**Woodland Creation Accelerator Fund (WCAF)**

**Accompanying Notes for Applicants**

(PLEASE READ THE FOLLOWING NOTES **BEFORE** COMPLETING YOUR EXPRESSION OF INTEREST FORM)

1. **Background**
	1. Local authorities across England have identified tree and woodland planting as a key part of their response to the climate change and biodiversity crises. A lack of capacity to develop and design planting proposals, to consult widely, apply for capital grants and organise planting has been identified as a key barrier to progress.
	2. The Woodland Creation Accelerator Fund (hereafter the Fund) is a simple fund with a total value of just under £8,000,000. It is designed to provide financial support to increase the capacity of specialist skills within local authorities enabling them in turn to accelerate the delivery of tree planting and woodland creation commitments. **The ultimate goal of the fund is to enable more trees planted particularly in winter seasons 2023/24 and 2024/25**.
	3. All upper tier authorities (county councils, unitary councils, London boroughs, metropolitan boroughs, combined authorities) are eligible to apply. The only exceptions are LA Woodland Creation Partnerships and successful TCAF applicants who are already in receipt of direct support for staff from the Nature for Climate Fund (NCF). For local authorities located within Community Forests, please see Section 5. The WCAF only applies to England.
	4. Capital funding already exists for local authorities to plant trees and woodlands. Advice and case studies are available from local Forestry Commission area teams and from organisations such as the Woodland Trust. This Fund completes the range of support available by funding new staff and consultants to move projects forward.
	5. The Nature for Climate Fund has funding available until 2025. There is no guarantee that support payments will be available after this date, so local authorities are encouraged to move quickly and take advantage of the funding while it exists.
2. **What will the Woodland Creation Accelerator Fund resource?**
	1. This is a revenue only fund (funding new staff and / or consultants). It is designed to be simple and flexible.
	2. We want you to tell us what you need in terms of additional staff / consultants. As well as thinking about your own planting plans, please also consider tree planting applications from others in your area. Is there a consultation ‘bottleneck’ with your historic environment record which is slowing down or even delaying private land applications, for example?
	3. It is most important that we strive to plant the right tree in the right place and for the right reasons. Consider if you need a strategy for planting or specific expertise (GIS mapping) to assist you? Do you need an additional resource to ensure that effective community consultation has taken place?
	4. We would expect typical applications to seek funding for new posts such as woodland creation officers, community engagement posts, project officers, specialist consultants or a blend of these. The key thing is that you apply to the Fund for your specific local needs.
3. **How much can I apply for?**
	1. Awards will be allocated with discretion – a scoring criteria will be applied followed by a decision panel to ensure that funding is spent in line with the overarching goals.
	2. The ceiling for a single local authority grant is **£150,000 - this is the total sum.** The money will be spread over two financial years 22/23 and 23/24 typically split 50:50. The first payment will be made in August 2022. The second payment in April 2023 contingent on activity in 22/23.
	3. Where local authorities are applying as a partnership, the total grant ceiling is raised to **£300,000.** In the Expression of Interest (EOI) please provide further information about your partnership.
	4. There is **no requirement for match funding**.
	5. Please note that the Fund cannot be used to fund existing staff.
	6. In the EOI, please specify how you intend to spend the money requested.
4. **Urban tree planting / rural woodland planting / levelling up**

* 1. We are keen to ensure that the Fund enables both urban tree planting projects and large woodland schemes to move forwards. Please indicate in the EOI whether the majority of your proposed planting is in urban or rural locations or both. **While the fund is called the *Woodland Creation Accelerator Fund* it should be noted that we also welcome applications that are based on individual trees.**
	2. In line with the government’s levelling up agenda, we are also keen to support those local authorities who have not been in a position to benefit from other NCF funds in the past due to a lack of specialist staff capacity.
1. **Tree and woodland planting commitment**
	1. A key part of the EOI is for you to tell us how many trees or hectares you will plant by 2025 which have been enabled by the Fund. We are particularly looking for realistic and deliverable proposals, so please provide any justification for your estimates. In particular we want to know the number of trees / hectares planted in the two planting seasons of 23/24 and 24/25 winters.
2. **Local authorities located within Community Forests**
	1. If your authority is located within one of theCommunity Forests, please discuss your proposal with the Community Forest Director and attach a letter of support which confirms the need and that there is no double funding for the posts requested.

*DEFRA reserves the right not to make an award if the proposal does not meet the objectives of a Community Forest Plan.*

1. **Recruitment**
	1. We are currently experiencing a national shortage in suitably qualified forestry specialists. Please consider this in your recruitment plans. You might consider up-skilling project managers and also engaging a specialist consultant or offering a flexible package that appeals to someone returning to work with a family etc. Please tell us about any creative approaches you will take with recruitment.
2. **How do local authorities apply?**
	1. Your Application will be submitted via the e-Sourcing platform ‘Bravo’. You need to be registered to apply and can find the site here- <https://defra.bravosolution.co.uk/web/login.html>
	2. Once registered, the ‘Invitation to Apply’ (ITA) can be accessed to view all relevant information and submit your application.
	3. Please review the ITA document carefully before submitting your Application following all instructions contained within. The Application will consist of mandatory questions on Bravo, completion of the Expression of Interest form, a Commercial Questionnaire and Form of Application.
3. **Application period**
	1. The application period will run for four weeks from 13th June 2022. Applications must be submitted by the deadline set in order to be considered. Applications will not be considered if they arrive outside of this period.
4. **What happens once the EOI has been submitted?**
	1. Once all of the EOIs have been submitted, we will lot applications into:

i) rural

ii) urban

iii) mixed

By lotting your Application according to the proportion of urban planting, it can be assessed with like for like Applications. This ensures a competitive bid process. The aim is to evenly allocate funding across the lots, though we reserve the right to base the final allocation upon Applications received to achieve the desired outcomes of this fund.

An assessment will be made against the following three primary areas:

* Evidence of need
* Commitment to planting by 2025
* A deliverability assessment

An Advisory Board comprising of subject matter experts will be involved in the final selection and assessment. This is a competitive bid process and we are hoping to fund at least 50 local authorities. We anticipate that the assessment process will take no more than two weeks

1. **Further support**
	1. See <https://www.adeptnet.org.uk/projects/woodland-creation-accelerator-fund> to view a joint webinar between ADEPT and Forestry Commission on WCAF.
	2. If you have any specific enquiries not covered by the above information or the FAQ documents for applicants, please contact via Bravo.
	3. Successful applicants will be required to take part in a programme of monitoring and evaluation. This will be conducted by The Association of Directors of Environment, Economy, Planning and Transport (ADEPT) to the end of the period of the Nature for Climate Fund programme and will capture the impact of this funding on accelerating tree planting and woodland creation.
2. **Awards**
	1. Awards will be made to successful Applicants (subject to satisfying due diligence checks) once the Evaluation of Applications is complete and the Grant Determination Letter and Memorandum of Understanding have been agreed been signed by all parties.

**Woodland Creation Accelerator Fund (WCAF)**

**Expression of Interest Form**

**Please add your Applicant Name here**

**Section 1: Qualification Questionnaire**

**Q1 – Are you an eligible upper-tier authority?** *Please answer Yes or No*

**Q2 – Have you received any Nature for Climate Fund (NCF) monies towards staff costs? (For Example: from the Trees Call to Action Fund (TCAF) or the two Woodland Creation Partnerships: Cornwall and Northumberland Fund)** *Please answer Yes or No*

**Q3 – Will this application result in trees planted by 2025?** *Please answer Yes or No*

**Q4 - Would you describe the planting you propose to complete as: i) mostly rural ii) mostly urban or iii) mixed?** *Please select the description which best fits your Application*

**Q5 – If you are located within a Community Forest have you attached a letter of support from the Community Forest Director?** *Please answer Yes or No*

**Section 2: Technical Questionnaire**

**Q6 – Are you applying as a sole authority or as a partnership?** (maximum 200 words)

* *If you select ‘partnership’ – please tell us about your partnership and its status e.g., partnership agreement in place.*

**Q7- Evidence of Need: In one page or less, please describe below why you need this additional resource?** Weighting= 15%

*Evaluation Criteria includes-*

* *Evidence of current resource for this work*
* *Evidence of a shortfall of resource capacity required to deliver your plans*
* *Detail of innovation within recruitment plans around the current shortages of specialist forestry staff*
* *Description of any barriers to planting you are addressing*

**Q8- Commitment to planting by 2025: As a result of increased capacity, how many trees (or hectares) do you estimate you will plant in the winter seasons 23/24 and 24/25? How did you reach these estimates (the basis of your assumptions)? (maximum of 300 words)** Weighting= 18%

*Evaluation Criteria includes-*

* Scale of planting
* *Legitimacy of estimates*

*Input basis of assumptions here…*

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Winter Season 23/24** | **Winter Season 24/25** |
| *Input figures…*  | *Input figures…* |
|  |  |

**Q9- Deliverability: How will increased capacity help accelerate tree and woodland planting in your area? (maximum one page)** Weighting= 22%

*Evaluation Criteria includes-*

* *The work new resource will complete in Years 22/23 and 23/24*
* *Maximising resource proposed*
* *Legacy plans for this resource beyond 2024*

**Q10 – Approximately what % of the above new planting will be accessible to the public?** Weighting= 5%*‘Public access’ refers to access by foot via public footpath or permissive access to all or part of the new woodland / tree planting*

**Q11– How many of your proposals of planting fall on land located within Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs) which are within the 25% most deprived according to the national Index of Multiple Deprivation?** Weighting= 0 LSOAs= 0% **|** 1-3 LSOAs = 5% **|** over 3 LSOAs= 10%)

**Section 3: Commercial Questionnaire**

To respond to this section, please refer to the Microsoft Excel spreadsheet entitled **‘WCAF Commercial Questionnaire Template’** to input your costing information as per the instructions contained within the document.

When submitting your completed spreadsheet to Bravo, please follow the naming convention **‘Applicant Name\_WCAF\_Commercial Questionnaire’**.

**End of Form**