



Value My Land

Maximising Returns for Landowners

Ecology & Biodiversity

A Practical Guide for Development Landowners

How ecological constraints, protected species and biodiversity requirements can affect development land — and how they can be addressed through good planning and design.



Value My Land

13 Ensign Business Centre | Westwood Way | Coventry | CV4 8JA

Email: info@valuemyland.com | Telephone: 0800 061 4006 | www.valuemyland.com

What is Ecology & Biodiversity?

Ecology is an important planning consideration for development land. Before a site is allocated, promoted or brought forward through a planning application, its habitats and ecological features may need to be understood so that potential effects on wildlife can be identified and managed.

For landowners, hedgerows, trees, ponds, watercourses, grassland, woodland or protected species do not automatically prevent development. The key question is whether ecological constraints can be assessed, avoided where possible and incorporated into a realistic development strategy that also provides biodiversity enhancement.

An ecological constraint is not automatically a development constraint. Early evidence can identify what matters, what needs to be retained and how a scheme can be designed around it.

Why does ecology matter in planning?

Local planning authorities must consider the ecological effects of development when preparing Local Plans and determining planning applications. Ecology can influence the developable area, layout, access, drainage, open space and the amount and location of habitat creation required.

- Identify important habitats and ecological features at an early stage
- Establish whether protected or notable species may be present
- Avoid or reduce harm through site selection, layout and design
- Plan mitigation, compensation and long-term habitat management where required
- Demonstrate biodiversity net gain and wider ecological enhancement

Where does ecology sit in the development process?

Initial site review → ecological appraisal → targeted surveys → layout response → mitigation & BNG strategy → planning application

[Read the full online Ecology & Biodiversity Guide](#)

Why Landowners Should Address Ecology Early

Ecology is sometimes treated as a matter to investigate only once a planning application is being prepared. For development land, that can be too late. Survey seasons, protected species requirements and the need to redesign around important habitats can affect both programme and development capacity.

Early ecological work gives the design team time to distinguish genuine constraints from features that can be retained, enhanced or incorporated into green infrastructure. It can also prevent unnecessary assumptions being made when a site is assessed through a HELAA, SHLAA, Local Plan review or planning application.

Survey timing can matter

Some ecological surveys are season-dependent. If evidence is commissioned at the wrong time of year, a required survey may have to wait until the appropriate season, potentially delaying a planning submission or leaving an important issue unresolved.

Early evidence can protect development capacity

A preliminary ecological appraisal can identify which boundaries, habitats or features should shape the concept masterplan. Designing around important ecology from the outset is usually more effective than preparing a layout first and attempting to retrofit mitigation later.

Ecology should be considered alongside other constraints

Ecology rarely operates in isolation. Hedgerows may influence access, ponds may affect drainage design, woodland may require buffers and habitat areas may form part of open space or sustainable drainage. A coordinated approach can allow ecological requirements to contribute positively to the development framework.

The best time to understand ecological constraints is before they dictate the layout or delay the planning programme.

Find Out Whether Ecology Could Affect Your Land

Ecological Features Commonly Found on Development Land

The ecological importance of land depends on the habitats and species present, the surrounding landscape and the way those features connect with wider ecological networks. Even intensively managed land can contain boundaries or features that require careful consideration.

Hedgerows & Field Boundaries Hedgerows can provide habitat and wildlife corridors. Their condition, connectivity and species composition may influence retention and buffering.	Trees & Woodland Mature trees, woodland edges and veteran trees can have ecological value and may require protection, root zones and habitat buffers.
Grassland & Brownfield Habitats Grassland, scrub and previously developed land can support valuable habitat even where the site appears unmanaged or disturbed.	Ponds, Ditches & Watercourses Water features can support amphibians, water voles, bats and other wildlife and may also connect with drainage and flood-risk design.
Buildings & Structures Existing buildings, barns and structures may provide roosting or nesting opportunities, particularly for bats and birds.	Ecological Networks Larger sites may contain connected habitats capable of forming green corridors, open space and biodiversity enhancement areas.

What will an ecologist typically consider?

- **Habitat types, condition and ecological value across the site**
- **Hedgerows, mature trees, woodland, ponds, ditches and watercourses**
- **Evidence of protected, priority or notable species**
- **Connectivity with habitats and ecological networks beyond the site**
- **Potential effects from lighting, access, drainage and construction activity**
- **Opportunities for habitat retention, enhancement and creation**
- **Biodiversity net gain requirements and long-term management**

The presence of ecological features does not automatically make land unsuitable for development. The important issue is whether effects can be avoided or reduced and whether a coherent mitigation, enhancement and biodiversity strategy can be delivered.

What Makes a Strong Ecological Strategy?

A strong ecological strategy starts with proportionate evidence and then uses that evidence to influence the development concept. The objective is not simply to produce a survey report: it is to demonstrate that the site can accommodate development while responding appropriately to ecological constraints and opportunities.

1. Establish the ecological baseline — Identify the habitats, boundaries and features present and understand their relative ecological importance.
2. Identify survey requirements — Determine whether further work is needed for bats, badgers, reptiles, amphibians, birds, dormice, water voles or other species relevant to the site.
3. Apply the mitigation hierarchy — Avoid ecological harm first, then minimise effects, restore habitats where possible and compensate for residual impacts where necessary.
4. Integrate ecology into the masterplan — Retain important features, provide appropriate buffers and connect habitat areas so ecology forms part of the site structure.
5. Plan biodiversity net gain — Establish how the required measurable improvement in biodiversity value can be achieved on-site, off-site or through an appropriate combination.
6. Provide for long-term management — Make sure retained and created habitats can be managed, monitored and funded for the required period without undermining development delivery.

A strong ecology case does more than identify wildlife: it shows how ecological evidence has shaped a deliverable development framework.

Is Ecology Likely to Prevent Development?

Ecological Evidence That Can Strengthen a Site

The level of ecological work should be proportionate to the site, the habitats present and the stage of promotion. A landowner does not necessarily need every species survey at the outset, but enough evidence should be available to understand whether ecology could materially affect capacity, timing or deliverability.

Preliminary Ecological Appraisal A PEA establishes the habitat baseline, identifies ecological constraints and opportunities and recommends any further survey work.	Protected Species Surveys Targeted surveys may be required where habitats could support bats, badgers, reptiles, amphibians, birds, dormice, water voles or other protected species.
Habitat & Hedgerow Surveys More detailed habitat or hedgerow assessment can establish condition, importance and the implications of loss, retention or enhancement.	Biodiversity Net Gain Assessment The statutory biodiversity metric can quantify habitat losses and gains and support a credible strategy for the required net gain.
Arboricultural Coordination Tree constraints and ecological value should be considered together where mature, veteran or habitat-rich trees influence the developable area.	Lighting & Impact Assessment Sensitive lighting design can be important where bats, woodland edges, hedgerows or other dark corridors need to be protected.
Ecological Mitigation Strategy A coordinated strategy can show retained habitats, buffers, habitat creation, species measures and the relationship with open space and drainage.	Habitat Management Plan Long-term management can explain how retained and created habitats will be established, maintained, monitored and funded.

The strongest ecological evidence is proportionate and design-led: it identifies genuine constraints early and demonstrates how they can be accommodated within a deliverable scheme.

How Ecology Is Taken Through the Planning Process

Ecological work normally develops in stages as the planning strategy becomes more detailed. The precise requirements depend on the site and the evidence identified, but the process commonly follows the sequence below.

1. **Desktop review** — Existing ecological records, designated sites, mapping and available habitat information are reviewed to identify likely sensitivities.
2. **Preliminary Ecological Appraisal** — A site survey identifies habitats, ecological features, evidence of protected species and the need for further work.
3. **Targeted species surveys** — Where suitable habitat or evidence is found, additional surveys may be required at the appropriate time of year.
4. **Masterplan response** — Development areas, access, open space, buffers, lighting and drainage are adjusted to avoid or reduce ecological effects.
5. **Biodiversity assessment** — Habitat losses and gains are measured and a strategy is prepared to meet applicable biodiversity net gain requirements.
6. **Planning submission** — Ecological reports, mitigation measures and enhancement proposals are submitted as part of the planning evidence base.
7. **Conditions, licences and management** — Detailed measures may be secured through conditions, obligations, habitat management arrangements or species licensing where required.

Ecological surveys are part of the evidence base. Their purpose is to inform a workable design and the measures needed to make development acceptable.

Read: Landscape & Development Land Guide

Read: Flood Risk & Drainage Guide

What If Ecology Is Raised as a Constraint?

A council may identify ecology as a reason for concern where a site contains valued habitats, lies close to a designated site, appears capable of supporting protected species or lacks evidence showing how biodiversity impacts would be addressed. That conclusion should be examined carefully rather than treated as automatically decisive.

The first step is to identify the precise ecological issue and the evidence behind it. A high-level desktop constraint may require site-specific survey work. Equally, a genuine ecological feature may be capable of retention within open space, buffering or a revised development layout.

A focused response can include:

- Reviewing the council's ecological assessment and the evidence on which it relies
- Commissioning a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal or targeted species surveys
- Revising the masterplan to retain important habitats and provide suitable buffers
- Demonstrating how mitigation and biodiversity enhancement can be secured
- Testing whether biodiversity net gain can be delivered without undermining capacity
- Submitting updated evidence through Local Plan representations or a planning application

Evidence can change the planning assessment

Ecological evidence can materially alter the way a site is understood. A feature shown on mapping may prove less constraining following survey, while a valuable habitat may be capable of retention within the green infrastructure network. The planning case should explain the actual effect on development capacity rather than simply listing ecological designations or records.

Where ecology is raised as a concern, the response should be evidence-led: identify the issue, test its significance and show how the development strategy addresses it.

How Can Ecology Affect Development Land Value?

Ecology can affect land value where it changes the amount of developable land, requires costly mitigation, affects access or drainage design, creates survey delays or requires off-site biodiversity provision. The effect can be modest on one site and significant on another, depending on the habitats and species involved.

Good ecological planning can also add certainty. If important features are understood, the developable area is realistic and the biodiversity strategy is deliverable, a purchaser or developer can assess the site with greater confidence. Unresolved ecological risk can lead to cautious assumptions about capacity, programme and cost.

The value outcome is site-specific

The effect on value depends on habitat type and condition, required buffers, survey and licensing requirements, on-site biodiversity opportunities and long-term management costs. Ecology should therefore be assessed alongside access, drainage, landscape, heritage, infrastructure and planning policy.

Understand the ecological position before agreeing terms

Before selling or entering into an option or promotion agreement, it is sensible to understand whether ecology could materially reduce the developable area or create abnormal costs. Equally, a well-designed green infrastructure strategy may allow important features to be retained without preventing a viable development scheme.

Ecology can influence value, but early evidence can turn uncertainty into defined design parameters, mitigation measures and realistic costs.

Find Out What Your Land May Be Worth

How Value My Land Can Help

Value My Land can review the ecological position as part of a wider development potential assessment and coordinate specialist ecological work where it is needed. The aim is to identify genuine constraints early and integrate them into a planning and promotion strategy rather than allowing unresolved ecology to become an avoidable obstacle.

Initial Development Potential Review We review ecology alongside planning policy, access, drainage, landscape and other constraints to understand the likely effect on development potential.	Ecology-Led Site Promotion Where ecology is relevant to a Local Plan submission, we can ensure the planning case explains the evidence, design response and deliverability.
Ecological Consultant Coordination We can instruct and coordinate ecologists and integrate their findings with highways, drainage, landscape, heritage and masterplanning work.	Local Plan Representations If ecology is cited as a reason to discount a site, we can prepare an evidence-led response and submit updated material at the appropriate consultation stage.
Masterplan & BNG Coordination We can help ensure habitat retention, buffers, green infrastructure and biodiversity net gain are reflected in the development strategy from the outset.	Landowner-Focused Approach The strategy is proportionate to the site and stage of promotion, avoiding unnecessary work while addressing matters that could materially affect value or delivery.

Promotion Agreements

Where we enter into a Promotion Agreement, we fund and manage the agreed planning process at our own cost and risk. This can include proportionate ecological surveys, biodiversity work and specialist advice required to support the planning strategy. If planning permission is not secured, the agreed promotion costs are written off.

The landowner retains ownership and control of the land throughout the promotion process. Because our return is linked to the sale proceeds, our objective is aligned with securing a deliverable planning position and maximising the value achieved for the land.

[Request a Free Development Potential Assessment](#)



Could Ecology Affect Your Development Land?

If you own land and want to understand whether habitats, protected species or biodiversity requirements could affect its development potential, contact Value My Land for a free, no-obligation initial assessment.

Telephone: 0800 061 4006
Email: info@valuemyland.com
www.valuemyland.com



Value
My Land

Delivering Sustainable Development

Further reading: [Ecology & Biodiversity Guide](#) | [Landscape & Development Land Guide](#) | [Flood Risk & Drainage Guide](#) | [Access & Highways Guide](#)

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