The Statutory Biodiversity Metric -Technical Annex 1: Condition Assessment Sheets and Methodology

Version Number: dec-2022 (v2.0.2)

Instructions

The method for assessing habitat condition is split into three main steps, outlined in detail below:
STEP 1: Considerations before assessing condition
STEP 2: Choosing the right condition sheet
STEP 3: Using condition sheets

Step 1: Considerations before assessing condition
The following points must be considered **before** undertaking a condition assessment:
1) Condition assessments must be undertaken by a competent person (hereafter referred to as assessors), as defined in the Statutory Biodiversity Metric User Guide.
2) Condition assessments should be undertaken at the optimum time of year for the assessed habitat(s).
3) Assessors must have digital or hard copy access to condition sheets (see **Tabs 1-25**) and the survey cover sheet during the survey (see **SURVEY COVER SHEET** tab).
4) The habitat type of the parcel(s) to be assessed must be determined before consideration can be given to its condition as this enables the assessor to select the correct condition sheet (see **HABITAT DEFINITIONS** tab).
5) The location and extent of the habitat parcel(s) to be assessed must be mapped, either on digital or paper maps (mapped habitat parcels can later be split according to their condition).
6) Each habitat parcel to be assessed must be assigned a unique reference ID.

Step 2: Choosing the right condition sheet
See **SELECTING CONDITION SHEET** tab which lists the habitat types found in the biodiversity metric and indicates which condition sheet should be used for each habitat type.
1) Some condition sheets are unique to a single habitat type; others cover a range of habitat types within the same broad habitat category.
2) For each sheet there is version A and B.
   i. Sheet A can be used to record information for one habitat parcel
   ii. Sheet B can be used to record information for up two 10 habitat parcels
3) Each condition sheet is set to print at A4 and can be used as a paper form.

Step 3: Using condition sheets (Tabs 1-25)
The following instructions and points of clarification apply to most condition assessment sheets:

A) Assess the habitat parcel against each condition assessment criterion, recording a 'pass' or 'fail' for each criterion assessed, unless otherwise directed by categories available on the sheet.
B) If condition varies within a parcel during the assessment then start a new condition assessment. Split the original parcel to ensure that each individual parcel comprises an area of habitat of a consistent type and condition.
C) Some condition assessment sheets have 'essential' criteria. Essential criteria must be passed to achieve a particular condition state.
D) Some condition assessment sheets list species that are indicative of suboptimal condition status. These lists are not exhaustive. An assessor may exercise professional judgement and consider additional species within this category, such as those of geographical relevance.
   Report any high-risk non-native invasive species to the GB non-native species secretariat.
E) Any relevant evidence for passing or failing criteria, or for a particular score, should be captured within the habitat survey notes and or by taking photographs. Photographs and notes should be referenced on the condition sheet.
F) Record any survey limitations on the condition sheet, such as access restrictions or timing restrictions. If survey limitations prevent any criteria from being confidently and accurately assessed, adopt a precautionary approach when passing or failing criteria.
   i. If a definitive pass or fail cannot be assigned through baseline survey, assume the criterion is passed.
   ii. When monitoring post-intervention habitat, fail criteria which cannot be assessed due to survey limitations.
G) Once all applicable condition criteria have been assessed, assign a result of Good, Moderate or Poor condition following instructions provided within the relevant condition sheet.
   i. The 'Fairly Good' or 'Fairly Poor' condition categories are intermediate categories for site-specific features of condition not captured in the standard condition assessment.
   ii. They should only be applied through application of professional judgement, and sound ecological evidence must be provided to justify the use of these categories.
   iii. If used, these categories can only be used to adjust the results of a standard metric condition assessment one condition category above or below its result (For example, you cannot go from a standard outcome of 'Poor' to an adjustment to 'Fairly Good' (nor from 'Good' to 'Fairly Poor').
   iv. Ensure any constraints are made clear in the Assessor's comment box in the metric and associated reporting.
H) If a habitat parcel is failing all criteria, it may be that the habitat type has been recorded incorrectly and the wrong condition sheet is being used.

The condition assessment survey is a good opportunity to identify any potential opportunities for habitat restoration or enhancement. Note potential opportunities for these within the condition sheet.

The **CA SUMMARY SHEET** can be filled out after the survey to summarise information about the condition assessments, including:
i. The site or location of the condition assessment survey
ii. The number of condition sheets used
iii. The number and type of habitat parcels surveyed and the condition they achieved

Notes on Using Condition Sheets
Additional habitat-specific instructions for non-standard condition assessment sheets are provided below.
Using the 'Woodland condition sheet': The Woodland condition sheet has been adapted from the 'Woodland Condition Survey' developed by the England Woodland Biodiversity Group (EWBG). All supplementary information needed to complete a Woodland condition assessment for the purpose of the biodiversity metric is provided or referenced within the Woodland condition sheet. Instead of allocating a pass or fail to each criterion, each of the criteria within the woodland condition sheets are allocated a score. These scores are summed, and
Using the 'Lake condition sheet': The Freshwater Biological Association's 'Habitat Naturalness Assessment' (HNA) is used to assess the condition of a lake. All supplementary information needed to complete a HNA is provided within the Lake condition sheet. The average of the HNA scores is used to assign a final condition score.
Using the 'Coastal condition sheet': Habitat condition sheets for most coastal and intertidal habitats, instead of allocating a 'pass' or 'fail' to each criterion, each of the criteria within the condition sheets are allocated a score. These scores are summed, and the total sum is used to assign a final condition score.
Using the 'Hedgerow condition sheet': The condition sheet for hedgerows has been adapted from the Defra Hedgerow Survey Handbook. All supplementary information needed to complete a hedgerow condition assessment is provided within the Hedgerow condition sheet. Each condition criterion is assigned to one of five functional groups. The condition of a hedgerow is assessed according to the number of criteria passed within these functional groups.

Condition Sheet: GRASSLAND Habitat Type (low distinctiveness)				Return to 'Selecting condition sheet' tab
UK Habitat Classification (UKHab) Habitat Type				
Grassland - Modified grassland				
On-site or off-site, site name and location	onsite	**Survey date and Surveyor name**	11.11.25	
Limitations (if applicable)		**Survey reference (if relating to a wider survey)**		
Grid reference		**Habitat parcel reference**		
Habitat Description				
short mown amenity grassland / modified grassland				
ukhab – UK Habitat Classification				

	Condition Assessment Criteria	Criterion passed (Yes or No)	Notes (such as justification)
A	There are 6-8 vascular plant species per m^2 present, including at least 2 forbs (these may include those listed in Footnote 1). **Note - this criterion is essential for achieving Moderate or Good condition.** Where the vascular plant species present are characteristic of medium, high or very high distinctiveness grassland, or there are 9 or more of these characteristic species per m^2 (excluding those listed in Footnote 1), please review the full UKHab description to assess whether the grassland should instead be classified as a higher distinctiveness grassland. Where a grassland is classed as medium, high, or very high distinctiveness, please use the relevant condition sheet.	no	max 5
B	Sward height is varied (at least 20% of the sward is less than 7 cm and at least 20% is more than 7 cm) creating microclimates which provide opportunities for vertebrates and invertebrates to live and breed.	no	short mown
C	Any scrub present accounts for less than 20% of the total grassland area. (Some scattered scrub such as bramble *Rubus fruticosus* agg. may be present). Note - patches of scrub with continuous (more than 90%) cover should be classified as the relevant scrub habitat type.	no	seperate section to grass
D	Physical damage is evident in less than 5% of total grassland area. Examples of physical damage include excessive poaching, damage from machinery use or storage, erosion caused by high levels of access, or any other damaging management activities.	yes	none present
E	Cover of bare ground is between 1% and 10%, including localised areas (for example, a concentration of rabbit warrens)[2].	yes	none present
F	Cover of bracken *Pteridium aquilinum* is less than 20%.	yes	none present
G	There is an absence of invasive non-native plant species[3] (as listed on Schedule 9 of WCA[4]).	yes	none present
		Essential criterion achieved (Yes or No)	no
		Number of criteria passed	4

Condition Assessment Result (out of 7 criteria)	Condition Assessment Score	Score Achieved ×/✓
Passes 6 or 7 criteria including passing essential criterion A	Good (3)	
Passes 4 or 5 criteria including passing essential criterion A	Moderate (2)	x
Passes 3 or fewer criteria; OR Passes 4 - 6 criteria (excluding criterion A)	Poor (1)	

Suggested enhancement interventions to improve condition score

Footnotes

Footnote 1 – Creeping thistle *Cirsium arvense* , spear thistle *Cirsium vulgare* , curled dock *Rumex crispus* , broad-leaved dock *Rumex obtusifolius* , common nettle *Urtica dioica* , creeping buttercup *Ranunculus repens* , greater plantain *Plantago major* , white clover *Trifolium repens* and cow parsley *Anthriscus sylvestris* . **Footnote 2** – For example, this could include small, scattered areas of bare ground allowing establishment of new species, or localised patches where not exceeding 10% cover. **Footnote 3** – Assess this for each distinct habitat parcel. If the distribution of invasive non-native species varies across the habitat, split into parcels accordingly, applying a buffer zone around the invasive non-native species with a size relative to its risk of spread into adjacent habitat, using professional judgement. **Footnote 4** – Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (as amended).	

Condition Sheet: INDIVIDUAL TREES Habitat Type | Return to 'Selecting condition sheet' tab

Habitat Types

Individual trees – Urban trees
Individual trees – Rural trees
Complete a condition sheet for each tree or block of trees.

Please see the separate Line of trees condition sheet for a line of rural trees. You should only use the Line of trees condition assessment and record that habitat type in rural locations.

Habitat Description

Individual trees (description applied to the urban or rural environment):
Young trees over 7.5 cm in diameter at breast height whose canopies are not touching.

Urban Perimeter / Linear Blocks and Groups (description applied to the urban environment only):
Groups or stands of trees (size requirement as defined above) within and around the perimeter of urban land. This includes those along urban streets, highways, railways and canals, and also former field boundary trees incorporated into developments. Canopies should predominantly overlap continuously. Groups of urban trees that don't match the descriptions for woodland may be assessed within this category.

On-site or off-site, site name and location	onsite	**Survey date and Surveyor name**	11.11.25
Limitations (if applicable)		**Survey reference (if relating**	
Grid reference		**Habitat parcel reference**	

	Condition Assessment Criteria	**Criterion passed (Yes or No)**	**Notes (such as justification)**
A	The tree is a native species (or at least 70% within the block are native species).	yes	x2 cherry
B	The tree canopy is predominantly continuous, with gaps in canopy cover making up <10% of total area and no individual gap being >5 m wide (individual trees automatically pass this criterion).	yes	auto pass
C	The tree is mature (or more than 50% within the block are mature)[1].	yes	semi-mature
D	There is little or no evidence of an adverse impact on tree health by human activities (such as vandalism, herbicide or detrimental agricultural activity). And there is no current regular pruning regime, so the trees retain >75% of expected canopy for their age range and height.	yes	none present
E	Natural ecological niches for vertebrates and invertebrates are present, such as	no	none present
F	More than 20% of the tree canopy area is oversailing vegetation beneath.	yes	within mod grass
	Number of criteria passed	5	

Condition Assessment Result (out of 6 criteria)	**Condition Assessment Score**	**Score Achieved ×/✓**
Passes 5 or 6 criteria	Good (3)	x
Passes 3 or 4 criteria	Moderate (2)	
Passes 2 or fewer criteria	Poor (1)	

Note that 'Fairly Good and Fairly Poor' condition categories are not available for this broad habitat type.

Suggested enhancement interventions to improve condition score[2]

Footnotes

Footnote 1 - See gov.uk standing advice on ancient and veteran trees. Available from:
Keepers of time: ancient and native woodland and trees policy in England (publishing.service.gov.uk)
and:
Ancient woodland, ancient trees and veteran trees: advice for making planning decisions - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

Footnote 2 - Enhancement of this habitat type is only possible by improving the habitat so that it meets all Criteria B, D and F. It is not possible or appropriate to enhance individual tree/s through meeting just one or two of those Criteria, nor by meeting Criteria A, C or E.

Condition Sheet: LINE OF TREES Habitat Type | Return to 'Selecting condition sheet' tab

Habitat Types

Line of trees
Line of trees – associated with bank or ditch
Ecologically valuable line of trees
Ecologically valuable line of trees – associated with bank or ditch

Please see the separate Individual trees condition sheet for linear blocks and groups of trees in an urban setting. You should only use this Line of trees condition assessment and record this habitat type in rural locations.

Habitat Description

See the Statutory Biodiversity Metric User Guide.
This assessment is based on the Hedgerow Survey Handbook[1]. For further clarifications please refer to the Handbook.
Where ancient and veteran trees are present within the line of trees, see Footnote 2 for standing advice.

On-site or off-site, site name and location	onsite	**Survey date and Surveyor name**	11.11.25
Limitations (if applicable)		**Survey reference (if**	
Grid reference		**Habitat parcel reference**	

	Condition Assessment Criteria	**Criterion passed (Yes or No)**	**Notes (such as justification)**
A	At least 70% of trees are native species.	yes	lime, elder, holly, sycanore, ash
B	Tree canopy is predominantly continuous with gaps in canopy cover making up	yes	no gaps
C	One or more trees has veteran features and or natural ecological niches for	yes	deadwood,
D	There is an undisturbed naturally-vegetated strip of at least 6 m on both sides to protect the line of trees from farming and other human activities (excluding grazing). Where veteran trees are present, root protection areas should follow standing advice[2].	no	one side abuts farming and within 6m
E	At least 95% of the trees are in a healthy condition (deadwood or veteran features valuable for wildlife are excluded from this). There is little or no evidence of an adverse impact on tree health by damage from livestock or wild animals, pests or diseases, or human activity.	yes	none present
		Number of criteria passed	4

Condition Assessment Result (out of 5 criteria)	**Condition Assessment Score**	**Score Achieved ×/✓**
Passes 5 criteria	Good (3)	
Passes 3 or 4 criteria	Moderate (2)	x
Passes 2 or fewer criteria	Poor (1)	

Suggested enhancement interventions to improve condition score

Footnotes

Footnote 1 – DEFRA (2007) *Hedgerow Survey Handbook: A standard procedure for local surveys in the UK.* 2nd ed [online]. Defra, London. PB1195. Available from: Hedgerow Survey Handbook (publishing.service.gov.uk).

Footnote 2 – Where ancient and veteran trees are present, see gov.uk standing advice on ancient and veteran trees. Available from:
Keepers of time: ancient and native woodland and trees policy in England (publishing.service.gov.uk)
and:
Ancient woodland, ancient trees and veteran trees: advice for making planning decisions - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)

Version	Changes made	Date released
Version 1.0.0	Initial draft statutory version	29th November 2023
Version 1.0.1	Individual trees tab – added wording to say *'Please see the separate Line of Trees condition sheet for rural trees. You should only use the Line of Trees condition assessment and record that habitat type in rural locations.'* Individual trees tab – Changed *'Canopies must overlap continuously'* to *'Canopies should predominantly overlap continuously'* Coastal tab – wording added to the list of 'General coastal species indicative of suboptimal condition' to say *'sea buckthorn (only outside its restricted native range)'* Scrub tab – wording added to Criterion A to say sea buckthorn can be 100% cover *'(only in its restricted native range)'* Instructions tab – changed date at top of sheet from 'November 2023' to 'February 2024' Habitat definitions tab – removed reference to 'see Technical Annex 2' from the table. Cells C11, C131 – C140. Hedgerow tab – 'See the Statutory Biodiversity Metric Technical Annex 2 and UK Habitat Classification' removed, leaving just the UKHab link. Intertidal biogenic reefs tab – changed 'see the Statutory Biodiversity Metric Technical Annex 2' to say 'see tab G1 of the Statutory Biodiversity Metric'. Intertidal hard structures tab – changed 'see the Statutory Biodiversity Metric Technical Annex 2' to say 'see tab G1 of the Statutory Biodiversity Metric'. Intertidal seagrass tab– changed 'see the Statutory Biodiversity Metric Technical Annex 2' to say 'see tab G1 of the Statutory Biodiversity Metric'. Intertidal sediment tab– changed 'see the Statutory Biodiversity Metric Technical Annex 2' to say 'see tab G1 of the Statutory Biodiversity Metric'. Pond tab– removed 'For ponds (non-priority) – see the Statutory Biodiversity Metric Technical Annex 2.' Habitat Definitions tab – cell E48 – removed reference to '<2ha' for Ornamental lake or pond. Habitat Definitions tab – cell E54, E55 – changed '<=2ha', from Ponds (priority) and Ponds (non-priority) to '<2ha'. Habitat Definitions tab - row 55 – removed references to Ponds (non-priority) having a definition different to that in UKHab.	12th February 2024
Version 1.0.2	Reformatting of instructions and habitat definition sheets Clarification of information in the habitat definitions sheet Addition of the RCA form Amended references in habitat definition sheet	3rd July 2025