



DAERA Environmental Advice for Planning

Standing Advice
Single Dwellings

Advice for planning officers to inform decision making and applicants seeking planning permission on the use of sustainable drainage systems in new developments.

Introduction

This Standing Advice has been issued by the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA), Natural Environment Division (NED), to support Planning Authorities, Applicants and Agents in the assessment of Single Dwelling Proposals (including new dwellings, replacements, renovations and alterations) that may affect natural heritage interests.

The advice promotes a risk-based and proportionate approach to decision making and is intended to:

- Assist Planning Authorities in identifying when Natural Heritage impacts are likely
- Clarify when consultation with NED is and is not required
- Reduce avoidable delays to Planning Applications
- Ensure Natural Heritage interests are appropriately protected

It is important to consider this advice alongside:

- The [NI Biodiversity Checklist](#) and [associated guidance](#)
- [DAERA/NIEA species-specific and topic-based Standing Advice](#)
- Published [NIEA survey specifications](#)
- The [Natural Environment Map Viewer](#)

This Standing Advice does not remove the need for planning judgement or the legal duties placed on Planning Authorities under wildlife and habitats legislation.

1. Scope

This Standing Advice applies to all planning applications for single dwellings that have the potential to affect natural heritage features, including:

- designated sites
- protected and priority species
- priority habitats
- earth science interests
- the water environment.

NED will only provide advice on landscape and visual impacts where proposals:

- are located within the World Heritage Site, or
- are considered regionally significant.

2. When Delays Occur

The most common causes of delay are:

- Missing ecological surveys, especially bat surveys – most ecological assessments are seasonally restricted, so if they are not commissioned in time, this can lead to significant delays.
- Incomplete, incorrect or illegible documentation.

All ecological information should be submitted together, upfront, with the planning application.

3. Advice for Planners

Only consult NED when a potential Natural Heritage impact has been identified. Every consultation must include all of the following:

- A completed NI Biodiversity Checklist (or equivalent ecological information).
- Any surveys the NI Biodiversity Checklist has identified as necessary.
- A completed NI Consultation Checklist.

Planners should use the NI Biodiversity Checklist Decision Flowchart before consulting NED.

3.1 When NOT to Consult NED

Do **not** consult NED in the following scenarios:

- No ecological information has been provided - request a completed NI Biodiversity Checklist first.
- The NI Biodiversity Checklist and the planner's site visit identify no Natural Heritage concerns.

- The NI Biodiversity Checklist indicates surveys are required, but they have not been submitted — request the necessary surveys before proceeding.
- Robust ecological surveys confirm no Natural Heritage issues and no mitigation is required.
- The only issue relates to invasive species - in such cases, attach the [invasive species informative](#) to any planning approval (unless the development is inside or within 100m of a designated site or priority habitat as NED must be consulted in this instance).

3.2 When to Consult NED

Only consult NED in the following scenarios:

- Ecological surveys have identified a Natural Heritage receptor requiring mitigation or compensation (**ensure the mitigation/compensation plan is attached**), including but not limited to:
 - Bat roosts in buildings or trees.
 - Badger setts (within 25m, or 100m where piling is proposed).
 - Other protected or priority species likely to be affected (e.g. smooth newt, otter, common lizard).
- The development is inside or within 100m of a designated site or a priority habitat.
- The Planner's site visit has raised potential Natural Heritage concerns.
- There are multiple recent applications in the area and there are concerns about cumulative impacts in relation to Natural Heritage interests.
- Where potential impacts to Earth Science Conservation Review sites have been identified.

4. Advice for Applicants/Agents

To avoid delays:

- Use the [NI Biodiversity Checklist](#) early in the design stage.
- Submit all ecological information upfront.
- Note that many surveys (especially bat emergence surveys) are seasonally restricted.
- Incorporate ecological mitigation hierarchy early into the design before submitting the application.

5. Main Topics to Consider

5.1 Designated Sites

- Is the development inside or within 100m of a nationally or locally designated site(s). This includes: European sites – SACs, SPAs & Ramsar sites, nationally important sites - ASSIs, NNRs, and locally important sites - SLNCIs?
- Has the supporting ecological information identified a possible hydrological link to a European or nationally important site?
- If the supporting information has identified the potential for likely significant effects to a European Site, the Planning Authority must consult Shared

Environmental Services (SES) and conduct a Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA).

5.2 Protected & Priority Species

Bats

- All bat species and roosts are strictly protected by law.
- Any building or mature tree impacted by works must be assessed for Bat Roost Potential (BRP).
- If BRP identifies potential, emergence surveys (May–Sept) are required before consulting NED. These surveys must be completed in compliance with NIEA publish [Bat Survey Specifications](#).

Consult NED only when:

- Surveys identify that a bat roost is present and a mitigation plan has been provided.
- The quality or methodology of the survey is uncertain or does not meet [published NIEA bat survey specifications](#) and [External Guidance on Bat surveys using NVAs](#).

Badgers

- Badgers and their setts are legally protected.
- A survey is required where badgers may be present within woodland, scrub or mature hedgerows.

Consult NED only when:

- Surveys identify that a sett(s) is located:
 - within 25m of the proposed development, or
 - 100m if piling is proposed.
- And a mitigation plan has been submitted.

Birds

- All wild birds and active nests are protected.
- Schedule A1 nests are protected year-round, e.g. Barn Owl (abandoned or quiet farm buildings, barns, old tree cavities), and Peregrine Falcon (quarry ledges, coastal cliffs and tall urban buildings are becoming more utilised).
- Routine impacts can be mitigated for using a standard breeding bird condition (1st March – 31st August restrictions).

Consult NED only when:

- Schedule A1 or priority bird species may be affected and a mitigation plan has been submitted.

5.3 Priority Habitats

Examples: [hedgerows](#), woodlands, species-rich grasslands, wetlands.

- Given ongoing biodiversity decline, the cumulative loss of priority habitats however small must be taken seriously. Avoidance is preferred; mitigation or compensation may be considered where unavoidable on a case-by-case basis.
- Removal of an established/mature hedgerow is not ecologically equivalent to a new immature planted one. It will take many years to establish and planting can fail.
- Mature hedgerows/trees should be shown as retained with buffers on drawings.

Consult NED only when:

- Habitat loss is likely and a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA) with a detailed Habitat Management/Restoration Plan has been provided.

5.4 Earth Science Features

Impacts must be avoided where the development proposal is inside or within 100m of:

- European sites – SACs & Ramsar sites, Nationally important sites - ASSIs, NNRs, and Locally important sites – SLNCIs - where earth science is a feature.
- [Earth Science Conservation Review sites.](#)

Impacts relate to:

- Loss of feature from excavation or deposition, for example.
- Loss of access or visibility of feature.

Mitigation/compensation may not be possible for some features, consult NED if impacts are likely.

5.5 Water Environment

- Connect to mains sewer where possible.
- Septic tanks/treatment systems must avoid impacts to watercourses and designated sites.
- Apply a 10m buffer, where possible, to water courses as avoidance. Buffers must be shown clearly on drawings.
- Impacts from hydrological links to designated sites will require mitigation.
- Follow Pollution Prevention Guidance and apply the [NIEA standing advice for development that may have an effect on the water environment \(including groundwater and fisheries\)](#)

5.6 Invasive Species

Do not consult NED if the only issue relates to invasive species - in such cases, attach the [invasive species informative](#) to any planning approval - unless the development is inside or within 100m of a designated site or priority habitat as NED must be consulted in this instance.

Use DAERA's standing advice for [Invasive Alien Plant Species](#)

6. Further Information

Links to all relevant DAERA Standing Advice and the NI Biodiversity Checklist are available [here](#).

The [Natural Environment Map Viewer](#) shows designated sites and priority habitats and should be used as part of your assessment.

7. Example Scenarios

Example 1: New dwelling in improved grassland; minor hedgerow removal

1. No significant natural heritage impact.
2. Use bird-nesting season condition and replacement hedgerow planting condition.
3. Do not consult NED.

Example 2: New dwelling and demolition of old building

1. Checklist determines bat potential.
2. If BRP or PEA by a competent ecologist finds no issues - do not consult NED. Attach bat / bird informative
3. If bat potential identified - request surveys before consulting with NED.
4. Consult NED if bats or other protected species have the potential to be impacted and you have received a mitigation plan.

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