



**Suffolk & Essex
Coast & Heaths**
National
Landscape



Dedham Vale
National
Landscape
& Stour Valley

Sustainable Development Fund (SDF)

Funding Criteria and Guidance for Applicants 2026-27

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1. Important dates

- Closing date for applications to be received – 23:59 on 3rd February 2026
- Project delivery and completion – April 2026 to March 10th 2027

2. How the fund works

- The National Landscape Grants Officer is available to give support and advice before applying through to project completion.
Contact: Oka Last grants@suffolkandessex-nl.org.uk Tel: 01394 445225
- Once your application is received, we will acknowledge receipt by e mail within 5 working days and let you know when the Panel will meet to consider your application.
- We may get in touch to ask for further supporting information.
- After the Panel Meeting we will let you know the outcome of your application. If your application is successful a formal grant offer letter and funding agreement will be sent to confirm any grant award and conditions.
- Grant payment is usually made in arrears, upon completion of the project, but a 50% up front interim payment may be requested when returning the agreement.

3. How much can you apply for?

- 3.1 There is formally no limit on the amount to be applied for per application. The panel usually award up to £6,000 per project although in exceptional circumstances higher awards may be made.
- 3.2 Grants over £1,000 are awarded for up to 70% of overall project value. The applicants own 30% may be in the form of in kind contributions. Up to 20% of the project value may be grant support of overhead costs e.g. staff and office costs. Small grants up to £1,000 will be funded for up to 100% of project financial costs. See [Project Budget Section 10](#) for more.
- 3.3 In kind contributions - All applicants are encouraged to present within their budget their own contributions to the project delivery, for example, an estimate of in kind volunteer time that will be spent on delivering the project. This helps the grant panel to consider how your project will bring added value to National Landscape communities. See [Project Budget Section 10](#) for more.

4. Who can apply?

- 4.1 The Fund is open to organisations and groups from the public, private or voluntary sectors. 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, groups of people or partnerships.
- 4.2 The Government commissioned Landscapes Review of National Landscapes and National Parks (2019) identified the need to engage with a broader range of society in delivering National Landscape purpose. The National Landscapes are committed to equality of opportunities to access the Sustainable Development Fund and seek to attract applications from the widest range of society possible.

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4.2 **Geographic eligibility:**

There are two separate Sustainable Development Funds, one for each National Landscape. Applicants may apply to one or both of the funds, a separate application is required for each:

- Suffolk & Essex Coast & Heaths National Landscape Sustainable Development Fund And...
- Dedham Vale National Landscape Sustainable Development Fund

The geographic area of each Fund is the entire geographic area of each National Landscape. You may view the geographic areas of each National Landscape on Google Maps:

[See Map Layer – green shaded areas](#)

- 4.3 Applicants may come from within or outside the designated National Landscape. Projects need not necessarily be based in the National Landscape, however, projects must meet the criteria of the fund to further the conservation and enhancement of the National Landscape. A grant award may be made to a project located outside of the National Landscape where benefit is seen to be achieved for/within the National Landscape, for example (but not limited to) projects that benefit transient wildlife or enhance landscape views from the National Landscape.

5. **What SDF funds**

The Fund supports a wide range of costs, essentially, everything that is needed to complete (or develop) a project, that falls within the criteria of the grant, may be funded. The following list is not all encompassing but gives examples of what costs the SDF may support: capital works, practical conservation work, public access and infrastructure improvements, activities, training, equipment, materials, technology, information and interpretation, native planting, publicity, contract work or professional services.

6. **What makes a strong project?**

Please see both National Landscape websites for summaries of past funded projects and to read case studies. Successful applications clearly demonstrate benefits to the National Landscape and strongly meet the Criteria of the Fund. Recommended reading about the vision of National Landscapes may be found in [Links Section 15](#).

7. **Purpose of the Fund**

- 7.1 The purpose of the Fund is to support the statutory purpose of National Landscapes:

- To conserve and enhance natural beauty and maintain the special qualities of the landscape.

Supplementary (non-statutory) purposes to National Landscape designation were developed in the 1990s and are:

- 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')

- 7.2 The objectives and priorities for each National Landscape are expressed through the individual National Landscape Management Plans. See [Links Section 15](#)

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8. Essential Criteria

- 8.1 Applicants must demonstrate that their project helps to meet National Landscape objectives and the purpose of the fund (Section 7) and should in some way contribute to environmental, social and economic sustainability. The below table shows ways in which a funded project may meet the sustainability objectives.

Essential Criteria – Sustainability	
Environmental sustainability	
Will your project?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conserve and enhance nature and biodiversity Enhance character of distinctive landscapes Sustain natural resources and geodiversity of the landscape Conserve and enhance historic resources e.g. landscape, archaeology, built or cultural heritage Support climate sustainability e.g. carbon reduction and sustainable practice such as using local, sustainably sourced materials Encourage sustainable travel and minimise adverse transport impacts
Social sustainability	
Will your project?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop community infrastructure Provide training or build community capacity to deal with challenges such as health and wellbeing or water resilience Provide new or improved local services Allow access for a wide spectrum of society and improve access for underrepresented groups of people. Have support or involvement of local communities e.g. volunteers Improve understanding, guide behaviour and help people enjoy the National Landscape Retain the tranquillity of the area
Economic sustainability	
Will your project?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allow sustainable public access and recreation Help the local economy such as supporting local businesses Provide skills for the future e.g. volunteering/training Generate its own income Attract other contributions e.g. funding partners Generate new or safeguard existing employment

- 8.2 Whilst the project does not have to bring equal benefit to all strands, there ideally will 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 development of one strand to the detriment of the others.

9. Desirable Criteria

- 9.1 A key aim of the fund is to guide the behaviour of individuals and communities in ways that enhance understanding of sustainable development and the objectives of the National Landscape while promoting co-operation and social inclusion. Preference will therefore be given to projects that meet some or all of the following criteria:

Provide interpretation that improves understanding, guides behaviour and helps people enjoy the National Landscape
Demonstrate innovation or best practice
Promote or help to implement social inclusion
Actively involve members of the community
Provide benefit to the public and wellbeing
Involve or encourage partnership working
Involve young people and/or other groups underrepresented in the National Landscape
Have little or no access to alternative funding sources
Lever in contributions from other sources e.g. funding partners
Complement key local and national strategies
Provide potential PR for project and the National Landscape

- 9.2 **National Landscape Priorities** - The National Landscape is keen to encourage projects that are pertinent to it's priorities. Preference will therefore be given to projects that deliver some or all of the following:

Working with communities at grassroots level to increase awareness of, support for and participation in the care of the National Landscape
Enhance landscape character
Enhance biodiversity
Educate and raise awareness of sustainable development
Provide sustainable access, recreation and tourism
Address impacts and causes of climate change
Support sustainable transport
Local product promotion/development

- 9.3 Criteria lists in Sections 8 & 9 are not exhaustive and other activities may be eligible to receive a grant.

10. Project budget

10.1 Applicants must complete one Budget Form, either:

- Small grant applications up to £1,000 should complete BUDGET FORM 1
Or
- Grant applications over £1,000 should complete BUDGET FORM 2

For help with this, please do get in touch with the National Landscape Grants Officer with any questions.

What the applicant contributes

10.2 Grants over £1,000 are awarded for up to 70% of overall project value. The applicants own 30% may be in the form of in kind contributions. Up to 20% of the project value may be grant support of overhead costs e.g. staff and office costs. Small grants up to £1,000 will be funded for up to 100% of project financial costs.

Overheads - Panels usually expect to fund project activity. Panels recognise that projects need resources to deliver them. Panels anticipate mainly seeing overhead costs being presented as in kind contributions from the applicant. In some circumstances, for example where staff are brought in to deliver a particular project the Panel will consider supporting overheads at a higher level than 20%

10.3 In kind contributions - To make SDF grants accessible to community groups, in the Budget Form, applicants may use the value of in kind help such as volunteer time to form at least part of their own contribution. Other examples of in kind contributions are staff time and loan of equipment, premises or land.

The Applicant should work out in kind contributions to project delivery as follows:

- For unpaid volunteer time - use the below table values.
- For in kind staff time (paid) - use the actual financial value.

Volunteer time 'in kind' values for budget presentation table		
Volunteer contribution	Examples	Value per day based on 7.5hr day
Unskilled	Site clearance, tree planting, event steward	£75
Semi-Skilled	event leader, project management, copy for interpretation boards, seeking formal permissions	£150
Professional	Legal, accounting	£375

VAT

10.4 If the grant payment is being made to a non VAT registered organisation/body/individual the VAT costs can be met by the SDF. If the grant payment is being made to a VAT registered organisation the SDF cannot meet any VAT costs (i.e. use budget figures excluding VAT).

11. Panel Process

Pre-panel assessment

- 11.1 Applications will be initially assessed by the Grant Advisory Panel. They will look at the fund criteria and judge how well the project meets those aspirations. Applicants may in some instances be asked to provide further information to allow a decision to be taken. It is the responsibility of the applicants, not the National Landscape Team, to ensure that they have supplied all the required information.

Panel assessment

- 11.2 Applications will be considered by the Sustainable Development Fund Panel which includes a member of both Suffolk & Essex Coast & Heaths, and Dedham Vale National Landscape Combined Joint Advisory Committee as well as the National Landscape Partnership. Representatives can include those reflecting particular interests such as farming and agriculture, local communities, natural heritage, education, built and cultural heritage, tourism and business.
- 11.3 The Fund is often over-subscribed with applications and 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 National Landscape. [back to Contents](#)
The Panel may advise that an offer is made for less than the full amount requested. They may also give guidance to the National Landscape Grants Officer to discuss certain aspects of the project with the applicant to clarify details before they give their final advice.
- 11.4 Whilst the Panel is authorised to deal with all applications, the scheme is overseen by the National Landscape Combined Joint Advisory Committee which 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 National Landscape Combined Joint Advisory Committee. A summary of the applications, the decisions made and the outcomes of successful projects will be reported to Defra to demonstrate the outcomes of the Fund. A summary of the projects funded by the SDF will be published annually on the National Landscape website.

12. Project delivery and Publicity

Project Delivery

- 12.1 Projects must wait to begin publicity and delivery of the project until the formal grant offer letter has been received, outlining conditions of the grant award, and the signed funding agreement has been returned.
- 12.2 Applicants are responsible for management and delivery of all elements of the project, including payment of project costs and safety. All necessary permissions and procedures for the safe delivery of the project must be in place. Your delivery must not conflict with any Government or other statutory body advice.
- 12.3 Grants must be used solely for the purposes specified in the application. Any proposed changes from your original application must be agreed in writing.
- 12.4 Unless otherwise agreed in writing all projects must be completed by the following March (i.e. grants must be completed by the end of the financial year).

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Acknowledgement and Publicity

12.5 Projects must comply with the Publicity Guidance for Grant Funded Projects. This document provides guidance on:

- Conditions and expectations of the Sustainable Development Fund
- Acknowledgement of your grant award
- Mandatory use of National Landscape logos
- Proof-reading by the National Landscape Team of project materials/publicity before release
- Use of digital platforms
- Planning and delivery of project communications
- Support available to your project from the National Landscape Team

12.6 The National Landscape reserve the right to use any material submitted for publicity purposes.

13. Monitoring

Monitoring

13.1 Mid-year update

We will ask for a very short mid-term update to keep the National Landscape Grants Officer in touch with the progress of your project and offer support as needed.

13.2 Final grant claim

When the project is completed it is mandatory that your final claim is received (by the National Landscape) by the deadline stated in the grant offer letter. This deadline is usually around early to mid March. This is essential for the National Landscape to meet it's end of financial year deadlines and to feedback to the regulating body Defra. The National Landscape is unable to guarantee payment of the grant if the final claim is received later than the given deadline.

For the final claim, the National Landscape must receive project papers as follows:

- End of Grant Monitoring Form
- A Bank Details Form, or Invoice to the National Landscape for the grant payment
- A short final report of approximately one page of text including general information about the project e.g. evaluation of achievements, numbers of events held, people and partners engaged, any challenges faced and evidence to support your final claim such as:
 - evidence of expenditure e.g. receipts/invoices
 - final budget summary
 - evidence of grant acknowledgement/project publicity
 - at least two electronic photos of the project that the SDF Panel and the National Landscape has permission to use in its own promotions

13.3 When projects don't go to plan...

If there are any concerns about fulfilling the conditions of the SDF grant award, the National Landscape encourages project leaders to open discussions early with the Grants Officer. The National Landscape wishes all projects to succeed and will approach negotiations with the aim of reaching a mutually satisfactory conclusion that delivers benefits to National Landscape communities.

The National Landscape will safeguard the wise and legitimate use of the Fund through monitoring the progress of projects. This may also include site inspections or requiring further evidence of project delivery.

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14. Payment of Grant

- 14.1 Grant payment is usually made in arrears, on completion of the project and final claim, but a 50% up front interim payment may be requested when returning the funding agreement. Advanced grant payment may be authorised to help with cash flow for smaller organisations and is unlikely to be for more than 50% of the grant offer.
- 14.2 Payment is requested by completion of the final grant claim, including a Bank Details Form or other payment options are available. Applicants need to have a bank account for grant payment to be made into. If this is not possible, the applicant may request (on the Application Form) to nominate a partner organisation to provide a bank account for project finance purposes.
- 14.3 The National Landscape is unable to guarantee payment of the grant if the grant agreement is not adhered to e.g. we may not be able to pay the grant if the final claim is submitted late or incomplete.

The National Landscape reserves the right to withhold or recover payment of all or part of any grant if the aims and objectives of the project are not fully met or if funds remain unspent.

- 14.4 There is a Government national monitoring programme to oversee the working of the SDF and therefore all supported projects must be ready to provide relevant information and access to the national monitoring team if asked to do so.

15. Links

- For more about applying to the SDF and other National Landscape grant giving programmes www.dedhamvale-nl.org.uk or www.coastandheaths-nl.org.uk
- Suffolk & Essex Coast & Heaths National Landscape Management Plan <https://coastandheaths-nl.org.uk/managing/management-plan/>
- Dedham Vale National Landscape & Stour Valley Management Plan www.dedhamvale-nl.org.uk/managing/management-plan/
- National Landscapes Association Colchester Declaration www.national-landscapes.org.uk/the-colchester-declaration
- The Landscapes Review of Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONBs) and National Parks (the Glover Review) www.coastandheaths-nl.org.uk/managing/reference-library/landscapes-review/

16. How to submit your application

A completed Application Form and Budget Form (preferably typed) should be received by the National Landscape **by 3rd February 2026, 23:59**

E mail: grants@suffolkandessex-nl.org.uk Tel: 01394 445225
National Landscape Grants Officer, Sustainable Development Fund, National Landscape Office, Saxon House, 1 Whittle Road, Hadleigh Road Industrial Estate, Ipswich IP2 0UF

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