Lost Nature: house builders fail to deliver required wildlife benefits

Thursday 12 December, 2024

A survey of new housing developments reveals that developers are installing just half of the ecological features that they should be.

- A Wild Justice report, written by researchers at the University of Sheffield, has revealed that housing developers are not keeping legally-binding promises to help wildlife on housing developments.

- A survey of nearly 6,000 houses across 42 developments found that only half of the promises to mitigate harm to nature had been kept. Many ecological enhancements had simply not materialised, with 83% of Hedgehog highways, 100% of bug boxes, and 75% of both bat and bird boxes found to be missing from new developments.

- The delivery of plant life across sites also painted a depressing picture: 39% of the trees detailed on planting plans were missing or dead, and nearly half of the native hedges that were supposed to be laid did not exist.

Skylark Close, Foxglove Avenue – we're all familiar with street names that give a nod to the natural world. But new research from the University of Sheffield, published by campaign group Wild Justice, shows that new housing developments are failing wildlife on a systemic and widespread scale.

Urbanisation can lead to harms to nature. Therefore, when developers obtain planning permission, it comes with a series of ecological conditions that they must meet to prevent biodiversity losses resulting from the change in land use. These mitigations and enhancements are intended to allow wildlife to thrive alongside human dwellings, creating new habitats like wildflower meadows, planting new trees, and installing homes for wildlife such as bird boxes.

Between June and August 2024, researchers from the University of Sheffield visited 42 new housing estates across five Local Planning Authorities in England, covering over 291 hectares of land. Their mission was simple: to look at what was there on the ground and compare it to what developers had promised to do as a condition of getting permission to build.

Their *Lost Nature* report, published by Wild Justice reveals that only 53% of the ecological features mentioned in planning conditions were present in reality.

Looking at enhancements for specific species, large proportions of ecological features were missing. 83% of Hedgehog highways, 75% of bird and bat boxes and 85% of reptile refuges were not present on the ground. When they looked for promised bug boxes, they couldn't find a single one, with 0% of them having been installed.

When it came to plant life, the developments didn't fare much better, with 39% of trees either dead or missing, and 82% of woodland edge seed mixes failing to materialise. Even the features that had been planted weren't always properly installed, rendering them effectively useless; 59% of wildflower grasslands were found to be sown incorrectly or otherwise damaged.

The distribution of compliance varied wildly: the least compliant site scored 0%, while the best scored 95%. These high scores are not, however, a sign that all is well on those developments. The method used measured compliance with planning conditions, rather than ecological value. This meant that quite unambitious schemes could score highly, provided that developers had done a small number of things for nature.

There was very little variation in the compliance of sites by type of developer, size of development (number of houses), area of the development site (in hectares), or geography (area of the country). Wild

Media:



Related Sectors:

Construction & Property ::
Environment & Nature ::

Related Keywords:

Planning :: Housing :: Houses ::
Planning Permission :: Nature ::
Environment :: Wildlife ::
Biodiversity :: House Building ::
Building :: Houses :: Birds ::

Scan Me:

Justice says this reveals a systemic issue across the planning and development system as a whole.

Wild Justice believe that the new Biodiversity Net Gain system introduced in 2024 is being used to justify increased levels of development on the grounds that ecological harms can be mitigated. They say that the *Lost Nature* report highlights a worrying gap in the implementation and enforcement of these biodiversity enhancements, meaning very often the 'net gain' will exist only on spreadsheets. The reality on the ground seems to be that nature is losing out.

Professor Malcolm Tait from the School of Geography and Planning at the University of Sheffield said: "The government has just announced ambitious housing targets, on the assumption that the planning system can ensure harms to nature are mitigated. But our research shows that housebuilders aren't implementing the ecological enhancements to help nature that they have promised. What we have revealed is a huge, systemic issue and an urgent need for the planning enforcement system to be given the resources it needs to protect wildlife from harm."

A spokesperson from Wild Justice said: "'This is regulatory failure - developers cheat the system and nothing happens - except wildlife loses out, yet again."

Company Contact:

_

Wild Justice

T. 07540415109
E. admin@wildjustice.org.uk
W. https://wildjustice.org.uk/general/lo...

Additional Contact(s):
mark@markavery.info

View Online

Additional Assets:

Newsroom: Visit our Newsroom for all the latest stories:
https://www.wild-justice.pressat.co.uk