

The Benefits of B-Lines to Local Authorities in England

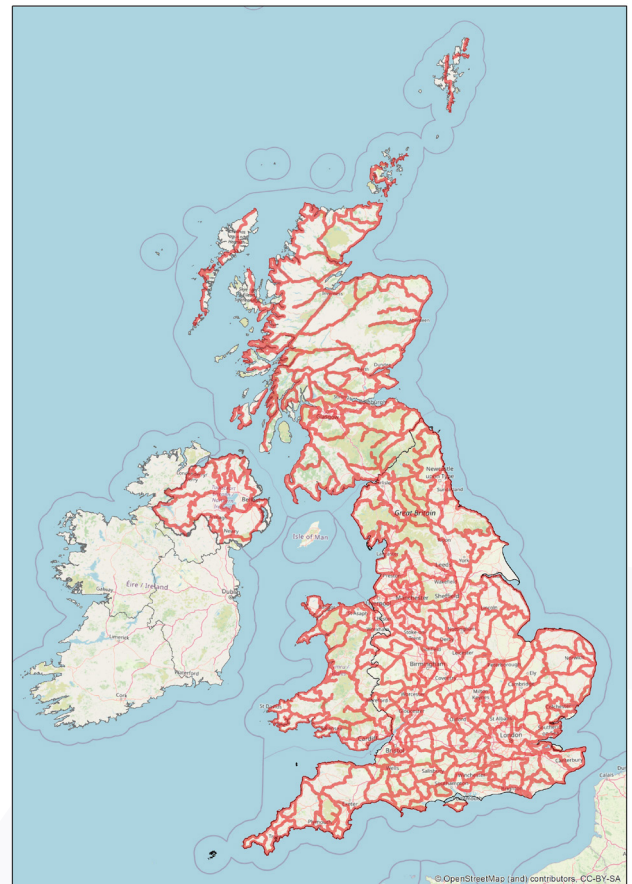


Toll Cross Park, Glasgow, Knapweed and Yarrow © Rachel Richards

What are B-Lines?

B-Lines are 3 km wide linear pathways “insect super-highways” composed of stepping stones of flower-rich habitats which link together existing important flower-rich areas (e.g. Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs), Local Wildlife Sites, Local Nature Reserves, nature reserves and Priority Habitats). They have been mapped on a county by county basis through a process of data collation, connectivity analysis and workshops with local stakeholders. Within B-Lines, together with partners and individuals, we are creating additional flower-rich stepping stones, big and small, to help pollinators and other insects travel safely through our landscapes.

B-Lines is a landscape-scale biodiversity initiative, developed and mapped by Buglife across the UK in partnership with local nature partnerships, statutory agencies, local authorities, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and other conservation partners. B-Lines is creating a UK-wide network of flower-rich habitats in line with commitments made in the Lawson review 2010 “Making Space for Nature”; identifying and creating linkages between flower-rich habitats. B-Lines is a landscape-scale framework within which we can all make a major contribution towards the National Pollinator Strategy 2014.



UK B-Lines network. Interactive map accessible at buglife.org.uk



Climate Action Northeast, natural regeneration by reduced cutting
© Rachel Richards

Local authorities are a key part of delivering B-Lines

Here are 6 actions for local authorities to support B-Lines and help local pollinator populations:

- 1 **Check the B-Lines map** to see where they run through your local authority and prioritise wildflower habitat enhancement and creation work within the B-Lines network where possible.
- 2 **Ensure that local wildlife sites and nature reserves** in B-Lines are being well managed to maintain a favorable condition of habitats and species.
- 3 **Review the management of green infrastructure** to create more flower-rich, pollinator friendly natural habitats of value to both wildlife and local residents.
- 4 **Create flower-rich areas** in parks, school grounds, roundabout, car parks, etc.
- 5 **Encourage local people** to manage gardens and community greenspaces to benefit pollinators and other wildlife as well as the local community.
- 6 **Create and adopt** a Pollinator Strategy within your local authority.

How can you use B-Lines and how can they help you?

Local Authorities have a duty to conserve, “and enhance” biodiversity in exercising their functions under the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act (NERC) 2006, which has been strengthened by the Environment Act (2021).

Supporting and helping to deliver B-Lines will help to deliver many local authorities’ commitments to biodiversity, whilst



Six-spot Burnet Moth (*Zygaena filipendulae*) © Lucia Chmurova

also contributing toward delivery of key objectives outlined in the National Pollinator Strategy. B-Lines provides a very simple framework within which local authorities can deliver their obligations; benefiting both their wildlife and their local communities.

B-Lines maps can assist in prioritising and delivering Green Infrastructure and other wildlife initiatives, in targeting action on your own estates and in strategic development planning work.

Using the B-Lines in strategic planning and green infrastructure work

Local authorities can use B-Lines as part of the biodiversity ‘evidence base’ to support biodiversity and green infrastructure mapping by including B-Lines in the mapping of habitat and landscape connectivity. This will help to ensure that pollinators are properly considered in emerging Local Plans. They can also help to drive the creation and restoration of individual Priority Habitat types and action plans for local species priorities. B-Lines is a simple yet effective approach to green infrastructure, which is highly attractive to local communities and simple to understand. Local authorities should identify synergies between B-Lines and existing green infrastructure mapping, and then use the B-Lines messages to promote and take forward action on the ground.



Pollinator garden © Kate Jones



Small Skipper (*Thymelicus sylvestris*) © Tanya St. Pierre/Cumbria Wildlife Trust

Supporting local planning

It is important that wildlife habitat is properly considered within all planning decisions, including the potential impacts on the connectivity of flower-rich habitats. Although not a statutory consideration, B-Lines can help to identify where important wildflower networks exist within the landscape. The Mitigation Hierarchy (avoid, mitigate and as a last resort compensate) should always be strictly adhered to in planning decisions to help protect flower-rich habitats.

B-Lines are also a useful lever to encourage developers to make their green spaces truly multi-functional and to deliver for pollinators, rather than creating traditional species-poor amenity grassland areas. Flower-rich habitats can support local place making and can be focal points for community activity in well planned developments.

The B-Lines are also an ideal mechanism for prioritising wildflower delivery in B-Lines through Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG), with net biodiversity gains through the planning system mandated in the Environment Act (2021). B-Lines are a prioritised and connected landscape so should be considered a local biodiversity priority.

Supporting improved land management

Local authorities can make a significant contribution by implementing positive management regimes on any flower-rich habitats and Local Wildlife Sites which form a key part of the B-Lines network. Many local authorities have significant land holdings, which have the potential to be managed more sympathetically for wildlife. Small changes to management regimes, such as reducing cuts and removing cuttings, carried out on roadside verges, parks and other amenity space can have a huge impact on the value of land to insect pollinators and other wildlife, and added together can make a major contribution towards the enhancement of the environment at a landscape-scale. By creating more accessible, natural greenspace, B-Lines will bring nature into more people's lives, with benefits to both physical and mental wellbeing.

Guiding habitat restoration ambitions

Restoring pollinator populations within B-Lines will depend on a large number of habitat restoration and creation projects being implemented across the UK. If local authorities focus their habitat restoration ambitions within the B-Lines network, the biodiversity benefits of their actions can be increased. B-Lines can be a useful driver of both local support and funding for habitat restoration objectives.

Enthusing and educating others to take action

Significant parts of the B-Lines network can be developed by enthusiastic individuals and groups often just taking action on small areas of land. Schools, businesses, local communities and private individuals can all help to develop the flower-rich habitats needed within B-Lines.

We would encourage local authorities to use B-Lines to enthuse and work with local people to help conserve our insect pollinators and other wildlife.



Bumblebee (*Bombus*) in meadow © Lucia Chmurova



Tiger Hoverfly (*Helophilus pendulus*) © Liam Olds



False Blister Beetle (Oedemeridae) © Lucia Chmurova

Policy background

The National Pollinator Strategy

The Government's National Pollinator Strategy 2014 sets out a 10-year plan to help pollinating insects survive and thrive across England. The Strategy outlines actions to support and protect the many pollinating insects which contribute to our food production and the diversity of our environment. It is a shared plan of action which looks to everyone to work together and ensure pollinators' needs are addressed as an integral part of land and habitat management. In particular the Strategy looks to local authorities to take a lead across many of their work areas and duties, including their role in local planning and also as managers of public and amenity spaces, brownfield sites, schools, car parks, roadside verges and roundabouts.

Environment Act (2021)

The Environment Act (2021) saw the setting of statutory targets for biodiversity recovery, importantly to reverse the declines in species abundance by 2030. The Act includes plans to enhance the NERC Act and strengthen the biodiversity reporting duty on local authorities, prepare spatial strategies to support nature's recovery and a new system mandating biodiversity gains through the planning system. As such, the Environment Act presents an opportunity to deliver the aspirations of B-Lines and create and restore wildflower-rich habitats, improving the extent and connectivity of habitats to help reverse the historic declines in our pollinators.

Local Nature Recovery Strategies

Clauses 100 to 104 of the Environment Act (2021) requires the preparation of Local Nature Recovery Strategies (LNRS), an England-wide system of spatial strategies to prioritise and map the work needed for nature's recovery. Each area covered by an LNRS has an appointed 'responsible authority' and each LNRS will be evidence-based, locally led and collaborative. These locally led LNRS networks will provide the foundation of the national Nature Recovery Network.

As a prioritised and connected network, B-Lines can play a valuable role in the LNRS evidence base, helping to identify core areas to target for the recovery of pollinators. They also offer a high profile and accessible delivery mechanism for wildflower-rich habitats, including individual Priority Habitat types that underpin the developing LNRS network.

National Planning Policy Framework

The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) outlines the Government's planning policies for England, how planning decisions should be made and the consideration of development plans. This includes specific references to conserving the natural environment and the natural capital and ecosystem services that it provides in Paragraph 174. B-Lines and wildflower creation and restoration overall provide a range of natural capital and ecosystem service benefits, not just through restoring pollinators but through carbon capture, supporting predators of agricultural pests and improving health and wellbeing.

Paragraph 174 of the NPPF also highlights the importance of "coherent ecological networks that are more resilient to current and future pressures". B-Lines is not only an existing prioritised and connected network, but its north-south and east-west connections will help pollinators to adapt to the changing landscape and climate. Paragraphs 175 and 179 of the NPPF recognise the need to "safeguard components of local wildlife-rich habitats and wider ecological networks, including the hierarchy of international, national and locally designated sites of importance for biodiversity; wildlife corridors and stepping stones that connect them; and areas identified by national and local partnerships for habitat management, enhancement, restoration or creation". This highlights not just the importance of recognised sites of biodiversity importance, but the wildlife corridors and stepping stones that provide valuable landscape connectivity - the mapped B-Lines. The NPPF recognises the need for a "strategic approach to maintaining and enhancing networks of habitats and green infrastructure; and plan for the enhancement of natural capital at a catchment or landscape scale across local authority boundaries".



Tractor cutting grassland with flail © Urban Green Newcastle

Paragraph 180 says that “opportunities to improve biodiversity in and around developments should be integrated as part of their design, especially where this can secure measurable net gains for biodiversity or enhance public access to nature where this is appropriate.” B-Lines provide a further driver for wildflower habitat delivery within development plans and wildflower-rich grasslands provide exceptional opportunities for the public to access and engage with nature. Paragraph 98 states explicitly that “a network of high quality open spaces and opportunities for sport and physical activity is important for the health and well-being of communities, and can deliver wider benefits for nature and support efforts to address climate change.”

Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act (2006)

Section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act states that, “Every public authority must, in exercising its functions, have regard, so far as is consistent with the proper exercise of those functions, to the purpose of conserving biodiversity”. All local authorities must consider the relevant species and habitats for their area listed under Section 41 of the NERC Act and be aware of their conservation in their policy or decision making. Improved management and restoration of Section 41 habitats within B-Lines can significantly benefit pollinators, including nationally threatened Priority Species.

The Conservation (Natural Habitats, &c.) Regulations 1994

The regulations require development plans “to include policies encouraging the management of features of the landscape which are of major importance for wild flora and fauna. Such features are those which, by virtue of their linear and continuous structure (such as rivers with their banks

or the traditional systems of marking field boundaries) or their function as stepping stones (such as ponds or small woods), are essential for the migration, dispersal and genetic exchange of wild species.” The regulations enact the European Union’s (EU) Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC) in the UK. Following the UK’s exit from the EU, changes in 2019 to the Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations (2017) transferred functions from the European Commission to the appropriate authorities in England.

Biodiversity Net Gain

Under the Environment Act 2021, all planning permissions granted in England (with a few exceptions) will be required to deliver a 10% Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG). BNG is currently required through national planning policy in England and Wales. Biodiversity Net Gain should deliver measurable improvements for biodiversity by creating or enhancing habitats in association with development on-site, off-site or through a combination of on-site and off-site measures. B-Lines can be used to help ensure the strategic location of BNG work to benefit pollinators. BNG should be secured for at least 30 years.



Road verge © Tanya St. Pierre/Cumbria Wildlife Trust

References

Lawton et al., 2010: Making Space for Nature: a review of England’s wildlife sites and ecological network. Defra.

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\(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/844442/nps-implementation-plan-2018-to-2021.pdf)

[Pollinator Action Plan 2021 to 2024
\(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/844442/pollinator-action-plan-2021-to-2024.pdf)

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