



Dorset National Landscape - Community Access Fund

Information & Guidance Notes 2026

Fund information

What is the Dorset National Landscape - Community Access Fund?

Dorset National Landscape wants to support a more diverse range of people to engage with their local natural & cultural heritage to help heritage thrive, be more resilient, valued and cared for now and into the future. To achieve this ambition, we will drive forward, support and coordinate the growth of the [Nature Buddies Network](#).

The Nature Buddies Network is funded by The National Lottery Heritage Fund, made possible by National Lottery players. With funding from The National Heritage Lottery and DEFRA supported funding we have been able to launch the Community Access Fund as part of the Nature Buddies Network.

These community grants are for **capital access improvements and delivery of taster/introduction activities**, for increasing the accessibility of local, relevant and enjoyable spaces for all to enjoy, helping people make connections to Dorset National Landscape natural & cultural heritage and each other in local communities. By supporting communities and tackling inequalities, this funding will enable groups and organisations to undertake projects which help to conserve and enhance the natural beauty in their local area, encourage connections with nature and enhance accessibility to support increased engagement and involvement in community greenspaces.

Applicants will have to show how the work will be sustained, managed and who will be responsible for the maintenance of works past the end of the project. Similar initiatives have been delivered as part of previous funding and successfully show how important smaller grants and support can enhance community involvement and help conserve local greenspaces through increased engagement and connection of members of their community.

The objectives and priorities for Dorset National Landscape can be found in our [Management Plan](#), which we strongly encourage you to refer to in your application.

How much money is available? Grant rates / match funding

In 2026 we have a total fund of £15,000.

A typical grant is likely to be in the region of £2-4k, but we are open to considering larger projects where there is a significant proportion of capital expenditure.

We would not expect to fund 100% of your project, and you should seek at least 25% of project costs from other sources. This is known as match funding. See Section C below for more information on this. Match funding can also come from valuing in-kind contributions, such as using a meeting room for free, and from volunteers. We may be able to advise you of alternative suitable funding options – please do ask.

Who can apply for funding?

The Dorset National Landscape - Community Access Fund will support community groups, VCSE organisations, or groups from the public, private or voluntary sectors, within or outside the Dorset National Landscape boundary.



What types of projects will be supported?

The Dorset National Landscape - Community Access Fund can support a range of capital projects including practical work such as access enhancements, changing stiles or gates, installing handrails, providing sit spots for people to enjoy watching nature or improving access to nature sites in communities, research projects, partnership development and training. A further list of example capital expenditure items can be found in appendix 1.

Grants can also be used to run a selection of taster or introduction activities that can engage with people new to nature connection, to engage with new audiences or for promoting your activity to referrers – signposters.

Grants can be used to fund new projects or to add value to an existing project. Projects don't necessarily need to be within the Dorset National Landscape boundary but must benefit the area and meet the aims of the fund. We do not fund projects that support direct commercial transactions for financial gain.

What must projects deliver?

Projects need to demonstrate that they will help deliver the Management Plan and at least one of the following strands (and not adversely affect any of the others):

- Address accessibility challenges to heritage assets and activities for under-served populations.
- Empower communities to enhance local natural heritage for nature recovery and increased access.
- Conserve and enhance the natural beauty and heritage of the Dorset National Landscape
- Support the social and economic wellbeing of local communities in sustainable ways that care for the environment
- Have the support and involvement of local people or meet a recognised local need

Priority areas we are looking to support:

We are particularly keen to encourage projects that link to our key priorities:

- Encourage and support underserved communities to connect to the National Landscape including, adults who face barriers to accessing heritage and are at risk of social isolation, people with disabilities and people from ethnic minority backgrounds
- Conserve and enhance the special qualities of the Dorset National Landscape
- Remove barriers to all people's enjoyment and involvement in the countryside
- Bring organisations and people together in tackling problems or promoting new ideas.
- Encourage links between urban groups and those resident in the Dorset National Landscape
- Demonstrate innovation or best practice

Application Assessment

Applications for will be judged by a Local Assessment Panel, made up of 6 to 8 people. It will include representatives from the Dorset National Landscape, Dorset Council, representatives from the health, wellbeing community, access and other specialists.



Pre-Application Support

The Nature Buddies project coordinators are available to support project development and the application process, if you would like to speak to someone about support or advice on the suitability of your project please email or call – Julie Hammon Julie.hammon@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk 01305 224785 or Kate Townsend kate.townsend@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk 01305 228246

Important dates:

Fund opens for applications:	Monday 23 rd January 2026
Deadline for submission of applications:	Friday 27 th February 2026
Assessment Panel Meeting:	TBC March
Applicants notified of outcome:	Friday 27 th March 2026
Projects completed / final date for claims to be submitted:	Mid-September 2026

Guidance notes for completing the application form

For every question you are given a box in which to type your answer which will automatically expand to fit the text as you type.

If completing the form by hand, please write clearly and neatly and submit additional sheets as necessary.

Applications will be considered against the set criteria not by the length of the proposal so please keep your application as concise as possible. We do not expect the final form to exceed 8 pages in total.

Section A – Applicant details

1. Please give the name of the organisation, company or individual who will be directly responsible for the project and financially accountable for how the grant will be spent.
2. This will tell us what the project is about, it should be short and catchy and clearly define what sort of work you will be doing.
3. How much money are you requesting? This must correlate with your financial statement in Section C.
4. Please complete the details of the main person who will be dealing with the application on behalf of the organisation, and corresponding organisational contact details for that person. If you have no email or website insert N/A.
5. Please complete the boxes that are applicable to your organisation. You do not need to be a registered charity or company, but you will need a basic constitution. Your organisation will need to have a bank account in its name, so that you can receive grant payments.
6. If your organisation is VAT registered, funding will be paid net of VAT. Non-VAT registered organisations will be paid the gross amount including VAT.
7. Please let us know the location at which the project will be based – you can check the Dorset National Landscape boundary [here](#)
8. Please let us know if your organisation is based within the Dorset National Landscape - use the boundary checker link above.



Section B – Project description

Please provide a summary of your project in a nutshell – explaining concisely what your project is about and what you need the funding for. **This is the only part of the application form which we will share directly with the assessment panel, and it must not exceed 200 words**

Project details

1. Please let us know the project location/grid reference and area it will cover (use hectares if applicable and let us know if it is in a conservation area, a SSSI/SNCI, on a scheduled monument etc).
2. Please let us know the anticipated start date of your project. This is when you expect to have all the finance and necessary permissions in place to enable the project to proceed. Any elements you want to be covered by the grant **must not** be carried out prior to this date.
3. Please let us know the anticipated end date of your project. This is when you believe your project will be completed and objectives met. Note any grant must be spent before **mid-September 2026**
4. Please provide a concise description of all the elements of your project.
5. Please list any key events/activity dates or milestones that you expect to take place during the project (can be approximate).
6. Use the tick box to let us know if the grant is for the project as a whole or a specific element of your project.
7. Please provide more detail on how the grant will be used to financially fund your project.
8. Is there clear evidence of the local demand or need for your project? Please tell us about any evidence you have gathered which supports your project. This could be a feasibility study, community consultation, survey or recorded discussions. Please provide a copy if available.
9. Tell us who will benefit from the project - who are the main targets, who else will benefit and will it involve any particular groups of people? (e.g people at risk of social isolation/ older people, people with disabilities etc.).
10. Please explain how your project will support the delivery of our aim to help people make connections to the natural & cultural environment and each other in local communities. Including how it will support communities and tackle inequalities. Please also explain if your project links in with any other projects or other organisations' strategies. If you are not sure, please do contact us for help.
11. Please list any permissions/insurance required to carry out your project and if that permission has already been obtained or not.
12. Let us know of any partners directly involved in the project's implementation.
13. We need to know what your project will achieve. So please tell us what the direct and countable results will be using the questions given.
14. Explain how you expect your project to continue after the grant funding period has ended – what will happen to the people you have helped or the place you have worked on? How will the project outcomes be financed and managed? Can you demonstrate it is a sustainable project?

Section C – Financial details



The fund can support up to 75% of the costs of most projects if you are a voluntary group or charity. The remaining funding must come from match funding, either cash or in-kind or a mixture of the two, but cannot be matched by Exchequer funds – i.e. money from a government department or agency (e.g. Natural England, Environment Agency, Forestry Commission etc.)

The grant is paid upon completion of the project and not in advance.

Please complete the Project Budget spreadsheet to show a detailed breakdown of costs and funding for your project using these guidance notes to assist you.

We would prefer you to complete the [Excel version](#) in which the figures will be automatically worked out for you; but if but if you are unable to use Excel please use the table in the application form and work out the figures by hand.

N.B. If using the Excel spreadsheet, you will see that some cells are locked and can't be edited. You can still add extra rows if needed.

Part 1 Expenditure Table – Description of costs and activities

- **Project manager:** If you pay someone with experience to manage your project; the cost will be a **cash** cost to your project. If a person chooses to manage the project without payment this will be an **in-kind** cost
- **Specialist contractor:** if your project requires you to hire specialist skills the cost will be a **cash** cost to your project
- **Purchase or hire of goods/equipment:** The cost of all goods and equipment that will be purchased or hired for the project should be individually listed. This will be a **cash** cost to your project. If someone loans you equipment without charging, the value can be included as an **in-kind** cost.
- **Design & print:** If you are paying for the design and print of leaflets or publicity material this is a **cash** cost. If, however, someone volunteers their time to design your material (without charge) this will be an **in-kind** cost
- **Volunteer time:** If people volunteer to help with the project (without payment) this can be recorded and used as an **in-kind** cost.

Recording volunteer time is essential and a timesheet detailing volunteer time and activity must be submitted with your claim forms (please request a timesheet template from us if needed). When calculating the value of your volunteers' time please use the following rates:

- *professional volunteer (for example, accountancy or teaching): £50 per hour*
- *skilled volunteer (for example, leading a guided walk): £20 per hour*
- *volunteer (for example, administrative work): £10 per hour*

Part 2 – Income Table

- **Description of sources of funding:** Please give details of all cash contributions towards your project from your own organisation and other partners/funders and state whether this is confirmed, awaiting decision or not yet applied for.
- **Sub-total of cash funding:** If you are completing the Excel form the cash sub-total will be added up for you. If you are completing the form manually, please add up the column.
- **In-kind contribution:** If you are completing the Excel form the in-kind total will be entered for you. If you are completing the form manually, please add up the total.
- **Amount requested from Fund:** If you are completing the Excel form the amount requested from the Fund will be entered for you. If you are completing the form manually, please add up the total of cash (a) and in-kind funding (b) and take this total away from the total project costs. The total will be the funding amount you are requesting from the Dorset National Landscape Fund.
- **Total income:** If you are completing the Excel form the total income box will be added up for you. If you are completing the form manually, please add up the sub total of cash funding box with the in-kind contribution and the amount of funding you are applying for. This total should agree with your total project cost above.
- **Funding as a % of the total project cost:** If you are completing Excel form online the figure will be calculated for



you. To manually calculate the % of total project cost divide the funding being requested by the total project costs and multiple by 100.

Section D - Declaration

The form must be signed by a person with relevant authority (can be an electronic signature), dated and emailed to:
Julie.hammon@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk

The closing date to return submissions is Friday 27th February 2026.

Email submissions are preferable. Please notify Kate Townsend on 01305 228246 if you prefer to submit a hard copy.

Appendix 1

Capital spend is a one-off itemised cost where funding is provided to purchase or invest in a physical item or asset (capital item) to achieve a stated outcome, in this case to improve accessibility for all. Some examples of what would be classed as capital expenditure, include access infrastructure, buildings, machinery and equipment, for example:

- Disabled toilet facilities
- Replacement/removal of gates
- Additional seating areas
- Improved access to waterways for the mobility-impaired
- Widening and resurfacing of paths for multi-user use, where this doesn't negatively impact on biodiversity and land use
- Purchase of trampers, mobility scooters, electric bikes and storage/charging facilities
- Purchase of specially adapted tools and personal protective equipment for volunteers
- Provision of accessible signage and visitor information, physical and digital
- Creation of a new or improvement of an existing piece of access infrastructure, such as building a toilet or fitting a new accessible gate or adapting a minibus or visitor centre.

- Research and development, defined in budgeting guidance as:

“Creative work undertaken on a systematic basis to increase the stock of knowledge, and use of this stock of knowledge for the purpose of discovering or developing new products, including improved versions or qualities of existing products, or discovering new or more efficient processes of production”.

Some examples that are not classifiable as capital:

- Removal of a stile - unless it's being replaced by an accessible gate
- Hire of a minibus
- Staff time that is not directly attributable to creation of an asset.

Further Reading

More guidance on creating accessible access can be found here:

[By all reasonable means: least restrictive access guidance](#) – Sensory Trust