Comhairle Ceantair an Iúir, Mhúrn agus an Dúin
Newry, Mourne and Down District Council

Financial Assistance Call 1 Local Biodiversity Enhancement

Application Form Guidance Notes 2027/2028

Ag freastal ar an Dún agus Ard Mhacha Theas
Serving Down and South Armagh

Comhairle Ceantair an Iúir, Mhúrn agus an Dúin
Newry, Mourne and Down District Council

Comhairle Ceantair
an Iúir, Mhúrn
agus an Dúin
Newry, Mourne
and Down
District Council

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1 About these Guidance Notes

These guidance notes explain the eligibility requirements, assessment criteria and application process for the Local Biodiversity Enhancement Fund.

Applicants should read the guidance notes before completing an application, as they explain what information is required and how applications will be assessed.

2 How do I apply?

Applications must be completed and submitted through the SmartSimple Grant Management System.

A paper application will only be considered in exceptional circumstances where an applicant is unable to access the online system.

Guidance on registering for and using SmartSimple is available separately.

Access the SmartSimple Grant Management System (newrymournedowndc.smartsimpleuk.com).

3 Quick Summary

3.1 Key Dates

Activity	Date
Applications open	19 October 2026 at 12 noon
Applications close	30 November 2026 at 12 noon
Project delivery period	01 April 2027 to 31 March 2028
Final project end date	31 March 2028
Expected outcome notification	April 2027

Applications submitted after the closing deadline cannot be accepted.

3.2 What is this fund for?

The Local Biodiversity Enhancement Fund supports the delivery of local biodiversity action across the Newry, Mourne and Down District Council area.

The Fund is intended to help community and voluntary organisations (i.e. **not-for-profit**) deliver projects that:

- Conserve and enhance biodiversity.
- Create and restore habitats for wildlife.
- Increase opportunities for people to participate in biodiversity improvement.

Full details of the programme aims, objectives and eligible activities are provided later in these guidance notes. See Section 6.

3.3 Important eligibility requirement

To be eligible for this fund, applicants must:

- Identify the owner of the land where the project will take place.
- Provide written permission from the landowner for use of the land.
- Projects must adhere to Habitats Regulations Assessment requirements if within 5km of a protected site. Please refer to Section 4.1 for details.

Applications that do not provide the required information may be deemed ineligible.

3.4 How much can I apply for?

The Local Biodiversity Enhancement Fund provides grants ranging from **£500 to £1,500**.

The estimated budget available for this theme is **£10,000**. Please note that this budget is subject to Council approval and may change.

3.5 Need help?

If you have questions about this theme or the application process before applying, please contact the Grants and Funding Team:

Telephone: 0330 137 4040

Email: grantsandfunding@nmandd.org

Website: SmartSimple Grant Management System (newrymournedowndc.smartsimpleuk.com)

4 About this Fund

Newry, Mourne and Down District Council provides Financial Assistance to support projects that make a positive difference to local communities. All Financial Assistance programmes are delivered in accordance with the Council's policies, procedures and regulatory requirements.

The Local Biodiversity Enhancement Fund aims to support projects that:

- Conserve and enhance biodiversity.
- Create and restore habitats for wildlife.
- Increase opportunities for people to participate in biodiversity improvement.

4.1 Relevant strategies and policies

Local Biodiversity Strategy

This theme supports the delivery of the Council's Local Biodiversity Strategy.

Applicants should review the Local Biodiversity Strategy (newrymournedown.org/biodiversity) and explain within their application how the project will contribute to local biodiversity improvement and support the aims of the strategy.

Projects within 5km of a protected site

Projects located within 5km of a protected site may be subject to Habitats Regulations requirements.

Before applying, applicants should use the DAERA Protected Areas (daera-ni.gov.uk/topics/protected-areas) resource to determine whether the project is located within or near a protected site.

Applicants should also identify any measures that may be required to avoid negative impacts on biodiversity.

Any relevant mitigation measures should be clearly described within the application.

5 Can I apply?

5.1 You may apply for this theme if:

- ✓ You are a constituted not-for-profit community or voluntary organisation.
- ✓ Your project takes place within the Newry, Mourne and Down District Council area.
- ✓ Your project will be delivered between 01 April 2027 and 31 March 2028.
- ✓ Your project meets the Local Biodiversity Enhancement criteria outlined in these guidance notes.
- ✓ Your organisation can provide the supporting documentation required as part of the application process; see Section 9.1 for full details.

The Council welcomes applications from both established and first-time applicants. Schools are also welcome to apply to this theme.

New projects are encouraged where they can demonstrate a clear community need and benefit.

5.2 You cannot apply if:

5.2.1 General restrictions

- × Your project is commercial or organised to generate profit.
- × Your project is for generating funds for a charity or other third-party organisation via sponsorship or donations.
- × Your project is promoted principally as a charity fundraising event.
- × Your project is funded through other Council funds.
- × Your project takes place outside the Newry, Mourne and Down District Council area.
- × Your project has already started, or any project costs have already been incurred before a Letter of Offer has been issued.
- × Your project is a trade or professional conference or convention.
- × Your project is an award ceremony or industry project.
- × Your project is a residential course with associated activities.
- × Your project is a social event organised primarily for members of an organisation.

5.2.2 Theme-specific restrictions

- Your project is principally focused on fruit and vegetable growing.
- Your project is a memorial garden or sensory garden.
- Your project is a large infrastructure development.
- Your project does not comply with Habitats Regulations requirements.
- Your project consists of structural works that do not directly contribute to biodiversity.
- Your project is solely an awareness-raising or communication project.
- Your project involves invasive species.
- You don't have landowner permission.

Important

Invasive non-native species can cause significant environmental damage and are not eligible for support under this programme.

Applicants should ensure that any plants, trees, shrubs, seeds or other species included in their project comply with current environmental legislation and guidance.

Further information on invasive species is available from the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA).

Invasive Species Northern Ireland
(invasivespeciesni.co.uk)

5.3 Important information to consider

- Applications must be **submitted by 30 November 2026 at 12 noon.**
- Late or incomplete applications cannot be accepted.
- All supporting documentation must be uploaded before the closing deadline.
- Successful applicants will be required to have adequate insurance cover, risk assessments and appropriate safeguarding arrangement in place for their project. **Relevant documentation must be made available to the Council immediately upon request.**
- Applicants must identify the landowner and, where applicable, provide written permission for use of the land that is valid for the current financial year.
- Projects must adhere to Habitats Regulations Assessment requirements if within 5km of a protected site.

Applicants should consider these requirements when planning their project and budget.

6 What is a Local Biodiversity Enhancement Project?

For the purposes of this theme, a **project** is an activity, programme or initiative that conserves, enhances or restores biodiversity within the Newry, Mourne and Down District Council area.

Projects should demonstrate clear environmental benefits through habitat creation, habitat enhancement, conservation activity or community participation in biodiversity improvement.

Important

Only **one application per project** will be supported. Applications relating to different elements of the same project will be considered as a single project and will not be eligible for multiple awards.

6.1 Aim

Support the implementation of local biodiversity action through delivery of practical conservation projects.

Important

Schools can apply under this funding call. We strongly encourage you to work outside of the school grounds and in the community where possible. We strongly recommend that schools think of the wider community benefits that their projects will bring.

6.2 Objectives

- Conserve and enhance the rich biodiversity of the district.
- Encourage community participation in the delivery of local biodiversity action and delivering the Council's Local Biodiversity Strategy (newrymournedown.org/biodiversity).
- Create new habitats for wildlife.

7 What can be funded?

The Local Biodiversity Enhancement Fund can support costs that are directly related to delivering your project.

All costs must be:

- Necessary for the delivery of the project.
- Clearly linked to the activities being proposed.
- Reasonable and proportionate.
- Supported by appropriate evidence if your application is successful.

7.1 Eligible costs

The following costs are normally eligible for support through this theme:

7.1.1 Tools and equipment (50% cap)

- Hand tools
- Pots
- Other equipment that can be demonstrated as essential for biodiversity activities.

Important

- Tools and equipment costs must not exceed **50% of the funding requested from Council**.
- For applicants requesting the maximum grant of **£1,500**, the maximum allowable equipment cost is **£750**.

7.1.2 Materials

- Native plants
- Wildflower seed
- Wildlife-friendly planting materials
- Compost
- Materials for habitat creation and restoration.

7.1.3 Refreshments (10% cap)

- Refreshment costs must not exceed **10% of the funding requested from Council**.
- For applicants requesting the maximum grant of **£1,500**, the maximum allowable refreshment cost is **£150**.
- Refreshments are limited to light refreshments such as tea, coffee, bottled water, biscuits, scones or fruit.
- Refreshments must be part of a wider project.

7.1.4 Project Delivery Support Costs

- One-off project insurance
- Part payment of annual insurance, where applicable.
- Communication or interpretation panels as part of a wider project.

Important

Part payment of annual insurance should be proportionate to the activity taking place and must be pre-agreed with the Grants and Funding Team prior to claiming.

Any interpretation resources produced as part of a funded project must be approved by the Council prior to printing or installation.

8 What cannot be funded?

The following costs are not eligible for support through this theme; this list is not exhaustive and is representative of funding intent.

8.1 Ineligible costs

Funding will not, normally, be provided for:

- Trade or professional conferences/conventions
- Award ceremonies or industry events
- Residential courses and associated events
- Festivals that are social events for an organisation
- Fireworks
- Presentations or gifts to individuals
- Hospitality
- Private security
- Admission to attractions
- Coaching qualifications or coach education
- Projects that are already funded or part-funded by another organisation or funding body.
- Third party contractors
- Insurance (ongoing running cost Insurance)
- Projects which deploy potential sources of income from the project to a charity or other third-party organisation via sponsorship or donations.
- Projects which are generating a profit unless the income being generated is being used to enhance the project or offset costs outside of those applied for.
- Volunteer or existing staff costs, donations to charities.

8.1.1 Financial and governance restrictions

Applications will not be supported where:

- The applicant will receive a personal financial benefit.
- Payments are made to members of the applicant organisation, employees, directors, trustees, board members or their immediate family members.
- Costs which cannot be independently verified or audited e.g. **cash payments**.
- VAT that can be recovered elsewhere.
- Projects, activities or costs that clearly fall within the remit of another statutory agency.
- More than one Financial Assistance application submitted for the same project. Applications relating to different elements of the same project will be considered as a single project and will not be eligible for multiple awards.

8.2 Income generation

Projects that generate income are not automatically ineligible.

However:

- Any income generated through the project must be declared within the application and must go directly to the project being delivered to enhance the project or offset project costs.
- Applicants must detail how income will be used.

Important

If you are unsure whether a cost is eligible, contact the Grants and Funding Team before submitting your application. Applicants who include ineligible costs may receive a reduced score or have those costs removed from consideration during assessment.

9 Before you start your application

Before starting your application, please make sure you have the information and documents listed below. Having these ready will make completing the application form much easier and help avoid delays.

9.1 Documents and information you will need

- Constitution or governing document
- Annual accounts, independently examined accounts, audited accounts or an income and expenditure report
- Organisation bank account details
- Written landowner permission for use of the project site
- A description of the project you wish to deliver
- A budget showing all project income and expenditure

Important

If governing documents or valid accounts are not uploaded the application will be deemed ineligible.

Bank statements on their own are not accepted as annual accounts.

If you do not have formal accounts, you may submit an income and expenditure report covering your most recent financial year.

Accountancy records must be dated within two years of the application closing date and must be uploaded to your organisation profile before the application closing date.

Applications will be assessed using the information available at the closing date. Documents uploaded after the closing date will not be considered as part of the assessment process.

Newly established organisations that have not yet completed a full financial year should provide an explanation within their application.

Applicants are responsible for ensuring that appropriate insurance cover, risk assessments and safeguarding arrangements are in place for all project activities. Insurance requirements should be considered when planning your project and budget. **Supporting documentation must be made available to the Council immediately upon request.**

10 Completing your application

The application form is divided into a number of sections.

Applicants should assume that assessors have no prior knowledge of their organisation or project and provide enough information for the assessment panel to understand what is being proposed.

Where possible, use clear and concise language. Bullet points can help present information clearly.

Important

Each question is assessed based on the information provided within the associated answer box.

Do not assume assessors will refer to information provided elsewhere in the application.

10.1 Organisation profile

Why is this important?

Information stored within your Organisation Profile forms part of the eligibility assessment. Only applications with complete and up-to-date organisational information can progress to full assessment.

Keeping your details up to date

Applicants are responsible for ensuring that organisation and contact details held within SmartSimple remain accurate and up to date, this includes the primary contact and Committee Members.

Important communications relating to your application, including requests for information and outcome notifications, will be sent using the contact details provided.

What should be included?

Your Organisation Profile should contain:

- Organisation governing document (for example, Constitution)
- Organisation Annual accounts or income and expenditure report
- Organisation bank account details

Important

Applicants should use contact details that are valid and monitored all year round. Contact details that are only available during certain periods, such as term-time only school contact details, may result in important communications being missed.

If your Organisation Profile is incomplete at the application closing date, your application may be deemed ineligible.

10.2 Project information

Project Title

Choose a project title that clearly identifies your project. This title will be used in all future correspondence.

Project Dates

Ensure the project start and end dates fall within the eligible delivery period. All project activity must be completed by **31 March 2028**.

Project Location

Identify the District Electoral Area (DEA) and settlement where the project will take place. Projects must be delivered within the Newry, Mourne and Down District Council area.

Landowner Permission

Local Biodiversity Enhancement applicants must complete the landowner permission upload section. Applicants should provide details of the landowner and upload written permission for use of the site.

10.3 Project description

Explain what the project is, who it is for, where it will take place and how it meets the theme objectives.

10.4 Aims, Objectives and Outcomes

Explain what the project is trying to achieve, the need it addresses, the outcomes expected and who will benefit. See Section 6.

10.5 Key Activities

Why is this important?

The Key Activities table helps assessors understand exactly what will happen during the project. The information provided here will also be used when evaluating project delivery if your application is successful.

What should I include?

For each activity provide:

- Activity name
- Description of the activity
- Number of participants

Good practice

Provide enough detail that someone unfamiliar with the project could understand exactly what each activity involves. Activities listed here should clearly link to both your project description and budget.

Activities listed here should clearly link to:

- The project description.
- The aims, objectives and outcomes of the project.
- The project budget.

10.6 Community Need

Explain why the project is needed, how the need was identified and how the project will address it.

Important

Focus on the need for the project rather than the general work of your organisation.

If the project is a repeat of a previous event or activity, applicants should provide a clear rationale for repeating it and explain how it continues to meet an identified need within the community.

10.7 Equality of Opportunity and Good Relations

Explain how the project will promote equality of opportunity, improve accessibility and encourage participation from all sections of the community.

10.8 Sustainability

Explain how benefits will continue beyond the funding period and identify any lasting impacts, partnerships, skills, knowledge or future opportunities created through the project.

Important

If the project is a repeat event or activity, explain how it has developed over time and any steps being taken to improve its long-term sustainability.

This question relates to the sustainability of the project and its benefits, not the sustainability of your organisation.

10.9 Budget

Why is this important?

The budget demonstrates how project funding will be used and forms an important part of the assessment process.

Include the full project cost

Applicants should include **100% of project costs**, not just the amount being requested from Council.

This should include:

- Funding requested from Council
- Match funding
- Sponsorship
- Donations
- Ticket income
- The organisation's own contribution

What should the budget show?

The budget should:

- Be realistic.
- Represent good value for money.
- Include a clear breakdown of costs.
- Demonstrate how figures have been calculated.

For example:

✓ Entertainment costs: 5 performers x £300 = £1,500
× Entertainment costs: £1,500

Important

- All income associated with the project, even if it is pending, must be declared.
- Applicants must declare any other Council funding, Service Level Agreements (SLAs), grants or public funding that support the project or related activities.
- Any funding shortfall should be explained within the application.
- Activities listed within the Key Activities table should clearly link to the budget.

Applications will be assessed taking account of any existing funding received.

10.10 Final submission

Before submitting your application, check that:

- All sections of the application have been completed.
- Supporting documents have been uploaded to your Organisation Profile.
- The budget is complete and all totals match throughout the application.
- All declarations have been completed.
- Contact details are up to date and the nominated contact is available year-round.

Important

Officers in a paid capacity cannot sign the application, signees must be Committee Members.

Good Practice

Before submitting your application, check that the total funding requested and the amount requested from Council is the same throughout the application form and the budget table.

What happens next?

Once submitted, your application will enter the assessment process. Applications cannot be amended after the closing deadline.

11 Assessment process

What happens after I submit my application?

Once your application has been submitted, it will enter the Council's assessment process. Applications cannot be submitted after the closing deadline of **30 November 2026 at 12 noon**. Late applications will not be accepted.

11.1 Stage 1: Eligibility Check

Your application will first be checked to ensure it meets the theme's eligibility requirements. This includes checking that:

- ✓ The application has been completed in full.
- ✓ All required organisational documents have been uploaded before the closing date.
- ✓ The applicant organisation is eligible for support.
- ✓ The applicant organisation has identified the landowner and provided written permission for use of the land.
- ✓ If within 5km of a protected site, the project has demonstrated how they will adhere to Habitats Regulations Assessment requirements.

Applications that do not meet the eligibility requirements will not progress to Stage 2 assessment.

11.2 Stage 2: Assessment

Applications that pass the eligibility check will be assessed against the theme criteria. Assessors will consider:

- How well the project meets the aims of the theme.
- Community participation and involvement.
- The level of community need demonstrated.
- Equality of opportunity, inclusion and good relations.
- Value for money.
- The outcomes and benefits the project is expected to deliver.

Applications are assessed using the information provided within the application form.

11.3 Stage 3: Scoring and Ranking

Eligible applications will be scored against the assessment criteria.

Applications must achieve a minimum score of 50% in each assessment area, as well as an overall score of at least 50%, before they can be considered for funding.

Applications that meet the minimum score requirements are then ranked according to their final score and funding awarded in order of highest score to lowest.

Important

- A score of 50% or above does **not** guarantee funding as applications may exceed the funding available for the theme.

11.4 Stage 4: Recommendations and Approval

Following assessment, recommendations will be presented through the Council's approval process. Funding recommendations are subject to Council approval.

11.5 Stage 5: Outcome Notification

Applicants are expected to be notified of the outcome in **April 2027**.

Applicants will receive one of the following outcomes:

Successful

If your application is successful, you will receive a Letter of Offer setting out:

- The approved project.
- The amount of funding awarded.
- The conditions attached to the funding.

After a successful application

Successful applicants will receive a Letter of Offer and access to the Grant Management system. Further guidance on managing your grant, requesting project changes and submitting claims is available in the **Grant Management Manual**; provided with your Letter of Offer.

Important

Successful applicants will be required to acknowledge Council funding in all information, press releases, interviews, articles and promotional materials relating to the project.

Further guidance on publicity and branding requirements will be provided within the Letter of Offer.

Scored and Ranked

If you application is successful but there isn't sufficient funding for your project, you will receive a scored and ranked notice. Should additional funding become available during the financial year a Letter of Offer will be issued.

Declined

If your application is unsuccessful, you will be informed in writing. Information on the appeals process is provided in Section 13.

Ineligible

If your application does not meet the theme eligibility requirements, it will not proceed to full assessment.

Reasons may include:

- Incomplete application
- Missing supporting documents
- Ineligible organisation

Applications are assessed using the information available at the application closing date. Documents submitted after the closing date will not be considered.

12 How applications are scored

12.1 Overview

Applications that pass the Stage 1 Eligibility Check will proceed to a full assessment. Eligible applications are scored against the criteria set out below.

Applications must achieve a minimum score of 50% in each of the following assessment areas:

- Programme Fit criteria
- Value for Money and Community Need criteria
- Wider community benefit criteria

A score above 50% does not guarantee funding. Applications are ranked and funding is awarded to the highest-scoring projects until the available budget has been allocated.

12.2 Assessment criteria

Applications are scored against the following criteria and weighting structure.

Question (as per application)	Criterion	Maximum	Weighting	Weighted Final Score
	Programme Fit			
Provide a description of the project and how it fits the theme applied for as per the guidance notes.	Description of the project	5	x 4	20
Provide an outline of the aims, objectives and outcomes of the project. Complete the key activities table which are the outputs of the project.	Aims, objectives and outcomes.	5	x 4	20
	Value for Money & Community Need			
Cost overview. This will consider that the costs are reasonable and proportionate to the project applied for with a detailed budget breakdown including income generation and how this is being applied to the project.	Cost overview	5	x 3	15
How the need for the project was established and how the project will fulfil this need.	Need	5	x 3	15
	Wider Community Benefits			
How will the project improve equality of opportunity and good relations? Please detail what actions will be undertaken which will contribute to improvement of equality of opportunity and good relations.	Equality of opportunity and Good relations	5	x 3	15
How will the project be sustained beyond the period over which the funding is being sought? Please outline any likely sustainable benefits which will occur through the delivery of this project.	Sustainability	5	x 3	15

In addition, the following scoring system will be used by the panel to ascertain the scores for the criteria above:

Link at project level	Link to Criterion	How evident	Score
The project proposal does not demonstrate that it has the capacity to deliver basic project outcomes that would be expected in order to be awarded funding.	The application does not meet the basic standard under this criterion	No relevant evidence provided	0
The project proposal demonstrates some ability to deliver key outcomes in some areas but overall, it is below the standard expected in order to be awarded funding.	The application met some of the basic requirements of this criterion.	Not sufficient evidence	1
The project proposal demonstrates an ability to deliver project outcomes to an acceptable standard, and it may be considered suitable for funding.	The application met the requirements of this criterion.	Less Evident	2
The project proposal is evident in the way it describes a range of activities that will result in good outputs and the achievement of outcomes.	The application is evident in the requirements of this criterion.	Evident	3
The project proposal is strong as the activities described will result in good outputs and the achievement of outcomes.	The application was very evident with strong fit with the requirement of this criterion.	Strongly evident	4
The project proposal fully complies with the outputs and achievement of the outcomes.	The project is excellent and fully met the requirements of this criterion.	Highly Evident	5

Good to know

Applications are assessed using the information provided within the application form. Assessors cannot make assumptions or award marks for information that has not been included.

13 Appeals

13.1 Can I appeal the decision?

An appeal may be submitted if your application has completed the full assessment process and you believe that:

A. The decision was one that no reasonable person would have made based on the information provided;

   Or

B. The Council's published procedures were not followed, and this may have affected the outcome of the assessment.

13.2 When can I not appeal?

There is no right of appeal where an application has been deemed ineligible because:

- The application was incomplete.
- Required information was not submitted by the closing deadline.
- Required declarations were not completed.
- The organisation or project did not meet the eligibility criteria requirements of the theme.

13.3 Before submitting an appeal

If your application is unsuccessful, you must first request a debrief session.

The purpose of the debrief is to:

- Explain how your application was assessed.
- Discuss the scores awarded.
- Help you understand the reasons for the decision.

Step 1: Request a Debrief

A request for a debrief must be submitted in writing within **15 working days** of the date of the outcome letter.

Step 2: Submit an appeal

Following the debrief, if you still wish to appeal the decision, your appeal must be submitted in writing within **10 working days** of the debrief session. Appeals should be sent to the Grants and Funding team. Applicants are advised to retain proof of submission.

13.4 What should be included in an appeal?

Your appeal should include:

- Organisation name
- Project title
- Funding theme applied for
- Contact details
- **The grounds (A or B) for the appeal**
- Any supporting information you believe should be considered

Important

An appeal is not an opportunity to provide new information or amend your original application. Appeals are considered on the basis of the information submitted before the application closing date and whether the published assessment procedures were correctly followed.

13.5 How will my appeal be considered?

Appeals are reviewed by a panel that was not involved in the original assessment process. The panel will review the information provided and determine whether the appeal should be upheld.

13.6 Possible appeal outcomes

Following the appeal, one of the following outcomes may occur:

Appeal not upheld – The original decision will remain unchanged, and the outcome will be confirmed in writing.

Appeal upheld – Where the appeal is upheld, the application may proceed as a successful application, and a Letter of Offer may be issued if sufficient funds remain available.