



Biodiversity offsetting

What is it and why does it matter

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What is biodiversity offsetting?



- Offsets are activities designed to compensate for the residual and unavoidable harm to biodiversity caused by development activity. Biodiversity offsets are distinguished from other forms of ecological compensation by their formal requirement for measurable outcomes and achievement of 'no net loss'. Often associated with offsetting are delivery mechanisms where developers can purchase biodiversity 'credits' from a landowner or habitat bank to deliver the offset requirement.

Offsets round the world:

- Australia - Bushbroker - high level of gov involvement
- Habitat banks in the US
- France - running a pilot scheme at the moment
- Bespoke schemes for big mining developments

The policy background?



- One of the actions in Defra's Structural Reform Plan is to 'assess the scope for actions to offset the impact of development on biodiversity'.
- A small project was established to look at this. We started by having quite a few conversations with people/organisations with a potential interest, to help steer the work.
- We went on to design a potential scheme and test this with various stakeholders.
- The proposals were endorsed/supported by Lawton and has been championed in Government by Richard Benyon – MP/DEFRA minister
- The proposals were then pulled together as the proposed pilot – this was announced as one of proposals in the England Biodiversity Strategy

Design Criteria



- Should not change existing levels of protection for biodiversity
- Deliver real benefits for biodiversity
- Be managed at the local level as far as possible
- **Be simple and straightforward as possible**, for developers, local authorities and others
- Be transparent, giving clarity on how the offset calculations are derived and allowing people to see how offset resources are being used
- Be good value for money

Pilots



- Pilots will run for **2 years**, from **April 2012**
- **Local authority led. "Ideal pilot"** would be:
 - group of local authorities (covering e.g. county, catchment)
 - who agree a strategy for using biodiversity offsets in their area
 - anticipating development
 - who will offer offsetting to developers who need to provide biodiversity compensation under planning policy requirements
 - who will use the common approach - the metric
 - who will participate in the independent evaluation

The 6 pilot areas are:



- Devon
- Doncaster
- Essex
- Greater Norwich
- Nottinghamshire
- Coventry, Warwickshire and Solihull

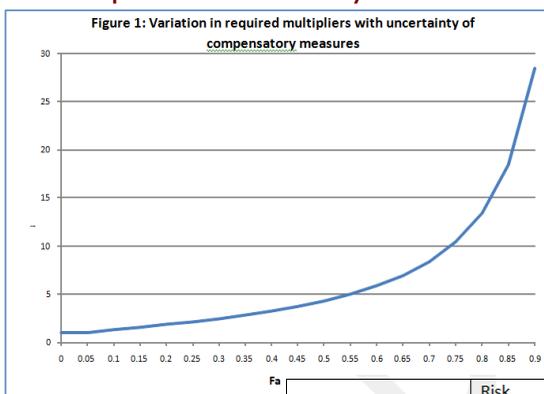
The pilots will develop a body of information and evidence that the Government will use to decide whether to support greater use of biodiversity in England, and if so, how to use it most effectively.

Metric



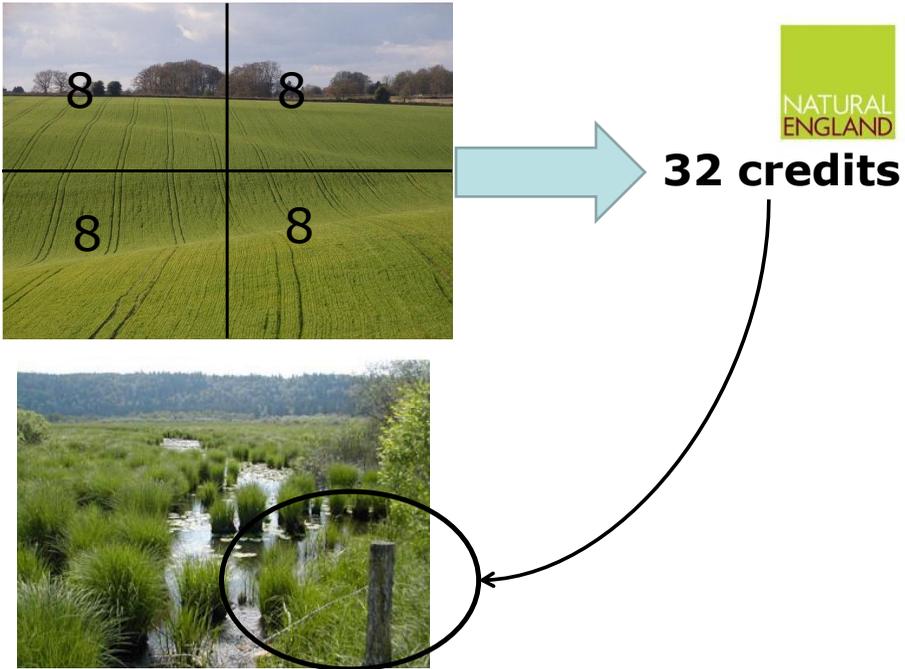
		Habitat distinctiveness		
		Low (2)	Medium (4)	High (6)
Condition	Good (3)	6	12	18
	Moderate (2)	4	8	12
	Poor (1)	2	4	6

Multipliers – delivery risk



Moilanen et al (2009)

Risk	Multiplier
Low	0
Medium	1.5
High	3
Very High	10



Problematic issues

- Species
 - Should be dealt with using existing legislation
- Off site impacts
- Quality assessment – for some habitats
- Dynamic habitats – BUT



Why does it all matter ?



- Biodiversity has and is suffering declines
- Current planning systems have not protected wider countryside
- NPPF - The purpose of the planning system is to contribute to the achievement of sustainable development.'
- The general thrust of more transparent mechanisms is likely to adopted
- As is the concept of habitat banking
- It raises some important issues about compensation in coastal areas – how do we deal with or measure dynamic systems
- Looking forward a greater recognition of the economic value of ecosystem services is going to bring this into sharper relief on the coast