



## **Dedham Vale AONB/Coast & Heaths AONB Sustainable Development Fund**

### **Funding Criteria and Guidance Notes for Applicants 2021-22**

#### **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 The Government has established a Sustainable Development Fund for each of the Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) in England.

Dedham Vale AONB usually has a fund for each grant year of £30,000.  
The Coast & Heaths AONB usually has a fund for each grant year of £40,000.

***Revised criteria from 2019:** the Fund will now take applications for up to 70% of a project value. If the project total value is £500 or under this can be 100%. Details in 8.2.*

- 1.2 The purpose of the Fund is to enable local communities and other organisations to make a difference in AONBs by promoting and achieving sustainable development. The Government stated that these schemes should focus on integrating the environment, local communities and the economy so that these unique areas are conserved and their natural beauty enhanced, making them more enjoyable for all, and reflect that sustainable development is central to the Government's approach.

#### **2. Sustainable Development**

- 2.1 There have been many definitions of sustainable development. The Bruntland Commission - the 1987 World Commission on Environment and Development - defined it as 'development that meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs'.
- 2.2 The Sustainable Development Fund reflects the Department of Environment Food and Rural Affairs' (Defra) objectives of sustainable development, partnership and social inclusion. It will aid the achievement of AONB objectives by encouraging individuals, community groups and businesses to co-operate in developing practical sustainable and local projects. Defra has stated that they would wish the scheme to 'develop and test new ways of achieving more sustainable ways of living in countryside of great natural beauty and diversity, which enhance and conserve local culture, wildlife, landscape, land use and community'.

#### **3. Purpose of the Fund**

- 3.1 The purpose of the Fund is to support the statutory purpose of AONBs:
- To conserve and enhance natural beauty.

The 1991 Policy Statement on AONBs identifies three related purposes:

- Recreation ('the demand for recreation should be met insofar as this is consistent with the conservation of natural beauty')

- Socio-economic ('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')

The objectives and priorities for the AONB's are expressed through the individual AONB Management Strategies, which are available in libraries, from the AONB office and on the AONB website.

#### 4. Applications

- 4.1 The Fund is open to organisations or groups from the public, private or voluntary sectors from within or outside the AONB.
- 4.2 Whilst applications from individuals are not precluded, there needs to be wider public benefit and it is expected that in most cases applications will be submitted on behalf of organisations or groups of people.
- 4.3 Applicants need not necessarily come from, or be based in, the AONB. However, projects must further the conservation and enhancement of the AONB.

#### 5. Essential Criteria

- 5.1 Applicants must demonstrate that their project helps to meet AONB and the three sustainable development objectives. That means it should in some way contribute to:

<b>Does your proposed project help conserve or enhance the natural beauty of the AONB and the SDF area?</b>	
<b>Economic sustainability:</b>	
Does it	Help the local economy in some way? Generate its own income? Attract other contributions? Generate new or safeguard existing employment?
<b>Social sustainability:</b>	
Does it	Develop community infrastructure? Provide training or build community capacity to tackle things? Provide new or improved local services? Allow/ improve access for a wide spectrum of society? Have support or involvement of local communities?
<b>Environmental sustainability:</b>	
Does it	Help biodiversity and/or sustain distinctive landscapes? Protect natural resources? Involve reducing, recycling, or reusing materials? Minimise adverse transport aspects?

- 5.2 Whilst the project does not have to bring equal benefit to all strands, there must be an element of help for each aspect, or certainly no adverse impact. Sustainable development is about the wise use of resources and avoids the exploitation of one strand to the detriment of the others.

## 6. Desirable Criteria

- 6.1 A key aim of the scheme is to change the attitude and behaviour of individuals and communities in ways that enhance understanding of sustainable development and the objectives of the AONB while promoting co-operation and social inclusion. Preference will therefore be given to projects that cover some or all of the following:

Demonstration of innovation or best practice
Promotion of or help implement social inclusion
Actively involve members of the community
Provide benefit to the public
Involvement or encouragement of partnership working
Complementary to key local and national strategies (e.g. Local Agenda 21)
Involvement of young people
Has little or no access to alternative funding sources
Lever in contributions from other sources
Provide potential PR for project and the AONB

- 6.2 **AONB Priorities** - The AONB is particularly keen to encourage projects that are pertinent to its key priorities. Preference will therefore be given to projects that cover some or all of the following:

Enhances landscape character	★
Education for sustainable development	★
Sustainable access and recreation	★
Sustainable tourism	★
Sustainable transport	★
Local product promotion/development	★
Enhances biodiversity	★
Working with communities at grassroots level to increase awareness of, support for and participation in the care of the AONB	★
Reduction in carbon emissions in communities	★

- 6.3 This is not a comprehensive list and other activities could qualify for grant aid.

## 7. Small / Other Grants Please ask for details.

Dedham Vale AONB and Stour Valley Project has a grant scheme called the Stour Valley Environment Fund for applicants who are based outside of the AONB, higher up the valley. This fund is administered by Essex Community Foundation.

Coast & Heaths AONB has a small grant scheme called the Community & Conservation Fund, suited to applications requesting around £500-£700, for local community conservation projects in the AONB and its extended project areas. It is hoped this fund will encourage community groups, schools, parishes etc to get involved in making a difference locally. It is possible to apply to SDF for small amounts.

The AONB also administers the Amenity & Accessibility Fund and the Galloper Wind Farm Fund that each have slightly different geographical areas to the AONB.

## 8. Grant Aid

8.1 Applications will be assessed by the Grant Advisory Panel. They will look at the above criteria and judge how well the project meets those aspirations. As it is likely that the Fund will be over-subscribed, the Panel will favour projects that really grasp the concept of sustainable development and have demonstrated how they are trying to meet the criteria and priorities of the AONB. The Panel may advise that an offer is made for less than the full amount requested. They may also give guidance to the AONB Manager to discuss certain aspects of the project with the applicant to clarify details before they give their final advice.

8.2 **The level of grant support was revised in 2019 and can now be up to 70% of the total costs.** Voluntary and community organisations may be able to use ‘in kind’ help (e.g. volunteer time or the loan of equipment, premises or land) to form at least part of their matching contribution. Up to 80% could be available in exceptional circumstances where the project is particularly innovative or struggling to find matching funding, although in most cases this will require a very clear demonstration of community support.

In both AONBs (revised guidelines, Jan 2019), where projects are seeking a grant of up to/in the region of £500, organisations can apply for 100% of the total costs. This change is intended to support small projects and grass roots organisations where finding match funding would be prohibitive to delivering a local project. Please note Coast & Heaths has a specific fund for small grants called Community & Conservation Fund that may be more appropriate for your application.

8.3 Following the advice of the Grant Advisory Panel, an offer of grant aid will be made. This will normally include certain conditions regarding

- What the grant aid is supporting
- Accepting the offer of grant within a certain period
- The evidence required to prove the project has been completed that will need to accompany the claim for the grant aid

8.4 A case can be made with the application, or exceptionally when returning the acceptance of the grant offer, for money to be released up front - i.e. before the project is started. This is to help with issues of cash flow for smaller organisations and is unlikely to be more than 50% of the grant offer. It is usual that all grants are paid in arrears.

8.5 If the application is from non VAT registered organisation/body/individual the SDF can fund up to 70% of the gross cost of the project. (i.e. VAT cost can be met by the fund).

8.6 If the application is from a VAT registered organisation the SDF cannot meet any VAT costs (i.e. use figures excluding VAT).

8.7 Unless otherwise agreed in writing all projects must be completed by the following March (i.e. grants awarded from April 2021 must be completed and claimed for by the end of March 2022).

## 9. Decisions

9.1 Applications will be considered by the Sustainable Development Fund Panel, which includes a member of both Coast & Heaths and Dedham Vale’s AONB Joint Advisory Committee and representatives reflecting particular interests such as natural heritage, cultural heritage, agriculture, tourism, recreation, education, business, local communities and young people.

Whilst the Panel is authorised to deal with all applications, the scheme is overseen by the respective AONB Joint Advisory Committees and they may choose to assume direct responsibility for the administration of some grants. This might arise for example where it appears that eligibility criteria are not being met or where there is a clear risk of financial mismanagement of the project. Any applications that are 'called in' will be considered by the Committee and its decision will be final. The work of the Grant Advisory Panel will be regularly reported to the Joint Advisory Committees. A summary of the applications, the decisions made and the outcomes of successful projects will also be reported to Defra to demonstrate the results of the Fund.

- 9.2 It is very important for the Grant Advisory Panel to see the financial details of your project. Therefore, please enter onto the application form a detailed breakdown of the expenditure and income of the project. It is important for the Panel to see how the money is likely to be spent. The Panel appreciates that some elements may be hard to cost but it is important that expenditure is not lumped together under large general headings or that guesses are made about costs. This is to everyone's benefit as it would be sad to find there is not enough money to complete the project when the Panel would have been willing to offer more grant aid to a well thought out application. If estimates have to be made, please indicate this on the form.
- 9.3 Applications will be acknowledged within five working days, and applicants will be informed of the date on which the Panel will consider their application. Applicants may in some instances be asked to provide further information to allow a decision to be taken.
- 9.4 The AONB office will undertake a simple eligibility assessment and will often come back to applicants if there is missing information or they feel the project is not eligible. However, it is the responsibility of the applicants, not the AONB team, to see that they have supplied all the required information.
- 9.5 Applicants will be informed within five working days of the Panel meeting whether their application has been successful, and if so the amount of grant they have been awarded. This will be followed up by written confirmation and a formal offer of grant aid for successful applicants.
- 10. Payment of Grant**
- 10.1 Grants will normally be paid in arrears/on completion unless alternative arrangements have been made in advance. (See section 8. Before any advance payment is made, applicants will have to provide evidence that the additional resources they need to complete the project will be forthcoming.)
- 10.2 The AONB will monitor the progress of projects and may, if required, carry out site inspections. If this monitoring highlights difficulties with the project there may be the need for discussion and negotiation. It is the desired intention to help all projects reach a satisfactory conclusion, but the AONB team and Grant Advisory Panel will wish to safeguard the wise and legitimate use of the Fund.
- 10.3 The payment of the grant will be dependent on the submission of relevant records (e.g. receipted invoices) as detailed in the grant offer letter or agreed in writing subsequently with the applicants. Payment request is by invoice from the applicant to the named fund.
- 10.4 There is a national monitoring programme to oversee the working of the Funds and therefore all projects supported must be ready to provide relevant information and access to the national monitoring team if asked to do so.

## 11. Monitoring and Publicity

### Monitoring:

- 11.1 Monitoring forms are required and are a necessary part of the feedback to Defra, the regulating body. A mid-year update is due in October 2021.
- 11.2 The AONB must have a short Final Report by end March 2022 to be emailed to [AONBgrants@suffolk.gov.uk](mailto:AONBgrants@suffolk.gov.uk).
- 11.3 This report should be approx one page and include an overview of the project achievements, lessons learnt/difficulties encountered and how the terms and conditions were met.
- 11.4 Please include at least two photos of the project and any feedback or quote from participants that the two AONBs have permission to use in its own promotions.

### Promotion and Publicity:

- 11.5 The AONB reserve the right to use any material submitted for publicity purposes.
- 11.6 ‘The Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty Sustainable Development Fund’ must be acknowledged on all completed projects and mentioned in all press releases and publicity material relating to projects. We suggest you use the following text:

***“This project has been (part)\* funded by the Coast & Heaths AONB\* OR Dedham Vale AONB\* Sustainable Development Fund”. \* delete as appropriate***

- 11.7 The AONB logo should be used.

**11.8 *It is important for the AONB Funding Officer to see any planned promotional materials in draft, before going to print. This is to help avoid any errors in use of fund name, any misspellings or incorrect ways of referring to the AONB and its co-funders.***

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**Completed applications (preferably typed, or if not, clearly written in dark ink) should be submitted on the application form by end of day Monday 17 May 2021, by email is permitted:**

AONB Grants Officer  
Sustainable Development Fund  
Dedham Vale/Coast & Heaths AONBs  
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