695. Sustainability & Climate Action - Biodiversity & Ecology - School Grounds Biodiversity Audit

Category:	Sustainability & Climate Action
Subcategory:	Biodiversity & Ecology
Status:	Best Practice
Type:	Approved Contractor
Priority:	Recommended
Commonality:	Common

Note: This document provides guidance to support compliance but is not a substitute for professional advice.

Why This Task Matters

Your commissioning of professional biodiversity audits enriches the educational environment by connecting pupils with nature, supports ecosystem resilience that benefits the wider community, and demonstrates the organisation's commitment to environmental stewardship. By ensuring comprehensive assessment of school grounds biodiversity, you create opportunities for curriculum integration, enhance mental wellbeing through natural spaces, and build confidence in the organisation's role as an environmental leader while recognising the vital contribution facilities staff make to fostering nature-rich learning environments that support both educational and ecological excellence.

Task Summary

Best Practice: This task involves commissioning an annual biodiversity audit to record habitats, planting, and wildlife across the school or college estate. The audit should include systematic survey of all green spaces, identification of plant and animal species, assessment of habitat quality, and evaluation of biodiversity enhancement opportunities. Contractors should use appropriate survey methods to document existing biodiversity features, identify rare or protected species, and assess the ecological value of different areas. The process should include creation of detailed site maps, species inventories, and recommendations for biodiversity enhancement. Results should support curriculum

integration, inform maintenance planning, and contribute to the Climate Action Plan. This professional assessment provides a baseline for biodiversity monitoring and helps demonstrate environmental responsibility while creating educational opportunities.

Relevant Legislation & Guidance

- **Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981**: Protects wildlife and habitats on school grounds.
- **Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006**: Requires consideration of biodiversity in land management.
- **DfE guidance on biodiversity in education**: Supports integration of biodiversity into school grounds management.
- **Biodiversity 2020: A Strategy for England's Wildlife and Ecosystem Services**: Provides framework for biodiversity enhancement.
- **Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000**: Includes provisions for habitat protection.

Typical Frequency

This task should be completed yearly, ideally during the growing season when biodiversity is most visible and survey conditions are optimal. The frequency could vary based on significant changes to the site, new development, or if monitoring indicates substantial changes in biodiversity. In education settings, annual audits provide regular assessment of biodiversity value and support curriculum planning.

Applicability

This task is recommended and common, applying to schools and colleges with any green spaces or grounds. It is particularly valuable for establishments with extensive grounds, wildlife areas, or those wanting to enhance biodiversity for educational purposes. The task applies regardless of site size, though larger estates may derive greater benefit from professional assessment. Schools and colleges should consider this essential for environmental education and demonstrating ecological responsibility.

Responsible Persons

- **Task Type**: This is an Approved Contractor task requiring specialist ecological knowledge and survey expertise.

- **Contractor Requirements**: The contractor should be qualified ecologists or biodiversity specialists with appropriate accreditations such as CIEEM membership or protected species licences. Cost estimates typically range from £500-£1,500 depending on site size and

complexity.

- **In-House Requirements**: Not applicable as this is an Approved Contractor task.
- **Permit to Work**: A permit to work may be required if the audit involves accessing restricted areas or protected habitats.
- **Delivery Model**: This task is normally contractor-delivered in most schools and colleges due to the specialist ecological expertise required.

Key Considerations

Important factors include timing surveys during optimal survey seasons, ensuring access to all green spaces, and coordinating with school activities to minimise disruption. Consider the educational value of involving pupils in post-audit activities. The audit should not cause significant disruption if properly planned. Risk assessment should consider safety implications of accessing different terrain and potential encounters with wildlife.

Task Instructions

Prerequisites & Safety

- Ensure contractor has appropriate ecological qualifications and licences
- Arrange access to all green spaces and habitats
- Coordinate timing to avoid sensitive breeding seasons
- Confirm permit requirements for protected areas

Tools & Materials

- Ecological survey equipment and identification guides
- GPS mapping tools and site survey instruments
- Photographic equipment for habitat documentation
- Protected species survey licences (if required)
- Site maps and boundary documentation

Method (Step-by-Step)

1. **Planning and Access**: Arrange site access and coordinate survey schedule with school operations.

2. **Habitat Survey**: Conduct systematic assessment of all green spaces and habitats.
3. **Species Inventory**: Record plant and animal species present on site.
4. **Biodiversity Assessment**: Evaluate habitat quality and ecological value.
5. **Mapping**: Create detailed site maps showing biodiversity features.
6. **Recommendations**: Develop recommendations for biodiversity enhancement.

Measurements & Acceptance Criteria

Surveys should follow established ecological methodologies with comprehensive species recording and habitat assessment. Biodiversity value should be evaluated using appropriate ecological criteria.

If Results Fail

Follow instructions on the Compliance Pod task completion form to record remedial/follow up actions and generate Reactive Task Tickets as required. If protected species are identified, immediate actions should include consulting conservation specialists and implementing appropriate protection measures.

Reinstatement & Housekeeping

No reinstatement required. Ensure all access points are secured and survey equipment removed.

Completion Checks

Confirm that comprehensive audit has been completed, report received, and all evidence uploaded to Compliance Pod.

Client Oversight Checklist (Before the Visit)

- Scope covers all green spaces and habitats on site
- Contractor has appropriate licences for protected species
- Access arrangements made for all areas including ponds or woodlands
- Survey timing avoids sensitive breeding seasons
- Educational involvement opportunities identified

Client Oversight Checklist (During the Visit)

- Contractor follows safe working practices in varied terrain
- Survey methods are appropriate for different habitat types

- Photographic evidence captured of key biodiversity features
- Protected species protocols followed if applicable
- Minimal disturbance to wildlife and habitats

Deliverables & Acceptance Criteria (After the Visit)

- Comprehensive biodiversity audit report
- Detailed site maps with habitat boundaries
- Complete species inventory with conservation status
- Photographic evidence of key features
- Recommendations for biodiversity enhancement
- Review report for completeness and technical accuracy

Defects & Follow-up

Follow instructions on the Compliance Pod task completion form to record remedial/follow up actions and generate Reactive Task Tickets as required. Agree priorities for implementing biodiversity recommendations, and schedule any follow-up surveys or monitoring.

Reinstatement & Sign-off

Confirm all survey activities completed safely, complete on-site sign-off, and upload evidence to Compliance Pod.

Record-Keeping & Evidence

- **Upload Process**: Upload any required statutory or supporting evidence to the corresponding task form in Compliance Pod.
- **Statutory Evidence**: No statutory evidence is required for this task.
- **Supporting/Good Practice Evidence**: Contractor audit report, site maps, and biodiversity inventory.

Common Pitfalls & Best Practice Tips

Common mistakes include scheduling surveys during poor weather, inadequate site preparation, or failing to act on audit recommendations. Best practices include providing historical biodiversity data, coordinating with curriculum staff for educational activities, and implementing quick-win recommendations immediately. In educational settings, use audit findings to develop pupil-led conservation projects. Warning signs include declining biodiversity indicators or lack of progress in habitat enhancement.

Quick Reference Checklist

- [ ] Verify contractor qualifications and arrange access
- [ ] Provide site documentation and historical data
- [ ] Coordinate timing with optimal survey conditions
- [ ] Review biodiversity audit report upon completion
- [ ] Implement prioritised recommendations
- [ ] Develop educational activities based on findings
- [ ] Upload evidence to Compliance Pod

Grouped Tasks

Grouping is feasible; align with related tasks of the same frequency and contractor visit.

Related Tasks

- Sustainability & Climate Action - Biodiversity & Ecology - Biodiversity & Green Space Maintenance Plan Review
- Sustainability & Climate Action - Biodiversity & Ecology - Biodiversity & Habitat Enhancement Project Monitoring

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