

AONB PROJECT FUND Guidelines for Applicants

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The AONB Project Fund provides assistance with works that help implement the AONB Management Plan. It can provide grants to assist with a range of works that contribute to the management of the landscape, biodiversity, historic environment and enjoyment of the AONB, such as rebuilding dry stone walls and restoring hedges, as well as community and sustainable development projects.

2. Applicant eligibility

- 2.1 To be eligible the project must either be within the Howardian Hills AONB or demonstrably benefitting the AONB/its communities. Land/property managers must demonstrate that they have sufficiently secure tenure on the property to be able to satisfy the Conditions attached to a grant.
- 2.2 Tenants applying in their own right must notify their landlords of their intention of applying for grant aid and have gained all necessary consents.

3. Conflict with other grant schemes

- 3.1 The Howardian Hills AONB Project Fund scheme does not automatically affect an applicant's eligibility for other grants or assistance. However, funding for the work covered by an AONB grant must not be claimed from any other source unless agreed in writing in advance.
- 3.2 Any land or features entered into an Agri Environment Scheme for which an annual payment is received will not normally be eligible for grants from the Howardian Hills AONB Project Fund, unless written approval has been received from Natural England confirming that this would not constitute double-funding.

4. Works eligible for grant aid

- 4.1 A list of landscape, biodiversity, historic environment and recreation features, together with grant-eligible items associated with their management or enhancement, is shown in Annex 1.
- 4.2 Details of the diverse types of community/sustainable development project that may be eligible for assistance are available in Annex 3. These projects would previously have been supported by the Sustainable Development Fund (SDF), which has now been incorporated into the AONB Project Fund.

5. Grant assessment criteria

5.1 The following criteria will be used to assess the eligibility and level of assistance for each application:

- a) *The eligibility of the project for funding from other grant sources.* The AONB Project Fund will normally only be used to fund projects that are unable to get assistance from other sources. Project Fund assistance may be used to supplement other grant sources, where it forms part of the funding 'jigsaw' and determines whether a project proceeds or not.
- b) *The priority of the project in relation to implementation of the AONB Management Plan.* Is the work on a Natural or Historic Environment Priority Site or does it contribute to achievement of the Landscape Management guidelines or Objectives? The current Management Plan can be found in the 'Library' section of the AONB website – www.howardianhills.org.uk
- c) *The general benefit accruing from the project* (public visibility, landscape, biodiversity or cultural heritage value, etc.).
- d) *The 'value for money' of the project and the plausibility of the costs.*
- e) *The level of funding necessary to enable the project to proceed.*
- f) *The quality, appropriateness and fine details of the project.*
- g) *The budget remaining at the time of the application.*

6. Grant Rates

6.1 Assistance will normally be in the range of 30-75% of approved costs, but can be up to 100%.

6.2 Work may be assisted either via a grant payment to applicants or via direct works organised and funded by the AONB Project. An in-kind contribution from the applicant will normally be required in the latter case.

6.3 'Standard Costs' may be used to simplify administration for both the applicant and the AONB Team, or where applicants wish to carry out works to a higher/more expensive standard than is technically necessary (e.g. post and rail fencing instead of pig netting). A list of 'Standard Cost' items and their applicable rates is contained in Annex 1.

6.4 Some work is subject to caps under EU State Aid regulations, based on whether the improvements increase agricultural productivity or not. These items and the grant rate/expenditure limits applicable are shown in Annex 2.

6.5 For match funding purposes, volunteer time can be included within community/sustainable development projects. It will usually be calculated at £50/day (£6.25/hr) for general volunteers and £150/day (£18.75/hr) for specialist, technical or professional volunteers.

7. Application process

7.1 The Application Form can be downloaded from the 'Grants' page of the Howardian Hills AONB website, at www.howardianhills.org.uk.

7.2 Completed application forms, together with any supporting documentation, should be returned to the AONB Team at:

Howardian Hills AONB, The Old Vicarage, Bondgate, Helmsley, York. YO62 5BP

or info@howardianhills.org.uk

7.3 Applicants seeking grant aid for sustainable development projects may be asked to complete a separate second-stage application form if their project is very large or complex.

8. Authorisation and scrutiny process

8.1 Grant offers/assistance will normally be authorised at AONB Team level. The AONB Team will consult with specialists where it is felt that further technical knowledge or guidance may be useful in assessing projects.

8.2 Joint Advisory Committee (JAC) Chairman approval will be required for grants/assistance that constitute more than 25% of the annual funding available within the relevant category (i.e. Natural Environment, Historic Environment or Sustainable Development & Rural Economy).

8.3 The AONB Manager will submit a monitoring report to each Core Funding Group and JAC meeting, giving details of all projects assisted. The AONB Manager may be asked for full details and required to justify the decisions made.

9. General conditions attached to offers of grant or assistance

9.1 Only one quotation needs to be submitted with an application, but 'Standard Cost' calculations may be used to ensure value for money or simplify administration.

9.2 Grant will only be payable on works included within an approved application.

9.3 No work will be assisted retrospectively. This condition may exceptionally be varied at the discretion of the AONB Manager, where it is felt that the start of the work has not unduly prejudiced the assessment of the eligibility of the project for assistance.

9.4 Where applicable, a signed copy of the grant offer letter and associated Conditions must be returned to the AONB Team before work commences.

9.5 The work must be completed as per the specification contained in the original application, although flexibility may be allowed if unforeseen circumstances arise.

9.6 Any works subject to a 'Standard Cost' calculation must be completed to the specification contained within the grant offer documentation.

9.7 Works covered by Conditions attached to a planning consent will not be eligible for assistance.

9.8 Where landscaping works such as tree/hedge planting or wall restoration have been funded, a proportion of the grant may be reclaimed from the applicant if a subsequent planning application is approved, for which the works could reasonably be considered to provide screening or landscape mitigation that might reasonably have been imposed by way of a Planning Condition. Grant may be reclaimed in accordance with the following regressive scale: Planning Approval within 1 year of payment of grant – 100%; Planning Approval within 2 years of payment of grant – 50%; Planning Approval within 3 years of payment of grant – 25%.

10. Maintenance Requirements

- 10.1 The applicant must agree to maintain the work in a sound and reasonable condition for five years after completion of the work, to ensure that it delivers the intended purpose.

11. Grant Payment

- 11.1 The agreed sum will be paid following the submission of a completed claim form, accompanied by receipted invoices or a statement of costs, and a satisfactory site inspection.
- 11.2 The final sum paid may be reduced 'pro-rata' if the final cost of the project is less than the estimate contained in the original application. If additional eligible costs have been incurred then an amount up to but not exceeding the original offer sum may be paid.
- 11.3 In exceptional circumstances, and only with the prior written approval of the AONB Manager, the grant offer or grant payment may be increased 'pro-rata' to cover additional eligible costs.

12. Breach of Conditions

- 12.1 If the applicant fails to carry out the work in accordance with the grant offer then all or part of the grant payment may be withheld until such time as the breach is rectified to the AONB Manager's satisfaction.
- 12.2 If the applicant fails to maintain the work in accordance with the grant offer, and the breach is not subsequently rectified to the AONB Manager's satisfaction, then all or part of the grant payment may be clawed-back.

13. Statutory Requirements

- 13.1 The AONB Project Fund scheme does not affect the requirement for any statutory consultations, notifications or permissions. These include, but are not exclusively limited to, planning permission requirements, Listed Building Consent, Environment Agency consents, Environmental Impact Assessment requirements, Felling Licence requirements, Tree Preservation Orders, notification to Natural England of any operations affecting or adjacent to a SSSI and statutory obligations with regard to public rights of way.

14. Data Protection and Disclosure of Information

- 14.1 North Yorkshire County Council (as the legal body under whose auspices the AONB Project Fund operates) is registered under the Data Protection Act 2018. The information contained in your grant application and any grant offer documentation will be used by the Council for administration, evaluation and monitoring purposes under the Public Task lawful basis for processing. The Council reserves the right to disclose all non-financial information contained within the grant offer to the named owner or agent and to other Public Authorities and Statutory Bodies. The Council reserves the right to disclose to the general public the area of land covered by the grant offer and the works carried out under the offer. Such information may be in the form of a map.

Annex 1

Types of work and items eligible for assistance – landscape, biodiversity, historic environment and recreation projects

Types of work eligible for assistance:

Traditional boundaries

- Restoration of hedges using traditional methods such as laying, coppicing and associated new planting. Work should be to restore a degraded feature – operations deemed to be ‘routine maintenance’ will not generally be eligible for funding
- Planting new hedges
- Restoration of drystone walls. Work must be to restore a degraded feature – operations deemed to be ‘routine maintenance’ are not eligible for funding

Tree planting

- Planting new individual trees within fields or along boundaries
- Planting small copses or new areas of woodland.

Woodland management

- Any measure designed to assist with the conservation management/restoration of Ancient Semi-Natural Woodlands (ASNW) or key Plantations on Ancient Woodland Sites (PAWS) Measures include, but are not limited to:
 - replanting with appropriate broadleaved species in preference to conifers
 - encouragement and protection of appropriate natural regeneration
 - coppicing
 - ride and glade management
 - control of inappropriate or invasive non-native species
 - manipulation of planting mixes during thinning operations

Conservation management of grasslands, wetlands or priority species

- Conservation grazing or cutting
- Managing access by livestock or wild animals
- Control of inappropriate or invasive non-native species
- Re-seeding or supplementary planting, to improve diversity
- Creation of ponds, scrapes and wetlands
- Raising water levels

Consolidation, restoration or protection of archaeological or historic features

- Managing access by livestock or wild animals
- Repair and protection from erosion, including establishing benign vegetation cover
- Consolidation of built remains to restore condition or prevent further deterioration
- Control of damaging vegetation cover e.g. scrub or bracken

Restoration of traditional buildings

- Consolidation or repair of stonework, roof structure, roof coverings, etc
- Repairs or replacement of rainwater goods
- Repairs or replacement of timberwork such as windows and doors
- Domestic residential properties are not eligible for funding

Enhancing access or enjoyment

- Provision of seats, sculptures, etc
- Provision of information or interpretation

Items of expenditure eligible for assistance:

- a) Materials – Trees and shrubs of an appropriate size; tree tubes or spirals, together with supporting stakes or canes; protective rabbit, stock or anti-trespass fencing; individual cages; chemical treatments; walling stone; fencing; gates; water management structures; building stone; bricks; timber; slates/pantiles; etc, etc
- b) Labour for construction, site preparation, planting, fencing, site or feature consolidation/repair, site management, etc. – hired specialist contractors; volunteers; farm labour; own labour
- c) Professional fees incurred in recording site interest, developing management options and preparing the application for grant assistance
- d) VAT, when this cannot be reclaimed by the applicant
- e) Planning fees associated with pond construction
- f) Any other items considered by the AONB Manager to be legitimate associated costs

Standard Costs

The following rates may be used for the specified items in some applications, where doing so would ensure value for money or simplify administration

Fencing	Pignet and line wire fencing for protecting hedgerows and tree planting, etc.	Grant rate % Standard cost per m	Variable £5.25
Hedge Planting	Cost is calculated on the basis of 6 plants per metre, using rabbit spirals and canes, and includes all materials and labour	Grant rate % Standard cost per m	Variable £5.00
Labour	Labour only Labour with hand held machinery Labour with tractor and trailer	Grant rate % Farmer's cost per hour Farmer's cost per hour Farmer's cost per hour	Variable £10.00 £15.00 £25.00

Annex 2

Criteria to determine the level of aid to be offered for the conservation of traditional boundaries and buildings and the creation or restoration of ponds for wildlife

Traditional Boundaries – classified as non-productive if:

- a) boundary is on land in arable cultivation
- b) boundary is demarcated by an existing fence line
- c) current farming practice does not require a stock-proof boundary

Aid will be granted up to 100% of the costs incurred, up to a limit of €10,000 per year.

Traditional Boundaries – classified as productive but not resulting in an increase in production if:

- a) current farming practice requires, or would benefit from, a stock-proof boundary
- b) future maintenance payments will be available through an agri-environment scheme

Aid will be granted up to 60%.

Restoration and Maintenance of Traditional Buildings – classified as productive but not resulting in an increase in production if:

- a) building is currently in use and the restoration/maintenance will not lead to an increase in use
- b) building is not currently in use and will not have any productive use after restoration

Aid will be granted up to 60%. Extra costs incurred as a result of using traditional materials will be funded at a rate of 100%.

Restoration and Maintenance of Traditional Buildings – classified as productive and would result in an increase in production if:

- a) investment results in a redundant building being brought back into agricultural use

Aid will be granted up to 40%. Extra costs incurred as a result of using traditional materials will be funded at a rate of 100%.

Creation or restoration of ponds for wildlife – classified as non-productive if:

- a) the investment provides no agricultural function in terms of stock watering, irrigation or land drainage

Aid will be granted up to 100% of the costs incurred, up to a limit of €10,000 per year.

Creation or restoration of ponds for wildlife – classified as productive if:

- a) the investment will provide for stock watering only

Aid will be granted up to 60%.

Creation or restoration of ponds for wildlife – classified as productive and resulting in an increase in production if:

- a) the investment provides an agricultural resource in terms of irrigation or land drainage

Aid will be granted up to 40%.

Annex 3

Community/sustainable development projects

What is Sustainable Development?

There are many different definitions of sustainable development. The definition that we use when considering projects is:

'Sustainable Development will promote and enhance the environmental, economic and community wellbeing of the Howardian Hills and ensure a better quality of life for everyone, now and for generations to come'

Achieving sustainable development requires working towards four main goals *at the same time*:

- *Social progress which meets the needs of everyone*
- *Effective protection of the environment*
- *Ensuring a diverse and prosperous rural economy*
- *Prudent use of natural resources*

What kind of project is eligible?

Successful projects will demonstrate:

- Sustainability (integrating all of the goals of sustainable development above)
- Harmony with Howardian Hills AONB purposes
- Support or involvement of local communities
- Partnership working wherever possible

What items of expenditure are eligible?

Grants can include the costs of the following items:

- Feasibility studies or research projects
- Group or partnership development
- Practical work/materials; capital and revenue costs
- Awareness raising and training

Priority will be given to projects that:

- Are innovative or demonstrate best practice
- Involve young people or other under-represented sectors of communities
- Bring in funds and/or support in-kind from other sources
- Add value or new dimensions to existing sustainability projects
- Reduce the need for fossil fuels and cut greenhouse gas emissions

Who can apply?

Public/private/voluntary sector organisations or individuals; businesses; community groups.

Individuals or businesses can only be beneficiaries where the project shows a clear benefit to the wider community.

Get advice!

Because sustainable development can potentially cover a wide range of projects, applicants are strongly advised to discuss their idea with the AONB Team before submitting an application. The AONB Team will also be able to advise whether any similar projects have already been carried out, from whom potential applicants may gain advice and/or experience.