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NURTURING NATURE

 Encouraging biodiversity is essential if housebuilders are to fulfil and exceed sustainability requirements; fortunately, says **ROGER HUNT**, there is a growing specialist consultancy sector to guide them



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Countesswells in Aberdeen



Mosaics, Oxford by Hill



New Garden Quarter by Pollard Thomas Edwards for Telford Homes and Notting Hill Genesis

Biodiversity is fundamental to human life on earth. Nevertheless, the vast majority of indicators point to a dramatic and recent decline in the variety of all living things. The natural world is under threat as never before and, with it, the fragile interconnection between nature, human health and wellbeing.

The sobering facts are laid bare in WWF's 'Living Planet Report 2020 – Bending the curve of biodiversity loss'. The threats and causes are multiple but include habitat loss and degradation, in part from residential development. New environmental legislation is on the horizon, with the Environment Bill making biodiversity net gain mandatory, either as part of a development or within the local area, but this comes when the UK planning system is under review. CPRE, the countryside charity, and other campaigning organisations have put forward six tests that provide a framework to protect, enhance and create green infrastructure.

Further advice is offered in a recent NHBC Foundation publication: 'Biodiversity in new housing developments: creating wildlife-friendly communities'. It sets out approaches to design and development that work with nature to deliver multiple benefits, for people and wildlife.

Brendan Ritchie, head of sustainability at Hill Group, notes that, as demonstrated by numerous studies and research, there is a significant positive impact to providing green and biodiverse environments within residential developments. "This includes benefits to

residents' overall wellbeing and mental health.

Closeness to nature and the provision of paths for walking and cycling has clear health benefits and a greater extent of tree planting and landscaping has a positive effect on air quality."

Understanding the value of nature as an asset to developers, communities and residents is an important step in delivering successful schemes. Neil Bancroft, associate at landscape architects and urban designers HarrisonStevens, suggests an approach based on natural capital assessment (NCA). "An NCA can be used to prove how much added value a quality landscape with access to nature can contribute towards house prices and to the marketability of a neighbourhood. Meanwhile, increasing biodiversity, integrating nature-based solutions and maximising the potential of ecosystem services can also help to boost the value of green and brown roofs. "On the periphery of new developments, larger green spaces like orchards, allotments and even cemeteries can also incorporate natural habitats. In doing this, however, we need to be mindful of how landscaping can impact microclimates. It's important that we achieve the right balance, which means proposals that are sensitive to the surrounding ecosystem and located in the right places."

Ambitious biodiversity targets, both national and company-specific, give businesses something to aim towards, pushing them to be innovative, believes ►

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Springfield Meadows Pond



up to 2,000 trees set to be planted and a 4.5-acre park planned for its centre. Berkeley has nine overarching design concepts to help it create nature-rich masterplans as part of early, cross-disciplinary design discussions about delivering a measurable net biodiversity gain. "It's not always necessary to apply all nine concepts to create a nature-rich, biodiverse place, but it's certainly a useful starting point," says Sean Gavin.

New Garden Quarter, another scheme in Newham, is a neighbourhood of 471 mixed-tenure homes with landscaped grounds and a spacious public square by Pollard Thomas Edwards for Telford Homes and Notting Hill Genesis. At its heart is a square with planting and landscape working in concert to boost biodiversity and provide room to play and relax. A SuDs strategy incorporating rain gardens and green and blue roofs deals with stormwater while extensive new planting and green infrastructure ensures an enhanced local ecology.

SuDs can offer multiple benefits, including water treatment and pollution removal; systems can combine filter strips, swales, bio-retention systems, ponds, tree planting and wetlands.



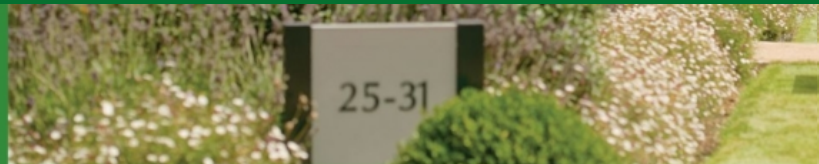
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at Redrow. "Together, we've worked to introduce a variety of pollinator-friendly measures, as well as implementing hedgehog highway networks, bat bricks and bird boxes to encourage local wildlife."

Redrow has published new design and landscaping manuals to be used by its teams and external design consultants to assist in the design of its developments. "We've adapted our approach to landscaping to create more natural, wildlife-friendly planting designs which complement the thriving communities we're building by creating beautiful spaces to enjoy. We use appropriate native planting mixes so that we can also provide shading, better air quality and play our part in climate change mitigation," explains Parker.

Plans to enhance nature on new housing developments need to be considered from the early design stages to ensure the right habitats are being retained and created, insists Sean Gavin, operations director at Berkeley South East London. "Working



closely with ecologists, landscape architects and local wildlife trusts is key to making this happen. Their expertise and advice will help to create nature-rich masterplans that also deliver a measurable net gain in biodiversity."

Berkeley's TwelveTrees Park scheme in the London Borough of Newham is transforming a brownfield site into a new neighbourhood that will provide 3,838 homes. More than half of the development is given to green spaces, gardens and ecological habitats, with

Grovenor Strategic Land's Cambridge development, Trumpington Meadows



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Rangeford Villages' retirement community at Wadswick Green in Wiltshire



Bumblebee hotel - Rodrow



Infrastructure must consider wildlife



Redrow biodiversity landscape



Trees have played a significant role at Countesswells in Aberdeen, a new community that will eventually include 3,000 homes on a 400-acre site. Extensive planting began early on with 600 trees taking root before the first families moved in. In addition, almost five acres of new green landscaping,

with a wildflower meadow, a burn and a community orchard have been created, which, in turn, has attracted a plethora of wildlife.

At Rangeford Villages' retirement community at Wadswick Green in Wiltshire, hedgerows are used to define spaces and screen key elements, including parking areas, helping to create wildlife corridors. The scheme also includes hot houses, native plants, trees. Tibbalds: tibbonalds.co.uk

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"Not only do these features deliver an improvement in amenities, they also enhance ecological diversity, simultaneously playing a key role in enhancing an area's natural ecosystem and built environment," says Will Green, head of civil engineering, at structural and civil engineering practice Perega.

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NHBC Foundation: nhbcfoundation.org
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