

Nature and landscapes guidance

This guidance is to help you design and deliver projects involving work or activity linked to habitats, species, landscapes, geology or the ecosystems of which they are part.

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Introduction

The UK continues to see significant declines in the variety, quantity and quality of our treasured landscapes, habitats and species, even though we are totally dependent on the benefits that nature provides us with. That is why Heritage Lottery Fund has committed to making our support for landscapes and nature a key priority in our current Strategic Funding Framework.

If you want to find out more about how HLF support has helped nature in the past then please see our research [What has HLF done for nature?](#)

Planning nature and landscapes projects

If your project involves work on an historic building, public park, garden or landscape you should undertake ecological surveys to ascertain the value of the existing site for nature and specific protected species. Virtually every project funded by HLF can have both positive and negative impacts on landscapes nature. We want to ensure that the capital projects we fund create a net gain for nature whenever possible, whether that is through providing bat roosts in the attic of an historic building; creating a green roof; or protecting and enhancing an existing habitat from loss during landscape or building work.

Some species such as badgers and bats are protected by law, as are some habitats, so it is important you are aware of their existence and needs by researching your site well and undertaking or commissioning specialist ecological surveys. You may need special licences or consents to carry out any building, construction or landscape works that may impact upon protected species.

Nature as the focus of your project

We wish to encourage projects that will help halt the loss of natural heritage that support healthy functioning ecosystems, and that establish coherent ecological networks for the benefit of both wildlife and people.

The best projects are those that will make a measurable difference in conserving habitats and species identified by surveys as being at risk, under threat or facing extinction. We are keen to encourage projects that will directly help to further the conservation of the UK Biodiversity Action Plan (UKBAP) priority habitats or species both locally and/or at a countrywide level. You should make sure you are aware of any country and/or local biodiversity action plans that affect your project area to ensure you are addressing key issues and threats that may have been identified.

It is often helpful to show that your project is supported and considered a priority by relevant parties such as a local biodiversity forum, a local authority, a Local Nature Partnership (LNP), a statutory body such as Scottish Natural Heritage or Natural Resources Wales, or by a habitat or species specialist group such as Buglife or Butterfly Conservation.

Habitat projects

The first step in planning your project is to consider what to include in your proposal. Think carefully about what survey or research data you already have or need to obtain, consider how the habitat should be conserved, enhanced, expanded or linked to others, what species are the key priorities and most importantly how the site will be managed and maintained once the project has been completed.

We understand that the benefits from investing in natural heritage conservation works can take many years to appear, but you should show us that you have a plan and the resources to ensure the site or species will be monitored and managed to achieve the project outcomes. Demonstrating that investment in natural capital has had an impact on the quality, distribution and amount of habitat is crucial so make sure you record the site before works begin and at regular periods during the project and beyond. Land and ecological surveys, aerial photography, land use mapping and anecdotal evidence are all useful tools to consider.

We are keen that our investment in natural heritage has the greatest impact in conserving and improving habitats that already exist so you may want to consider a project that enhances a number of existing habitats or that helps join-up existing habitats with new planting such as woodlands or meadows, or with landscape corridors such as hedgerows. Whilst we can fund the creation of entirely new habitats, our greatest concern is to improve the quality and resilience of existing priority habitats by improving their quality and management, and by the creation of buffer strips, by making habitats bigger or by creating greater connection between other nearby habitats.

Landscape-scale projects and those delivering at multiple sites

We know that working across more extensive areas achieves results in making habitats more resilient and allowing populations of species to expand and move if conditions change.

If you are planning a project that will deliver work and/or activities across areas of landscape or areas of land that are not adjoined, then you should plan to submit an Area Action Plan as part of your second round application instead of separate conservation, activity and maintenance/management plans.

Separate guidance on Area Action Plans is available on our website.

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

You can find information on assessing landscape character here in our Area Action Plan guidance. Mapping landscape and seascape character is now a well understood process and expert help is readily available either from statutory bodies such as Natural England or Historic England, or from expert consultants. In considering landscape character it is also important to think about not just habitats and geology, but also built and cultural heritage. When proposing conservation works over an area of landscape it is useful to consider the range of features that make that landscape special. These might include field patterns, banks, hedges, ditches, woodland as well as walls, buildings, topography, land use, archaeology, designed landscapes such as gardens and settlements. If you are planning to make changes to the landscape character of an area you might want to show us how the changes will be beneficial and that they will not lose or detrimentally change other equally valuable heritage features or assets. When considering landscape character you should also consider intangible heritage for example, local dialects, traditions, language, music and crafts.

Species projects

The best way to conserve species is through habitat conservation, restoration, re-creation and enhancement. Providing well managed habitat is likely to support a greater diversity of species and be more sustainable in the long-term.

However there are certain species that are now so threatened and their future so fragile, that they need individual positive intervention. These are species likely to be identified as UK Biodiversity Action Plan (UK BAP) priority species or to be identified in individual country biodiversity strategies. In the past we have supported projects focused on the recovery of red squirrel, Scottish wildcat and puffin. If a single species project is proposed it is a good idea to clearly explain why this approach has been taken and to provide strong supporting evidence of the need. Providing examples of where similar conservation approaches have been tried, tested and proved to be successful is also useful so we can assess the degree of risk involved.

Any project including the re-introduction of species to the UK always requires a robust environmental case to be made, which will need to be supported by the relevant country nature conservation agency. The project will need to meet the guidelines established by IUCN/SSC Re-Introduction Specialist Group (www.iucnsscrg.org/).

When a new species is to be introduced it is essential to ensure that suitable habitats already exist to sustain the species in the long-term. Some species have an economic value in their own right, particularly fish such as salmon and birds such as grey partridge. Applications involving game species or those with a commercial value will need to demonstrate that the public benefit arising as a result will far outweigh any private or commercial gain to the landowner or grantee.

Geological and earth heritage projects

The UK is renowned for the diversity and historic significance of its geology. The geodiversity this creates includes rocks, fossils, minerals, landforms, landscapes, geological processes and soils. Geodiversity has had a strong influence on our heritage and our lives. For example geology has dictated where we built castles and towns, where we grew crops or planted woodland, where we developed industry and created some of our most scenic landscapes. Yet many people fail to make the connection between our underlying geology, current land uses and landscape character we see today.

We are keen to see more projects that focus on interpreting and explaining our geological heritage, on protecting and enhancing important geological sites, and in engaging more people in enjoying and understanding our geodiversity.

Recording data on habitats and/or species

In order 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 as well as national bodies such as the statutory agencies and the National Biodiversity Network (NBN).

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

- make data accessible to more people
- provide a wider range of people with volunteering and learning opportunities in identifying, surveying and recording species and habitats
- supply all habitat and species data, free of charge, to local record centres and to the National Biodiversity Network (see note below)

Many natural heritage projects will produce digital material or “outputs”, such as digital photographs, drawings, data sheets, web sites or smartphone apps. We have specific requirements for such digital outputs, which are set out in our terms of grant and explained in our digital good-practice guidance.

In order to supply data on habitats and species to the National Biodiversity Network (NBN), observations must comply with the standards for data quality and accessibility as set out by the NBN on the NBN Atlas (www.nbnatlas.org). This data must be made available to the public 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 online recording tool iRecord (www.brc.ac.uk/irecord) or they can be shared with your local or regional environmental record centre (www.alerc.org.uk) for onward transmission to the NBN Atlas (www.nbn.org.uk). If you are unsure how best to proceed, please contact the NBN directly to discuss the most appropriate data supply route. You must also meet HLF's requirement for digital outputs.

HLF's standard Creative Commons licence (CC BY-NC) permits and encourages use and re-use of digital material, free of charge, for non-commercial uses. We recognise that data produced as a result of an ecological survey might be of considerable interest to natural heritage organisations engaged in commercial work, such as desk-based assessments. It is not our intention to restrict the use of data in these circumstances, so if you ask us to make an exception to our standard licence for your data, we are likely to agree that information provided to a local record centre, NBN may be licensed with the Creative Commons licence CC BY, which permits commercial use with attribution. Any digital outputs from your project that do not contain ecological data will still need to be licensed with the standard licence.

Site information

Projects involving the acquisition of land

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

Providing access to natural heritage sites

We are committed to ensuring that all our projects offer the public greater access whenever possible and practical. The projects we support might include works to enhance footpath access for all users, help link up long distance footpaths and cycle path networks, or provide new access to areas previously closed off.

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

This opportunity to voluntarily dedicate their land for public access is particularly relevant to potential land acquisitions with the support of HLF funds. The willingness to voluntarily dedicate land purchased with HLF funds will be regarded positively. Making a dedication under Section 16 of the Act does not prevent a change of use or prevent development but does:

- give legal public right of access to the land that would not otherwise be covered by the CRow Act, such as woodland
- ensures that the right of access remains in force even if the land changes hands
- ensures that the right of access to dedicated land that has been mapped as open country or registered common land continues, even if the land loses those characteristics at some point in the future

We understand that some fragile habitats and species can be damaged or disturbed by physical access and noise. If this is the case you may wish to consider providing different levels or zones of access to different parts of a project area. Some areas might be fully accessible all year round, whilst others may be closed during breeding or nesting seasons. If you feel full physical access may not be appropriate then you may wish to consider using other forms of access to allow people to see and appreciate the heritage through for example the use of hides, remote cameras or other digital technologies.

Working on private land

Many priority habitats and species are found on land that is owned by private individuals or for-profit organisations. We do, however, accept applications for landscape and nature projects that are on both public and privately owned land, provided that public benefit outweighs any private gain for the individual land owner(s) where they are private individuals or for-profit organisations. The lead applicant for the project must, however, be a not-for-profit organisation or a public body if your grant request is for £100,000 or more.

In order to include private land, your overall project must meet all four criteria below:

- have a core of good-quality priority habitat or support a significant population of priority species from which to extend out from; this core land must be designated as being of national, regional or local importance
- enhance and/or expand the extent and quality of habitat that will help to meet UKBAP habitat and species targets
- contribute to long-term sustainable management of the area
- demonstrate a strategic approach to the conservation of a priority habitat or species

Even when working on private land we will expect some degree of public access to be provided. However we also accept the principle of zoned levels of physical access within your project area and that physical access may not always be appropriate or desirable for habitat conservation reasons. There should already be public access to the land that you own, and you may also have some infrastructure, for example paths or hides, that can help to accommodate increased public access.

Protected sites and species

Some natural heritage sites and individual species are protected by law for example as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) or Areas of Special Scientific Interest (ASSI) in Northern Ireland. This means you may need to obtain consent for any work

that you do that may include conservation works, using particular types of machinery or handling particular animal species. Your local authority will be able to tell you whether a site is protected and national agencies can advise on particular species that are specially protected.

Similarly some areas of natural heritage value may also be of archaeological importance and may be protected as scheduled ancient monuments, listed buildings or registered landscapes. The local authority will be able to advise you if any of these designations affect your site or project and whether any form of consent will be required.

HLF projects and Agri-Environment schemes

Where Agri-Environment Scheme agreements will achieve part of the approved purposes of an HLF project then the payments made as a result of these agreements, together with the landowner's/farmer's contribution, can be included as partnership funding towards the overall cost of the HLF project.

It is important to know the date agreed for the start of the Agri-Environment funded works rather than the date the Agri-Environment agreement was signed. To qualify as match funding for an HLF project the start date for the Agri-Environment funded works must not be earlier than one year before the HLF first or second-round grant approval date. However the annual Agri-Environment Scheme payment for that year before the first or second-round pass cannot count as partnership funding, only the annual payments made during the life of the HLF grant contract can count.

If you have questions on how to use agri-environment funding as match funding please ask your local HLF office for further details and refer to our Frequently Asked Questions.

Ecosystem services in HLF projects

In recent years the natural heritage sector has sought to find a way of clarifying the ways in which humans benefit from the natural environment and the goods and services it provides. A key document is the *Millennium Ecosystem Assessment* (MEA) (2003) which popularised the concept of ecosystem services to explain the ways in which the natural environment (ecosystems) generates goods and services that make human life possible and underpin human wellbeing.

In 2011 the UK published its *National Ecosystem Assessment* (UKNEA), which included extensive analysis of the UK's ecosystems and ecosystem services. This approach is now widely embedded in natural environment policy across the UK.

The ecosystems approach can provide a transparent though still complex framework that allows a better understanding of the impacts of projects, programmes and policies on ecosystems and the services they provide.

HLF welcomes projects that wish to use MEA terminology to distinguish the different types of ecosystem services and the goods that they produce, as well as to illustrate

the positive impacts of an HLF funded project on ecosystem services. Due to the complexity of the language and the emerging nature of the science we do not expect or require projects to use ecosystem terminology but larger projects may find it helpful in reporting benefits or losses.

Specialist help

If you are a community group thinking of carrying out a natural heritage project you may need specialist help. You can find help from a number of sources including your local authority, your local county or country wildlife trust, specialist species or habitat groups such as the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust (WWT), Amphibian and Reptile Conservation or Plantlife.

Your group may also benefit from specialist training in biological identification and conservation management techniques so remember to ask for funding to provide training, expert advice, mentoring or to allow visits to other similar sites. It is surprisingly easy to damage vulnerable natural habitats simply by failing to appreciate their subtleties, over enthusiastic ground clearance or by using the wrong management techniques.

More information and resources

National Biodiversity Network (NBN)

The NBN operate the NBN Gateway that acts as a data warehouse for biodiversity information. Individual records covering plants, mammals, birds and invertebrates are stored on the NBN Gateway and displayed on a map of the UK. It is a partnership involving members of virtually every wildlife conservation in the UK, the government and country agencies.

www.nbn.org.uk

Wildlife and Countryside Link

Wildlife and Countryside Link is an umbrella body, whose purpose is to bring together voluntary organisations in the UK to protect and enhance wildlife, landscape and the marine environment, and to further quiet enjoyment and appreciation of the countryside. WCL is London based and focuses on Government policy and strategy in England.

www.wcl.org.uk

There are other links in each devolved administration.

Northern Ireland Environment Link

www.nienvironmentlink.org

Scottish Environment Link

www.scotlink.org

Wales Environment Link

www.waleslink.org

The Royal Society of Wildlife Trusts (RSWT)

The RSWT is the umbrella body for the 47 individual Wildlife Trusts that cover the UK. They help co-ordinate the trusts activities and campaigns for wildlife at a UK level.

www.wildlifetrusts.org.uk

The Geological Society

The Geological Society is the UK national society for geoscience and the professional body for Chartered Geologists. The Society provides a wide range of professional and scientific support services.

www.geolsoc.org.uk