

Homes for people and wildlife

How to build housing in a nature friendly way

Briefing Note

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Introduction

On 11 January the Wildlife Trust, a national charity responsible for some 2,300 nature reserves across the UK, published new guidelines that put the natural environment in to the heart of housing development and propose that new housing can be built in a way to help reverse wildlife and habitat decline.

The report sets out ways in which people and nature can prosper together and prioritises where and how houses are built, as opposed to the volume of houses needed by a particular date. Below is a summary of the key points.

The Challenge

The Wildlife Trust addresses the issue that the majority of people now live their lives without any contact with nature. Further, habitats are also being destroyed with 97% of lowland meadows in England and Wales have been lost since 1930 and 56% of wild plants and animals have declined and 15% are still at risk of disappearing altogether. Whilst intensive agriculture is said to be the main cause, development is also purported to be a major contributor.

The Solution

The guidelines set out two ways in which this can be achieved:

i. Location

New housing should be developed in areas serviced by good infrastructure, so as to avoid harming environmental assets.

Ecological network maps can provide information on existing natural features and identify new areas, where ecosystems and wildlife can be recovered.

ii. Design

New housing developments and houses themselves should be designed to integrate space for both wildlife and people, as well as to reduce carbon emissions and minimize water usage.

The Benefits

A good 'nature-rich' development is said to provide the following:

- Connectivity between wildlife and places;
- Improved health and wellbeing and quality of life;
- Easy access to high quality, wildlife-rich, natural green space;
- Effective water management, pollution and climate control;
- Real, measurable gains for wildlife.

From a developer's point of view there are a number of benefits to encouraging wildlife provision in new developments, including: enhancing brand value; creating a more attractive living environment; engendering a sense of community; reducing the impacts of climate change and generally increasing the market value of properties built.

Richard Beresford, Chief Executive of the National Federation of Builders, welcomed the guidelines, but recommended that the Wildlife Trust also look to collaborate more closely with the house building industry.

Whilst the Wildlife Trust is not a statutory consultee in the determination of planning applications, they are often consulted by Local Planning Authorities where a site is likely to have impacts on a site of wildlife importance. This guidance clearly sets out their expectations and best practice in terms of planning for wildlife in the development process.

If you require any further advice regarding the above, please do not hesitate to contact one of the offices listed below.

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