



**Kingsbrook  
Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire  
Barratt David Wilson Homes**

## **BIG Biodiversity Challenge Award Category: *Habitat Creation: Project of the Year (>5ha and above)***

### **Project overview**

Barratt David Wilson Homes (BDW) and the RSPB have joined forces to create the UK's first fully wildlife-friendly housing development at Kingsbrook, a 306-hectare project on the outskirts of Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire, with the aim of "Giving Nature a Home". Delivering 2,450 homes, more than 60% of Kingsbrook is designated as wildlife-friendly green space. Barratt David Wilson Homes believes that it is possible, with careful planning and commitment, for people and wildlife to comfortably co-exist and thrive.

### **What were the biodiversity conditions on site, prior to the enhancement?**

The site was characterised previously by low-lying semi-improved grass fields (both grazed and cut for silage) and arable fields enclosed by thick mature hedgerows. The goal throughout planning and delivery was to ensure that wildlife levels would not only be maintained but considerably enhanced.

### **What were the reasons behind this project ?**

The RSPB is working with BDW on the masterplan of the 2,450-home, wildlife-friendly project, which built the care of the natural environment into the scheme at the earliest stages. The project aims to set a new benchmark for housing development that delivers not just biodiversity recovery but real biodiversity gains, disproving the common conception that development and biodiversity are mutually exclusive.

Kingsbrook will set the standard for commercially viable development which addresses biodiversity loss, supports healthy well-functioning ecosystems, with better places for the benefit of nature and people.



### What were the biodiversity measures taken?

60% of the site is designated as wildlife-friendly green space (excluding private gardens). For example, BDW are enhancing existing pastures which includes grassland, network of ponds, hedgerows and woodland which will benefit smaller wildlife such as newts, bats, reptiles, badgers, and farmland birds.

Open areas within the development provide a network of natural, semi-natural and urban green space to encourage biodiversity; these will be linked by green corridors maximising connections between urban and countryside areas. Specific wildlife-friendly initiatives were created and integrated into the design of the development. These included “swift bricks,” artificial nesting bricks built into homes; hedgehog highways, small access points built into garden fences to encourage hedgehogs and amphibians to travel between gardens; bat-friendly street lighting; amphibian-friendly kerbing; and bat boxes.

In addition, the sustainable urban drainage system creates rills and swales of water on the surface, rather than channelling it into pipes, forming a wildlife habitat that uses nature to clean the water. Houses were plotted in less bio-diverse areas, while ancient hedgerows were protected, and miles of new ones created and planted with native trees.

Consideration has been given to layouts of streets and gardens, providing green space and wildlife corridors to encourage fauna to use the site safely; lighting has been carefully specified to provide safety for people while protecting insects and bats from harm; and a far wider than normal selection of planting ensures food and shelter for all kinds of creatures.

Today, not only has the partnership proved people and wildlife can comfortably co-exist and thrive, but it has resulted in a wealth of initiatives that can be transferred to other BDW projects and into the wider construction industry.



*An image of Grand Union Canal which runs parallel to Kingsbrook*



*The RSPB garden at Kingsbrook*



## Further information

In 2014 the RSPB, Barratt David Wilson Homes and Aylesbury Vale District Council set out to build a new exemplar housing development designed to incorporate wildlife-friendly measures throughout. The partners aim to demonstrate how modern housing developments can provide homes for wildlife, reduce impacts of development on species and habitats and enhance human connection with nature. The project mirrors what is intended to happen in the future through the Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) system, in which housing is built on land of low biodiversity value with improvements to be made both within the development and on land nearby to benefit wildlife – although Kingsbrook pre-dates BNG.

In the baseline survey report published in 2015, two questions were set:

1. How does biodiversity (composition and abundance) change in all habitats once a housing development has been built, and
2. What are the impacts of nature-friendly interventions on biodiversity and people and how do these change over time?

This report focusses on the first question through data collected on breeding birds, bumblebees, and butterflies, using the same survey methodology for these taxa as outlined in the baseline survey of 2015. Both the 2015 and 2021 surveys were separate from those required by law as part of the planning process such as of Badgers and Great Crested Newts.

2021 results indicate increases and maintenance levels of bird species, including those showing signs of breeding, urban bird populations and bees. Most notably, House Sparrows (up 3941%), Collared Dove (up 900%) and Starling (up 96%).

Such is Barratt David Wilson's commitment to nature, it has employed a Group Head of Biodiversity, a Biodiversity Co-ordinator, and a Senior Landscape Architect, all who work with the RSPB to improve outcomes for biodiversity.

## What was the motivation for carrying out the enhancement?

The upheaval of construction work on greenfield sites and the barren monoculture of grass that can be left behind is extremely damaging to wildlife. Barratt David Wilson set out to create an industry first in delivering the UK's first fully nature-friendly housing development and demonstrate that all housing developments can at the very least maintain or even improve biodiversity levels. The exceptional results at Kingsbrook position Barratt David Wilson as a leader in the housebuilding sector, and its learnings can be transferred into the wider construction industry for future generations, and species, to benefit from.