



## Bristol Tree Forum further comments

21/05164/F | *Erection of 157 no. dwellings (MAJOR). | Land On The West Side Of Novers Hill Bristol*

### Summary

These comments are in addition to our comments of [25 October 2021](#) and to our ancillary comments of [07 November 2021](#). They are in response to the recent publication of the applicant's Biodiversity Net Gain Metric calculation<sup>1</sup> (BNG2.0) and to the production of a new Proposed Site Master Plan.<sup>2</sup>

Crox Bottom is already a well-managed habitat. Offsetting the habitat loss caused on the Western Slopes by 'enhancing' the Crox Bottom habitat' is simply not an option. It is not viable, does not have permission from the landowner and the local community group that looks after the site opposes it.

This latest proposal will further degrade what little is left of the **Pigeonhouse stream and adjacent meadows SNCI** habitats that justify its SNCI status. Grassland and tree habitats will be removed, some of it apparently, merely to create a "public open space".

If the error we have noted in the BNG calculations is corrected, there will be a 37% net loss of on-site habitat with less than a 4% net gain of hedgerow habitat.

As the West of England Nature Partnership (WENP) - Ecosystem services maps clearly show, allowing this proposal to proceed will destroy important ecosystem service opportunities. One of the goals of the **Bristol City Council Ecological Emergency Action Plan 2021 -2025** is to make '*space for nature by ensuring that at least 30 per cent of land in Bristol to be managed for the benefit of wildlife by 2030*'.<sup>3</sup> One of the **One City Climate Change Strategy**<sup>4</sup> goals is to ensure that '*the natural environment in Bristol will be restored, protected and enhanced to deliver climate change benefits.*' Both these will be frustrated if this application is allowed.

### The Biodiversity Net Gain Calculation

As we stated in our comments of 25 October, we remain of the view that it is not appropriate for the applicant to have used BNG2.0 rather than BNG3.0.

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<sup>1</sup> 21\_05164\_F-BNG\_CALCULATION\_24.8.21-3088354.xlsx

<sup>2</sup> 21\_05164\_F-PROPOSED\_SITE\_MASTERPLAN-3088358.pdf

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.bristol.gov.uk/documents/20182/5572361/Ecological\\_Emergency\\_Action\\_Plan.pdf/2e98b357-5e7c-d926-3a52-bf602e01d44c?t=1630497102530](https://www.bristol.gov.uk/documents/20182/5572361/Ecological_Emergency_Action_Plan.pdf/2e98b357-5e7c-d926-3a52-bf602e01d44c?t=1630497102530) - page 8

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.bristolonecity.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/one-city-climate-strategy.pdf>



We also note an inconsistency between the reported condition of the *Native Species Rich Hedgerow* habitat which is designated as ‘Good’ in the applicant’s Biodiversity Net Gain Assessment<sup>5</sup> and the ‘Moderate’ condition assigned to it in BNG2.0. If this is corrected to *Good*, then there is no enhancement, and the Hedgerow unit percentage net gain is only **3.89%** rather than the 30.91% shown in BNG2.0.

If the proposed off-site enhancements proposed are ignored and the incorrect condition of the *Native Species Rich Hedgerow* is corrected, then there will be a net on-site habitat loss of **37.34%** as a result of the site losing **10.55** Habitat units (Figure 1).

<b>On-site baseline</b>	<i>Habitat units</i>	28.25
	<i>Hedgerow units</i>	3.96
	<i>River units</i>	0.00
<b>On-site post-intervention</b> (Including habitat retention, creation, enhancement & succession)	<i>Habitat units</i>	15.10
	<i>Hedgerow units</i>	4.11
	<i>River units</i>	0.00
<b>Off-site baseline</b>	<i>Habitat units</i>	0.00
	<i>Hedgerow units</i>	0.00
	<i>River units</i>	0.00
<b>Off-site post-intervention</b> (Including habitat retention, creation, enhancement & succession)	<i>Habitat units</i>	2.60
	<i>Hedgerow units</i>	0.00
	<i>River units</i>	0.00
<b>Total net unit change</b> (including all on-site & off-site habitat retention/creation)	<i>Habitat units</i>	<b>-10.55</b>
	<i>Hedgerow units</i>	0.15
	<i>River units</i>	0.00
<b>Total net % change</b> (including all on-site & off-site habitat creation + retained habitats)	<i>Habitat units</i>	<b>-37.34%</b>
	<i>Hedgerow units</i>	3.89%
	<i>River units</i>	0.00%

Figure 1: Biodiversity Net gain Headline Results - without any off-site calculation

Under Schedule 14 of the new Environment Act 2021<sup>6</sup> (yet to come into force) ‘... the biodiversity gain objective is met in relation to development for which planning permission is granted if the biodiversity value attributable to the development exceeds the pre-development biodiversity value of the onsite habitat by at least the relevant percentage ... The relevant percentage is 10%.’

According to the Act, the biodiversity value attributable to the development is the total of the following:

<sup>5</sup> 21\_05164\_F-BIODIVERSITY\_NET\_GAIN\_ASSESSMENT\_AUGUST\_2021-3045061 - table 9

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2021/30/schedule/14/enacted>



- (a) The post-development biodiversity value of the onsite habitat
- (b) The biodiversity value, in relation to the development, of any registered offsite biodiversity gain allocated to the development
- (c) The biodiversity value of any biodiversity credits purchased for the development.

This obligation has been reinforced in the recently adopted **Bristol City Council Ecological Emergency Action Plan 2021 -2025**: *'Biodiversity Net Gain of 10 per cent net gain will become mandatory for housing and development, meaning habitats for wildlife must be left in a measurably better state than before the development. Developers must submit a 'biodiversity gain plan' alongside usual planning application documents. The local authority will assess whether the 10 per cent net gain requirement is met. If net gain is not achievable on-site, offsite habitat creation/enhancements will have to be agreed.'*<sup>7</sup>

The Crox Bottom site is owned and managed by Bristol City Council, which has not indicated that it supports this proposal. It is also worth noting that the Friends of Crox Bottom oppose these proposals (figure 2).

4) I read with interest that Lovell have proposed offsetting some of the impact of the development by improving areas of Crox Bottom in mitigation. This is impossible. Crox Bottom is classed as a

steep sided wooded valley. It is not the same habitat whatsoever and cannot provide an alternative to Novers Hill. There is also no space within Crox Bottom to establish any other type of habitat, without removing some of what is already there, which would be completely irresponsible and unacceptable. I might also add that not one person from Lovell has contacted the Friends group with regards to this proposal. One would have considered that to be a basic courtesy, given the current tensions around the planning application.

Figure 2 Extract from the Friends of Crox Bottom comments

As already pointed out, if the applicant's proposals to 'enhance' the habitats at Crox Bottom are excluded from the application, the application fails to achieve the 10% net gain required under the Environment Act 2021. Therefore it should not be allowed to proceed.

<sup>7</sup> [https://www.bristol.gov.uk/documents/20182/5572361/Ecological\\_Emergency\\_Action\\_Plan.pdf/2e98b357-5e7c-d926-3a52-bf602e01d44c?t=1630497102530](https://www.bristol.gov.uk/documents/20182/5572361/Ecological_Emergency_Action_Plan.pdf/2e98b357-5e7c-d926-3a52-bf602e01d44c?t=1630497102530) - page 13

## The new proposed site masterplan

The applicant has produced a new site masterplan (Figure 3). This new plan is significantly different from the original proposed site masterplan submitted on 15 January 2021 with 21/00200/SCR<sup>8</sup> (Appendix 1). In particular, the ‘green’ elements show important changes but give no explanation of the likely impacts these will have on the SNCI. We also note that no new habitat or ecological assessment has been produced in light of these changes.

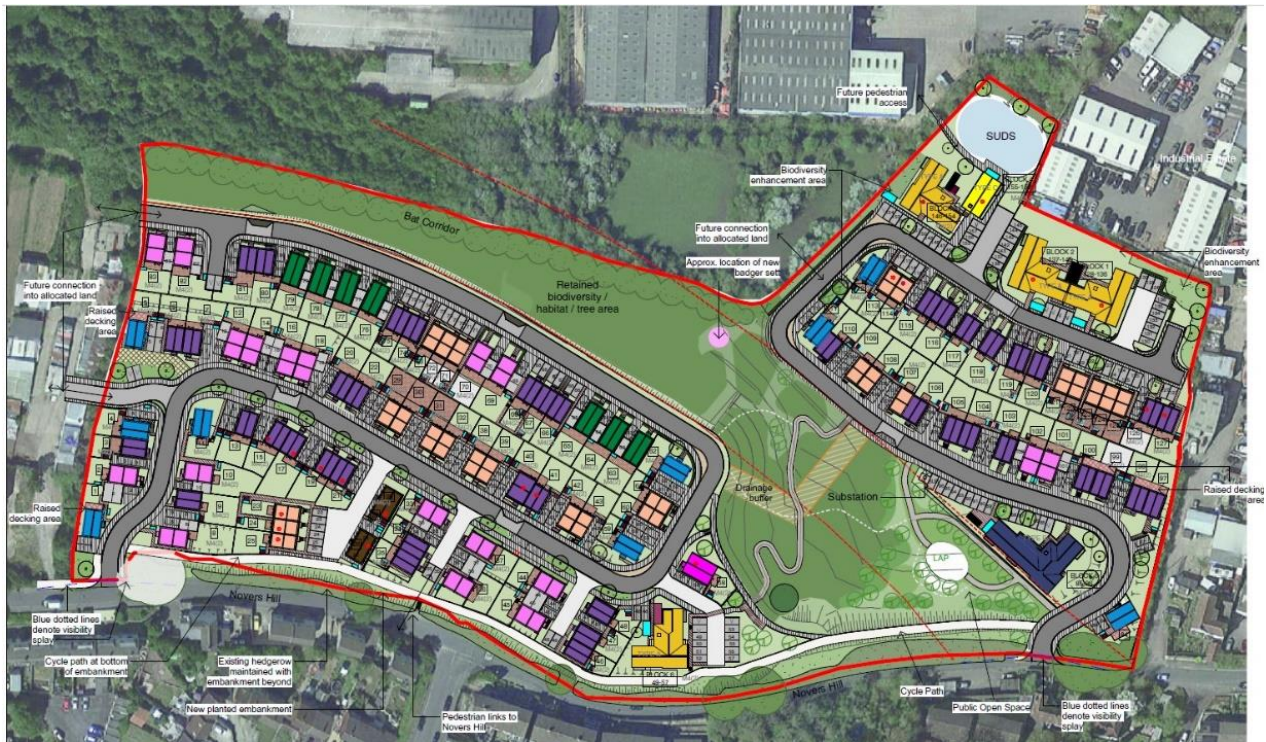



Figure 3 New site masterplan.

Setting aside the still outstanding issue about the boundary of the **Pigeonhouse stream and adjacent meadows SNCI** (we say it’s the BRERC/Pinpoint boundary<sup>9</sup>), we are concerned that this latest proposal will only further degrade what little will be left of the habitats that are noted as justifying the site’s SNCI status - *...grassland and scrub. Semi-improved calcareous grassland & species-rich neutral grassland. Includes Priority Habitat Lowland Meadow & Lowland Calcareous Grassland.*

These proposals will convert the whole of the northern half of the land between the two housing developments into a ‘*public open*  *space*’ complete with footpaths, a cycle path, road

<sup>8</sup> [21/00200/SCR](#) | Request for a Screening Opinion as to whether an Environmental Impact Assessment is required.

<sup>9</sup> <https://maps.bristol.gov.uk/pinpoint/>

and ornamental trees (? - the symbol is not keyed) added, thereby destroying the existing grassland habitats (Figure 4). It seems that a so-called 'bat corridor' will be created by removing trees and converting the area to some form of grassland (Figure 3).



*Figure 4 Habitat map annexed to the Biodiversity Net Gain Assessment overlaid on the new proposed site masterplan.*

Whether or not the boundary of the SNCI is as shown in the **BRERC/Pinpoint** maps or as shown in the **Bristol City Council Local Plan Policy Map**<sup>10</sup>, there can be no dispute that this part of the development site falls within the **Pigeonhouse stream and adjacent meadows SNCI**.

<sup>10</sup> <https://maps.bristol.gov.uk/policies/>



The Local Plan - Site Allocations and Development Management Policy **DM19: Development and Nature Conservation**<sup>11</sup> states that development proposals which will ‘have a harmful impact on the nature conservation value of a Site of Nature Conservation Interest’, *will not be permitted* (our emphasis). As these new proposals will have a harmful impact on the SNCI, they are contrary to DM19 and so cannot be permitted.

We have also seen these objections (Figure 5), made during the formulation of the current Local Plan, which relate to the eastern segment of the development site which is covered by Site Allocation BSA1108<sup>12</sup>. We suspect that similar comments were probably made in respect of the two other Site Allocations on the Western Slopes (BSA1114 & BSA1119).

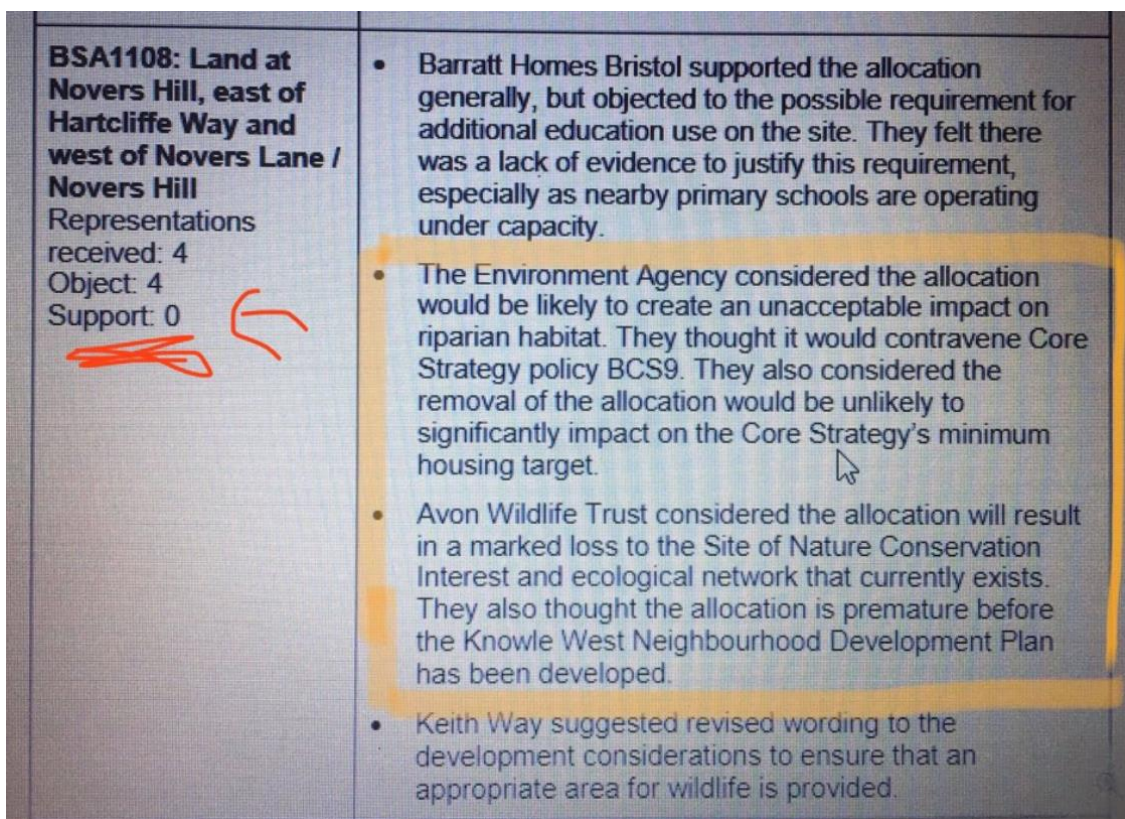


Figure 5 Comments made about BSA1108 during the formulation of the current Local Plan

Clearly, both the Environment Agency and Avon Wildlife Trust considered that the proposals would have an unacceptable negative impact on the existing **Pigeonhouse stream and adjacent**

<sup>11</sup>

[https://www.bristol.gov.uk/documents/20182/34540/BD5605%20Site%20Allocations\\_MAIN\\_text%20V8\\_0.pdf/46c75ec0-634e-4f78-a00f-7f6c3cb68398](https://www.bristol.gov.uk/documents/20182/34540/BD5605%20Site%20Allocations_MAIN_text%20V8_0.pdf/46c75ec0-634e-4f78-a00f-7f6c3cb68398)

<sup>12</sup>

<https://www.bristol.gov.uk/documents/20182/34540/Site%20Allocations%20Annex%20Adopted%20July%202014%20Indexed.pdf/d6dfdc7e-0f55-4a07-be74-9cd5fffaa64d> - page 118



meadows SNCI.

Avon Wildlife Trust has already made its position clear - ‘*Avon Wildlife Trust recognises Bristol's Western Slopes as a vital wildlife corridor and stands with those people calling it to be protected from development.*’<sup>13</sup>

Natural England has made it clear that as ‘*significant effects on statutorily designated nature conservation sites or landscapes are unlikely*’, it has no interest in commenting further.<sup>14</sup> SNCIs are not *statutorily designated nature conservation sites*, though they are still recognised in Bristol’s core planning policies and so cannot be ignored, as DM19 makes clear.

## The West of England Nature Partnership - Ecosystem services map

The West of England Nature Partnership (WENP) - Ecosystem services map<sup>15</sup> identifies Novers Park (the Western Slopes) as ideal for providing Multiple Ecosystem Services including Woodland, Grassland and Water Quantity mitigation opportunities:<sup>16</sup>

Figure 6 shows where the best opportunities for woodland creation are in order to expand and strengthen the woodland network.



<sup>13</sup> <https://www.avonwildlifetrust.org.uk/news/support-bristols-green-spaces>

<sup>14</sup> [21/00200/SCR](#) | Request for a Screening Opinion as to whether an Environmental Impact Assessment is required. 21\_00200\_SCR-NATURAL\_ENGLAND-2850361.pdf

<sup>15</sup> <https://tandem1.co.uk/wenp/maps/>

<sup>16</sup> Unfortunately, it is not possible to zoom in sufficiently using these maps to show more specific site detail.



Figure 6 WENP - Woodland opportunities

Figure 7 shows where the best opportunities exist to restore and recreate good quality grassland and flower-rich meadows.

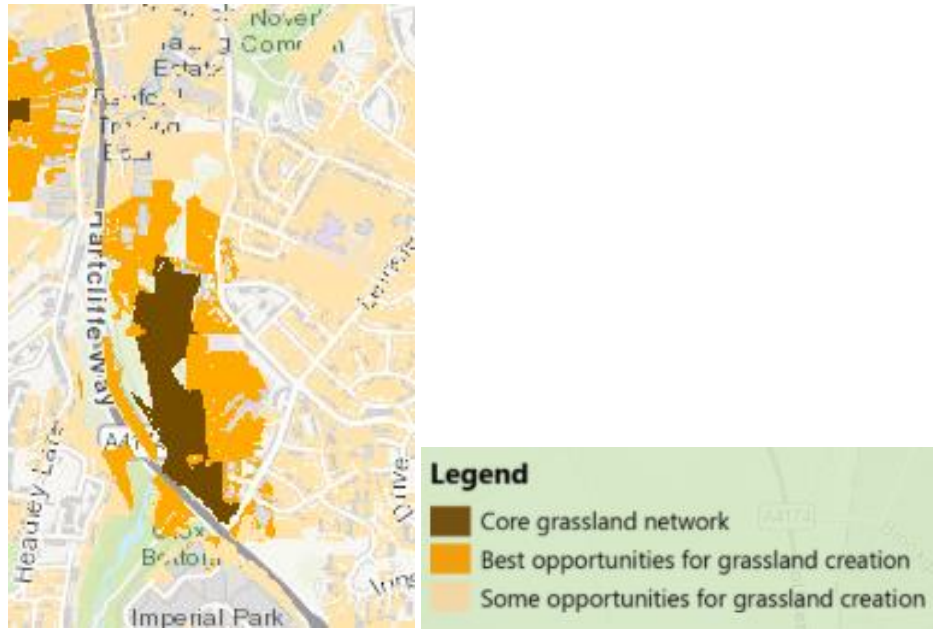


Figure 7 WENP - Grassland opportunities

Figure 8 shows where the best places exist to modify the land so that it can store water for longer following rainfall. Slowing the movement of water across the land can reduce surface run-off and the risk of flooding.

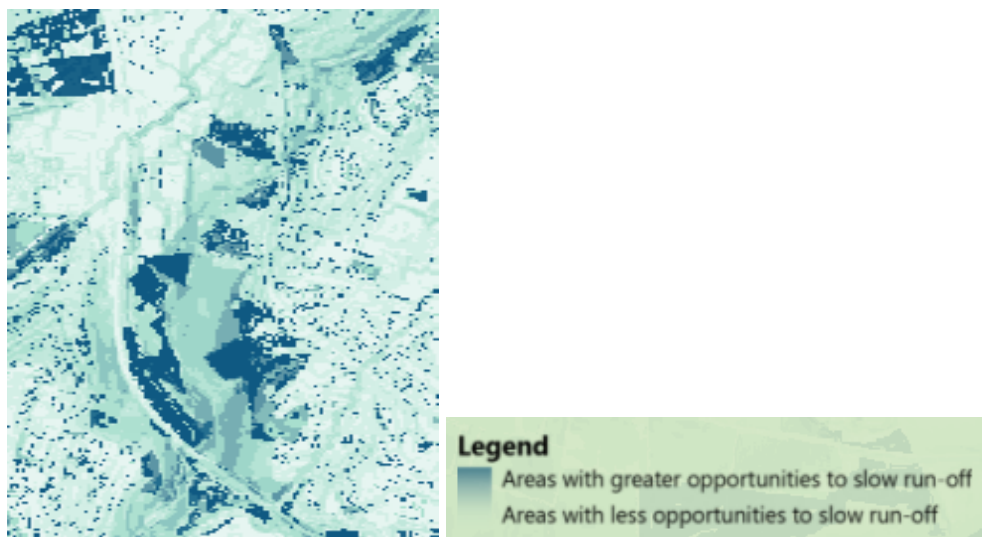


Figure 8 WENP - Water Quantity opportunities





These WENP maps clearly show how the Western Slopes provide an ideal opportunity for enhancing the important ecosystem service opportunities which the site already provides.

**Bristol Tree Forum**

**23 November 2021**



# Appendix 1

The original Proposed Site Masterplan submitted with [21/00200/SCR](#) | Request for a Screening Opinion as to whether an Environmental Impact Assessment is required.

