Landscapes, seas and nature good practice guidance

29/01/2024

See all updates

Natural heritage is some of our oldest heritage, from 150million-year-old fossils to native plants and insects that existed long before human life. But the UK is one of the most nature depleted places on Earth with around one in six species threatened with extinction.

By reading this guidance you'll get information to help you design and deliver projects that can put urban and rural landscapes and habitats into recovery, so they support abundant natural heritage and healthy natural systems.

Supporting nature and conservation recovery

A healthy and thriving natural environment is central to our future prosperity. It provides essential services like purifying drinking water and pollinating food crops. It also nurtures our souls by providing places to relax, unwind and recreate.

Supporting landscape, sea and nature projects is a key priority of our Heritage 2033 strategy. We want to support conservation of the vital habitats and species that remain, help habitats recover and expand, and ensure that urban and rural landscapes – as well as their natural heritage – can be enjoyed by everyone.

We will also support projects focused on built and cultural heritage to play a key role in supporting nature's recovery.

All projects should consider how they can both **reduce the loss of natural heritage and contribute to a net gain in habitats and species**. For example:

- a museum development project might create new habitats on roofs or in parking areas to offset any potential habitat loss and increase the project's contribution to the natural environment
- a heritage railway project might create strategic wildlife corridor and new line-side habitats linked to adjoining landscape features like hedgerows or ponds to support local natural heritage

Expert advice

Applicants without experience in delivering built or cultural heritage focused projects should seek advice from local experts such as the 46 Wildlife Trusts, environmental charities like the RSPB or expert consultants represented by bodies like the Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management or the Landscape Institute.

Data recording and future access

To manage habitats and species in future there must be accurate baseline data on the abundance, health and distribution of species and habitats. Existing data is held by many organisations such as specialist species or habitat groups, local authorities, local record centres and national bodies such as the statutory agencies and the National

Biodiversity Network (NBN).

We requires projects that involve collecting and recording habitat and species data to:

- make data accessible to more people
- provide a wider range of people with volunteering and learning opportunities in identifying, surveying and recording species and habitats
- supply all habitat and species data, free of charge, to local environmental record centres and to the NBN (they provide information on how to do this on the NBN website)

Many natural heritage projects will produce digital material or 'outputs', such as digital photographs, datasets, web and app content. We have specific requirements for digital outputs, which are set out in our terms of grant and explained in our digital good practice guidance. The digital resources we fund must be **available, accessible** and **open**, to make sure the heritage materials we fund today can be found and used now and in the future.

To supply data on habitats and species to the NBN, observations must comply with the standards for data quality and accessibility as set out by the NBN Trust on NBN Atlas. This data must be made available to the public at capture resolution, subject to sensitive species restrictions.

There are several ways to supply your data:

- directly to the NBN Atlas
- using the online recording tool iRecord
- share it with your local or regional environmental record centre for onward transmission to the NBN Atlas

If you are unsure how best to supply data, please contact the NBN Trust via email at support@nbnatlas.org.

The reasonable costs associated with processing and submitting project data to local or regional Environmental Record Centres and to the NBN can be included as an eligible cost within your grant application.

Biodiversity net gain

In January 2024 the government in England introduced new legislation to deliver biodiversity net gain (BNG) across certain types of development that require planning consent. BNG requires that the existing biodiversity baseline of a development site is measured and protected, and that any unavoidable loss is compensated for by new habitats that will deliver a 10% net gain in site biodiversity.

BNG is a condition and policy requirement of planning consent. **Any applicants with projects falling under BNG requirements will need to factor in mandatory BNG as part of their development round application**. If a site cannot accommodate sufficient BNG then provision may also need to be made offsite. **This applies to projects in England only**. See the Defra website for more information on biodiversity net gain.

Species re-introduction projects

Some UK native species are now so threatened and their future so fragile that they require specific interventions. Conservation translocations are the deliberate movement and release of plants, animals or fungi into the wild for conservation purposes. This includes reintroductions that translocate an organism inside its natural range to areas from

which it has been lost. Reintroduction aims to re-establish a viable population of a species, but it is strictly governed by codes and guidance published by governments and statutory agencies across the UK's four nations.

We can support species reintroductions where there is strong evidence they provide the best way of delivering nature's recovery, where they are shown to comply with current government guidance and legislation, and where they offer a sustainable solution.

Individual guidance on reintroduction and wildlife licences has been published across the four nations:

- England: Reintroductions and other conservation translocations: code and guidance for England
- Scotland: Reintroducing native species, NatureScot
- Wales: Natural Resources Wales, Species licensing
- Northern Ireland: Wildlife licensing, Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs

Some species have an economic value in their own right, particularly fish such as salmon, birds such as grey partridge and crustaceans such as lobster. Applications involving game species or those with a commercial value will need to demonstrate that the public benefit of their successful reintroduction will far outweigh any private or commercial gain to the landowner or grantee.

Acquiring land

We can fund projects that involve the purchase of land that is important for its landscape aesthetic value, for physical public access, for nature and geodiversity. You will need to consider and justify why outright purchase of the land is seen as essential to its long-term conservation rather than other approaches such as management agreements or covenants. We may ask you to explain what other options besides outright ownership have been considered and why purchase offers the best solution.

Providing access to landscapes and nature

We are committed to ensuring that the projects we support create better public access whenever possible and practical. Projects we fund might include works to enhance the extent and accessibility-for-all of National Trails, footpaths, cycle path networks or provide new access to areas previously closed off.

In England and Wales, the Countryside and Rights of Way Act (CRoW) 2000 provides public access to areas known as "access land". The Act also allows for the voluntary dedication for land to be held for public benefit in perpetuity (or where relevant for the duration of a long lease). This means that even if land is not mapped as 'open country' or registered common land, landowners and long leaseholders can dedicate this land for free public access. Voluntarily dedicating land for public access is particularly relevant to potential land acquisitions supported with our funding and will be regarded positively.

While we expect projects we fund to improve public access, we understand that some fragile habitats can be damaged or species disturbed by physical access and noise. If this is the case, you may wish to consider providing different levels or zones of access to different parts of a project area. Some areas might be fully accessible all year round, while others may be closed during breeding or nesting seasons.

If you feel full physical access may not be appropriate, you may wish to consider using other forms of access to allow people to see and appreciate the heritage through, for example, the use of hides, remote cameras or other digital technologies.

Working on private land

Many priority habitats and species are found on land that is owned by private individuals or for-profit organisations. If the UK is to meet current targets around nature recovery, habitats need to be improved whether they are privately or publicly owned.

We accept applications for landscape and nature projects that are on both public and/or privately owned land, provided public benefit outweighs any private gain for the individual landowner(s) where they are private individuals or for-profit organisations. Private owners may apply for grants up to £250,000, whereas not-for-profit bodies can apply for larger grants.

To include private land in your application your project should aim to meet all these criteria:

- have a core of good-quality priority habitat or support a significant population of priority species
- enhance, expand and/or join-up the extent and quality of habitat that will help to meet UK Biodiversity Action Plan habitat and species targets
- contribute to long-term sustainable management of the area
- demonstrate a strategic approach to the conservation of a priority habitat or species

Even when working on private land we will expect some degree of public access to be provided. However, we also accept the principle of zoned levels of physical access within your project area and that physical access may not always be appropriate or desirable for habitat conservation reasons.

Landscape-scale projects and those delivering at multiple sites

We know that working at a landscape-scale delivers results in making habitats more resilient and allowing populations of species to expand and move if conditions change.

If you are planning a project that will deliver work and/or activities across an area of countryside or areas of land that are not adjoined, you should submit an area action plan as part of your delivery round application instead of separate conservation, activity and maintenance/management plans. See our area action plan good practice guidance.

It’s important that you have a good understanding of the landscape character of the area where you intend to work to ensure your project is appropriate to the local area. While landscape character will change over time, many landscape features, such as ancient woodlands, ridge and furrow plough markings or trackways, have prevailed for centuries.

You can find information on assessing landscape character in our area action plan good practice guidance. Mapping landscape and seascape character is now a well understood process and expert help is readily available either from statutory bodies such as Natural England or Historic England, or from expert consultants.

In considering landscape character it’s also important to think about not just habitats and geology, but also built and cultural heritage. When proposing conservation works over an area of landscape it is useful to consider the range of

features that make that landscape special. These might include field patterns, banks, hedges, ditches, woodland, as well as walls, buildings, topography, land use, archaeology and designed landscapes such as gardens and settlements.

If you are planning to make changes to the landscape character of an area, you might want to show us how the changes will be beneficial and that you will not lose or detrimentally change other equally valuable heritage features or assets. When considering landscape character, you should also consider intangible cultural heritage, for example, local dialects, traditions, language, music and crafts. See our intangible cultural heritage good practice guidance.

Using Agri-Environment Schemes as partnership funding

Agri-Environment Schemes encourage land managers such as farmers to protect and enhance the nature, natural environment and landscape character of their land by paying them for the provision of environmental services. Through an?agri-environment contract or "agreement" land managers commit themselves to undertaking agricultural activities or levels of production intensity that deliver positive environmental outcomes, while not being necessarily the first choice from the point of view of profitability.?The schemes are voluntary and combine a financial incentive with advocacy and advice.

Each country of the UK has its own?agri-environment scheme.?The principle remains the same but the detail differs with?agri-environment schemes now being part of the agricultural financial support system?being introduced over time to replace the system of direct payments established under the EU common agricultural policy (CAP), including the Basic Payment Scheme (BPS).

Agri-Environment Schemes can be included as partnership funding for a Heritage Fund application. Where an agri-environment scheme agreement will help achieve the approved purposes of a project funded by us it can, together with the landowner’s/farmer’s contribution, be included as partnership funding towards the overall cost of that project. The agri-environment scheme payments would need to be for separate but complimentary works contributing to achieving the approved purposes of the Heritage Fund grant.

Our funding will cover a percentage of the overall project costs with the balance provided through partnership or match funding. This brings a range of other funds together from diverse sources and can include agri-environment payments.? Taken together the Heritage Fund and partnership funding will cover 100% of the overall cost of a project and can include project staffing costs, the preparation of whole farm plans, on-site interpretation, farm visits by local schools etc.

Our funding will be complimentary with?agri-environment agreements where the agri-environment payments are for separate works that are not subject to prior conditions.?To qualify as partnership funding for your project the start date of any agri-environment scheme agreement must not be earlier than one year before the development round or delivery round grant approval date.

You can find more information about what level of partnership funding we expect under the Your contribution to project costs section of our standard guidance. If you are unsure on utilising agri-environment payments as partnership funding please contact your local office.

Green Flag Awards

If your project is focused on a public park or garden and received a grant of over £250,000, our terms of grant will require you to apply for and achieve a Green Flag Award for the site once the project has reached practical completion

of the capital works.

You will then need to retain a Green Flag Award at a high pass level for seven consecutive years following practical completion. This is to ensure our investment is protected and the quality standards expected as part of Green Flag Award application are maintained.

The total cost of applying for and retaining a Green Flag Award for seven years can be included in your application. You may be asked to provide evidence of Green Flag Award achievement during the duration of your grant contract.