

Hopwood Hall rewetting scheme

Biodiversity Net Gain case study

November 2022



Background

A new biodiversity haven has been created in Rochdale, Greater Manchester, in one of the very first off-site habitat creation schemes delivered in the city-region using a developer contribution for Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG).



The project

4ha of wet grassland and open pools have been created on land believed to be a former peat bog drained at the turn of the last century to provide agricultural land.

Habitat works on the site included:

- Ditches blocked to allow standing water to form and provide wetland habitat for wildlife including birds and rare mosses
- 13,000 trees planted to form a hedgerow
- Repairs to fencing that will exclude grazing animals for much of the year
- The relocation of rare mud snails from another site in Rochdale where their habitat has been lost

The process

Hopwood Hall College in Middleton aimed to deliver a 10% uplift in Biodiversity Net Gain alongside the development of temporary classrooms and associated facilities. The delivery of on-site biodiversity net gain was not possible as the site location was very constrained by the Green Belt designation, and a tightly drawn application boundary, preventing habitat creation on site or immediately adjacent to the site. Despite the development being described as temporary, it was considered that losses to marshy grassland on the site would be permanent because changes to the hydrology of the site needed to facilitate the development would be effectively irreversible. To deliver a 10% uplift in Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) a shift to off-site compensation was required.

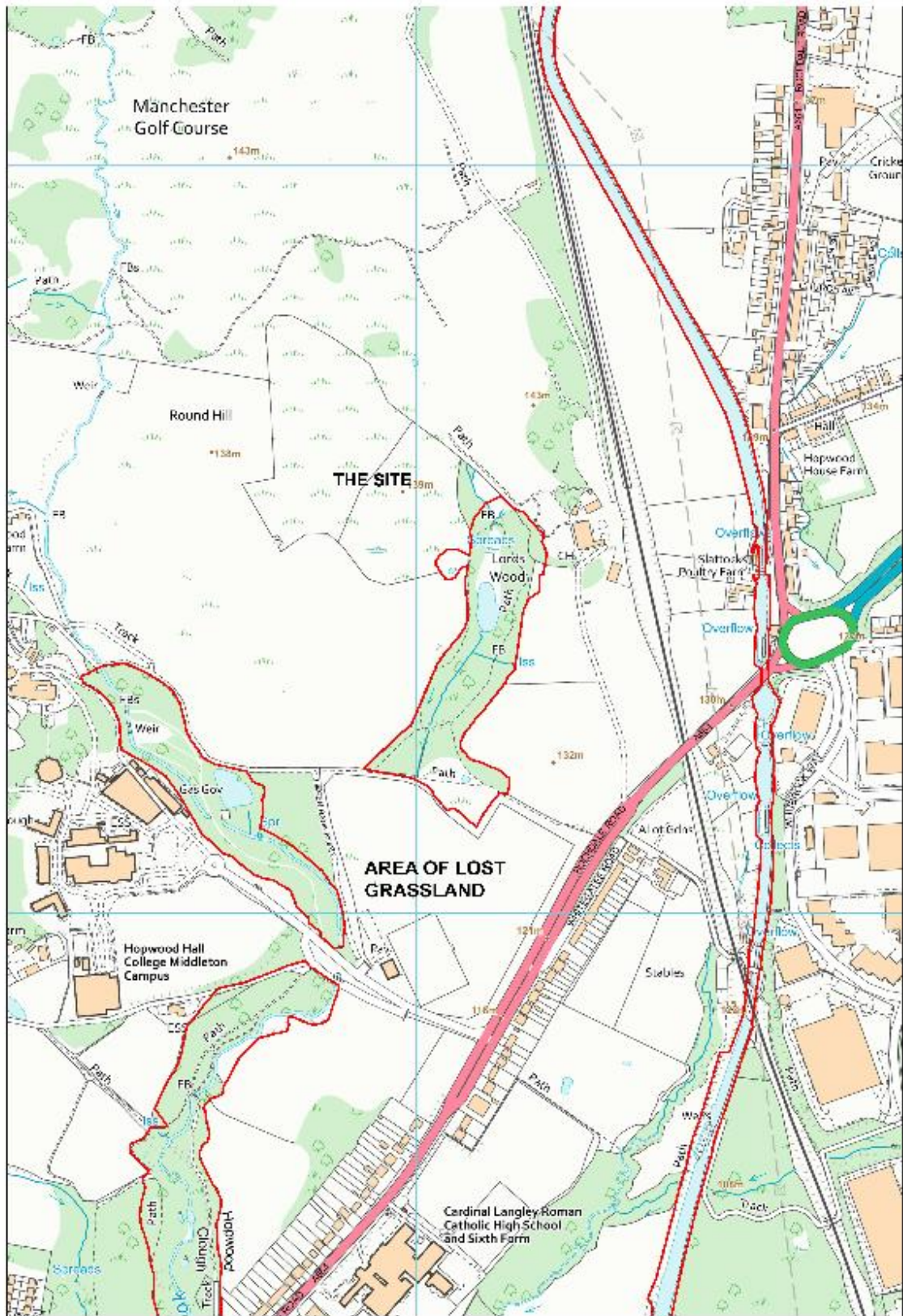
Nearby land owned by Rochdale District Council (shown on the page 4) was identified as having strong potential to deliver off-site BNG by Michael Cummings, Woodland and Natural Capital Project Officer at Rochdale Borough Council. Located adjacent to an existing Site of Biological Interest the land delivered on the priorities set out in Greater Manchester's draft Local Nature Recovery Strategy. Greater Manchester Ecology Unit (GMEU) was already carrying out habitat surveys nearby to this site, as part of a separately funded project to create ponds for great crested newts. Planned surveys were extended to include the proposed habitat creation site and a habitat management plan produced. This plan showed that the site could deliver a 5.11 uplift in biodiversity units.

The purchase of the units by Hopwood Hall College was secured as part of the planning conditions by Rochdale District Council. A Unilateral Undertaking was used in this case, as it was a minor development and where the Council is the landowner, rather than a full S106. The applicant (in this case, the Department for Education), with the agreement of Rochdale Council, paid GMEU directly to deliver the BNG unit uplift. Funding included provision for GMEU, in partnership with Rochdale Council, to maintain the site for 30 years and to monitor the site.

In addition to the habitat works paid for by the Hopwood Hall BNG contribution, the green volunteer ranger service planted up a new hedgerow, comprised of 1,300 trees provided by City of Trees. Rochdale Council and GMEU also stacked the BNG contribution with Great Crested Newt funding to further boost nature recovery on-site

by creating a series of new ponds in nearby woodland for amphibians, with direct habitat connectivity between the ponds and the new wet grassland. GMEU designed the works in collaboration with Rochdale Council, and works are being overseen by the Council and GMEU.

Alongside the habitat creation funded so far by Hopwood Hall, there is still potential for further habitat creation works at the site and the site will be among the first to be added to a local offset register for BNG.



Above map shows the location of the development site to the south of Manchester golf course and the nearby offset site to the north.

Key outcomes and lessons learned

- Local ecological expertise and Local Authority Officer knowledge is key to the identification of nearby off-site biodiversity net gain opportunities
- By engaging early in the process, the GMEU played a key role in facilitating the BNG assessment process and contributions, as it passed through the planning process. GMEU were able to provide continuity in ecological advice on both development schemes and informing habitat creation on off-site BNG sites
- BNG contributions can be stacked with greater crested new funding, species relocation and philanthropic contribution to maximise the potential for nature recovery.



Quote

“This is a case where an excellent outcome for nature has been achieved by the application of BNG principles and joined-up thinking. An area of very high value habitat was able to be restored close to the development impact.”

Derek Richardson, Principal Ecologist, Greater Manchester Ecology Unit

More information

If you have any questions about this project, please email Mandy Elford at GMEU. Visit [the GM Green City website](#) to find out more about Biodiversity Net Gain in Greater Manchester.