



# Positive Planning

**Good planning for the environment is essential for the Isle of Man to remain a Special Place to Live and Work.**

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## Introduction

This note sets out key principles that Manx Wildlife Trust believe are the foundation of a quality planning system and how the environment is considered within it.

Good planning integrates the needs of the environment and contributes to urban and rural renewal, providing its own infrastructure support through clean water, pollination, places to explore and relax and ultimately allow ecosystems to support our quality of life.

Planning requires a strategic and forward-looking function alongside a development control, with information to support open and transparent decision making that doesn't compromise our future through individual and short-term needs.

Good planning is the foundation of sustainable development, with its three pillars of the economy, society and the environment.

Good planning requires no presumption in favour of development, but instead should continue the emphasis and philosophy found in one of the strategic objectives of the Isle of Man Strategic Plan 2016 (p11, para 3.3a) to support the precautionary principle that assumes and development could be damaging unless proven otherwise.

## Key Principles for the Natural Environment in Planning

### I. Information and Evidence

Policies and decision making should be based on up-to-date information for the local environment. This also requires robust data collected following best practice. Guidance should also be up to date to enable applicants and the public to understand what may be required at the earliest opportunity. Ecological surveys are often seasonal and come with specific limitations. Biodiversity information should be a validation requirement for planning applications, and when managed well this does not cause delays.

MWT have monitored planning applications from July until December 2017 and only <1% required any further comment with regards to biodiversity. Although this does not cover the significance of those application, it does help indicate the scale of requirements.

### II. Sustainable Development

Good planning is the foundation of sustainable development, and as such it has to integrate a huge number of objectives, but it has to recognise we need to live within environmental limits and need to understand the environmental costs/impact of proposals.

Development can integrate the needs of biodiversity and the environment so that win-win scenarios are clearly delivered. Biodiversity is not a constraint to development, but part of quality design and planning.

### **III. People and Planning**

Planning processes should enable decision to be made in a democratic, transparent, and participatory way. Importantly it should help deliver outcomes the market on its own cannot deliver (for example see points VII and VIII, below) for society and the environment.

### **IV. Strategic Approach to Environment in Planning**

Planning is a key tool to meet environmental objectives, and this now requires considerations to be beyond the site and how proposals may impact the wider system. Protection and enhancement of our natural infrastructure should be a part of all aspects of planning. The approach to the natural environment should be holistic, take a wider network view of areas of value to nature conservation (ASSIs, Local Wildlife Sites, habitat and species), and integration of the environment using the Ecosystem Approach.

### **V. Maintain and Enhance**

Attaching respective weight to designated sites of international, national and local importance. The Statement sets the aim that Plan policies and development decisions should maintain, and enhance, or restore or add to identified conservation interests.

### **VI. Alternatives, Avoidance and Mitigation**

There should be a clear exploration of reasonable alternatives where proposals harm biodiversity. Avoidance is an expected part of the mitigation hierarchy, and planning system should be satisfied that any development cannot be located on less harmful alternative sites.

Where there are no alternatives, harm should be mitigated, and where this is not possible compensation should be agreed. Where these are not possible, planning permissions should be refused.

### **VII. Promote Benefits And Gains**

Conservation of the natural environment and biodiversity should be integrated and promoted into development. Where possible wider gains could be agreed through use of Section 13 agreements and potentially any future equivalent of the Community Infrastructure Levy<sup>1</sup> - which would allow development of green infrastructure of clear and defined biodiversity benefit. This would have large benefits for local communities and the Isle of Man.

### **VIII. Green Infrastructure**

Green Infrastructure is the network of green and blue spaces around us, and as part of the planning system has a huge benefit to society. As such it should be part of an integrated approach to planning on the Isle of Man.

High quality green infrastructure provides a wide range of valuable benefits, including: improvements to people's physical and mental health; opportunities for people to meet friends and neighbours; opportunities for children to learn through play; mitigation of the effects of climate change; reduction in flooding; reduction in air pollution; increased biodiversity; increased economic activity; places for active transport e.g. walking and cycling.

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<sup>1</sup> Note: this was part of the national Planning Policy Consultation in January 2018.