Application Guidance

Trees Outside Woodland Fund

Grants between £10K and £40K

England only

the tree council

Department for Environment Food & Rural Affairs

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Programme overview

The Tree Council and Defra are once again working in partnership to deliver the Trees Outside Woodland Fund (TOW Fund) for the 2026/27 planting season.

The fund's purpose is to establish trees outside woodland to create or enhance green spaces using a range of tree sizes, species and planting types.

This fund contributes to the Government's Environmental Improvement Plan, which aims to increase England's overall tree canopy cover from 14.5% to 16.5% of total land area by 2050.

Funding available:

Grants of between £10,000 and £40,000 are available per application to support the purchase of trees, establishment aids, and other eligible project costs.

Planting locations:

Projects must be in England only.

Process:

The fund will remain open from July to 31 October 2026, or until all funding has been allocated. Applications will be reviewed in the order they are received. Early applications are strongly encouraged.

Eligibility

To be eligible for a grant from the TOW Fund, projects must meet the following criteria:

Projects must:

- Be in **England**.
- Be **not for profit**.
- Comply with **biosecure tree sourcing** requirements.
- Be completed, and all reporting submitted, by **5 March 2027**.

Applicants must:

- Ensure that public liability insurance is in place for every planting event.
- Obtain written landowner permission for each planting site before planting takes place.

You can apply if:

- You are a **local authority based in England**, including county council, unitary authority, metropolitan or London borough, combined authority, district, borough, or city council.
- You are a **registered charity planning to deliver the project in England**, with an annual income or turnover of more than £100,000.

What we're looking for

We are looking to support well-planned tree planting projects that establish trees outside woodland to create or enhance green spaces for the benefit of communities and/or wildlife.

Assessment criteria

As this is a competitive grant, applications that clearly demonstrate how their project meets the criteria below are more likely to receive funding.

1. Project need

Applicants should clearly demonstrate why the project is needed and the difference it will make. Strong applications will explain how the project addresses a specific environmental or community need, such as low tree canopy cover, habitat fragmentation, flood alleviation, climate resilience, or lack of access to green space.

Where relevant, applicants are welcome to reference strategies or action plans to demonstrate need and local priorities.

2. Community benefit and involvement

Projects should provide clear benefits to local communities and, where possible, encourage participation. This may include volunteering opportunities, education or wellbeing initiatives, increased access to green space, partnerships with local organisations, schools or community groups. Strong applications will clearly explain who will benefit and how communities will be involved.

3. Biodiversity enhancement

Projects should demonstrate how planting will enhance biodiversity at the proposed site(s), for example through improved habitat connectivity, increased ecological resilience, benefits for pollinators and wildlife, and supporting local nature recovery.

Strong applications will clearly explain the biodiversity outcomes expected and, where relevant, reference tree species and the reason for their selection, as well as planting approach, to demonstrate how these support and enhance biodiversity.

4. Site suitability and tree selection

Applicants should demonstrate why the proposed site(s) are suitable for tree planting and how tree selection has followed the ‘right tree, right place’ principle.

We are also interested in your proposed planting approach, including the type of planting, the number of trees to be planted and, where possible, the species you intend to use.

5. Establishment and aftercare planning

Tree survival is very important to us. Applicants should provide a clear and realistic plan for tree establishment and aftercare, to support long-term success. Please note that long term establishment and maintenance costs must be borne by the grantee.

Projects that do not demonstrate a clear approach to aftercare and long-term tree survival are unlikely to receive funding.

6. Value for money

Projects should demonstrate good value for money, ensuring that the proposed activities efficiently use grant funds to achieve the greatest possible impact.

7. Deliverability

Applicants should demonstrate a realistic and achievable delivery plan, including key milestones, responsibilities, and sufficient resourcing to deliver the project successfully.

Projects must be completed, and all reporting submitted, by 5 March 2027.

Note

Match funding is not a requirement of the fund, although it may strengthen your ability to deliver the project.

What we do & don't fund

The TOW Fund is primarily designed to support capital costs associated with the purchase of trees and establishment aids.

In simple terms, this means funding is intended for physical items (such as trees) and direct delivery costs (such as contractor fees) required to plant and establish trees, rather than internal staffing or organisational running costs.

We encourage applicants to consider a diverse planting project, incorporating a mix of planting types/approaches, tree species and tree sizes (for example, whips, feathers and standards), as this helps support biodiversity, improve resilience and deliver good value for money.

Note:

At project completion, you will be required to provide evidence of expenditure, including itemised invoices or receipts showing the goods purchased, services delivered, or works completed.

Trees and planting types we fund

Planting type:

This fund supports a wide range of planting types, including, but not limited to:

- Hedgerows
- Orchards
- Agroforestry
- Riparian
- Miyawaki (microforests)
- Street trees
- Parkland trees
- Standard trees in hedgerows
- Copses / small groups of trees / spinneys

Trees should be planted in publicly accessible, publicly visible, or community-used spaces to maximise public benefit.

We may support planting on private land where there is a clear benefit to wildlife, local communities, visual amenity, or where planting forms part of a wider environmental strategy. However, we are unlikely to fund trees planted in private residential gardens.

Tree sizes:

We support a range of tree sizes, which include:

- Whips
- Feathers
- Maidens
- Standards (up to 10-12cm girth)

Tree type:

- Bare root, cell grown, root-balled and container.
- Trees can be native or non-native species, as long as they are UK-sourced and grown.
- Fruit trees on semi-vigorous, vigorous and very vigorous rootstocks.

All trees funded through this grant must comply with bio-secure tree sourcing requirements.

Trees and planting types we are unlikely to fund

To maximise long-term impact and value for money, we are unlikely to support:

- Large container stock, except in certain circumstances (e.g. urban standards, where bare rooted stock is unavailable).
- Imported stock, except when unavoidable (trees must still be compliant with biosecurity requirements).
- Single species planting, unless in an appropriate setting and with a valid reason.
- Fruit trees on dwarfing rootstock.
- Invasive and rapidly growing species, such as laurel, Leyland cypress and cherry laurel.
- Non-native conifers, unless in certain circumstances (e.g. urban areas, arboretum, with pollutant control being a key objective).
- Trees intended to be grown on and planted at a later date. All trees must be planted by the March 2027 deadline.

Establishment aids

We encourage the use of sustainable, recyclable, non-polluting, and low impact resources and materials for tree establishment and protection.

We do fund:

- Sustainable tree guards (e.g. biodegradable natural materials or bioplastics).
- Robust guards for larger urban trees.
- Non-plastic ties (e.g. rubber or hessian).
- Stakes (preference for coppiced material such as chestnut or hazel).
- Organic mulch or biodegradable mulch mats.
- Soil amendments (e.g. biochar).
- Fencing (if needed, and more cost effective).

We don’t fund:

- Plastic tree guards or ties.
- Mulch mats derived from fossil fuels.
- Chemical weed control, herbicides and peat-based products.

Other project delivery costs

This fund is primarily designed to support the purchase of trees and establishment aids. We can support a limited amount of other project delivery costs that are essential to successful planting and establishment of your trees.

These costs must be capped at 20% of the total grant requested, to ensure the majority of funding is directed towards trees and establishment aids.

We do fund:

- Contractor costs for ground preparation and tree planting.
- Specialist surveys or technical advice (by prior agreement).
- External organisations delivering tree planting events specifically for your project.
- Digger or equipment hire for landscape works.
- Irrigation equipment needed for tree establishment.
- Personal protective equipment (PPE) required for project delivery.

We don’t fund:

- Van or car hire.
- Signage, tree labels or interpretation panels.
- Project management costs (including contractor or in-house teams).
- Community engagement or outreach sessions, except for project specific tree planting events (see above).
- Internal organisational costs, including staff salaries, overheads, core operating expenses, or costs charged by internal teams within your organisation.
- Long-term maintenance costs, such as watering beyond initial establishment.

Biosecure tree sourcing requirements

Keeping newly planted trees pest and disease free is a priority for the health of our treescapes. To be eligible for this grant, all trees must meet the Biosecure Procurement Requirement and you will be required to evidence this at project completion.

This means trees must be sourced from suppliers who can demonstrate compliance with the Plant Health Management Standard. Suppliers must either:

- Be a member of the Plant Healthy Certification Scheme; or
- Be able to provide a Ready to Plant (RtP) assessment voucher for the trees supplied.

Plant Healthy is the UK's certification scheme for plant health management and helps reduce the risk of introducing tree pests and diseases.

Click here for more about Plant Healthy

Before you apply

We strongly recommend confirming at the application stage that your preferred supplier(s) is/are Plant Healthy certified or can provide Ready to Plant vouchers.

If contractors or other third parties are purchasing trees on your behalf, it is your responsibility to ensure they can also provide the required biosecurity evidence.

Making an application

How to apply

All applications must be submitted through our online application form.

The application form, guidance documents and templates can be found on our website using the link below.

To support your preparation, you can review all the application questions before starting your application.

Multiple applications

Eligible applicants may submit more than one application. However, to ensure balanced distribution of funds and geographic spread, a cap may be applied to the total funding awarded to any single organisation or planting type.

Click here for application form

Application process

For the 2026/27 planting season, the TOW Fund is operating a one-stage application process. Applications will be reviewed on a rolling basis and the fund will remain open from July 2026 until 31 October 2026, or until all funding has been allocated, whichever is sooner.

Early applications are strongly encouraged due to expected demand.

Applications will be reviewed in the order they are received and assessed against the criteria by a judging panel.

Applicants will be notified of the outcome within six weeks of submission.

Need support?

If you have any questions or would like support with your application, please get in touch with the grants team - we are happy to help.

Preparing to apply

Before you begin your application, we recommend having the following information and documents ready:

- An overview of your project, including the need for the project, what you hope to achieve, the number of trees you plan to plant, and ideally, the species.
- Completed Project Budget Sheet (see further guidance below).
- The proposed planting locations, and where possible, a map or site plan showing the planting locations (see further guidance below).
- Plans for assessing planting locations and an outline of planting methods.
- Plans for post-planting care, including who will undertake the work and how ongoing maintenance will be funded.
- Detailed delivery plans, including key dates, milestones and responsibilities. You are welcome to submit a Gantt chart or similar.
- Any additional supporting information you'd like to share, such as management plans, specialist surveys, partnership details or photos.

Helpful tips

Save your application regularly

Each time you click save, you will receive an email containing a link to return to your application later.

Be concise and clear

Please follow the word limits and aim to use plain English, answering questions as directly as possible.

Name your files clearly

When uploading documents, please ensure each file is clearly labelled so we can easily identify what it relates to.

Project Budget Sheet guidance

Please provide a realistic estimate of project costs using the Project Budget Sheet template provided.

The template can be downloaded from our website. Please ensure you use this template rather than your own.

The first tab of the spreadsheet includes guidance on how to complete the document, including the level of detail required at application stage, such as tree species, sizes and numbers.

Estimating project costs

Please provide costs that are as realistic and accurate as possible.

Costs should be based on current supplier quotes or recent comparable project costs, where possible.

You are not required to submit quotes at application stage.

VAT

Please note that we cannot fund VAT that can later be reclaimed from HMRC.

- If your organisation cannot reclaim VAT, please include costs inclusive of VAT (Inc. VAT).
- If your organisation can reclaim VAT, or is VAT exempt (for example, some local authorities), please provide costs excluding VAT (Ex. VAT)

Click here for template Project Budget Sheet

Planting locations and maps

If you already have a clear idea of your planting locations, please upload any relevant information, such as a Google My Maps, GIS file, grid reference or site plan. While this is not essential at application stage, it can help us better understand your project and proposed planting activity.

Creating a map can also help you plan your project, visualise proposed planting areas and estimate tree numbers calculating the size and layout of your site(s).

We recognise that some projects may not yet be able to confirm all proposed planting locations at application stage, especially larger, county wide projects. This is understandable, however, we ask applicants to provide as much information as possible about the location and setting where planting is expected to take place (for example, highways, parks, farmland, community spaces).

If your application is successful

Successful applicants will have to provide full details of all planting locations no later than 5 March 2027. This should include the species or species mix planted at each location, maps or site plans, and photographic evidence for a minimum of 10% of all planting sites.

Please note that The Tree Council may also undertake some sampled evaluation site visits, as part of project monitoring.

Further guidance on the information and evidence required at project completion will be shared with successful applicants.

Application steps & key dates

Decisions and initial payment

Applicants will be notified of decisions within six weeks of submission.

Successful applicants will receive a formal funding offer and a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), outlining the terms of the grant and project completion requirements. The MoU must be returned within two weeks (unless agreed otherwise in exceptional circumstances). Failure to return the MoU within this timeframe may result in the grant offer being withdrawn and reallocated.

Once the MoU has been returned, the initial 70% of funding will be released.

Receiving final payment by 31 March

The final 30% payment will be released following submission of the completion report. If you require this final payment before the end of the financial year, we strongly encourage you to submit your completion report as soon as planting is complete, to enable us to prioritise your payment.

Application steps & key dates

Stage	Details	Deadline
Application	Applications submitted via the online form. Applications will be assessed by a judging panel against key project criteria.	July 2026 – 31 October 2026 (or until funding is fully allocated).
Decision notification	Applicants informed of the outcome of their application.	Within 6 weeks of submission.
Award letter issued	Successful applicants will receive a funding offer and Memorandum of Understanding (MoU).	MoU to be returned to The Tree Council within 2 weeks.
Initial payment (70%)	70% of grant released once the signed MoU and bank details have been returned.	After MoU and bank details received.
Project check-in	Email or call to review project progress and provide support if needed.	December 2026 – January 2027
Project completion	All project activities completed and completion report submitted.	By 5 March 2027
Final payment (30%)	Remaining funding released following approval of the completion report.	31 March 2027

Contact us

If you have any further questions, please take a look at the frequently asked questions (FAQ) document on our website first, as this includes answers to many of the common questions we receive related to the Trees Outside Woodland Fund.

If you can't find the information you need, or would like to discuss your project in more detail, please get in touch with the grants team.

The best way to contact us is via:
grants@treecouncil.org.uk

A member of the team will respond as soon as possible and, where helpful, we can arrange a call to discuss your project in more detail.

Additional guidance

The Tree Council's Guidance Hub contains a wealth of information, guides and toolkits to help you plant and care for your trees and hedgerows.

Click here to visit the Guidance Hub