

Fund to drive private sector investment in nature opens for second round

Organisations seeking investment for nature projects to tackle climate change, create and restore habitats, or improve water quality are being urged to apply for the second and final round of the [Natural Environment Investment Readiness Fund](#).

The fund of up to £10 million will provide grants of up to £100,000 to environmental groups, local authorities, businesses and other organisations to help them develop nature projects in England to a point where they can attract private investment.

Funding will be invested in a broad range of projects that will deliver environmental benefits while also demonstrating a wide range of innovative approaches to generating revenues from the wide range of benefits that nature provides.

Projects will be designed to provide a return on investment by capturing the value of the carbon, water quality, biodiversity and other benefits provided by natural assets such as woodlands, peatlands, catchments and landscapes.

This will create a pipeline of projects for the private sector to invest in, demonstrating the UK's leadership and action in scaling up finance for nature and climate during COP26. The opening of the application window comes after the Chancellor set out the UK's plans to [become the world's first net zero aligned financial centre](#), welcoming commitments from private companies covering \$130 trillion of financial assets that will create a huge pool of cash that could fund our net zero transition.

Environment Minister Lord Benyon said:

As nations come together at COP26 to make important commitments to protect and enhance our natural environment, it is vital that we drive greater levels of private sector investment, alongside continued public sector funding, if we are to successfully tackle the climate and biodiversity crises.

The fund has already provided support to 29 projects working to create new woodlands and wetlands and restore peatlands, with the second round of funding providing more opportunities for organisations to get support to attract private sector investment in their projects.

Emma Howard Boyd, Chair of the Environment Agency and interim Chair of the Green Finance Institute, said:

The climate and nature emergencies are entwined, protecting and enhancing the domestic natural environment will help protect investments from climate disruption and deliver steady long-term returns.

The Natural Environment Investment Readiness Fund is already showing how different revenue models stimulate investment. We need major investors to recreate these at pace and on a much larger scale. COP26 has focused attention on preparing for climate shocks using nature-based solutions. Alongside public sector investment, the private sector must be encouraged and supported to find the opportunity in protecting nature and managing climate change.

Among the 29 schemes benefitting from the first round of funding are projects to restore kelp forests, create new woodland, deliver natural flood risk management, and improve water quality. They include:

- Crystal Clear Clyst Bond, an East Devon District Council scheme seeking to convert farmland to woodland in an area experiencing a growth in development, via an Environmental Impact Bond;
- Swinton Estate in North Yorkshire, working to develop a new business model for multi-functional forestry to realise wider benefits from carbon sequestration, biodiversity credits, recreation, and water quality
- Lancashire Wildlife Trust's scheme to raise investment to restore peatland through the Greater Manchester Environment Fund by modelling revenues from the sale of carbon and biodiversity credits through woodland creation and increasing biodiversity; and
- Surrey Wildlife Trust's scheme to establish a natural capital investment company to model biodiversity net gain at scale in support of development growth in the southern England.

The Fund has been designed by Defra and the Environment Agency, working with HMT, Natural England and Access – Foundation for Social Investment.

Tony Juniper, Chair of Natural England, said:

It is essential that we find ways to attract more investment into nature recovery. This is why I'm so pleased that the Natural Environment Investment Readiness Fund has opened its doors to bids again. This is a vital area of innovation and there were some excellent bids in the first round, showing the potential to gain further momentum behind ecological recovery.

The development of investment-ready projects will be a vital part of how we deliver the ambitious Nature Recovery Network that is at the heart of Natural England and the government's plans. Interest in joining and growing these new markets is increasing all the time and I'm proud that Natural England is playing an important role through providing technical expertise.

The Green Finance Institute (GFI) has supported Defra and the Environment Agency throughout the Fund's first round and will continue to promote the knowledge gained across the finance sector, in partnership with Ecosystems Knowledge Network and the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation.

Dr Rhian-Mari Thomas OBE, Chief Executive, Green Finance Institute, said:

As highlighted in our recent report, England alone faces a £21 to £53 billion finance gap over the next decade in reaching key nature goals. The Fund plays an important role in filling this gap through its development of a potential pipeline to attract private investment into nature, and through the shared learning provided by the Fund's Community of Practice.

We look forward to seeing the innovative projects within this second round of funding.

The fund – which will be open for applications until 3 February – will help deliver on commitments in the government's [25 Year Environment Plan](#) and [Green Finance Strategy](#), as well as supporting the Prime Minister's [10 Point Plan for a Green Industrial Revolution](#) and the [Net Zero Strategy](#).

Further information

- The Environment Agency runs a [NEIRF SharePoint](#) website where additional support will be announced during the application window. Access can be provided by emailing NEIRF@environment-agency.gov.uk.

[New measures to protect pension savers from scam transfers](#)

The new regulations, which come into force on Tuesday 30 November, will mean suspicious transfers can be stopped from ending up in the hands of a fraudster, as pension trustees and scheme managers get new powers to intervene.

Minister for Pensions Guy Opperman said:

We are tackling the scourge of pension scams in practical terms to safeguard pensioners' hard-earned savings.

These measures will provide better protection for savers.

Fraudsters frequently offer “too good to be true” incentives such as free pension reviews, early access to pension cash, or other time-limited offers. Lured in by these bogus offers, targets are then tricked into transferring their savings into a scam scheme and defrauded out of their savings.

Where there are tell-tale signs of fraud or methods frequently used by scammers, trustees and scheme managers will be able to prevent a transfer request – giving it a “red flag”.

In other circumstances where fraud is suspected, an “amber flag” will pause a transfer until the scheme member can prove they have taken scam specific guidance from the Money and Pensions Service (MaPS).

The Government is working closely with regulators, the Pension Scams Industry Group (PSIG) and enforcement agencies to protect pensioners and raise awareness of the dangers presented by unscrupulous fraudsters.

Helen Morrissey, Senior Pensions and Retirement Analyst at Hargreaves Lansdown:

Scammers rob people of their hard-earned retirement savings and for too long schemes have been powerless to stop them. These measures are a welcome step forward in protecting scheme members by giving schemes the power to stop transfers or refer members for guidance if they have any suspicions.

Anthony Arter, Pensions Ombudsman, said:

Having witnessed the real damage that pension scams can inflict on an individual’s retirement I welcome the new transfer regulations which look to make transfers safer. I am optimistic that over time statutory clarity regarding the level of due diligence expected of trustees and additional information and guidance to be given where appropriate to those planning to transfer, will help combat pension scams, and also reduce the number of transfer complaints to The Pensions Ombudsman.

Complaints received after the regulations come into effect, will be investigated within the framework of those regulations (and industry guidance) on a case by case basis, having regard to the facts and evidence in each case.

The government has committed to reviewing the new regulations within 18 months to ensure they remain as effective as possible in targeting the evolving methods used by scammers.

In May 2021 the DWP launched the consultation “Pension Scams: Empowering Trustees and Protecting Members”. The [consultation response](#) can be found on GOV UK

Media enquiries for this press release – 0115 965 8781

Follow DWP on:

[UKEF secures budget increase to help UK exporters Build Back Better](#)

Press release

Increase signals continued expansion of UKEF's role in government after record levels of support for UK exporters in 2020-21.



The Chancellor of the Exchequer has announced that UKEF will receive a 20% increase to its budget in the Government's latest Spending Review. The increase will be funded by the premium income UKEF generates for the taxpayer.

This will enable UKEF to boost its support to UK exporters trading internationally and continue delivering for all regions and nations of the UK. It will be used to:

- Continue to deliver a multi-year growth programme already underway so that UKEF can continue to offer its expanded products and services to reach more customers
- Enable UKEF to implement its Net Zero commitment and increase support for green projects, outlined in its ambitious [Climate Change Strategy](#).
- Expand its network of International Export Finance Executives across priority overseas markets
- Strengthen risk management, underwriting and cyber security capacity as the scale and complexity of its portfolio increases

Louis Taylor, CEO of UK Export Finance said:

UKEF has been central to the government's response to the pandemic

and this increase will allow us to continue to support UK exporters as they bounce back from the pandemic and take advantage of new trading opportunities for British businesses across the world.

UKEF's role expanded during the pandemic to ensure liquidity continued to reach major exporters impacted by lockdown and trading restrictions. In 2020-21, the department provided the highest level of support for UK businesses in 30 years. £12.3 billion went to 549 UK businesses, which is estimated to have supported up to 107,000 UK jobs.

Looking ahead, this financial settlement will ensure UKEF can play its role in supporting the economic recovery, and helping businesses realise the opportunities created through the UK's new free trade agreements.

About UK Export Finance

[UK Export Finance](#) is the UK's export credit agency and a government department, working alongside the Department for International Trade as an integral part of its strategy and operations.

Established in 1919, it exists to ensure that no viable UK export should fail for a lack of finance from the private market. It provides finance and insurance to help exporters win, fulfil and get paid for export contracts.

Contact

Published 8 November 2021

[DVLA seeks views on widening pool of healthcare professionals completing medical questionnaires](#)

Press release

DVLA has on 8 November launched a consultation on widening the pool of healthcare professionals that can complete DVLA medical questionnaires.



By law all drivers must meet the medical standards for fitness to drive and each year DVLA makes 500,000 medical licensing decisions. To help make these decisions, DVLA often requires questionnaires to be completed by a driver's doctor or consultant.

The consultation launching today is seeking views on potentially changing the law – and amending the Road Traffic Act 1988 to enable healthcare professionals other than registered medical practitioners (doctors who are registered with the General Medical Council) to complete DVLA medical questionnaires.

This forms part of an approach by DVLA to improve the medical licensing processes and speed up the process by reducing the burden that currently rests with doctors in providing the information that is necessary to allow the DVLA make evidence-based driver licencing decisions.

In many cases other healthcare professionals, such as nurse practitioners, would be more involved in patient treatment and therefore equally placed to complete the questionnaire.

The consultation will run until 6 December and is inviting feedback particularly from registered healthcare professionals, medical practitioners representative bodies within the health sector. [It is available to view on GOV.UK](#) and will take around 25 minutes to complete.

DVLA Chief Executive Julie Lennard said:

Year on year we are seeing an increase in medical licensing applications for drivers and we are continuously looking for ways to improve the process for customers and the medical profession.

This proposal would allow a wider pool of healthcare professionals to complete a driver's medical questionnaire, reducing the burden on GPs and consultants. We are particularly keen to seek views from registered healthcare professionals, medical practitioners and representative bodies within the health sector on making this change.

Roads Minister Baroness Vere said:

These plans are designed to make the medical licensing processes more efficient to both reduce waiting times and ease the burden on doctors and consultants.

I encourage medical and healthcare professionals to provide their views to this consultation so we can ensure we can safely improve the system in a way that suits everyone.

Published 8 November 2021

Newhaven flood barrier success

Environment Agency staff last night (7 November 2021) temporarily installed a flood barrier, the first of its type in the UK, across the railway at Newhaven, East Sussex.

The successful exercise was done in close cooperation with Network Rail to ensure that if flooding struck, the Environment Agency's plans for protecting the community and the safety of all those involved could be achieved.

The exercise was arranged to coincide with planned engineering works on the railway to avoid disruption to the local community.

The Environment Agency's work on the railway forms part of the £17.5 million Newhaven flood alleviation scheme, which was opened by Maria Caulfield MP last month. It is just one of many 'winter ready' schemes and projects ensuring communities are prepared for the stormy conditions and increased flood risk that can be experienced during the winter months.

Two newly built large earth embankments sit either side of the railway north of the town adjacent to Parsons level crossing. An impermeable barrier sits underneath the tracks in the ballast and any time forecasts show that flooding is expected, the line will be closed and the Environment Agency will deploy the temporary flood barrier across the tracks on the modified crossing.

Nick Gray, Solent and South Downs Flood and Coastal Risk Manager said:

The need to extend defences across a live railway line was a notable challenge for the scheme. A unique solution was needed so we built a base and new walls to tie into the flood embankments and installed drainage as well as diverting signalling, power and telecoms cables.

By temporarily joining these two embankments we can form a complete

flood defence in the event of a major flood.

Geodesign Barriers, the barrier provider, was on site to support the Environment Agency alongside the Newhaven flood alleviation scheme contractor JacksonHyder, with Network Rail overseeing rail health and safety.

The work on the railway has been complex involving close collaboration between numerous organisations, both in the private and public sectors, to design and build this unique solution.

Logan Subramaniam, Head of Asset Protection for Network Rail said:

Network Rail's Kent and Sussex Asset Protection team have worked very closely with the Environment Agency and it has given us great satisfaction at having been part of this successful project. We are working hard to understand the impacts that climate change will have on the performance of our assets and services, along with the safety of our workforce and passengers.

[There is further information on the Newhaven scheme](#). Completed in 2021, the scheme better protects over 800 properties and vital infrastructure from flooding from the tidal River Ouse.

A film about the scheme is available to view [Newhaven flood alleviation scheme – YouTube](#).

- The barriers are demountable flood defences that can be quickly mobilised and demobilised with minimal plant and consist of collapsible galvanised steel supports, which are easily opened and locked into a 45-degree position.
- The temporary barriers and supporting equipment will be stored locally. Environment Agency staff will deliver the equipment to site and deploy it when required.
- The recently completed Newhaven flood alleviation scheme, opened by Maria Caulfield MP on 15 October 2021, was part of the £2.6 billion being spent over 2015-21 across the country, delivering more than 1,500 projects to better protect 300,000 homes. This is on top of £1 billion by 2020 to maintain flood defences.
- We have doubled this investment to a record £5.2 billion for the current capital programme, which began earlier this year and will see around 2,000 new flood and coastal defences created to better protect 336,000 properties across England.

- The majority of funding for the Newhaven flood alleviation scheme has come from the government in the form of Flood and Coastal Risk Management Grant in Aid (GIA).
- The 'Coast to Capital' and 'South East' Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs), each contributed £1.5 million, working in partnership with us to help deliver their wider commitment to the regeneration of Newhaven.
- You can [check whether you are at risk of flooding or to register for free flood alerts and warnings](#).