

Local Environment Fund

*Supporting Oxfordshire communities to take action to restore nature and
promote public access to green spaces*

Detailed Guidance for Applicants

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Introduction

TOE supports projects which improve and benefit Oxfordshire's environment. Our funding is derived from a range of sources, some of which have specific requirements; eligible funding applications are considered in the light of the funds available. We thank all our funders for their support.

These notes provide guidance for applicants and will continue to be updated. **We ask all applicants to contact us at an early stage** to discuss project ideas to ensure they meet our funding criteria.

TOE aims to support the delivery of a range of local and strategic projects which will deliver against the county's priorities for increased sustainability and the emerging Nature Recovery Network, a major commitment in the UK Government's 25-Year Environment Plan. The network is intended to improve, expand and connect habitats to address the decline in wildlife. Providing wider environmental benefits for people is also key to this plan. The Nature Recovery Network takes existing protected sites to be the best areas for wildlife, and the core of any network, but wider action is needed to support nature's recovery by extending and linking these existing sites, both to support wildlife and to recover the range of economic and social benefits that nature provides.

Funds are also available for projects which create new and/or improve existing public access to urban green spaces and Oxfordshire's countryside.

1. Areas of support

Nature's recovery is one of TOE's top priorities and so we are working with partner organisations and contributing to policy development to identify ambitious long-term projects, strengthening the good work already being delivered. We invite organisations and community groups to seek funding from TOE to:

- Carry out projects which promote and enhance wildlife habitats and species by creating new areas that increase the biodiversity resource and improve the way land is managed
- Help people to better connect with their local environment and the countryside

1.1 BIODIVERSITY

Definition – Biological diversity is the variety of life and its processes; it includes the variety of living organisms, the genetic differences among them and the communities and ecosystems in which they occur.

All biodiversity projects should at their core aim to bring about actual practical improvements to biodiversity on a local or landscape scale and they should all demonstrably fit within the wider county or national strategy for biodiversity.

Projects involving surveys of habitats or species or the production of management plans will only be eligible where they are part of a larger scheme that will lead to advances in our understanding of species and habitat requirements or direct improvements to biodiversity.

The "*Oxfordshire Community & Parish Guide to Biodiversity*", produced by Oxfordshire County Council, Thames Valley Environmental Records Centre (TVERC) and the Berks, Bucks and Oxon Wildlife Trust could help provide ideas about what you can do in your community:

- Discover what is in your area
- Contribute to a Parish or Neighbourhood Plan
- Find sources of help, information and funding
- Set up a local conservation group
- Read about inspiring projects that have resulted in a better local environment and also enhance biodiversity.

www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/sites/default/files/folders/documents/environmentandplanning/countryside/naturalenvironment/communitybiodiversityguide.pdf

The Oxfordshire Wildlife and Landscape Study (OWLS) provides useful guidelines on landscape character and general biodiversity down to the Parish level – <http://owls.oxfordshire.gov.uk>

Examples of the types of projects that TOE might support include

- Kirtlington Wildlife And Conservation Society was awarded a grant for their project to restore the village pond.
- TOE contributed funding to the Freshwater Habitats Trust's project which is restoring rare alkaline fens at several sites around Oxford.
- Greening Chinnor was given a grant for their project to restore Keens Lane community orchard.
- Oxford Urban Wildlife Group received a grant for restoring the ponds, improving the ground flora in the wooded areas and creating a wildflower meadow at Boundary Brook Nature Park.
- Brightwell-cum-Sotwell Environment Group was given a grant towards their project to restore the village's community woodland and to deculverting the 'allotment stream' to provide wildlife with access to water.

All biodiversity projects are advised to request a data search from TVERC to inform their proposed plans. A nominal fee may be charged. It is requested that biodiversity improvement works are incorporated in a new/updated management plan for the project site, and that ecological records generated through TOE-funded projects are shared with TVERC (www.tverc.org/cms/content/share-your-records).

For works involving a watercourse, it is essential that all appropriate consent forms are in place. Consent would come from the Environment Agency for main watercourses, or the lead water authority for a non-main watercourse which is likely to be the local authority. This link to the Water Framework Directive (www.environment.data.gov.uk/catchment-planning/RiverBasinDistrict/6) provides status information for waterbodies in the Thames Catchment and it could provide useful context for relevant applications.

NOTE: RECORDERS' FUND FROM TVERC

Grants are available to support work that improves the quality, quantity or coverage of voluntary recording in Berkshire or Oxfordshire. Most grants from the TVERC Recorders' Fund are up to £500.

Examples of what TVERC's Recorders' Fund can be used for include:

- Digitising paper records - priority given to recent data & under-represented taxa.
- Money towards running training courses or promotional activities to recruit new recorders and improve the quality of voluntary recording.
- Training for individuals (volunteers, not professionals).
- Money towards the online publication of species atlases and checklists.
- Contributions to the costs of setting up or running a recording group.
- Purchase of equipment for field survey work, including ID guides, for use by the group. Please check first whether TVERC have suitable equipment available for free loan
www.tverc.org/cms/equipment-and-books
- Purchase of data management tools, including upgrading and new hard/software to be used solely for the purposes of recording.
- Provision of travel expenses for voluntary recorders (either at 45p/mile or the cost of public transport) to deliver any of the above.

NB : TOE does not fund bird seed or other food used to attract species in survey work.

Applicants for this grant should include in their application:

- The applicant's in-kind contribution to the project in terms of volunteer time or other resources.
- Approximate number of records that will result from this project.

- Approximate number of new recorders who will be engaged.
- Confirmation that your records will be made available to TVERC
www.tverc.org/cms/content/share-your-records

1.2 ACCESS TO THE COUNTRYSIDE AND URBAN GREEN SPACES

Definition – Making Oxfordshire’s countryside and settlements easier and safer to explore on foot, by bicycle and by horse, and more attractive as areas for enjoyment. Access can be on public rights of way, permissive routes, cycle tracks, Open Access land, community-owned areas, nature reserves, local green spaces in urban areas and country parks.

Improving access to green spaces and the wider countryside has many health benefits and allows more people to visit and appreciate the natural environment whether in a rural setting or an urban green space close to where many people live.

We support projects that will encourage more people to enjoy local green spaces for informal recreation and projects that will increase environmental awareness. For example, Barracks Lane Community Garden was awarded a grant to restore and replant their raised beds. Recycled plastic was used for the new raised beds and the plants were carefully selected to create a bee-friendly haven in the heart of East Oxford.

TOE supports projects that fit with the aims of Oxfordshire County Council’s Rights of Way Improvement Plan (ROWIP) and where all permissions have been obtained. The primary aim of such projects should be to bring about actual physical improvements to public rights of way, permissive routes, cycle tracks, access land, community-owned areas and local green spaces in urban areas, nature reserves and country parks. Please note that where new permissive paths are created, there should be some form of written agreement in place with the landowner which confirms the public will have unrestricted access for at least three years.

We will only grant aid the provision of signage, route marking, information or interpretation if it forms part of a wider scheme for physically improving access. As a guide, we suggest that you limit any of these elements to less than 25% of the overall grant request.

TOE wishes to support projects to improve the accessibility and quality of the rights of way network by

- Creating new links and circular routes – for example to connect a village or shop to the countryside, or join up two or more public rights of way, a route to school or the shops, a route which avoids a busy stretch of road, or to create circular routes around communities.
- Improving access points to make paths safer and more accessible. The basic premise for such work **must** be adoption of the least-restrictive access method, i.e. gaps are least restrictive, followed by gates, kissing gates and then stiles. TOE can support the upgrading of access structures where the proposed new gap (or structure) would be less restrictive than the current one. Applicants will be expected to provide the least-restrictive structure possible in any particular situation. Consideration should always be given to which access structure is most appropriate for the site, i.e. if there is livestock in fields a self-closing gate or a kissing gate may be required. (Further information about least-restrictive access is available at www.accessiblecountryside.org.uk/creating-access)
- Improving path and bridleway surfaces, after drainage has been managed, to increase year-round usability for paths particularly in village areas, or to make key paths more enjoyable for less agile users. Full consideration should always be given to the provision of adequate drainage as the first stage of any path improvements. Please note that if you are applying for funding towards a board

walk, TOE prefers to support the use of recycled plastic, but will consider the use of locally and sustainably sourced wood where there is a firm commitment to regular maintenance.

- Improving signs and route-marking – e.g. by providing village information boards, ‘on path’ information, or themed interpretive trails to increase connections to the natural environment and to increase enjoyment and understanding.
- Promoting the wider use of the countryside and green spaces – e.g. by showing all accessible spaces and paths on community information boards, by encouraging local businesses to provide facilities for walkers, cyclists and equestrians, by enabling practical works to improve access to and understanding of the natural environment. Please note that TOE will only consider funding such promotion work as part of a project involving the delivery of practical works. As a guide we suggest that you limit any of these elements to less than 20% of the overall grant request.

To reassure us that you have thought through your project carefully, please include detailed information about access improvements with your application, including

- Maps of access routes
- Where the access routes are statutory rights of way, your project needs to be approved by the Public Rights of Way officer at Oxfordshire County Council. Please send us a copy of email correspondence confirming their approval.
- The positions of proposed new gates, information boards, board walks on your site
- The name of the manufacturer and style/model of the product being proposed, e.g. for a new gate
- The height, width, length and material to be used, e.g. for surface improvements or a board walk
- Where relevant, architects’ plans, the specification you gave contractors who have provided quotes, your methodology for undertaking capital work with volunteers.

TOE will only support projects where applicants have considered how the access improvements will be publicised to the local community once the project is complete, in order to ensure greater use and enjoyment. This might include specific information and maps on notice boards and in parish magazines, downloadable circular walk leaflets, opening events, guided walks etc. **Please include details of how you intend to promote your project in your application.**

Please refer to further information at www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/rowip for a range of community-led project ideas and to read the Local Council Guide to Improving Public Rights of Way.

NOTE: LOW CARBON, SUSTAINABILITY AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Reducing fuel use and carbon emissions is central to county and national policy to address and control climate change. Whilst TOE cannot fund specifically low carbon projects such as lighting, heating or insulation improvements, it does require all projects to have an eye to reducing fuel use and achieving sustainability. This includes the longevity of the materials used, e.g. as wood will rot, it has a limited life so TOE prefers to support the use of recycled plastic for items such as raised beds, benches, board walks, etc. If applicable, please mention in your application how your project will be sustainable.

Please contact us if you have any questions about what TOE can and cannot fund. This will help you ensure your project meets the eligibility criteria. Email: admin@trustforoxfordshire.org.uk

2. Who can apply for funding?

TOE can fund not-for-profit organisations including voluntary groups, Parish Councils, charities and Community Interest Companies. Local Authorities such as County and District Councils may also apply for grants, but TOE prefers applications to be submitted by local community groups or charities.

Please note that you cannot re-apply for a grant for a project which has previously been rejected.

3. Location of Projects

With the exception of the TVERC Recorders Fund which covers Berkshire and Oxfordshire, TOE's priority is to support projects located in Oxfordshire. However, consideration can be given to projects which straddle the county boundary or which benefit communities in Oxfordshire and its immediate neighbourhood. TOE is keen to see its funds distributed across the county; we are unlikely to support several projects within one community. Projects to be funded through the Landfill Communities Fund must be less than 10 miles from a registered landfill site.

4. Access requirements

TOE generally only funds projects at sites where there is some level of public access. Please note that any projects funded through the Landfill Communities Fund **there must be public access for everyone in the community for a minimum of 104 days per year which is interpreted as 2 days or 4 evenings a week**. The only exception is for biodiversity projects which address the needs of a priority habitat or species. Such projects can take place on private land with no public access.

5. Community involvement

TOE looks to support projects which involve and benefit local communities. Please ensure that there has been effective community consultation resulting in widespread support for the project and good involvement of volunteers.

TOE cannot accept applications from projects which might result in local disagreement so please ensure that any areas of potential conflict are resolved prior to submitting an application.

6. Ongoing management

TOE seeks to fund projects which are sustainable into the future and we need to know:

- How the project will be managed in the long term. Biodiversity projects should have a site management plan. TOE may be able to provide advice so do get in touch if this would be helpful.
- Where the funds will come from to manage the project into the future.
- Who will undertake ongoing management in the future.
- The succession planning in place to ensure your organisation will have the capacity to manage the project effectively in the longer term.

7. What we don't fund

- We cannot fund projects which fulfil a statutory requirement or a requirement of planning permission.
- Most projects funded by TOE should involve capital works to improve a site. We do not fund revenue costs alone but can support a small proportion of revenue costs which are directly related to the delivery of practical projects.
- We do not fund the production of leaflets.
- We do not fund bird seed or other food used to attract species in survey work.

8. Level of funding

TOE grants via the Landfill Communities Fund are up to £15,000. Larger requests for transformational projects can be considered when funds are available. Most grants from the TVERC Recorders' Fund are up to £500.

Use our 'Small Grants' application form to apply for up to £1,000. Applications for Small Grants are assessed on a rolling basis.

Use our standard grant application form to apply for between £1,000 and £15,000. Applications are assessed in a quarterly funding cycle and application deadline dates are advertised on our website.

Please contact the TOE office on 01865 407003 or email admin@trustforoxfordshire.org.uk for more information about our funding streams and to find out if your project might be eligible for a larger grant.

A separate document outlining our application process can be downloaded from our website.

9. Specification and quotes

Where work is to be done by contractors, please provide TOE with a copy of the specification.

All costs need to be justified and accompanied by a detailed breakdown so that TOE can see all the costs associated with the delivery of the project. We require

- o 2 comparable quotes are required for costs in project budgets which are less than £1,000, and
- o 3 quotes are required for all costs over £1,000.

These quotes could be formal quotes from contractors, or screenshots showing the prices quoted by online suppliers.

Some of the projects we support are very specialist in nature and require specific expertise for their successful delivery. We recognise that in these circumstances there will often be little value going to more than one contractor for a quote, but the rationale for presenting fewer than the required number of quotes needs to be justified in Answer 5.4 on our application form.

From July 2022 applicants are allowed to include a separate budget line for 10% contingency in the event of price increases. The contingency budget can only be claimed if cost increases caused by inflation or unseen impacts can be demonstrated. The contingency budget cannot be used on additional items simply to spend it.

10. Match funding requirements

TOE looks favourably at applications from projects that have strong local support and volunteer input, and that have sought funding from other sources.

11. Timetable for project delivery

Projects should be completed within a reasonable timescale. The project completion deadline will be stated in our formal grant offer to successful applicants. TOE is unable to fund any work retrospectively so it is **essential** that a project does not start before the formal funding contract is in place.

Please give the anticipated start and completion dates for your project careful consideration; be realistic about timescales and what might be achieved. Where projects are funded through the Landfill Communities Fund and registered with the regulatory body ENTRUST, extensions will only be permitted under exceptional circumstances.

12. Project publicity

TOE and its funders request that all grants are acknowledged and promoted in the local media and via social media; guidance notes on project publicity are sent to all funded projects.

13. Project monitoring

TOE expects applicants to monitor the impact of their project and inform TOE of the results. The level of monitoring required is dependent on the type of project.

- **Access projects** - it may be the state of accessibility after 12 months and monitoring will involve a site visit of a request for photographs.
- **Biodiversity and Community projects** - it may be the percentage success of any planting after 1 year and 5 years. The effectiveness of ongoing maintenance or management will need to be monitored by the applicant/landowner and evidence of results provided through the submission of photographs.

Please report your monitoring results to TOE as they will be used to inform future grant giving.

14. Submitting your application

- Please complete all the sections on the application form.
- Provide photographs and site plans which help to illustrate the need for your project. Please note that we ask successful applicants to keep a photographic record of their projects as a way of recording progress.
- Provide maps showing project location. This could be a screen shot of Google Maps after you have placed the 'pin' on your site, or an annotated OS map, or a map produced in GIS.
- Provide copies of quotes from contractors and/or for materials – these can be screen shots if using online suppliers.
- Submit your application by email to admin@trustforoxfordshire.org.uk
- Your application will be processed at the TOE office.
- You can apply for a Small Grant of up to £1,000 at any time. Applications are considered on a rolling basis and it is TOE's Chief Executive who makes the final decisions about the allocation of funds.
- For grant requests of £1,000 to £15,000. We operate a quarterly funding cycle. Application deadlines are posted on our website and TOE's Local Environment Fund Grant Panel meets four times a year.
- An additional stage is required for Transformational Grants of over £15,000. After speaking to the TOE office, if your project is eligible, you will be asked to submit an Expression of Interest for consideration by the Grant Panel. If accepted, you will be invited to apply using the standard application form.
- After your application has been processed at the office, an independent assessor with relevant expertise will contact you to discuss some of the details of your project and to arrange a site visit to discuss aspects of your project.
- The assessor's report, along with any relevant supporting information (including quotes), will be distributed to the TOE Grant Panel members before their meeting. Please note that assessors provide technical advice and that the Grant Panel makes funding recommendations. It is TOE's Chief Executive who makes the final decisions about the allocation of funds.

- For all grant applications – Following the Chief Executive’s decision, relevant projects are registered with ENTRUST, the regulatory body for the Landfill Communities Fund. A formal contract is then issued for signature and return to TOE before the project can start.

15. Our commitment to you

We appreciate that fund raising is not easy, but TOE is proud of the care taken in considering applications. Whatever the outcome, you can be confident in our approach and the care with which we handle your information.

- 1 Every application received is acknowledged so you know it has arrived safely.
- 2 All applicants will be notified of the outcome of application, whether successful or unsuccessful.
- 3 Every eligible application is considered by at least one of TOE’s Trustees.
- 4 Your application will receive careful attention, but it is not possible to guarantee that funding will be available – we know you will understand that sometimes we have to decline good projects as it is simply not possible to support everything.
- 5 The Grant Panel will note any requested amount you may indicate, but they do not work on an “all or nothing” basis so we may provide support at a different level than that requested.
- 6 We are respectful of your time and resources – please be assured that we will only request additional information when we think it forms an important part of your overall proposition, or if we wish to clarify something we feel is relevant to our understanding of your project. We ensure we have all the information we need so you can be confident you have done all you can to make your case.
- 7 Occasionally applicants may be invited to attend a Grant Panel meeting to provide additional information and answer questions, but we usually gather the information we require beforehand.
- 8 TOE does not give grants up front, but reimburses the costs incurred in delivering a project as agreed and outlined in the formal funding offer. Details about how to claim your grant are given in our application process guidance.
- 9 Reporting guidelines are kept as clear and uncomplicated as possible to ensure we can remain up-to-date with the delivery of your project while minimising the administrative burden for us both.

16. Data Protection and confidentiality

We share application forms, supporting information and project assessment forms with the TOE Grant Panel, TOE Board of Trustees and independent assessor for the project. Information is only shared as required to make a funding decision regarding the project and we have procedures in place to keep information safe.

The TOE Privacy Notice is available at www.trustforoxfordshire.org.uk. Please contact us if you would like any further information regarding our data protection procedures by emailing admin@trustforoxfordshire.org.uk or giving us a call on 01865 407003.

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