

Biodiversity Offsetting

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Defra

- What is biodiversity offsetting? The background
- Developing the proposal for the pilot – the process
- Looking forward – what will happen in the offsetting pilot?

WHAT IS BIODIVERSITY OFFSETTING? THE BACKGROUND

Biodiversity offsets

are conservation activities designed to deliver biodiversity benefits in compensation for losses in a measurable way.

Used around the world

- **Australia** - very high level of involvement of government
- Habitat banks in the **US**
- **France** – running a pilot scheme at the moment
- Bespoke schemes for big mining developments, sometimes supported by the work of the **Business and Biodiversity Offsets Programme**
- **EU Biodiversity Strategy:** ‘The Commission will carry out further work with a view to proposing by 2015 an initiative to ensure there is no net loss of ecosystems and their services (e.g. through compensation or offsetting schemes).’

Some evidence that current arrangements aren't always delivering well

Currently there is

- **Statutory protection for the most important sites**, requiring compensating measures for unavoidable damage.
- Government guidance to planning authorities protecting some sites and aiming to **prevent harm to biodiversity**
- Guidance that planning authorities should identify areas for the restoration or creation of habitats which contribute to regional targets, and support this through appropriate policies

Where **'significant harm'** to biodiversity cannot be avoided or mitigated, compensatory measures are expected (or required in relation to sites with statutory protection).

However, there are a number of reasons why this may not be protecting biodiversity

- Compensatory measures may be inadequate - lack of expertise and resources
- Compensatory action tends to be piecemeal and small scale. This may not be efficient or effective
- the cumulative impact of losing small, and relatively less important sites is not addressed

Little evidence is collected on this – we have commissioned a study of a sample of planning authority decisions.

..... SO

- Defra commissioned a study on biodiversity offsetting in 2009.
- Coalition agreement:
‘We will introduce measures to protect wildlife and promote green spaces and wildlife corridors in order to halt the loss of habitats and restore biodiversity.’
- Defra’s Business Plan commits to
assess the scope for action to offset the impact of development on biodiversity
- ‘Making Space for Nature’ recommended that **‘If a formal system of biodiversity offsets is to be introduced, pilot schemes should be established to test and refine its operation, to ensure it meets the conditions we have set out for a safe and effective system.’**



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DEVELOPING THE PROPOSAL FOR THE PILOT – THE PROCESS

“Assess the scope for action to offset the impacts of development on biodiversity”

- Conversations with interested stakeholders: particularly local authorities, developers, conservationists
- 73 responses to discussion material on line over the winter:
cautious enthusiasm
- Wider policy considerations:
 - Natural Environment White Paper
 - Localism
 - National Planning Policy Framework
 - Reducing burdens

Principles for biodiversity offsetting

- Not change existing levels of protection for biodiversity
- Deliver additional benefits, not just protection, as part of ecological networks
- Be managed at the local level as far as possible
- Be as simple and straightforward as possible

Believe it is a mechanism that can help deliver planning policy more effectively – pilots to see how it could work in England

The measurement

Why do we need a metric?

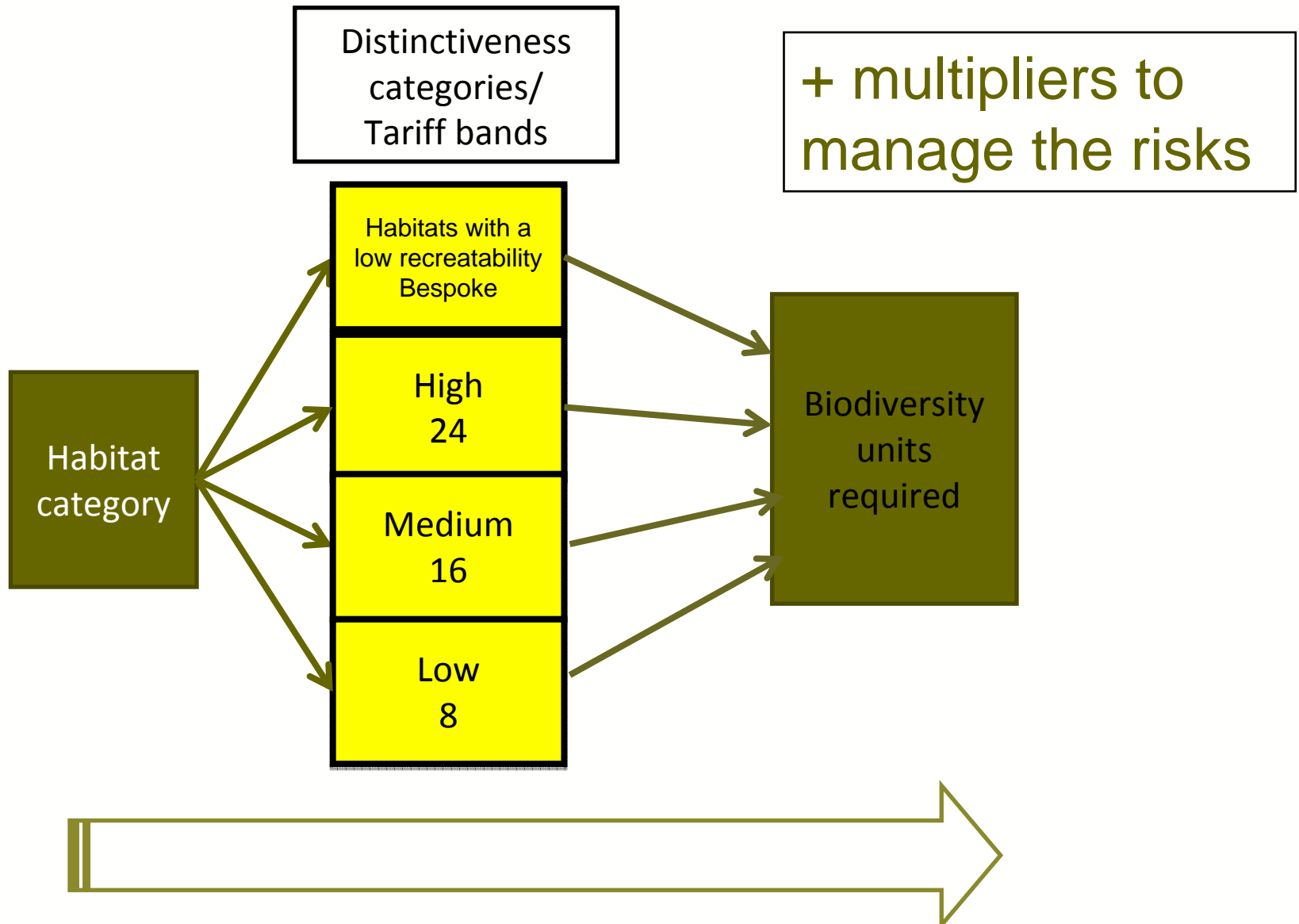
Provides a transparent unit of biodiversity that can be:

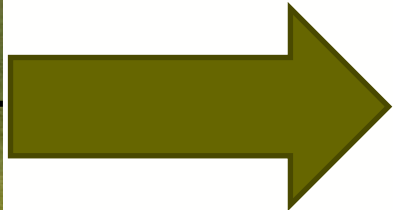
- exchanged between sites of different quality or condition
 - between habitat types
 - can be used to measure actions taking place within habitats
- it is not a financial value**

Design Criteria:

- need to balance desire to reflect all biodiversity needs with simple and straightforward, and avoiding additional burdens
- needs for transparency

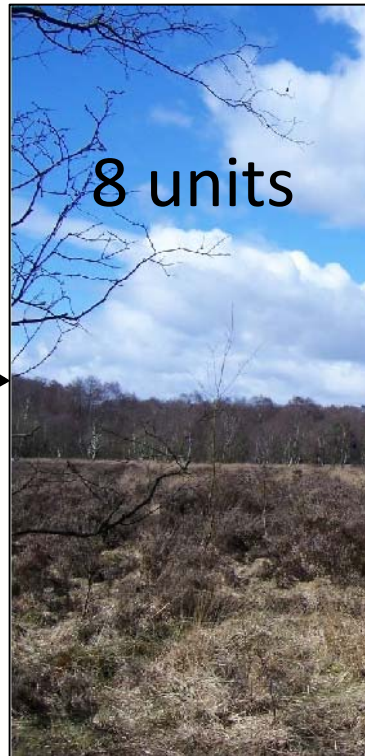
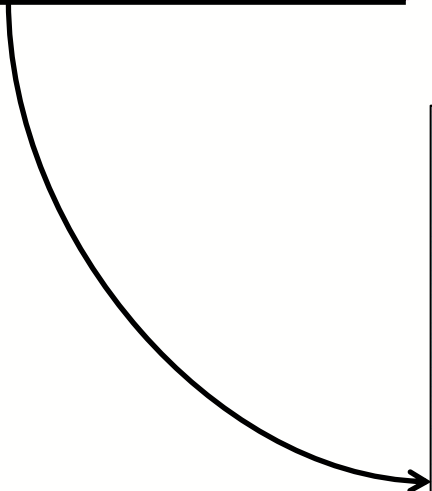
Assessing biodiversity value





32 units





- Asked for expressions of interest in being **a pilot** from local authorities, as at the heart of the proposed approach.
- Ideally working across an area larger than a District Authority area, backed by existing local partnerships.
- Also asked developers, conservation groups and others with an interest to let us know if they would be interested in delivering a **complementary project**
- Deadline for expressions of interest was **30 September**.

**LOOKING FORWARD – WHAT
WILL HAPPEN IN THE
OFFSETTING PILOT?**

Next steps

- Assess the expressions of interest to decide who we will work with – by end of November.
- Commission independent evaluation
- Develop toolkit for participants with pilot areas, and with others who have volunteered to be on a “sounding board”.
- Set up support networks, and NE advisors in place on the ground, to quality assure projects and support local authorities.
- Pilots start in April 2012 until April 2014.
- Hoping for links with NIAs and LNPs

Many thanks

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