

PRIORITY SPECIES

ADVICE FOR PLANNING OFFICERS AND APPLICANTS SEEKING PLANNING
PERMISSION FOR LAND WHICH MAY IMPACT ON PRIORITY SPECIES

ISSUE 02 APRIL 2017

Introduction

Northern Ireland priority species are those species which require conservation action because of their decline, rarity and/or importance. Priority species can be susceptible to impacts from development. This standing advice provides information to help with assessing planning applications which have the potential to impact on priority species, to inform when NIEA should be consulted and to ensure priority species are adequately considered during the planning process.

Northern Ireland Biodiversity Strategy

The overall aim of the Northern Ireland Biodiversity Strategy is to halt the loss of and enhance biodiversity. The decline in the number and range of our native species and the habitats where they occur are key factors in the loss of our biodiversity and this requires conservation action. The current list of 481 species has been selected based on pre-defined criteria. A full list of Northern Ireland priority species can be found on the NIEA website at <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/articles/what-biodiversity>. For a minority of species the only conservation action is monitoring and research to identify what further actions may be required. However the majority of species can be vulnerable to development and they need to be considered when determining planning applications.

Legislation

The Wildlife and Natural Environment Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 (known as the WANE Act) introduced a biodiversity duty on public bodies in Northern Ireland. It states that *'it is the duty of every public body, in exercising any functions, to further the conservation of biodiversity so far as is consistent with the proper exercise of those functions'*.

The WANE Act also requires that the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) maintains a list of species requiring special attention when delivering this duty. The Northern Ireland Biodiversity Lists are available at <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/articles/what-biodiversity>. Actions for these species have been addressed in a range of government policies and activities.

Many priority species are subject to special conservation measures under European and domestic legislation such as the Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC), the Birds Directive (2009/147/EC) and the Environment (Northern Ireland) Order 2002 (as amended). These areas are called Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) (Habitats Directive), Special Protection Areas (Birds Directive) and Areas of Special Scientific Interest (ASSIs) (Environment Order).

Some priority species are also specifically protected under the Conservation (Natural Habitats, etc) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1995 (as amended) and the Wildlife (Northern Ireland) Order 1985 (as amended). The Habitats Directive also requires that the population size and range of certain species are monitored with the aim of achieving what the Directive refers to as Favourable Conservation Status (FCS).

Policy

Planning Policy Statement 2, Natural Heritage, Policies NH1, NH2 and NH5 and the Strategic Planning Policy Statement can apply when considering impacts on priority species.

Sources of Information

- **List of Northern Ireland Priority Species**
See <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/articles/what-biodiversity>.
- **Priority species web pages** which show how to recognise the priority species, its conservation importance, status and specific sources of information. Maps of general locality of species records are available on this website. See <http://www.habitas.org.uk/priority/>.
- **Centre for Environmental Data and Recording (CEDaR)** is the Local Records Centre for Northern Ireland, and facilitates the collection, collation, management and dissemination of biodiversity and geodiversity information for Northern Ireland and its coastal waters. They can provide records of species on sites or within the nearby area of an application on request. See <http://www.nmni.com/cedar>
- **National Biodiversity Network (NBN) Gateway** can be checked for each site for priority species records. This will be at resolutions from 100m to 1km dependent on species records. See https://data.nbn.org.uk/Site_Datasets.
- **Northern Ireland Species Action Plans** <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/articles/what-biodiversity>
- Spatial information
 - **NIEA Biodiversity Hazard mappings** show areas likely to be of significance for priority species and priority habitats containing
 - Local Wildlife sites
 - Mapped priority habitats
 - Mapped sensitive bird sites (often displayed as 1km² area grids)
 - **CEDaR Priority Species dataset** showing areas where priority species most sensitive to development are recorded on CEDaR (displayed as 1km² area grids).
 - **Landscape Character Area (LCA) biodiversity summaries** indicating significance for priority habitats and species on landscape-scale

Survey Requirements

The Northern Ireland Biodiversity Checklist <https://www.daera-ni.gov.uk/topics/environmental-advice-planners> should be referred to when deciding if a survey is required for priority species that are also protected by legislation for a complete application.

A survey for priority species is more likely if the proposal is located within priority habitat. The Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA) Biodiversity Hazard mapping highlights those areas where priority species are more likely to occur. However NIEA does not have, and cannot reasonably be expected to have, total knowledge of the location of every priority

species or area of priority habitat in Northern Ireland. Therefore the NIEA Biodiversity Hazard mapping should not be utilised to infer the complete coverage of these environmental assets in Northern Ireland. In addition this spatial data has no set update frequency so changes in habitat or species locations are not always recorded.

A survey for priority species is also more likely if the proposal is located within the CEDaR Priority Species Dataset. This data is provided from CEDaR and indicates locations where priority species have been recorded. The data is displayed at 1km² area grids.

As the survey specifications can vary considerably between species types and groups, and also types of development, applicants may wish to discuss survey specifications through the pre-application process.

How a Development Proposal Could Impact on a Priority Species

Priority species can be vulnerable to changes in land-use such as development. Whether within designated sites or in the wider countryside, Northern Ireland priority species require action to prevent further biodiversity loss, and where possible, action to restore declining populations.

Impacts from development can be direct loss of the species or indirect loss through loss and degradation of suitable habitat caused by land-take, changes in hydrology or water and air pollution. Some species are also sensitive to disturbance which can affect their survival.

NIEA Consultation on Priority Species

The potential impact that development can have on priority species is extremely variable. There is also much variation in the quality and reliability of existing records for priority species and in the ease with which they can be both detected and identified.

A large number of priority species are dependent on priority habitat. Therefore if a proposal has the potential to impact on priority habitat, an assessment of priority species should be included with every priority habitat survey [see NIEA Priority Habitat Standing Advice].

Where a survey of a priority habitat is requested, priority species that are likely to be present should also be considered by the applicant's ecologist. This survey should be sent to NIEA once received.

Although most priority species are found in priority habitats some are found outside of priority habitat and these are still sensitive to development. This is mainly applicable to

- species that occur in coniferous forestry, such as Red Squirrel or Goshawk; or
- species that occur in or on buildings such as Swift (in cities and towns) or Barn Owl (farm buildings); or
- species that occur in agricultural land such as wading birds (Curlew, Lapwing).

For sites outside the NIEA Biodiversity Hazard Mapping, a check should be made of the CEDaR Priority Species Dataset. This will highlight which priority species are in the general area of an application site.

If a priority species is present, an assessment of priority species should be requested from the applicant. This assessment of impacts should include a survey for the appropriate species if the site contains habitat or structures that are likely to be used by that species. This survey should be sent to NIEA once received.

However if the species encountered is detailed below (in the Specific Advice section), the standing advice provided should be applied and NIEA would not require consultation (except where indicated).

NIEA standing advice sheets would also apply for the following priority species: Otters, Bats and Common Lizard.

Specific Advice for Some Species

There are some priority species that are less likely to be impacted by development within most of their life cycle. For the species below the advice detailed within this section can be followed when these priority species are found on an application site. It is also highlighted where greater impacts must be considered and where NIEA consultation would be required. This advice cannot be applied to wind turbine applications.

Urban Wildlife

Hedgehog

- retention of boundary hedgerows
- provide hedgerow or habitat connectivity through the development

Starling/Song Thrush/House Sparrow

- retention of trees and hedgerows where possible
- retention of some grass areas on site
- ensure compensatory replanting of any trees and hedgerows so no overall loss
- no vegetation clearance to take place between 01st March to 31st August
- provide replacement nest boxes for House Sparrow on buildings where present
- consult NIEA if a large wintering starling roost on site

Herring Gull

- No demolition of building between 01st March to 31st August

Farmland Wildlife

Starling

- retention of trees and hedgerows where possible
- ensure compensatory replanting of trees and hedgerows so no overall loss
- no vegetation clearance to take place between 01st March to 31st August

- consult NIEA if a large wintering roost on site

Skylark

- no clearance works to take place between 01st March to 31st August
- retain current grassland management

Tree Pipit/Lesser Redpoll/Spotted Flycatcher/Bullfinch/Wood Warbler

- retain woodland areas with favourable management
- retention of trees, hedgerows and scrub where possible
- no vegetation clearance to take place between 01st March to 31st August

Tufted Duck/Common Scoter

- retention of wetland habitats with favourable management
- no vegetation clearance to take place between 01st March to 31st August
- consult NIEA if Common Scoter breeding site - a breeding bird survey will be required.

Cuckoo/Reed Bunting/Grasshopper Warbler/Yellow Wagtail

- retention of wetland habitat in area
- retention of trees, hedgerows and scrub where possible
- ensure compensatory replanting of trees and hedgerows so no overall loss
- no vegetation clearance to take place between 01st March to 31st August

Linnet/Duncock (Hedge Accentor)/Tree Sparrow

- retention of trees, hedgerows and scrub where possible
- ensure compensatory replanting of hedgerows so no overall loss
- no vegetation clearance to take place between 01st March to 31st August

Nightjar/Lapwing/Curlew/Little Tern/Turtle Dove/ Chough/Yellowhammer

- NIEA consultation only required if found on site during the breeding season. A breeding bird survey will be required.

Potential Colonising Species

Golden Eagle/White-Tailed Eagle/Bittern/ Hawfinch/Quail/Whimbrel/Red-Necked Phalarope/Black-Necked Grebe/ Corncrake/ Redwing/Field Fare

- NIEA consultation only required if found on site during the breeding season. A breeding bird survey will be required.

Wintering waders and waterbirds at coastal sites (Lapwing, Golden Plover, Knot, Dunlin, Black-tailed Godwit, Whimbrel, Curlew, Redshank, ducks, geese, gulls)

- retain intertidal habitats
- avoid disturbance to traditional high-tide roost sites
- no works in feeding habitat between 1st November and 28th/29th February

Brent Geese

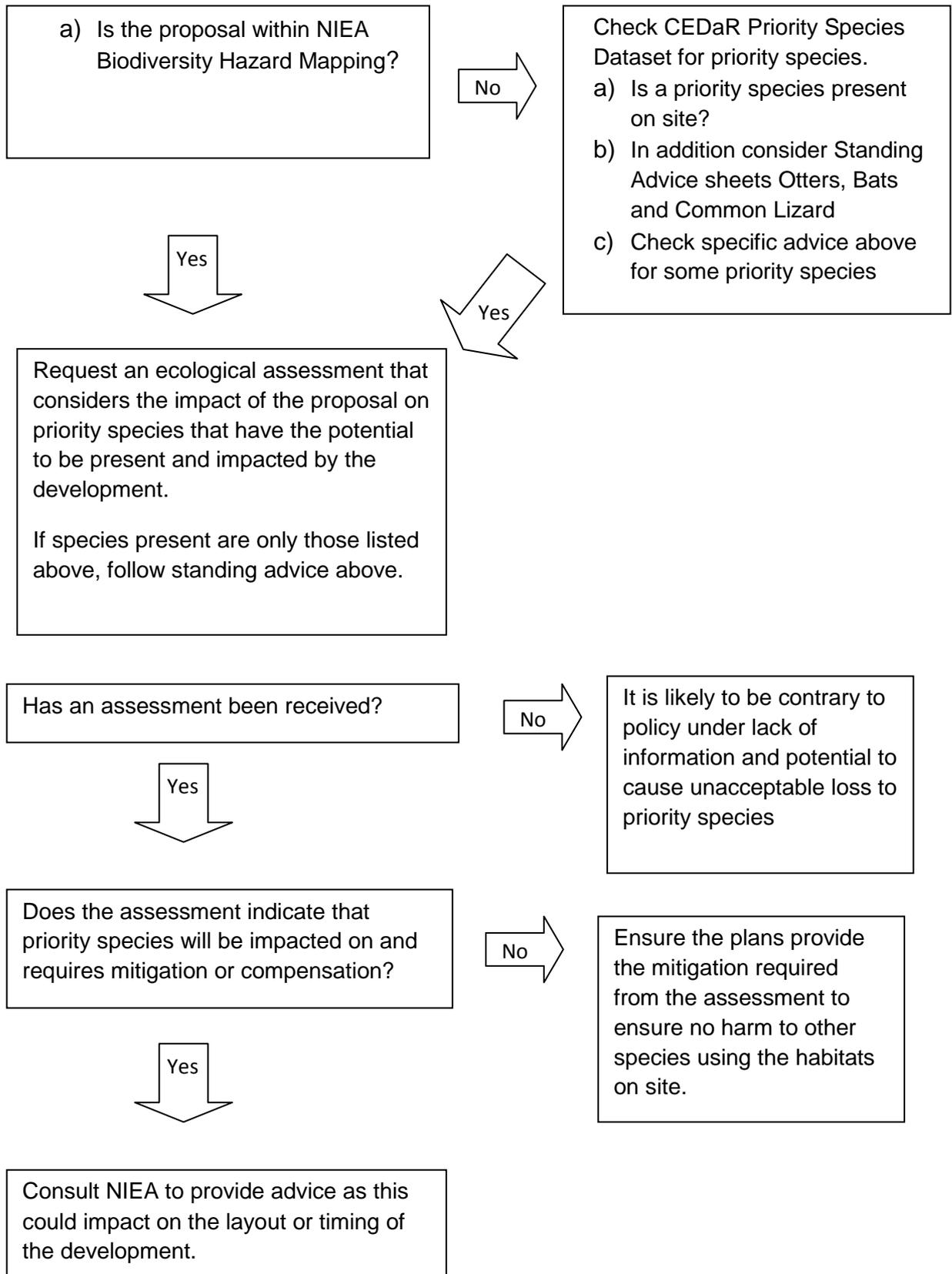
- NIEA only require consultation if the proposal is for a wind turbine within 1km of a Brent Goose feeding site (coastal site) or the species is present on farmland near the proposal in the winter period. A wintering bird survey will be required.

Seabirds

Black-Throated Diver/Sooty Shearwater/Balearic Shearwater/Arctic Skua

- terrestrial planning is unlikely to affect these species

Process to consider for applications when dealing with priority species





**Creating prosperity and well being
through environment and heritage
excellence**

EMFG Planning Response Team
Klondyke Building
Cromac Avenue
Malone Lower
Belfast
BT7 2JA
T: (028) 9056 9604
E: PlanningResponse.Team@daera-ni.gov.uk