



Habitat Connectivity Grant Fund

Application Guidance

1. Project Background

Fragmentation of habitats and the landscape, through factors such as increased development and changing land use, has resulted in small patches of habitat that are less suitable for the long-term viability of species populations, especially in a changing climate. Chalk grassland is now a rare and fragmented habitat of international importance. The UK holds 50% of the world's chalk grassland and in Kent we have around 1900 hectares (5%), a fraction of what we used to have. The old Chalk New Downs Project aims to improve the coherence of the landscape, and connectivity of chalk grassland and associated habitats, by increasing their size, improving the condition, restoring sites in locations where they historically existed and by making links between existing habitat patches. This will be achieved through creation of habitat corridors, buffers and stepping stones.

To secure the sustainability of the project, OCND intends to re-connect the local community with their natural heritage and instil a sense of ownership of their surroundings through a series of awareness, education and habitat management activities.

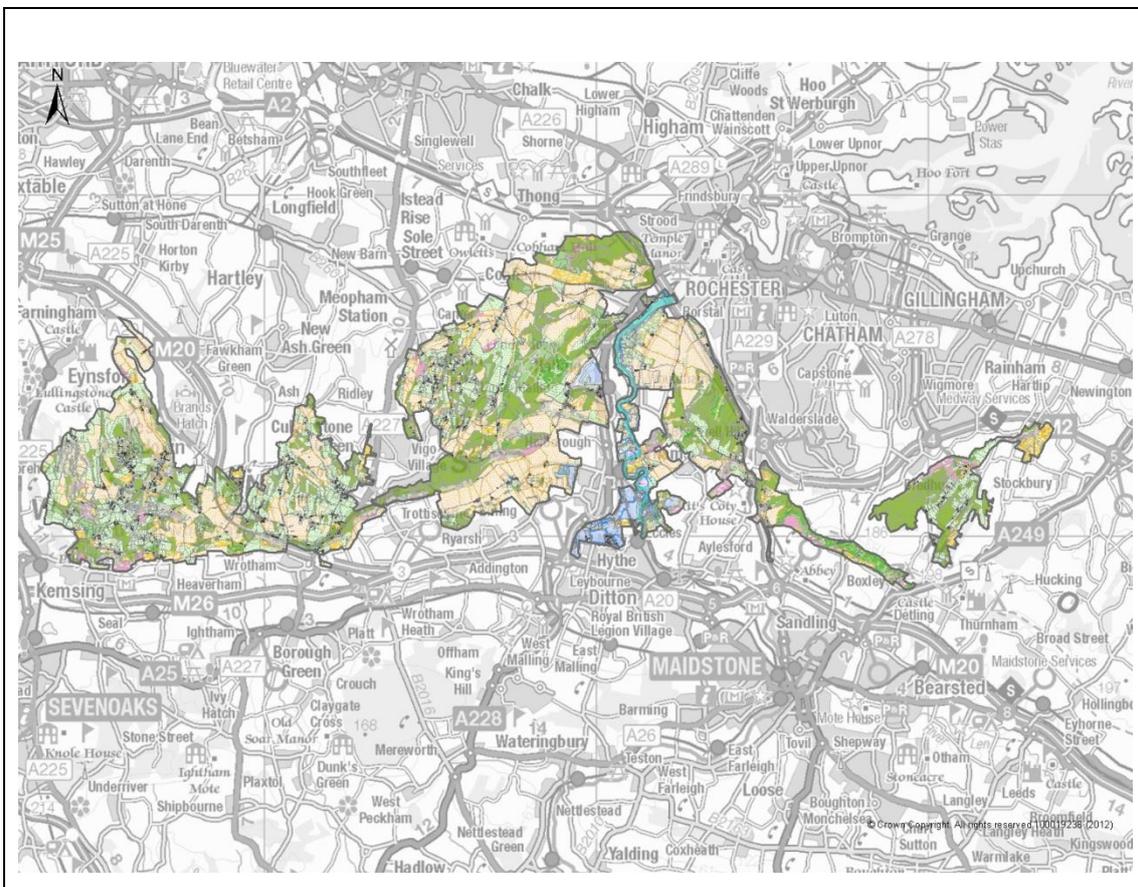
Kent County Council has obtained funding from the Heritage Lottery to deliver this ambitious four year project.

1.2- Project Objectives

The project has the following objectives:

- To re-connect and restore chalk grassland and allied downland habitats by addressing management along the scarp between Kemsing Down and Detling Hill.
- To encourage appropriate use of chalk downland for better enjoyment, by changing perceptions and addressing negative behaviours such as environmental crime.
- To reconnect people with the historic and current landscape by exploring people's values and perceptions of the chalk downland heritage.
- To enable and support organisations involved in spatial planning to make better informed decisions that will encourage and maintain habitat connectivity

2. About the project area



The project area stretches from Kemsing Down to Detling Hill covering almost 10,000 hectares of intensively farmed landscape (2,429ha)¹, including sparse remnant hedges leading up to the steep chalk scarps and wooded ridges. These ridges include large areas of broad leaved woodland (2,361ha) and small patches of important UK Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) Beech & Yew Woodlands (223ha). Due to the intensively farmed landscape there are also large areas of improved grassland (2,281), however these areas present a good

¹ 2012 Kent Habitat Survey and Landcover. Source for all habitat extent data in this document.

opportunity for habitat connectivity with significant amount of arable weed margins to be restored and expanded.

In geological terms the area is mainly Upper Chalk capped with clay, with flints or deposits of Head Gravel. Given the chalk characteristic of the soil, the area contains very small fragmented patches of the most iconic of Kent's habitats; the Kent Habitat Survey shows that in 2012 there was a total of 273ha of chalk grassland, of which only 17.3ha is categorised as unimproved species rich supporting a diversity of rare plants including many orchid species and rich invertebrate communities. A considerable area (122ha) of this habitat is now rapidly declining in quality. This estimation is likely to have changed during the last 4 years and it is the role of this project to obtain a better estimation during the 4 years delivery phase.

The project area also contains 117ha of lowland meadows, an important UKBAP habitat which has a rich variety of species traditionally managed as hay meadows, a management practice fast in decline.

2.1 The Habitat Connectivity Model

During the development phase, a model of a functional habitat network through the project area was created by analysing historic maps ranging back to the first edition OS maps, interpreting aerial photography from the 1940s to 2015, evaluating the distribution of indicator species and the results of the 2012 Habitat Change Analysis. This work gave us a map that identifies the areas or sites that need to be restored, expanded or buffered in order to obtain a coherent ecological network.

From this first analysis a number of landowners and managers were approached and Management and Maintenance Plans drafted for their sites, identifying the improvement work required. In order to reflect changes on the ground throughout the project life, at least 2 additional analyses will be conducted to identify further sites for work.

These maps are available from the project team.

3- Funding scope

This grant scheme will support capital work proposals that:

3.1 Contribute to securing habitat connectivity across the project area, through the enhancement and management of chalk downland habitats and in particular chalk grassland. This can be achieved through restoration, expansion and improvement of those habitats.

The grant could fund **habitat projects** that include any of the following:

- Fencing to secure long-term grazing management of chalk grassland
- Installation of a water supply to secure long-term grazing management of chalk grassland
- Pond creation and management
- Hedge planting, or restoration to improve habitat connectivity.
- Top soil inversion, top soil removal for creation of wildflower meadows
- Creation of scrapes
- Scrub clearance management on chalk grassland

3.2 Improving the management and condition of Kent Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) priority habitats. The Kent Landscape Information Service (KLIS) provides a map of the Kent BAP priority habitats. KLIS can be found here:

<http://webapps.kent.gov.uk/KCC.KLIS.Web.Sites.Public/ViewMap.aspx>

3.3 Priority will be given to sites identified during the development phase as historic sites and key components of the ecological network. Areas identified in subsequent habitat connectivity analysis will also be prioritised.

A map showing these sites is available from the project team or via the project website, www.oldchalknewdonws.org.uk

3.4 Sites adjacent to the ecological network or of high biodiversity opportunity will also be considered. Maps of Habitat Opportunity Areas are available from KLIS.

3.5 The grant can be used to improve access to the project area along public rights of ways ensuring that those access routes are also managed in a way that benefit biodiversity and/or allow species movement. The grant could fund **access projects** that include any of the following:

- Planting or restoring hedgerows along a public right of way
- Installing or upgrading gates to improve access to a site
- Improving the surface of a public right of way

Maps of Public Rights of Way are available through KLIS.

3.6 Sites either statutory designated (e.g. Site of Special Scientific Interest), and non-designated sites such as Local Nature Reserves, Local Wildlife Site (LWS) and Roadside Nature Reserve will also be prioritised.

4. Funding Terms

These grants are being offered under the following terms:

4.1 The OCND project will fund 90% of the proposal costs, up to an amount of £10,000.

4.2 It is expected that the applicant contributes 10% towards the project proposal either in cash or in-kind.

4.3 When appropriate, capital work must be carried out following the design guidance set by the Kent Downs AONB. A copy of the guide is available from here:

<http://www.kentdowns.org.uk/guidance-management-and-advice/landscape-design-handbook>

4.4 When erecting stock fencing the contract specification must follow the guidance included in Appendix 1.

4.5 When creating or gapping up hedgerows the applicant must refer to the Kent Downs AONB guide on managing hedgerows to guarantee the natural character of the area.

4.6 Funding from this grant may impact upon State Aid rules if it is felt to provide an unfair competitive advantage to an applicant. The applicant must demonstrate that is not the case with their proposal. More information about state aid can be obtained from here:

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/state-aid>

4.7 All applicants must agree to report progress of their projects and to projects being evaluated to ensure the outcomes match those agreed by the OCND project team.

4.8 Successful grants recipients will be required to work alongside an OCND team member or contracted land manager advisor to ensure work is scoped, tendered, delivered and sustained appropriately.

4.9 All applicants must agree to work at their site being used in OCND publicity.

4.10 We will accept applications from single organisations and partnerships - for example, a partnership between a conservation organisation and a community group.

4.11 Prior to confirmation of the grant funding, we will ensure that all terms and conditions can be met. If not, and if appropriate, a written amendment to the standard terms and conditions will be appended.

5. What we will and will not fund

5.1 The grant will only support capital works undertaken with landowner's permission and the support of a member of the OCND team or a designated land management advisor (see point 6 below).

5.2 The grant will not fund any work unrelated to the target sites, feasibility studies, the acquisition of grazing animals, land or buildings or flood control.

5.3 Capital work already funded through Countryside Stewardship Agreements or any other trust or foundations.

5.4 We will not fund work for personal gain, it is expected that the projects funded will have a public good through their provision of benefits for wildlife.

6. Role of project staff and land management advisors

As part of the terms of receiving this grant, recipients are required to work alongside an OCND member of staff or an appointed land management advisor. Their roles are:

6.1 To ensure the project delivers the benefits for habitat connectivity and improved access under the terms of the grant.

6.2 Visit the holding prior to a decision being made to award funding by the grant panel (or OCND project steering group), assist the landowner in ensuring the benefits of their proposal to the overall project aims and report back to the grant panel ahead of a decision.

6.3 Make a minimum of three further visits to each landowner, at project inception/start of capital works, mid-point in the project and project completion.

6.4 The OCND project reserves the right to require work to stop at any point if it is felt to be detrimental to habitats and species, contravenes any statutory regulations or requirements or is felt to be outside the terms under which the grant was awarded.

7. The Grant Evaluation Panel

Representatives from the following organisations shall make up the Grant Evaluation Panel:

- Kent Wildlife Trust
- Kent & Medway Biological Records Centre
- Kent County Council
- Tonbridge & Malling and Gravesham Borough Councils
- Kent Downs AONB
- Medway Valley Countryside Partnership
- Natural England
- OCND Project Manager

8. How to Apply

If you are interested in applying, then please contact the OCND team for an application form.

Before completing your application please ensure that you have spoken to a member of the team.

An annual set amount of funding will be available per year for four years. This amount will be announced prior to the application start date in March each year. We accept applications at any time of the year but generally decisions will be made at the Project Steering Group meetings taking place three times a year - ask the OCND team for meeting dates.

The following must be provided with your application:

- Completed application form
- Annotated Map
- Photos of the site
- A breakdown of project cost with delivery times (in application form)
- Relevant permits to conduct the work
- Any other supporting information such as management advice, ecological reports, species records, etc

9. Successful Applications

9.1. Management and Maintenance

We wish to ensure that grants allocated for the protection of habitat and wildlife are appropriately spent and subsequent habitat improvements protected. Therefore, and following Heritage Lottery Fund criteria, where capital works are completed the landowner or tenant will be expected to agree to maintain any capital assets in a reasonable condition for a minimum period of ten years. If the approved purpose of the grant is habitat improvement, creation or expansion, subsequent management of the site should be conducted in a way that is not detrimental to our investment and carried out following best management practice for that habitat and associated biodiversity.

9.2 Buying goods and services

If you receive a grant you will be expected to adhere to the following procurement thresholds:

Up to £7,999	Provide one written quote
£8,000 - £10,000	Provide at least three written quotes

We encourage value for money and if you do not accept the lowest quote you will need to tell us why.

9.3 Monitoring & Evaluation

It is important that the outcomes of any grant awarded are monitored and reported on. We would expect any grant recipient to allow an OCND team member access to their land to evaluate the success of any work undertaken through the grant at least once per year up to the end of the agreed maintenance period.

In your application you will be asked to identify project aims and outputs. Monitoring of your project will be based on these aims and outcomes, so it is very important that they are realistic and achievable. Failure to achieve them may result in grant monies being withheld.

You must send us a completion report at the end of your project by a set date agreed with us and using a Report and Claim form provided by us. It is within this report that you will tell us whether or not the project has been successful and all the outputs achieved.

9.4 Payment of Grant

Payment will be made upon completion of the work to a satisfactory standard mutually agreed by the recipient and the OCND project team and submission of the completion report.

Only under exceptional circumstances, and at our discretion, will we pay 60% of the grant at the beginning of the project (this recognises the capital cost of materials etc. which may be required to deliver the project). The remaining 40% will be paid on completion of the work. The OCND Project retains the right to vary the above payments schedules at the discretion of the grant evaluation panel.

9.5 Insurance

You must ensure that all necessary insurance cover is in place. We are not responsible for liabilities incurred by the applicant and/or grant recipient.

9.6 Publicity and acknowledgement

The OCND project reserves the right to publicise projects receiving grants in any future promotions. You must ensure that we and the Heritage Lottery Fund are acknowledged in any publicity. The OCND team can provide the relevant logos in a suitable format.

APPENDIX 1

Stock Fencing Specifications

Requirements

- Remove all old fencing material before putting up the new fencing
- Use seasoned sweet chestnut whenever possible or softwood timber that is fully peeled, coated with wood preservative and pressure treated
- Put up a steel wire mesh fence at least 1.05m high
- Use additional strands of galvanised steel wire (plain or barbed) if you need extra height
- Use straining posts that have a top diameter of at least 125mm, or are 100 by 100mm in cross-section when sawn
- Make sure the straining posts are 1.85m long if set in concrete and 2.15m long otherwise
- Place the straining posts no more than 150m apart if using mild steel line wire, or 300m apart for high tensile wire
- Use a straining post at every change of direction (horizontal or vertical) and at each end of the fence
- Use struts that have a top diameter of at least 80mm, or are 75mm by 75mm when sawn
- Make sure the struts are 1.6m if set in concrete and 1.9m long otherwise
- Notch struts into the straining post at an angle of no more than 45 degrees
- Use intermediate posts that have a top diameter of at least 65mm, or are 75mm by 75mm when sawn
- Make sure the intermediate posts are 1.7m long and space them no further than 3.5m apart
- Make sure that all the materials you use meet the relevant British Standards - examine copies of the most up-to-date standards for guidance

Do not:

- Attach the fence to trees or hedgerows
- Block or restrict access to open access land

Keeping records

You will need to keep the following records and supply them when you make a grant claim:

- Any consents or permissions connected with the work
- Receipted invoices, or bank statements where a receipted invoice is unavailable
- Photographs of the before and completed work

Specification adapted from
Countryside Stewardship guidelines Oct 2017

APPENDIX 2

Hedge Planting Specification

- Carry out work between 1 November and 31 March
- Prepare the ground along a 1.5m wide strip to provide good soil conditions and as little competition from other vegetation as possible
- Apply any herbicide to the 1.5m strip in the August or September prior to planting only
- Use 2-year-old transplants
- Plants must be at least 450mm to 600mm high
- Use at least 5 native species of local provenance (if available) typical of the Kent Downs, with no one species making up more than 70% of the total
- Plant in a staggered double row 40cm apart with a minimum of 6 plants per metre
- Keep hedge clear of weeds until it is established
- Protect plants with individual guards or tree shelters and remove once the plants are established
- Replace all failures in the following planting season
- Trim the newly planted hedge for the first 2 years to encourage bushy growth, allowing the hedge to become taller and wider at each cut
- Prevent livestock and grazing animals from damaging the hedge by setting fencing at least 1.2m from the centre of the hedge, or, if there is a bank, as close to the base of the bank as possible
- Refer to Kent Downs AONB guidance suitable species for you geology
<http://www.kentdowns.org.uk/uploads/documents/HEDGEROWS.pdf>

Specification adapted from

Countryside Stewardship guidelines Oct 2017

APPENDIX 3

Relevant Consents

Prior to the commencement of the works the grant applicant must obtain any relevant consents and submit these with the grant application. This may include:

- Consent from NE if the site is designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)
- Consent from Historic England if the site includes a Scheduled Monument
- A felling licence from the Forestry Commission
- Tree Preservation Order (TPO) consent
- Consent from Natural England if your proposal is likely to impact on any protected species.

Cross Compliance

It is the responsibility of the grant applicant to check that the proposed project meets all cross-compliance regulations and if needed obtain written permission from the Rural Payment Agency if required.

Burning & Chipping arisings from scrub clearance or fence re-instatement

- Ideally arising should be chipped on site and any saleable wood removed from the site or stacked as habitat piles in a suitable location if it is uneconomic to remove.
- Fire sites should be kept to a minimum and avoid areas of known sensitive species, such as orchids.
- Any work involving large machinery, such as diggers or tractors must be carried out to minimise the impact on the ground. It may be necessary to temporarily stop work during poor weather if ground conditions become too wet.
- Any damage from vehicle movements must be re-instated
- Any fire sites should be located to minimise damage to chalk grassland and other protected species

- Consider burning on metal sheeting to protect the ground and allow the removal of ash to prevent nutrient enrichment.
- Fires should always be attended, turned in and dampened down before leaving site.
- Small volumes of brash can be burnt on discrete fire sites; on wet ground for example these can be laid on corrugated metal sheets to aid removal of ash and prevent it mixing with soil.

Source: The Scrub Management Handbook: Guidance on the management of scrub on nature conservation sites (IN124) published by Natural England.

Managing scrub & tree cutting

Any scrub management and tree cutting must be done outside of bird nesting season (1 March and 31 August). Any tree cutting or scrub management must aim to avoid impact to nesting birds and infringement of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and breaching the European Habitats Directive 1992/Nesting Birds Directive.

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/wild-birds-protection-surveys-and-licences>