Environmental sustainability good practice guidance

29/01/2024

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The Heritage Fund is committed to supporting nature recovery and environmental sustainability across all our activity. We expect the projects we fund to help protect the environment.

By reading this guidance, you'll learn more about how to plan a heritage project with environmental sustainability in mind, as well as nation-specific guidance and tools that can help you meet our expectations.

The Heritage Fund’s role

The climate crisis is here. Global temperatures are rising as a result of greenhouse gas emissions caused by human activity. Science tells us we have just a few decades to prevent an unpredictable and potentially dangerous future.

Our natural world has never been under such intense pressure. In the UK our animal and plant species have declined on average by around 19% since monitoring began in 1970 and we are now one of the most nature depleted countries in the world. Around one in six species are at risk of being lost from the UK. Loss of our natural heritage and climate change are intrinsically linked. We need nature to help reduce and slow climate change and we need to halt climate change to save nature.

If we want future generations to be able to enjoy and benefit from our natural and cultural heritage, we must make responsible environmental choices now about how we live, work and care for it. We need to be part of raising the UK's climate ambitions for 2035 and changing the UK for the better.

As a major investor in conservation, the Heritage Fund has a significant role to play through the projects we fund. Protecting the environment is one of the four investment principles that will guide all our grant decision making under Heritage 2033.

What we expect from the projects we fund

Depending on what is most appropriate for each project, we ask the projects we fund to help protect the environment:

- by supporting nature’s conservation and recovery
- by reducing negative environmental impact
- by supporting heritage to adapt to the climate crisis

Each of these is explained in detail later in this guidance.

Where to start

Follow these four steps when putting together your application.

Step 1: Read the guidance below and do your own research before you start planning

- Think locally, nationally and globally.
- Ask what could your project achieve for the environment?
- Ask what are the possible negative environmental impacts it might have?
- Think short and long term: consider the whole lifecycle of any materials, products or services used or created. For example, the journey from raw materials to when things become waste and beyond.

Step 2: Identify what you want to achieve with your project and how you're going to measure it

- Think about the improvements you want to make and how you will monitor your progress. What are you going to measure and when, and what will success look like? For example, you might aim to add passive cooling to your building and success will be being able to stay open on days when the outdoor temperature is above 30 degrees Celsius.
- Don't forget to think about the resources that might be needed to sustain the project in future – this is called 'full life costing'.

Step 3: Rethink your project if necessary

- Monitor progress and constantly review your project to make sure you deliver what you set out to achieve for the environment and mitigate any negative impacts.
- As your project progresses you may need to adjust designs, content or delivery plans. Please tell us if these changes might reduce the environmental benefits or increase negative environmental impacts.

Step 4: If you haven't already, join Fit for the Future

Fit for the Future is a UK-wide environmental sustainability network. It brings together organisations from the not-for-profit, heritage, public, cultural and commercial sectors to share ideas and knowledge.

The Heritage Fund works with Fit for the Future to help our applicants embed environmental sustainability and protection within their projects.

We recommend all applicants join the network. This will help ensure your project achieves the very best standards of environmental sustainability and protection and will strengthen your application.

You can join six months in advance of submitting your application and include the membership fee as an eligible project cost in your application. Don't forget to calculate how many years' membership you will need: this fee will then be included in any grant.

We cannot cover fees if your application is unsuccessful, if your organisation is already a member of Fit for the Future, or if you joined in advance of the six months before submitting your application.

For further information, email: info@fftf.org.uk.

Supporting nature's conservation and recovery

Applicants should demonstrate how their projects will be beneficial to the natural environment in supporting habitats and species, and how they will mitigate against any damage or loss caused through delivery of their project. You can do this by:

Protecting and enhancing existing habitats and creating new habitats

We support the principles established in Making Space for Nature: A review of England's Wildlife Sites and Ecological Network which recommended creating more, bigger, better and joined-up spaces for nature right across the UK:

- More – a need to increase the proportion of land for nature by creating new habitats.
- Bigger – the larger the habitats the more resilient they will be in future.
- Better – existing sites enhanced to encourage greater diversity and abundance of species.
- Joined-up – existing habitats better connected to allow species to move as conditions change and creating nature recovery networks.

Minimising the loss of nature

Any development – whether expanding a museum, restoring an historic building or improving public access – could result in a loss of habitats and species. Our aim is to achieve net gain for nature and to minimise any loss caused by the projects we fund. If loss is unavoidable then it should be compensated by creating new and/or improving existing habitats on or near the site. We will be unlikely to support projects that involve the loss of priority or protected habitats and species, and will not support projects that include the use of peat, artificial grass or artificial plants.

Considering carbon sequestration

The natural environment has a vital role to play in tackling the climate crisis because healthy ecosystems take-up and store a significant amount of carbon in soils, sediments and vegetation. Planting trees and restoring carbon-rich habitats such as peatbogs, wetlands, marine seagrass, meadows and sand dunes all act to sequester carbon. We will support projects that deliver positive impacts for the environment.

Reducing pollution

We ask projects to demonstrate clear protocols that show how the project will avoid or reduce any negative environmental impacts both during and after development, eg: air, noise, soil and water pollution.

Digital resources and materials

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 in the future.

Recording data on habitats and/or species

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).

The Heritage Fund requires projects that involve collecting and recording habitat and species data to:

- make data accessible to more people
- provide a more diverse 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

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 the NBN Atlas. This data must be made available to the public at capture resolution, subject to sensitive species restrictions.

See the NBN guidance on submitting data for Heritage Fund projects. If you are unsure how best to supply data, email the NBN Trust: support@nbnatlas.org.

Reducing negative environmental impact

Projects should consider their carbon footprint, waste and pollution and identify ways to reduce them. Areas to focus on include:

Construction

Projects often include retrofits, conservation works or temporary structures for exhibitions or events. Your project can reduce its negative environmental impact through:

- minimising project materials
- considering the whole life carbon emissions caused by the project
- ensuring the construction is as energy efficient as possible
- using recognised sustainable building accreditations and methodologies

Our Heritage 2033 strategy states that “if projects involve construction, we will encourage restoration, conservation and reuse, rather than new build”. This means we will focus our support on projects that reuse, restore and conserve existing buildings.

However, we recognise that many projects will require a degree of new build (such as an extension or auxiliary building) to make heritage sites viable, accessible and effective at saving heritage. We do not specify a maximum proportion of a site that can be new build, but any aspects of your plans that include new build should have a clear rationale showing why they are necessary to deliver a project that is inclusive, accessible, financially viable and effective at preserving heritage. All new-build aspects of a project should be delivered to the highest environmental standards.

Site operation

The energy and water required to keep a site running and continue delivering outcomes once a project is complete means that our funding can have a long-term environmental impact.

Applicants should demonstrate how they plan to keep their carbon footprint low once any capital works are finished and the site is in full operation or to counteract higher utilities usage resulting from increased visitor numbers. You can do this by:

- reducing ongoing energy usage through effective energy management
- using renewable energy sources
- saving water

Waste

There are many opportunities to actively minimise the amount of waste generated by your project, from the design stage through to post-completion site operation. This can be achieved by:

- considering how to reduce, reuse and recycle construction materials
- having an ongoing waste management plan in place for the site

Procurement

The way in which the goods and services required to carry out a project are selected and transported can have a significant effect on its overall carbon footprint and the potential to support the local economy.

We ask projects to ensure they take an environmentally sustainable approach to choosing their suppliers, for example, by:

- prioritising local suppliers
- maintaining oversight of your supply chain

Transport

Transport can impact on the environment in many different ways – from the air pollution and risk to health caused by tailpipe emissions, to the destruction of natural habitats to create transport networks.

Your project should consider how to reduce the environmental impact of visitors, staff and volunteers travelling to the project site, for example, by:

- considering existing transport infrastructure and making improvements where possible
- encouraging the use of public transport

Supporting heritage to adapt to the climate crisis

Global heating, and the changes it already causes, directly impacts our heritage, our society and our natural environment. The historic built and natural environment is particularly vulnerable to extreme weather events and changing weather patterns as a result of our changing climate. Projects need to consider and assess climate projections and integrate resilience planning into project development.

To help heritage thrive in a sustainable future, projects should think about the adaptation needed for long-term resilience in the face of our changing climate.

Adaptation to heritage sites

Projects and sites might need to consider challenges from flooding, droughts, extreme high winds, coastal erosion and sea level rises, and changes in seasonal temperature such as managing severe overheating, and invasive non-native pests and diseases. Climate adaptation is about considering how to prevent damage to heritage sites and assets by taking account of future climate predictions.

Skills development and knowledge exchange

We want to empower project partners with knowledge of environmental and climate change factors, through training and upskilling participants and recognising its impact on wellbeing. Traditional skills and practices have a role to play in a sustainable future and we would like to support projects that explore knowledge transfer and use of traditional methods in a contemporary context.

Strengthening communities

Volunteering and community engagement can be a brilliant gateway to sustainable development, nature recovery and climate action. We would like to hear how projects strengthen their environmental outcomes through community engagement.

Contemporary collecting

Our projects often have a unique opportunity to engage communities with topics around environmental sustainability. In addition it’s also important we capture and record the changes created by the climate crisis for future generations.

Organisational leadership

Long term planning is required to enable heritage organisations to support and thrive in a sustainable future. Applicants should consider how they can successfully embed environmental sustainability into their organisation, for example, by:

- implementing a sustainability strategy
- monitoring and reporting on their carbon footprint
- embedding sustainability into their organisation's mission and values

Examples of good practice

Multiple benefits

We know that across the heritage sector environmental sustainability is always about proportionality, so depending on the size of your organisation and the grant you seek, success will look very different.

Best practice is an evolving process of learning, informed by the principles in this guidance. Your project should contribute positive change for your local area and communities and thus contribute to the wider planet.

There are shared themes across environmental sustainability as outlined above, ie: in your approaches to climate change, in your disposal of waste and your careful water use. As a constant, always working together with communities to build local knowledge and involvement underpins environmental sustainability.

- Brampton Museum, Newcastle Under Lyme's redevelopment project won the Ethical, Responsible & Sustainable Tourism Silver Award at the Enjoy Staffordshire awards 2022, demonstrating that good environmental practice is a good for business too.
- Burrell Collection, Glasgow's redevelopment project also improved access to nature, including the neighbouring Pollok Country Park. This intentional, joined-up planning means that local people have more reasons to visit both sites, stay longer and enjoy their local neighbourhood, alongside increased benefits for national and international tourists.

Creative approaches

Over the past 30 years of National Lottery funding, thousands of creative practitioners across theatre, music, visual arts, writing, performance poetry and more have shared skills and expertise with heritage organisations, supporting the heritage sector to become more sustainable and relevant. These creative methods and wider learning styles engage a wider range of audiences, recruit younger and more diverse staff and volunteers, and increase local and international engagement with environmental sustainability.

- Pontypridd Community Garden worked creatively with neighbours and local volunteers and students to open the garden to a wider and more inclusive range of visitors. Participation and volunteering opportunities – such as free wellbeing and yoga workshops, practical gardening and food growing skills – are embedded throughout the seasons.
- The Sainsbury Centre in Norwich's Sediment Spirit: Towards the Activation of Art in the Anthropocene exhibition brings together local and international artworks from the 1960s to the present day that respond to the climate crisis. It presents interactive artworks that invite audiences to "view the Earth as a living and responsive being that we play an active part in sustaining".

Nation-specific advice and tools

England

The Climate Change Act 2008 is the basis for the UK's approach to tackling and responding to climate change. In England, it commits the UK Government by law to reducing greenhouse gas emissions by at least 100% of 1990 levels (net zero) by **2050**.

For advice on how the Climate Change Act works, visit the Committee on Climate Change (CCC) website. The CCC ensures that emissions targets are evidence-based and independently assessed. A Green Future: Our 25 year plan to improve the environment sets out government action to help the natural world regain and retain good health.

Advice for built and cultural heritage

- Historic England advice on the impacts of climate change on built heritage
- Museums & Climate Change Network

- Arts Council report: How culture is combating climate change
- Julie's Bicycle is a London-based charity that supports the creative industry to act on climate change and environmental sustainability
- The Construction Leadership Council UK has set up the Green Construction Board to drive forward environmental sustainability in the UK construction industry

Advice for landscapes and nature

- Natural England and RSPB Climate Change Adaptation Manual
- The Wildlife Trust response to climate change
- Committee for Climate Change report on land-use policies required to achieve net zero in the UK
- Environment Agency guidance including flood risk assessment
- Government calls for 30% of world's oceans to be protected by 2030
- UK's 30by30 Initiative to save the world's ocean

Toolkits and advice

- Ashden and Friends of the Earth: Sustainable Towns and Cities
- Farmers and Growers carbon calculator
- Our racial equity in nature toolkit

Scotland

Scotland has declared a climate emergency and set world-leading targets to become a net-zero emission country by **2045.** The Climate Change (Emissions Reduction Targets) (Scotland) Act 2019 sets these targets, with interim targets for reductions of at least 56% by 2020, 75% by 2030 and 90% by 2040.

Climate change policy in Scotland responds to both UK and Scottish frameworks. Scotland's legislation requires a delivery plan for meeting targets to be published at least every five years.

The Scottish Climate Change Adaptation Programme (SCCAP) addresses the impacts identified for Scotland in the UK Climate Change Risk Assessment (CCRA). It published Climate Ready Scotland: Second Scottish Climate Change Adaptation Programme 2019–2024 in September 2019. A Climate Change Plan update was published in December 2020.

Scotland's fourth National Planning Framework (NPF4) was adopted by Scottish Ministers in February 2023. NPF4 sets out national planning and spatial policies and priorities. It includes six overarching spatial principles which will be used to plan future places: just transition, conserving and recycling assets, local living, compact urban growth, rebalanced development and rural revitalisation.

A consultation on Scotland's draft Biodiversity Strategy, and the first delivery plan, closed in December 2023. The draft strategy sets out the Scottish Government's vision to halt and reverse biodiversity loss. The consultation also covered the proposed Natural Environment Bill, which will "provide a framework for establishing statutory nature targets to drive delivery".

Advice for built and cultural heritage

- Historic Environment Scotland: Climate Action Plan 2020-2025
- Historic Environment Scotland: Climate Change Adaptation for Traditional Buildings
- Climate Change Risk Assessment
- A Guide to Climate Change Impacts
- Built Environment Forum Scotland case studies

Advice for museums and collections

- Museums Galleries Scotland guidance on environmental monitoring and air pollution

Advice for landscapes and nature

NatureScot's guidance on:

- communities and landscape
- environmental assessment
- Natural Capital Asset Index

Toolkits and advice

- Adaptation Scotland helps the public sector, businesses and communities to understand what climate change means across Scotland
- Sustainable Scotland Network for public sector professionals
- Business Energy Scotland
- National Performance Framework: Carbon Footprint indicator
- Green Tourism's guide to promoting sustainable business tourism
- Net Zero Nation's 'one stop shop' of information on tackling the climate emergency for individuals, communities and organisations

Wales

The Welsh Government has declared a climate emergency. In June 2019, the Minister for Environment, Energy and Rural Affairs set a target for Wales to achieve net zero emissions by **2050**. Wales also has interim targets for 2030 and 2040, and a series of five-year carbon budgets. They include Wales's share of emissions from international aviation and international shipping.

The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 aims to ensure that future generations have at least the same quality of life as we do now. It sets our seven wellbeing goals and details ways in which public bodies must work to improve the wellbeing of Wales. The Welsh Government has issued guidance for bodies on how they can be compliant.

The Environment (Wales) Act 2016 provides a legal framework to manage Wales's natural resources. In March 2019, the Welsh Government launched A Low Carbon Wales. The plan sets out the Welsh Government's approach to cut emissions and increase efficiency in a way that maximises wider benefits for Wales. In November 2019, the Welsh Government published: Prosperity for all: A climate-conscious Wales, setting out a five-year climate change adaption plan and infographic.

Advice for built and cultural heritage

- Historic Environment and Climate Change in Wales Sector Adaptation Plan
- A Strategic Approach for Assessing the Impacts of Climate Change on the Historic Environment 2012

Advice for landscapes and nature

- CADW Flooding and Historic Buildings in Wales
- Natural Resources Wales Guidance and Advice
- Tree species: how to improve the resilience of your woodland

Toolkits and advice

- Cynnal Cymru/Sustain Wales

Northern Ireland

The Climate Change Act (Northern Ireland) 2022 sets a target of an at least 100% reduction in net zero greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by 2050.

Find out more from the Northern Ireland Climate Change Adaptation Programme 2019–2024 and the Civil Society and Local Government Adapts supporting document.

There is more information in the UK Climate Change Risk Assessment 2017 for Northern Ireland and UK Climate Change projections.

Advice for built and cultural heritage

- NI Business Info resources on carbon emissions and climate change
- Explore the Department for Communities' Historic Environment website

Toolkits and advice

- Climate Northern Ireland climate change network and e-newsletter
- Northern Ireland Environment Link
- Committee on Climate Change advice on reducing emissions

Further sources of information

- How the Heritage Fund is tackling the climate crisis