involve sharing the benefits fairly among stakeholders and achieving an overall gain in the services that ecosystems provide⁵. However, the principles do not explicitly link BNG to people's wellbeing. This gap could unintentionally lead to poor practice and poor outcomes for people affected by a development's BNG measures.

With funding from the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, CIEEM - in collaboration with Balfour Beatty, the University of Oxford, and Wild Business Ltd - undertook a scoping study to determine whether, and if so how, people's wellbeing should be incorporated more directly into the BNG Good Practice Principles for development within the UK⁶.

The scoping study involved desk-based reviews and consultations that included webinars, an on-line questionnaire, interviews and focus group discussions. We explored the academic research on wellbeing, the policies across the UK that already incorporate wellbeing into development planning, and views gathered from our interviews, focus group discussions and online consultations.

¹ CIEEM, CIRIA, IEMA (2016) Biodiversity Net Gain Good Practice Principles for Development. UK

² HM Government (2018) A Green Future: a 25 year plan to improve the environment.

³ [ensuring_no_net_loss_-_bull_et_al_2018.pdf \(iucn.org\)](#)

⁴ Our report "What the Science Says" describes how wellbeing is defined in the literature

⁵ [Biodiversity Net Gain: Good Practice Principles for Development | CIEEM](#)

⁶ CIEEM, CIRIA, IEMA (2016) Biodiversity Net Gain Good Practice Principles for Development. UK

The study commenced during autumn 2020 and was completed in spring 2021. The project team was supported by a Technical Advisory Panel, with expertise from industry, academia, and government, who provided advice and feedback throughout. The team and Technical Advisory Panel members are listed in Appendix A. The study findings are documented in the following reports:

Defining and assessing human wellbeing: what the science says	A literature review of how wellbeing is defined assessed within the academic literature
How do governments define wellbeing?	A literature review of how wellbeing is defined by international and UK governments and key organisations
Accounting for wellbeing within planning applications	A desk-based review of whether planning authorities in England require consideration of a development's impacts on people's wellbeing as part of a planning application
Biodiversity Net Gain and Wellbeing: consultation responses	A report on responses to this study's consultations on whether, and, if so, how, wellbeing should be incorporated more directly into UK industry's BNG Good Practice Principles
Biodiversity Net Gain and Wellbeing: core messages and recommendations	A summary of the core messages from all of the evidence gathered by this scoping study, together with the recommendations.

1.2. Core Messages and Recommendations

This scoping study aimed to explore whether, and how, good practice for BNG should incorporate people's wellbeing. The focus was on the way that BNG is achieved and the specific elements of people's wellbeing that are influenced by biodiversity and by BNG (i.e. not all elements of wellbeing).

During our consultations, several people discussed the much broader context of people's wellbeing in general and how it relates to sustainable development. As BNG sits within this broader context, it is important to acknowledge these discussions even though they are outside the scope of our study.

To this end, our first set of core messages regard the broader context of sustainable development and people's wellbeing in general. We present the messages that emerged from our scoping study and collate the recommendations that respondents made.

Our second set of core messages relates to this study's aim: whether, and how, good practice for BNG should incorporate people's wellbeing. Our study does not relate to people's wellbeing in general, rather the specific elements of wellbeing related to biodiversity and to BNG (Figure 1).

Finally, we present specific recommendations on the next steps to follow this scoping study.

When making recommendations, we recognise this is a time of policy change as the UK emerges from Covid19 restrictions and in the light of Brexit, and that the status of BNG policy and practice across the UK is dynamic and varied. It is critically important not to distract from efforts to mainstream approaches to deliver BNG, especially the establishment of a basic capacity to support implementation. However, it is equally important not to leave it too late in ensuring that social considerations form part of good practice for designing and implementing BNG.

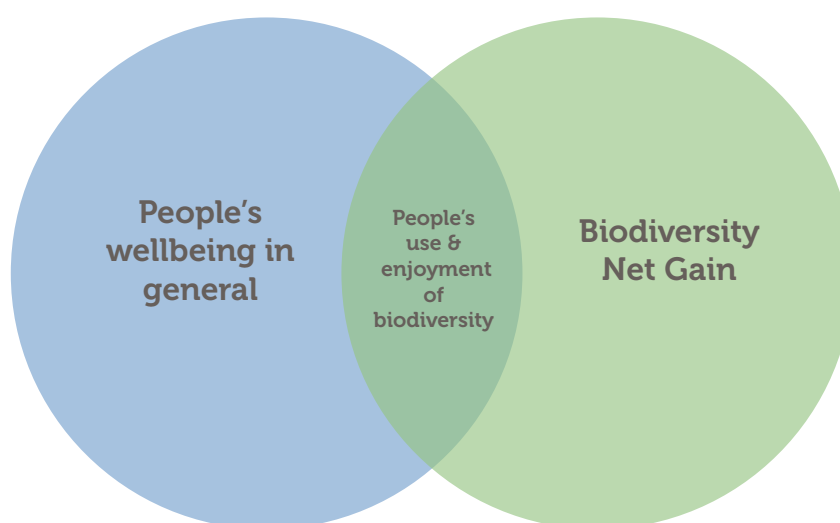
The recommendations in this report are for all stakeholders involved with development, BNG and the related social considerations, including:

- National government departments and statutory regulators
- Local Planning Authorities especially those involved with the biodiversity and social aspects of local plans

- and planning applications
- Developers with voluntary commitments to BNG and/or policy requirements to deliver BNG
- Biodiversity and social practitioners within industry including from client organisations (those commissioning developments), consultancies and contractors
- Third parties involved with BNG projects including local record centres, brokers, and offset providers
- Environmental and social professional institutes
- NGOs and academic researchers

Figure 1. The broader context of sustainable development, within which lies people's wellbeing in general and Biodiversity Net Gain. The link between wellbeing and BNG relates to the specific elements of wellbeing related to biodiversity and to BNG.

Sustainable Development



2. The broader context of people's wellbeing and sustainable development

2.1 Improve existing wellbeing assessments

Core messages from the consultations

Existing social impact assessments of developments do not capture the full extent of objective and subjective elements of people's wellbeing. Often, they are not undertaken as part of a multi-disciplinary, proportionate approach to impact assessments that involves close collaboration between social and environmental professionals.

We wanted to know whether, and to what extent, impacts on people's wellbeing (in general) from development are currently assessed as part of social impact assessments. Social professionals involved with our consultations stated that Health Impact Assessments (HIAs), which are a sub-set of social impact assessments, are used to assess wellbeing impacts from development. Indeed, our review of local planning policies relating to wellbeing showed that HIA was the most cited tool to assess impacts on wellbeing⁷.

We then asked about current use of HIAs within impact assessments. Respondents described the advantages of HIAs, which included being able to apply HIAs proportionately depending on the scale of a development and its impact, and in ways that fit the local context so as to focus on what is locally important. However, many respondents described how HIAs are not fully integrated within impact assessments of developments and, consequently, their recommendations are overlooked or not deemed necessary. They also highlighted the lack of integration between HIAs and ecological impact assessments, and respondents discussing other socio-economic impact assessments raised similar concerns

⁷ This review is described in our report on Local Wellbeing Planning Policies

about the lack of integration between different types of impact assessment.

Finally, respondents acknowledged that HIAs focus on health and do not adequately cover the subjective elements of wellbeing. Many also raised concerns about the practicalities of assessing people's wellbeing, such as collecting sensitive data, and the difficulties of assessing subjective aspects of wellbeing for formal impact assessments.

Recommendations from respondents and consultees

Respondents made several recommendations for assessing the impacts from development on people's wellbeing in general. They also highlighted current initiatives to improve social impact assessments of development, and we spoke with people involved with these initiatives, including professional groups working on improving the practice of HIAs. Together we discussed the broader context of sustainable development and how social impact assessments need to cover a good balance of aspects of health and wellbeing, especially to capture the subjective elements of people's wellbeing. The recommendation that emerged from these discussions sits within the broader context of people's wellbeing and sustainable development.

The recommendation is: **to improve social impact assessments of developments to better incorporate people's wellbeing, especially the subjective elements of wellbeing, and build capabilities and skills in wellbeing impact assessments through practical support such as guidance, training and case studies.**

Linking back to BNG

Assessing impacts on wellbeing from BNG requires expertise in social impact assessments. It is not the responsibility or role of ecologists to assess social impacts. Rather, social experts need to undertake this aspect of the work alongside other members of the team designing BNG, including ecologists (Box 1).

The work already being undertaken to improve social impact assessments of development is highly relevant for this study. However, from our specific viewpoint of BNG, these improvements on their own are not enough. A better interface needs to be established between social impact assessment, wellbeing and BNG (Figure 2). This is especially needed so that social impact assessments link directly with BNG, and to capture the specific elements of wellbeing related to biodiversity and BNG.

Our next recommendation to pilot assessments of BNG-related wellbeing assessments (see Sections 3 and 4) would generate useful evidence to help establish a better interface between social impact assessment and BNG. In addition to these pilots, we recommend:

Producing guidance about assessing the impacts of BNG on people's wellbeing

This guidance would be a useful addition to the work already underway to improve social impact assessments. The guidance should cover how to assess people's wellbeing related to biodiversity and how wellbeing could be affected under BNG. The guidance should also cover how to use the resulting information to inform the design and delivery of BNG, so that BNG designs achieve net gains for biodiversity, and do so in ways that do not negatively affect people's use and enjoyment of biodiversity but enhance this where possible.

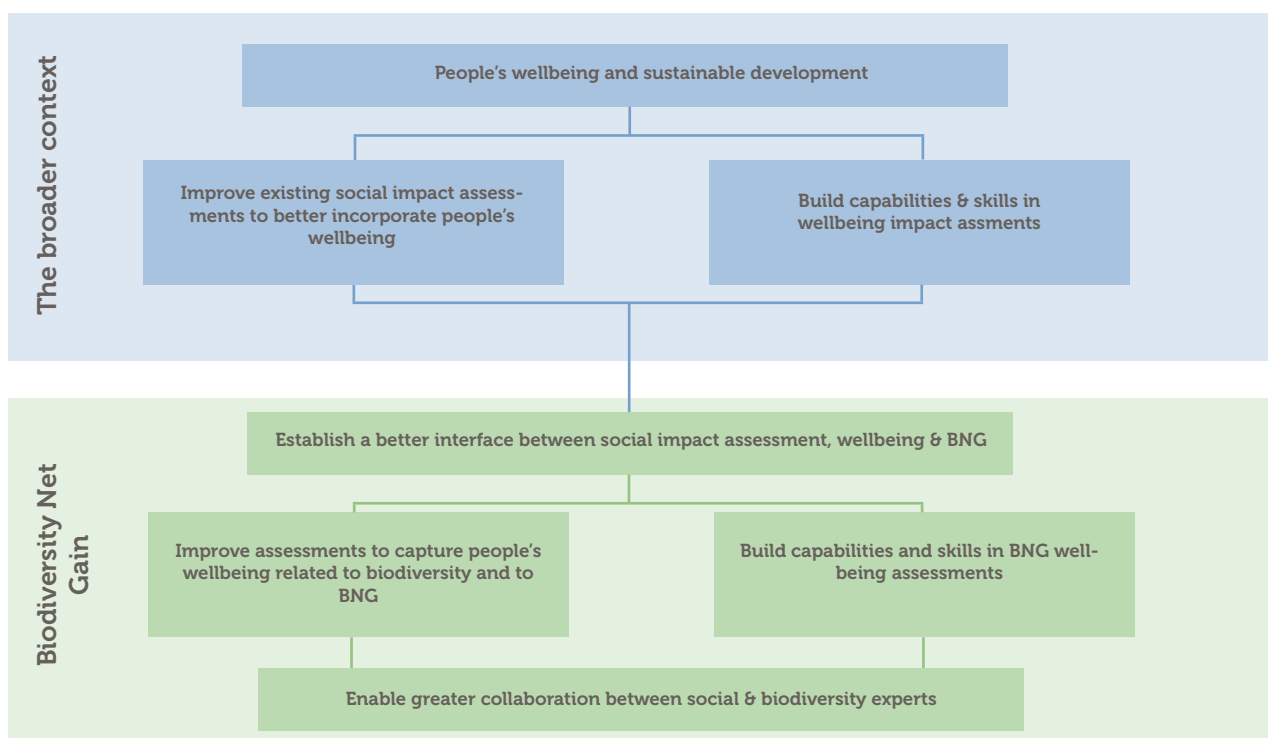
Building capabilities and skills in BNG-wellbeing assessments, and enable collaboration and coordination between social and biodiversity experts

To complement the guidance, there should be a range of practical support to build capabilities and skills in BNG-wellbeing assessments. This could include comprehensive training programmes, the publication of sector-specific guidance, online discussion forums and groups, and the publication of case studies. Aimed at both social and biodiversity experts, this capacity building should support greater collaboration and coordination between social and biodiversity experts during impact assessments, and thereby improve the design and delivery of BNG.

Box 1. Whose job is it to assess people's wellbeing?

During our consultations, the question “whose job is it” to assess wellbeing impacts from BNG was frequently raised, together with concerns about burdening ecologists with a task outside their expertise. Ecologists can highlight the need for social inputs into the design and delivery of BNG, but undertaking social assessments is not their responsibility nor expertise. Rather, it requires expertise in social impact assessments and close collaboration between social and biodiversity experts, as part of a multi-disciplinary, proportionate approach to impact assessments.

Figure 2. Improving existing wellbeing assessments: recommendations to improve existing social impact assessments within the broader context of sustainable development, and the specific recommendations relating to Biodiversity Net Gain



2.3 Strengthen existing wellbeing policies

Core messages from the consultations

Policy requirements to consider and address how development affects people's wellbeing already exist across the UK. However, in some instances the requirements are inconsistent and unclear, which limits the effectiveness of wellbeing policies within development planning.

We reviewed planning policies to see whether requirements relating to development and people's wellbeing in general already exist, and we found that they do. The leading example is the Welsh Government's Wellbeing of Future Generations Act 2015. This places a statutory duty on public bodies to ensure that sustainable wellbeing becomes a core focus. It also emphasises the government's commitment to integrating a "Health in All Policies" approach into policy making, using HIA to assess the impacts of policies, plans and development projects.

In England, some Local Planning Authorities require planning applications to include consideration of the development's impact on wellbeing. However, some local plans lack clarity on how, and to what extent, developers must consider the impacts of their projects on people's wellbeing. This clarity is especially important to apply wellbeing assessments on a

proportionate basis, for example wellbeing assessments for small-scale housing developments might be a desk-based scoping exercise whereas they could be more involved for large-scale infrastructure developments. Another issue is the critical lack of capacity within Local Planning Authorities to implement wellbeing policies.

So, policies exist that require consideration of a development's impact on people's wellbeing. But a lack of clarity on exactly what these policies require, and a lack of capacity to implement the policies, greatly limits the effectiveness of wellbeing policies within development planning.

Recommendations from respondents and consultees

When discussing wellbeing policies in general (i.e. not specifically related to BNG), many respondents highlighted this current time as critical, given increasing political recognition of the climate and biodiversity crisis, and ambitious plans for a 'green recovery' as the UK emerges from Covid19 restrictions. Respondents felt that the current policy reforms are a significant opportunity to truly integrate people's wellbeing within the planning, designing, construction and operation phases of development.

However, before launching into wide-scale policy reform, respondents stated the need to first fully understand why existing policies on people's wellbeing are not being effectively implemented. Respondents made a series of recommendations for policymakers, including those developing local plans and those involved with Covid-19 related policy. These recommendations relate to the broader context of people's wellbeing and sustainable development, and are to:

Understand what works with regards to wellbeing policies

The first step should be to gather knowledge, experience and case studies from across the UK on "what works" and "what good looks like" with regards to planning policies on wellbeing. This review should include the variety of policy requirements with respect to wellbeing, the type of wellbeing assessments that should be submitted as part of a planning application, and how developers are expected to demonstrate that policy objectives on wellbeing have been met.

Strengthen existing local planning policies on wellbeing

Once it is clear which planning policies on wellbeing are being implemented across the UK, and how they are working, this information can be used to strengthen existing local planning policies on wellbeing. Key would be to clarify policy objectives and the indicators of success. In other words, with regards to sustainable development and people's wellbeing, what does success look like and when has success been achieved? Clarification is also needed on the requirements for wellbeing assessments that developers submit as part of a planning application.

Strengthening local planning policies on wellbeing could be undertaken as part of local plan-making and plan revisions. In addition, this could link with recommendations for improving wellbeing assessments for development (see Section 2.1).

Boost capacity

A critical lack of capacity, especially within local authorities, was frequently highlighted as a major barrier to developing and implementing wellbeing policies (as well as BNG). Capacity is a long-standing issue and addressing capacity shortages within local authorities and statutory agencies must be at the centre of the forthcoming planning policy changes.

Linking back to BNG

We asked for views on whether and how people's wellbeing could be integrated more directly into BNG practice. Many respondents referred to policy; they believed that the starting point is an overarching policy requirement for people's wellbeing in general to be a material consideration within the broad context of development planning. This overarching requirement would then initiate a need to narrow-down and focus on the specific aspects of people's wellbeing associated with biodiversity and BNG.

On this basis, strengthening existing planning policies on wellbeing is highly relevant for this study. However, from our specific viewpoint of BNG, this on its own would not be enough (Figure 3). There are additional measures to undertake, which are:

Understand how wellbeing and BNG policies could be better integrated

Our brief review of wellbeing-related planning policies in England showed that some Local Planning Authorities require planning applications to include consideration of the development's impact on people's wellbeing. Some also require developments to deliver BNG. This should mean that, to apply all policies consistently, developers should consider the impacts of BNG on people's wellbeing. However, our review indicated a lack of integration between wellbeing and BNG policies that limits the implementation of these policies together. In addition, we found that policy references to people and biodiversity mostly described the amenity values of nature, rather than the many elements of people's wellbeing that are related to all of biodiversity.

We recommend extending our brief review of wellbeing-related planning policies in England to a comprehensive UK-wide review that aims to identify any existing links between wellbeing and BNG policies, to understand any barriers to integrating wellbeing policies with BNG policies (or vice versa) and to identify how the two areas could be linked in both policy and practice.

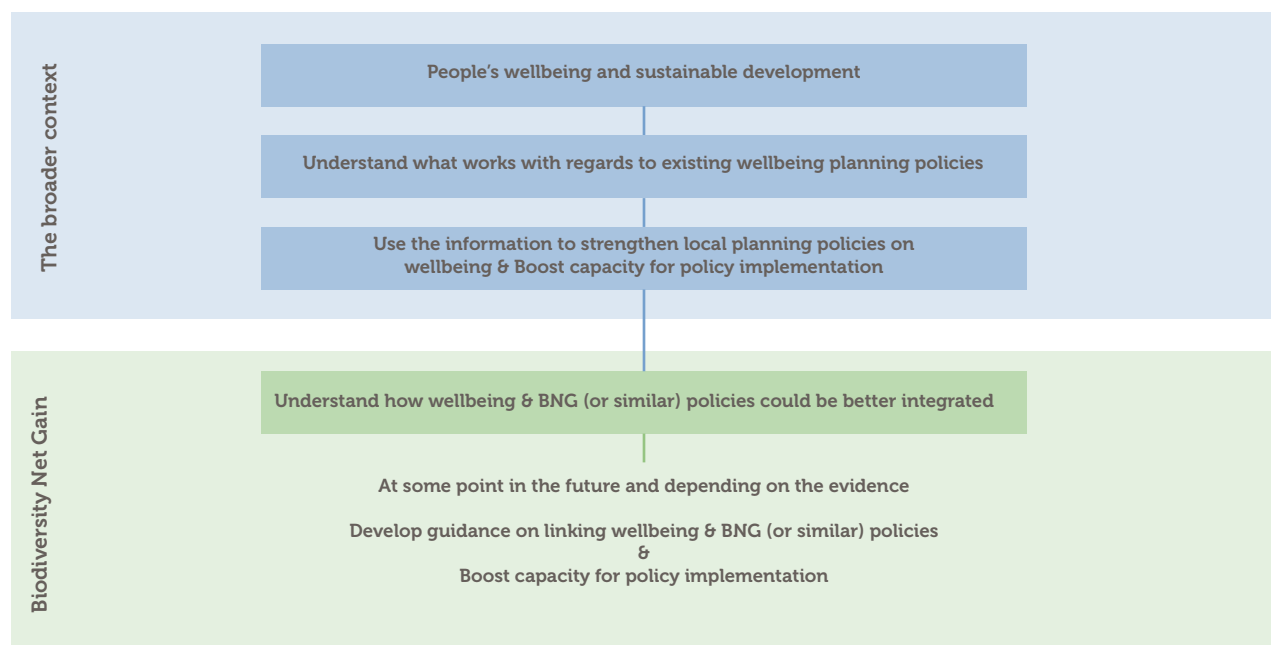
Develop guidance

At some point in the future, developing guidance on linking policies on wellbeing and policies on BNG would be appropriate. The timing depends on the implementation of BNG policies in England, and potentially similar policies elsewhere in the UK. The guidance should make clear that policy objectives of both BNG and wellbeing are to be achieved, rather than one at the expense of another. For larger projects, this might necessitate a suite of measures, for example compensating people whose wellbeing is affected by loss of biodiversity (or access to it) as a result of a development and associated BNG measures, at the place where they incurred the loss, while also creating a biodiversity offset to achieve BNG through biodiversity gain elsewhere. Such guidance should also include indicators of success with regards to the implementation of policies on wellbeing and BNG; what is success and when would success be achieved?

Boost capacity

We echo and strongly support calls to boost capacity within local authorities. We also underline that the government must be held to its commitments to provide additional resources as part of the mandatory requirement for BNG.

Figure 3. Improving existing wellbeing policies: recommendations to improve wellbeing policies within the broader context of sustainable development, and the specific recommendations relating to Biodiversity Net Gain



3. Biodiversity Net Gain and people's wellbeing

This section contains core messages and recommendations regarding BNG and the specific elements of wellbeing that relate to biodiversity and to BNG.

3.1 Make explicit 'do no harm and, where possible, do good' within BNG good practice

Core messages from the consultations

During our consultations, there was widespread agreement that BNG projects should be designed and implemented in ways that 'do no harm and, where possible, do good' with regards to people's wellbeing. However, there were differences in opinion as to how this should be achieved. Some respondents thought that wellbeing considerations should be separate from BNG practice, as they could divert attention away from, or lessen, ambitions to enhance biodiversity. Other respondents believed that BNG practice must consider any related change in wellbeing in order to achieve net gain in a truly sustainable way. While these differences existed, the 'do no harm and where possible do good' principle was a place of common ground.

The UK's BNG Good Practice Principles involve sharing the benefits fairly among stakeholders and achieving an overall gain in the services that ecosystems provide⁸. However, the principles do not explicitly state that the process of achieving BNG should avoid or mitigate detrimental impacts on people related to changes in biodiversity. Neither do they explicitly link BNG to people's use and enjoyment of biodiversity. This could unintentionally lead to poor practice and poor outcomes for people affected by a development's BNG measures. For example, Taherzadeh and Howley (2018⁹) gathered stakeholder views on biodiversity offsetting within England. Social issues including social justice and equity were as important to stakeholders as biodiversity issues. Furthermore, Bateman and Zonneveld (2019¹⁰) show how locating BNG measures close to a development site could lead to overall social gain while leaving the poorest members of society worse off.

The social aspects of BNG are now even more important to account for because of potential forthcoming policy change within some parts of the UK. For example, one proposed policy change explicitly linked BNG to access to nature but with no safeguards to protect people's wellbeing. This was the proposed amendment to England's National Planning Policy Framework¹¹, which at the time of writing states:

"Opportunities to improve biodiversity in and around other developments should be pursued as an integral part of the design especially where this can secure measurable net gains for biodiversity and enhance public access to nature."

Enhancing people's physical access to nature does not presuppose that people will actually make use of this opportunity, nor does it account for the various values that different groups attribute to nature and how this influences their wellbeing. Also, an objective to "enhance public access to nature" should consider what the access was, and who had the access to nature, before the development and its BNG measures were instituted, with the aim to ensure no one is disadvantaged. For example, people living near to the development may lose access to nature but live too far from the biodiversity offset to benefit from it. Linking BNG with impacts on people's wellbeing could be a safeguard against these concerns, although making this linkage must not compromise the achievement of net gains in biodiversity. To integrate social aspects within BNG, and particularly biodiversity offsetting, international standards adopted the principle of leaving people 'no worse off'. For example, the BBOP Cost Benefit Handbook (2009¹²) states that successful offsets "need to deliver the required conservation gains without making local people worse off, for example due to land and resource use restrictions created by the biodiversity offset" (Box 1).

Throughout our consultations, respondents emphasised the importance of linking the social aspects of BNG with existing national policies. When we reviewed policies across the UK, we found that the principle of 'do no harm' already exists, for example the public health duty¹³. We also reviewed international publications on BNG and on sustainable development that articulated recent advances for development to go beyond "do no harm" and proactively contribute towards wider societal goals. In some publications, this has been phrased as "do good" (Box 2).

⁸ Biodiversity Net Gain: Good Practice Principles for Development. IJCIEEM

⁹ No net loss of what, for whom?: stakeholder perspectives to Biodiversity Offsetting in England | SpringerLink

¹⁰ BATEMAN_ZONNEVELD_Net_Env_Gain.pdf (uk2070.org.uk)

¹¹ Ministry of Housing, Communities and local Government. National Planning Policy Framework: draft text for consultation (2021)

¹² Biodiversity Offset Cost-Benefit Handbook - Forest Trends (forest-trends.org)

¹³ For example, see fph-do-no-harm-guidance-final.pdf

We asked whether ‘do no harm and, where possible, do good’ for people’s wellbeing was appropriate for BNG projects. There was widespread agreement that it was, although there were differences in opinion as to how this should be achieved. This illustrates the need to gather evidence on how integrated BNG-wellbeing approaches can work in practice and, in Section 4, we describe our recommendation for undertaking BNG-wellbeing pilots with the aim of gathering this evidence.

Box 1. International Standards and Principles regarding Biodiversity Net Gain and People

While many within the international development arena have adopted the principles of “do no harm” and “do good” for people, some international standards and principles for BNG adopted the principle of leaving people “no worse off”.

For example, members of the Business and Biodiversity Offset Programme (BBOP¹⁴) developed best practice in following the mitigation hierarchy (avoid, minimize, restore, offset) to achieve no net loss or a net gain of biodiversity. The **BBOP Standard on Biodiversity Offsets** (2012¹⁵) states that *“an important component of successful biodiversity offsets can be the development of a package of benefits to indigenous peoples and local communities to compensate them for the residual impact of the development project and the offset on their use and enjoyment of biodiversity, and to secure their support and involvement in the implementation of the offset. These benefits could range from provision of biodiversity components (e.g. medicinal plants, fuel wood) to financial compensation”*

The Standard refers to the **BBOP Cost Benefit Handbook** (2009¹⁶), which states that successful offsets *“need to deliver the required conservation gains without making local people worse off, for example due to land and resource use restrictions created by the biodiversity offset”*. The handbook suggests a range of tools that can help ensure that *“people are left at least as well off as a result of the project and offset, and preferably better off”*.

The Good Practice Principles of **“Ensuring No Net Loss for people, as well as biodiversity”** (2018) adopted “at least as good” within the context of people’s wellbeing. The desired social outcome from NNL/NG developments was stated as that *“people perceive the components of their wellbeing affected by biodiversity losses and gains to be at least as good as a result of the development project and associated biodiversity NNL/NG activities, than if the development had not been implemented”*.

¹⁴ [Business and Biodiversity Offsets Programme - Forest Trends \(forest-trends.org\)](https://www.forest-trends.org/business-and-biodiversity-offsets-programme/)

¹⁵ [Standard on Biodiversity Offsets - Forest Trends \(forest-trends.org\)](https://www.forest-trends.org/standard-on-biodiversity-offsets/)

¹⁶ [Biodiversity Offset Cost-Benefit Handbook - Forest Trends \(forest-trends.org\)](https://www.forest-trends.org/biodiversity-offset-cost-benefit-handbook/)

Box 2. Going beyond 'do no harm' for development to 'do good'

Within the broader context of international sustainable development, the principle of 'do no harm' requires implementers of development projects to avoid and then mitigate the negative social impacts of their activities.

In this context, the concept of 'do no harm' was developed in the 1990s by a collective of international and national NGOs for when development programmes are being implemented by outside agencies, with the recognition that, without careful consideration, outside interventions can end up harming more than benefitting people. Various framework and tools now exist to support development projects to avoid causing harm and to increase their positive impact for individuals, communities and wider society.

Recently, there have been calls for development projects to go beyond 'do no harm' and instead to 'do good', where developers proactively contribute towards improving the environment and people's lives and wellbeing. This concept of 'do good' has been described in a variety of ways. For example, within conservation, WWF and IIED published a framework to enable socially-just conservation in a changing climate. This framework is based on principles which include 'do good' for the climate (defined as contributing towards tackling climate change through conservation) and 'do good' for people (defined as proactively contributing towards improving human-wellbeing through conservation)¹⁷.

In a commercial setting, concepts have emerged that include 'net positive' whereby companies contribute more to the world than they use or take.

Specifically, with regards to BNG, the IUCN Business and Biodiversity Programme's Review Protocol for Biodiversity Net Gain (2017) set the background for BNG, describing the expectation for development to go beyond 'do no harm':

"The concept of minimizing impacts on environment and society has been long established in some sectors (e.g. mining and other extractive industries). In recent years, however, there has been a growing expectation from civil society, regulators and investors for developers, both in private and public sector, to not only do no harm but, in some cases, to also contribute to local, national or global targets for environmental and social wellbeing."

Recommendations

The UK's BNG Good Practice Principles were published in 2016 to set a high standard for designing and delivering BNG. The intention was to review and update the Principles as experience was gained in all aspects of BNG and across the UK. Consultations on updating the BNG Principles started before Covid19 restrictions were enforced, but were put on hold during the pandemic. The consultation will resume in the autumn of 2021; this is an opportunity to improve the clarity and strength of wording of the social aspects of the BNG Principles. We recommend the following:

Include 'do no harm and, where possible, do good for people's wellbeing' within the UK's BNG Good Practice Principles, with the aim to encourage greater rigour in implementing the social aspects of BNG

In the context of BNG, "people's wellbeing" only regards the specific elements of wellbeing related to biodiversity and to BNG, and how this is potentially affected in positive or negative ways by the delivery of BNG. Including 'do no harm and, where possible, do good for people's wellbeing' within the UK's BNG Good Practice Principles would be important from a moral perspective and would align with wider sustainable development goals. It is also important from a business perspective given that meaningful engagement with stakeholders, especially with people potentially affected by BNG

¹⁷ WWF (2017) Climate-smart people-centred conservation. [G04149.pdf \(iied.org\)](#).

measures, is effective in gaining a ‘social licence to operate’.

Explain the context of BNG and wellbeing, as well as the responsibilities of biodiversity and social professionals

The BNG Principles document should include an explanation of ‘do no harm and, where possible, do good for people’s wellbeing’ in the context of BNG, making clear that this is about the way that BNG is achieved and only the specific elements of wellbeing related to biodiversity and to BNG (i.e. not all of biodiversity and not all of wellbeing). The explanation should also clarify that it is not the responsibility or role of ecologists to assess social impacts. Rather, social experts need to undertake this aspect alongside the other members of the team designing BNG, including ecologists.

4. Next steps following this Scoping Study

In this section, we list our recommended next steps to follow this scoping study. These are intended to link closely with and support the recommendations in Sections 2 and 3.

While undertaking this scoping study, as a project team, we discussed this critical time for BNG, noting that alternative approaches designed to achieve similar biodiversity outcomes from development emerge within policy and practice across the UK. This includes the Planning Act (Scotland) 2019 that introduced a new requirement to consider how development and the planning system can best contribute to the enhancement of Scotland’s biodiversity, and the associated publication “Delivering Scotland’s ambition to secure positive effects for biodiversity¹⁸”. In Wales, planning authorities have an enhanced biodiversity duty that requires them to maintain and enhance biodiversity and the resilience of ecosystems across their functions. This translates as “Net Benefit for Biodiversity” which is to achieve net gains in biodiversity with specific consideration of the ecosystems affected, in terms of how their health and resilience (i.e. their ability to adapt to pressures such as climate change and their ability to provide benefits for people) can be maintained and enhanced by consideration of their diversity, extent, condition, connectivity and adaptability. There is also the forthcoming mandating of a BNG requirement in England, and the associated work to establish the capacity needed to deliver it effectively.

It is critically important not to distract from these efforts. But it is also important not to leave it too late for people’s wellbeing to be part of the design and implementation of BNG. So, for next steps to follow this scoping study, we recommend the following:

Gathering lessons from existing initiatives to integrate social considerations into BNG

The recommended first step would be to gather lessons, knowledge, experience and case studies from across the UK on “what works” and “what good looks like” with regards to social considerations when designing and implementing BNG. For example, ecosystem service assessments of BNG are emerging that give insights into people’s use of and interactions with biodiversity, and possible changes of this use under BNG. However, these assessments often do not cover how different groups value and enjoy nature or how this influences their wellbeing. Gathering lessons from existing social assessments of BNG would help to identify how best to integrate wellbeing considerations into BNG. Also, given the innovative wellbeing work in Wales, we recommend gathering lessons learnt on how this approach is being implemented there in relation to biodiversity.

Pilot wellbeing assessments of BNG

We recommend a review of how social assessments can better capture people’s relationship with biodiversity (and nature more broadly) and how this influences their wellbeing. This includes the social and relational elements, feelings of self-determination and agency, and material issues like loss of asset value. The review should consider people’s relationship with nature broadly (i.e. not just with respect to BNG) and how this can be better integrated into planning and decision-making. Existing academic research has addressed these issues in a range of geographies and using a range of approaches, but there is a need for a review that translates these findings into a document that is useful to the audiences outlined in our Introduction.

¹⁸ [securing-positive-effects-for-biodiversity.pdf \(transformingplanning.scot\)](#)

The next step would be to develop an approach for carrying out social assessments of people's relationships with nature suitable for piloting on BNG projects. This would allow users to apply the 'do no harm and, where possible, do good' principle. The pilots should represent different infrastructure developments including housing, power and transport, as well as different scales from small to large, and different social and biodiversity settings across the UK. The aim of these pilots would be to evaluate how well assessments can capture people's wellbeing associated with biodiversity, how such assessments can be applied on a proportionate basis with regards to the scale of a development and its impact on biodiversity, and how the assessments can feed into the design and long-term delivery and monitoring of BNG. Also, it will enable robust and feasible indicators of success to be developed, suitable for measuring progress towards the aim to 'do no harm and where possible do good for people's wellbeing' when designing and implementing BNG.

Develop practical support for social and biodiversity experts

The pilots would gather evidence on how BNG-wellbeing approaches can work in practice. Depending on what the pilots show, the next recommendation could be to develop practical guidance on integrating people's wellbeing within BNG assessments.

If guidance is to be produced, consultations should be held on the type and format of the guidance required. These consultations should include social experts, ecologists and BNG experts from a range of UK-wide sectors including government, industry and NGOs.

With feedback from the consultations, guidance would then be produced on undertaking wellbeing assessments for BNG, and applying the 'do no harm and, where possible, do good' principle, including long-term monitoring of outcomes. The guidance would clarify the roles and responsibilities of social and BNG experts within a BNG assessment, and outline how multi-disciplinary approaches can work in practice and on a proportionate basis in relation to the scale of a development, its impact on biodiversity and the related impact on people's wellbeing.

Support efforts to improve wellbeing assessments within development planning

Work is already being undertaken to improve social assessments of developments, including greater consideration of people's wellbeing. While the pilots we suggest would focus on the specific aspects of wellbeing that relate to biodiversity and to BNG, it would be useful to draw out lessons learnt that support efforts within the wider content of wellbeing and sustainable development.

Support efforts to link wellbeing and BNG policies

At some point in the future, and depending on the implementation of BNG policies and the 'green recovery' from Covid19, and using evidence from the pilots, policy-making could be supported by recommending how BNG and wellbeing policies can link together, and how such links relate to broader policies on sustainable development. This especially relates to synergies and potential mismatches between BNG and wellbeing policies and other policy initiatives, as well as monitoring and compliance requirements for both BNG and wellbeing policies.

Appendix A: Project Team

Project Lead

Julia Baker, Balfour Beatty

Technical Advisory Panel

TAP Member	Organisation
Sally Hayns	Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM)
Kerry ten Kate	Independent Consultant
E.J. Milner-Gulland	University of Oxford
Joseph W. Bull	Wild Business Ltd; Durrell Institute of Conservation and Ecology (DICE)
Sarah Scott	Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (DEFRA)

Research Team

TAP Member	Organisation	Leading on:
Hannah Williams	WSP	Requirements to consider development impacts on people's wellbeing within regional and local planning policies in England
Shuo Gao	University of Oxford	What the science says: defining and assessing wellbeing
Isobel Taylor	Wild Business Ltd	Consultation responses on whether and how BNG good practice should more directly incorporate wellbeing



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