

## 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' 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 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.

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## 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.”*

### 2.2 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.

### 2.3 Strategic significance in Westmorland and Furness

#### 2.3.1 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
<b>High</b>	1.15	This category can only be applied when the habitat in question is a priority habitat <b>and</b> is within the coverage of the LNRN for that priority habitat (see Table 2). The relevant layers of the CLNRN map are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Primary Habitat;</li> <li>▪ Associated Habitat;</li> <li>▪ Habitat Restoration – Creation;</li> <li>▪ Restorable Habitat;</li> <li>▪ Fragmentation Action Zone; and</li> <li>▪ Network Enhancement Zone 1.</li> </ul>
<b>Medium<sup>1</sup></b>	1.10	This can only be applied when the habitat in question is a priority habitat <b>and</b> is outside the coverage of the LNRN for that priority habitat (see Table 2) <b>or</b> is a priority habitat for which no LNRN has been defined (see Table 2).
<b>Low</b>	1	All habitat parcels that cannot be assigned to high or medium strategic significance should remain as the default category of low.

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
<b>Blanket bog LNRN</b>	Blanket bog
<b>Coastal habitats combined LNRN</b>	Coastal and floodplain grazing marsh
	Coastal saltmarsh
	Coastal sand dunes
	Coastal vegetated shingle
<b>Hay meadows combined LNRN</b>	Lowland meadows

<sup>1</sup> 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
	Upland hay meadows
<b>Lakes</b>	Eutrophic standing waters
	Mesotrophic lakes
	Oligotrophic and dystrophic lakes
	Ponds
<b>Limestone pavements LNRN</b>	Limestone pavements
<b>Lowland calcareous grassland LNRN</b>	Lowland calcareous grassland
<b>Lowland dry acid grassland LNRN</b>	Lowland dry acid grassland
<b>Lowland fens LNRN</b>	Lowland fens
<b>Lowland heathland LNRN</b>	Lowland heathland
<b>Lowland raised bog LNRN</b>	Lowland raised bog
<b>Purple moor-grass and rush pastures LNRN</b>	Purple moor-grass and rush pastures
<b>Reedbeds LNRN</b>	Reedbeds
<b>Traditional orchards LNRN</b>	Traditional orchards
<b>Upland calcareous grassland LNRN</b>	Upland calcareous grassland
<b>Upland fens, flushes and swamps LNRN</b>	Upland flushes, fens and swamps
<b>Upland heathland LNRN</b>	Upland heathland
<b>Woodland LNRN</b>	Lowland beech and yew woodland
	Lowland mixed deciduous woodland
	Upland mixed ashwoods
	Upland oakwood
	Wet woodland
<b>Wood pasture and parkland LNRN</b>	Wood pasture and parkland
	Arable field margins
<b>Unassigned (all to be treated as medium strategic significance as there is no corresponding CLNRN layer)</b>	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



CLNRN layer group used to determine strategic significance	Priority Habitat
	Open mosaic habitats on previously developed land
	Sabellaria alveolata reefs
	Saline lagoons

### 2.3.2 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
<b>Priority rivers</b>	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"> <li>▪ <a href="#">Priority River Habitat Map</a></li> <li>▪ <a href="#">Criteria for inclusion</a></li> </ul>	Very high
<b>Other rivers and streams</b>	Rivers and streams that are not classified as Priority River Habitat. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <a href="#">Statutory Main River Map</a></li> <li>▪ <a href="#">Ordinary Watercourses</a></li> </ul>	High
<b>Canals</b>	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"> <li>▪ <a href="#">Canal and River Network</a></li> </ul>	Medium
<b>Ditches</b>	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
<b>Culverts</b>	A covered channel or pipe designed to prevent the obstruction of a watercourse or drainage path by an artificial construction. As defined by the <a href="#">Flood and Water Management Act 2010</a> . 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
<b>High</b>	1.15	This can only be applied to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Priority rivers;</li> <li>▪ Main rivers; and</li> <li>▪ Ordinary watercourses.</li> </ul>
<b>Medium<sup>2</sup></b>	1.10	This can only be applied to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Canals; or</li> <li>▪ Ditches <b>only if</b> an acceptable justification, based on the location and quality of the habitat, is produced by a suitably experienced ecologist.</li> </ul>
<b>Low</b>	1	Any ditch unless there is adequate ecological judgement as to why a these should be upgraded (this should be agreed with the LPA). Culverts should also be considered as low strategic significance.

## 2.4 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,

<sup>2</sup>Only 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.



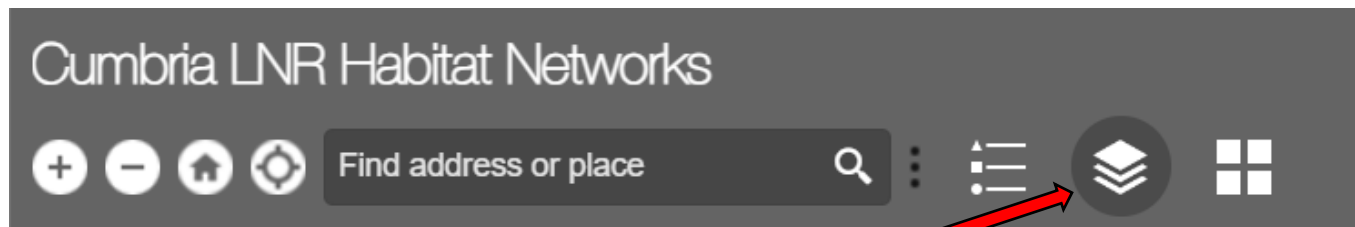
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especially that which may have been produced by the responsible LPA. The guidance used to determine strategic significance should be clearly referred to in the biodiversity gain plan or other supporting information.

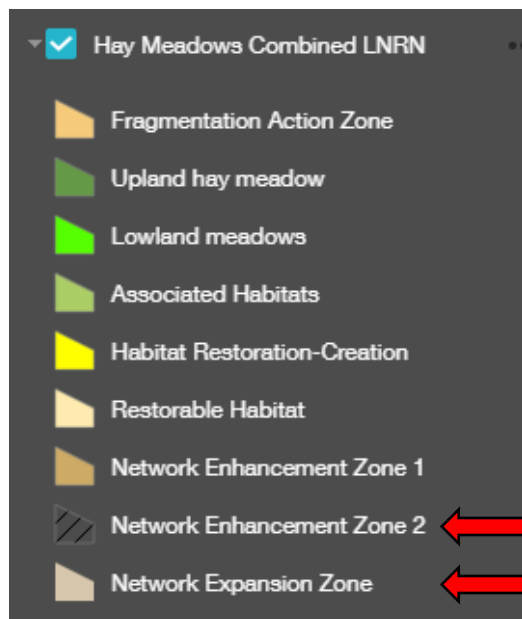
### 3 Using the Mapping Resources

#### 3.1 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.



### 3.2 Using the Catchment Data Explorer

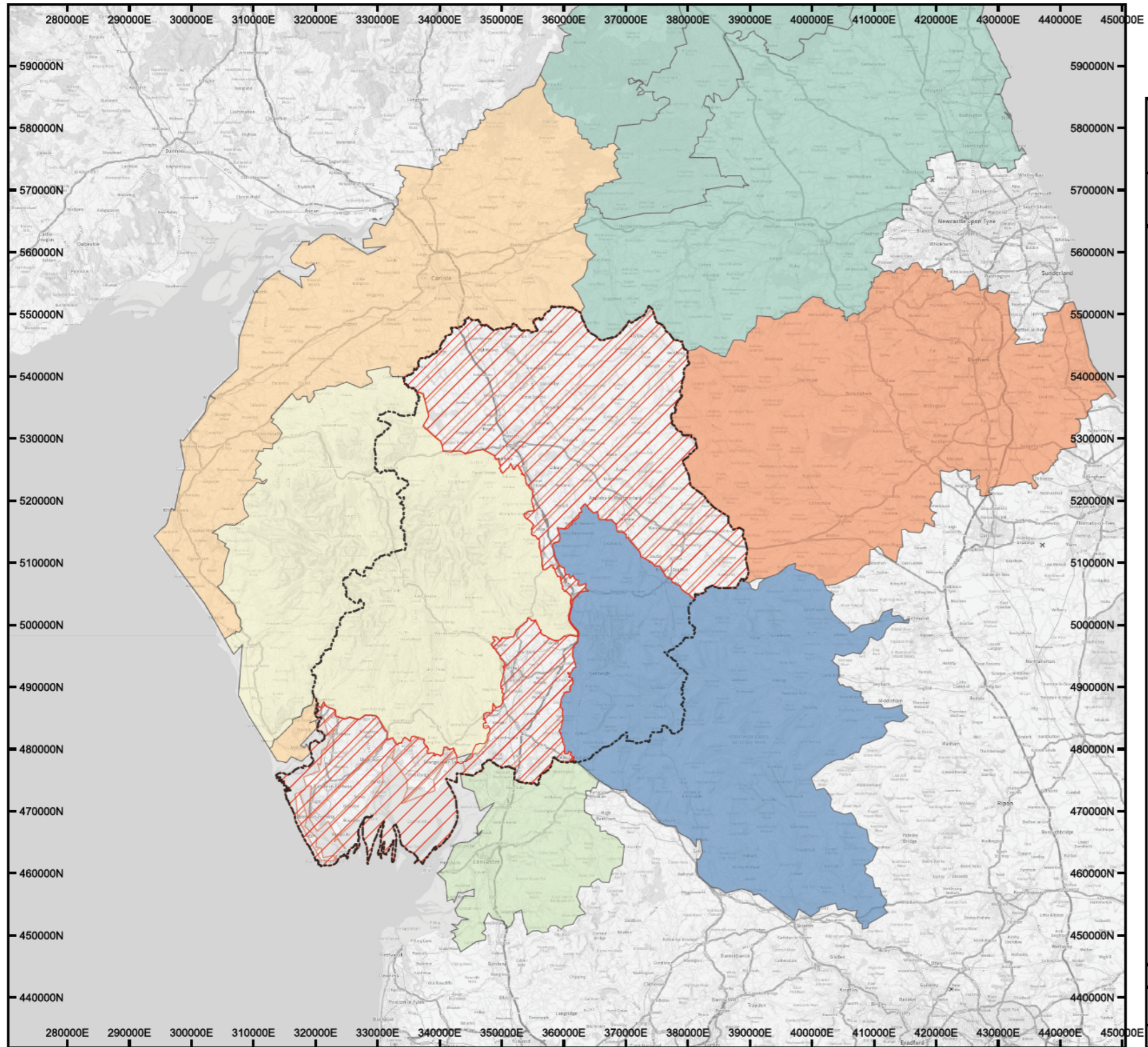
- The catchment data explorer is hosted by Defra: [England | Catchment Data Explorer](#)
- To find operational catchment boundaries: from the homepage choose the River Basin District (for River Eden this is Solway Tweed) > choose the management catchment (for River Eden this is Eden and Esk) > use the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



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




## **Figures**

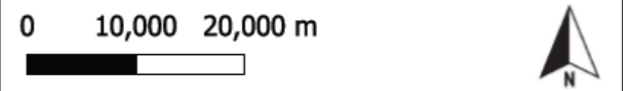
<b>Figure No.</b>	<b>Title</b>
Figure 1	Westmorland and Furness LPA and Neighbouring LPAs



**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



<b>SHEET:</b> A3	<b>SCALE:</b> 1:600,000	<b>BY:</b> AB	<b>QA:</b> ML	<b>REV</b> 2.0
Projection: OSGB 1936/British National Grid - EPSG 27700			02/11/2023	