



Orbit Group

Biodiversity Approach



building
communities

orbitgroup.org.uk

Our approach to enhancing biodiversity in communal outdoor spaces

Our target:

30% of our outdoor estates spaces will be enabling nature's recovery by **2030**

Orbit has set out its commitments to the environment in its Orbit Earth programme. Through this Orbit recognises its responsibility in enhancing the areas it manages for the benefit of the environment and people, and the role it can play in supporting nature and wildlife across its communities to help tackle the climate and ecological crisis.



Climate action to become net zero carbon



Enhancement of outdoor spaces to improve the quality of natural resources including biodiversity, land, water and air



Sustainable consumption to manage resources, materials and products responsibly



Currently we estimate that roughly **17% of Orbit's overall outdoor space is enabling nature's recovery**, requiring a 13% uplift to reach the proposed target of 30%. This will require biodiversity enhancement works on a number of estates per year between now and 2030 to meet our target, plus an ongoing maintenance style that ensures the improvements are sustained in the long term.



We will share the lessons we learn from the delivery of this programme through our membership with the Green Spaces Advisory Board – a pioneering cross-industry collaboration of Ground Control and six other leading housing associations we are a founding member of which is working together to empower the housing sector and the communities on the journey to a biodiverse, net zero carbon future – as well as other relevant groups within the housing sector.

Why are we doing this?

Biodiversity is the variety of life on Earth. In the context of Orbit's communities, it is every natural thing which is living on each estate. Globally, we're living in a biodiversity crisis and humans are the reason huge numbers of species are now under threat from extinction. The UK has lost half of its wildlife since 1970 and 1 in 10 species are currently threatened with extinction. The natural world isn't just a 'nice to have', we all rely on it daily for clean water, food and our health and wellbeing.

Designing natural outdoor spaces with the environment in mind allows carbon to be stored from the atmosphere and provides cleaner air. They also help us adapt to the effects a changing climate will bring, like reducing flood risk and overheating of buildings.

How Orbit chooses to manage its outdoor spaces and indeed designs its new developments, has a knock-on impact on species living close by and the availability of suitable habitats for nature. If managed in a way that supports nature, these communities can play a key role as not only stepping stones for biodiversity but part of a joined-up network of natural spaces to help wildlife recover.

Furthermore, there is considerable evidence to show that contact with a variety of natural environments is beneficial to human health and wellbeing, from increased physical activity to reductions in stress and improvements in social inclusion. Making our communities more biodiverse means that our customers are more likely to have the opportunity to connect to wildlife on their doorstep and boost their wellbeing. We know the natural environment is something our customers care about – 92% said having access to nearby green space is important to them - and has become particularly prevalent during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Backed by experts

In October 2020, Orbit partnered with the Wildlife Trusts. This partnership means we have created a biodiversity approach that is both backed with scientific evidence yet practical and people-centric in its delivery. The Wildlife Trusts are campaigning for at least 30% of the UK's land and sea to be connected and protected for nature's recovery by 2030 ('30by30'). Orbit has now aligned with this target, going beyond government guidance in this area to protect and enhance our planet.



Alignment to Corporate Strategy

We believe there are many business benefits from making space for nature - managed in the right way more naturalised outdoor areas on estates look good, attract more wildlife, and make communities nicer places to live. This is a key part of our 2025 strategy and supports the recommendations made in the Social Housing White Paper. From an economic perspective, if planned carefully, the ongoing grounds maintenance of more natural areas can require less intensive management, which has the potential to reduce grounds maintenance costs and service charges to customers too.

ORBIT

25

Customer engagement

We recognise that all our estates and communities are unique in physical characteristics and in the people who live there. We also acknowledge that some customers will be more supportive of the proposed changes than others and some outdoor spaces have more opportunity for environmental improvement than others. The target and delivery plan are purposely designed to be flexible to reflect this, with good engagement and communication with internal teams, contractors and customers central to its success.

As part of the pilot phase of this project, customers were engaged with regularly, including a written introduction to the project, its benefits and a short survey to gauge support; face-to-face conversations; formal letter call for feedback; an opportunity to get involved on improvement days - either through volunteering or nature wellbeing activities - as well as installation of information signs.

These points of engagement are designed to ensure customers have an opportunity to shape the plans on their estate and raise any concerns prior to implementation. Customer feedback will continue to be monitored after changes are made as different seasons are likely to pose differing views from customers.



Delivering on our biodiversity target through a phased approach

Through our work with the Wildlife Trusts and the learnings from our pilot, we aim to achieve the target through four key phases:

Phase 1:

All estates will undergo a baseline assessment with the creation of criteria for prioritising roll out in conjunction with stakeholders being key to the outcomes.

Our practical delivery plan toolkit, which was developed with Warwickshire Wildlife Trust, will undergo testing and we aim to start creating and implementing biodiversity management plans for a small number of estates. Alongside this, we will identify and apply for external funding grants.

Phase 3:

An annual programme of biodiversity improvements will now become the norm, alongside the continual monitoring of estates which have undergone changes both in terms of customer satisfaction and benefit to the environment. Any feedback will be used to modify the delivery plan as necessary.

Phase 2:

Close working with our grounds maintenance contractors. New tenders will embody our commitment and will ensure newly improved estates have the right maintenance regime and skills in place to sustain the biodiversity value long term. Training will be provided as necessary.

Phase 4:

The final phase in the lead up to 2030 will be to reassess all estates to measure their biodiversity value in contribution to the target. Even if initial improvements achieve the 30% supporting nature's recovery measure, they will only truly meet the target if this value has been retained through ongoing maintenance.



The connection to Orbit Homes

Currently, this biodiversity approach and target focuses on existing Orbit estates, however, there is a natural link with developments and Orbit Homes' new build estates that are handed over to operational teams. Orbit Homes will aim to achieve a 30% of outdoor spaces supporting nature's recovery upon handover as well as meeting the mandatory Biodiversity Net Gain measure of 10% set by the Government. The two approaches, whilst not the same, are heavily aligned.

If considered at the landscape design stage of development and suitable maintenance is upheld pre-handover, there should be minimal intervention needed. Orbit Homes will be taking a number of actions in the short term to align with the target including the development of a standard landscaping specification, identifying where landscaping can be delivered earlier in site development, and communicating the benefits of a connection to nature to with customers.



For more information, contact environment@orbit.org.uk



orbitgroup.org.uk



Orbit Group



@OrbitGroup



building
communities



Think before you print!

Go paperless - consider whether printing is necessary