INTRODUCTION

Aim and objectives of the fund

The aim of the fund is to strengthen the well-being and sustainability of communities by promoting sustainable living and working within the National Park.

The fund supports projects that meet the following objectives:

1. Enhance the **cultural heritage** of the New Forest
2. Conserve the **biodiversity** of the national park
3. Raise **awareness** of why the New Forest is a special place
4. Provide opportunities to **engage** people with the national park
5. Support the provision of **local food and goods**
6. Reduce **carbon emissions** in the national park
7. Provide **sustainable transport** options including cycling facilities

The sustainable communities fund is an important part of helping to further the national park purposes:

- To conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the area
- To promote opportunities for the understanding and enjoyment of the special qualities of the park by the public.
- Working in partnership with other organisations, it is also the Authority's duty to seek to foster the economic and social well-being of the local communities within the national park.

Examples of projects funded to date can be found at: http://www.newforestnpa.gov.uk/scf. If you are unsure of whether your project is suitable for funding, or you have an idea that you would like to discuss, please contact the grants officer.

PRE-APPLICATION

Who can apply for funding?

We welcome applications from individuals, organisations and community groups from the public and voluntary sector.

How much funding is available?

Projects can request up to £2,000 towards 100% of project costs.

What type of expenditure is not eligible for funding?

The fund is not able to cover the following:

- Expenses incurred before the grant agreement is signed
- Costs associated with putting your application together
- Planning applications and associated supporting documents
- Loans and interest payments
- VAT that you can recover
- Costs towards maintaining buildings or fitting eco-technologies to private homes

Does my project need planning permission or environmental consent?

You must seek advice on whether your project needs planning permission prior to submitting your application. If planning permission is required please contact the grants officer to discuss this further. If planning permission is not required, please provide a copy of the letter/email stating this.

Our planning team is able to provide advice free of charge, by calling 01590 646615 between the hours of 8:45 and 13:00. Further information about planning regulations is available at http://www.newforestnpa.gov.uk/info/20128/do_i_need_permission.

You should also make sure you obtain all other necessary consents, e.g. landowner, environmental consent from Natural England, etc., prior to submitting your application.

What else do I need to consider before submitting my application?

We are committed to supporting the development of best practice to ensure that projects are as sustainable as possible. Projects should therefore consider the following as part of their application:

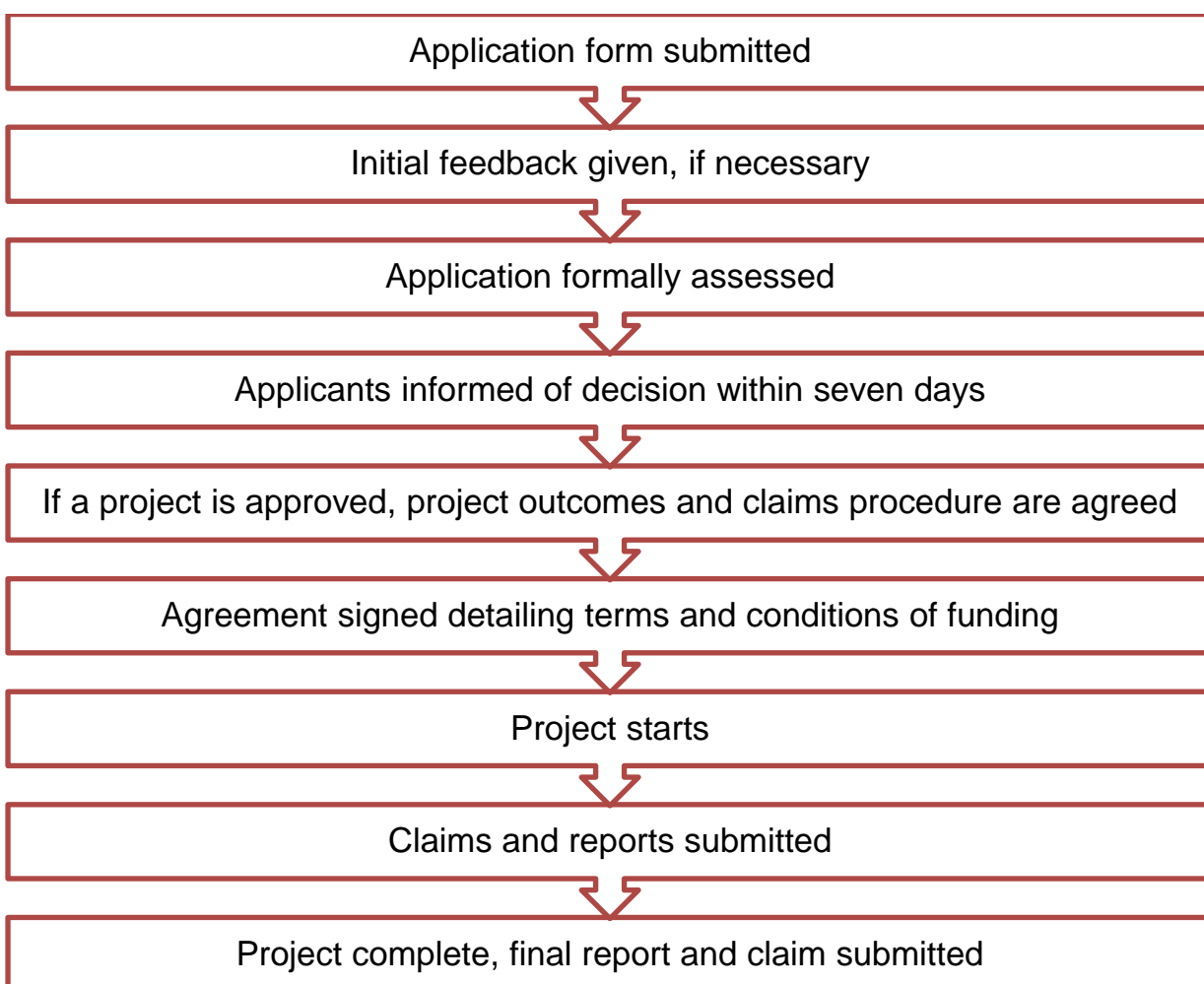| Reduce, reuse, recycle	Reducing, re-using or recycling lessens the impact of materials on the environment, use natural materials where possible.
Encourage energy efficiency	Purchasing energy efficient products, improving insulation, and reducing energy demand helps keep energy consumption to a minimum.
Reduce need for fossil fuel	Using sustainable modes of transport, renewable technologies, natural based products all help to reduce the demand of a finite resource.
Minimise pollution to air, water or land	Products which are non-polluting or from an environmentally friendly source reduce negative impacts on the environment e.g. FSC wood, water based eco-friendly paints, products with low embodied energy etc.
Use of locally produced materials, goods or food	Sourcing locally reduces the need for long distance transportation whilst supporting the local economy.

Local involvement and ownership	Projects which have the support and involvement of the local community are more likely to have an impact and succeed.
Involving young people or volunteers	Involving people in your project will encourage individuals to positively contribute to their community, raise awareness and knowledge.
Encouraging urban-rural links, people who may have difficulty enjoying, living or working in the area	Raise the quality of life for all members of the local community, encourage our urban neighbours to enjoy and understand this special place.

APPLICATION PROCESS AND EXPECTATIONS

What is the deadline for applications?

Applications can be considered at any time.

What is the process for approving applications?

Application form submitted

Initial feedback given, if necessary

Application formally assessed

Applicants informed of decision within seven days

If a project is approved, project outcomes and claims procedure are agreed

Agreement signed detailing terms and conditions of funding

Project starts

Claims and reports submitted

Project complete, final report and claim submitted

How is my application assessed?

Applications are assessed by the grants officer and chair of the fund panel.

When assessing your application, projects must:

- Further the aims and objectives of the fund
- Ensure they consider the long term sustainability/impact
- Have the support or involvement of local communities
- Provide value for money
- Demonstrate the need/demand/added value for the project
- Meet state aid rules (see below)

State Aid rules apply to the amount of public sector funding that can be offered to individuals or projects. Please contact the grants officer (01590 646634 or scf@newforestnpa.gov.uk) to check whether any rules apply to you or your project and if so what level of funding we can offer you.

What should I include in my application?

The following information will help you to complete the application form. A copy of the form can be downloaded from http://www.newforestnpa.gov.uk/scf. We recommend that you contact the grants officer to talk through your project before completing the form. Where possible, forms should be completed electronically and submitted to scf@newforestnpa.gov.uk.

1. **Contact details**
Provide details of the main contact for the project.

2. **About you or your group**
Provide information on how the group/organisation is constituted.

3. **Project summary**
Provide a brief summary of your project in no more than 200 words. This is useful for us to promote your project internally amongst our team and ensure they are aware of your plans, and externally amongst our members and wider stakeholders.

4. **Project timetable**
Provide an estimation of the likely start and finish date of your project.

5. **Project description**

5.1 Introduce your group/organisation and give a brief summary of its history and formation. This helps us to understand the role of your group/organisation and its context within the national park.

5.2 Describe how your project idea developed and why it is in need.

5.3 Explain what your project intends to do and how it intends to do it. In order to make a decision about funding we need to understand what you are aiming to do and how this will be achieved. We will use this information to measure your project against the fund's criteria.

5.4 Describe how people, communities and organisations will benefit from your project.

6. Community engagement

Projects must have the support or involvement of local communities therefore it is important to demonstrate any engagement to date, or if this is forthcoming. Explain how you have engaged the local community in your project, for example through the Parish Council or via local user groups.

7. Supporting information

7.1 Ensure that you consider how much supporting information you could usefully provide. For example letters of support, photographs, pictures, site sketch, plans/maps. It is also helpful to include quotations to show that the project costs identified are a true reflection of the actual costs of undertaking the work. When purchasing goods, materials or services you must be confident you can justify that it shows value for money.

7.2 If your project involves generating an income either from a new business or new revenue stream please ensure you also include a business plan.

8. Consents and planning permission
Provide details of any permission that is required before the project can be implemented (e.g. planning permission, ownership of site, etc.)? Please say what is needed and when it will be agreed.

9. Project budget
Provide an itemised breakdown of the costs of your project. If your organisation is VAT registered, the cost presented should be net, i.e. excluding VAT. If your organisation is not VAT registered and is not able to recover VAT, the cost presented should be inclusive of VAT.

10. Monitoring and evaluation
Provide details of how your project will be monitored and evaluated (see section on monitoring and evaluation below).

POST-APPLICATION STAGE

What happens if my project is agreed by the panel?

All project operators are required to sign an agreement detailing the finances, milestones, and timescales. The agreement also sets out purchasing and publicity requirements.

How do I claim the funds awarded to my project?

Claims are usually paid retrospectively i.e. the project spends their own funds and then reclaims. If you do not hold sufficient funds to finance your project it may be possible to provide part of the grant up front. Please contact the grants officer to discuss further.

Evidence will be required of all spend associated with the project, for example copies of invoices, receipts, etc. Where match funding includes in-kind support in the form of goods and services provided as contributions to the project rather than cash, we will require evidence of this.

The following can be considered as match-funding:

- Cash or other grants
- Cost of tangible items given freely, for example building materials or meeting room space that has been donated
- Staff time, for example your own staff or professionals who work for free on the project such as a web designer
- Time given by volunteers, which should be calculated using the following rates:

    - Manager   £16.76
    - Coordinator   £13.13
    - Researcher   £13.13
    - Administrator   £9.38
    - Labour input   £6.25

How should I monitor and evaluate my project?

Throughout the life of the project you will be required to provide regular updates on progress.

A simple progress report will need to be submitted each time a funding claim is made and will provide:

- Updates against the project milestones agreed at the start of the project
- Notification of any changes to the project plan – for example if funding has been agreed/withdrawn, any increase/decrease in the number of volunteers involved in the project, or changes to the scope of the project

Upon completion of the project a short evaluation will need to be submitted. The evaluation is aimed at understanding the achievements of the project in more detail and recognising what can be learnt from the project, both positive and negative. This information helps us to evaluate the contribution of the fund to its overall objectives as well as ensure that the fund remains a valuable part of the management of the national park.

To assist with evaluating the project we have a number of standard factors which we will ask you to report against, if applicable. These are:

- Number of community groups and local voluntary organisations directly involved in your project (and details of which groups)
- Number of young people (aged 13 – 24) involved in your project
- Number of local businesses involved in your project (and details of which businesses)
- Number of project participants / visitors / users
- Number of volunteers involved and how much time they gave to the project
- Number of visitors to the project or users of the facilities

As part of the evaluation we will also ask you to consider the following:

- How have people (volunteers, local communities, other organisations) benefitted from your project?
- Will any part of your project continue post-funding? How will you do this and who will be involved?
- Which parts of your project worked well?
- Which parts of your project didn't work so well?
- What would you do differently?

We will also ask you to provide evidence of any publicity about the project, and encourage you to speak to others involved in your project for feedback.