Nature Networks Fund (round two)

See all updates

This fund aims to strengthen the resilience of Wales' network of protected land and marine sites, supporting nature's recovery while actively encouraging community engagement.

This guidance was last updated on 8 January 2026. See all updates.

Important

Nature Networks Fund (round two) is no longer accepting applications.

Explore our available funding.

Overview

This is round two of the Nature Networks Fund.

As a key element to the delivery of the Nature Networks Programme, the aim of the Nature Networks Fund is to improve the condition and resilience of **Wales' network of protected land and marine sites**.

Improving the condition of these protected and connected sites will enable them to function better as **nature networks**. Nature networks are vital, resilient areas where habitats and species can thrive and expand. Restoring connectivity in these networks will:

- prevent further declines in species and habitat condition
- support nature recovery
- enhance capacity to adapt to the climate crisis

This fund will also support the active involvement of communities in and around protected sites. Strengthening engagement with nature has direct health and wellbeing benefits for people, as well as improving the resilience of the sites themselves.

The protection of sites is reliant on strong organisations and good governance. Therefore, **round two** of the Nature Networks Fund will **additionally support capacity building**, including: financial resilience, community engagement, training and apprenticeship programmes and inclusion work.

What is the protected sites network?

The protected sites network covers Special Areas of Conservation, Special Protection Areas and other Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs). To check whether land or sea is included within this definition please visit the Natural Resources Wales website and the DataMapWales website.

Application deadlines

Grants between £30,000 and £250,000: **12noon on 19 October 2022**

Grants between £250,000 and £1million:

- mandatory Expression of Interest (EOI) deadline: **12noon on 21 September 2022**
- application deadline: **12noon on 7 December 2022**

Once you have read the guidance below, visit our application portal

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Aims of the fund

Through round two of the Nature Networks Fund, we want to support:

- Action on protected or connected sites that specifically benefits the management of protected habitats and species on Special Areas of Conservation, Special Protection Areas and Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs). It should also demonstrate the sustainable management of natural resources across Wales. This can include action outside of protected sites that will benefit the network as a whole.
- Improvements on protected sites or their connected sites that local communities are able to actively participate in, and benefit from. An aim would be to support active involvement with a diverse range of people and communities (particularly under-served groups) to increase the network of people engaged with nature, and with building the resilience of their local ecosystems.
- activity that allows organisations to build their capacity, develop their resilience and reach under-served communities

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Who can apply?

The scheme is open to all individuals and organisations working with natural heritage in Wales. This is provided that you have the right permissions, licences and consents in place to undertake activity on the protected site network or surrounding areas. The site/land you are improving must be in Wales but you/your organisation can be based anywhere in the UK.

In some cases, it may be appropriate for project work to take place in Wales but not on protected sites. For example, in projects where the focus is on training and apprenticeships, trainees may be working on different sites, but the skills they develop may be beneficial to the whole sector later on in their careers. In these cases, it is your responsibility to

demonstrate the value your project will bring to the protected site network in the long-term within your application form.

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What we expect from projects

Activities must deliver direct benefits to the protected site network now or in the future. This can include:

- improvements directly on a site or on surrounding areas that will improve the condition of features and connectivity of sites
- improvements to accessibility of a site, or supporting organisations to reach under-served communities
- Supporting organisations or individuals who are (or will be in the future) responsible for sites. This could include planning, staffing, training, apprenticeships, green financing, good governance, etc.

As applicants, you must demonstrate that you are aware of, and working towards obtaining, the relevant permissions and licenses to carry out your project.

You will be expected to demonstrate that your planned project delivers against the management objectives or conservation objectives for the relevant site.

We will be looking to fund a combination of capital and revenue activity across a portfolio of projects. To understand more, please refer to the section within this guidance called ‘Preparing your application’.

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Key dates

Programme opens **18 August 2022**.

Grants between £30,000 and £250,000

- application deadline: **12noon on 19 October 2022**
- applicants informed of decisions in **January 2023**
- projects must be complete by **31 March 2025**

Grants between £250,000 and £1million

- mandatory EOI deadline: **12noon on 21 September 2022**
- applicants successful at EOI stage will be invited to submit full applications by **5 October 2022**
- application deadline: **12noon on 7 December 2022**
- applicants informed of decisions in **March 2023**
- projects must be complete by **31 March 2026**

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Preparing your application

What costs can you apply for?

It is important that you identify which of your project costs are capital and which are revenue. Applications can include any of the following:

Capital costs

- the purchase of items associated with land management activities, such as trees, hedge plants, fencing and capital works items required to deliver the outcomes
- general costs incurred in installing the capital works, which include contractor costs for labour and use of equipment
- the purchase of machinery and equipment up to the market value of the asset
- the purchase, design and installation of interpretation panels (and translation costs)
- acquisition or development of computer software and acquisitions of patents, licenses, copyrights and trademarks
- consultant and architect fees, other technical design costs, site surveys and professional fees such as fees related to environmental and economic sustainability
- Planning application fees and costs. Fees incurred for statutory permissions, licences and consents are eligible, provided they are essential for the delivery of the capital project. These can be incurred before the start of the project but must be incurred after 18 August 2022, and must be evidenced in the same way as other expenditure.
- Contingency funding for additional capital costs. We recommend this be approximately 10% of your capital costs.
- inflation funding to allow for cost increases in future years of project delivery

Revenue costs

- staff time
- full cost recovery or core organisational costs towards project delivery
- activity costs (events, refreshments, etc)
- room hire
- evaluation
- planning, for example business planning, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Reviews, green financing opportunities
- training, apprenticeships costs
- translation costs
- Contingency funding for additional revenue costs. We recommend this be approximately 10% of your revenue costs.

You may not include future costs for ongoing maintenance or running costs beyond the duration of the project.

Welsh language

You must consider the Welsh language in all aspects of your work and tell us how you will promote and support the Welsh language and reflect the bilingual nature of Wales.

You will need to show how you will offer bilingual provision in your project budget and plan. You should include the budget for translation under the 'Other' costs category in the project costs section of the application form.

If you would like more information on how to do this, please read more in our guidance for delivering a Welsh bilingual project. You can also get in touch with our Welsh language support team at: cymorthcymraeg@heritagefund.org.uk

Supporting documents

The following supporting documents must be uploaded with your application form. File sizes should be smaller than 20MB. **Note** that some of the supporting documents required for this programme are different to those stated in the online application form.

For this programme, we require the following documents:

- Governing document (mandatory if your organisation has one).
- Audited or verified accounts (mandatory if you are an organisation).
- Project plan (mandatory for all projects) and risk register (mandatory for applications over £250,000) – you can download a template from our project plan page.
- Partnership agreement (mandatory, if you are working in a partnership).
- Job descriptions (mandatory, if you are creating new jobs or apprenticeships as part of your project).
- Briefs for commissioned work (if applicable).
- At least one map showing the locations of capital works (mandatory for applications over £250,000), please upload this under ‘Images’).
- Images to illustrate your application (optional).
- Calculation of full cost recovery (if applicable).
- evidence of support, such as letters, emails or videos of support (optional).
- Cash flow (mandatory for large applications). This should be detailed for the first year and an outline for consecutive years.
- Project management structure (mandatory for applications over £250,000). This should outline your project management structure so we know who will make decisions and how you will control change during your project.
- Detailed cost breakdown (mandatory for applications over £250,000). A spreadsheet detailing the cost breakdown in the Project costs section of the application. Please separate costs into Capital and Revenue.
- Main risks document for after the project is completed (mandatory for applications over £250,000). This should outline the main risks facing the project after it has been completed and how they will be managed.

Supporting documents are **not needed for Expressions of Interest.**

Third party ownership requirements

Your project’s land (which may include different plots of land over a wide area) may be owned by a third party or multiple third parties (including private owners). If this is the case, legal agreements should be put in place between you

and each land owner.

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 the following:

- 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 and provide public access in accordance with the terms of the grant (as applicable)
- a provision that any onward disposal should be subject to the third party agreement
- 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 make sure you are compliant with these requirements. The land owner agreements will need to be completed and in place before grant money is released for work on each plot of land owned by a third party. In some circumstances we might require the owner to sign up to our terms and conditions.

You may include the costs of adapting and setting up any third party agreements, including the cost of taking legal advice, as part of the costs in your application.

Licences, permissions and consents

Applicants must demonstrate in their application that they are aware of, and working towards obtaining, the relevant permissions and licenses to carry out their project.

Match funding

There are no requirements for cash or non-cash contributions for the Nature Networks Fund (round two). However, any cash, non-cash or volunteer contributions you provide can add to the impact and value for money of your project, which will be considered in assessment.

As this programme includes National Lottery funding, you may not use this grant as match funding for a project from The National Lottery Heritage Fund, or vice versa. You may use other sources of match funding including other funding programmes from Welsh Government or Natural Resources Wales, and should include these on your application form.

Evaluation

We recommend that you consider evaluation from the beginning of your project. The more carefully projects budget for their evaluation, the higher the quality of the final report. We have recommended minimum spends on evaluation. You can find further information on this in our evaluation guidance.

At the end of your project we will expect you to submit an evaluation report. This needs to be submitted before we pay the last 10% of your grant. This should include details of how ecosystem resilience and/or habitat connectivity has benefitted (or will benefit in the future) from the investment. You should share relevant monitoring data and methodology.

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Pre-application advice webinar and workshops

We held a pre-application webinar on Tuesday 23 August 2022 and a smaller drop-in workshop on Wednesday 14 September. We have published a series of FAQs in answer to the questions raised at these workshops.

We will provide a further workshop for grant applications of over £250,000 that have successfully passed the Expression of Interest stage. This will be held on **24 October** and we will send details out directly to those projects.

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How to apply

Grants from £30,000 to £250,000

For grants between £30,000 and £250,000, you can apply as soon as you're ready. The application deadline is 12noon **on 19 October 2022.**

Make sure you read our application help notes carefully and check that you are eligible to apply. These help notes should provide all the information you need to make an application.

Please note: The Heritage Fund uses the same application forms across a variety of our programmes. Some questions need to be answered differently for this programme, so you must carefully read the application help notes to understand what information is required where. Please **do not** use the help icons embedded in the online form.

We have designed the application process to be as straightforward as possible and we are requesting only the information we need.

When you're ready, apply for grants between £30,000 and £250,000

Grants from £250,000 to £1million

Our application process is competitive and we cannot fund every good quality application that we receive.

Expression of Interest

We recognise the work that goes into preparing an application, and to give you the best chance possible, we ask all applicants for a grant between **£250,000 and £1million** to complete a short **Expression of Interest (EOI) form**. Please refer to our EOI help notes for more information on how to complete your form.

You must submit your EOI by the deadline of **12noon on 21 September 2022**.

We will use the information you provide to decide whether or not to invite you to submit a full application. An invitation to apply does not guarantee grant from us in the future, but does indicate that we see potential in your initial proposals.

We aim to respond to your EOI within 10 working days.

If your EOI is successful, we will provide additional guidance on how to complete your full application. You must submit your full application by the deadline of **12noon on 7 December 2022**.

When you're ready, submit an EOI form for grants between £250,000 and £1m

Full application form

Our application forms for grants over £250,000 will be released to you on a different portal. Successful applicants will receive a link to this portal via email. Please follow that link rather than signing into our usual portal.

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Application help notes and templates

- application help notes for grants between £30,000 and £250,000
- Expression of Interest (EOI) help notes for grants between £250,000 and £1million
- receiving a grant guidance

For grants between £30,000 and £250,000 you need to submit a project plan with your application. Please refer to our project plan page to review and download our template.

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After you apply

Once you send us your online application, we will check everything is in place and be in touch to let you know if we need any further details.

Unless we need to check anything with you, it is unlikely that you will hear from us again until we notify you of the decision.

Assessing your application

We will assess eligible applications on the following criteria:

- contribution to nature recovery of protected sites in Wales
- engagement of a wider range of people in nature
- the number of jobs/apprenticeships/traineeships offered, especially for young people

- deliver value for money
- demonstrate long-term sustainability
- a geographic spread of projects across Wales
- a combination of capital and revenue projects across the portfolio

Balancing criteria

If we receive more good-quality applications than we can fund, we will prioritise projects which will:

- work in our Areas of Focus or areas that most strongly support the delivery of Resilient Ecological Networks within the Nature Networks Programme
- represent a geographical spread across Wales and across all Nature Networks (round one) and round two projects
- provide active public engagement with nature

If you are awarded

We will notify applicants for **£30,000 to £250,000 of our decisions in January 2023**, and for **£250,000 to £1m in March 2023**. We will provide additional guidance on our monitoring requirements and legal conditions at that point.

All grants under £100,000 will be paid in three instalments. You will receive 50% of your grant once you have received permission to start your project. You will receive the next 40% at the midpoint of your project, when the first 50% has been spent. We withhold the final 10% of your grant until the project is completed.

Grants of £100,000 and over will be paid in arrears, in regular instalments, on receipt of evidence of expenditure.

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Additional information

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, public funding for organisations is no longer governed by the European Commission's state aid rules. This is 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 31 December 2020 are subject to the new UK subsidy control regime. The principles of which are set out in Chapter Three (Subsidies) of Title XI (Level Playing Field) of Part Two (Trade, Transport, Fisheries and Other Arrangements) 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.

As an applicant, it is your responsibility to check whether state aid or subsidy control clearance is required. You should seek independent legal advice if you are unsure whether a project will require clearance.

Working on private land

Many designated 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. We 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.

Property ownership

Land and buildings for capital works

You must either own the freehold or have a lease which meets the following requirements:

- **not for profit organisation:** your lease must have 10 years left to run after the project completion date
- **private owner:** your lease must have at least 10 years left to run after the project completion date
- we **do not** accept leases with break clauses (these give one or more parties to the lease the right to end the lease in certain circumstances)
- we **do not** accept leases with forfeiture on insolvency clauses (these give the landlord the right to end the lease if the tenant becomes insolvent)
- **you must** be able to sell on, mortgage, or sub-let the whole or part of your lease but if we award you a grant, you must first have our permission to do any of these

Land or buildings in third party ownership

If a third party owns the land (which may include a project partner) we will either require the owner to sign up to your grant contract directly with us, or require you to enter into a legally binding agreement with the owner.

Acquisitions of land or buildings

If your project involves buying land or buildings, you must buy them freehold or with a lease with at least 99 years left to run.

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Further help and resources

- for technical support or assistance with accessibility, please contact our customer service team by email: enquire@heritagefund.org.uk
- good practice guidance: advice on a range of topics to help you achieve a high quality project, including our guidance on conducting evaluation
- nature and landscapes guidance: help to design and deliver projects
- these area statements from Natural Resources Wales outline the key challenges and initiatives taking place within each Welsh area
- To discuss your application with a member of staff, please email natur@heritagefund.org.uk. Alternatively, Natural Resources Wales can provide advice on the management objectives, please email: sitesactions@cyfoethnaturiolcymru.gov.uk.
- for more information about how your data will be processed under this grant programme, please see our privacy policy

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Making a complaint

We understand that you may be disappointed with a decision. There is no right to appeal or re-apply for the Nature Networks Fund (round two).

We can only review our decision if you can make a formal complaint about how we have dealt with your application. We have a two stage complaint process for this fund. We will only be able to consider and investigate the complaint if you can demonstrate that:

- we did not follow the published procedures for assessing your application
- we have misunderstood a significant part of your application
- we did not take notice of relevant information

A formal 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.

Changes to this guidance

We will regularly review this guidance and respond to user feedback. We reserve the right to make changes as required. We will communicate any changes as quickly as possible via this webpage.

The Nature Networks Fund (round two) is being delivered by The National Lottery Heritage Fund in partnership with the Welsh Government and Natural Resources Wales.



Page updates

- **2 September 2022:** FAQs from our pre-application webinar were published and you can now book to attend smaller drop-in sessions. More information in section 'Pre-application advice webinar and workshops'.
- **14 September 2022:** the Expression of Interest (EOI) deadline was pushed back from 20 September to 21 September 2022 due to the bank holiday.
- **3 October 2022:** Following our applicant drop-in workshop held on 14 September, additional questions were added to the FAQs page. Details were also updated to confirm the date of the next workshop.
- **19 October 2022:**
    - The list of supporting documents in the 'Preparing your application' section was updated to reflect the different requirements between the two funding ranges.
    - Two sentences were added at the top of the ‘After you apply’ section to reflect our assessment process.

- **9 November 2022:**
  - The information under match funding in the ‘Preparing your application’ section was updated to show that you may include other sources of match funding beyond National Lottery.
  - Information about how full application forms will be released to applicants for grants in the £250,000 to £1million range was added to the ‘How to apply section’.
- **28 February 2023:** The page was moved to closed programmes.

Tag Link
Closed programmes