

Ecological Appraisal and Assessment: Current Best Practice Explained!

Preliminary Ecological Appraisal

The Preliminary Ecological Appraisal (PEA) can be used in a variety of situations, but is generally used to provide an initial assessment of any ecological constraints and opportunities which may be relevant to a proposed development. Essentially PEA consists of a desktop study and a site survey to identify and map features of ecological value.

Guidelines for Preliminary Ecological Appraisal are published by the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management (CIEEM). The guidelines seek to create a standardised approach to baseline/ preliminary site assessment; there is shift away from using the various terms previously applied (e.g. Extended Phase 1 habitat survey; Ecological Site Appraisal; Ecological Scoping Survey; Walkover Survey).

Where the PEA process identifies potential ecological constraints (such as the presence of protected species), further surveys and assessment are likely to be necessary. The PEA will usually contain some initial recommendations as to how the potential ecological impacts of a proposal might be avoided or mitigated, and where biodiversity enhancements could be delivered.

A Preliminary Ecological Appraisal is not a substitute for Ecological Impact Assessment (EclA) process described below. In the case of large development schemes, PEA will be an essential tool at the scoping stage. For most sites the PEA will be used to inform the design team and identify further work. It may also be used to inform site promotion or pre-purchase due diligence. At the simplest end of the scale a PEA may be submitted in support of a planning application, provided no significant ecological constraints have been identified.

Ecological Impact Assessment (EclA)

For development where potentially significant ecological effects are likely to arise from proposals, an Ecological Impact Assessment (EclA) will be required. Typically the EclA report prepared for planning submission will collate the baseline information gathered during the PEA and/or other detailed surveys. It will value existing ecological features, consider the potential effects of development and assess any residual ecological impacts after mitigation (both adverse and beneficial).

A robust EclA should demonstrate to the decision-making authority that a proposal is in accordance with the relevant legislation and planning policy. The Ecological Impact Assessment Guidelines published by CIEEM in January 2016 represent a best practice approach. As these guidelines state, "*EclA is a process of identifying, quantifying and evaluating potential effects of development-related or other proposed actions on habitats, species and ecosystems*".