Nature Conservation Fund: Round 2

Guidance for applicants

Empowering communities to create thriving, nature-rich greenspaces.

Key Information

Objective of the grant: to support nature recovery and connectivity objectives across South Norfolk

Projects must meet **key criteria** by demonstrating their potential to:

1. **Carbon sequestration:** Projects that actively contribute to tackling carbon emissions.
2. **Biodiversity benefit:** Initiatives that enhance local ecosystems and support a diverse range of plant and animal life.
3. **Public accessibility to greenspace:** Creating and improving green spaces that are accessible and enjoyable for the entire community.
4. **Air quality and urban cooling:** Targeted planting to reduce pollution and provide shade in urban areas.

The most successful projects will integrate all three goals seamlessly.

Eligibility:

- Applicants can include Town and Parish Councils, community groups, charities, and schools in South Norfolk
- Applicants must be able to prove ownership of land,have a lease of at least 10 years, or provide landowner permission for the project to take place at the point of application.
- Applicants must demonstrate that they have public liability insurance at an appropriate level of cover.
- Projects must be able to make a meaningful start on site within 4 months from agreement of funding allocation. Where schemes are at risk of not proceeding or delivering within the agreed time frames, meetings will be held to evaluate delivery timelines. Where schemes do not proceed following the evaluation, the amount allocated must be returned for re-allocation. Funds cannot be transferred to another project.
- Projects must have all regulatory consents in place.

Maximum grant available: up to £10,000 per project.

Closing date for full applications: 18th September 2026

Deadline for project delivery: 31st March 2027

NATURE CONSERVATION FUND

South Norfolk COUNCIL

Introduction

The Nature Conservation Fund offers grants of up to £10,000 per project to support communities in the South Norfolk district to develop and enhance biodiversity and local greenspaces.

Further information about the fund

- We strongly encourage applicants to provide match funding or an in-kind contribution towards their projects, which can include but is not limited to volunteer time, materials, capital, building partnerships with relevant stakeholders.
- Project costs should not include VAT, unless this cannot be recovered.
- Projects can be delivered on private land as long as what is to be delivered is fully accessible to the general public and landowner permission is provided alongside the application.
- Successful projects by Town and Parish Councils, community groups, charities, and schools will be made paid upfront based on quotations provided for the works.
- Funded projects must recognise the financial assistance of South Norfolk Council, through the inclusion of the Council's logo and written statement, (as stated within the Grant Offer Letter).
- The decision to provide funding will be made by the Climate Change and Environment Team, subject to review of the application form and any additional information, on each occasion.
- Projects will be required to complete a short report (one page maximum) on project outcomes at the end of the project delivery stage (31st March 2027) and for the 12-month period following project delivery (by 31st March 2028).

Other considerations

Methods to manage the project for a 12-month period following delivery should be explained within the grant application, providing detail on source(s) of funding for ongoing expenses, source(s) of labour (for example, a volunteer group), and how sustainable watering solutions have been considered where practical. Projects that include ongoing maintenance following delivery will be prioritised for funding.

Applicants are also encouraged to monitor the success of the project and environmental and/or social benefits that the project has delivered. For example, to monitor biodiversity at the site, a 'bioblitz' could be organised before and after work has been completed on the site to understand changes in which species are present. Social impact surveys could also be completed by volunteers working on the site or attending associated events to understand how the project has influenced them (for example, their attitude towards nature or level of

physical activity). Guidance on social and environmental monitoring will be provided to successful applicants.

To encourage sustainability, projects must commit to deliver benefits, relative to the grant scheme's key criteria, for a minimum of 10 years following project delivery. Applicants must demonstrate how the project will be sustainable across this period of time.

Projects should aim to engage the local community both during and after the delivery of the project. For example, this can be achieved through fundraising events, volunteering planting days, and contacting local schools, youth groups or volunteering groups.

We recommend that all projects include the installation of an interpretation board about the project. The costs associated with this should be included within the project budget and grant request.

Project locations must be cross referenced with housing allocations to ensure that they do not fall within allocated zones. This can be checked within the Town or Parish Councils Neighbourhood Plan, or Greater Norwich Local Plan.

Let us know if the project is dependent on additional work, projects or infrastructure being completed.

Strategic fit

Applicants must demonstrate that the proposed projects meet one or more of the following objectives:

	Objective
1	Carbon sequestration
2	Biodiversity benefit
3	Public accessibility to greenspace
4	Air quality and urban cooling

1. **Mini Forests** – promoting carbon sequestration and biodiversity

Mini forests, or Miyawaki forests, are highly effective for carbon capture due to their dense, fast-growing native species. Using native species helps create species rich habitats that boost biodiversity. Their multi-layered structure mimics natural forests, supporting rapid, self-sustaining ecosystems. This innovative approach is perfect for quickly restoring degraded land and creating urban green spaces.

A £10,000 grant will cover the cost of a mini forest. The final look of the mini forest, the capacity of the group to manage the project and the nature of the site can influence the final cost of the mini forest.

We recommend that applicants read this document for guidance: Miyawaki-Method-Handbook_v6.pdf

Planting should take place between November and February. Applications must include details on planting and species.

Applicants must have obtained permission from the landowner where applicable and must ensure that the project location is suitable for planting (for example, applicants must check for the presence of pipelines, etc).

Requirements

Items	**Further information**
Trees	These should be whips, they need to be planted very densely e.g. 3-5 per m2. They should be a mix of native species, chosen for a mix of heights. The handbook has more details.
Fencing	Mini forests need to be fenced to prevent deer or rabbit damage for a minimum of two years However, if the whole site is fenced this may be sufficient.
Tree guards	If the area is fenced then tree guards shouldn't be needed. If they are used then they must either be biodegradable or there must be a plan in place to remove them. The mini forest will grow quickly and densely so it may be difficult to remove them after the second year of growth.
Site preparation	
Site checks	Underground utility and archaeology checks should be carried out before starting. Map Search - Norfolk Heritage Explorer
Nearby trees	The plot should not overlap with the root area of other existing trees and should not be shaded by them.
Ground preparation	Dig one metre down and turn the soil. Groups can either use a contractor or hire a digger if the group does not already own one.
Soil improvers	Should use organic options, see appendix 4 of the handbook.
Mulch	It is important that the site is mulched to improve the survival rate of the trees, costs vary dependent upon what the group has

	access to. A wood chip mulch is ideal. This should be a thick layer of at least one inch and should cover the whole site, not just around the trees. It may be easier to mulch before the trees are planted.
Planting	Volunteer labour can be used. It might be a nice idea to organise a community planting day to involve local people in your project.
Watering	The trees will need to be watered regularly for the first 2-3 years, especially in dry, hot summers. Sustainable watering solutions must be considered where practical.

2. **Circular walks and 'Missing Links' –** promoting access to greenspace

Circular walks:

The aim of this project theme is to improve and promote local walking routes, through the creation of new footpaths, waymarking/signage, promotion and interpretation. This can include creating circular walks or new sections of paths to improve connections to existing Public Rights of Way or other permissive paths. The aim of creating a circular walk is to enhance access to nature and encourage greater outdoor recreation and fostering/improving better connections with local greenspaces. Circular paths must start and finish roughly in the same place to qualify for grant funding.

Applicants must identify a suitable circular walking path and demonstrate where intervention can be targeted.

Can include funding to cover improved signage and waymarking to promote existing paths, enhanced hedgerow and tree species, with the overarching aim to improve local access to greenspace.

The circular path much be in place for a minimum of 10 years following delivery, and a management plan following project delivery must be provided alongside the application to demonstrate how the circular walk is going to be maintained in the future.

Missing Links:

Applicants can apply for funding to complete/connect local networks for walking/cycling through (permissive) agreements with landowners, with funding used to cover the cost of legal fees.

Legal agreements made must serve a minimum period of 20 years, with 30 years being the preference.

To measure the success of this project, the number of metres/kilometres added to existing routes, or of new routes created must be recorded. The number of people using the footprint (over a set period of time) can be recorded using counters.

3. **Ponds** – promoting biodiversity

Ponds are essential for improving biodiversity, offering habitats for amphibians, insects and birds, and serving as ecological stepping stones that link fragmented environments. They capture carbon through organic material stored in sediments formed from aquatic plant growth. Historically ponds played a vital role in East Anglia's landscape. Healthy, biodiverse ponds improve biodiversity, ecological health and builds resilience to climate change.

Restoration:

This can be either the restoration of an existing pond or a ghost pond.

Ghost ponds are ponds that have been either filled in or lost due to a lack of management. Pond restoration must be done in the winter (November - February) to reduce disturbance to the wildlife in the pond. If the pond you plan to restore supports a protected species (e.g. Great Crested Newt) you must refer to Natural England guidance before commencing any work.

Project applications must stipulate when works are planned to be carried out.

Further guidance by Norfolk Wildlife Trust on restoring ponds can be found here: Norfolk Ponds Project – Restoring Norfolk's Ponds leaflet.pdf

Management:

Pond management will be a crucial part of the project. Applicants must demonstrate that they have thought about the future management of the site, including time, costs and expertise required.

Planning permission:

The creation of a new pond(s) may require planning permission via a full planning application.

Town and Parish Councils are eligible for a 50% discount on planning fees and may be exempt from needing planning permission through permitted development rules. Once the details of the project are known more guidance can be provided by the Climate Change and Environment Team

Obtaining planning permission is likely to take up to 8 weeks.

For the restoration of existing ponds, the Planning team will need to have sight of the works being done.

Where projects aim to increase the size of existing ponds, above a modest change, planning permission will be required.

Any costs associated with planning permission can be included within the grant request.

4. **Air Quality and Urban Cooling**

The Woodland Trust provides guidance on planting to support improvements in air quality and urban environments: Tackling Air Pollution With Trees - Woodland Trust

Tree planting can contribute to local air quality improvements by capturing particulate matter and influencing pollutant dispersion. Trees and green infrastructure also provide urban cooling benefits through shading and evapotranspiration.

Targeted planting may be particularly beneficial where it reduces exposure for sensitive receptors. Suitable locations may include:

- School playgrounds
- Hospital and care settings
- Car parks
- Industrial sites
- Intensive livestock units
- Sensitive habitats affected by nearby pollution sources

Planting in these locations may help reduce exposure to pollutants where schemes are appropriately designed and located.

Design principles for air quality and cooling

Applicants should consider the following when developing proposals:

- Locate planting between pollution sources and sensitive receptors where possible
- Use dense, continuous planting (e.g. hedges or belts) rather than isolated trees
- Ensure planting is of sufficient scale to provide a meaningful buffer
- Select suitable species, ideally with dense or long-lasting foliage
- Avoid creating enclosed or poorly ventilated spaces
- Maximise canopy cover in areas where shade will benefit people

Further guidance is available from the Woodland Trust and national guidance on trees and air quality. Benefits are site-specific and depend on design, location and species selection. Poorly designed planting may reduce dispersion and could increase pollutant concentrations in some circumstances.

5. **Other project ideas**

We welcome alternative project ideas for this Fund, as long as the outputs can be measured, monitored and can be delivered in line with the three key objectives of the Fund.