

Nature Conservation Fund

Guidance for applicants

Empowering communities to create thriving, nature-rich greenspaces.

Introduction

The Nature Conservation Fund is a **pilot scheme** offering grants of up to £10,000 per project to support communities in the South Norfolk district to develop and enhance biodiversity and local 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.

The most successful projects will integrate all three goals seamlessly.

Eligibility:

- Applicants can include Town and Parish Councils, community groups, charities, schools and landowners in South Norfolk
- Applicants must be able to prove ownership of land or have a lease of at least 10 years.
- 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 6 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.

Open to Expressions of Interest from: 1st April 2025

Further information about the fund

- Applicants must initially submit an Expression of Interest (EOI) and attend an online meeting with one of our team to discuss the project proposal.
- EOI forms and guidance will be available in March 2025. We will begin reviewing EOIs from 1st April 2025. Following the online meeting, the most suitable proposals will be invited to submit a full application.
- 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.
- Successful projects by Town and Parish Councils, community groups, charities, and schools will be made paid upfront based on quotations provided for the works
- Successful projects by landowners will be paid quarterly in arrears based on evidence of expenditure, at an intervention rate agreed on approval of the project (and stated within the Grant Offer Letter).
- Funded projects must recognise the financial assistance of South Norfolk Council, through the inclusion of the Council's logo and written statement, (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.

Other considerations

Methods to manage and monitor 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, and source of labour (for example, a volunteer group). Projects that include ongoing maintenance will be prioritised for funding.

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 also aim to engage the local community both during and after the delivery of the project.

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.

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

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](#).

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
250 – 300 trees	Costs approx. £300
Fencing	Mini forests may need to be fenced to prevent deer or rabbit damage. However, if the whole site is fenced this may be sufficient.

Tree guards	
Site preparation	
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	
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
Planting	Volunteer labour can be used

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 must 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. If you need support in identifying ghost ponds, the Climate Change and Environment Team can offer specific guidance to applicants.

Pond restoration must be done in the winter (November - February) to reduce disturbance to the wildlife in the pond. This window becomes tighter if the site is home to Great Crested Newts, restoration work can only take place between December and January. Project applications must stipulate when works are planned to be carried out.

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. 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.