## Nature Networks- Rules of Thumb

([Natural England, 2020](https://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/publication/5144804831002624))

Please note that the figures quoted are guidelines only, based on currently available evidence and should be used with due regard to local circumstances. In this table, ‘Site’ does not necessarily mean a designated site, but an area of contiguous wildlife habitat.

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| **Better site****quality** | **Bigger****sites** | **More****sites** | **Stepping stones &****permeable matrix** | **Corridors** |
| * Encourage natural processes
* Encourage habitat mosaics
* Create more niches for more species – use ‘ecosystem engineers’ and welcome ecological disturbance.
* Increase messiness (variation of physical structure within sites).
* Restore missing biodiversity by increasing niches or by reintroduction
* Maintain rare species
* Encourage climate colonists
* Reduce edge effects by buffering sites and encouraging graded ecotones to ‘soften the edge’
* Buffer sites with at least a 50-100 m buffer strip, possibly up to 500 m wide
* Maintain ecological continuity of

management to protect soils. | * Big enough to encourage natural processes – include sufficient area to ensure functioning ecosystems
* Provide space for ecosystem dynamism, supporting mosaics and to encourage succession
* Reduce edge effects by decreasing the edge:area ratio
* Join habitat fragments; choose the ones that will create the biggest site
* Restore degraded habitat surrounding the site.
* Enlarge sites to

>40 ha (or >100 ha for wide- ranging species) | * Add larger sites in preference to many smaller sites
* Target areas of unprotected irreplaceable habitat or with a long ecological continuity of un- intensive land management
* Target areas with complex or additional topography & geomorphology and with a potential to be climate change refugia
* Target areas of important habitat potential in the surrounding area.
* Target degraded areas with potential for high ecosystem service delivery.
* Ensure connectivity is good for new sites.
 | * For poorly dispersing species, sites should be < 1 km from each other and < 200 m apart for highly specialised species within a habitat
* Expand sites towards existing habitat to reduce space between patches.
* Increase the cover of semi-natural habitat in landscape to at least 20%
* Reduce the intensity and increase the diversity of land use in the surrounding countryside
* Stepping stones should provide appropriate resources to avoid becoming ecological traps
 | * Natural corridors are better than human designed corridors
* Use linear landscape features
* Ensure corridor habitat matches that in core sites
* Minimum width of corridors = 100 m,

preferably wider |