



# GOOD BY DESIGN

Nature as development's  
best insurance policy

SEPTEMBER 2026

CIEEM's vision for Good Development sets out a framework for harnessing ecological expertise effectively to get the most out of every single project we build in the UK - for the economy, for communities, and for climate resilience.

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## How we do it

The Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management ([CIEEM](https://cieem.net/)<sup>1</sup>) is the voice of 10,000 ecologists and environmental managers in the UK.

Our members work on the frontlines of infrastructure delivery in public and private sectors including housing, transport and energy.

They support housebuilders, developers and planning authorities to understand, assess, manage and improve the natural environment to ensure regulatory compliance and enable much-needed development.

## What our members deliver

**Ecologists and environmental managers are the best placed delivery partners for securing 'win-wins' for infrastructure and nature recovery.**

Our members work at the intersection of planning and nature protection to unlock 'Good Development'. Their work includes:

### **Site assessment and risk mitigation.**

Surveying potential development sites to flag ecological constraints that could damage the longevity or cost of expensive infrastructure. In infrastructure projects, ecologists can identify any compliance risks relating to protected species and habitats from the outset. They then advise on nature-based solutions to issues that might otherwise become site constraints or require hard engineering solutions.



### **Climate and flood risk mitigation.**

Providing guidance on tree planting, sustainable drainage and ecological design to address climate risks like extreme heat and flooding. This ensures a site's long-term resilience, and protects its value over time. For example, ecologists and environmental managers partner with developers in urban housing developments to suggest nature-based solutions that address overheating, such as shading and tree cover. They might also advise on sustainable drainage that mitigates flood risk, keeping residents safe and avoiding retrofitting costs as the climate changes.

### **Insurer and lender risk data.**

Advising on environmental risk management that shapes how insurers and lenders price risk and unlock financing on developments pre-build. For a large-scale industrial development seeking project finance, an ecologist would contribute to advice on air quality or nutrient neutrality implications, reducing unforeseen Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) risks that increasingly influence project financing and approvals.

## Local planning decision-making.

Working within and alongside local councils to ensure planning decisions like site selection are evidence-based from the outset. An ecologist's input during Local Plan preparation can flag that a proposed housing allocation would affect a protected species population, leading the council to allocate development to a different, less ecologically sensitive site before the planning application is submitted, cutting cost and accelerating delivery.

## Supporting pragmatic BNG delivery.

Supporting housebuilders and Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects in England to meet Biodiversity Net Gain requirements. An ecologist undertakes a baseline assessment for a housing scheme's statutory 10% biodiversity gain delivery, increasing access to green spaces for communities.

## Unlocking nature markets for farmers.

Supporting farmers to turn low-yield or marginal land into a biodiverse long-term income stream, by assessing, creating and managing the habitat banks that generate the BNG units developers buy when they can't achieve enough gain on their own site. For instance, landowners consult ecologists and environmental managers when creating and registering habitat banks to diversify their income. These can also serve as crucial nature-based solutions for managing flood risk.

## Licensing for protected species.

Ensuring compliance so that development can proceed where protected species are present. Local housing authorities would consult an ecologist to build a licensed mitigation and translocation plan when species like the endangered Hazel Dormouse, protected under law, are identified. This allows a stalled housing scheme to proceed, saving months of delay and the associated holding costs on the site.

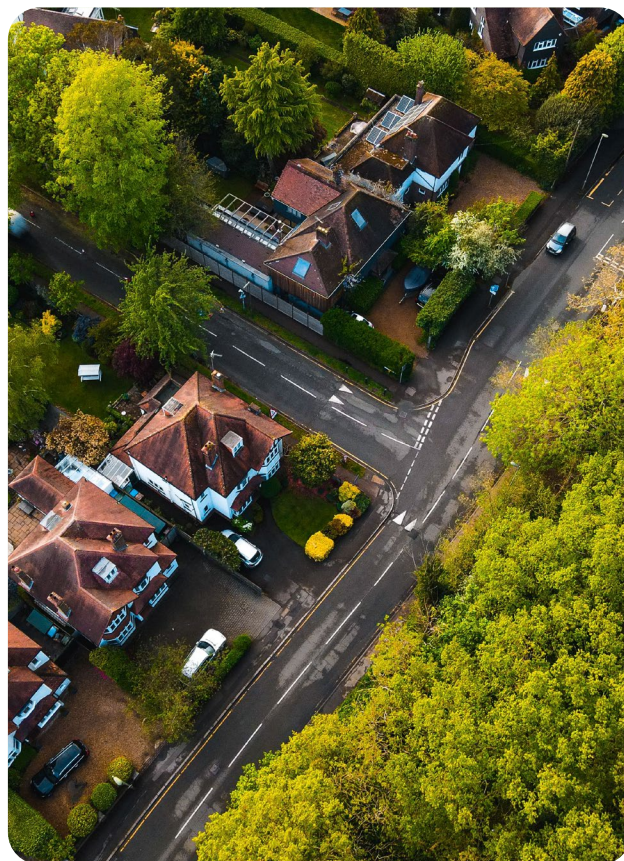
## Why Good Development matters

The UK is not building housing and infrastructure fast enough. Nor is it delivering on its nature recovery ambitions at the pace or scale required.

In recent times, these two agendas have been framed as mutually exclusive competing priorities.

This assumption is inaccurate, costly for communities and not representative of the public's view. According to CPRE<sup>2</sup>, 84% of people believe it's possible to build the homes the UK needs while safeguarding the countryside for future generations.

While there are some inevitable trade-offs to manage, the integration of nature does not threaten delivery. It makes development better quality, built to last and more likely to hold value over time.



<sup>2</sup> <https://www.cpre.org.uk/news/three-quarters-want-more-protection-for-uk-countryside-new-poll-reveals/>

The right ecological expertise at the right time increases future resilience to climate and other environmental impacts, improves design, and accelerates delivery of resilient development that gives communities the local infrastructure and green space they need.

Nature moderates temperatures around homes, absorbs floodwater, filters air and supports the mental and physical health of residents.

But in the **most deprived 20% of neighbourhoods in England<sup>3</sup>**, nearly one in three people have very limited access to nature, almost three times the rate in the most affluent areas.

Nature-integrated infrastructure is more valuable too. **ONS analysis<sup>4</sup>** of over a million property sales found homes within 100 metres of public green space sell for an average of £2,500 more than equivalent homes over 500 metres away - a premium that rises to over £5,000 in homes with a view of green or blue space.

**The UK spent £28.9 billion on infrastructure development in 2025. If we want to protect this investment into the future, harnessing nature cannot be optional - it's an essential insurance policy.**



## What is Good Development?

Good Development creates places that work for the people who live and work in them. Nature is crucial to making that happen - not as a constraint but a powerful tool that ensures places serve people in the long-term.

Development is genuinely good when it:

### ☐ **Is built for climate change.**

Good Development is designed to withstand flooding, heat and the other pressures already reshaping UK infrastructure. The New Towns Taskforce's principles call for low-carbon, climate-resilient development that helps to protect, restore and enhance biodiversity. Good Development follows that government-set standard.

### ☐ **Works for the people who live there.**

Good Development is built at a density that lets residents walk to local amenities and access green spaces, both integrated within developments and nearby. It avoids the delays that come with lack of community support for new development.

### ☐ **Is built to last.**

Good Development holds its value over time rather than degrading - for residents, for investors and for the taxpayers that fund public housing and infrastructure projects. New research from Loughborough University shows flooded properties lose around 3% of their value immediately after a flood, with the loss rising to around 10% after 15 years, affecting house prices and the length of home ownership.

### ☐ **Is affordable for communities.**

Good Development protects against future costs associated with flood risk and the urban heat island effect. It integrates nature to make homes cheaper to run, and less susceptible to costly climate impacts.

### ☐ **Delivers without delay.**

Good Development moves through the planning process faster by identifying risks at the outset that can cause delay at design stage - reducing friction, legal challenge and construction interruptions later.

# Case study

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## Nature restoration laid the foundations for urban regeneration in Mayfield Park, Manchester

The Mayfield Partnership (Manchester City Council, Transport for Greater Manchester and LCR), U+I, and Studio Egret West

Ecologists and environmental specialists were embedded from the outset in an ambitious project to transform a former industrial site into Manchester's first new park in a century.

At the heart of the project, the River Medlock was brought back into the open after decades confined by concrete. Contaminated soil was removed and the restored river channel was engineered to mitigate flooding.

The ecological restoration was significant: the park can now hold 12 Olympic-sized swimming pools of floodwater reducing flood risk downstream, and brown trout have returned to the river.

The investment in nature came first, and now that groundwork is supporting a wider place-based regeneration project backed by a public-private funding partnership. This will deliver 2,000 new homes and two million square feet of commercial space - estimated to bring £7 billion to the local economy once complete.

Research estimates the project could also create £274 million in health benefits over 25 years, due to improved access to green space, environmental conditions and healthier urban design.

Here, nature's restoration provided the essential foundations for urban regeneration - an unblocker rather than a landscaping afterthought.



Photo: Richard Bloom

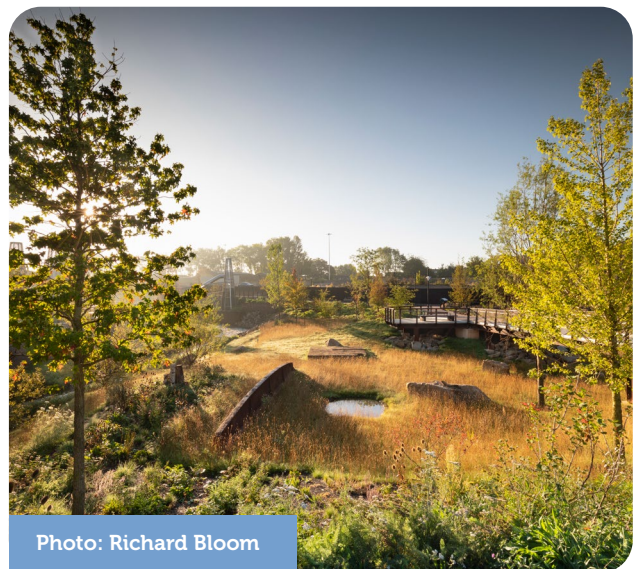


Photo: Richard Bloom



Photo: Luke Hayes



# Case study

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## Early ecological input streamlined housing development in Hampshire

Ecological Planning and Research (EPR)

Ecologists were brought in to guide the masterplanning of an 800-home development on a 52-hectare site in Romsey, Hampshire. The site was home to a legally protected newt population that put the scheme at risk of delay, legal challenge or refusal if left unaddressed.

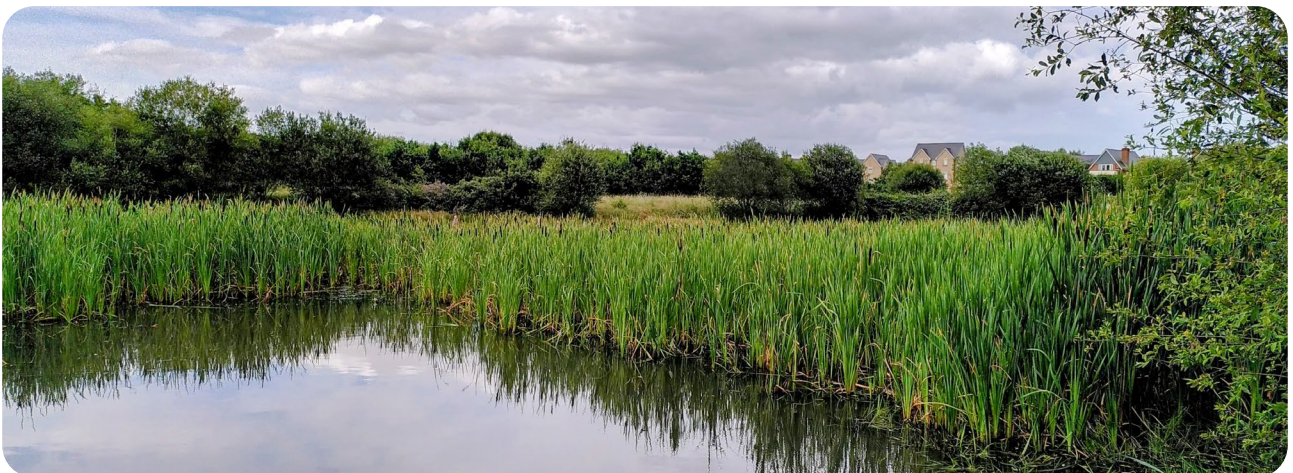
Bespoke ecological surveys mapped protected species routes early, allowing the scheme to avoid the most sensitive areas by design, rather than having to address them through costly redesigns and mitigation later.

Resolving that constraint from the outset meant the development could move through to approval without the delays often caused by unresolved ecological risks and unmapped protected species. This enabled the council to bring forward 800 homes, 40% of them affordable, unlocking meaningful progress against its housing delivery targets.

A 20-hectare nature reserve, which has since been designated as a Site of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC) and a Local Nature Reserve, was created alongside the homes to compensate for habitat loss on site, including new ponds and restored grassland. This added lasting value to the finished development and boosted access to nature for local residents.



Photo: Ecological Planning and Research (EPR)



# How prioritising the expertise of ecologists and environmental managers delivers on core government priorities

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## **Economic growth.**

Government has committed to fast-tracking 150 major infrastructure decisions this Parliament as part of delivering the highest sustained growth in the G7. Ecological input helps ensure these projects are resilient and built to last, protecting the investment behind each project. It also means the same projects can help deliver the government's 30by30 commitment to protect 30% of land and sea for nature by 2030.

## **Better living standards.**

The government has committed to 1.5 million new homes in England delivered through the "exemplary development" of homes that are "high-quality, well-designed, and sustainable...creating places that increase climate resilience and promote nature recovery." Ecological expertise will help deliver that commitment.

## **Clean energy.**

The government has a target to reach 95% clean power by 2030. Hitting it will require Nationally Significant Infrastructure Projects to move through planning at unprecedented speed. With BNG due to come into force for NSIPs in England in November of 2026, early ecological assessment will be crucial to this.

## **Climate adaptation.**

The CCC's advice to government warns that without action, 92% of homes could overheat by 2050. Inaction on adaptation could cost between £60bn and £260bn a year. It's cheaper and more effective to build climate resilience up front than to retrofit, so ecologists will be crucial delivery partners for well-adapted homes of the future.



## How government can drive Good Development

1. Promote and explicitly designate the need for ecological input from the site selection and design stage of planning applications, especially in the pursuit of the New Towns programme and further reforms to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF).
2. Include ecological representation on Defra's Infrastructure Board, to ensure that infrastructure decisions take account of how ecological levers can support delivery.
3. Protect the world-leading Biodiversity Net Gain policy from further exemptions to ensure future development is resilient and that all parts of society have access to green space, which is essential for equalising living standards.
4. Explicitly designate a role for ecologists within the 30by30 Delivery Plan to ensure that landowners can access expert advice and make the best decisions for nature.





## **CIEEM**

Grosvenor Court  
Ampfield Hill, Ampfield  
Romsey, SO51 9BD

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& Environmental Management  
Company Number: RC000861  
Registered Charity (England and Wales): 1189915.  
Registered Charity (Scotland): SC054698

