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The Scottish Government

Riaghaltas na h-Alba

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European Regional Development Fund

Investing in a Smart, Sustainable and Inclusive Future

Frequently Asked Questions

Green Infrastructure Fund

Guidance for Applicants

October 2016



Disclaimer

Applicants should be aware that as the Green Infrastructure Fund is a new programme, the guidance will be reviewed as the programme evolves and therefore may be subject to change. The European Union and Scottish Ministers reserve the right to amend the National Rules and SNH reserves the right to amend the published guidance during the period of the programme. Decisions to fund projects will be based on the availability of funding, how well the project matches the Green Infrastructure Fund priorities and its contribution to outcomes as part of the whole Strategic Intervention. These priorities may change during the course of the Strategic Intervention to take into account gaps in meeting priorities in previously funded Operations and not to fund at all. The Scottish Government reserves the right not to award any support at all under this programme.

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Frequently Asked Questions

Purpose

The purpose of this document is to provide answers to questions that have been asked by potential applicants to ensure that everyone has access to the same information. Some of the questions have been identified by the Green Infrastructure Team and included as guidance. Reference should be made to the full suite of Green Infrastructure guidance documents in the [Green Infrastructure Fund Handbook](#).

Background

1. What is Green Infrastructure?

Green Infrastructure is planned greenspace and water that uses the natural environment to provide environmental and quality of life benefits. It includes parks, woodlands, street trees, play spaces, allotments, community growing spaces, playing fields, road verges, swales, green walls and living roofs, rivers, streams, wetlands and sustainable drainage, active travel and recreational routes.

It is best planned into development from the start, but can also be retro-fitted to existing areas.

2. How much funding is SNH receiving?

Under the 2014-20 Programme, we expect that the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) will provide £15M towards delivering £37.5M worth of improvements to the urban environment of our cities and larger towns. Scottish Natural Heritage has been approved as Lead Partner for the period up to 2018, during which time we intend to deliver £8m ERDF investment. A mid-term review in 2018 will take place before further approvals to 2020.

3. What do you hope to achieve with this Challenge Fund?

We intend to lead delivery of a Strategic Intervention through a Challenge Fund delivering coordinated investment in Green Infrastructure across urban Scotland, targeting those communities who are most disadvantaged. The activities will help increase the accessibility, quantity and quality of greenspace, ensuring that people have access to good quality spaces for recreation and health.

We want people to love, use and value their greenspaces, and through this to feel happier, healthier and better connected to their communities. We expect to see inequalities in health and opportunity being reduced, and an increase in how people value and understand what nature does for them. Green Infrastructure can help people develop skills and have the confidence to seek and sustain jobs. It can also attract businesses into areas by making them more attractive for investment.

4. How many projects are likely to be funded?

Under the 2014-20 Programme, we intend to deliver a minimum of 15 substantial projects across Scotland that improve or create at least 140 hectares of urban green infrastructure.

Scottish Natural Heritage has been approved as Lead Partner for the period up to 2018, during which time we intend to deliver a minimum of 8 projects. A mid-term review in 2018 will take place before further approvals to 2020.

5. Will all the projects be in the Central Belt?

No, any town with a population of more than 10,000 is eligible for funding and we hope to achieve a spread of projects throughout eligible areas of Scotland. At least one project must

6. Longer term outcomes, like changes to health, may not be evident by the end of 2023. What happens in this case?

We are aware that some outcomes can take time, and indeed may take a generation to become evident. However, monitoring to 2023 should indicate the direction of travel. Monitoring should also pick up where the activities have not delivered the desired outcomes and give a sense of why this has happened.

7. The outcomes, including socio-economic outcomes, in the Green Infrastructure Strategic Intervention could be affected by a lot of other factors. How much of a difference is acceptable to attribute to our project?

It is important to consider changes in the external environment that could impact on the outcomes you are trying to seek. Your monitoring and evaluation plan should explain how you will take into account changes that affect outcomes but are not attributable to the funded activities. The method described in 'A Guide to Social Return on Investment' from the Cabinet Office may be helpful. It is available on-line from the [Social Value UK website](#).

8. How much will selection of projects be driven by the need to deliver a minimum number of hectares through your Strategic Intervention?

We want to see a substantive increase in the area of new or improved green infrastructure by end of 2018. In order to demonstrate this, we will monitor this increase and have agreed an indicator of 65 hectares by 2018. However, this is only one aspect of delivery and we will be looking at what applications deliver across the outcomes, towards horizontal themes and for communities. There is no minimum or maximum geographic size for a project.

9. How did the 65 hectares of green infrastructure target arise?

The 65 hectare target arose from an iterative process during development of the Green Infrastructure Strategic Intervention. It reflects broad agreement about what stakeholders thought was a realistic and meaningful increase.

10. What do you mean by geographic spread? Won't prioritising areas in the 20% most deprived areas according to the SIMD skew the results to west central Scotland?

We are prioritising areas that are among the 15% most deprived according to the SIMD and recognise that we could spend the entire Green Infrastructure Fund in west central Scotland. However, one of our high level outcomes is to transform cities and major towns across Scotland. This is why we will take into account the geographic spread of applications across the lifetime of the Green Infrastructure Strategic Intervention.

The Scottish Government expect us to fund at least one project in the Highlands and Islands area because it is an ESIF Transition Area.

11. Will areas that are already green be scored higher than applications involving vacant and derelict land?

No, applications are scored against deliverability, impact, outcomes and fit with the horizontal themes. However, we would like to see some vacant and derelict land being transformed to green end use.

Funding Structure

1. Is the funding all through the ERDF, or are Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) and/or others contributing some funds as well?

Through the Green Infrastructure Fund, ERDF will provide up to 40% of the funding for successful projects in the Lowland and Uplands area (LUPS) and up to 50% for projects in Highlands and Islands (H&I) area. The rest of the match funding must be confirmed by applicants before we can issue a Delivery Contract. The additional funding cannot come from other European Community funding sources.

Potentially, SNH could be part of your match funding package but needs to be applied for separately and is unlikely given the current funding situation.

2. ERDF is a “gap funder”. What does that mean?

Being a gap funder means we are a funder of last resort and the Green Infrastructure Fund contribution should be the minimum amount required to allow your project to proceed. In your application, you will need to demonstrate that you have identified the Green Infrastructure Fund as the most appropriate funding source and identify match funding. We will not confirm our funding until all the other funds have been confirmed.

If you are not able to deliver on all the aspects of your project, we will expect you to maintain your investment and we will reduce our funding to match the new level. For example:

	Original Cost model	Revised cost model
Eligible cost	£1,500,000	£1,300,000
Match funding	£900,000	£900,000
ERDF funding (gap)	£600,000	£400,000

3. Have you spoken to other potential match funders?

Yes, we have strong links with other major funders in Scotland and they are aware of the objectives and timescales relating to the Green Infrastructure Fund.

4. Can very large projects be phased over your Phase 1 (up to end 2018) and Phase 2?

Large projects could be phased, but each phase would have to be stand-alone and subject to separate applications. Please note we cannot guarantee that there will be a Phase 2 beyond 2018 because of the situation regarding Brexit

5. What is the role of the private sector?

Private sector investors can contribute funding to a project, but it cannot be used as match funding against ERDF. The table below illustrates two funding scenarios for the same application.

Source	No Private funding	Private funding
Total project cost	£900,000	£900,000
Private funding	£0	£120,000
Total eligible costs	£900,000	£780,000
Match funding	£480,000	£480,000
ERDF funding (gap)	£420,000	£300,000

6. Would Section 75 Agreement funding be eligible as match funding?

Section 75 sets out the framework for planning obligations. We cannot fund activity that is a condition of planning permission or a requirement of Section 75. There may be circumstances where Section 75 funds can be used as match funding, where these are held by a Local Authority for green infrastructure purposes.

Eligibility

1. What kinds of projects will be funded?

Projects eligible for funding must benefit Green Infrastructure and demonstrate how they meet the requirements set out in the National Rules guidance regarding eligibility:

<http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0050/00503459.pdf>

Green Infrastructure includes the "green" and "blue" (water environment) features of the natural and built environments that can provide benefits and contribute to the quality of life in urban areas. Projects funded under the Green Infrastructure Fund should reflect the thinking in the Green Infrastructure: Design and Placemaking guidance published by the Scottish Government. <http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2011/11/04140525/0>.

Green Infrastructure projects must:

- create new, additional functionality in existing or new natural and semi-natural habitats; and/or
- create/retrofit urban greening, particularly where water and urban climate management benefits are integrated and links between greenspaces are established or re-created

The projects must contribute to a need identified through at least one of the following: local and regional plans, policies and strategies; appropriate masterplans; charette; and/ or community engagement.

The Green Infrastructure Fund aims to increase participation in greenspace so community engagement is a key component. The applicant organisation needs to demonstrate how they have already engaged the local community through development of the application and how they will engage and involve the local community through its implementation.

Our Eligibility Guidance sets out examples of eligible and ineligible activities.

- 2. Some of our funding will be lost if we do not start now. Can we backdate claims to before application submission?*

Only works incurred and defrayed within the approved lifetime of the project are eligible.¹ If your application is successful, then we can fund procured costs, such as consultancy fees, incurred after the official Green Infrastructure Strategic Intervention opening date of 1 April 2015. We cannot fund any costs for unsuccessful applications.

- 3. Our Green Infrastructure application is a relatively small part of a wider project. If we start the wider project, does that make the Green Infrastructure element ineligible for ERDF funding?*

If your application is part of a wider project, you can progress in phases. As long as you don't start works on the Green Infrastructure project you are applying for it can be submitted as an application. In this scenario, you can tell us about the wider project as part of the context but only include costs for the project you are applying for.

- 4. Is temporary planting eligible?*

Temporary planting is not normally eligible as it does not contribute effectively to the Green Infrastructure Fund's outcomes. We are looking for transformative Green Infrastructure projects. Temporary planting may be acceptable if you can demonstrate in your application that it is a small but essential part of your project and how it contributes to our outcomes.

- 5. It appears from the guidance that development work with communities is not eligible for funding. Why not, since it seems an important outcome of the Green Infrastructure Fund?*

Scoping and development work with communities is not eligible for funding but it is an important and fundamental aspect of your project. It is an important outcome and is essential for delivering the Horizontal Themes. We see engagement with communities as a core activity for the applicant in developing an on-going and lasting relationship with your community.

- 6. Is buying land eligible?*

Land purchase is not eligible except in exceptional cases. If the land purchase is a small element of a wider green infrastructure project and you can demonstrate that it is essential to delivery of the outcomes, please discuss this with your support officer as soon as possible before applying so we can discuss it with the Scottish Government before giving you a steer.

- 7. Are improvements to access eligible? For example, new road crossings.*

Improving accessibility is eligible. However, we will not fund specific special needs accessibility that is not part of the wider Green Infrastructure improvements. Due to the cost

¹ National Rules Section 4.1.2

of road crossings it is unlikely that they would be funded except where you can demonstrate that it would be absolutely crucial to the delivery of outcomes.

8. We are undertaking a major regeneration project and our green infrastructure improvements will form a major constituent part. Will the Green Infrastructure Fund pay for replacing utilities across the site as part of the regeneration project?

No. We will only fund activities that contribute to green infrastructure outcomes. You will need to find another way to fund utilities and other infrastructure such as parking spaces. However, provision of utilities that can be demonstrated to be an intrinsic part of the Green Infrastructure may be considered eligible.

9. We know that planting in the public realm is potentially eligible but are structures in the public realm eligible?

Multi-functional Green Infrastructure that improves the public realm is eligible. However, you will need to consider the function of the structure. For example, if the surface is permeable and improves water permeability and quality of the Green Infrastructure then we may be able to fund it. Or if the structure enables people to experience nature in an urban environment who may otherwise be excluded because of their health we may be able to fund it.

10. Can we have multipoint applications?

We can consider applications which address a number of discrete locations across a community or a number of settlements, bearing in mind your project has to benefit populations in communities of more than 10,000. There must be a clear rationale for the sites identified and a coherent approach to identified need and outcomes addressed and/or how well connected the sites would be and to have a significant impact and achieve long term, transformational change.

11. What urban/rural classification maps will you be using?

We will be using the most up-to-date 6-fold Urban-Rural classification from the Scottish Government. For deadlines in 2016 it will be the 2013-14 data. If you think that this data is out of date for your application then you must present evidence to support your assertion.

12. Is there any risk of disallowing some activities after we have been offered a contract and projects have completed construction?

Yes, there is some risk to SNH and to you as a grantee because EU auditors have the right to scrutinise data and information relating to your project until 2030. Eligibility criteria are set out broadly in the National Rules and specifically in the Green Infrastructure Fund Eligibility guidance. As an applicant, you have a responsibility to ensure that what you apply for to the Green Infrastructure Fund is eligible for funding. If you are applying for Green Infrastructure funding, we will help you reduce this risk by providing advice at support meetings and extensive written guidance, we will carefully assess your application for eligibility and if you are awarded funding we will agree terms with you in a Delivery Contract and carefully review your quarterly claims and supporting evidence before payment. As a grantee, it is your responsibility to ensure that you are fully compliant for Audit.

13. How does maintaining a defect liability period fit with a strict deadline for claims?

This will be discussed on a case by case basis with grantees.

14. Can we apply for funding for two different projects?

Yes you can. There is no upper limit on the number of applications you can make but applicants must make sure that there is no overlap in outputs to avoid applying for double funding.

. You may wish to consider aggregating your projects into a single application if the outcomes are the same and/or they complement each other.

15. Can we apply for funding for projects that are next to each other?

This would be possible but you will need to be careful to avoid problems with double funding. This covers not just physical overlaps on the ground, but also potential interactions between projects working with the same communities and between other activities in receipt of European Structural Funds.

16. Does the 10,000 population threshold need to be a single settlement, or could smaller towns have their populations aggregated?

The smallest settlement where activity funded by the Green Infrastructure Fund can happen is 10,000. Smaller settlements cannot be aggregated to meet the 10,000 threshold.

17. What is the minimum spend?

SNH has determined the following minimum amounts:

- the total project eligible costs must be a minimum of £650,000
- seeking an ERDF grant of minimum £250,000

There is no upper financial limit.

18. I am not sure if my organisation is registered as an eligible body with Scottish Government. Can we still apply at this stage?

If you are not sure if you are registered, please contact us and we will check on your behalf. You will need to be registered before you apply.

19. Can applications come from partnerships?

No, partnerships in the traditional sense are not eligible to apply. However, if a partnership is legally constituted, it may be considered an organisation and therefore eligible. Please contact the Green Infrastructure team if you wish to discuss this.

20. Private organisations are not eligible for funding. Can activities happen on their land?

Green Infrastructure can be created on private land that is publically accessible without restriction through a legally binding agreement.

21. What are the criteria for a charity to be an eligible body?

If the applicant is a charitable body they need to be registered as an eligible body with the Scottish Government, have the capacity to manage cashflow and project management experience for this scale of project and prove it is a registered charitable body. In certain circumstances, we may require a 'sponsor' to vouch for the applicant if they are a voluntary or charitable organisation.

22. Will you fund staff?

Yes, we can fund staff for delivery purposes. Dedicated staff can be full or part-time, but must spend 100% of their funded time on your ERDF funded Green Infrastructure project.

23. What stage should our plans and applications be at when we submit our application to the Green Infrastructure Fund?

We will require detailed plans and applications for the capital work you plan to deliver. Plans for designed elements should be up to and including RIBA work stage 3. Plans for non-designed elements, such as interpretation or digital outputs should also be at the equivalent of RIBA work stage 3. (For guidance on RIBA stages please refer to: <https://www.architecture.com/files/ribaprofessionalservices/practice/ribaplanofwork2013template.pdf>)

24. We will be applying to other funding organisations. Will we need to rewrite supporting documents or can we use the same as submitted to other organisations?

If you have submitted supporting documents to other funding organisations which fulfil our purposes you can submit these but you must follow our guidelines on labelling and referencing them. A checklist of mandatory supporting documents and how to reference these is included in the Application Form guidance it would be acceptable to send us the same without editing.

Evidence, monitoring and compliance

1. How long will we have to keep information on our project?

The length of time information needs to be kept for audit is laid out in the National Rules and we will agree the period with you formally when we offer a Delivery Contract. You will need to keep records until 31 December 2030 which is the end of the Audit and Compliance period. We will be keeping our records about the Programme until 2030.

2. When do we need to show measurable outcomes?

Outputs, which flow directly from the approved activities, must be delivered within the lifetime of the project. Milestones towards delivering these outputs should be identified on your application form and will be confirmed in your Delivery Contract.

Outcomes and their associated results must be delivered and evidenced by 2023. Annual reporting of results will be required up to this point for applications approved between 2016 and 2018. However, you may be audited on outcomes up to 2030.

3. What evidence do we need to provide for volunteers taking part?

You will need to provide numbers of volunteers with postcodes, the number of volunteer hours attributed to the project, broad details that provide evidence of impact on the outcomes and horizontal themes of your funded project and how you will measure the impact of the volunteer's contributions.

4. Will SNH make inspections before payments against claims? If inspections will happen will they be made only by members of the Green Infrastructure team?

The Green Infrastructure team may make inspections before payments are made. This will be discussed with you as part of agreeing your Delivery Contract and will be dependent on the risk rating given to your project. It is possible that inspections will be also be made by external people from the Scottish Government or the EU. All projects will need to present evidence of progress, not just completion, as part of claims. For example, we will require photographs of infrastructure at various stages during building or installation.

5. What are the 'badging' requirements for projects?

We have produced comprehensive guidance on branding in our Communications Toolkit. You are advised to become well acquainted with the Green Infrastructure Fund and ERDF National Rules on branding because compliance will be strictly monitored.

6. How will the biodiversity outcomes be captured by monitoring?

The Monitoring and Evaluation Framework provides mandatory and suggested indicators. We are happy to discuss monitoring and evaluation methods with you at your support meeting.

7. Your guidance states that the green infrastructure needs to be in place in perpetuity. Is that realistic?

The Managing Authority expects that the Green Infrastructure that is a result of your funding should continue in perpetuity for the approved purposes. The Green Infrastructure Fund is about long term transformational change for local communities. We recognise that not every aspect of your green infrastructure will remain unchanged but provided that the area is still fit for purpose and still delivering the same outcomes, unavoidable changes can be considered by SNH or the Scottish Government through a formal Change Process.

8. What level of support would you want to see from the local community?

We need to see that there is demand from the local community and that they will continue to be engaged in the application.

Each project will have to engage with its own communities and encourage participation in the planning, development, management and use of green infrastructure. Community engagement will be essential to ensuring that communities derive the full benefit from the improvement or increase in their green infrastructure.

Further guidance is available in the Green Infrastructure Fund Community Engagement Guidance.

Process

1. What will the scoring process be?

Our scoring criteria and assessment process is published on our website in our Assessment and Selection Process and our Eligibility and Assessment Scoring Forms guidance.

2. Who decides if our project gets funding?

Applications are assessed for eligibility and quality by an independent panel of 3 assessors per application. Then the highest scoring eligible applications are considered by a Scrutiny Panel with members selected for their experience, skill, independence, professionalism and commitment to delivering the outcomes of the Green Infrastructure Fund. The Scrutiny Panel will confirm which applications should be recommended for funding and pass them to the CEO of SNH for approval and then the Scottish Government as Managing Authority for acceptance. This process is fully explained in our Assessment and Selection procedure guidance.

3. When do we actually have to have the project finished?

The physical activities and approved purposes of the project need to be complete by 30 December 2018 and all financial transactions by 30 June 2019.

4. What is the deadline for our final claim?

The final claim date for the first funding round will be 31 March 2019. This is because all physical work must be complete by December 2018.

5. I disagree with the decision not to fund our project. How can I get you to reconsider?

The recommendations by the SNH CEO about which projects to fund are final. If we decline to fund a project at one funding round, and our feedback shows that what you are proposing was eligible, you can choose to address any issues and resubmit for funding to a future round. If you think that there was an error in how we processed your application then hopefully you will speak to us in the first instance but you can complain using the [SNH complaints system](#).

6. To what extent can Scottish Natural Heritage staff get involved in developing applications? Would it be acceptable for SNH staff to sit on advisory groups, Boards, etc?

It is important that we maintain a separation between the Green Infrastructure Team and any applicants. The Green Infrastructure Fund Team will be offering support meetings. During these meetings we can discuss your application in relation to our published guidance but cannot give advice on the detail of your application. However, other SNH members of staff, who are not in the Green Infrastructure team, can be involved on Boards or Steering Groups or in supporting development of projects. This involvement would then preclude that person from being involved in assessment of applications.

7. Is a nil return acceptable in a quarterly forecast/claim?

Yes, reporting will be required every calendar quarter. If you have not defrayed any expenditure we would expect that to be confirmed. However, we will still require you to

submit your quarterly progress reports. This is explained in more detail in our Monitoring and Evaluation guidance.

8. What would be the risk to the grantee of not delivering all of the outputs?

We expect all of the agreed **outputs** to be delivered, unless otherwise agreed in advance through our Change Process. We accept that sometimes the **outcomes** take longer to appear. We would need to see reasonable progress towards outcome achievement. If there is slippage in implementation let the Green Infrastructure Team know as soon as you have identified the risk.

9. What is involved in the claims process?

You will need to submit your quarterly progress reports with financial reports on defrayed expenditure at calendar year quarters to draw down your grant. Further details are in our Claim Process Overview.

10. Who does what in the Green Infrastructure team?

There are seven people in the Green Infrastructure team:

The **Head of Green Infrastructure Fund** will lead the Green Infrastructure Challenge Fund team to successful delivery of a series of major projects to improve greenspace and other Green Infrastructure in urban Scotland. They are responsible for compliance with all appropriate European Union and Scottish Government rules and requirements; mainstreaming horizontal themes; ensuring systems are in place for identifying and actively managing risks; act as the main contact for the Scottish Government; commission a formal review of the Green Infrastructure Strategic Intervention in 2017/18; and ensure that an approach to assessing overall impact is developed and implemented.

The **Project Manager** will manage the two Project & Funding officers; lead the development, management and use of all systems for the retention of all appropriate documentation; manage planning and reporting of the project overall; ensure that all risk management controls are fully implemented; and manage the formal review of the Green Infrastructure Strategic Intervention in 2017/18.

The **Finance and Audit Manager** will lead the development and operation of robust, credible and compliant financial structures and procedures; lead the effective planning and assignment of all project resources; lead on the development and operation of processes for the quality assessment of all cost options and the financial viability testing of each project; prepare the financial plan, budget and profile for the Green Infrastructure Strategic Intervention and individual Operations; lead on the development and operation of procedures for processing and cross-checking of all claims from grantees; and the claiming of funds from the Managing Authority.

The **Project & Funding Officers** will maintain a strong relationship with applicants / grantees to: ensure compliance with ERDF National Rules; give advice on eligibility of applications and rules of the Green Infrastructure Challenge Fund; meet with you to ensure that you understand the requirements of the Fund; input project data, claims/report information into the online management system (EUMIS); develop scheme policy; and communicate and present the Green Infrastructure Challenge Fund to a wide range of

bodies, including press and Public Relations. Your lead contact in the Green Infrastructure team will not assess your application.

The **Audit and Compliance Officer** will provide advice and support to the project delivery team and grantees on audit, compliance and progress reporting systems and issues; help complete regular compliance checks; help develop responses to risks and issues arising; support the development and operation of all systems for the monitoring and evaluation of the performance of grantees and of the Green Infrastructure Fund as a whole.

The **Administrator** will manage the Green Infrastructure website; take minutes at support meetings with partners; manage the Green Infrastructure email box, including accepting applications and claims; and ensure that all audit, financial and performance reporting systems are maintained.

Communication

1. How will the EU Referendum result affect the Green Infrastructure Fund?

Following the Referendum on the future of the UK in Europe, SNH has received advice from The Scottish Government that we should progress the first phase of the Green Infrastructure Fund as planned. This means that we expect to be able to award projects which will complete by the end of 2018 and that we intend to run a second funding round, closing on 31 October, as planned.

2. Will there be opportunities to learn from each other?

Yes, we have planned a series of events to share good practice. As the delivery of projects progresses, we aim to showcase Green Infrastructure achievements, which results in green infrastructure becoming mainstreamed into development.

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