Green Recovery Challenge Fund round 2

Closed programmes

A short-term competitive fund to kick-start environmental renewal while creating and retaining a range of jobs in England.

Important

The Green Recovery Challenge Fund round 2 is no longer accepting applications.

- Find out how to acknowledge your grant
- Explore our available funding

Overview

The second round of the Green Recovery Challenge Fund supports nature projects across England with funding worth up to £40m. Grants from the £40m first round of funding were awarded in December 2020.

The Green Recovery Challenge Fund is open for applications at two grant levels:

- £50,000 to £250,000. Deadline 12noon 14 April 2021
- £250,000 to £2m. Deadline for Expressions of Interest 12noon 22 March 2021

You must contribute at least 5% of your project costs in cash (partnership funding) for all grants over £250,000.

Projects must deliver against at least one of the fund's three themes:

1. Nature conservation and restoration, including ecosystem restoration and species recovery;
2. Nature-based solutions, particularly for climate change mitigation and adaptation; and
3. Connecting people with nature.

The fund has been developed by Defra and its Arm's-Length Bodies, including Natural England, the Forestry Commission, and the Environment Agency. The National Lottery Heritage Fund is distributing and monitoring this government money.

You must read this guidance before submitting an application.

When you are ready, apply on our application portal

Make sure your project title begins with 'GRCF2021'.

Expand All accordions

Key changes to the fund in round 2

Some important changes have been made to the fund since the first round of grants. These include:

- a requirement for organisations applying for grants over £250,000 to contribute a minimum of 5% partnership funding in cash (see ‘What costs can you apply for?’)
- a reduction in the maximum grant request to £2m
- a limit to the number of applications organisations can submit as the lead applicant: eligible organisations can only submit one application for a grant of £50,000-£250,000 and one application for a grant over £250,000 (see ‘Who can apply?’)

We have also provided additional information on our funding priorities in the section ‘What you can apply for’.

Expand All accordions

Who can apply?

Under this programme, we welcome applications from:

- environmental charities
- partnerships involving at least one environmental charity

For round 2, **eligible organisations can submit a maximum of one application for a grant of £50,000-£250,000, and one application for a grant over £250,000, where they are the lead applicant.**

Eligible organisations can be partners in multiple projects provided they can demonstrate that they have the capacity and capability to deliver within the time available.

We encourage organisations to apply as partnerships where this is likely to lead to more joined-up projects.

Environmental charities

Your organisation will be a not-for-profit organisation such as a charitable incorporated organisation or company limited by guarantee. The organisation must be registered with the Charity Commission. The organisation’s principal aims (or charitable objectives) will be concerned with the protection and/or improvement of the natural environment.

We will ask to see your constitution or governing document as part of your application (see ‘Supporting documents’).

Partnerships

In addition to at least one environmental charity, partnerships can include:

- other not-for-profit organisations, including non-environmental charities
- AONBs, National Park Authorities, local authorities and universities. However, these bodies can only use the grant funding to cover certain costs.
- 'For-profit organisations' (for example utility companies). However, these bodies cannot be the lead applicant or receive any of the grant funding.

Partnerships **cannot** include the following government bodies (although these bodies may contribute funding, land and/or advice/guidance):

- non-ministerial departments
- executive agencies
- executive or advisory non-departmental public bodies

If you are making a joint application, you will need to decide which organisation will be the lead applicant. The lead applicant will fill in the application form and, if you are successful, receive the grant and report on progress.

We will need to see a draft of your partnership agreement as part of your application (see 'Supporting documents').

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What can you apply for?

Applicants can apply for projects which are ready to deliver – this means that it is fully planned and costed and can start immediately once the funding has been awarded. You must be able to spend the grant fully by the end of March 2023. All project activity must take place in England.

Below is guidance on Defra's priorities for each of the three core themes of the fund:

- nature conservation and restoration
- nature-based solutions
- connecting people with nature

Further guidance on setting out what your project will seek to deliver against the themes is provided in the 'Additional Information' section.

Nature conservation and restoration

This theme aims to contribute to the government's 25-year environment plan goal of thriving plants and wildlife.

We particularly welcome project proposals that contribute to the development of the Nature Recovery Network (NRN), in one or more of the following ways:

- creation or restoration of priority habitat (as defined under Section 41 of the NERC Act), particularly natural and semi-natural grassland, heathland, wetlands and coastal habitats

- improvement in the condition of SSSIs and other protected sites
- creation or restoration of blue and green spaces that connect wildlife-rich habitat by acting as wildlife corridors, particularly in urban and peri-urban areas
- nature recovery at a landscape-scale
- nature recovery within protected landscapes
- recovery of threatened native species, including helping to reverse species decline
- increasing the diversity and populations of insect pollinator species

We also welcome projects that contribute to improving the health and resilience of the marine environment.

Applications should demonstrate how one or more of the Lawton principles listed below will apply to the project:

- bigger (e.g. expansion or buffering of nature reserves)
- better (e.g. improvement in condition of a SSSI)
- more (e.g. higher species populations or greater species diversity), and
- more joined up (e.g. creation of wildlife corridors connecting sites)

Nature-based solutions, particularly for climate change mitigation and adaptation

This theme aims to contribute to the Government's 25 Year Environment Plan goal of mitigating and adapting to climate change.

We particularly welcome projects that contribute to the government's net zero target and/or National Adaptation Plan, such as:

- woodland restoration and management
- tree planting*
- creation or restoration of wetlands (other than peatlands**)
- creation and restoration of permanent grassland (that is either wildlife-rich or buffers and connects wildlife-rich habitats)
- other forms of natural flood management
- river or waterways bank protection and improvements
- blue carbon habitat restoration projects
- natural regeneration (e.g. scrub) and land/soil stabilisation (e.g. hedgerow creation)
- wildfire prevention

* Given the level of competition for this fund, we encourage you to consider whether capital costs for tree planting could be covered by other Defra grants, such as woodland creation grants, which will launch this spring.

** We are unlikely to fund projects that focus mainly on capital costs for peatland restoration as these can be funded by Defra's Nature for Climate Peat Fund, which is due to launch in the spring.

For further information about other grant schemes that you may wish to consider, please see the additional information section.

Connecting people with nature

This theme aims to contribute to the government's 25-year environment plan goal of enhancing beauty, heritage and engagement with the natural environment.

We particularly welcome projects that include one or more of the following:

- improving access to nature for under-represented groups, such as Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities, people from economically disadvantaged places, disabled people, children and young people, and older people
- bolstering physical and mental health and wellbeing
- connecting people from urban areas with nature and green or blue spaces
- creation and improvement of nature-rich, active travel corridors, trails, boardwalks, signage, interpretation, increases in accessible paths in urban, rural and coastal locations
- employment of wardens, rangers, educators etc
- increasing volunteering (including volunteer recruitment from under-represented groups)
- community engagement and citizen science for environmental conservation and improvement

We are unlikely to fund relatively high-cost, capital investments in facilities such as the construction of visitor centres, cafes or car parks.

Jobs and skills

We want to see how your project will create and/or retain jobs. You should tell us about **all** of the following where they apply to your project:

- new jobs created by the project, employed by you or your partners, including paid apprenticeships and job placements
- jobs retained by the project (existing members of staff working directly on the project, who otherwise might be at risk of redundancy)
- jobs supported by the project (other existing members of staff whose employment costs will be supported directly through this project through Full Cost Recovery, e.g. back office staff)
- amount of spend with contractors and suppliers including freelancers/self-employed people (in your cost breakdown)

In your Full Cost Recovery calculations please make clear how many jobs will be supported.

We are also interested in your proposals for developing skills that are needed by the sector now and in the future, for staff, trainees/apprentices and volunteers. This could include:

- entry level skills training for new workers in the sector (particularly people aged 16-24)
- on-the-job or in-house training
- external specialist courses

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What costs can you apply for?

Examples of eligible costs include –

Revenue costs:

- salaries etc of staff working directly on projects
- wages for apprentices or job placements (only where these cannot be funded through other sources*)
- recruitment
- skills and training
- volunteer travel and subsistence
- equipment hire
- communications
- monitoring and evaluation activities
- legacy planning activities
- Full Cost Recovery – for charities only

* You are encouraged to apply to the Government's Kickstart scheme, which pays 100% of costs for six-month work placements and can be used as a source of partnership funding for your project.

Funding for AONBs, National Park Authorities, Local Authorities and universities can only be used to cover the following with regards to revenue costs:

- salaries and direct on-costs of staff delivering the project
- costs of backfilling an existing post where a member of staff is transferred to deliver new work associated with the grant
- activity costs

Capital costs:

- building/planting materials
- equipment purchase (where essential to deliver the project)
- contractors/consultants
- interpretation materials
- land/lease purchase where essential for the success of your project

Land purchase will only be considered in exceptional circumstances where clear value for money can be demonstrated.

Please note that this list is not exhaustive and gives you an idea of the types of costs we will cover.

Your project costs must also be compliant with UK Subsidy Regime rules.

As part of the assessment process we will consider how the proposed budget delivers on the project's environmental objectives. For example, we will assess how equipment costs relate to stated objectives and will challenge anything that seems disproportionate. We will also consider the balance of budget across partners. We expect a substantial proportion of any grant awarded to benefit environmental charities directly.

Projects can deliver works or activities on private land providing that they are for public benefit rather than private gain.

The costs you apply for should cover the period from 1 August 2021 (for grants of £50,000-£250,000) or 1 September 2021 (for grants over £250,000) to 31 March 2023 only.

What costs can’t you apply for?

The following costs are ineligible:

- anything that contravenes HMG’s advice on COVID-19
- recoverable VAT
- costs related to promoting the cause or beliefs of political or faith organisations
- costs already covered through other funding, for example from COVID-19 related HMG funds, mainstream funds from HMG or other schemes such as the Heritage Emergency Fund
- costs related to lobbying and/or activity to influence legislative or regulatory action
- costs incurred prior to any grant award
- Full Cost Recovery for ‘other not-for-profit organisations’ (e.g. AONBs, National Parks Authorities, local authorities, universities)

How much partnership funding is needed?

We expect this fund to be highly competitive. We will be looking for applications to demonstrate value for money, particularly by including partnership funding to cover a proportion of the costs. Partnership funding from The National Lottery Heritage Fund is not eligible. Partnership funding can be unsecured at the point of application but will need to be confirmed by the time the project is given permission to start.

For applications up to £250,000:

- There is no minimum partnership funding requirement. However, we will only fund 100% of costs where the project is otherwise offering exceptional value for money.

For applications over £250,000:

- Applicants must contribute at least 5% partnership funding in the form of a cash contribution from public or private sources (in kind contributions such as volunteer time are not accepted).

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When to apply

For applications up to £250,000:

- Applications are **open until 12noon on 14 April**. We aim to assess applications and make decisions within nine weeks of this closing date.

For applications over £250,000:

- Expressions of Interest are **open until 12noon on 22 March.** We will aim to assess Expressions of Interest within 11 working days of the deadline and will consequently invite the top scoring projects to apply.
- If we invite you to apply, you will then have five weeks to submit the full application.

This guidance covers everything you need to know to apply. We have designed the application process to be as straightforward as possible and we are requesting only the information we need. **Please read this guidance and the supporting application form help notes before you start your application**. (See 'Help notes and templates' below.)

Please note: The National Lottery Heritage Fund uses the same online forms across the programmes we administer. Some questions need to be answered differently for the Green Recovery Challenge Fund so follow the application form help notes at all points to understand what information is required where.

We are not able to offer specific one to one advice for this fund.

Make sure your project title begins with 'GRCF2021'.

Expand All accordions

How will we assess applications?

For applications up to £250,000

Firstly, we will consider whether you meet the essential criteria for the programme (see under ‘Who can apply?’ and ‘What can you apply for?’, above). If you do not meet the essential criteria, we will not assess your application further.

If you meet the essential criteria, we will then assess your application against the five quality criteria below. The criteria are given equal weight, and we will prioritise applications that perform most strongly overall across all five. We will also consider if your proposals are proportionate to the amount of funding for which you are applying.

We expect to receive more high-quality applications than we can fund. Where there is a need to differentiate between applications assessed as high-quality, our decision makers will apply the balancing principles below. This is to make sure the portfolio of projects is balanced across the themes and priorities of the fund, and geographically across England.

For applications over £250,000

At Expression of Interest stage, we will firstly consider whether you meet the essential criteria for the programme (see under ‘Who can apply?’ and ‘What can you apply for?’, above). If you do not meet the essential criteria, we will not assess your Expression of Interest further.

If you meet the essential criteria, we will then assess your Expression of Interest against the first three of the five quality criteria below. The criteria are given equal weight, and we will prioritise Expressions of Interest that perform most strongly overall across all three. We will also check that your costs appear reasonable for what you will be delivering and offer good value for money.

We expect to receive more high-quality Expressions of Interest than we can fund. Where there is a need to differentiate between Expressions of Interest assessed as high-quality, our decision makers will apply the balancing principles

below. This is to make sure the portfolio of projects is balanced across the themes and priorities of the fund, and geographically across England.

If you are invited to submit a full application, we will check that you still meet the essential criteria for the programme. We will then assess your application against the full range of quality criteria below, based on the more detailed information provided. We will also consider if your proposal is proportionate to the amount of funding for which you are applying.

Our decision makers will once again use the balancing principles below in order to select applications for grant awards.

Quality Criteria

The application will be primarily assessed on your ability to:

1. Create and/or retain jobs, and develop skills, especially for young people (16-24) and/or people in areas of high unemployment that need economic investment.
2. Contribute to HMG environmental objectives and priorities as set out under the three fund themes (see ‘What can you apply for?’).
3. Deliver the project activities successfully within the required timescale. Priority will be given to projects that are already fully planned with permits, licences and consents in place. You must be able to demonstrate a track record of high-quality delivery on the part of the applicant(s), and the appropriate skill sets to deliver the project. You should also demonstrate that the project proposal either follows established good practice in delivering outcomes or provides an opportunity for testing and learning from new approaches.
4. Deliver good value for money for public funds. Value for money means the level of outcomes that you will deliver relative to the total amount of grant you are requesting based on clearly defined outcomes and realistic costings. We will include in this assessment the level of partnership funding you are contributing from non-government sources.
5. Demonstrate the long-term sustainability of the project outcomes beyond the funded period. We want to see how you will maintain and build on what your project has delivered, how your project links to local plans and strategies, and how you propose to secure any follow-on funding required. We will expect you to work up your sustainability plans further during your project, and you should budget for this in your project costs.

Balancing Principles

In making final award decisions, we will ensure as far as possible:

Geographical spread: a balanced geographical coverage across England, including rural, coastal and urban areas.

Range of projects: a range of projects across the themes and priorities of the fund (as outlined under ‘What can you apply for?’). In applying this principle, we will prioritise projects that contribute strongly to more than one theme.

Evaluation

We will need to understand how you plan to demonstrate the impact of your project or how you have delivered against your objectives. You must build in evaluation from the beginning of your project. We expect to see a realistic budget included for evaluation in your project costs.

We will expect you to collect qualitative and quantitative information to evidence the proposed outputs of your project, against an identified baseline. These outputs will vary according to the nature of your work, but you can find further guidance in the Additional Information section.

At the end of your project we will expect delivery of an evaluation report, sent in before we pay the last 10% of your grant.

We will also expect you to participate in a wider evaluation of the fund to be managed by The National Lottery Heritage Fund, which will require you to share data about the outputs of your project at interim stages. Further details on this will be supplied if you are successful in receiving a grant.

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Supporting documents

You will need to submit the following supporting documents with your online application. We must receive them by the published application deadline.

Everything we need to assess your application is in the application form and supporting documents. Please do not submit any extra documents as we will not use them in our assessment.

All applications must include:

- governing document, for example, constitution (**mandatory** for all environmental charities)
- detailed cost breakdown (**mandatory** for all applicants)

A spreadsheet detailing the cost breakdown is provided in Section six: project costs in the online application form. For partnerships, please separate out costs per partner.

Please ensure that your calculations provide a breakdown of costs relating to jobs, making clear how many jobs will be created/retained in total as outlined in the ‘Jobs and Skills’ section of this guidance.

- project plan (**mandatory** for all applicants)

All applicants must submit a project plan using the template provided (See section on ‘Help notes and templates’). Your project plan should set out activities that will clearly progress the land, feature or community towards the eventual outcome. Your project plan should also show how all permits, licences and consents needed to carry out the work will be in place within six months of any grant awarded.

- table of consents (if applicable)

A list of all identified permissions, permits, licences and consents needed to undertake your project with narrative explaining whether these are already applied for or in place. For any not yet applied for, indicate the target date for submission and likely response times.

- draft partnership agreement (if applicable)

This document should outline all partners' roles and responsibilities.

- calculation of full cost recovery (if applicable)

If you are including full cost recovery in your project budget, you must include a document that outlines how this calculation has been made.

Please ensure that your calculations provide a breakdown of costs relating to jobs, making clear how many jobs will be supported in total as outlined in the 'Jobs and Skills' section of this guidance.

- Subsidy Control declaration (**mandatory** for all applications over £250,000)

All applicants are responsible for ensuring that costs and activities are compliant with the UK's international obligations in respect of subsidies. By submitting an application you are confirming that Subsidy Control has been considered and the project costs requested are compliant. It is also your responsibility to declare if your organisation has received any funding under special drawing rights since 1 January 2021.

For applications over £250,000 you **must** submit a signed letter from your Chief Executive (or equivalent) to declare that Subsidy Control has been considered and checked in relation to your application. You should flag any potential issues identified and provide a commentary on how these will be resolved in advance of any grant award. This letter should also declare whether or not your organisation has received any subsidies under special drawing rights since 1 January 2021, and - if it has - the total amount received in that period.

If your project includes buying land, you will need to submit additional supporting documents. A list of these is in the 'Additional Information' section, and in the application form help notes.

We will not begin assessing your application until you submit all of the relevant supporting documentation. If you do not provide your supporting documents by the application deadline your application will be withdrawn.

You should attach the relevant supporting documents to your online application form. We can accept most standard file formats. Please use the document names above so that we can easily identify each document.

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The application process

Before you apply

- We are not offering individual advice for this programme, so make sure you read the application questions, help notes and guidance and check that you are eligible to apply.
- You will need to register on the application portal prior to submitting an application.
- Have your supporting documents ready to submit with the form.
- Make sure you keep within the word limit for the application form.

Applications under £250,000

When you are ready to apply, complete and submit your application via our application portal. If you do not already have an account you will need to register.

When you submit your online form, you will be asked to confirm that you have read, understood and agree with the statements set out in the declaration.

Applications over £250,000: Expressions of Interest

For applications for a grant above £250,000 a short Expression of Interest (EOI) form is mandatory. Guidance on the questions to be answered and a copy of the form can be found in the 'Help notes and templates' section.

An assessment panel involving all the fund partners will use the information you provide to decide whether or not to invite you to submit a full grant application.

We will aim to respond to all EOIs within 11 working days of the deadline. You will then have five weeks to submit a full application.

Complete and submit your Expression of Interest using the EOI form on our application portal.

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Once you have submitted your application

We will check that your organisation and application meet the essential eligibility criteria, outlined above. If your application does not meet these criteria, we will not be able to assess your application and we will let you know this.

If your application meets the eligibility criteria, we will assess the information provided in your application and supporting documents against the quality criteria (see 'How will we assess applications?').

All applications once assessed will be considered together on a competitive basis within each size bracket (up to £250,000 and over £250,000) by an assessment panel involving all the fund partners. In the event that we receive more high-quality applications than we can fund, we will use the balancing principles to differentiate between high-scoring applications.

We will aim to get back to you with a decision within nine weeks of your application. It is not possible to provide applicants with feedback on their application.

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If we award you a grant

If we award you a grant, we will send you a letter, which includes the amount you have been awarded and outlines the terms of the grant.

You will need to complete and sign a permission to start form to confirm that you are accepting the grant and signing up to the terms in the letter. When you have completed this process, we will pay a proportion of your grant upfront.

For projects of £50,000-£250,000:

- We will give you 50% of the grant upfront.
- Once you have spent and evidenced the first half of your total eligible project costs, we will then give you the next 40%.
- The final 10% is paid when you have finished your project and sent us a final completion report and project evaluation, alongside evidence of the remaining grant spend.

For projects over £250,000:

- We will give you 25% or £250,000 of the grant upfront, whichever is the lower.
- Once you have spent this sum, we will pay quarterly in arrears, on submission of a progress report and payment request form including evidence of spend.
- The final 10% will be paid when you have finished your project and sent us a final completion report and project evaluation, alongside evidence of the remaining grant spend.

All grantees will be required to participate in monitoring and evaluation of The Fund:

- For grants of under £250,000, we will expect you to report on the progress of your project at the mid-point, and on completion.
- For grants of over £250,000, we will expect you to report on the progress of your project quarterly, including on completion with the evaluation report.

We will expect evidence of delivery and expenditure, such as before and after photographs, reports, invoices and receipts. More detailed information will be provided at point of grant award.

We will be evaluating the impact of the whole Fund and we will require you to take part in data collection to support this work. We will provide more information about this requirement in due course.

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Changes to this guidance

We will continue to review our processes to ensure we are able to provide support where it is needed. We reserve the right to make any changes needed to the guidance and programme. We will communicate any changes as quickly as possible via this webpage.

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Additional information

Guidance on Project Outcomes and Output measures

We recognise that it may not be possible to demonstrate delivery of longer-term environmental or social outcomes by the end of March 2023. However, we expect you to:

- Set out in your application what you will deliver during the project that will contribute to your longer-term outcomes.
- Have a plan to evaluate the project's impact (see the evaluation section under 'How will we assess your application?', above).
- Have a plan to sustain positive impacts of the projects post-delivery, on which you will work in more detail during your project.

We expect you to describe in your application where you have drawn on existing evidence around what works in delivering against the key themes, or in developing indicators for your projects. For example, you may wish to use websites such as the Cambridge Conservation Database or the Woodland Wildlife Toolkit, in considering objectives and indicators for Nature Conservation and Restoration or Nature Based Solutions, or the Nature Connectedness Indicator Assessment tool for Connecting People with Nature. Where projects are more innovative in their approach, we are interested to understand how the project could contribute to wider learning.

Below are some indicative project outcomes and output measures under each theme, that you may want to consider in completing the section on Project Outcomes. This will help you to define activities and deliverables within your plan and collect quantitative data to evaluate impact. Please note that this is not an exhaustive list.

Nature conservation and restoration

Example Project Outcomes

Heritage will be in a better condition, as a result of (for example):

- new or restored wildlife-rich/priority habitats
- existing wildlife habitats protected and enhanced
- wildlife habitats expanded or more connected
- actions to support species (particularly pollinators and other native species)

Example Outputs – what are your expected results by March 2023?

- area of land/water prepared or planted to support new habitat or species
- area of woodland brought into active management to improve condition
- area of natural habitats now joined up to create wildlife corridors
- area and number of wildlife ponds
- measures implemented as part of river or waterways restoration plans and fish passageways

??Nature-based solutions for climate change mitigation and/or adaptation

Example Project Outcomes

Heritage will be in a better condition, as a result of (for example):

- habitat restored or created for enhanced carbon sequestration and storage and/or improved resilience to climate risks
- nature and land use change supporting better resource management, reduce carbon emissions or improve quality e.g. water, air
- nature-based solutions to support climate change adaptation, including flood mitigation or coastal erosion management
- increased investment in Natural Capital to deliver solutions
- use of green infrastructure to support enhanced river or urban cooling alongside other adaptive benefits to urban areas
- improvement in soil health and associated benefits for biodiversity, water retention, agriculture etc

Example Outputs – what are your expected results by March 2023?

- number, area and/or density of trees planted, or woodland brought under active management
- land management assessed for carbon budget and actions implemented to reduce emissions
- measures implemented to improve soil health
- volume of natural water storage secured, or area of land managed for water quality
- area of catchment roughened for water slowing
- area of land and habitats identified, prepared or undergoing changes to increase resilience to climate change risks, following assessment of local vulnerabilitie

Connecting people with nature

Example Project Outcomes

- engaging or empowering community to support nature-based objectives
- access to nature improved
- people connecting with nature to increase understanding and/or improve wellbeing
- improving or increasing nature where people live

Example Outputs – what are your expected results by March 2023?

- relative position along the community engagement standards scale (outreach/consult/involve/collaborate/shared leadership)
- opportunities for volunteering for nature or citizen science, such as species monitoring
- increase in numbers and diversity of people engaging with nature or visiting natural features
- length of footpath or area of open access land now accessible
- area of new nature identified/ prepared or introduced within 200m of residential area
- number of features supporting wildlife in schools, parks and residential areas

Jobs/local economic impact and financial sustainability

Example Project Outcomes

- people gain or retain employment in the environment sector

- skills developed or retained within the organisation
- additional income for local businesses
- greater local involvement in your organisation
- improved governance or partnership arrangements
- increased financial resilience

Example outputs – what are you expecting to achieve by March 2023?

- number of jobs created or retained
- skills, expertise or qualifications gained
- number of businesses supported
- increase in visitor or volunteer numbers
- development of relationships to secure income streams
- improved evidence base to support ongoing activities

Citizen science, biological-recording and data

Any habitat and species data collected through your project must comply with the standards for data quality and accessibility as set out by the National Biodiversity Network (NBN) on the NBN Atlas. These observations must be made available to the public on an Open Licence at capture resolution, subject to sensitive species restrictions.

There are several ways of achieving this. NBN Atlas Data Partners may prefer to supply datasets directly to the NBN Atlas. Alternative options include through the online recording tool iRecord or they can be shared with your local or regional environmental record centre for onward transmission to the NBN Atlas. Please ensure if submission to the NBN Atlas is via a third party they are aware of the requirements to submit this data at capture resolution on an Open Licence. If you are unsure how best to proceed, please contact the NBN directly to discuss the most appropriate data supply route.

Tree planting

For projects that involve tree planting, it is important to source biosecure planting stock, preferably grown in the UK to reduce the risk of introducing or spreading harmful plant pests and diseases. We would encourage the use of plants from Plant Healthy certified nurseries where possible. Plant Healthy is a certification scheme designed to ensure that people who grow and handle plants have suitable biosecurity standards in place.

Other funds

As part of our value for money assessment, we will consider whether the Green Recovery Challenge Fund is the most appropriate funding source for all of your project costs. Below is a list of other Defra funds that you could consider as alternative funding sources. This list is non-exhaustive and applicants are advised to check the Defra website for other relevant funds.

- Woodland Creation Planning Grants (open now). Forestry Commission scheme to support the design of new woodland.
- Woodland Carbon Fund (open now). Capital funding from the Forestry Commission for the creation of new productive woodland for carbon sequestration.

- Nature for Climate Peat Fund. Capital funding for peatland restoration and creation (Spring 2021)
- Natural Environment Investment Readiness Fund (first application window closes on 26 March 2021). Fund to support the development of private sector investment in natural environment projects.
- Countryside Stewardship. Provides financial incentives for farmers, woodland owners, foresters and land managers to look after and improve the environment.
- BN11: Planting new hedges.

Subsidy Control

It is an applicant's responsibility to confirm that their application has been considered and checked in relation to Subsidy Control rules.

At the point of publication of this guidance for applicants, public funding for organisations is no longer governed by the European Commission's State aid rules as set out in Article 107-109 of the Treaty of the Functioning of the European Union and associated regulations and guidelines. Instead all grant decisions made after 11pm on the 31st December 2020 are subject to the new UK subsidy control regime, the principles of which are set out in Chapter 3 (Subsidies) of Title XI (Level Playing Field) of the Trade and Cooperation Agreement.

There is expected to be further guidance, a consultation and possibly new legislation in this area to build upon those principles. You will be expected to comply with the principles of the subsidy control regime and to satisfy any future requirements. Agreements that have been entered into will be reviewed and varied accordingly. We reserve the right to impose further requirements and additional conditions in relation to this matter.

It is an applicant's responsibility to check whether State aid or Subsidy Control clearance is required. Applicants should seek independent legal advice if they are unsure whether a project will require clearance.

Working on private land

Many priority habitats and species occur on land that is owned by private individuals or for-profit organisations. Projects can deliver works or activities on private land so long as any public benefit clearly outweighs any potential private gain, and provided Subsidy Control rules are not breached. For example, we could fund the restoration of hedgerows or create farm ponds, provided that they do not add financial value to the land or convey any significant indirect financial benefit that could breach Subsidy Control rules.

When working on private land we understand there may be limits to public access. We do however encourage public access whenever practical and also accept that physical access may not always be appropriate or desirable for habitat conservation reasons. If improved access is possible you may also wish to apply for funding for new infrastructure, for example paths or hides, that can help to accommodate increased public access.

Works can take place on land owned by a Government Department or Arm's Length Body provided they do not financially benefit from any investment. If an environmental charity or partnership were to undertake work on such land, then it can only be for works that would not be covered by any statutory responsibility. For example, if a charity created a new fish pass on Environment Agency (EA) land that would be acceptable provided responsibility for ongoing maintenance was transferred back to the Environment Agency and it is work that EA would not normally undertake as part of their statutory duties. Due consideration would also need to be made to ensure compliance with Subsidy Control rules.

Third party ownership requirements

Where the land subject to grant funding is owned by a third party or multiple third parties (including private owners), legal agreements should be put in place between each land owner and the grantee. We expect these agreements to be in place **within four months** of any grant award.

There is no prescribed form of agreement but we have specific requirements which should be included in any third party land owner agreements.

At a minimum, the land owner agreements should include:

- details of the parties
- confirmation as to how the land is held (freehold or leasehold)
- a description of the property (including plans)
- covenants on the part of the land owner to maintain the land in accordance with the terms of the grant (as applicable) or to allow access for the grantee to undertake maintenance
- a provision that any onward disposal should be subject to the third party agreement
- A provision that the agreement will last from the start of the work on the third party land until 10 years following Project Completion. You will need to provide us with copies of the landowner agreements to ensure compliance with these requirements. The land owner agreements will need to be completed and in place before any grant monies are released for work on each plot of land owned by a third party.

Third party grants

We will consider applications that include third party grants where these are deemed essential to the successful delivery of your project. This is where a pot of money is ring-fenced for you to fund third party land owners (including private land owners) for activities or capital works that contribute to achieving the outcomes of your project.

If you feel that this is a necessary element of your project, we would not generally expect the funding pot to exceed 20% of the total grant request or £200,000, whichever is lower, unless you have made a clear justification in your application. You must also detail how you plan to administer and monitor the payments, and evaluate what they achieve.

You will be responsible for ensuring specific outcomes are delivered by third parties and that the terms of the grant are complied with, including repayment of the grant if necessary. You will need to demonstrate how you will formalise this through a legal agreement to ensure delivery and secure the maintenance of any capital works for at least 10 years after the project’s completion. You may include the costs of setting up a third-party agreement, including the costs of taking legal advice, as part of the costs in your application.

Consideration of permissions or licenses

Applicants should consider if their project requires any permissions, permits, consents or licenses for the project to be delivered. These could include (but are not limited to):

- a protected species license issued by Natural England or the Marine Management Organisation
- a Marine Licence from the Marine Management Organisation
- site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) consent or assent from Natural England
- an Environmental Impact Assessment from the Forestry Commission

- a valid approved felling licence from the Forestry Commission
- planning permission from a local planning authority

The cost of any permissions or licenses should be considered in the overall project costs and included in the bid if appropriate to ensure the project is deliverable. Early engagement with licensing bodies is advised.

Buying land

The Green Recovery Challenge Fund will only consider funding the purchase of land **in exceptional circumstances** where clear value for money can be demonstrated. Land must be at or below market value and vital for nature conservation. If you already manage the land that you want to buy, you will need to show us what extra benefits the purchase will bring. You will need to show that all options for entering into an appropriate management agreement with the freehold owner have been explored before seeking a grant for purchase.

If we award you a grant, we may require a charge on the land or any buildings. We can fund all associated purchase costs such as agent's fees, saleroom fees and taxes. Please ensure these are reflected in your cost table. If your project includes buying land then the terms of the grant will last in perpetuity. If you wish to dispose of what you have bought in future, you will need to seek the permission of both Defra and The National Lottery Heritage Fund. We may claim the grant back.

The information we need about the purchase

With your application you will need to provide:

- a location plan to scale, clearly identifying the extent of the land and any building(s) to be purchased and any relevant access to the land and building
- One independent valuation. This should include an explanation of how the assessment of the market value was reached. We welcome valuations by the District Valuer. We will normally be prepared to support a purchase at a figure up to 10% above the top of any range in an accepted valuation.
- evidence that the current owners are the owners (have legal title) and have the right to both sell the land and/or building and transfer the title to the new owner
- evidence of any legal covenants, or rights (such as fishing, shooting, mineral, drainage), or long- or short-term tenancies, or rights of way or access, or any other interests which are attached to the land or building

Expand All accordions

Help notes, templates and support webinar

- Application help notes for grants from £50,000 to £250,000
- Expression of Interest guide and questions
- Application help notes for grants from £250,000 to £2m
- Project plan template
- Terms of grant
- FAQs

- Recording of our support webinar

See all the application help notes and resources.

Expand All accordions

Making a complaint

We understand that you may be disappointed with a decision. We can only review our decision again if you can make a formal complaint about how we have dealt with your Green Recovery Challenge Fund application.

We will only be able to consider and investigate the complaint if:

- We did not follow the published procedures for assessing your application.
- You can show that we have misunderstood a significant part of your application.
- You can show that we did not take notice of relevant information.

A complaint must be made in writing by emailing enquire@heritagefund.org.uk within 10 working days of receiving your application decision. We aim to acknowledge your complaint within three working days.

Your complaint will initially be reviewed by an Area/Country Director from The National Lottery Heritage Fund, who is independent of recommendation and decision panels for this fund. We aim to communicate a decision within 15 working days from when you submitted your complaint.

For assistance, contact our Customer Services Team on 020 7591 6044 or email enquire@heritagefund.org.uk.

The Heritage Fund is distributing the Green Recovery Challenge Fund in partnership with Natural England, the Environment Agency and Forestry Commission, on behalf of the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (Defra).

Green Recovery Challenge Fund

Department for Environment Food & Rural Affairs

Heritage Fund

Environment Agency

NATURAL ENGLAND