

ALTON TOWN COUNCIL PRESS RELEASE



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What Biodiversity Net Gain means to Alton

Alton Town Council has taken the first steps to see if recent planning legislation changes can benefit our local environment and the town's green spaces.

Biodiversity net gain (BNG) is an approach to development, and land management, that aims to leave the natural environment in a measurably better state than it was beforehand.

The word 'biodiversity' comes from the term 'biological diversity'. It refers to the variety of all living organisms, including animals, birds, insects, plants, bacteria and fungi.

Under the [Environment Act 2021](#), all planning permissions granted in England (with a few exemptions) will have to deliver at least 10% net gain in biodiversity from April 2024. BNG will be calculated using a Defra system of measurement. All habitat gains will need to be maintained for at least 30 years.

If a developer is unable to achieve the necessary biodiversity gain on their site, they can comply with the legislation by buying credit units for the biodiversity gain to be achieved elsewhere.

This is a potential source of funds for Alton Town Council (ATC) to enhance our green spaces. ATC is exploring potential opportunities for delivering biodiversity net gains on our sites and selling the associated biodiversity units to developers.

Kings Pond is the obvious site where work will need funding soon. The first step in finding out if BNG credits can provide some of this funding was to undertake a baseline assessment of the site using the Defra biodiversity system. ATC appointed RPS Group to make the baseline assessment and to draft a BNG Strategy for the site. This was completed in December and the report is available on the ATC website.

The report indicates that the potential funds that could be raised by selling BNG credits for improvements to the Kings Pond site could be more than £1million. This figure is exciting but must be viewed with great caution. In practice it may not be possible to achieve many of the biodiversity gains the report assumes and not all the changes that would be needed will be acceptable. Also, the cost of maintaining habitats for 30 years needs to be factored in.

The next step will be to look at the possible biodiversity gains in one area of the Kings Pond site in more detail. The southern part of the site is unlikely to be affected by any work to the pond so the BNG potential of the woodland here will be considered first.

For further information on Biodiversity Net Gain, Natural England have issued:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sVR9VZYkMLc>

https://naturalengland.blog.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/183/2022/03/BNG-Brochure_Final_Compressed.pdf

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