

Shropshire Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Sustainable Development Fund - Guidance for applicants 2010-11
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1. Eligibility

- The Fund can support a range of activities including practical work, feasibility studies or research projects, group development, awareness raising and training. Public, private, voluntary sector and community groups can apply. Individuals and businesses can also apply where the project shows a clear benefit to the wider community.
- You don't have to live or work within the AONB to apply, and the work doesn't necessarily need to take place within the AONB. You must simply demonstrate that your project represents sustainable development which will benefit the AONB (see information in Appendix 1 on these core criteria). Connecting the work carried out with these criteria is a key aspect of the grant scheme and may require you to think about your project in a different way. Projects outside the AONB will be considered but will be less likely to be funded.
- A short written report, with photographs where appropriate, is required from each project at the end of the year showing how the work provided these benefits.
- **Applicants must undertake a sustainability appraisal of their project** as part of the full application, and organisations applying must demonstrate a corporate commitment to sustainable development. Support and guidance will be available to assist with this.
- **Grants can only be made for activity within a particular Financial Year (April to the end of March).** Longer projects must be broken down and an application made for the part of the work which can be completed within the Financial Year, with worthwhile outputs. **A separate application would need to be made at a later date for work in the next Financial Year.** A later application would stand on its own merits and not be guaranteed for approval.
- **The Fund cannot grant aid anything retrospectively.** Preparation work may be done but costs incurred before the date of the offer letter cannot be claimed or used as match funding. However, if you have made significant expenditure on an earlier phase of the project, do mention this in your application because it may provide justification for a higher rate of grant.

2. Priority areas for projects include:

- i. Climate change, energy conservation and renewable energy. (Energy conservation will be given the highest priority, and must accompany any application for renewable energy. Renewable energy projects must justify why SDF funding is needed in relation to other available grants. SDF will not support householder/domestic renewable projects but will give a high priority to community and woodfuel projects in particular.)
- ii. Sustainable transport, e.g. green travel plans for businesses and other projects reducing road travel and optimizing use of public transport.
- iii. Connecting sustainable farming with landscape, food and health, including broadening community involvement and understanding.
- iv. More sustainable use of resources, especially in relation to farming and land management.
- v. Influencing patterns of recreational use by visitors and locals towards sustainability – i.e. lower environmental impact, greater understanding and more return to local economy.
- vi. Conserving threatened wildlife or heritage features in the landscape (but avoiding overlap with other government grants for land management).

(Note that since reduced funds are available in 2010-11, priority may be given to applicants who have not previously had SDF funding).

3. Things the fund is unlikely to support

- Work outside the AONB which has no connection to it, e.g. restoration of a heritage or landscape feature outside the AONB would not be eligible; education or community work carried out outside the AONB but relating to it would be.
- Work with social or economic benefits but no environmental aspect. e.g. work on a village hall or community building would only be eligible if incorporating energy efficiency measures, demonstrating use of sustainable materials, etc.

4. Size of grants

Grants will normally be in the range of £1,000 - £5,000. Smaller grants will not normally be considered due to the administration required. Larger grants will only be made in very exceptional circumstances.

5. Rates of grant and match funding

Grants can be of up to 75% for voluntary and private sector bodies and up to 50% for public bodies. (Voluntary sector bodies for this purpose include voluntary/local community bodies, National Trust, Rural Community Councils, Wildlife Trusts, Parish and Town Councils. State schools are classed as public bodies). **A minimum of 15% of the total budget must be cash match funding from other sources** (but note exchequer funding rules below). The remainder of match funding to the SDF grant can be made up of in-kind and volunteer time contributions, and these should be costed in to the budget. Higher levels of cash match funding will strengthen an application.

SDF funds count as exchequer funding (from central government), and Treasury rules dictate that **total exchequer funding in a project must not exceed 50% for projects by public bodies and 75% for community groups and private sector applicants.** This may limit the sources which can be used for match funding, especially where the SDF grant is being requested up to that maximum rate. In other words, the Treasury shouldn't be paying for everything by just putting together funding from different Exchequer sources.

Other sources of exchequer funding include: AONB core funds, LEADER, Business Link, British Waterways, English Heritage, Environment Agency, Forestry Commission, Government Offices for the Regions, Natural England and Regional Development Agencies. These can be used to match with SDF provided the total exchequer funding does not exceed 50% for projects led by

public bodies or 75% for those led by community groups and private sector applicants, i.e. other sources of cash or in kind funding will also be needed. Public funds which do not count as exchequer funding and can therefore be used as match funding include Local Authorities, National Lottery Funds, European Funds (e.g. Objective 2), Education Authorities, Hospital Trusts. Money from the private sector (businesses) and the voluntary sector (including charitable trusts, etc) can also be used as match funding.

In very exceptional circumstances, where the benefits to the AONB are especially significant, dispensation may be obtained to offer SDF grants of up to 100 per cent.

6. Before making a full application

Projects must be discussed before a full application is made. You can start by sending in the brief project ideas form (available on the website or from the office) or by contacting Cath Landles at the Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership, The Old Post Office, Shrewsbury Road, CRAVEN ARMS, SY7 9NZ. Tel (01588) 674084. Fax (01588) 674099. E-mail: cath.landles@shropshire.gov.uk.

After looking at your idea we will recommend to you whether the project should progress to a full application. If so, we will provide an application form at that stage. We will also try to provide advice on developing the project and how it can best fit the aims of the Sustainable Development Fund. (Please note that the application form has changed for 2010-11. If you have previously applied, please do not use the old form.)

7. Writing the full application

You may fill in the form electronically or by hand, but **you must return a signed paper copy of the application.** Some of the questions may seem more relevant to your proposal than others, but please try to provide some information for them all.

Remember that your application will be read by people who may know nothing about your proposed project. You may want to get a friend to read through the application to check if you have explained it well. In particular in question 5 make clear what will actually be done in the project. Pictures or plans should be included for any proposed works on the ground. For larger projects more information will be useful.

Budget

- The budget must balance on the expenditure and income sides.
- Check the guidance on match funding above.
- Please ensure you state whether any match funding has been secured or not.
- If your organisation is VAT registered and you are able to reclaim VAT yourselves, the grant offer will be made to you ex-VAT. If you pay VAT then you may include this in the budget and claim grant against it. If you only pay a proportion of your VAT, please include in the budget only that proportion which you pay, i.e. that part you are not able to reclaim from the Inland Revenue.
- If the project runs for more than one year, please ensure that the income/expenditure are clearly indicated for the current year in which you are applying for grant. Details for other years may also be provided separately but will not form part of the application.
- In kind and volunteer time should generally be costed at £50/day (or £7/hour) for non-professional input, and £150/day (or £21/hour) for professional input. Travel expenses should be costed at 47p/mile. Other in-kind contributions should be included at their actual cost.

Checklist

- Have you answered all the questions?

- Does your budget balance and have you filled in VAT details correctly? (Note recent change to VAT rate)
- Have you signed the paper copy of the application to send in?
- Have you enclosed any plans, pictures or further information about the project if appropriate?
- Have you enclosed any background information about your organisation if appropriate?
- Have you enclosed evidence of permission where required?

An application which does not have all the necessary information may be returned for further work. If you have completed the application form electronically, it will help us with distribution if you can email it to us as well as posting the signed paper copy.

8. Assessment of your application

The Grant Advisory Panel will meet on Wednesday 24th March 2010. The deadline for receipt of applications is two weeks ahead of the panel date, i.e. 10th March 2010. There may be additional meetings later in the year depending on how allocation of the funds is going. For larger applications, you may be asked to come to the Panel meeting to answer some questions about your project. The Panel (currently 7 members) is made up principally of members of the AONB Partnership representing community, business and statutory interests and with a range of knowledge. The Panel may seek external specialist advice if necessary. Smaller applications may not need to go before the full Panel and can be processed more quickly. If your application is not approved we will explain why and advise you whether it may be worth adapting the project to reapply.

9. If your grant is approved

You will receive a formal offer letter, outlining the rate of grant and a maximum cash sum, the budget and the required outputs of the project. Special conditions relating to your project may be set, and the general conditions of grant also apply (see Appendix 2). These set out the procedures for claiming your grant, and for monitoring and reporting. **The offer letter is a legal contract, and you will only receive the grant if your project meets the agreed outputs and conditions.**

If a project does not work out as intended, the grant offer may be amended, but it is preferable to avoid this. **If you have to abandon or curtail your project, or don't expect to claim the full grant, you must let us know as soon as possible, as the money may then be allocated elsewhere.**

Importantly, the grant is not paying for just a part of your project, but funding a proportion of the whole project you have described in your application. **You will therefore need to complete the project and provide evidence of all of the eligible expenditure and outputs in order to claim the full grant.**

Appendix 1 BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON CORE CRITERIA

Purposes of Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty designation

The statutory purpose of AONBs is “to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the area”. Natural beauty includes landscape, landform and geology, wildlife and cultural heritage. Government guidance on AONBs also identifies subsidiary purposes:

- **Socio-economic needs of local communities** (‘account should be taken of the needs of agriculture, forestry, other rural industries, and the economic and social needs of local communities’).
- **Sustainable development** (‘particular regard should be paid to promoting sustainable forms of social and economic development that in themselves conserve and enhance the environment’).
- **Recreation** (‘the demand for recreation should be met insofar as this is consistent with the conservation of natural beauty’).

The strategic priorities of the Shropshire Hills AONB Management Plan 2009-14 are:

Valuing, conserving and enhancing what we have

Conserving habitats, heritage and quality; appropriate and high quality development

Keeping the Shropshire Hills countryside thriving

Land management, especially farming; sustainable communities

Shifting to low carbon

Taking the right action to mitigate climate change

Adapting for the future, working alongside nature

Landscape scale conservation; functioning ecosystems; social and economic adaptation

Helping people to connect with the AONB

Awareness; enjoyment and wellbeing; community involvement

The Management Plan is available on the AONB website www.shropshirehillsaonb.co.uk.

Sustainable Development

Sustainable development has been defined as “promoting and enhancing environmental, economic, and community well-being, to ensure a better quality of life for everyone, now and for generations to come”.

Achieving sustainable development requires meeting four main goals at the same time:

- Social progress which meets the needs of everyone;
- Effective protection of the environment;
- A diverse and prosperous rural economy;
- Prudent use of natural resources.

Individual projects can place particular emphasis on any one of these four goals, should seek to make progress on all, but must demonstrate no negative impact on any. The AONB SDF grant panel will be seeking to ensure that the cumulative impact of SDF in the AONB is a balanced achievement of these goals of sustainable development.

Checklist of sustainable development criteria

Projects will need to show how they fit some of these criteria, but it will not be necessary to try to fit all of them. This information may be of help in completing the sustainability appraisal part of the application form.

Environment Criteria:

- **Biodiversity** is the variety of life - habitats and species, rare and common. In England, wildlife is often adapted to low intensity management, and biodiversity may be best conserved or enhanced by continuing or reinstating traditional practices such as cutting grasslands for hay and grazing, or coppicing broadleaved woodlands.
- **'Reduce, re-use, recycle'** can be applied as a principle to any resource consumption e.g. from water to wood. Reducing consumption of a resource is usually the most sustainable option, with reusing and recycling as the next or complementary options.
- **Energy.** Projects may seek to reduce energy usage, e.g. through building design or alteration, or generate energy sustainably, or both. Projects demonstrating how renewable energy can be developed in harmony with a high quality landscape will be particularly welcomed.
- **Minimise pollution to air/water/land.** Promoting processes and products that reduce harmful discharges to the environment, either to land, water or air.
- **Traditional materials.** The use of carefully sourced materials such as wood, slate or local stone is likely to enhance the aesthetic appeal of any building project and aid sustainability.
- **Sustainable transport** means reducing dependency on cars and encouraging use of public transport, walking and cycling.

Social Criteria:

- **Participation/support and ownership** refers to the degree to which local people and/or people who use or work in a place or service have been involved in planning and implementing the project being put forward for funding. A high degree of participation and ownership will only come if it has been consciously sought and encouraged.
- **Involving young people** can be in project formulation and implementation, as well as them being the beneficiaries.
- **Local Social Needs.** Supporting community needs such as the provision of services or amenities, health issues, opportunities for young people, the elderly, and disadvantaged or minority groups.
- **Community structures.** Are locally-run organisations in place to manage and develop the project over the long term? Something imposed from outside, paternalistically or by a well-meaning individual is less likely to be sustainable than one owned and controlled by a local organisation or partnership.
- **Local appraisal/feasibility.** Consultative processes designed to draw out the views of people living in a local community. There are numerous ways of undertaking an appraisal, from a public meeting to a sophisticated questionnaire. The more rigorous and involving the appraisal, the more weight can be placed on its results.

Economic Criteria:

- ***Generates own income.*** The ability to create a resource, service or activity for which there is a demand and a willingness to pay, improves its long-term sustainability.
- ***Helps local economy*** – a sustainable community is considered to be one in which there is a diverse range of economic activities, which actively trade with each other. This enables it to be more stable and less vulnerable to destabilizing external influences. Sustainable projects should help to strengthen and diversify the local economy and use local products and services.
- ***Business plan.*** A written document that is 'owned' by those who have responsibility for long-term management. It should clearly state the business objectives of those involved in the management of a resource, service or activity, and the way in which financial and human resources will be found and applied to achieve those objectives.
- ***Jobs, training, volunteering.*** Will the project create or support paid or voluntary jobs, and training opportunities? If voluntary tasks are of a good quality and linked to training they can enable people to move into paid work.
- ***Cost effective.*** Projects will be assessed on their value for money.
- ***Levering in other funds/support in kind from other sources.*** Projects that have explored other complementary grant/funding sources to give added value to the SDF will score highly.

ADDITIONAL DESIRABLE CRITERIA

Projects are more likely to be funded if they also demonstrate:

- ***Community Support*** – involving others in the development of the project, and meeting community needs, e.g. as defined in a Parish Plan or Community Strategy.
- ***Partnership*** - bringing organisations and people together to co-operate in tackling problems or promoting new ideas.
- ***Social inclusion*** - for example through involving young people, those from black or minority ethnic groups, the elderly or those with disabilities, or encouraging links between urban groups and those resident in the AONB.
- ***Innovation and Creativity*** - demonstrating the use of new ideas, unique design and thinking beyond the usual constraints.
- ***Best Practice*** - building upon what is considered to be best practice in the particular area of work. Knowledge of what has been done elsewhere should inform but not constrain the planning and design of the project.
- ***Strategic fit*** - being complementary to other local, regional and national strategies.

Appendix 2 General Conditions of Grant

The following conditions apply to all offers of grant made through the Shropshire Hills AONB Sustainable Development Fund by Shropshire Council under section 9 of the Local Government Act 1974, unless expressly deleted or varied in the formal offer letter to the applicant.

While some of the following conditions will not be relevant to all grant-aided projects, the decision whether to apply an individual condition remains solely at the discretion of Shropshire Council.

QUALITY OF WORK

1. All work grant aided through the Sustainable Development Fund must conform to specifications submitted with the grant application unless agreed in writing.
2. The grantee will ensure at all times that works and activities covered by the offer of grant aid will conform to any relevant statutory obligations, bylaws, planning consents or building regulations.
3. The grantee will be responsible for ensuring all works are carried out to a high standard. Any physical works carried out through the project must be maintained in a satisfactory condition for a period of five years from the date of the final claim.
4. Where public access forms part of the project, the grantee will ensure that such access is allowed and no person is unreasonably denied access.
5. Where the land or feature to which this agreement pertains is sold or otherwise disposed of then the contents of this agreement shall be passed to the new owner of the land or feature. Where this is not possible then Shropshire Council may require any grant paid to be repaid in part or in full.

PUBLICITY

6. The support of the Shropshire Hills AONB and Natural England must be acknowledged in any publicity material about the project produced by the grantee.
7. The Shropshire Hills AONB logo may be used on publicity material, but must be unchanged in any way (e.g. no alteration of the horizontal and vertical proportions). Colour and black and white versions of the logo are available from the Partnership.
8. The Shropshire Hills AONB Partnership or Natural England may use information about the project (including photographs) to publicise the Fund, or refer publicly to grants offered and work undertaken either generally or specifically.

FINANCIAL CONDITIONS, CLAIMS & MONITORING

9. The offer of grant is made on the understanding that in the course of making the application, the grantee will have disclosed any other financial contribution which may be received for the same purpose from any other body. So far as any contributions have not been disclosed prior to any offer of grant from the Sustainable Development Fund, the Council may subsequently vary or require the repayment of any grant to take account of them.
10. The offer of grant must be accepted in writing within 21 days of the date of the offer letter. The acceptance should be signed by the named contact in the application.

11. The offer of grant is made on the understanding that no grant will be paid for work carried out prior to the acceptance of the formal offer of grant, or after the end of the Financial Year in which the grant offer was made.
12. Claims for the grant must be accompanied by a progress budget related to the proposed budget in the grant offer, and backed up by evidence of expenditure (i.e. copies of receipts or invoices for all cash items, time sheets using the template provided for costs of in-kind and voluntary contributions).
13. Variation in approved items for expenditure or dates of claims will only be in exceptional circumstances and a written request must be made for any such changes. Significant changes of the division of expenditure between the headings above should also be requested in writing.
14. Abandonment of the project or significant delays affecting claim dates must be communicated to the AONB Team at the earliest opportunity.
15. Final claims must be accompanied by a written report outlining the achievements of the project, relating these to the AONB's purposes and sustainable development principles, and summarising any lessons learned from the project. (A report may be 1-2 pages for a grant of £1,000 or less, and should be around 10 pages for a grant of around £10,000). A small number of photographs illustrating the project should be included, which the AONB Partnership may use for publicity purposes. If possible these should be supplied in digital form. Copies of any written publicity must be provided, and photographs of other forms of publicity (e.g. events) if appropriate.
16. Information will be requested at intervals about progress with the project.
17. Members of the AONB Team or the Grant Advisory Panel may need to visit the project or see its work either before or after completion, and must be allowed access to do this with reasonable notice, in order to:-
 - inspect any work carried out with Sustainable Development Fund grant aid,
 - monitor the conduct and progress of any works listed in the formal offer of grant,
 - monitor usage of the site or features as defined in the formal offer of grant.

The grantee will give due consideration to any recommendations made following such a visit.

BREACH OF CONDITIONS AND DISPUTES

18. In the event of a breach of any conditions herewith Shropshire Council may declare any grant offer to be void or may vary the amount to be paid. Where the grant, or a portion of it, has been paid then Shropshire Council may require the amount to be repaid in part or in full.
19. Any dispute between an applicant and the Council about the interpretation of these conditions, shall be referred to the arbitration of a person to be agreed between the parties, or, failing agreement within 28 days after each party has given to the other written request to concur in the appointment of an arbitrator, a person to be nominated at the request of either party by the President of the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors. In the event of arbitration, costs will be shared equally between the parties.
20. The offer of grant shall be governed by the Laws of England and Wales and shall be subject to the jurisdiction of the Courts of England and Wales.