

# Our approach to nature

## Protecting the environment is a fundamental part of our decision-making.

You can read more about our approach to the environment and our Environmental Sustainability Strategy here:

- Approach to the environment factsheet [www.eastwestrail.co.uk/consultation2024](http://www.eastwestrail.co.uk/consultation2024)
- Environmental Sustainability Strategy [www.eastwestrail.co.uk/environmentalsustainabilitystrategy](http://www.eastwestrail.co.uk/environmentalsustainabilitystrategy)

**This factsheet provides more detail on how we'll protect nature and deliver biodiversity net gain.**

## Our approach to nature

Biodiversity is the variety of life and includes all plants and animals and the habitats they live in. It also provides essential services for people, including carbon storage, clean air and food.

One of our **Environmental Sustainability Strategy** pillars is to build a railway that:

**'supports a thriving and diverse natural environment; through ensuring the maintenance of healthy ecosystems (wildlife, habitats, soil, land and water resources)'**

This means developing our proposals in a way that protects, creates, enhances and restores habitats to benefit a larger interconnected

green network. As part of this approach, the project will provide a 10% biodiversity net gain - which means EWR will have a measurably positive impact on biodiversity compared to what was there before.

## Understanding existing nature

Our ecologists and biodiversity specialists have a vital role in shaping the design of our project and we are continuing to develop a comprehensive understanding of the ecological characteristics of the areas crossed by the proposed railway. We have used this knowledge to inform the proposed route so that, wherever possible, it avoids important habitats and features.

Desk-based studies and physical surveys have taken place over the last few years and will continue during design development to give us a detailed understanding of the current environmental conditions.

Surveys consider different wildlife groups, including bats and birds, as well as protected species such as otters, water voles and badgers. Additionally, habitats including trees, hedgerows and watercourses are assessed. We are also meeting with local council officers and governmental and non-governmental organisations to discuss our proposals. This engagement and dialogue will continue as the design develops to help us to build a base of local knowledge, concerns and opportunities to inform our assessment of impacts and the development of our proposals.



## Protecting nature

When developing our designs, we seek to avoid any impacts to natural features in the first place. This can involve changing the design or timing of works for example. If we are unable to avoid a potential impact we consider measures to reduce and minimise it, for example by improving water quality from drainage outfalls to reduce impacts to aquatic ecosystems.

Where minimisation cannot fully remove the impacts, restoration is considered. This involves re-establishing a feature or ecosystem, bringing it back to its original state or to a healthy state close to the original. If residual adverse effects remain after appropriate avoidance, minimisation and restoration measures have been taken, compensatory offsetting measures would be required as a last resort.

## Enhancing biodiversity

As part of our proposals, we are committed to delivering overall benefits to nature through a process called biodiversity net gain (BNG). BNG is about leaving biodiversity in a measurably better state after a development than before, including creating more or better-quality habitats. We will identify a BNG baseline as part of the environmental surveys we are undertaking. This baseline will help us understand what we need to do to achieve our commitment of 10% BNG across the project.

To achieve BNG in practice, we will design habitat creation and enhancements based on sound ecological principles. These will be determined by the area of habitat we could create and its potential variety of species, the rarity of the habitat and its strategic significance (how much it would contribute to local nature conservation objectives). Climate resilience is also an important factor that we will consider in the design, along with immediate aftercare and long-term management of BNG habitats.

The wildlife-rich habitats we would seek to create will either be within the boundary of our proposals or delivered through working off-site in partnership with different landowners and BNG providers. To help identify and explore these opportunities to achieve BNG we will work with local and regional stakeholders as we continue to develop our proposals.