

Strategic Significance for Biodiversity Net Gain – Version 1.0

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

This guidance outlines our interim approach to strategic significance in relation to mandatory Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) within Westmorland and Furness Council's jurisdiction as a Local Planning Authority (LPA).

1.2 Area where this guidance applies

This guidance applies only within the area where Westmorland and Furness acts as the LPA. This is broadly described as the Westmorland and Furness unitary authority area minus the areas covered by the Lake District National Park and Yorkshire Dales National Park (Figure 1); both national parks have their own planning authorities.

1.3 Aim of the guidance

The guidance aims to assist planning applicants and BNG unit providers in completing the 'strategic significance' drop-down for each habitat parcel within all three modules of the Statutory Biodiversity Metric. The modules comprise area habitats, hedgerows and watercourses.

The guidance has been written with reference to the [Statutory Biodiversity Metric User Guide](#); the guidance will be updated as required when new versions of the Statutory Metric are published.

1.4 Layout of the guidance

Section 2 of the guidance covers strategic significance. A further section on spatial risk may be added at a later date. In the interim, users should refer to the Statutory Biodiversity Metric User Guide.

The guidance is deliberately as succinct as possible so as not to distract from its purpose. For example, it does not go into detail about the rules and principles of the metric, how to fill in the metric or how to interpret the results of the metric; the reader should refer to the current version of the metric user guide for this information.

Where relevant, web links have been provided to external documents that can be accessed for further information.

2. Strategic Significance

2.1 Metric definition

The Biodiversity Metric User Guide defines strategic significance as: *“the local significance of the habitat based on its location and habitat type”*.

The Biodiversity Metric User Guide identifies that:

“Where a Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) has been published, you should use the relevant published LNRS and the descriptions set out in table 7 to assign strategic significance. [...] If an LNRS has not yet been published, a relevant planning authority should specify alternative documents for assigning strategic significance whilst an LNRS is put in place.”

3. Local Nature Recovery Strategy

Cumbria does not currently have a published LNRS, however the county was selected by the Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) to be one of five pilot areas for LNRSs, which took place between August 2020 and September 2021. The pilot was intended to test the LNRS concept and processes, with the lessons learnt carried forward into the national roll out of LNRSs which took place in June 2023. Westmorland and Furness are the Responsible Authority (RA) for the Cumbria LNRS, which is currently in production and is likely to be published in early 2025.

The LNRS pilot led to the development of the [Cumbria Local Nature Recovery Network \(CLNRN\)](#). This includes the CLNRN interactive map, which identifies specific areas, zones or networks where we should aim to take action for nature. The CLNRN map is considered to be the current best and most coherent strategy with regards to prioritising nature recovery and will form the basis of the future LNRS; in conjunction with this guidance document, it will be used to determine strategic significance in Westmorland and Furness until the LNRS is published.

4. Strategic significance in Westmorland and Furness

4.1 Area Habitats and Hedgerows

Strategic significance must be determined using the CLNRN map in conjunction with this guidance document; no other plans, policies or strategies should be used. Guidance on how to use the CLNRN interactive map is given in section 3.

Table 1 sets out how the strategic significance categories within the Statutory Biodiversity Metric should be attributed for area and hedgerow habitats in Westmorland and Furness. **The guidance applies to all on-site and off-site tabs (i.e. baseline/habitat enhancement/habitat creation) within the metric.** For example, if a priority habitat that is part of the CLNRN, is recorded within the on-site or off-site baseline for a site then its strategic significance must also be recorded as high within the metric. The guidance should be treated as interim and will be updated once the final LNRS is published.

Table 1 Interim definition of strategic significance for area and hedgerow habitats in Westmorland and Furness

Strategic significance category	Score applied in the metric	Definition in Westmorland and Furness
High	1.15	<p>This category can only be applied when the habitat in question is a priority habitat and is within the coverage of the LNRN for that priority habitat (see Table 2). The relevant layers of the CLNRN map are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Primary Habitat; ▪ Associated Habitat; ▪ Habitat Restoration – Creation; ▪ Restorable Habitat; ▪ Fragmentation Action Zone; and ▪ Network Enhancement Zone 1.
Medium¹	1.10	<p>This can only be applied when the habitat in question is a priority habitat and is outside the coverage of the LNRN for that priority habitat (see Table 2) or is a priority habitat for which no LNRN has been defined (see Table 2).</p>
Low	1	<p>All habitat parcels that cannot be assigned to high or medium strategic significance should remain as the default category of low.</p>

Priority habitats are [habitat of principal importance in England](#) as defined under Section 41 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Act 2006 (as amended). A list of priority habitats with significant areas in Cumbria is presented in Table 2. Many priority habitats have an equivalent layer group in the CLNRN map; the table also shows which category should be used where there is no equivalent layer.

Table 2 Priority area and hedgerow habitats in Cumbria and the corresponding CLNRN layer group used to determine strategic significance

CLNRN layer group used to determine strategic significance	Priority Habitat
Blanket bog LNRN	Blanket bog
Coastal habitats combined LNRN	Coastal and floodplain grazing marsh Coastal saltmarsh Coastal sand dunes Coastal vegetated shingle

¹ The Medium category does not apply when using the Small Sites Metric (SSM). However, due to their status as priority habitats, the presence of any on-site habitats classified as High or Medium strategic significance under this guidance will likely trigger use of the Statutory Metric instead of the SSM.

CLNRN layer group used to determine strategic significance	Priority Habitat
Hay meadows combined LNRN	Lowland meadows Upland hay meadows
Lakes	Eutrophic standing waters Mesotrophic lakes Oligotrophic and dystrophic lakes Ponds
Limestone pavements LNRN	Limestone pavements
Lowland calcareous grassland LNRN	Lowland calcareous grassland
Lowland dry acid grassland LNRN	Lowland dry acid grassland
Lowland fens LNRN	Lowland fens
Lowland heathland LNRN	Lowland heathland
Lowland raised bog LNRN	Lowland raised bog
Purple moor-grass and rush pastures LNRN	Purple moor-grass and rush pastures
Reedbeds LNRN	Reedbeds
Traditional orchards LNRN	Traditional orchards
Upland calcareous grassland LNRN	Upland calcareous grassland
Upland fens, flushes and swamps LNRN	Upland flushes, fens and swamps
Upland heathland LNRN	Upland heathland
Woodland LNRN	Lowland beech and yew woodland Lowland mixed deciduous woodland Upland mixed ashwoods Upland oakwood Wet woodland
Wood pasture and parkland LNRN	Wood pasture and parkland
	Arable field margins
Unassigned (all to be treated as medium strategic significance as there is no corresponding CLNRN layer)	Calaminarian grasslands Hedgerows Inland rock outcrop and scree habitats Intertidal habitats (all priority types) Maritime cliff and slopes Mountain heaths and willow scrub Mud habitats in deep water Open mosaic habitats on previously developed land Sabellaria alveolata reefs Saline lagoons

4.2 Watercourses

The watercourse unit module within the Statutory Biodiversity Metric is designed to be applied to the features set out in Table 3.

Table 3 Watercourse descriptions based on the Statutory Biodiversity Metric User Guide, with mapping resources where available

Watercourse type	Metric User Guide watercourse definition	Metric distinctiveness
Priority rivers	Highly naturally functioning stretches of rivers identified on the Priority River Habitat Map, and un-mapped stretches meeting the criteria for inclusion on the Priority River Habitat Map. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Priority River Habitat Map ▪ Criteria for inclusion 	Very high
Other rivers and streams	Rivers and streams that are not classified as Priority River Habitat. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Statutory Main River Map ▪ Ordinary Watercourses 	High
Canals	An artificial body of water originally created for the purposes of navigation, whether it is currently navigable or not. Sections of canalised rivers meeting this definition should be recorded as this habitat type. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Canal and River Network 	Medium
Ditches	Artificially created linear water-conveyancing features which are less than 5m wide, and are likely to retain water for more than 4 months of the year. Record as a ditch only where the watercourse does not meet the definition of a higher distinctiveness watercourse or canal.	Medium
Culverts	A covered channel or pipe designed to prevent the obstruction of a watercourse or drainage path by an artificial construction. As defined by the Flood and Water Management Act 2010 . Record culverted sections of any watercourse type as 'culvert'. A site visit may be required to identify extent of culverting.	Low

Guidance within the Statutory Biodiversity Metric User Guide should be followed when recording ditches within floodplain wetland mosaic and coastal and floodplain grazing marsh and watercourses associated with hedgerows and lines of trees. In both these cases, if these meet the definition of a watercourse, they should be recorded in the watercourse module.

No CLNRN map was developed for watercourses as part of the Cumbria LNRS pilot. Therefore, a different approach to determining strategic significance is required for watercourses than for area and hedgerow habitats. As rivers are continuous features within the landscape and because all parts of a river system are important for providing ecological connectivity, a broad approach to apportioning strategic significance, based on habitat distinctiveness has been taken. This is considered appropriate

given that this document constitutes interim guidance on strategic significance. All watercourses in Cumbria will be considered in detail as part of the LNRS and opportunities for enhancement and restoration identified. Once the LNRS has been published this guidance will be updated.

Table 4 sets out how the strategic significance categories within the Statutory Biodiversity Metric should be attributed for watercourses in Westmorland and Furness. **The guidance applies to all on-site and off-site tabs (i.e. baseline/habitat enhancement/habitat creation) within the metric.** For example, if a watercourse is recorded within the on-site or off-site baseline for a site then its strategic significance must also be recorded in accordance with Table 4.

Table 4 Interim definition of strategic significance for watercourses in Westmorland and Furness

Strategic significance category	Score applied in the metric	Definition in Westmorland and Furness
High	1.15	This can only be applied to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Priority rivers; ▪ Main rivers; and ▪ Ordinary watercourses.
Medium²	1.10	This can only be applied to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Canals; or ▪ Ditches only if an acceptable justification, based on the location and quality of the habitat, is produced by a suitably experienced ecologist.
Low	1	Any ditch unless there is adequate ecological judgement as to why these should be upgraded (this should be agreed with the LPA). Culverts should also be considered as low strategic significance.

5. Strategic Significance Outside of Westmorland and Furness

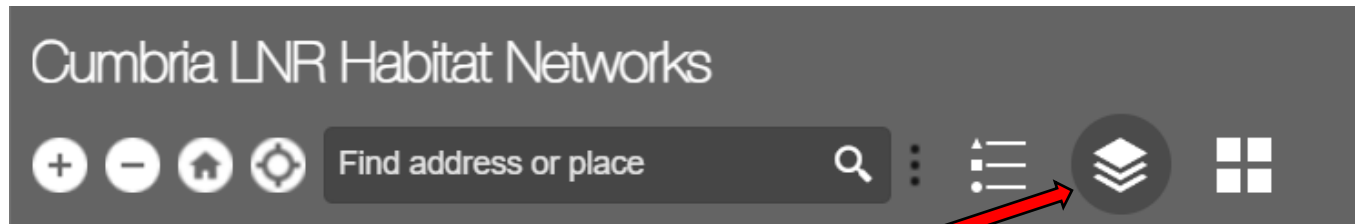
Where applicants need to assess the strategic significance of land outside of Westmorland and Furness, for example when assessing off-site compensation, they must refer to appropriate guidance for that area, especially that which may have been produced by the responsible LPA. The guidance used to determine strategic significance should be clearly referred to in the biodiversity gain plan or other supporting information.

²Only medium and low distinctiveness watercourses feature in the Small Sites Metric (SSM). However, the presence of any on-site habitats classified as High distinctiveness will likely trigger use of the Statutory Metric instead of the SSM.

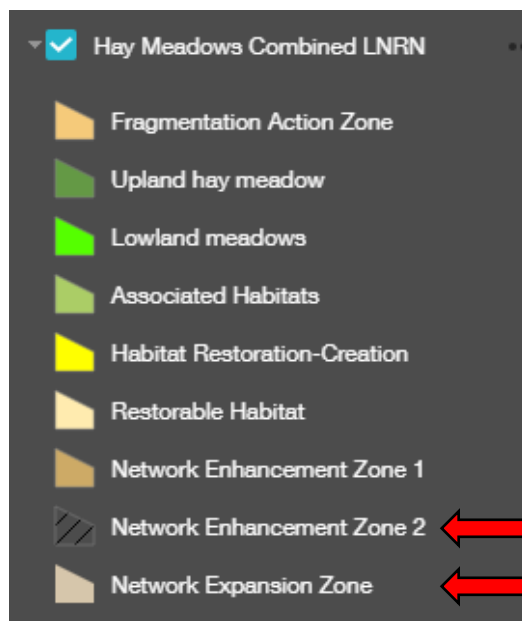
6. Using the Mapping Resources

6.1 Using the CLNRN Map

- The CLNRN map is hosted by Cumbria Biodiversity Data Centre (CBDC) here: [Cumbria LNR Network Map](#)



- From the zoomed-out view choose the layer list icon
- Choose the LNRN layer that corresponds with the parcel of priority habitat on your development or compensation site.
- Find your development or compensation site using the map view.
- Expand the layers list and check if any of those listed in Table 1 intersect your habitat parcel (see example below for meadows)



Layers **excluded** from assessment of strategic significance (Table 1). The layers cannot be turned off but their coverage should be interpreted by using the legend to the left of the layer.

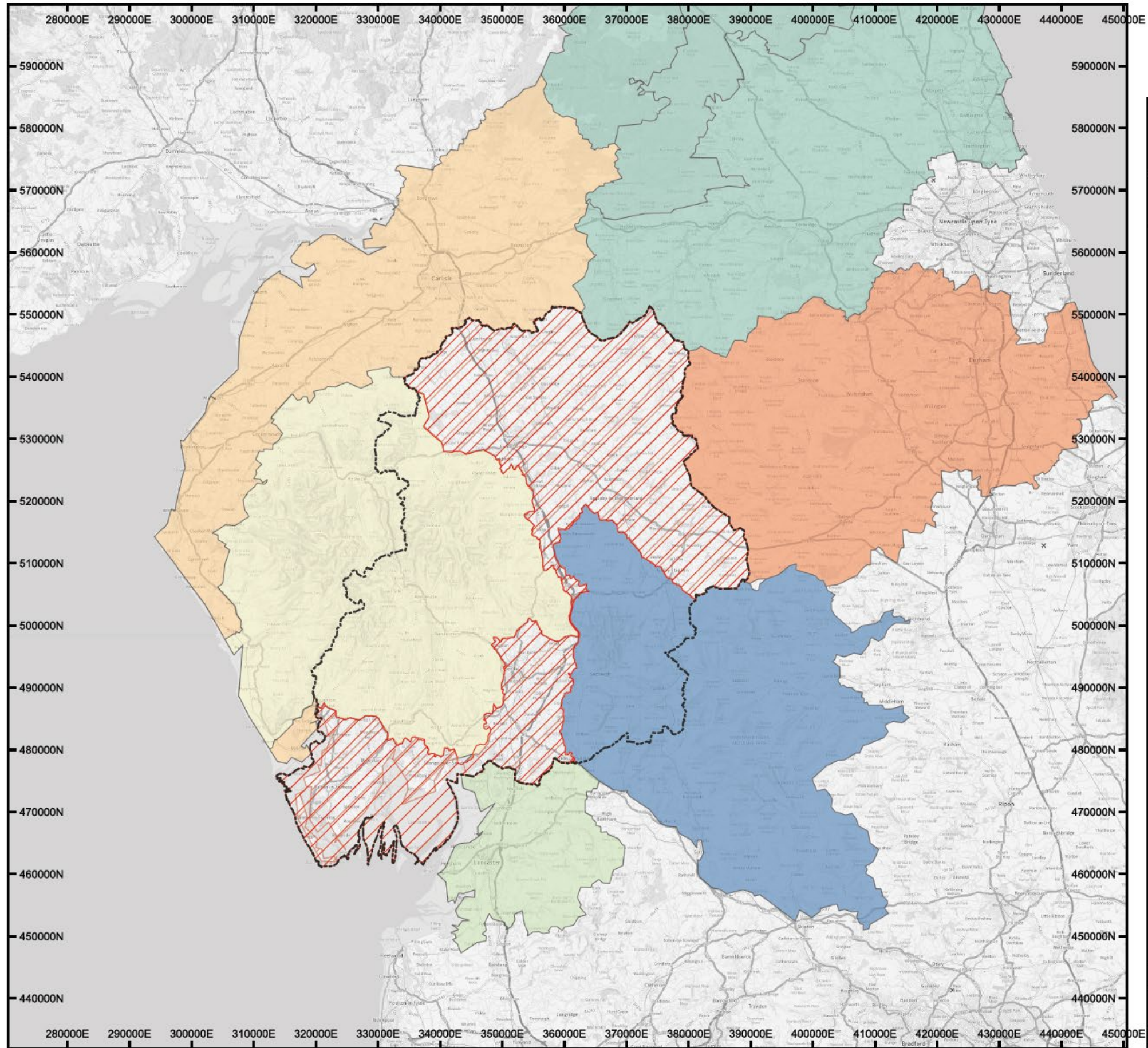
- Note that in some cases (e.g. Hay Meadows Combined LNRN), where the layer group includes more than one priority habitat, these will have individual named layers (in this case 'Upland hay meadow' and 'Lowland meadows') instead of a single layer named 'Primary habitat'.
- Where appropriate layers intersect the habitat parcel then the extent of the parcel intersected can be assessed as having high strategic significance.

6.2 Using the Catchment Data Explorer

- The catchment data explorer is hosted by Defra: [England | Catchment Data Explorer](#)
- To find operational catchment boundaries: from the homepage choose the River Basin District (for River Eden this is Solway Tweed) > choose the management catchment (for River Eden this is Eden and Esk) > use the map to find your operational catchment.
- To find waterbody catchment boundaries: from the operational catchment page choose your operational catchment > use the map to find your waterbody catchment.

Figures

Figure No.	Title
Figure 1	Westmorland and Furness LPA and Neighbouring LPAs



Basemap: Ordnance Survey Map data ©2023

Biodiversity Net Gain Guidance Note - Appendix 1


**Westmorland &
Furness Council**


**Figure 1 - Westmorland
and Furness LPA and
Neighbouring LPAs**


KEY

 Westmorland & Furness Unitary Authority Boundary

Local Planning Authorities

 Westmorland and Furness LPA

 County Durham LPA

 Cumberland LPA

 Lake District LPA

 Lancaster LPA

 Northumberland LPA

 Yorkshire Dales LPA

0 10,000 20,000 m



SHEET:
A3

SCALE:
1:600,000

BY: AB

QA: ML

REV 2.0

Projection: OSGB 1936/British National Grid - EPSG 27700

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