optimis ecology

Looking for

ecology and biodiversity experts

Introduction

If you are looking for ecology and biodiversity experts Optimis provides a specialist service that ensures projects can maximise biodiversity gains and deliver ecological benefits alongside development.

Conserving and enhancing the natural environment is an intrinsic part of the planning and development process. It is essential that all development minimises impacts on and provides net gains for biodiversity in line with policy and legislation requirements.

When might ecology or biodiversity expertise be required?

To demonstrate that a proposed development is acceptable, applicants are often required to present ecological and biodiversity appraisals showing how the project avoids harm and improves biodiversity.

If significant harm to biodiversity resulting from a development cannot be avoided, or mitigated, then planning permission may be refused. Conversely, developments that conserve or enhance biodiversity should be supported. Opportunities to improve biodiversity in and around development should be integrated into a project's design, securing net gains in biodiversity and enhancing public access to nature where appropriate.

Who is best placed to prepare ecology and biodiversity appraisals?

Ecological appraisals and biodiversity assessments are specialist pieces of work that require an expert to prepare – an expert who can act in the best interests of the client, whilst being able to fully comply with legislation and Planning Policy at National and Local level.

We believe it is essential to appoint an expert who can plan and develop ideas that conserve and enhance our natural environment alongside development. Optimis has this knowledge, skill, and many years of relevant experience.

Our expertise

At Optimis our unique in-house expertise enables us to act successfully on behalf of clients to demonstrate the ecological benefits development projects can offer.

We act on behalf of clients to deliver projects that support the natural environment and ensure the success of a project with a scheme design that is viable, deliverable and policy compliant.

Joanne Makin MSci MCIEEM CEnv
Ecology and Biodiversity Consultant

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Our expertise at Optimis

At Optimis our main expert is our Ecology and Biodiversity Consultant, Joanne Makin. Joanne is a Chartered Environmentalist and Full Member of the Chartered Institute for Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM). She holds Natural England class licences for protected species including bats, dormice and great crested newts, as well as an industry-recognised certificate for botanical identification. Joanne has over ten years experience gained from both the private and public sector, working for various consultancies and local planning authorities, up to a senior level.

Optimis also works closely with trusted surveyors and experts. This ensures the project team can adapt to meet each project's individual requirements and is project managed by our in-house expert.

Our services

Optimis offers a range of ecology and biodiversity services covering various aspects of our natural environment affected by planning, construction, and development. We ensure all our work is carried out to the highest standard and in accordance with the relevant industry guidelines.

"My first experience of working with Optimis Ecology was on a very tricky project where they provided clear advice and offered an innovative solution. They have since advised on a number of other projects and have always provided a helpful and insightful service".

Ben Kelly,
West Green Planning Limited

Ecology Services

Preliminary Ecological Appraisal

A Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA) assesses what ecological features are present or potentially present within the proposed project site and surrounding area. It involves both a desk study and field survey to identify the key ecological constraints and opportunities associated with the project. The appraisal determines whether any further ecological surveys or assessments are required, as well as outlining any mitigation or enhancement measures.

This report is intended to inform the client and design team(s) and may be suitable for planning application submission where there are limited ecological features present. Alternatively, the PEA is used to inform a subsequent Ecological Impact Assessment Report accompanied by any further ecological surveys and assessments necessary.

Need help?

Ask Optimis to advise what appraisals and assessments reports are required for your project.

Ecological Impact Assessment

An Ecological Impact Assessment (EcIA) is where potential impacts resulting from a project are identified, quantified, and assessed. It follows on from a PEA and includes the findings of any ecological surveys that are necessary. The assessment concludes whether there are any 'important' ecological features and if potential impacts of the project would result in any 'significant effects' upon those features.

This report is required at the design stage of a project to form part of a planning application submission, to demonstrate compliance with the legislation and planning policies relevant to nature conservation.

Protected Species Surveys

We carry out and advise on survey design and mitigation, to ensure the project avoids harm whilst conserving and enhancing habitats and features for protected species.

This includes surveys for:

- Badgers
- Bats
- Breeding Birds
- Dormice
- Great Crested Newts
- Invertebrates
- Otters
- Reptiles
- Water Voles

Our **Ecology Survey Calendar** (*page 11*) provides a general guide to survey timing and the seasonal constraints which apply to ecological survey work. It is therefore important to plan ahead with the survey season to avoid delays and ensure the success of your project.

Bat Services

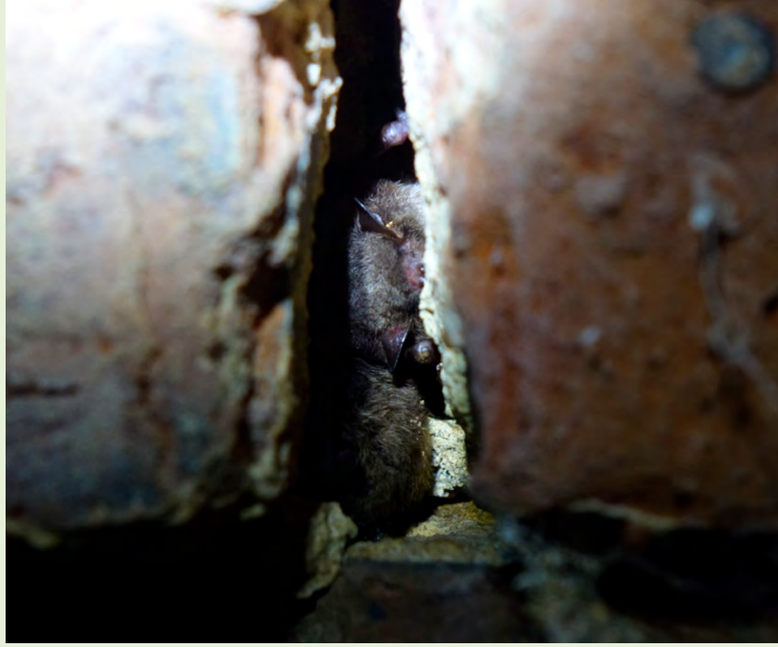
Preliminary Roost Assessment

A Preliminary Roost Assessment (PRA) determines if bats or their roosts are likely to be impacted by a proposed development. It involves an external and internal inspection of the structure and a search is undertaken for any potential roosting features. Any evidence of bats that may be present is recorded. The assessment categorises the suitability of the structure for roosting bats, and recommends whether further surveys are required to determine their presence or likely absence.

This report is suitable for planning application submission where there is no evidence of bats and the structure is considered to have negligible suitability for roosting.

Dusk Emergence and Dawn Re-Entry Surveys

Dusk emergence and dawn re-entry surveys for bats would be required if the proposed development is reasonably likely to impact a structure that is suitable for roosting bats. The surveys establish whether a bat roost is present, as well as determining the number of bats and type of roost.



It is important to plan these surveys into your project programme as early as possible. Our **Ecology Survey Calendar** (*page 11*) provides a general guide to survey timing and the seasonal constraints which apply for bat surveys.

Biodiversity Services

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 Environment Act 2021 sets out the following key components of mandatory biodiversity gain. It amends the Town & Country Planning Act requiring a minimum 10% gain to be secured for at least 30 years for all developments.

"We have worked on several schemes with Optimis Ecology to maximise the biodiversity gains on our developments. Optimis are prompt in undertaking surveys and completing reports and always communicate effectively with the landscape architects and design team to ensure suitable habitats and planting are specified and delivered on site".

Nick Evans,
Vabel Projects Ltd

Biodiversity Net Gain Feasibility Report

A BNG Feasibility report considers whether a project can deliver gains in biodiversity. The feasibility of BNG needs to be considered as early as possible, at the conceptual stage of a project and before designs are fixed. It can involve working with the client and design team(s) to appraise different design options and predict the outcomes for biodiversity.

This report is not intended to form part of a planning application submission but is useful in pre-application discussions or option appraisals, or viability/purchase of land. It advises the client and/or design team what is feasible and required to achieve a concept that delivers biodiversity gains.

Biodiversity Metric

A Biodiversity Metric is used to calculate the value of a site in 'biodiversity units'. The value is calculated for both the baseline conditions and also for the proposed design, in order to determine the associated percentage change in biodiversity. Ideally, a minimum 10% gain in biodiversity, as per the mandatory requirement should be achieved.

This metric is required at the design stage of a project to form part of a planning application submission, alongside a Biodiversity Net Gain Design Stage Report. Alternatively, the metric can be used at the concept stage of a project to aid in project design at an early stage, alongside a Biodiversity Net Gain Feasibility Report.

Biodiversity Net Gain Design Stage Report

A BNG Design Stage Report is necessary to demonstrate how the design of the project will achieve a net gain in biodiversity. It describes the baseline conditions and proposed design of a project, to evidence the biodiversity metric calculations. It demonstrates the habitats being retained and enhanced, as well as what new habitats will be created.

This report is required at the design stage of a project to form part of a planning application submission, alongside a Preliminary Ecological Appraisal/Ecological Impact Assessment Report.

Need advice?

Ask Optimis to advise what assessments and reports are necessary to achieve and demonstrate biodiversity net gain on your project.

"It is a pleasure to work with Optimis Ecology who are always friendly and approachable. Backed with extensive knowledge they provide excellent invaluable practical advice for incorporating ecology into the design of buildings and their settings".

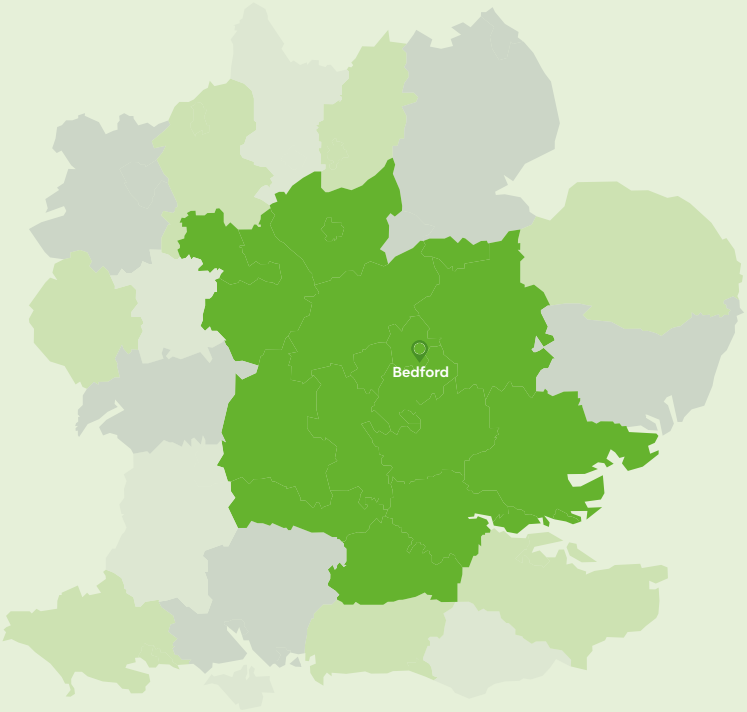
Richard Langridge,
CMI Architecture Ltd

Ecology Survey Calendar

	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC
Habitat Survey				Habitat survey (as part of Preliminary Ecological Appraisal or similar)								
Botanical Survey	Lower plants only (mosses & liverworts)				Detailed botanical surveys (woodland, heathland, grassland habitats etc.)					Lower plants only (mosses & liverworts)		
Invertebrates												
Great crested newts				Pond Survey (4/6 x survey; must inc. 2/3 surveys mid-Apr to mid-May)								
				eDNA Survey (mid Mar to end-Jun)								
Reptiles				Reptile Survey (7 x surveys required)								
Birds			Nesting bird season (avoid vegetation clearance or nesting bird check req.)									
			Breeding bird surveys (4 x monthly Mar to Jun)									
	Wintering bird surveys											
			Migratory bird surveys					Migratory bird surveys				
Badgers	Survey possible throughout the year				Vegetation can obscure evidence in summer months							
							Licensable period for sett closure and disturbance					
Dormice				Nest Tube/Box Survey and Footprint Tunnels (several surveys spread monthly between Apr and Oct)							Nut search only	
Bats	Bat Roost Assessment (Structures and Trees) possible throughout the year											
	Hibernation survey only				Emergence and Activity surveys spread throughout the season						Hibernation survey only	
Water voles		Habitat suitability assessment		Water vole survey (2 x Surveys; the first Apr to Jun, the second Jul to Sept)						Habitat suitability assessment		
Otters	Survey possible throughout the year											
	JAN	FEB	MAR	APR	MAY	JUN	JUL	AUG	SEP	OCT	NOV	DEC

Key: Optimal Survey Period | Sub-optimal Survey Period | Survey not possible

Main areas of operation



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