

# Shropshire Hills AONB Conservation Fund

## Guidance for applicants 2022-23



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### 1. Priorities and eligibility

The Fund is for projects which deliver either or both of the priorities:

- i. **Conserving and enhancing the natural beauty, landscape, wildlife or heritage of the Shropshire Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).**
- ii. **Educational and awareness-raising activities relating to the Shropshire Hills AONB and its conservation, especially involving young people.**

(See appendix 1 for more detailed guidance on conservation priorities).

- The Fund is focused on projects delivering practical conservation work on the ground. Activities such as feasibility studies or research may also be considered if the case is strong enough. Note that the Fund will not normally support activities which are eligible under government land management schemes such as agri-environment schemes.
- The work carried out needs to be either within the AONB, or directly benefiting it. For example, restoration of a heritage or landscape feature outside the AONB would not be eligible, while education work relating directly to the AONB but taking place outside it would be eligible.
- Public, private, voluntary sector and community groups can apply, along with individuals and businesses, but in all cases **the project must show a clear public benefit**. You don't have to live or work within the AONB to apply, as long as your project delivers benefits to it. Priority may be given to applicants who have not previously had funding from the AONB Trust.
- Grants will normally only be made for activity within a particular Financial Year (April to the end of March). This may mean breaking down longer projects and making an application for the part of the work which can be completed within the Financial Year, with worthwhile outputs. If the Financial Year timing is really not going to work for your project, it is possible that alternative dates may be considered.
- **The Fund cannot grant aid anything retrospectively.** Preparation work may be done, but costs incurred before the date of the grant 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.

- Projects are more likely to be funded if they also demonstrate community support and fit with local and national strategies.

## 2. Size of grants

Grants will normally be in the range of £500 - £2,000. Smaller grants will not normally be considered due to the administration required.

## 3. 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). Match funding can be made up of cash, in-kind and volunteer time contributions, and these should be costed in to the budget.

## 4. Before making a full application

Please complete the Project Ideas Form, a short (two sides of A4) form to briefly describe your project idea. The form can be download from our website at <https://www.shropshirehillsaonb.co.uk/help-to-look-after/shropshire-hills-aonb-trust/aonb-conservation-fund>

Once you have emailed the Form to us, we will get in touch with you to discuss your project in more detail. We will be able to recommend whether your project should progress to a full application and try to provide advice on developing the project and how it can best fit the aims of the Fund. Any problems accessing the Project Ideas Form please contact Steph Hayes on 01743 254740 or email [stephanie.hayes@shropshire.gov.uk](mailto:stephanie.hayes@shropshire.gov.uk)

**Deadline for receiving Project Ideas Form is 25th February 2022.**

## 5. Writing the full application

We will provide you with the full application form, which you can fill in electronically or by hand. If electronically, your sent email with the completed application form will be taken as an authorized signatory.

**Deadline for receiving Full Applications is 14<sup>th</sup> March 2022.**

**Remember that your application will be read by people who may know nothing about your proposed project. Please make it clear what will actually be done in the project, and pictures or plans should be included for any proposed works on the ground.**

### 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 a 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 45p/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?
- Have you emailed your completed application form, or signed a 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?

## 6. Assessment of your application

The Fund's Grant Panel will meet on Wednesday 23<sup>rd</sup> March 2022. **The deadline for receipt of application is 14<sup>th</sup> March 2022.** The Panel is made up principally of representatives of the funders and members of the AONB Trust representing a range of interests and with a broad range of knowledge. The Panel may seek external specialist advice if necessary. If your application is not approved, we will explain why and advise you whether it may be worth adapting the project to re-apply.

## 7. If your grant is approved

You will receive a formal offer letter by email, outlining the rate of grant and a maximum cash sum, the budget and the required outputs of the project. This grant offer is a contract between you or your organisation and the Shropshire Hills AONB Trust. 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, it may be possible to amend the grant offer, 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.**

If your project is part of a larger one for which you received funding from another source, you will need to complete the entire project before you can claim your grant. You will need to provide evidence that all outputs have been achieved.

A short written report, with photographs where appropriate, is required from each project at the end of the year showing how the work met the aim(s) and delivered public benefits. Please acknowledge the financial support you have received from the Shropshire Hills AONB Trust in any publicity associated with your project.

## Appendix 1 Background information on the conservation priorities

The Shropshire Hills was one of the first areas to be designated as an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) in 1958. The purpose of this national designation is to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the landscape. This includes looking after the nature within it, heritage features and geology, as well as scenic quality and tranquility, and engaging and involving people with the Shropshire Hills landscape.

Your project will play an important role in helping to look after this special landscape and encouraging more people to connect with and care for the Shropshire Hills AONB. The following information will help you to link your project with the conservation priorities from the Shropshire Hills AONB Management Plan and Nature Recovery Plan.

### Local conservation priorities from the AONB Management Plan, 2019-24

The AONB covers almost a quarter of Shropshire and has much diversity in its landscape. It would be worth reading the 'local area section' relevant to your project as it will describe some of the locally distinctive features, key issues and priorities for management. Please get in touch if you are unsure which area your project falls into.

- [Long Mynd – Stiperstones](#)
- [Clun Forest and Valley](#)
- [Stretton Valley, Wenlock Edge and Dales](#)
- [Wrekin Forest](#)
- [Clee Hills](#)

### Conserving and celebrating historic sites and features

The historic environment covers a wide range of built and natural heritage assets including buildings and features with statutory protection and those which are locally valued. Many landscape features have historic importance, such as hedgerows, veteran trees, parkland and ancient woodland. These are often at risk from neglect as much as from direct damage.

There is a need to understand and promote the connectivity of historic sites and their setting as part of the wider landscape to effectively conserve and manage them. Retaining traditional building and craft skills is also important.

Further information is in the [AONB Management Plan 2019-24](#) and [Heritage webpage](#).

### Connecting young people to nature

Helping young people to understand and care for the Shropshire Hills landscape is a key part of increasing support for its conservation. No one knows they want to conserve something until they've enjoyed it and touched it.

The Conservation Fund can support projects which involve young people across all areas, from schools, to family-oriented and outdoor activities. Broadening access to, and understanding of, the natural environment and local heritage features/sites can be a valuable springboard to a wider understanding of the landscape. There is a need for more opportunities to experience and learn about wildlife and geology, and much scope to raise awareness of both environmental issues and food and farming. Further information is on our [Outdoor Learning webpage](#).

## **Involving people in your project**

Volunteering can bring real personal rewards and benefits. Improving understanding of the special qualities of the AONB is a key part of increasing support and action for its conservation. At the same time, most people's enjoyment will be enhanced by greater knowledge.

## **Priorities from the Shropshire Hills Nature Recovery Plan**

Many of Shropshire's priority habitats are found in the AONB, but they're fragmented. The Plan sets out what is needed to help nature recover and refers to valuable habitats and key species which are under threat.

### **Priorities in the Shropshire Hills:**

- Best possible management of existing high-quality habitats
- Improving margins and buffer areas to heathland and rough grassland hills
- Renaturalising catchment headwater areas
- Regenerating and expanding upland semi-natural woodlands
- Woodland creation to improve habitat networks,
- Habitat improvement of river and stream corridors
- Managing and re-creating wildflower meadows and species-rich grasslands, including roadside verges.
- More sustainable regenerative management of farmland
- Management of invasive non-native species such as Signal Crayfish, Himalayan Balsam.
- Connecting people to nature so that they care about it and see the benefits to their wellbeing, quality of life and prosperity.

### **Valuable habitats include:**

- Upland heathland and rough grasses
- Peatland
- Species rich grassland and meadows
- Native woodland and trees outside woods (ie orchards, hedgerow trees etc)
- Rivers, streams, ponds and headwaters (the tributaries feeding the river system)

Enlarging areas of existing good habitat and/ or connecting areas of high-quality habitat by creating wildlife corridors is especially valuable and preferable to the creation of new habitat.

### **Some of our key species under threat include:**

- Lesser horseshoe bat & dormouse
- Curlew & lapwing
- Grayling butterfly & bilberry bumblebee
- Green winged orchid & marsh gentian

Good conservation practice is to restore species through better habitat management across large areas, but some species may still require bespoke management. The need for this should be clearly outlined for any project wishing to focus on particular species.

For further information see our [Nature Recovery Plan webpage](#).

Further information about the Shropshire Hills AONB is available on the website at [www.shropshirehillsaonb.co.uk](http://www.shropshirehillsaonb.co.uk)

## **Appendix 2 General Conditions of Grant**

The following conditions apply to all offers of Conservation Fund grant made by the Shropshire Hills AONB Trust, 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 the Shropshire Hills AONB Trust.

### **QUALITY OF WORK**

1. All work grant aided through the Shropshire Hills AONB Conservation 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 the Shropshire Hills AONB Trust may require any grant paid to be repaid in part or in full.

### **PUBLICITY**

6. The support of the Shropshire Hills AONB Trust 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 AONB Partnership.
8. The Shropshire Hills AONB Trust and Partnership 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 Shropshire Hills AONB Conservation Fund, the AONB Trust 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 Trust 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 Trust's priorities, 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 4 pages for larger grants). A small number of photographs illustrating the project should be included, which the AONB Trust or 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, Trustees 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 Shropshire Hills AONB Conservation 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 the Shropshire Hills AONB Trust 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 the Shropshire Hills AONB Trust may require the amount to be repaid in part or in full.
19. Any dispute between an applicant and the Trust 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.

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