

# Northern Forest Partnership Innovation Fund Frequently Asked Questions

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## Before you get started...

These FAQs are to be used in conjunction with the expression of interest and full application forms for the Partnership Innovation Fund.

They provide, among other information, details about:

- the purpose of the Partnership Innovation Fund
- the eligibility criteria
- what it can pay towards
- additional information to help you answer key questions in the application forms
- the regulatory framework for woodland creation.

If, after reading these FAQs, you are still unsure on whether your project could be eligible or how to best answer any of the questions in the application forms, please do not hesitate to contact the Woodland Trust at [NorthernForest@woodlandtrust.org.uk](mailto:NorthernForest@woodlandtrust.org.uk), or call us on **0343 248 4031**. We will be able to provide you with further support.

## A) The Northern Forest Partnership Innovation Fund

The £2.1 million Partnership Innovation Fund is resourced by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), and managed by the Woodland Trust. The Fund is available to support the creation of new woodland in the Northern Forest by the planting of 1 million trees by the end of March 2022.

**The primary purpose of the Fund is to deliver large scale woodland creation in the Northern Forest through innovative models and mechanisms.**

### 1) Key eligibility checklist

The Fund can provide up to 50% of eligible costs for projects that meet the key eligibility criteria ie £1 of funding for every £1 of secure match funding provided by the applicant.

Any project seeking a grant award from the Partnership Innovation Fund must:

- be within the Northern Forest boundary  
<https://thenorthernforest.org.uk/location/>
- lead to the creation of at least 3 hectares of woodland by the end of March 2022
- not request any more than the maximum £2.10 of grant support per tree planted, including any other work you are applying for grant support for such as landowner engagement
- demonstrate true innovation, especially financial or enhanced mechanisms/models that can deliver woodland creation at scale. This might include for example, new approaches to partnership working, novel mechanisms for attracting the finance to support your woodland creation or by securing sources of match funding that have not been

traditionally employed to facilitate woodland creation. If you are unsure if your proposed match funding meets the criteria of this grant package, do not hesitate to contact us to discuss the matter further

- provide match funding of at least 50% from another source. i.e. the Partnership Innovation Fund can only contribute up to 50% of eligible costs.

#### In addition:

- Projects must not be co-funded by the Defra's other tree planting programmes like the Countryside Stewardship Scheme or Woodland Carbon Fund. However, an applicant for the Partnership Innovation Fund could also apply for the Woodland Carbon Guarantee.
- Woodland created through the Partnership Innovation Fund should meet the requirements of the UK Forestry Standard.
- Applicants can seek funding for multiple small woodlands (that add up to at least 3 hectares) across their land holding particularly where wider objectives can be secured such as natural flood management and management of diffuse

# A) The Northern Forest Partnership Innovation Fund (continued)

pollution into watercourses.

- If you are the landowner of the project area you must have full control of all the land required for planting and any required permissions for the activities needed to deliver and maintain your planned project.
- If you are not the landowner and do not have management control, you should get the written consent of all other parties who have management control for the entire period of the grant agreement, and submit this with your completed application form.
- Alternatively, if you are yet to secure the land for your project, you should set out in the supporting information to your application what process you are following to secure the necessary landowner agreement.
- If you are a tenant, you will also need to provide written consent of all other parties who have management control, and have security of tenure for the full period of the grant agreement.

## 2) Desirable criteria

- Projects should seek to maximise other public benefits including opening new opportunities for public access and engagement, carbon storage, nature recovery, natural flood management etc.
- Applicants should be open to sharing and promoting the learning that flows from the innovation within their project.

## 3) What can the Partnership Innovation Fund support?

The Fund can pay directly for:

- trees (preferably UK Sourced and Grown) and tree planting
- tree protection (shelters, ties, stakes, fencing to exclude stock). The reduction in the use of plastic or ideally plastic-free proposals are encouraged.

A modest proportion of grant funding requested *may* contribute towards:

- infrastructure that can be demonstrably linked to unlocking access to woodland creation opportunities, for example access tracks, bridges, culverts
- work to facilitate woodland creation including landowner engagement, scheme design, ecological, landscape and archaeological assessments to support Environmental Impact Assessment determinations
- ground preparation/treatment prior to planting.

## 4) What definitely can't it support?

The Fund cannot be used to:

- purchase land or buildings
- maintain the trees post-planting
- tree replacement losses due to drought, predation, disease etc.

## 5) When will we know if our full application has been successful or not?

By the end of October 2020 at the latest for

planting in the 2020/21 planting season.

In future years the application window will remain open all year, or until all available monies have been allocated.

## 6) What length of contract will it be?

The contract will last for 15 years after completion of the project supported by the Partnership Innovation Fund.

## 7) What conditions will you be placing in the grant contract?

A grant contract will be required, and will consist of a range of criteria, including that:

- the woodland must remain in situ for at least 15 years
- the owner must maintain the trees and ensure adequate stocking density (as outlined and agreed in the grant contract) is achieved at year 5. A stocking density of at least 1,100 trees per hectare is much preferred. However, if a robust case for less can be made, this may be considered in exceptional circumstances
- the Northern Forest Partnership will wish to use projects supported by the Partnership Innovation Fund to promote its work to others
- any project over-spend will be the responsibility of the applicant to finance; any under-spend in the grant awarded will be returned to the Woodland Trust and directed towards other Partnership Innovation Fund projects.

## 8) What type of match funding is eligible?

Match funding should primarily be monies secured by the applicant.

However, in some instances other forms of match funding will be considered (for example, infrastructure to unlock access to land parcels, fencing to exclude stock etc). Applicants must show the breakdown of their match funding in their application.

Funding in the form of monies from Defra's other tree-planting programmes like the Countryside Stewardship Scheme for example, are not eligible as match funding for the Partnership Innovation Fund.

## 9) How will you be comparing my application to others?

We have a set of criteria that includes an assessment of the following outcomes:

- quality and depth of innovation
- level and security of match funding/gearing to increase return on investment from the grant requested
- return on investment on the grant requested in terms of the number of trees planted
- sustainability in delivery
- long term management of the resource created
- geographic spread across the Northern Forest

# A) The Northern Forest Partnership Innovation Fund (continued)

- management of risk i.e. how the applicant has sought to manage and mitigates risks related to the planned project
- scalability and wider application of the model.

## 10) How will the grant be paid?

- Payment will be BACS.
- Payments will only be made once a successful applicant has signed an associated Partnership Innovation Fund grant agreement with the Woodland Trust.
- Once a grant agreement has been signed, successful applicants can begin to claim their approved grant as their project is delivered i.e. in arrears, using a template that will be provided including provision of a budget table and copies of invoices. For larger, longer or more complex projects,

financial claims can be submitted quarterly. For smaller, shorter, or relatively simple projects, financial claims may be submitted at project completion rather than quarterly, subject to agreement with the Woodland Trust.

- Successful applicants will be expected to seek three written quotes for all work of £5,000 (excluding VAT) or more in value, and to provide evidence of these when submitting financial claims.
- You must be in a position to manage your own cash-flow, because unless agreed otherwise all grant payments will be made in arrears of project spend.
- An end of project report is required at the project completion for all projects. A template will be provided.
- Your final grant payment will only be made after a satisfactory project completion report, and proof of spend.

# B) Completing the expression of interest and full application forms

## Expression of interest form

We hope the Expression of Interest Form is self-explanatory, but if you have any questions please contact the Woodland Trust at [NorthernForest@woodlandtrust.org.uk](mailto:NorthernForest@woodlandtrust.org.uk) or telephone 0343 248 4031

## Full application form

We hope that the majority of the full application form is self-explanatory. However, we have provided further explanation on the following sections:

### Section 5.10 – Please attach a planting/design map to your application

Planting/design maps must provide the following minimum information:

- Maps should be based on OS maps and/or Geographical Information System (GIS)-generated digital maps.
- Maps must be based on a scale of 1:2500 or 1:5000 or for large schemes 1:10000.
- Any proposed areas of open space within the proposed planting areas must be shown.
- Fence lines should be indicated.
- Include the location of any capital works proposed for funding.
- Indicate the planting design, including species.

- Indicate water courses and open water.
- Indicate access tracks to be created and maintained.
- Indicate open ground - show and identify features that justify/support internal open space eg Public Right of Way, rides/tracks, way, leaves etc.

### 6.2 Complete and submit a project milestones plan (Appendix 1) as part of your application, to provide us with further information on what your project will do and when

For this section, we want to know the key project stages / interim targets you want to hit and when during your project delivery. This will not only help us see how you are going to structure your project activities and timetable, but it will also help you plan to achieve the project aims and SMART objectives you stated in Sections 4.2 and 4.3.

The list of milestones will also help us understand your project in more detail.

If you have any further questions about completing the full application form, please contact the Woodland Trust at [NorthernForest@woodlandtrust.org.uk](mailto:NorthernForest@woodlandtrust.org.uk) or call 0343 248 4031

### Before you submit your application

This section of the application form is to help you check you have all the relevant documentation ready for completing and sending off your application.

Use the tick boxes provided to make sure you have completed each action required.

# C) Regulatory Framework

Proposals to create new woodland are regulated by the Forestry Commission (FC), and it is the responsibility of the applicant (not the Woodland Trust) to adhere to the requirements of these regulations. Where protected sites and protected features exist, consents from other bodies may also be required.

The following is intended as a guide only, and has no legal authority. For detailed advice please speak to your local Forestry Commission Woodland Officer by contacting the relevant regional office. Further information on these can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/forestry-commission/about/access-and-opening#Area-Offices>

The key relevant regulatory controls on woodland creation are the:

- Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Regulations;
- Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations;
- Public Register- for proposals in receipt of public funds and / or for EIA decisions;
- SSSI (Sites of Special Scientific Interest) consent.

It should also be noted that other designations may have requirements to obtain licences, permissions or consents, and it is the applicant's responsibility to ensure that have all the necessary permissions etc. in place before commencing any work.

## 1) Environmental Impact Assessment

The FC is the Relevant Authority for making environmental impact assessment (EIA) decisions on forestry projects (Afforestation, forest roads and quarries and deforestation).

There are thresholds which dictate if and what kind of EIA decision is required. See the Forestry Commission EIA page <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/assess-environmental-impact-before-you-create-new-woodland>.

Where an EIA decision is required, and in order to meet the EIA information requirements currently in place, proposals for new planting need to be supported by well-evidenced planning and design documentation, including:

- The grant fund application form – including applicants / agents details;
- The EIA (Afforestation) Enquiry form – for new planting projects where EIA applies;
- A MAGIC and a Land Information Search constraints check;
- Mapping information – in GIS or image format – see GIS guidance below;

The local Historic Environment Records (HER) – an overview of HER's can be found at <https://historicengland.org.uk/advice/technical-advice/information-management/hers/>

## EIA Notification for new planting projects

New planting proposals between 2ha and 5ha which lie outside sensitive areas of England are subject to a Basic EIA Notification process.

Proposals between 5ha and 50ha which lie fully within Low Risk areas of England are subject to Full Notification. Full Notification proposals will be published on the Public Register for 28 days, prior to the FC giving an EIA decision.

## All other proposals on other land, including sensitive areas are subject to full EIA Opinions.

The FC must determine Basic Notifications within 28 days of receipt, and Full Notifications within 42 days of receipt. However, for all proposals needing an EIA Opinion you must wait for the FC to give its decision.

The FC uses the Public Register for Consultation to publish details of new planting proposals in Low Risk areas which meet the EIA Full Notification requirements during the assessment stage (see below). All EIA decisions on forestry projects are published on the Public Register for Decisions.

New planting proposals must take account of any recently planted woodland, such as projects less than 5 years old and within 500m of the boundary of the proposal. These projects need to be considered in terms of cumulative environmental effect and should be identified as part of the proposal area and included on this form. Note that these woodland areas may be on other people's land.

Most afforestation projects will require an EIA determination. For further guidance on EIA's go to: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/assess-environmental-impact-before-you-create-new-woodland>.

## 2) Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations

The FC is the Competent Authority for making Habitats Regulations Assessment (HRA) decisions on forestry projects where they have potential to impact on protected European sites (Special Areas of Conservation, Special Protection Areas and RAMSAR). These sites form part of a European network of priority habitats and safeguard many rare and protected plant and animal species.

The effects of woodland creation can be significant if care is not taken in the planning, design and implementation of new woodland. For example, tree species could seed into protected non-woodland habitat, or ground preparation works could lead to water runoff and sedimentation of protected watercourses.

Alongside the EIA process, the FC will assess new woodland proposals to determine if any European sites could be affected and if they believe there is a risk they will undertake a further assessment of that risk. You may need to provide additional information, or undertake surveys, and potentially have to change some elements of the proposals before you can plant. You may even be refused permission to plant if the risks to protected European sites cannot be eliminated.

## 3) Public Register

The FC uses two Public Registers. One register is used to notify the public of new planting and felling projects that are being proposed and to provide the public with an opportunity to comment on those proposals. This Public Register has a consultation period of 28 days and applies to

# C) Regulatory Framework (continued)

all new planting proposals (including short rotation coppice) which meet the following criteria:

- a project area greater than 0.5 ha;
- a minimum block width of 20m;
- the project will have the potential for more than 20% canopy cover throughout;
- the tree species will be capable of 5m height growth in normal conditions;
- be in receipt of public funds or subject to EIA Full Notification assessment.

The other Register is to notify the public of new planting and felling projects or EIA projects where a decision has been reached on whether that proposal can proceed or not. You can only view the Forestry Commissions decisions and are not able to comment on them.

Further information on the Public Register can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/consultation-and-the-public-registers>.

## 4) SSSI (Sites of Special Scientific Interest) consent

Sites of Scientific Interest are the UKs most biologically important sites, often designated for particular habitats and the species they support. When making their decisions, the FC is required to consider the impact of woodland creation on SSSI and will liaise with Natural England as to the appropriateness of woodland creation proposals on or next to SSSI.

In most cases it will not be appropriate to plant new woodland on existing SSSI, but there are exceptions. Equally, planting immediately next to SSSI needs careful planning, and speaking to Natural England when you are developing your proposal is critical to ensure you take account of the potential impacts such proposals may have on the protected site.

Where woodland creation works are appropriate and where they would directly take place within an SSSI, the FC will help the land's owner or occupier to obtain SSSI Consent from Natural England for those works. You will need to complete a Supplementary Notice of Operations to fully explain how you intend to undertake all aspects of the woodland creation project. This can found at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/natural-england-consent-for-work-in-sites-of-special-scientific-interest-operations-note-27>.

