

The Mendip Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty: Sustainable Development Fund Information Sheet

The Mendip Hills AONB has an established grant scheme to help you with projects that will look after the AONB now and for the future.

This briefing sheet explains what the scheme is, what 'sustainable development' is, who can apply for a grant, and how to go about applying.

What is the Sustainable Development Fund?

The Sustainable Development Fund is a grant scheme that has been running since July 2005. It supports projects that bring social, environmental and economic benefits to the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB)¹. It aims to develop and test new methods of achieving a more sustainable way of life in this area of great beauty and diversity.

The total fund for the Mendip Hills AONB is yet to be confirmed for 2010/11 but there is likely to be approximately £50,000. This will provide grants to organisations, businesses, community groups and individuals who wish to explore and develop practical projects that enhance, conserve and develop the environment, economy and way of life.

What is Sustainable Development?

"Sustainable development will promote and enhance the environmental, economic and community well-being of the Mendip Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and ensure a better quality of life for everyone, now and for generations to come."

Achieving sustainable development requires working towards four main goals at the same time:

- Social progress which meets the needs of everyone
- Effective protection of the environment
- Ensuring a diverse and prosperous rural economy
- Careful use of natural resources

Individual projects can place particular emphasis on any one of these four goals. Ideally, they should seek to make progress on all of them, but must demonstrate no negative impact on any.

Why the Mendip Hills?

The Mendip Hills is one of 36 AONBs in England. They extend over more than 15% of England's land area and represent some of our finest landscapes. They are statutory designations, set up with the purpose of conserving and enhancing the natural beauty of the areas they cover. The Fund seeks to foster projects which are the best of their kind in these outstanding and vulnerable areas.

The scheme is delivered locally by the Mendip Hills AONB Unit and co-ordinated nationally by Natural England on behalf of the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.

What kind of project is eligible?

Successful projects must:

- Help deliver the AONB Management Plan²;
- Further the purposes of the AONB³;

¹ For a map of the Mendip Hills Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, please visit our website www.mendiphillsaonb.org.uk

² Copies of the AONB Management Plan are available from the AONB office or can be viewed on-line at www.mendiphillsaonb.org.uk

³ The primary statutory purpose of AONBs is to conserve and enhance natural beauty. There are three related purposes:

- Recreation ('the demand for recreation should be met insofar as it is consistent with the conservation of natural beauty')
- Socio-economic ('account should be taken of the needs of agriculture, forestry, other rural industries, and the economic and social needs of local communities')

- Promote sustainable development;
- Have the demonstrable support or involvement of communities;
- Be complementary to key local, regional or national strategies.

Grants can cover the costs of some or all of the following:

- Practical work;
- Feasibility studies or research projects;
- Group or partnership development;
- Awareness raising and training about sustainability;
- Equipment and materials.

The scheme particularly welcomes projects that:

- demonstrate innovation or best practice;
- link community, economy, culture and environment;
- develop skills and “capacity building” in the community;
- involve young people;
- combat social exclusion and promote diversity;
- bring organisations and people together to co-operate in tackling problems or promoting new ideas;
- encourage links between rural and urban groups;
- lever in contributions from other sources;
- have little access to alternative public funding;
- add value or new dimensions to existing sustainability projects.

Examples of projects could include:

- renewable / green energy schemes;
- sustainable transport;
- environmental building design;
- awareness campaigns;
- innovative products or initiatives;
- community environmental schemes;
- recycling schemes;
- conservation activities;
- promoting local produce.

Grants can be used to:

- Pump-prime new sustainable development projects which have been unable to find funding from other sources;
- Provide match-funding for new sustainable development projects;
- Add value to existing sustainable development projects;
- Add a sustainable development aspect to existing projects.

Who can apply?

Public, private, voluntary sector, individuals, businesses or community groups can apply. Individuals or businesses can only be beneficiaries where the project shows a clear benefit to the wider community.

You don't have to live or work within the AONB to apply. You must simply demonstrate that your project will have a positive impact upon the AONB and satisfy the core criteria of the grant.

How we assess your application

Applications will be considered on a first come, first served basis. Before you submit an application, please speak to us! The AONB team can guide and support the development of your application where appropriate.

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- Sustainable development ('particular regard should be paid to promoting sustainable forms of social and economic development that in themselves conserve and enhance the environment')

The decision whether to award a grant is made by the AONB Partnership Committee's grant advisory panel. The panel has representatives from a range of interests, including community, business and environmental management.

Grants

- Grant payment is administered by Somerset County Council on behalf of the Mendip Hills AONB Partnership
- The scheme can provide up to 50% funding to local authority and business projects and 75% funding for not-for-profit and voluntary sector projects.
- In exceptional cases (where there is significant voluntary or "in kind" input) 100% may be provided.⁴
- In all cases, an agreement setting out what is required for satisfactory completion of the project will be signed prior to receipt of grant. There will also be requirements about monitoring and recording the project outputs.

How can we in the AONB team help?

If you would like more information or want to talk through a project idea please contact the AONB office.

Mendip Hills AONB Unit
Charterhouse Centre, Nr Blagdon, Bristol BS40 7XR
Tel 01761 462338
e-mail: mendiphills@somerset.gov.uk
website: www.mendiphillsaonb.org.uk

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⁴ For match funding purposes, volunteer time can be included. It will usually be calculated at £50/day (£6.25/hr) for general volunteers and between £100/day (£12.50/hr) and £300/day for specialist, technical or professional volunteers.