

BSI Flex 705 – Nature Markets - Community engagement and benefits – Code of Practice

Introduction

BSI Flex 705 is a standard that forms part of a wider Nature Investment Standard (NIS) framework. It provides practical recommendations for nature projects on good practice for community engagement and the delivery of community benefits.

It builds on the overarching principles set out in BSI Flex 701, as well as the community requirements detailed in market standards BSI Flex 702 to 704. Together, these provide more comprehensive guidance on the topic to support the scale-up of high-integrity nature markets.

A code of practice

This standard is designed to operate as a code of practice, allowing flexibility for nature investment projects and schemes to demonstrate good practice in community engagement and benefit delivery in ways that are proportionate, transparent, and credible.

Because communities differ widely in their needs, capacities, and preferences, flexibility is needed. For example, the approach suited to a 200-hectare project in the Scottish Highlands may differ from that suited to a 5-hectare project in lowland England. Therefore, the code of practice focuses on ensuring meaningful engagement and clear benefits without imposing rigid processes that could become barriers to participation.

BSI Flex 705 public consultation

This first iteration of BSI Flex 705 is intended to establish good practice for community engagement within nature investment projects. It is an initial version positioned as a basis for further review, discussion, and improvement.

This public consultation represents an important opportunity for stakeholders to shape the direction, scope, clarity, and practical application of the next iteration of the standard and NIS framework.

While we encourage comments on the entirety of the standard, we would like to draw attention to the following topics that were a focus of discussion throughout the process:

- Does the standard address proportionality clearly and appropriately?
- Is it clear how proportionality should be applied in practice, including how actions should vary depending on project size, risk, impact, or context?
- Does the standard provide sufficient clarity for consistent application, or would additional supporting materials (e.g., examples, methods, guidance) help projects and schemes apply it in practice?
- Is the flexibility provided under the code of practice approach appropriate given the current state of nature markets, or should a more stringent approach be considered, such as a specification?
- From your perspective, which market actors are likely to place the greatest value on the additional guidance provided by Flex 705, and what drivers (e.g. reputational, risk-management, policy, or procurement needs) are shaping that demand?
- Are there any risks or unintended consequences that may arise, including where guidance may inadvertently place pressure on participation or investment?

To respond to the public consultation, please go to the BSI standard development portal.



Nature markets – Community engagement and benefits – Code of practice

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BSI Flex 705 v1.0:2026-03



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Foreword

This BSI Flex is part of BSI's Nature Investment Standards (NIS) programme, sponsored by the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (Defra). This BSI Flex was sponsored by Defra and the Scottish Government, its development was facilitated by BSI Standards Limited and it was released under licence from The British Standards Institution. It came into effect on 31 March 2026.

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- Deciding Matters
- Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (Defra)
- Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs Northern Ireland (DAERA)
- Foundation Scotland
- International Advisory Panel on Biodiversity Credits (IAPB)
- Keep Wales Tidy
- Nattergal
- Scottish Forestry
- Scottish Land Commission
- Soil Association Certification
- The Scottish Government
- University of Gloucestershire
- University of Oxford
- University of Strathclyde
- Woodland Savers

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The content in this version is part of an iterative process. It is likely to change from time to time with subsequent iterations.

Relationship with other publications

This BSI Flex is intended to be used in conjunction with BSI Flex 701 v2.0:2025-03, *Nature markets – Overarching principles and framework – Specification*.

This BSI Flex is part of the Nature Investment Standards Programme and builds upon BSI Flex 701 by applying its principles to community engagement.

It also builds on the community requirements in the other standards in the Nature Investment Standards Programme:

- BSI Flex 702 v2.0:2026-03, *Nature markets – Supply of biodiversity benefits – Specification, 5.6*
- BSI Flex 704 v2.0:2026-03, *Nature Markets – Supply of nature-based nutrient benefits – Specification, 5.4*

BSI Flex 703 v1.0:2025-03, *Nature markets – Supply of nature-based carbon benefits – Specification* is also part of the NIS programme.

Information about this document

The NIS programme focuses on supporting the growth of high-integrity nature markets across the UK. The standards in the programme provide clear guidelines for participating in nature markets – where businesses can invest in environmental projects that deliver habitat restoration or natural carbon removals. Further information on the programme can be found at <https://nature-investment.bsigroup.com/>. This is Version 1 of BSI Flex 705, which has been released to enable stakeholders to engage with the initial content and feed back comments for further versions of the document to be developed. This is the first public consultation of this BSI Flex and so the content is not to be considered as having received wider feedback. Users are therefore encouraged to comment on this version.

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Presentational conventions

The provisions of this document are presented in roman (i.e. upright) type. Its recommendations are expressed in sentences in which the principal auxiliary verb is “should”.

Commentary, explanation and general informative material is presented in smaller italic type, and does not constitute a normative element.

The word “should” is used to express recommendations of this document. The word “may” is used in the text to express permissibility, e.g. a course of action that is permitted but is not a provision of the document. The word “can” is used to express possibility, e.g. a consequence of an action or an event.

Notes and commentaries are provided throughout the text of this document. Notes give references and additional information that are important but do not form part of the recommendations. Commentaries give background information.

Where words have alternative spellings, the preferred spelling of the *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* is used (e.g. “organization” rather than “organisation”).

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Compliance with a BSI Flex cannot confer immunity from legal obligations.

In particular, attention is drawn to the following Acts and regulations:

- Equality Act 2010 [1]
- General Data Protection Regulation [2]

0 Introduction

0.1 Relationship between nature markets and communities

Natural capital projects typically target landscape interventions that are capable of generating credits (e.g. carbon, biodiversity or nutrient credits), to be sold on commercial markets. Consequently, these projects, and the nature markets they form, have a direct impact on our natural environment; shaping our natural capital stocks and the ecosystem services they provide. These services, in turn, form the foundations of our economy and society, underpinning a myriad of socio-economic benefits. Consequently, natural capital projects can impact the communities who live in close proximity to them, as well as further afield; both positively and negatively.

0.2 Community engagement

In order to better understand the impacts a project might have on a given community, how the community views these impacts and the types of benefits the community seeks, it is essential that suppliers engage with communities. This engagement goes beyond simply informing communities about the details of a project (i.e. “doing to” the community) or even consulting with communities about a project’s design (i.e. “doing for” the community).

Instead, it entails genuine and ongoing participatory engagement with the community (i.e. “doing with” the community), built upon the principles of collaboration, empowerment, inclusivity, transparency, communication, legitimacy and accountability. The aim here, is to generate community-based insights to assess whether the needs of the community are being supported by the project and to co-design solutions that might enhance the project’s value to the community.

0.3 The value of effective community engagement and benefit creation

Implementing effective project-level approaches to community engagement and benefit-sharing is an important means of adding value to credits and enhancing suppliers’ customer value proposition. Furthermore, these approaches represent an important means of project risk management, as they integrate the community’s feedback into the heart of the project’s design, to help the project serve the community’s needs over its duration and beyond. This serves to help mitigate opposition to these projects and cultivate long-term community support. Finally, empowering communities to co-create these projects through participatory engagement can serve to build trust and legitimacy between communities and suppliers, which are critical to the success of the natural capital projects of which communities are ultimately custodians.

The failure to implement effective plans for community engagement and benefit-sharing from natural capital projects can therefore pose both a project delivery and reputational risk for suppliers and their investors. To operate with high-integrity, nature markets need to be co-created with local communities, so that they create and enhance community benefits, whilst also mitigating any negative effects. BSI Flex 705 v1.0:2026-03 seeks to set out and embed good practice to address this need for the UK’s nature market.

0.4 Proportionality

As a code of practice, BSI Flex 705 v1.0:2026-03 outlines a set of good practice recommendations whilst also providing flexibility on the actions taken to deliver equivalent or better outcomes. Underpinning this standard is the principle of proportionality and the need to apply some community-facing measures (e.g. community engagement, benefit sharing/creation, impact assessment, monitoring and evaluation) proportionately to the scale and impact of the project in question. The purpose of this is so that the application of this good practice does not compromise a project's practical or commercial viability to the extent that it is not considered to represent an attractive investment. Where proportionality applies to the recommendations outlined in this standard, this is made explicit. It is expected that questions of how these measures are applied proportionately are considered as part of the supplier's participatory engagement with communities.

0.5 Link to other BSI nature market standards

This standard gives recommendations that predominantly build upon the principle set out in BSI Flex 701 v2.0:2025-03, **5.6** Engagement with local communities, but also has relevance to other principles in BSI Flex 701 v2.0:2025-03 such as in **4.1** Transparency and **4.3** Governance of market participants and market intermediaries.

This standard also builds upon the community requirements set out in BSI Flex 702 v2.0:2026-03, **5.6** and BSI Flex 704 v2.0:2026-03, **5.4**.

1 Scope

This BSI Flex gives recommendations for natural capital projects with regard to community engagement and benefits.

Aligned with the overarching principles outlined in BSI Flex 701, this BSI Flex covers:

- a) community mapping, coordination of engagement, co-production, legitimacy, prior consent, consensus building, grievance mechanisms and resourcing of participatory engagement;
- b) communication, transparency and accountability;
- c) community impact assessment, community impact mitigation and benefit sharing; and
- d) monitoring and evaluation of community impacts, engagement and benefit sharing.

This BSI Flex is intended for use by suppliers of nature-based credits.

In addition, this BSI Flex might be of interest to:

- communities;
- other nature market participants;
- market intermediaries, including the different codes/standards/schemes;
- buyers of nature-based credits;
- investors in nature-based projects;
- service providers;
- environmental non-government organizations;
- regulators;
- policy developers; and
- academics.

This BSI Flex is intended for use in the UK.

***NOTE** This BSI Flex might inform nature market activity in other parts of the world but does not explicitly take into account non-UK environmental, governance and other contexts. It is also relevant to nature credits from suppliers in the UK traded in non-UK markets.*

2 Normative references

The following documents are referred to in the text in such a way that some or all of their content constitutes provisions, or limits the application, of this document.¹⁾ For dated references, only the edition cited applies. For undated references, the latest edition of the referenced document (including any amendments) applies.

BSI Flex 701 v2.0:2025-03, *Nature markets – Overarching principles and framework – Specification*

¹⁾ Documents that are referred to solely in an informative manner are listed in the Bibliography.

3 Terms, definitions and abbreviated terms

3.1 Terms and definitions

For the purposes of this document, the terms and definitions given in BSI Flex 701 v2.0:2025-03 and the following apply.

3.1.1 adaptive management

process of iteratively planning, implementing and modifying strategies for managing resources in the face of uncertainty and change

NOTE Adaptive management involves adjusting approaches in response to observations of their effects and changes in the system brought on by resulting feedback effects and other variables.

[SOURCE: BS EN ISO 14090:2019, 3.3]

3.1.2 community

collective of people that live in a particular place, with a clearly defined local geographical boundary

NOTE A community of place might intersect with other communities of interest or practice, that hold a shared sense of identity, interests, motivations, values, etc.

[SOURCE: University of Strathclyde, *Community participation for community benefits from natural capital projects* [3], 3.1.1]

3.1.3 community benefit agreement

legally binding arrangement setting out the nature and scope of the community benefit fund

NOTE A community benefit agreement can be between the project owner(s) and one or more parties, who are ordinarily a community-based organization or intermediary acting on a community's behalf.

[SOURCE: University of Strathclyde, *Guiding Principles and Actions for Enhancing Community Benefits from Community Benefit Funds* [4], modified, Note added]

3.1.4 community benefit fund

voluntary fund that a project developer or owner(s) donate into, based on a pre-agreed package of community benefits, to be provided to one or more communities

NOTE These packages typically involve annual payments and/or in-kind community benefits (e.g. shared ownership, revenue sharing, access to land/infrastructure, etc.). The fund is normally (part-) governed by a community, with the aim of generating benefits to that community.

[SOURCE: University of Strathclyde, *Guiding Principles and Actions for Enhancing Community Benefits from Community Benefit Funds* [4], modified]

3.1.5 community engagement

purposeful process, which develops a working relationship between communities, community organizations and public and private bodies to help them to identify and act on community needs and ambitions

NOTE 1 Community engagement involves respectful dialogue between everyone involved, aimed at improving understanding and taking joint action to achieve positive change.

NOTE 2 Community engagement is supported by the key principles of fairness and equity, and a commitment to learning and continuous improvement.

NOTE 3 More information on community engagement is given in the Scottish Government's National standards for community engagement [5] and in Wales Council for Voluntary Action (WCVA), The National Principles for Public Engagement in Wales [6].

[SOURCE: Scottish Government, *National standards for community engagement* [5], modified]

3.1.6 co-production

suppliers, and the communities impacted by their projects, sharing power and responsibility, and working together for mutual benefit in equal and reciprocal relationships

NOTE Co-production enables people to access relevant and meaningful support when they need it, services to be effective and make a positive difference in people's lives, and people, services, and communities to become more effective agents of change (see Wales Council for Voluntary Action [WCVA], The National Principles for Public Engagement in Wales [6]).

3.1.7 community impact

past, present or future economic, societal or environmental impacts experienced at the level of a local population, rather than at the level of an individual person or household, which might be subjectively judged to be positive or negative impacts, depending on the individual's perspective

3.1.8 cultural heritage

reflection and expression of people's constantly evolving values, beliefs, knowledge, traditions and practices, which are central to individual and collective identity and memory, providing continuity between past, present and future

NOTE 1 Cultural heritage includes tangible and intangible heritage, which might be recognized and valued at the local, regional, national or global level.

NOTE 2 Examples of cultural heritage include living expressions inherited from ancestors, such as oral traditions, performing arts, social manners, rituals, festive events, knowledge and practices related to nature and the universe, and knowledge and techniques linked to traditional crafts.

[SOURCE: The Gold Standard Foundation, *Core document: Safeguarding Principles and Requirements* [7]]

3.1.9 marginalized groups

those that have little or no influence over decision-making processes

NOTE Marginalization might be related to a range of factors, including age, gender, ethnicity, socio-economic status and religion (see Community & Biodiversity Alliance's Climate, Community and Biodiversity Standards [8]).

3.1.10 participatory engagement

deliberative involvement of diverse stakeholders in decision-making processes, where impacted communities contribute to project-level decision making that directly impacts their lives and surroundings

NOTE Participatory engagement goes beyond simply informing or consulting with communities but requires collaborating with them to establish a shared understanding and to co-create a preferred solution. Examples of participatory engagement include public dialogues, citizens' juries, participatory appraisal, structured consensus building, scenario mapping, etc.

3.1.11 return on investment

profit generated by an investment relative to its cost

3.1.12 vulnerable groups

group(s) of people who lack secure access to the assets on which secure livelihoods are built (socio-political, cultural, human, financial, natural and physical) and with high exposure to external stresses and shocks (including climate change)

[SOURCE: Climate Community & Biodiversity Alliance, *Climate, Community and Biodiversity Standards* [8], 3.1.9, modified, "groups of people" added]

3.2 Abbreviated terms

For the purposes of this document, the following abbreviated terms apply.

CBA Community Benefit Agreement

MoU Memorandum of Understanding

SMART specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound

4 Foundations

COMMENTARY ON CLAUSE 4

Community engagement is built upon a set of foundations that outline the importance of coordination, co-production, legitimacy, prior consent, consensus building and appropriate resourcing.

4.1 Community mapping

4.1.1 Suppliers should formulate a detailed understanding of the boundaries, priorities and capabilities of the community to be engaged with, and their capacity to engage.

NOTE 1 *In order to interpret the priorities of the community it is helpful to understand their history and cultural heritage.*

NOTE 2 *Deciding Matters' Best Practice Guide: Community Inclusion for Community Benefit [9] advises that the mapping process captures local-level organizations that serve to galvanize and represent these community groups.*

4.1.2 In order to formulate a detailed understanding of the community's characteristics (see **4.1.1**), suppliers should appropriately resource and support the mapping of the communities who are likely to be materially impacted by the project's activities.

NOTE 1 *The Scottish Land Commission's Practice Guide: Developing an Engagement Plan for Decisions Relating to Land [10] advises that, where applicable, the community mapping process acknowledges and builds upon recent community mapping exercises, using these as a baseline. Common examples include land use development plans, such as local place plans, or broader local-level strategic planning, such as community action plans.*

NOTE 2 *Suppliers are advised to update the community mapping exercise regularly so that it remains representative of the present community. The schedule for updating community mapping needs to be discussed and agreed with communities from the outset of the project so that it is appropriate to the characteristics of the project and community in question.*

4.1.3 The mapping process should involve community organizations (e.g. community councils, development trusts), where these exist and possess knowledge about the structure and characteristics of the community.

4.1.4 To avoid consultation fatigue and the duplication of effort, the community mapping process should begin with a desk-based exercise that synthesizes existing literature and datasets, prior to the commencement of direct community engagement.

NOTE The Climate Community & Biodiversity Alliance's Climate, Community and Biodiversity Standards [8] specifies the use of digital data to identify the boundaries of a project area, such as GPS coordinates and digital map files. It also advises that a map of the local area, the location of its different community groups and the boundaries of the project area be provided, including high conservation value areas and any associated impacts generated through project activities.

4.1.5 Where there is an existing statutory requirement for community engagement (e.g. planning, forestry), suppliers should make this clear to the community, alongside any plans for additional and voluntary engagement.

4.1.6 Suppliers should include marginalized and/or vulnerable groups as part of the mapping process, even if these form a relatively small proportion of the community's population.

NOTE 1 Attention is drawn to the nine protected characteristics outlined in the UK's Equality Act 2010 [1].

NOTE 2 Census data can be utilized to provide an overview of the distribution of these demographic characteristics within the community.

4.1.7 Suppliers should connect their community mapping exercises with local environmental assessments and benchmarking to assess which ecosystem services the local community relies on and their relative importance to the community's well-being and cultural identity.

4.1.8 Suppliers should test the accuracy of their community mapping with community members through the engagement process and make adjustments as needed.

4.2 Coordination and scheduling of community engagement

4.2.1 The community engagement programme should be coordinated with other planned community-level project consultations, so that they complement one another and are integrated wherever possible.

NOTE Communities have a finite capacity to engage on substantive issues and are often subject to multiple concurrent consultations. This can result in communities being unable to engage effectively or choosing not to engage, due to consultation fatigue. Stronger alignment and integration across multiple projects can avoid the duplication of effort from both suppliers and the community.

4.2.2 Community engagement should be targeted, timely and longitudinal, and scheduled to align with critical junctures of project decision making.

NOTE 1 Targeted engagement is where specific community members that have self-identified as having a material interest in certain aspects of the project, are engaged with in more detail on these issues. As per guidance in BS EN ISO 37101:2022+A1, effective involvement does not necessitate involving all the interested parties across all phases of the engagement process. Instead, it might be appropriate to concentrate engagement with specific community groups into discrete time periods, when these groups' input is most valuable in terms of informing decision making.

NOTE 2 Timely engagement happens well in advance of any final decisions being taken. Early-stage community engagement is also important to ascertain which issues pose the most significant impacts for the community.

NOTE 3 Longitudinal engagement takes place regularly, over the lifetime of the project, and aligns with critical junctures of decision making and delivery milestones.

4.2.3 The depth and breadth of community engagement should be proportionate to the scale and complexity of the project's potential community impacts (see Clause 6).

4.2.4 Suppliers should commence community engagement from the outset of a project's development, so that communities are made aware of their plans in a timely manner.

NOTE 1 In line with guidance from the Scottish Land Commission's Protocol on Community Engagement in Decisions Relating to Land [11] and Scottish Government's Natural Capital Market Framework [12], commencing community engagement as early as possible affords the opportunity for the community to provide feedback at a time that could reasonably influence the project's design.

NOTE 2 The Scottish Land Commission's Protocol on Community Engagement in Decisions Relating to Land [11] advises that information regarding planned changes is made available to the community at least three months before any planned changes are made.

4.3 Co-production of community engagement plans

4.3.1 In order to enhance the legitimacy of participatory engagement processes, preliminary plans for community engagement should be discussed with the community, as identified via community mapping (see 4.1), to ascertain which approaches work best for engaging with the different community groups in question.

4.3.2 Suppliers should hold discussions with the community about which issues are within scope for community engagement and document these as part of a co-produced agreement.

NOTE This might take the form of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), that outlines the engagement's scope and overarching process, as well as the rights and responsibilities of relevant parties (e.g. supplier, community, intermediaries).

4.4 Legitimacy

4.4.1 A diverse sample of the community should be involved in the programme of community engagement.

NOTE 1 Guidance from Welsh Government [6] recommends that suppliers monitor engagement so that it is accessible, inclusive, and representative of diverse community voices, including people with different protected characteristics and lived experiences, including underrepresented people.

NOTE 2 BS EN ISO 37101:2022+A1 provides further guidance. Scotland's National standards for community engagement [5] outlines some common examples of the support needed to enable vulnerable and marginalized groups to engage, including the provision of:

- suitable transport;
- support for caring responsibilities (e.g. childcare or elder care);
- personal assistance or care;
- accessible venues and suitable catering;
- interpreter services and communication aids;
- meetings and events organized at appropriate times;
- access to online tools (e.g. social media and video conferencing), where appropriate; and
- reimbursement of out-of-pocket expenses.

4.4.2 Suppliers should outline the community participatory engagement processes they have employed and provide evidence of these processes.

NOTE Guidance on appropriate participatory methods, and on the associated evidence of these having been employed, is given in the Scottish Government's Participation Handbook [13].

4.4.3 Where a diverse sample of the community has not been engaged with, especially vulnerable and marginalized community members, the supplier should document the reasons for failing to do so (e.g. any barriers to engagement) and record where reasonable adjustments have been made to engage with these community members (e.g. measures taken to address barriers).

NOTE The sample of the community with whom the supplier has engaged can be compared with the information collected as part of a community mapping process (see 4.1), to help indicate how representative the sample is of the wider community.

4.5 Consent

Suppliers should seek community members' consent to opt in to any supplier-led engagement.

NOTE The participation of community members is voluntary and non-mandatory. Consequently, it is necessary for suppliers to obtain explicit consent that is given on the basis that it is free, prior and informed: see the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), Free Prior and Informed Consent: An Indigenous Peoples' right and a good practice for local communities. Manual for project practitioners [14] for further information.

4.6 Consensus building

Suppliers should demonstrate the steps taken to build support amongst the community for the project's design and delivery.

NOTE 1 The Scottish Land Commission's Practice Guide: Developing an Engagement Plan for Decisions Relating to Land [10] advises that the building of consensus follows four key steps:

- opening up the discussion, away from adversarial behaviours;
- generation of ideas and identification of those ideas that are mutually acceptable;
- testing support to develop a shortlist of options; and
- refining shortlisted options for mutually beneficial solutions.

NOTE 2 Consensus building takes time and is a layered process that is built on dialogue, trust and transparency. Where consensus is reached, it is advisable it be maintained to avoid it becoming eroded over time.

4.7 Grievance mechanisms

Suppliers should put in place a transparent, confidential and impartial process for addressing, filing and resolving grievances, in which any applicable fees do not impede legitimate access of civil society organizations or local communities to the grievance process.

NOTE 1 In accordance with the IAPB's Framework for high integrity biodiversity credit markets [15], High Level Principle 17, the grievance mechanisms are to be relevant to all stakeholders and rights-holders including Indigenous Peoples and local communities, women, youth, elderly people, LGBTQIA+ individuals, persons with disabilities and any marginalized groups. The design of these mechanisms can be informed by good practice guidance provided by the United Nations' Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights [16], 28-30; the United Nations Development Programme's Social and Environmental Standards' Grievance Redress Mechanisms [17]; and the Forest Stewardship Council's FSC Remedy Framework Procedure [18].

NOTE 2 Gold Standard's Core document: Safeguarding Principles and Requirements [7] indicates that suppliers are to demonstrate how and where any disputes have been resolved, such as through the resourcing of third-party mediation.

4.8 Resourcing

4.8.1 At the planning stage, suppliers should make resources available, proportionate to the scale and impact of the project, to address barriers that have been identified as having the potential to undermine the proposed community engagement programme and its objectives.

NOTE 1 Welsh Government guidance [6] stresses the importance of recognizing diversity, identifying barriers, and addressing them proactively. As part of this process, participants need to be able to highlight any obstacles to their involvement with specific attention paid to differing experiences and situations, such as neurodiversity, cultural and linguistic backgrounds, LGBTQIA+ identities and caring responsibilities, as well as disabled, elderly and young people.

In this context, some groups might require tailored methods to participate fully. The outcomes of this assessment can usefully inform any additional resourcing needs to facilitate community engagement.

NOTE 2 Welsh Government guidance [6] recommends that where community participation can only be realized through compensating community members for their time, then funds are to be made available to do so. Furthermore, reasonable expenses are also to be reimbursed.

NOTE 3 Deciding Matters' Best Practice Guide: Community Inclusion for Community Benefit [9] and the Welsh Government [6] advise that any such planned investment is factored into broader project costs.

4.8.2 Where the monitoring and evaluation process (see Clause 7) reveals that the community engagement process is not operating effectively, due to deficiencies in the supplier's and/or community's capacity and/or capability to engage, then additional resources should be made available to address these deficiencies, which are proportionate to the scale and impact of the project.

NOTE Additional in-house capacity and/or capability might be addressed through the recruitment of more suitably trained staff to lead on the community engagement programme. Where it is not possible to address such deficiencies in-house, engagement activities may be outsourced to a suitably competent person – see BSI Flex 702 v2.0:2026-03, 3.7.

5 Communications

COMMENTARY ON CLAUSE 5

Pertinent information about the project, and associated decision-making processes and outcomes, are made transparent and shared with the community in an accessible format and via appropriate channels.

5.1 Contact

5.1.1 Suppliers should make available their up-to-date contact information to the community.

5.1.2 Suppliers should hold up-to-date contact information for relevant community council and community organizations in the area.

5.1.3 Where suppliers delegate activities to third-parties (e.g. engagement, impact assessment, benefit sharing, etc.), these contact details should also be shared with the community.

5.2 General transparency

5.2.1 In accordance with BSI Flex 701 v2.0:2025-03, 5.6.1, suppliers should make information accessible and transparent to the community throughout the project's duration.

NOTE Deciding Matters' Best Practice Guide: Community Inclusion for Community Benefit [9], recommends the co-production of a clear and accessible glossary of terms that outlines key terms and acronyms, to enable a shared understanding between suppliers and communities.

5.2.2 Suppliers should be transparent about project governance, including land and asset ownership, decision-making structures and legal status.

NOTE 1 As per the Scottish Land Commission's Good practice: Protocol on transparency of ownership and decision-making [19] the following steps are to be taken.

- Up-to-date information about who owns land or buildings and the extent of the landholding is always to be made publicly available.
- If there are people or bodies with significant influence and control over land and buildings, information about who they are and the extent of their control is to be made publicly available along with information about ownership.

NOTE 2 Communities and suppliers may agree to disclose additional information, in a manner proportionate to the scale and impact of the project, which pertains to the financial aspects of the project's business models, such as its rate of return on investment, funding/finance sources, etc. See guidance from Rewilding Britain in Rewilding Finance: Harnessing high-integrity investment to boost rewilding across Britain [20].

NOTE 3 This guidance aligns to BSI Flex 701 v2.0:2025-03, 4.1 which emphasizes that information is to be made available "unless it is commercially confidential, personal data or otherwise protected under data protection law".

5.2.3 Justification should be provided for where any project information outlined in 5.2.2 is not disclosed to the community.

NOTE 1 Examples might include the information being commercially sensitive or non-compliant with the General Data Protection Regulation [2].

NOTE 2 If communities disagree with the rationale provided by the supplier, they can raise a grievance with the supplier (see 4.7).

5.3 Initial information (project outset)

At the outset of a community engagement programme, suppliers should make available all the necessary information to provide the community with a detailed understanding of the project's potential impacts.

NOTE 1 PD ISO/TS 17033 provides further guidance on providing supporting information. The Climate Community & Biodiversity Alliance's Climate, Community and Biodiversity Standards [8] advises that the information regarding the project and/or activity includes:

- the nature, scale, pace, reversibility and scope of any proposed project or activity;
- the reason(s) for or purpose(s) of the project and/or activity;
- the project and/or activity's expected duration;
- the areas and communities likely to be affected;
- the project design options being considered and a preliminary assessment of potential economic, social, cultural and environmental impact of these, including potential risks and fair and equitable benefit sharing in line with the precautionary principle;
- individuals and organizations expected to be involved in the execution of the proposed project (including Indigenous Peoples, private sector staff, research institutions, government employees and others); and
- procedures that the project is expected to involve.

NOTE 2 It is advised that impacts posed by the project be communicated to the community, with a focus on who is likely to be affected, when, where and why, alongside the associated risk matrix of impact and likelihood.

NOTE 3 See Clause 6 for further guidance on community impact assessment.

5.4 Programme information

5.4.1 Suppliers, and other external partners, should communicate the purpose, scope and process of the community engagement programme, and the outcomes the engagement programme is intended to achieve.

5.4.2 Suppliers should outline the objectives of the community engagement programme, and verify that these are: specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound (SMART).

NOTE More information on SMART objectives is given in BS 8904.

5.4.3 Suppliers should make available to the community the schedule of planned community engagement that is to be delivered, information on who is to be engaged with, when and how this engagement is to happen, and a clear rationale for the preferred engagement approach.

5.4.4 Suppliers should make available to the community the programme of community engagement that has been delivered, while noting any divergence from the planned engagement (see 4.2) and providing a clear explanation for this divergence.

5.5 Communication channels

5.5.1 Suppliers should provide local communities with accessible channels to communicate with managers of the supply area, in accordance with BSI Flex 701 v2.0:2025-03, **5.6.2**.

5.5.2 Suppliers should communicate project information and updates to local communities in a timely, accessible and non-technical manner in order to facilitate understanding by all the community.

***NOTE 1** Mapping the community's characteristics helps to inform the supplier's community communication strategy. Baseline information about the community can help to inform the ways that different community groups prefer to communicate, including format (e.g. in-person, online, post, audio), language and channels. Mapping needs to be sensitive to the communication preferences of marginalized and/or vulnerable community groups. See 4.1 for further guidance on community mapping.*

***NOTE 2** As per the Scottish Land Commission's Practice Guide: Developing an Engagement Plan for Decisions Relating to Land [10], suppliers might need to arrange for expert stakeholders to explain complex issues to the community in an accessible manner.*

5.6 Recording, storing and sharing outputs

5.6.1 Suppliers should make transparent to those with whom they have engaged the engagement programme that was undertaken, and how the outcomes of the community engagement have influenced the project's design and implementation.

***NOTE 1** It is advisable that suppliers, prior to the commencement of engagement activities, agree with the community as to how notes, actions and decisions are to be recorded and shared, and with whom.*

***NOTE 2** The Scottish Land Commission's Protocol on Community Engagement in Decisions Relating to Land [11], 4.3.9, Note, advises that this information is shared within six weeks of the meeting date or the end of the consultation period, unless otherwise agreed.*

***NOTE 3** More information on transparency is given in BS 8904.*

5.6.2 Suppliers should make available to the community any project monitoring and evaluation reports (see Clause 7).

6 Impacts

COMMENTARY ON CLAUSE 6

Suppliers assess the potential impacts of a project (both positive and negative) on the community, and stipulate their distribution, likelihood, severity, timing and longevity. Community impact mitigation and benefit creation arrangements are subsequently tailored to (and co-produced with) communities and made transparent.

6.1 Assessment scope

6.1.1 Suppliers should undertake an evidence-based impact assessment of a project on the community across a broad range of dimensions in accordance with BSI Flex 701 v2.0:2025-03, **3.1.6**, that assesses:

- a) positive and negative impacts;
- b) primary impacts (e.g. directly related to the natural capital project's impacts) and secondary impacts (e.g. additional interventions outside the scope of the natural capital interventions, such as community benefit funds or provision of in-kind benefits);
- c) types of impacts: environmental, social, economic, cultural heritage, etc.;
- d) magnitude of impacts: the size and severity of the impacts (i.e. minor to major);
- e) likelihood of impacts;
- f) demographic (i.e. who) and spatial (i.e. where) distribution of impacts: private (i.e. impacts felt by a narrow section of the community) and common (i.e. impacts felt by the community as a whole);
- g) longevity and permanence of impacts: short term and long term;
- h) frequency of impacts: regular or irregular;
- i) timing of impacts (i.e. when): near-term and far-term;
- j) accumulation of impacts: how (potentially small) impacts accrue over time; and
- k) the causal explanation for these impacts (i.e. why).

NOTE 1 More advice on impacts is given in BS 8904 and the Scottish Government's Protocol on Community Engagement in Decisions Relating to Land [11]. BS EN ISO 37101:2022+A1 also provides further guidance.

NOTE 2 Any impact assessment may make use of any extant baselining and impact assessment that have been generated through the project's statutory consenting/permitting, to avoid unnecessary duplication of effort.

NOTE 3 The impact assessment of the proposed project may use evidence to causally connect the natural capital project's interventions with the natural capital stocks and ecosystem services they impact.

NOTE 4 As explained by Pound et al. [21] impact assessments are to recognize the intrinsic value of landscape and nature rather than limiting them to ecosystem services or human use.

6.1.2 The assessment of the project's potential impacts on the community should be evidence based, benchmarked against baselines and integrated with the community mapping (4.1), to demonstrate which members of the community are likely to be impacted and how.

NOTE The Scottish Government's Methods Toolkit for Participatory Engagement and Social Research [22], 4.4.3 notes how the baseline analysis provides an essential point of reference against which project impacts can be assessed.

6.1.3 The community impact assessment should be sensitive to "impact leakage", meaning that any project-linked benefits accrued to one community, do not negatively impact other communities.

6.1.4 Understanding the impacts on local communities should be, at least in part, informed by engagement with local communities, in order to capture the subjectivity of value judgements about different impacts (e.g. benefits, scale, severity).

NOTE See CCBA's Climate, Community and Biodiversity Standards [8].

6.2 Benefit principles

6.2.1 Community benefit sharing plans should be sensitive to a community's unique circumstances, history, needs and priorities (see 4.1) and be the product of participatory engagement with the community.

6.2.2 Community benefit sharing plans should make reference to the community's priorities, as identified through existing local plans (e.g. community action plans, local place plans), where these already exist.

6.2.3 Suppliers' decisions about the prioritization of specific benefits, and choices about how best to deliver these, should be based on the evidence gathered via community engagement (see 4.2 and 4.3).

6.2.4 Targeted community benefits should be demonstrable, additional to, and benchmarked against a counterfactual baseline scenario (i.e. a future where the project is not implemented).

NOTE The Scottish Land Commission's Delivering Community Benefits from Land [23] notes that suppliers need to take into account the community benefits already provided from the land and how the proposed project might erode and/or enhance these. The Climate Community & Biodiversity Alliance's Climate, Community and Biodiversity Standards [8] offers a counterfactual baseline scenario against which alternative "with-project" scenarios can be compared, to provide evidence that benefits are additional and would have only been realized if the project was implemented.

6.3 Community impact mitigation

6.3.1 Suppliers should outline what measures have been taken to mitigate potential negative community impacts, considered significant by the community, so that they are proportionate to the scale and impact of the project.

NOTE In alignment with the Scottish Land Commission's Delivering Community Benefits From Land [23], it might be appropriate for any community benefit sharing arrangement to also be proportional to the full financial value anticipated, or realized, by the project. This means, for example, taking account not just of operational profits but also any uplift in the value of underlying assets, such as an increase in the value of land.

6.3.2 Measures to mitigate the potential for negative community impacts should include plans to avoid undermining the existing social and economic benefits the community receives via natural capital stocks.

NOTE ICVCM's Core Carbon Principles. Assessment Framework [24], assessment criteria 7.4, states that any mitigation activity avoids, or where this is not feasible, minimizes forced physical and/or economic displacement.

6.3.3 Suppliers should explicitly outline how negative impacts, considered to be significant by marginalized and/or vulnerable groups, have been mitigated and positive impacts (i.e. benefits) have been enhanced.

6.3.4 The risks associated with the realization, timing and distribution of community benefits should be made explicit.

6.3.5 Where desired by the community, any supplier and community benefit sharing arrangements should be codified in a community benefit agreement (CBA), which is to also include a mechanism for review, to assess whether it is still fit for purpose, meets the priorities/needs of the community, etc.

NOTE CBAs are commonly used in the renewable energy industry. Burness Paull's Guidance Note and Template – Community Benefit Memorandum of Understanding [25], recommends that the community and developer sign an MoU as a “statement of intent” before entering into a legally binding CBA. A CBA template is available from Local Energy Scotland [26] and good practice guidance on developing a written CBA is available from the Scottish Land Commission's Community benefits from natural capital investment – Route Map [27].

6.3.6 Suppliers should state if, and how, they have made provision to share benefits from the sale of credits with local communities, making transparent:

- a) the spatial location of the local communities that benefits are shared with, and the process and timescales for sharing the benefits;
- b) how these timescales for sharing the benefits relates to the timing of the management actions to supply credits, and sale of credits from the supply area;
- c) if the local community has been involved in designing the provisions;
- d) the governance arrangements for community benefit sharing; and
- e) how these benefit sharing arrangements are proportionate to the scale and impact of the project.

6.3.7 As there is a range of different governance options involved in the design, implementation, delivery and review of project-related community benefit sharing, suppliers should make explicit which organizations hold project management decision-making powers and the governance processes to which these adhere.

NOTE 1 It is important that the community decides how much control they wish to hold over how and where financial/in-kind community benefits are distributed amongst the community. The community might choose to make such decisions entirely independently or outsource such decisions to a suitably competent person – see BSI Flex 702 v2.0:2026-03, 3.7.

NOTE 2 Some contributions from the project owner into a community benefit fund might come with some general conditions over how, where and when such funds can be spent by the community. For example:

- a) activities that cannot be funded (e.g. political activism);
- b) the geographic area within which these funds can be spent (e.g. a 10 km radius from project boundary); and
- c) the time period in which these funds can be invested (e.g. calendar year).

7 Monitoring and evaluation

COMMENTARY ON CLAUSE 7

The efficacy of the community engagement programme, and the project's impacts on the community (both positive and negative) are regularly evaluated to inform ongoing changes to project design.

7.1 Scope

7.1.1 The community monitoring and evaluation programme should be proportionate to the scale and impact of the project.

7.1.2 The supplier should formulate a plan that outlines the process and responsibilities for the monitoring, evaluation and review of the project's community engagement programme and community impacts.

NOTE Guidance on formulating a plan for monitoring, evaluation and review is given in BS 8904.

7.1.3 The monitoring and evaluation of community impacts should map onto the dimensions outlined in 6.1.1.

NOTE 1 Suppliers are advised to review the efficacy of community benefit sharing approaches annually, with the option to revisit their design at appropriate junctures where there is strong community support and/or evidence to do so. Depending on the depth and breadth of the proposed changes, this might involve revisiting the terms of the underpinning CBA.

NOTE 2 Undertaking a longitudinal assessment of project impacts and community benefits can help to evidence how these impacts have evolved during the lifetime of the project and identify any trends that might need to be encouraged or mitigated in order to enhance community benefit.

7.1.4 Monitoring and evaluation should assess the effectiveness of any measures taken to maintain or enhance existing benefits, to deliver new benefits and to mitigate any potential disbenefits associated with the project.

7.2 Indicators, evidence and methods

7.2.1 Suppliers should discuss with the communities affected by the project which indicators are most appropriate to measure the project's community impacts and the effectiveness of the project's community engagement, benefit creation and benefit sharing programme.

7.2.2 These indicators should also include the types of evidence necessary to populate these indicators, as well as the baselines against which these indicators are benchmarked.

NOTE 1 A set of appropriate metrics is included in *Deciding Matters' Best Practice Guide: Community inclusion for community benefit [9]* and the *Scottish Land Commission's Community benefits from natural capital investment – Route Map [27]*.

NOTE 2 Transparent methodologies for monitoring are provided in *BS EN ISO 37101:2022+A1:2024, the Climate Community & Biodiversity Alliance's Climate, Community and Biodiversity Standards [8]* and *Gold Standard's Core document: Safeguarding Principles and Requirements [7]*.

7.3 Adaptive management

Where the project is not delivering pre-agreed community benefits (either as direct impacts from the project and/or additional community benefit sharing arrangements) the project developer should take steps to diagnose the factors responsible for this and co-produce a remedial action plan with the community to address these issues.

NOTE It is possible that the project might not be yielding community benefits due to earlier deficiencies in the community engagement methods employed. Consequently, a useful review of effectiveness extends beyond the community benefit sharing arrangements in place and into the community engagement approach. For example, these might include the number of community stakeholders involved in the engagement, their distribution across different community groups, and the time period across which engagement took place.

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