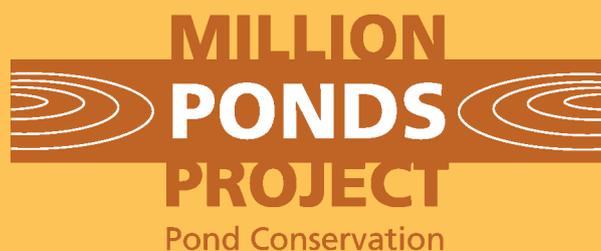


Ponds, a priority habitat: best practice guidelines for planners and developers



A 50-YEAR PROJECT TO CREATE A NETWORK OF CLEAN WATER PONDS FOR FRESHWATER WILDLIFE

In 2007, ponds were added to the list of Priority habitats in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP). The Pond Habitat Action Plan (HAP) is available at the Pond Conservation website.

Biodiversity, including BAP Priority habitats, is a material consideration in the planning process, and Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) have a duty to ensure that the potential impacts of all planning decisions on biodiversity are fully considered.

This factsheet aims to (i) help planners and developers fulfil their obligations under Planning Policy Statement 9 (PPS9), and (ii) help LPAs meet their duties under Section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006. The key principles to achieve this as presented in PPS9 are:

- Planning decisions should be based on up-to-date information.
- Planning decisions should aim to maintain, and enhance, restore or add to biodiversity interests.
- The aim of planning decisions should be to prevent harm to biodiversity interests. Where a planning decision would result in significant harm to biodiversity which cannot be prevented or adequately mitigated against, appropriate compensation measures should be sought.

This factsheet addresses these issues for pond habitats by providing:

- **Box 1:** A decision tree for implementing the Pond HAP targets in the context of development control planning.
- **Box 2:** The Pond HAP targets with supporting notes.
- **Box 3:** A decision tree showing best practice for assessing Priority Pond status.
- **Box 4:** Priority Pond qualifying criteria.

Around 20% of ponds in the wider countryside are likely to be high quality sites which qualify as Priority Ponds under the UK Pond HAP. It is particularly important to protect these existing high quality sites in the development control process, and therefore planners and developers should identify whether ponds at risk from development qualify as Priority Ponds (see Box 3).

Development, including aggregates extraction, also offers many opportunities to enhance the local freshwater habitat resource, and mitigate for pond loss due to development, through high quality clean water pond creation. Guidance on creating high quality ponds for wildlife can be found in the *Pond Creation Toolkit* and *Aggregates Toolkit Sheet A2*.

Who should read this factsheet?

This factsheet is intended for planners, development control officers, ecology consultants and developers, and for anyone interested in biodiversity in the context of the planning system.

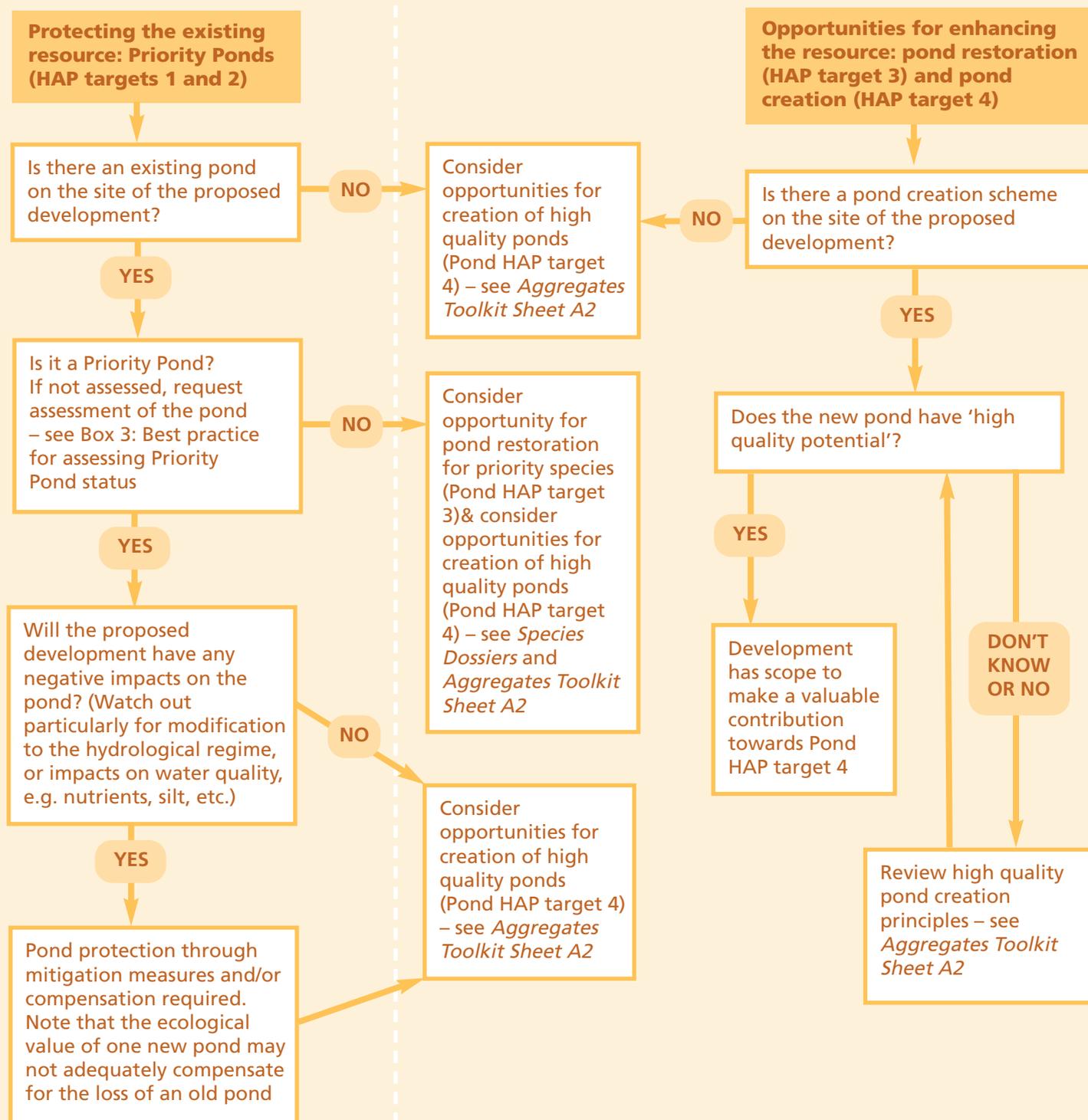
Aims of this factsheet

This factsheet aims to give guidance on:

- Implementing the Pond HAP targets in the context of development control planning.
- The Pond HAP targets.
- Best practice for assessing Priority Pond status.
- Priority Pond qualifying criteria.

Box 1: Decision tree for implementing the Pond HAP targets in the context of development control planning

See Box 2 for information on the Pond HAP targets 1 to 4





Box 2: Pond HAP targets

Target 1 (maintaining extent)

Maintain the number of Priority Pond sites

In addressing this target, particular emphasis should be placed on maintaining water quality, functional pond networks and species metapopulations. A pond site is a pond or a cluster of ponds including its surrounds. Priority Ponds are identified by assessing sites against a set of five criteria (see Box 4).

Target 2 (achieving condition)

Maintain quality of Flagship Pond sites

The aim of this target is to work directly with a sub-set of about 1% of Priority Ponds (“Flagship Ponds”) to ensure they are monitored and their quality is maintained. The list of Flagship Ponds is yet to be agreed.

Target 3 (restoration)

Restore pond sites to priority status to deliver Species Action Plan (SAP) targets

This target can apply to any non-Priority Pond with good potential for successful restoration for a SAP species, and can be aimed at improving water quality, or directly managing habitats. Invasive habitat management (e.g. plant clearance or dredging) should be undertaken only where there is little risk of damage to the existing biodiversity value of the pond site.

Target 4 (expansion)

Create new pond sites of high quality potential

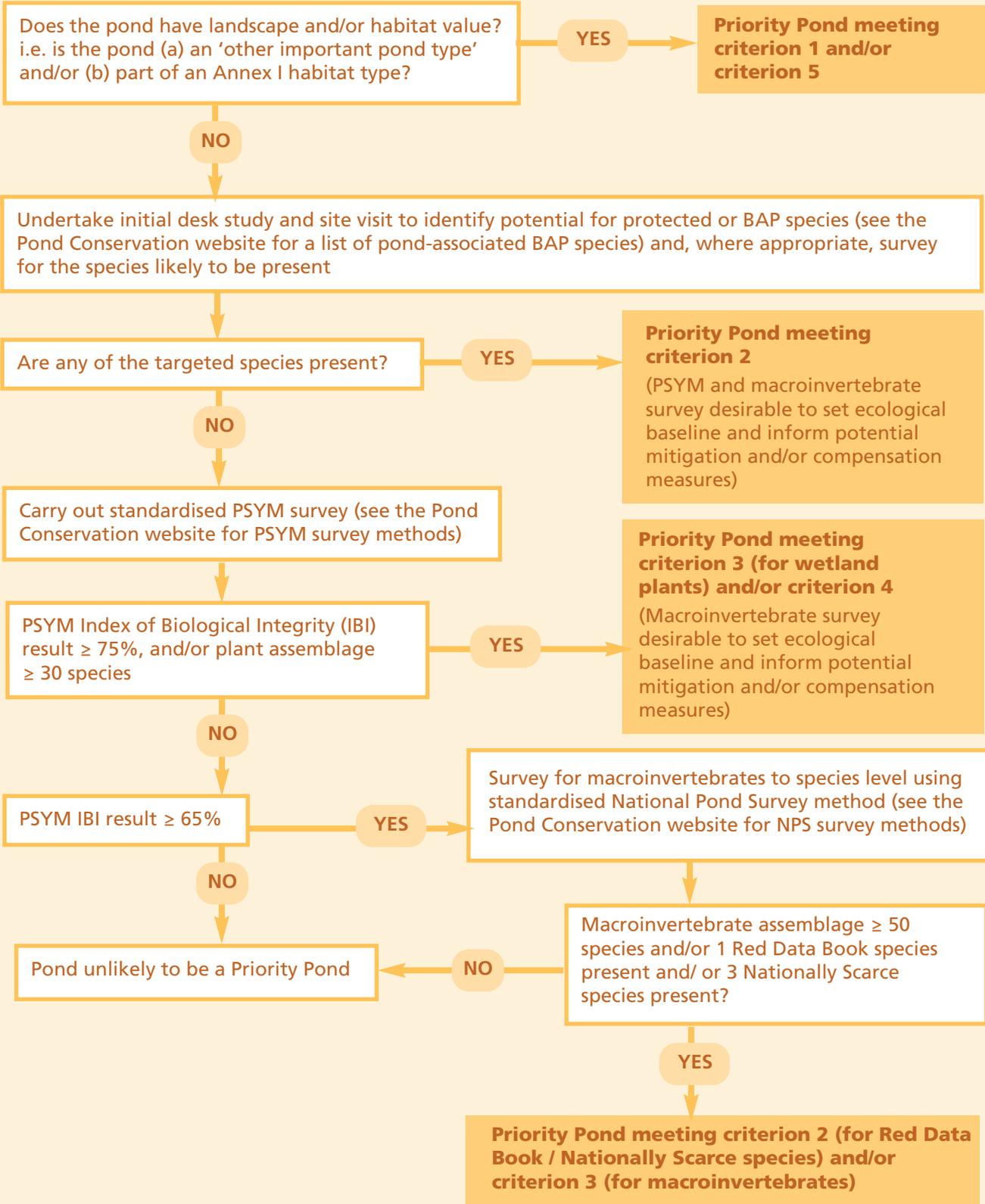
The aim of this target is to create a network of ponds with clean water and high biodiversity potential. The provisional definition of ‘high quality potential’ is ‘ponds located in areas where they drain a semi-natural surface-water catchment, which are unlikely to be significantly impacted upon by their after-use (e.g. stocked with fish, used to treat contaminated runoff)’. Creation of (i) pond mosaics/complexes, (ii) new ponds that increase landscape connectivity or form protective networks, and (iii) new sites that are targeted to support pond-associated BAP species are particularly encouraged. Ponds cannot be counted against this target if they are created to compensate for the destruction of existing high quality ponds. The rationale for pond creation and the key principles of high quality pond creation are presented in *Aggregates Toolkit Sheet A1* and *Aggregates Toolkit Sheet A2*.

BEWARE: Pond creation schemes should not *replace* large nature conservation schemes such as reedbed, wet grassland or wet woodland. However, pond creation can be integrated into most wetland or terrestrial habitats (see *Aggregates Toolkit Sheet A5*).

Box 3: Best practice for assessing Priority Pond status

Refer to Box 4 for definitions of Priority Pond qualifying criteria

This decision tree gives a protocol for assessing status of Priority Ponds according to the Pond HAP criteria.





Box 4: Priority Pond qualifying criteria

UK BAP Priority Ponds are defined as permanent and seasonal standing water bodies up to 2 hectares in extent which meet one or more of the following criteria:

Criterion 1 Habitats of international importance

Ponds that meet criteria under Annex I of the Habitats Directive (see www.jncc.gov.uk).

Criterion 2 Species of high conservation importance

Ponds supporting Red Data Book species, UK BAP species, species fully protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act Schedules 5 and 8, Habitats Directive Annex II species, a Nationally Scarce wetland plant species, or three Nationally Scarce aquatic macroinvertebrate species.

Criterion 3 Exceptional assemblages of key biotic groups

Ponds supporting exceptional populations or numbers of key species. Based on (i) criteria specified in guidelines for the selection of biological Sites of Special Scientific Interest (currently amphibians and dragonflies only), and (ii) exceptionally rich sites for plants or invertebrates (i.e. supporting ≥ 30 wetland plant species or ≥ 50 aquatic macroinvertebrate species).

Criterion 4 Ponds of high ecological quality

Ponds classified in the top PSYM category ('high') for ecological quality (i.e. having a PSYM score $\geq 75\%$). PSYM (the Predictive SYstem for Multimetrics) is a method for assessing the biological quality of still waters in England and Wales.

Criterion 5 Other important ponds

Individual ponds or groups of ponds with a limited geographic distribution recognised as important because of their age, rarity of type or landscape context e.g. pingos, duneslack ponds, machair ponds.

Note that any pond could *potentially* be a Priority Pond, even ponds which dry out, are very shaded, or those which may be unsightly or in urban areas. The key point is that ponds need to be adequately surveyed in order to assess their status (see Box 3).

For further information about the Million Ponds Project and to consult the other Factsheets from the Aggregates Toolkit, please visit www.pondconservation.org.uk/millionponds or email info@pondconservation.org.uk

