National Forest Management Grant 2023/24
Guidance notes for applicants

This note provides guidance on how to apply for a National Forest Management Grant. Please note that only projects which directly benefit the National Forest area are eligible for grant assistance.

1. What sort of projects are eligible?

For a project to be eligible for a Management Grant it must demonstrate clear benefits for at least two National Forest objectives including:

- forestry
- wildlife conservation
- landscape enhancement
- recreation (including public access)
- community use and/or involvement
- heritage protection.

Many projects have the opportunity to provide multiple benefits. Clear links should be demonstrated to meet the National Forest's Vision.

Grants will be competitive, to ensure that the most beneficial applications receive funding. The applications will be scored (using the Management Grant Scoring Criteria) by the National Forest to assess the applications that provide the greatest benefits.

Table 1 (at the end of these notes) lists the types of projects that can be grant aided. Management schemes which combine several elements are particularly encouraged.

2. Who can apply for a Management Grant?

Grants are available for land owners, including:

- farmers and estate owners;
- charities;
- local authorities;
- community groups;

Government bodies and agencies (such as the Forestry Commission and Natural England) are not eligible to apply for these grants.

Important notes regarding community-focused projects:

Management Grants to engage local communities are intended to support groups or organisations applying on behalf of community groups.

Community-focused projects should work with local residents and be supported by the community as a whole. A community group applying for a Management Grant must have a formal constitution and office bearers.

3. Grants criteria and eligibility

Grants are available to fund **up to 100%** of the total cost of your project (60% for woodland options and 100% for habitat options). New applications may be made for additional stages of a project, if appropriate. However, where possible, this should be discussed with the NFC at the time of the initial application.
NFC may pay up to a maximum of **£20,000** (inclusive of VAT), towards works at any one site within a financial year (1st April – 31st March). The NFC reserves the right to alter this figure throughout the year depending on the options chosen, grant uptake and budget availability.

The Management Grant will require Before and After fixed point photography for all options within an approved scheme. **Before photos** (with grid reference) will **need to be supplied within the NFC template on application** and the After pictures will need to be supplied with the grant claim.

To help applicants raise their share of the total cost of projects, match-funding may include cash funds raised or donated and grants received from Local Authorities or other grant-making bodies. If match-funding is dependent upon receiving grants from other sources this could result in the National Forest grant payment being delayed pending confirmation of that other award, so please bear this in mind if you want to avoid delays.

Work undertaken by unskilled volunteers may also be included as match funding. Volunteer time is costed at £50 per day or £6.65 per hour.

The NFC will not fund projects where other more suitable sources of funding have not been applied for first (for example Countryside Stewardship). In addition, **Management Grants cannot be used in the following circumstances:**

- for commercially viable thinning and extraction, transportation of timber and other wood products; for processing wood or other forestry resources into products; or for energy generation (e.g. wood fuel). This is to comply with the National Forest Company's (NFC) State Aid approval for its grant schemes.
- to double fund works that are already being funded through other NFC or publicly funded grant schemes (e.g. Forestry Commission, Environmental Stewardship, England Rural Development Programme).
- for the acquisition of land or buildings; works required as part of any planning agreement; or other 'capital' items such as vehicles, computers and other equipment. Consideration will be given to the temporary hire of such items, if relevant.
- core-funding expenses such as staff wages, rents or on-going maintenance costs.

Management Plan

A site management plan or similar should be in place, or in advanced production before meaningful site works commence. A copy of the plan must be supplied to the NFC with the grant application. If a plan is in progress, proof must be shown that it is in advanced production

4. How to apply for a Management Grant

Applications should be made on an application form, which is available on request from the NFC. It is advisable that, before completing the form, potential applicants discuss their projects with the appropriate member of the NFC team to ensure that projects are eligible for funding. The contacts are:

Ed Hiorns – Lead Woodland Management Advisor; Tel: 07816213377 or ehiorns@nationalforest.org

Rosanna Rapacchietta Woodland Advisor; Tel: 07855 976355 or rrapacchietta@nationalforest.org

The grant application window opens **1st November 2022 and** closes **31st January 2023**. Applications can be submitted by email or post. Successful applicants will be notified as soon as possible following the grant deadline and projects will need to be completed and all claims submitted before 1st March 2024.

5. Guidance on completing the application form

The following guidance will help ensure that you provide all the correct information needed by the NFC to process your application. Please read it carefully as missing or incorrect information may delay processing.

Applicant details

This information will be used for all correspondence. Where possible, the NFC will use email to respond to your application, so it is important that (if available) a correct email address is included.

In describing your organisations' aims and financial structure, a simple summary is all that is required. The NFC retains the right to request a copy of your audited accounts but will ordinarily only request this in certain circumstances.

Details of proposals

It is essential that you identify the objectives of your project and how these contribute towards achieving the objectives of the National Forest Green Print. Use Table 1 at the end of these notes to help you. When describing your project, make sure to reference how it will deliver the objectives that you have highlighted.

It is also important to be clear about the timetable for the project. Management Grants must be applied for, spent, and claimed within the same financial year. Where projects run across financial years, you should discuss this with a member of the NFC team to ensure that this will not present problems and this is never guaranteed.

When considering the benefits of your project to the National Forest, be sure to consider wider as well as direct benefits. For example, the creation of a woodland management plan may have benefits in planning for timber, as well as wildlife, landscape, and public amenity (if the site has public access).

Specifications and costs

Please use the Excel costs calculator to set out the specifications and costs of the proposed works. **Please ensure you have the most up to date 2023/24 version**. The calculator sets out the standard costs and associated grant funding as well as providing a platform for the additional projects section. Separate guidance on how to fill in the cost's calculator is available within the spreadsheet.

The full costs of the project should be provided in the application. For woodland options, the grant requested cannot be more than 60% of the total cost of the project, so it is essential that you identify all costs or it may reduce the amount of grant you are able to receive. The value of volunteer inputs can be included in the project costs as an element of the 40% match-funding. Volunteer time should be clearly accounted for (e.g. total number of hours or days) and be costed at a rate of £50 per day or £6.65 per hour.

Under 'Applicants Resources', you must be able to provide 40% of the total project costs. If different match-funding elements are involved, they should each be described, and the amounts given. If you have identified volunteer time as part of your project costs, this should be referenced. If grants from other organisations are to be used as match-funding, you should clearly state whether this funding has been secured or, if not, when it is expected.

Two competitive quotes must be provided for anything that is not a standard cost. These must be comparable in what they are quoting for.

Scheme Cost Per Hectare

When applying to the National Forest Management Grant the Habitat Enhancement Options (H1-H18) are further assessed against cost per hectare implications. When assessing applications, the National Forest will be looking for schemes that have an appropriate cost per hectare/km. The overall aim is to keep the habitat options which are 100% funded **at or around £1,000 per ha/km***, this is to provide the best cost, benefit for the funds available. Therefore, some of the higher cost per ha/km options will only be viable when choosing other lower cost options to offset, bringing the overall habitat cost per ha/km within the range mentioned above. For 2023/24 the Standard Options list guidance document has been updated to reflect these conflicts.

When applying for fencing, we can use the area (ha) being fenced in our calculations, therefore please identify the metres required of fencing on the application calculator and then identify the area fenced within the application form and/or the application map. This condition does not apply for hedgelaying or other boundary improvement options.

*Applications with a higher cost per ha/km will be considered but risk some or all the options chosen being removed from the approval of a scheme.

Site management proposals

Where your project involves the management/use of land, you must provide the information requested. This will allow the NFC to ensure that there are no potential conflicts with existing land uses. Please provide a six-figure grid reference for the site (e.g., SK 123 456) as part of the description of its location.

It is important that you specify your legal interests in the site and where you do not own the site, the details of the landowner. This is necessary to ensure that the landowner permits the proposed work on their property. If you withhold any relevant information regarding land ownership, the NFC retains the right not to offer any grant.

You must also confirm whether the site is currently covered by any site designations, agri-environment schemes or formal consents listed on page 3. Each of these may present a constraint to a potential project and may require consultation with other organisations. You <u>must</u> answer 'Yes' or 'No' for each of these questions. Failure to do so will delay the processing of your application and, should information regarding constraints be withheld, the NFC retains the right to withdraw its offer of any grant. When discussing your project with a member of the NFC team, it may be possible for the NFC to check its records for potential constraints, but it is the responsibility of the applicant to ensure that they have the correct information to complete the application form.

Maps

It is also **essential** that you provide a plan(s) identifying the location of the land you wish to enhance and any site works.

Map(s)/Plan(s) need to be either 1:2,500 / 1:5,000 or 1:10,000 scale with grid lines marked/drawn to scale with a red line around boundaries. Map(s) also need to be signed and dated.

A map(s) of appropriate scale should be used to identify the works. The plan should show clearly labelled compartments (including sub-compartments where applicable), as well as site management proposals included within the grant application. The plan should clearly relate with the compartments and work items listed in the cost's calculator.

Where possible any **shapefiles or similar should be submitted** with the application. This will provide NFC with capabilities to efficiently map activity across the Forest.

Declaration

Finally, the Landowner must sign the declaration and provide the other information requested.

An agent, who is authorised to do so, may sign the application, and claim forms. However, a copy of a relevant agent's authorisation form must be sent in with the application.

The NFC must receive a signed copy of the application to be able to process it. If emailing a copy of the application form, a signed paper copy must also be sent via post (or scanned and e-mailed).

Completed application forms should be returned to: Ed Hiorns, Lead Woodland Management Advisor at: ehiorns@nationalforest.org or The National Forest Company, Bath Yard, Moira, Swadlincote, Derbyshire, DE12 6BA

6. What happens next?

The Management Grant fund has limited resources, which must be apportioned to provide support to projects throughout the National Forest area. Applications will be scored on their merits and value for money in delivering the National Forest's Vision. In determining whether to offer a grant, the Management Grant Scoring Criteria will be used to guide the decisions of the National Forest Company. The National Forest Company has sole discretion as to whether to offer grants or not.

If successful, you will be sent an offer letter detailing the amount offered, the conditions of the grant offer and the date by which the grant must be claimed. We will then require written confirmation of your acceptance of the grant (within 1 month) on the "Acceptance of Grant Aid" form sent to you with the offer letter.

Felling License

This is the applicant's responsibility and could have legal and financial penalties, as successful applications do not automatically grant a felling license from the Forestry Commission. Where applicable contact the Forestry Commission to obtain a felling license, prior to the commencement of any works. Failure to do so could result in illegal felling works, prosecution and the NFC withholding all grant payment.

7. Submitting your claim

Ordinarily, claims can only be made on completion of the project. When claiming your grant, it is important that you use the claim form sent to you with your offer letter. If you cannot locate the claim form, you can ask for a replacement copy from the NFC.

Payment will be made by BACS transfer or cheque, so you must complete a BACS payment form at the time of the claim or specify the name to which a cheque should be made payable.

Proof of payment must be provided for any items outside of the standard costs (e.g., training & other projects).

When providing a breakdown of the expenditure claimed, it is important that you provide a full breakdown of the total final costs of the project. It is this figure that will determine the amount that you can claim. Unless otherwise stated in the offer letter, the amount claimed cannot be more than the amount offered or up to 60/100% of the final total cost of the project (dependant on the options chosen and whichever is less).

In special circumstances, grants can be claimed in several payments (based on agreed outputs/milestones). In these cases, the amounts of previous claims against the current grant should be provided. Any partial claims must be a minimum of £1,000 or 100% of grant offer, if lower than £1,000.

Unless agreed with the NFC, claims must be submitted by the deadline specified in your offer letter. This should take the form of a full account of your project's income and expenditure as well as information on the work done. Photographs, taken before and after the project should also be included.

If you have questions about any aspect of the Management Grants or require a pre application site visit, then please contact Ed Hiorns at the National Forest Company on 07816213377.

Table 1 – NF Management Grants

Activity	Key objectives	Examples
Woodland management planning	• Plans to guide woodland management and help access grant funding	• Production of management plans, including FC small management plan. • Can include deer management plans or ecological surveys.
Woodland management works	• Improved visual amenity for visitors • Enhancing wildlife habitats within woodlands • Enhancing the wider landscape	• Pruning of trees for access and biodiversity • Removal of redundant fences, tree guards and site signs • Vegetation management to maintain/enhance views • Management of non-wooded wildlife habitats within woodland sites
Managing wildlife damage and ash dieback	• Grey squirrel and deer management • Works that support the removal of *Hymenoscyphus fraxineus* infected ash	• Planning, coordinating, and implementing control measure following national best practice (e.g., by the UK Squirrel Accord, Deer Initiative, Forest Research and Forestry Commission) • Completion of the National Forest Squirrel Damage and Impact Survey • Options that help to transform woodlands away from infected ash, support other species and diversification. E.g., ride edge thinning, timber extraction, coppicing, scallop creation.
Woodland management training	• Skills training to support woodland owners or forestry workers operating in the National Forest	• Chainsaw training: operation of forestry machinery that directly supports woodland management work (this is likely to be limited to 1 or 2 operatives per application) each application should have a clear reasoning regarding the benefits of each training opportunity.
Public access works	• Enhancing public amenity within woodlands	• Vegetation management/coppicing along woodland rides and to maintain key public access routes • New site signage and waymarking • Dedication of new Rights of Way • Creation of new rides or paths through blocks to bypass, where original permissive routes are becoming waterlogged or regularly inaccessible

Activity	Key objectives	Examples
Community engagement	• Support to local communities engaged in woodland management	• Skills training, visits to learn from other successful projects
Restoration of hedgerows	• Restore overgrown hedgerows to provide a stockproof barrier • Improve habitat connectivity	• Hedgelaying • Gapping up • Hedgerow tree surgery
Developing habitats on a farm	• Increasing habitat value in an arable farm setting	• Annual pollinator mix • Flowering summer catch crop • Anthrapod banks
Developing habitat on a pastoral farm	• Increasing habitat value in a pastoral farm setting	• Sheep netting • Enhancing diversity on existing grasslands • Riverside grass margins
Improving deadwood habitat	• Providing deadwood habitat to increase the biodiversity value within the woodland. UKFS priority habitat	• Creation of Deadwood (H6) • Veteranisation of trees (H7) • Deadwood habitat piles or wind rows within woodland compartments