

*Meeting of Cheddar and Axbridge Local Community Network (LCN) Climate and Nature Committee, Wedmore 29/4/2025*

Talk by Somerset Council Biodiversity and Landscape Officer

Present: Chair, LCN Link Officer, several local councillors, and members of Wedmore PC and others

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**Put very simply:** Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) is a way of creating and improving natural habitats. BNG makes sure development has a measurably positive impact ('net gain') on biodiversity, compared to what was there before development.

At least a 10% gain in biodiversity units must be shown on a development plan to be delivered over 30 years.

Developers will need to submit detailed plans under a Main or Small Sites (1-9 houses on sites less than 0.5 ha) Metric

NB: this is new (2024), mandatory and aims to supplement not replace all existing protections and requirements

The aim is to consider habitat first and development second, not vice-versa.

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Much will depend on quality of baseline assessment carried out for larger developments and qualifications of assessor.

Where a developer cannot mitigate habitat loss locally they can buy credits in 'habitat banks locally' (1:1) or in neighbouring areas (1:1.5) or further away (1:2). So it costs them more if they use a more distant site.

Obvious issues, among many others:

- This is complicated and new. Implications for Planning Committee?
- Some developers will look for loopholes and mitigations
- Much depends on enforcement/follow up

### **What might we do as a PC? Two strands:**

1. Ideally, in my view, as a long-term community project involving many groups, record the wildlife of Draycott and RS.

Westbury are already doing this. We could talk to them. There are also many well-established Somerset groups recording bats, moths, flora etc

There are existing local/national registers for trees, orchards, hedgerows etc that we can use to record what we have locally.

This links to....

2. Since the above is daunting and long-term, we might break it down into small steps. If we think/know a development is likely to happen in a particular location, tap into every ounce of local knowledge about those fields and hedgerows etc and research further as needed. Barbra Lakin mentioned using old tithe maps to check hedgerows, recording trees (Woodland Trust) etc. When reported properly these features are officially flagged to a Planning Officer as they consider the application metric mentioned above.

### **Summary:**

- BNG is new, complex, and undoubtedly far from perfect!
- But it could be a good stimulus for our own woodland/orchard project and for community involvement with nature
- There are organisations/people out there with knowledge and skills who are ready to help so we