

FARMING

Follow the best advice to aid BNG projects

Land agent and surveyor expert **Hugh Townsend** explains in greater detail Habitat Banks and the Local Planning Authority (LPA) monitoring costs



THERE has been little information on costs and frequency for Local Planning Authority (LPA) monitoring of Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) habitat sites which is an important part of a budget when considering a BNG project.

The guiding principle is that an LPA should charge the landowner/manager no more than the actual costs for doing this. This cannot be a profit-making exercise.

As more and more of our clients and others establish habitat banks across the country, we have however seen a wide a range of approaches and costs. These are not fixed indefinitely and are sure to be reviewed especially as there are an increasing number of Responsible Bodies (now 13) with most providing private sector charging rates which adds evidence to actual costs which we believe are likely to decrease.

Costing methods, in most cases to date are based on either area or number of biodiversity units produced. For example, North Yorks Council and South Derbyshire District Council have six size categories and prices £2,522 - £9,289 and

£3,508.85 - £20,485.61 respectively. In both cases, for sites over 40ha bespoke pricing is necessary. Some have only three size categories with no bespoke pricing for sites over 40ha, including Torridge District Council and Exmoor National Park with prices of £4,131.08 - £6,022.86.

Certain LPAs are charging a fixed rate per site or number of units but this is only for assessment of reports provided to them without their own site visit. Examples of this system include the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead (£5,000) and the New Forest District Council (£4,980). In the case of New Forest District Council the cost may be increased if a higher inspection time is required.

Calderdale Council and Wyre Forest District Council are charging a fixed rate per biodiversity unit, £2,000 and £750 per unit respectively although this tends to be for onsite creation rather than offsite mitigation. Leeds City Council and Bradford Council propose two categories of costing. A price of £5,000 for sites with more than 10 units. £3,000 for Leeds City Council (no site visit) and



> BNG is designed to make sure development has a measurably positive impact on biodiversity, compared to what was there before development acceleratorhams

£2,000 for Bradford Council if a site has less than 10 units. Additional one-off payments may be required such as for damage or loss of irreplaceable habitat

As for frequency of site visits, LPAs appear to want between five and seven site visits over the 30-year period, apart from Buckinghamshire County Council who propose 10 vis-

its. The majority plan on conducting five yearly visits from the fifth year of the habitat creation. LPAs such as Devon County Council plan on conducting an extra site visit at an unspecified time. Of course this will vary depending on what habitat is involved and can be driven by the ecological needs or lack of need.

We suspect that these costs will

come down, as over estimation will be common without the experience of practice.

■ **Hugh Townsend, FRICS, FAAV, FCI Arb. is the land agent / surveyor expert of the WMN Farming supplement and he may be contacted on 01392 823935 or htownsend@townsendchartered-surveyors.co.uk.**

All welcome to celebrate Agrifest at Westpoint

AGRIFEST is back for 2024, and it's now officially the biggest and best primestock show in the South West.

On Wednesday, November 6, for one day only, close to 200 animals are poised to parade through Westpoint Arena, groomed to within an inch of their lives, to share in a whopping prize fund of £5,000.

Chair of Agrifest, Deborah Custance Baker, is delighted to bring this ever-popular show back: "It's a great event for farmers, offering them the opportunity to show off their finest primestock specimens, attend workshops and seminars and generally indulge in a fun, social day out in what is normally a dark and rainy November and just before the long, hard winter sets in.

ADVERTISING FEATURE

"There is always a fantastic buzz in this giant-sized covered space, which may be familiar as the cattle barn for Devon County Show but also transforms into an event venue during the rest of the year, welcoming spectacles such as music concerts and Disney on Ice, and which will be crammed to the gills with animals and their owners prepping for the main ring, as well as 30 trade stands selling everything from tractors to t-shirts."

The annual Agrifest Sausage, Steak and Burger competition, which is always a show favourite, will this year welcome a new category - 'Ready to Eat' - covering pork

pies, sausage rolls and pasties.

Deborah continues: "It's going to be a real sizzler and the heat will really be on for competitors to get their entries in to ensure their samples are primed and ready for tasting by the discerning palates of culinary experts, including legendary butcher Steve Turton."

Agrifest is a free to come to event for literally anyone who is interested. Deborah concludes: "Whether you're a farmer, work in agriculture or just love getting up close and personal to cattle and sheep and learning more about different breeds, everyone is welcome."

■ **Doors open at 8am. For further information and to enter, visit www.agrifestsouthwest.co.uk.**

> Last year's primestock champion, Handsfree
Katie Mortimore Photography

