

Scottish Natural Heritage

Planning for development: What to consider and include in Habitat Management Plans

Guidance

Version 2

March 2016



Contents

1.	Introduction	3
2.	Background and context – role of habitat management plans	3
3.	Role of SNH	3
4.	What should be included in a HMP.....	4
5.	Things to consider when writing or reviewing a HMP	5
6.	The role and function of a steering group	5
7.	Further advice	6
8.	Site specific advice and providing feedback on this guidance.....	6

1. Introduction

The purpose of this document is to promote a common approach to Habitat Management Plans (HMPs) for development proposals. It has been written with wind farms in mind, but many of the broad principles described in sections 4 and 5 also apply to other development types.

The guidance is aimed at a range of people involved in writing and reviewing HMPs, for example, developers, ecological consultants and Planning Authorities. It provides advice on the broad principles and information that should be included in a HMP. The guidance does not however provide detailed management or monitoring prescriptions. This is because each site will have different environmental conditions and requirements. What works at one site might not be appropriate at another.

Where a HMP proposes land management within or potentially affecting a Natura site, consideration of the requirements of the Habitats Regulations will also be required. Other planning and regulatory requirements may also need to be taken into account when drafting a HMP, for example waste licensing, Controlled Activity Regulations, Control of Woodland Removal Policy.

2. Background and context – role of Habitat Management Plans

A HMP may be included in a suite of mitigation measures proposed by the applicant as part of their submitted development proposal, or be required by a condition of planning consent. In either case, the HMP should set out how it will:

- mitigate or compensate for the impacts caused by the development, or
- enhance the natural heritage interest of the area.

The work may, for example, be done directly by restoring or enhancing habitat to off-set habitat lost during construction. It may also be done indirectly, for example by managing habitat/prey species outwith the wind farm to encourage birds away from the turbines.

Although HMPs are usually implemented within the development site, they may also occur on land outwith the development site, subject to relevant legal agreements. It is vital that in-principle agreements with all affected landowners are in place at the time of the submitted development proposal. This will avoid problems at later stages (for example a key landowner pulling out post-consent).

Some habitat management works may start before or during construction. However, HMPs are usually implemented post-construction. It should be noted that HMPs are separate from Construction Method Statements (CMSs) and Construction Environmental Management Plans (CEMPs). These deal with impacts during construction. Many of the broad principles described in section 4 also apply to the writing of other plans such as CMS and CEMPs. We encourage developers to check that all plans are complementary to ensure that the aims and objectives support each other.

3. Role of SNH

Our engagement in HMPs and the advice we can offer will relate to:

- the sensitivity of the site;
- the impacts of the development on the natural heritage; and
- the opportunities for habitat restoration/enhancement.

The developer and/or their advisors should take the lead role in identifying habitat management methods and opportunities. We will only provide advice where a HMP is required to mitigate against significant adverse impacts on designated sites or protected species, as set out in our [Service Statement](#). In all other cases, we would expect the developer and Planning Authority to devise and implement the HMP without reference to SNH. Regardless of our involvement, we encourage developers to follow the principles of good practice laid out in this guidance.

4. What should be included in a HMP

The HMP needs to provide sufficient information to inform readers of its purpose and how this will be achieved. It should be written as concisely as possible – targeting actions/works at the interests of the site rather than presenting general information. This will also allow compliance checking by the Planning Authority. Key things to include are:

- *What is the reason for the HMP?* If it is required due to a planning or consent condition, then the condition should be stated. If it was a commitment from the development proposal submission, then the original commitment should be stated. This will make it clear to future readers why the HMP exists, some of whom may not read it until many years after the HMP is first created.
- *What are the aims of the HMP?* The HMP should state what it is trying to achieve (eg to enhance the condition and extent of certain habitats in the habitat management area, provide mitigation and/or compensation for any negative aspects of the development on flora and fauna identified in the submission, etc). This will allow monitoring of the success of the HMP over time.
- *What methods, where, when and who?* The HMP should detail what land management, survey or other measures will be used to achieve the aims. It should set out: where they will be carried out (maps are useful to indicate this, particularly to replicate monitoring surveys over time); when the measures or surveys will take place; and who will be responsible for them. This will help to ensure that post-construction monitoring is focussed on delivery of the aims of the HMP and on those effects deemed to be significant (ie the reasons that the HMP is necessary).

The HMP should provide sufficient detail (presented in a concise way) so that new readers know what works should be happening, where and when. The reader should know who is responsible for making the works happen (also see *Reporting and Reviewing* section below). This information allows compliance monitoring by the Planning Authority, and helps to maintain public/stakeholder confidence in the HMP.

- *What is the monitoring schedule?* The HMP should provide a quick reference table listing the required management/reporting works and when they are scheduled to take place.
- *Reporting and reviewing?* The HMP should specify how often and when reports will be produced, who will review the reports (ie who is on the HMP steering group) and how amendments to the HMP measures will be authorised, etc.

For example, a report detailing the results of the monitoring and the recommendations for ongoing management should be produced within 2 months of the end of each monitoring year. The report should be reviewed and approved by the HMP Steering Group (see section 6 below for more information on the role and function of steering groups).

- *Flexibility?* The HMP should include a short section indicating that it is a live document. This is because it may be altered following monitoring or trial results, unexpected events or evolving guidance. For example, unexpected impacts may arise during/following construction, impacts on certain flora or fauna may be more or less than predicted, new guidance may supersede previous guidance, etc. The HMP should set out the process by which any proposed amendments will be approved. This may involve a steering group (see section 6 for more detail). Approval for amendments to the HMP must occur before revised measures are implemented. Please note that where Natura sites are affected, a Habitats Regulations Appraisal (HRA) may also be required before measures can be implemented.

5. Things to consider when writing or reviewing a HMP

We recommend that HMPs should be informed by appropriate site investigations and are presented in draft as part of the Environmental Statement submission. They should then be finalised during the post-consent/pre-construction phase of a development.

The HMP should make use of the most up-to-date guidance and information that is available at the time of creation, and be updated appropriately throughout its lifetime. For wind farm developments, the finalised HMP is likely to be applicable for the duration of consent/permission (the operational stage), eg around 25 years. During this time, it will be referred to by different people with varying backgrounds and interests, some of whom will have little or no prior knowledge of the site or development (eg the Planning Authority, ecological consultants, general public, etc). The HMP therefore needs to:

- be realistic in its aims and objectives.
- clearly explain its aims and objectives.
- define the area covered by the HMP (using appropriately scaled maps).
- include all relevant information, maps and figures. This is to ensure that future readers can understand what it is seeking to achieve, why, where, how and when. If reference is made to figures or maps contained in a submitted proposal or planning application, copies of these should be included in the HMP.
- incorporate flexibility and be subject to periodic review. This will ensure that works/actions can be altered in response to monitoring results over time, evolving guidance or unexpected events. Any alterations would be subject to approval of the HMP steering group (see section 6).
- complement other plans and activities affecting the development site and, where appropriate, neighbouring development sites (ie aim for consistent/complementary management across contiguous sites where this is compatible with the HMP for each development site).
- consider the post-operational stage of the development, eg plan ahead for the eventual restoration and decommissioning (or repowering) of the site, to make sure that the good work of the HMP is not undone at this stage.

6. The role and function of a steering group

The role of a HMP steering group is to:

- review and discuss monitoring results; and
- approve proposed amendments to the HMP during its lifetime.

A steering group would usually be made up of a representative from the Planning Authority and the developer. SNH would only participate in a steering group where our engagement is required in accordance with section 3 of this guidance. Other parties may also be part of the steering group depending on their interest in the development. These parties may include, for example, SEPA, Forestry Commission Scotland, Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, British Trust for Ornithology, or landowner/managers.

We recommend that the Planning Authority chairs the steering group. They would also make the final decision if agreement cannot be reached through the steering group. Decisions should take full account of any specific planning or legal requirements that might apply, and be reached through consensus wherever possible.

It is unlikely that the steering group will have to meet to discuss every report– most reports could be reviewed and approved by correspondence. However if significant results are found or unexpected matters arise that would benefit from discussion, then a meeting of the steering group should be arranged as soon as possible. If changes to the HMP are needed, approval should be provided in writing by each party before changes are implemented.

7. Further advice

We have published a range of guidance on wind farm construction and post-construction monitoring that may be of use for HMPs. This is available on our [website](#).

8. Site specific advice and providing feedback on this guidance

For advice on draft site specific HMPs, please contact the SNH case officer for your site.

We welcome constructive feedback on our guidance. If you have any suggestions on how to improve this guidance, or have any queries about it, please contact a member of the [SNH renewables team](#).

