

Environment Fund 2023-28

OVERARCHING ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA and ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT PRIORITIES

Sustainability at the heart of a living, working, active landscape valued by everyone.



Environment Fund Strategic Strand 2023-2028

OVERARCHING ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA and ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT PRIORITIES

OVERARCHING ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

Grant applications may be submitted by not for profit organisations or councils which will deliver measurable key environmental outcomes. Projects should deliver outcomes at a Northern Ireland wide scale, sub-regional scale, water catchment scale, be related to a designated site or on DAERA owned/managed natural environment sites.

Applicants can also receive funding as a partner helping to deliver specific outcomes identified in another organisation's application.

Overarching Factors that will be taken into account in any shortlisting and allocating funding to projects are:

a) Scale

Projects must deliver measurable key environmental outcomes at a Northern Ireland wide scale, sub-regional scale, river catchment scale, on or related to a designated site, or on DAERA owned/managed natural environment sites. All on the ground project activity must take place in Northern Ireland¹.

Where the resources for allocation exceed the budget available, for allocation to high priority projects, the scale of the impact of the proposed project will form a significant part in the decision making process.

b) Evidence of the need for the project and its outputs

Applicants must succinctly outline how the project has been identified, why it is needed and how it will help ensure measurable delivery of environmental obligations, priorities or behavioural changes leading to an improved environment under international and domestic law, the draft Programme for Government, environmental strategies and policies, and environmental action plans.

¹ The organisation delivering the project may be based outside Northern Ireland or there be cross-border work taking place but this grant must be spent on the element of work to be delivered for NI

c) The project's environmental impact (Environmental Impact Priorities for funding below) and how this will be measured, monitored and mapped (using GIS, where required).

d) Value for money

Activities that:

- Leverage significant match funding;
- Leverage significant voluntary and community action;
- Are delivered in a cost efficient manner;
- Develop more efficient and streamlined ways of working that achieve more sustainable, long term delivery of outcomes, e.g. through delivery coalitions, partnerships etc.;
- Demonstrate that government funding is essential to enable the delivery of the outcome;
- Minimise duplication and maximise additionality;
- Share expertise and provide knowledge transfer;
- Reach a big sector or several sectors of society to effect long-term change in behaviours benefitting the environment

e) Sustainable impact

Projects that identify that the environmental outcomes will be sustained after the funding period and how this will be done.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT PRIORITIES

1) Nature and Climate Recovery: Building Ecological and Climate Resilience

2) Connecting People with the Environment

The application must demonstrate how your project will deliver against these key environmental outcomes for Northern Ireland outlined below to meet National and International commitments (including the Convention on Biological Diversity), legislative requirements and the draft Environment Strategy, Green Growth Strategy, Peatland Strategy and Programme for Government and build resilience to climate change. It must identify how these will be measured, monitored and reported. Each of the Environmental Impact Priorities listed are important – they are not in a prioritised order. Further advice and information on setting out what your project will seek to deliver against the priorities is provided within the Guidance Notes.

1) Nature and Climate Recovery: Building Ecological and Climate Resilience



Landscape, water, habitats, species and earth science condition maintained or improved and extent increased

We are particularly interested in projects that will significantly contribute towards commitments to have 30% of land and sea protected, connected and managed for nature by 2030 as described in the UK nature conservation agencies' [UK Nature Positive 2030 Report \(jncc.org.uk\)](https://jncc.org.uk), especially initiatives and actions which will increase the area and quality of priority habitats, and/or create and support Nature Recovery Networks enhancing habitat connectivity, increasing species abundance and diversity and supporting species of conservation concern.

These will demonstrate contribution to one or more of the Lawton principles² listed below:

- bigger (e.g. expansion or buffering of natural heritage sites);
- better (e.g. improvement in condition of a ASSI or restoration of degraded habitats);
- more (e.g. higher species populations or greater species diversity); and
- more joined up (e.g. joining up fragmented habitats or creation of wildlife corridors connecting sites).

Protected areas

Developing and delivering³ management measures⁴ which significantly contribute to maintaining and increasing the area of protected area⁵ in favourable condition including:

- a. Improvement in the condition of Areas of Special Scientific Interest (ASSIs), peatland habitats and designated sites in the terrestrial, marine and coastal environment.
- b. The number of inland waterbodies (including groundwater), transitional, coastal, Bathing Waters and Shellfish Waters reaching good status under the Water Environment (Water Framework Directive) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2017;

² Making Space for Nature (Lawton 2010) [\[ARCHIVED CONTENT\] ARCHIVE: Defra, UK - The Environment - Biodiversity \(nationalarchives.gov.uk\)](#)

³ This excludes costs of actions and associated management/staff costs that is targeted by other funding programmes (where these intend to provide adequate funds to deliver the outcomes) such as the Environmental Farming Scheme, Woodland grant schemes, and other national and European grants. Delivering can include maintaining existing measures.

⁴ Favourable management is defined as the application of management measures/interventions necessary to support the recovery of the site's special features towards favourable conservation status. This is based on a detailed assessment of ecological requirements of a particular site.

⁵ Protected area defined as SAC, SPA, ASSI, Emerald Sites, Ramsar and Marine Conservation Zones and World Heritage Sites.



- c. The number of components (habitats, species, pressures) of the marine environment reaching good status under the Marine Strategy Regulations (2010).
- d. Delivery of priority management and monitoring measures to support the national and international protection of the Giant's Causeway and Causeway Coast World Heritage Site.

Nature Recovery Networks

- a. Significantly contribute towards the development or implementation of landscape scale management and restoration of priority habitat⁶, including terrestrial, freshwater, coastal and marine habitats.
- b. Pilot projects to scope and demonstrate delivery of the 30x30' target
- c. Creation of 'nature networks' at a landscape or catchment scale of blue and green spaces for habitats and species which will address habitat fragmentation, enhance habitat connectivity, enhance nature reserves, connect wildlife-rich habitats and support higher species populations or greater species diversity by acting as wildlife corridors or 'stepping stones'.
- d. Recovery of threatened native species, including helping to reverse species decline.
- e. Measures to tackle specific pressures and threats to the natural environment such as invasive non-native species, wildfires and ammonia.
- f. Develop and deliver actions which contribute to ecological coherence in the marine area.
- g. Strategic, and sustainable environmental management¹ of other areas at a sub-regional scale⁷ where there exists a regional or sub-regional scale action plan and/or strategic approach to achieve significant environmental outcomes. This includes Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

Climate adaption and resilience:

- a. Developing and delivering actions which contribute to climate adaption and resilience of our natural environment.
- b. Measures which support the environment sector to reduce its carbon footprint.

Strategic land purchase may be considered where this is necessary to deliver the environmental outcomes outlined above.

2) Connecting People with the Environment:

⁶ List of UK BAP Priority Habitats: [UK BAP Priority Habitats | JNCC - Adviser to Government on Nature Conservation](#). Useful resource: [Northern Ireland Priority Habitat Guides | Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs \(daera-ni.gov.uk\)](#). [UK BAP Priority Species | JNCC - Adviser to Government on Nature Conservation](#)

⁷ In the Northern Ireland context, this relates to areas recognised for their landscape significance, e.g. AONBs. [The European Landscape Convention describes 'landscape' as](#) areas, as perceived by people, whose character is the result of the action and interaction of natural and/or human factors.

Connecting with the natural environment, understanding it and taking action to have a positive effect on it

We are interested in projects that will deliver at a significant scale:

- Essential evidence and coordination that underpins decision making and action;
- Connect significant numbers of people with nature through increasing the quality, quantity or accessibility of nature to people;
- Understanding and behavioural change - increasing understanding and involvement in the protection of nature, landscape character and earth science

Essential evidence and coordination that underpins decision making and action

- a. Monitoring and reporting of change in status and production of statistically reliable long term surveillance indices/data including monitoring of habitats, species and fresh and coastal waters, particularly delivering statutory obligations for habitat and species monitoring;
- b. Development of feasibility studies, strategic plans, data, mapping and statistics on outdoor recreation and environmental education at a regional or sub-regional scale.
- c. Strategic and economic assessment of the impact of interventions;
- d. Broad scale scenario planning, horizon scanning, policy analysis, scoping studies, development and provision of expert advice, including expert advice to the Department;
- e. Outdoor recreation mapping and assessment of demand and value;
- f. Collection and analysis of essential new data/information including reviews of existing data/information;
- g. NI-wide coordination of information, knowledge, resource and funding opportunities.

Research & Development is excluded except where this is an integral part of the wider project.

Connect significant numbers of people with the natural environment through increasing the quality, quantity, sustainability or accessibility of nature to people

- a) Design, creation and improvement of nature-rich core path networks, strategic routes, waymark ways and trails in urban and rural locations and provision of associated infrastructure to enhance accessibility for all, primarily in partnership with councils. The aim is to increase the percentage of households that have publicly accessible quality natural space greater than 2ha within 400m or at least one site greater than 20ha in size within 2km. Routes must:
 - Lead to a quality experience of the natural environment;



- Be a minimum of 1km long or provide nature rich link paths to longer walks or provide sustainable access to a designated site; and not charge for their use.
- b) Projects on DAERA sites, particularly for those for whom access is currently difficult.

Understanding and behavioural change - increasing understanding and involvement in the protection of nature, landscape character and earth science

- a) Delivery of NI wide projects and/or coordination of strategic environmental engagement on behalf of a wide variety of stakeholders, to achieve long-term behavioural changes to reduce pressures on the environment, improve local environmental quality and result in good environmental practice and civic action becoming an intrinsic part of all parts of life.
- b) Provision or improvement of regional/national coordination, resources and capacity building activities for leaders and peer leaders to support development of confidence and capacity to deliver environmental learning and engagement projects for the natural environment.
- c) Improving specific groups connection, work for or understanding of the natural environment through strategic national or regional coordination activities that may include development and implementation of:
 - i) Educational opportunities and/or access to nature, particularly for under-represented groups and less engaged audiences.
 - ii) Citizen science for environmental conservation and improvement where this will produce essential, reliable long-term surveillance indices/data.
 - iii) Action for the environment or behavioural changes reducing pressures on the environment and increasing sustainability.
 - iv) Promotion of environmental responsibility and good practice, including for outdoor recreation.

Strategic land purchase may be considered where this is necessary to deliver the environmental outcomes outlined above.



For further information:

Environment Fund Grants Team
Klondyke Building
Cromac Avenue
Gasworks Business Park
Malone Lower
Belfast BT7 2JA.

Tel: 028 9056 9610

Email: efgrants@daera-ni.gov.uk

www.daera-ni.gov.uk



An Agency within the Department of
**Agriculture, Environment
and Rural Affairs**

www.daera-ni.gov.uk



**INVESTORS
IN PEOPLE**