**CANNOCK CHASE AREA OF OUTSTANDING NATURAL BEAUTY**

**Sustainable Development Fund:**

**Funding criteria and Guidance Notes**

**Introduction**

The Sustainable Development Fund helps to achieve the Cannock Chase AONB’s objectives by encouraging individuals, community groups and businesses to develop practical sustainable and local projects.

***What kinds of project can be funded?***

The Fund can support a range of activities including practical work, feasibility studies or research projects, group development, awareness raising and training.

Applications will be assessed against the criteria listed below. It is expected that successful projects will meet all of the essential criteria, and as many as possible, but not necessarily every desirable and local criteria.

**Essential Criteria**

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| 1 | Help deliver the Management Plan for the Cannock Chase AONB (copies can be viewed on-line at <http://www.cannock-chase.co.uk/>This means that the project must address one or more of the following issues: | * Landscape and Geology;
* Biodiversity
* Historic Environment
* Sustainable Resources
* Living and Working in the Cannock Chase area.
* Farming and Rural Land Use
* Forestry, Woodland and Trees
* Tourism, Recreation and Access
* Transport
* Planning & Development
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| 2 | Further the purposes of the AONB to conserve and enhance the natural beauty of the area. There are three related purposes: | * recreation (‘the demand for recreation should be met in so far as it 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’)
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| 3 | Promote sustainable development |  |
| 4 | Have the demonstrable support or involvement of communities. |  |
| 5 | Be complementary to key local, regional or national strategies. |  |

**Desirable criteria:**

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| --- | --- |
| 1 | Demonstrate innovation or best practice |
| 2 | Ensure the countryside is managed. |
| 3 | Develop skills and “capacity building” in the community |
| 4 | Involve young people |
| 5 | Combat social exclusion and promote diversity |
| 6 | Bring organisations and people together to co-operate in tackling problems or promoting new ideas |
| 7 | Encourage urban involvement/ links to the AONB. |
| 8 | Lever in contributions/ match funding from other sources |
| 9 | Demonstrate changing of attitudes and behavior, evidence will be expected within the project. |
| 10 | Add value or new dimensions to existing sustainability projects |

***Who can apply?***

Public, private, voluntary sector, community groups, individuals and businesses from within or outside the AONB can apply to the Fund.

You do not have to live or work within the AONB but you must be able to demonstrate that your project will have a direct positive impact upon the AONB, have a wider public benefit and satisfy the essential criteria of the grant. Your project must comply with any relevant regulatory requirements. Community groups will need to have a basic constitution and a bank account in order to receive grant payments.

For more information about the AONB please visit website:

<http://www.cannock-chase.co.uk/>

***How much can be applied for?***

The Fund can support up to 75% of the total project cost (our contribution plus your contribution) if you are a voluntary group or charity and up to 50% of the total project cost for public bodiesincluding Local Authorities, National Lottery Funds, European Funds, Education Authorities and Hospital Trusts.

In exceptional cases, 100% may be provided for voluntary/ charitable bodies. In most cases, this would require significant voluntary or “in kind” contributions e.g. volunteer time or the loan of equipment, premises or land and a very clear demonstration of community support.

For government organisations i.e. bodies funded directly through the Treasury (not local authorities), the level of SDF grant plus match-funding from government organisations should not exceed 50% of the total cost of the project.

**Please note funding is not available to meet statutory responsibilities**.

**Applicant’s Contribution**

Applicants will normally be expected to provide the remaining 25% or 50% of the total project costs. This is referred to as “matched funding.” Matched funding can be both your own time i.e. in-kind funding and/or money.

Volunteer in-kind funding should be costed at £50/day (or £7/hour) for non-professional input or £150/day (or £21/hour) for professional input.

**Limitations on Cash-Matched Funding**

SDF funds count as exchequer funding i.e. they come from central government. Treasury rules dictate that total exchequer funding in a project must not exceed 50% for projects led by public bodies and 75% for those led by community groups. This may limit the sources which can be used for match funding, especially where the SDF grant is being requested up to the maximum rate.

Other sources of exchequer funding include: AONB core funds, British Waterways, Natural England, Defra, English Heritage, Environment Agency, Forestry Commission, and Government Offices for the Regions, Local Transport Funds and Regional Development Agencies. These sources can be used to match with SDF provided the total exchequer funding limit is not exceeded. In this case, other sources of cash or in kind funding will also be needed.

Public funds which do not count as exchequer funding and are available to be used as match funding include: Local Authorities, National Lottery Funds, European Funds (e.g. LEADER+, Objective 2), Education Authorities, and Hospital Trusts.

Funds from the private sector (businesses) and the voluntary sector (including charitable trusts, etc.) can also be used as match funding.

**VAT**

If your organisation is VAT registered and you are able to reclaim VAT yourselves, the grant offer will be made excluding VAT. 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 HMRC.

In the case of a non VAT registered organisation/body/individual the VAT can be included in the cost of the project and grant can be claimed against the gross cost of the project (i.e., including the VAT element).

***How are applications assessed?***

**Applications under £1500**

1. Assessed by a ‘fast-track’ procedure to enable small projects to happen quickly and encourage small community groups, schools, parishes etc to get involved in making a difference locally.
2. The same criteria apply – although it is appreciated a small project may not have the scope to meet all the requirements.
3. The application will be assessed by the AONB Unit and one of the Grant Panel members (on occasions the AONB Unit and Panel member may decide to refer a small grant application to the Panel for determination).
4. Should you or your organisation have any issues over cash flow with regard to a potential SDF project, then please contact the AONB Unit to discuss these prior to your application.

**Applications over £1500**

1. Assessed by the SDF Grant Panel of representatives with a range of community, business and environmental management interests.
2. Particularly complex projects may also include Technical Advisors on the Panel and/or require a case presentation to be made by the applicant. Project requests over £5,000 will be closely scrutinized.
3. Projects will be judged on how well they meet the essential and desirable criteria.

**All Applications**

As there are limited funds available, projects will also be assessed in terms of their benefits and value for money. Those projects able to demonstrate the potential to deliver a wide range of the Fund’s objectives and also offer value for money are more likely to achieve grant support. Sustainability must be considered in all applications, for example, the use of locally sourced and/or sustainably managed materials.

Whilst the Panel is authorised to deal with all applications, the scheme is overseen by the AONB Joint Committee. Any applications may be ‘called in’ for consideration by the Joint Committee, for example, where there is concern over financial mismanagement of the project. The Joint Committee’s decision will be final. The work of the SDF Grant Panel will be regularly reported to the Joint Committee and 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.

***How and when to apply***

The SDF is a competitive grant fund and applications are generally considered on a first come, first served basis. Grants can only be made for activity within a particular financial year i.e. 1 April to 31 March. Applications are now being invited for projects that can be completed before the end of March 2020. The closing date for the second round of applications is 15 November 2019. However, depending on available funding, further applications may be invited later in the year.

Application forms are available for download from our website <http://www.cannock-chase.co.uk/> . In order to speed up the decision making process, we suggest that you complete, and return, the form electronically to:

cannockchase@staffordshire.gov.uk

Applications will be acknowledged as soon as possible on receipt. Applicants may be contacted for additional information where necessary. Once the application has been validated, a decision on the application should be made within ten working days. Applicants will be contacted, in writing with a formal grant offer and the relevant terms and conditions.

**If you are successful**

* Grants will normally be paid in arrears/on completion and will be dependent on the submission of relevant records (e.g. receipted invoices) as evidence of expenditure.
* The AONB team will monitor the progress of projects and may, if required, carry out site inspections prior to the approval of grant, before making any payments and at project completion.
* You will be required to sign a declaration stating that you accept unconditionally the terms and conditions of the fund. No grant will be paid prior to the applicant formally accepting the grant offer in writing.
* There is a national monitoring programme to oversee the working of the fund. Therefore all projects supported by it must be ready to provide relevant information as requested; and allow access to the national monitoring team if asked to do so.