Grantee Q&A: the Heritage Fund's flexibility in



Peter McEvoy, Director of Land Management at Ulster Wildlife stands far right. Also pictured visiting Fedian are, left to right, Sharon Archer, Senior Investment Manager at the Heritage Fund, John Witchell, Ulster Wildlife Chair, Dawn Miskelly, Ulster Wildlife Chief Executive Officer, Giles Knight, Environmental Farming Scheme Advisor and Nikki McVeigh, Northern Ireland Committee Member for the Heritage Fund.

Peter McEvoy from Ulster Wildlife shares reflections and advice on the different stages of the nature conservation charity's project – from writing an application at speed to the surprising amount of nature recovery it's already supported.

About the project

Fedian is a 91-acre area of grassland and woodland in County Fermanagh, overlooking Lower Lough Erne. The site has been traditionally farmed for decades, so offers an increasingly rare habitat to many at-risk species that rely on actively managed land and sensitive farming practices.

With our support, Ulster Wildlife purchased the farmland to care for the site's natural heritage, and is also welcoming schools and the local farming community to promote conservation and sustainability.

What did you find most challenging about your application and how did you overcome these challenges?

We knew that the site might be coming up for sale but it came onto the open market quite unexpectedly, so we had to secure funding quickly. We explored lots of funding options which each had their own challenges. A discussion with our local Heritage Fund team unlocked what was possible.

They explained the structure of the Heritage Fund's decision-making process, what could be achieved at speed and gave us a clear steer on what a good application looked like. We spoke on the Friday and I'd submitted our application by Sunday night.

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Fedian is untouched by intensive farming methods and is a haven for species from marsh fritillary butterfly to pine marten. Photo: Ulster Wildlife.

What would you recommend future applicants spend more time on when developing their application?

Leave plenty of time for securing endorsements and recommendation letters. Get the ball rolling on the processes that involve third parties – land valuations, for example – as soon as you can, to ensure you've got the architecture of your project in place before submitting your application.

When delivering your project, what surprised you?

The nature itself. Over our first year, we've had many surveys done, welcoming experts in everything from fungi to inverte per butterf butterf



Dingy skipper butterfly have been spotted at Fedian. Photo: Ulster Wildlife.

What one thing do you know now that you wish you'd known before you began?

To go straight to the Heritage Fund with a project about natural heritage. Our project was about protecting bees, orchids and butterflies, but that wasn't a barrier to securing support.

I was concerned that preserving an area of species-rich grassland wouldn't align with the Heritage Fund's priorities, before I spoke to the Northern Ireland team. In fact protecting the environment is one of the investment principles that every funding application must consider. We didn't feel we had to manipulate our bid to fit the Heritage Fund's requirements.

(Note: We awarded £27m to land, nature and parks projects in just the first year of our Heritage 2033 strategy. Find out more about our funding for nature and biodiversity projects.)

Following this funding, what are you most looking forward to in your project's future?

There's so much potential for networking and reaching out to bring more people onto the site. Spreading the word about what we're trying to achieve and how we're going about it is exciting. We hope that other people in a similar position who are looking for funding hear about us and recognise their own project and what can be done, in partnership with funders, to protect nature.

This is part of a series of Q&As with successful grantees – helping to demystify the project application and delivery process and share experience across the sector.



Fedian Nature Reserve. Credit: Ulster Wildlife.



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How to apply



Big City Butterflies. Credit: Chris O'Donovan.

Habitats and species