



THE NATIONAL FOREST

Sustainable Tourism Grants: Applicant Guidance

The National Forest Company (NFC) Sustainable Tourism Grants have been set up to support businesses to grow tourism responsibly, and to encourage them to invest wisely to create a greener future for the sector.

Developing sustainable tourism aligns with the National Forest's 25-year vision for a place where people and nature can work together to grow a positive future.

Through these grants, the NFC aims to support organisations that share this vision and can put forward projects that help to develop the National Forest as a landmark sustainable tourism destination: inspired by the Forest, accessible to everyone, and responsive to the urgency of climate change.

Grants are available to support projects that will:

1. Improve and promote access for all visitors to surrounding woodlands and habitats.
2. Strengthen visitor connections with the Forest.
3. Protect and enhance nature to improve the visitor experience.
4. Raise visitor awareness of the National Forest story and future vision.

In particular, the NFC welcomes the development of projects and experiences which are new to the Forest and will help to extend the season. Inspiration for projects can be sought from other regions or internationally, providing they are compatible with and sensitive to the Forest's environment and positioning a sustainable tourism destination.

1. What's on offer?

We are looking to offer between five and seven grants between £1,000 and £5,000. Grants can be used to fund between 50% and 70% of total project costs and will require match-funding. Grant offers of more than 50% of total project costs will generally only be considered for exceptional projects or projects that can demonstrate more public benefit - please discuss your project with the NFC team before applying.

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

Grants from the NFC are primarily used to support projects that would not otherwise happen without some external financial input. Grant applications, especially those from individual businesses, that show higher levels of match funding will be looked upon more favourably as this

indicates a greater commitment to the project and will enable the NFC to support projects which deliver wider public benefit and may require a higher intervention rate for them to proceed.

2. What sort of projects are we looking to support?

We are looking to support new and innovative ideas and projects that will help deliver at least one of the four themes identified above. The table below suggests example projects:

Theme	Example projects*
Improve and promote access for all visitors to surrounding woodlands and habitats.	Drying rooms, cycle storage / e-bike hire, access improvements so that visitors can access National Forest woodlands and nearby trails more easily, upgrading of existing trails for multi-users, development and promotion of new walking and cycling routes and new route signage etc.
Strengthen visitor connections with the Forest.	Development of new or improved nature and woodland themed activities and experiences, including feasibility studies, new equipment, promotion, and training / bursaries to support new enterprise relating to woodland themed activities and experiences.
Protect and enhance the surrounding natural and built environment for nature and visitors.	Pond creation, tree planting, hedgerow improvements, wildflower meadows etc.
Raise visitor awareness of the National Forest story and future vision.	Interpretation and installations, new digital channels.

**Note: this is not an exhaustive list, if uncertain as to whether your project is eligible, please discuss with the NFC team before applying.*

We are particularly interested in funding collaborative projects that have been developed in partnership with other tourism providers and businesses within the National Forest.

3. Grant criteria

Project applications will need to:

- Demonstrate that the project meets at least one of the themes identified in the table above.
- Evidence how the project will attract visitors from one or more of the target visitor markets identified in the [National Forest Tourism Growth Plan](#).
- Demonstrate clear value for money.
- Evidence the steps taken to ensure that the benefits of projects are accessible to all.
- Utilise local supply chains and promote other local products and services, where possible.
- Explain steps taken to minimise negative environmental impacts and the carbon footprint of the project.
- Evidence that the benefits of the project can be sustained beyond the life of the project.
- Ensure that activity is delivered within the National Forest boundary benefitting National Forest visitors, communities, and businesses.
- Projects will need to be completed by Thursday 29 February 2024.

4. Who can apply?

Organisations working in the tourism and hospitality sector who define themselves as any of the following will be eligible to apply for this grant:

- Small businesses (with fewer than 50 employees)
- Local charities, social enterprises, community interest companies
- Projects developed in partnership with any of the above.

Other organisations not on this list may be considered in exceptional circumstances – please discuss this with the NFC team before applying.

The National Forest covers 200 square miles of the Midlands, including parts of Leicestershire, Derbyshire, and Staffordshire – find out more about the Forest here: nationalforest.org. We expect that the work funded by these grants will take place within the National Forest boundary, although organisations who apply need not be based in the Forest.

5. What we can't fund

The NFC will not be able to fund projects where other more suitable sources of funding have not been applied for first. In addition, Sustainable Tourism Grants cannot be used to fund:

- Existing activity. Applications must only include activity which is considered 'new' i.e. working with new partners, targeting new markets, developing new products/packages etc. Existing groups/businesses must ensure their project demonstrates development or progression from previous activity undertaken.
- Acquisition of land, buildings, motorised vehicles (except e-bikes).
- Tree planting and biodiversity enhancements required to meet a planning condition.
- Annual core marketing costs e.g. membership fees.
- Planning fees.
- General running costs e.g. staff wages, rents, office equipment or on-going maintenance costs.
- Purchase of new equipment and plant to deliver energy efficiency savings.
- Replacement of equipment and infrastructure e.g. interpretation signage.
- General refurbishment of buildings.
- Reprints of existing promotional literature or simple website upgrades.
- VAT if you are VAT registered, as it is expected that you will be able to reclaim the VAT on purchases made. Therefore, exclude VAT from the costs in the budget. If you are not able to reclaim VAT, then it represents a true cost to you and should be included in the costs.
- Utility costs, e.g. we will not fund costs towards groundworks for utility costs such as electricity and gas.

6. Additional information

Quotes

To demonstrate value for money, you must obtain two quotes for every element of the project above £1,000. Please submit all quotes when submitting your completed application form.

Permissions

Please ensure that your project has all the permissions required. These may be from the landowner Planning Authority (inc. listed buildings consent), Natural England, Environment Agency, Highways Authority, Building Regulations etc.

7. How to apply

You will need to complete the application form which can be downloaded [here](#) and must be returned to the National Forest team by **12 pm on Thursday 6 April 2023**.

Please complete the form carefully, making sure to include:

- A clear explanation of the project, its aims and objectives.
- How you will measure success.
- The expected impacts and legacy of the project, identifying how benefits created during the project may continue in the future.

If you require further information or would like to have an informal discussion prior to submitting your application, please contact Richard Drakeley, Tourism Development Manager at rdrakeley@nationalforest.org or call 07866 176598.

The deadline for the submission of applications is **12 pm on Thursday 6 April 2023**. Applications need to be emailed to Richard Drakeley at rdrakeley@nationalforest.org or posted to the National Forest Company Office (address on application form).

If you would prefer to submit your application in another format for access reasons or require the information in an alternative format, then please get in touch.

Please also complete the Diversity Monitoring Form and return this to lwarren@nationalforest.org. The form is to help monitor our opportunities and analyse diversity information so that we can ensure that our processes are fair, transparent and promote equality of opportunity.

8. What happens next?

Applications will be reviewed during the period 11 to 25 April 2023 and all applicants will be notified of our decision via email by the end of the day on Tuesday 25 April 2023. If your application is successful, you will be sent a formal offer letter along with the grant conditions. We will then require written confirmation of your acceptance of the grant (on the "Acceptance of Grant Aid" form sent to you with the offer letter) within two weeks of receiving your offer. If you would prefer your grant to be paid by BACS transfer, please ensure that you have filled out the BACS information on the "Acceptance of Grant Aid" form before returning it. If your application is unsuccessful, you will be given feedback.

9. Grant conditions

Grant offers will be made subject to several conditions, including:

- The applicant agrees not to dispose of an asset purchased with grant aid without the prior approval of the NFC.
- The NFC should be given credit for their support on all press releases if issued, and on all publicity material, applying the National Forest brand guidelines and using the National

Forest logo. When approving proofs with your design agencies, you are also required to provide the NFC with a copy of the proof to sign off that the logo has been correctly applied.

- On project completion the National Forest Company will require a short, written project summary and simple evaluation, evidencing project outcomes and achievements. Organisations may also be asked for information and images that would support the production of a case study. Accepting your grant will require your support with these evaluation activities.
- Contributions can only be claimed once the work has been invoiced and paid for.
- Applicants must ensure that they can cash flow their project. Staged payments may be possible - please discuss this with the NFC team before applying.