Farming with Nature Landscape Projects

Applicant Guidance

November 2026

1. Overview

The Landscape Projects scheme is a strand of the Farming with Nature package designed to support farmers and stakeholders working collaboratively to undertake landscape-scale, long term projects aimed at improving biodiversity recovery and habitat connectivity at a landscape regional level that cannot be delivered on a single farm.

Biodiversity is the measure of species variety - the more species in a habitat the greater the biodiversity. A habitat provides the basic needs for species such as food, shelter and places to reproduce.

Habitat connectivity is the creation of wildlife corridors or habitat stepping stones, and the creation, expansion or buffering of priority habitats, with the intention of improving connectivity between priority habitats, particularly those associated with designated sites, across the landscape.

The scheme seeks to provide funding to applicants to form landscape-scale groups that will facilitate collaboration on designing, developing and implementing bespoke landscape actions. This initiative aligns with Northern Ireland's environmental and agricultural frameworks and serves as an integral component of the Farming with Nature Scheme.

It is proposed that the scheme will provide funding for:

1. The development of the proposed project including administration, habitat assessment and mapping, facilitation, monitoring & evaluation and the delivery of training to farmers.
2. A capital grant to support the co-design, delivery and management of bespoke landscape actions tailored to improve biodiversity and habitat connectivity.
3. A participation payment to farmers for attendance at training and other events with an additional payment for taking part in the monitoring of the effects of the bespoke actions on their land.

Landscape Projects will be selected based on a Competitive Call, administered by DAERA. Applicants will submit a project proposal that identifies the location, need, objectives, and proposed landscape actions to improve biodiversity and habitat connectivity on a landscape scale.

Landscape Project Coordinators will be responsible for project objectives, managing group membership, establishing a local steering group, advising and training participants, creating a baseline habitat map, developing a project plan of landscape actions, implementing the plan, and publishing data.

Project Coordinators will also be fully responsible for ensuring that all landscape actions set out in the approved project plan are undertaken by the relevant contractors and/or farmers to the required specification and standard. They must ensure that all supporting documentation, including itemised invoices, tender documentation, and any other evidence required to verify expenditure and delivery, is accurate, complete, and submitted to DAERA officials in a timely manner to facilitate the release of project funding.

In developing and implementing bespoke landscape actions, Project Coordinators must ensure that proposed payment rates are proportionate, reasonable, and represent value for money. Where appropriate, payment rates should be benchmarked against comparable actions and payment levels available through other relevant agri-environment, conservation, or land management schemes. Project Coordinators must be able to demonstrate the basis on which costs have been calculated and provide evidence that expenditure is necessary, justified, and delivers value for public funds.

Where inspections, audits, or other verification processes identify that claimed works have not been completed, have not been completed to the required standard, or are not adequately supported by the necessary evidence, DAERA reserves the right to withhold, reduce, recover, or restrict funding. In such circumstances, DAERA may also terminate the project agreement where it considers there has been a material breach of the project requirements or funding conditions.

DAERA will establish a Landscape Projects Steering Group who will be responsible for oversight of projects, paying grants on a quarterly basis, monitoring and evaluating outcomes and delivering data to DAERA for Business Intelligence.

Landscape Projects aims to encourage innovation, with bespoke measures tailored to the specific environmental needs, rather than being limited to a set list of prescribed measures which may not be as effective.

It is envisaged that Landscape Projects will encourage the development of a long-term landscape scale approach to delivery of conservation goals in NI.

2. Aims and examples of projects

Proposals could include:

- the coordination of landscape scale habitat creation and restoration to facilitate the formation of wildlife corridors.
- the restoration and enhancement of habitats at a landscape scale, such as wetlands where managing water levels and flow may not be possible within a single farm.
- the management or creation of habitats to benefit priority species, particularly those at most risk.

Land already included in an existing scheme may form part of a collaborative action. However, DAERA will not fund the same activity twice, and it is the responsibility of the Project Coordinator to ensure that no issues of double funding arise. Project Coordinators must ensure that proposed activities complement and enhance, rather than duplicate, works already being funded through other schemes.

We will provide advice and guidance, and support innovation and knowledge transfer as part of this collaborative action.

Landscape Projects particularly welcomes proposals that target the most significant environmental challenges or opportunities within the locality. This may be achieved through the creation, restoration or continued positive management of protected sites and wildlife-rich habitats, alongside actions that strengthen priority habitats, ecological networks and areas supporting threatened species.

Protected sites include:

- special area of conservation (SACs)
- special protection areas (SPAs)
- RAMSAR sites
- Areas of special scientific interest (ASSIs)

Wildlife-rich habitats could include:

- Acid, neutral or calcareous grassland
- coastal saltmarsh or sand dunes
- ponds, bogs or fens
- moorlands
- woodlands
- rivers or streams
- scrub or hedgerows

All projects should provide how they address the primary benefits of improved biodiversity and habitat connectivity, both structural connectivity (the physical arrangement and linking of habitats) and functional connectivity (how species are able to move through and use the landscape).

You should also explain how your project will manage, restore or create habitats in ways that provide wider secondary environmental benefits. These may include improvements to:

- Air, soil and water quality
- Hydrological and ecological function
- Landscape and heritage
- Climate mitigation and resilience
- Risk reduction, for example from flooding, drought, wildfire, erosion or invasive species

3. Duration of the scheme

Landscape Projects is a 5-year scheme, divided into four phases:

1. Application, the period when you can apply to join the scheme. **The online portal will be open for applications from 9 November 2026 and you must submit you application by 5.00 pm on 4 December 2026.**
2. Evaluation, where DAERA will assess application forms and make an offer of funding up to, 10 of the highest-scoring projects which meet the required criteria thresholds. This will take approximately 12 weeks.
3. Development, where DAERA may carry out further checks. If the checks are successful, you will be offered a project development grant which will be awarded from the beginning of April 2027. The development phase will last a maximum of two years.
4. Delivery, the bespoke project actions are implemented and managed.

Project development involves preparing for project delivery. This phase may require a maximum of two years to complete.

Project delivery refers to the period during which the project will be carried out if the project development phase has been completed and a delivery plan approved. The terms and duration of the delivery agreement will be determined during the project development phase.

4. Who can apply

Applications may be submitted by constituted groups/organisations, including farmer led groups (a single legal entity) or public bodies, which will deliver measurable key environmental outcomes. Non-government organisations, agents or other third parties, can apply or run a Landscape Project on behalf of participants. All applications must be from a single legal entity. Funding is provided on a costs incurred basis, project coordinators and farm businesses should not profit from participation in the scheme.

The person who applies (the Lead Applicant) does not need to be a participant within the proposed project. They must have experience of project management within an agricultural and/or environmental setting and if they do not have this expertise, how will you get it to ensure the needed project governance. The Lead Applicant must also be confident in their ability to meet all requirements of the scheme, as full responsibility for the delivery and management of the project, the achievement of agreed outcomes, and compliance with scheme requirements will rest with them.

The Lead Applicant will be responsible for maintaining appropriate governance arrangements throughout the lifetime of the project, including the establishment and operation of any required steering groups, decision-making processes, financial controls, record-keeping procedures, and reporting requirements. They must ensure that the project is managed effectively, transparently, and in accordance with all terms and conditions of funding. Failure to maintain the required governance structures or to deliver agreed project outcomes may result in funding being withheld, reduced, recovered, or the project agreement being terminated by DAERA.

You must upload a copy of your organisation's constitution to the online portal.

Farm businesses participating in the project must either have management control of the land or obtain consent from those with such control for the period covered by the project development and delivery agreements. As such, land held in conacre agreement will not normally be eligible unless specific consent is obtained.

All participating farm businesses must have either a Category 1 or Category 2 DAERA Business ID.

5. Eligible land

Your project must be:

- on land mapped on DAERA's Land Parcel Identification System
- on land in Northern Ireland
- the area of land that will be managed within the project must be able to deliver both primary priorities of improving biodiversity and habitat connectivity.
- a broadly connected area of at least 500 hectares (ha), or 250 ha for projects including designated sites. This area is the total LPIS field area of the DAERA farm businesses registered with the project.
- Smaller projects may be considered if you can show that your proposal fits a smaller clear environmental boundary. Examples of this would include clusters of woods, meadows, marshes and/or sub-catchments.
- The area of land is spread over a minimum of five separate land holdings all managed by different people. For common land to be included, the applicant must secure consent from all landowners with an interest within the clearly defined project area for the duration of the project.

In most cases holdings should be adjoining or mostly adjoining. They may be dispersed if applicants demonstrate that cooperation across separate holdings is necessary to achieve scheme priorities.

Connectivity is important for achieving key environmental objectives. However, it is recognized that habitats and land tenure in Northern Ireland can often be fragmented. Project areas may have gaps, but applicants must explain how these will not affect environmental outcomes. This will be evaluated under the primary environmental objective's criterion.

Projects may:

- involve whole holdings or parts of them
- include land that is in other government schemes

If your project includes or impacts a protected site, we advise that you discuss your proposals with DAERA and seek their guidance on your application. It will be the lead applicant's responsibility to obtain all necessary consents and permissions to carry out works relating to the project.

You may apply for Landscape Projects on land that is in an existing government or non-government scheme although DAERA will not pay for the same activity twice and it is the responsibility of the Project Coordinator to ensure that no issues of double funding arise. Double funding occurs where payment is received for actions or outcomes that have already been funded or are required under statutory duties, regulatory requirements, licence agreements, or other agri-environment schemes.

Examples of existing schemes include:

- Environmental Farming Scheme
- Other Farming with Nature Schemes
- Environment Fund Schemes: -
- Peatland Challenge Fund
- Nature Recovery Challenge Fund
- Peace Plus Schemes: -
- Peace Plus
- Peace Plus Nature
- Sustainable Catchment Partnership
- Rivers Agency Funded Schemes
- Others as this list is not exhaustive

6. When and how to apply

Applications for Landscape Projects are open on the **9 November 2026**.

7. How to apply

You can apply for Farming with Nature Landscape Projects until **5.00 pm on 4 December 2026.**

Applications can only be made through the online portal (https://www2.daera-ni.gov.uk/fwnlandscapeprojects)

To apply you'll need to complete the:

- online project proposal and costs template
- land manager support form for each farm business

You will also need to create and upload a suitable map or maps of the project area. This needs to clearly show the defined project area at an appropriate scale to accurately identify and interrupt your project location and size, the different land management holdings and the current land use and any noteworthy existing habitats or features. You will have need to demonstrate an indicative plan of the proposed bespoke actions across the project area with explanatory text on how you will refine the plan during the development phase. For example, to determine the best location for specific activities.

Project coordinators must submit these documents using the online portal and must have a Government Gateway (GG) or NIDirect account (NIDA) logon to do so.

If you do not already have a Government Gateway or NIDirect account, a link has been provided on the portal landing page to create one before submitting your application.

You are required to read and agree to the scheme terms and conditions before submitting your completed application. (see Annex 3)

The DAERA Assessment Panel will evaluate your application against the following scoring criteria:

- project readiness
- primary environmental objectives
- secondary environmental objectives
- value for money

The scoring criteria guidance explains how applications will be scored. A copy of the scoring criteria is available at [Farming with Nature Landscape Projects Scoring Criteria | Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs].

Project proposals will be scored against a minimum standard, should no proposals meet the required standard, funding will not be awarded to any project.

8. How to show evidence of support from Farm Businesses

You will require confirmation that at least five land managers in the project area have been engaged before you apply and that they support your project moving forward into project development.

A land manager is any person or organisation that owns or manages land in the project area, including tenants and those with rights of common.

The Project Coordinator will be required to complete an online land manager support form for each farm business. This form is to be printed off and the relevant signatures obtained.

A signed copy of each land manager support form can then be uploaded to the online application portal. The application cannot be submitted unless there is a minimum of five land manager support forms uploaded.

9. After you have applied

The DAERA Assessment Panel will evaluate your application against the following scoring criteria:

- project readiness
- primary environmental objectives
- secondary environmental objectives
- value for money

We'll offer up to 10 of the highest-scoring projects above the minimum standard, a place on the scheme. You should get a decision within 12 weeks of the application deadline.

A Letter of Offer will be issued to successful applicants. You must sign and return this document to the Department before your project can be accepted for the project development phase.

The 6 highest scoring unsuccessful projects that meet the minimum standard will go onto a reserve list. The reserve list will be open for 6 months from the date when decisions are communicated. If any selected projects exit the scheme during this time, a space may be offered to the highest scoring project on the reserve list.

If your project is selected for the reserve list, there is no guarantee that it will be taken forward.

If you're unsuccessful, DAERA will give you written feedback should you request it. You have 10 working days from the receipt of your application outcome notification to submit a request for feedback.

Review of Decisions

If, after receiving feedback, you still feel that we did not reach the correct decision you have access to DAERA's Review of Decisions Procedure. This provides applicants with a fair, impartial and transparent assessment of a disputed decision in an efficient manner and ensures that the final decision is made within the law and in line with the regulations and Scheme rules.

Information on our Review of Decisions Procedure can be found at the following link Guide to Review of Decisions

10. Project development phase

Projects approved for the development phase are required to complete quarterly development milestones. Project Coordinators will complete the enrolment of farm businesses to the Landscape Project during the development phase.

DAERA will also complete eligibility checks of farm businesses.

Further milestones of project development are required including project plans, associated timelines and costs. More detail is in section 15.1.

Single legal entity

All Landscape Projects development agreements are between DAERA and a single legal entity that represents your project.

Your single legal entity could be:

- a group of Farm Businesses that have formed a legal entity, for example, a company limited by guarantee, community interest company or a co-operative
- another organisation acting as intermediary between the land managers, DAERA, and other parties
- If your project does not have a legal entity in place, it cannot progress to the development stage as it will fail to meet the minimum eligibility criteria. If you are considering applying to the scheme, you should have started the process to establish a legal entity well in advance of submitting your application.

10.1 What you need to do

You'll need to:

1. Establish the Farm Business Membership of your Landscape Project, with each business completing a land manager support form.
2. Form a Steering Group made up of the Project Coordinator, other expert stakeholders, and at least three representatives of the Farm Business participants.

More details of each step are in the milestones in section 17.1. DAERA will monitor progress against these milestones quarterly. Failing to complete a milestone may result in the termination of the Landscape Project.

You'll be allocated a Project Officer from DAERA at the start of the development phase. Your project officer will:

- serve as your main point of contact and will guide you through the process
- support you by ensuring the proposals and evidence you submit are as complete as possible
- support you during the project development phase

Your funding will begin at this phase, you'll receive a project development grant to pay for this work. The maximum amount of development funding depends on the number of Farm Businesses who have expressed an interest at application.

DAERA will fund eligible facilitation costs for up to 50 participating farm businesses per project. There may be scope to support additional participating farm businesses where this is justified by the scale of the proposal and its potential environmental benefits. Any such support will be subject to the overall funding available and will be considered on a case-by-case basis during the development phase, taking account of the project's likely contribution to delivering the scheme objectives.

These costs may include:

- administration
- habitat assessment and mapping
- project facilitation
- monitoring and evaluation
- training for farmers.

This phase is expected to take a maximum of two years to complete. We aim to support you to complete your development phase and start delivery on the ground as soon as possible.

Certain planning tasks in this phase are complex and may require specialist support or guidance. Costs for any specialist assistance anticipated should be included in the project development costs form.

DAERA will meet with you at regular intervals to evaluate your progress.

10.2 Project deliverables

Additional project documentation is required during the Development Phase, as follows:

- Landscape Project management plan – reviewed plan of objectives to be delivered, costs, and timescales
- Project Governance plan – who is responsible for what.
- Proposed bespoke actions – co-designed with DAERA Landscape Project Officer and to include details of the work to be carried out, estimated costs, and any consents or approvals required.
- Use maps to show where bespoke actions are happening across the land holdings and scale of these actions in hectares or metres, whichever is most appropriate.
- Monitoring & evaluation plan – with targets across the life of the funding period.
- Risk assessment – for works, double funding and other risks.

DAERA will check the information you provide, and work with you to:

1. Conduct background checks to ensure the project is still in line with the information provided in your application, assess financial suitability, and check for double funding.
2. Carry out a detailed evaluation of your costs. You may be asked to reduce them if we think your costs are too high, or in some cases increase them if we think the work might cost more.
3. Agree the activities you'll carry out during the development phase, when you'll carry them out, and how the payments will be scheduled.

You'll be required to complete a series of deliverables during the project development phase. These will help you prepare for delivery, and the co-design and delivery agreement with DAERA.

The following are examples of potential areas of focus. Additional deliverables that are not included in this list may also be proposed for the project.

Landscape management plan

You must illustrate what the project expects to achieve during delivery. You should:

- describe the environmental outcomes of the project
- identify and map current land use and environmental features
- outline planned activities for the delivery phase

- use maps to illustrate where activities will take place or where outcomes will be achieved and how this achieves habitat connectivity across your project area.
- Illustrate how resilience throughout the lifetime of the project has been considered
- review and decide what will happen to existing agreements or funding across the project area once the delivery agreement commences
- consider any legal consents, permissions or other statutory requirements required for land management actions planned for project delivery

Project governance plan

You should lay out the governance and decision-making structure. This should include:

- roles and responsibilities during the project development and delivery phases
- terms of reference for governance groups
- key performance indicators and success factors
- a risk assessment and contingency plans - include how you will mitigate and manage any risks
- change and contract management arrangements
- plans and long-term legal safeguards to secure the future of the project after the delivery agreement ends

Proposed Habitat restoration works

- Details plans of what, where and when habitat restoration will be completed
- Approvals, permission and consents required form the relevant bodies
- Quotes from contractors, suppliers or famers themselves if appropriate.
- All elements of the bespoke action that are required to deliver the intend objective.
- Preparation of tender documentation where appropriate procurement levels have been reached.

Monitoring and evaluation plan

You should illustrate how you'll monitor and evaluate the impact of your project. This should include:

- a baseline assessment of habitats and species within the project plan for regular monitoring of habitats and species as the project progresses.
- evaluation questions to help understand the environmental, economic outcomes and value for money of your project
- any models you'll use to predict outcomes and to ensure appropriate data collection
- the frequency, methods and costs for ongoing reporting and monitoring
- a learning plan to share project findings and best practices
- a plan for how you'll deal with data storage and data protection considerations

Stakeholder engagement plan

You should illustrate how you'll ensure local stakeholders are aware of your project, and how you will ensure they will have opportunities to share their views. You should:

- Put in place an appropriate method for promoting your project and providing updates throughout its duration. This could be through a website, blog, social media, newsletters, or other suitable channels, helping to tell the story of the project and share its progress and achievements.
- identify relevant stakeholders and their interests in the project
- identify engagement and collaboration opportunities during delivery
- illustrate how you'll engage with the range of audiences identified over the lifetime of the project
- explain the outcomes you are seeking from engagement with each audience

10.3 Project development phase milestones and progress checks

Your letter of offer for funding in the Development Period will list the agreed deliverables, activities, and future costs for your project. It will set out how these will be evaluated at agreed dates, or 'milestones' (Annex 1).

We'll offer some flexibility in the number and timing of milestones required by your project and will agree these with you.

At each milestone, we'll assess your progress against the plan in your Letter of Offer.

If progress is as expected and the cost evidence sufficient, we'll issue payments quarterly. Further details on payments are included in the 'how you'll be paid' section.

You may have an opportunity to develop and re-submit evidence if a deliverable is not on track. Any additional costs incurred will not necessarily be covered by the project development grant.

You may have already produced some relevant deliverables before joining Landscape Projects, for example through participation in other government schemes or private activities. This could help you progress through the project development phase more quickly. We will not cover the costs of any deliverables developed before signing your project development grant agreement.

You must not make a head start on any deliverable before your Letter of Offer is issued.

10.4 Project breaches and ending funding

We do not want to see projects fail and will support you should any challenges or issues emerge during the project development phase.

Under the terms of the grant agreement, we reserve the right to end your funding if:

- your project does not meet the funding conditions
- you breach the terms of the agreement

We'll consider not taking action if you can provide good reasons for the breach and Force Majeure may apply. In this situation, you or anyone authorised to act on your behalf will need to provide written evidence to show:

- what has happened,
- how it meant you were unable to meet your agreement obligations, like progressing through a milestone.

The following examples may be considered good reasons for a Force Majeure:

- a severe natural disaster, including flooding and droughts
- the accidental destruction of capital items, such as laptops, that are connected to your agreement
- criminal damage
- supply chain issues
- serious illness

We'll assess any evidence you provide and decide what course of action to take.

If your project cannot meet the project development phase requirements, you'll leave the scheme.

10.5 Project development grant: eligible funding

Your project development grant will cover costs of facilitation, administration, participant training, conducting a baseline survey and monitoring. Your letter of offer will detail how much you will receive during the development period.

You are required to complete the project development costs section of the application form when you apply to the scheme. These costs help DAERA decide how much funding you'll receive for the project development phase.

All costs should be for the work you need to carry out to produce the deliverables required for the project development phase.

The maximum amount of Development funding depends on the number of DAERA Farm Businesses who will be participating. This does not include VAT.

DAERA will fund eligible facilitation costs for up to 50 participating farm businesses per project. There may be scope to support additional participating farm businesses where this is justified by the scale of the proposal and its potential environmental benefits. Any such support will be subject to the overall funding available and will be considered on a case-by-case basis during the development phase, taking account of the project's likely contribution to delivering the scheme objectives.

Farm businesses will be paid for participation on an annual basis and where applicable, carrying out monitoring on their land.

The project development costs detailed in your application will be evaluated against the value for money criterion.

You must provide evidence that your costs are proportionate, reasonable, and represent value for money. Where appropriate, payment rates should be benchmarked against comparable actions and payment levels available. Project Coordinators must be able to demonstrate the basis on which costs have been calculated and provide evidence that expenditure is necessary, justified, and delivers value for public funds.

Evidence that may be used to justify costs includes:

- Staff time, daily rates and estimated effort required.
- Quotes, estimates or market comparisons.
- Benchmarking against similar projects or land management schemes.
- Previous experience of delivering comparable activities.
- Relevant industry or professional rates.

The amount of capital funding available to deliver a project's bespoke actions will normally be capped at £500,000 per project over the five-year scheme period. However, additional funding may be considered where this is justified by the scale of the proposal and the environmental benefits it is expected to deliver. Any funding above this level will be subject to the overall budget available and will be assessed on a case-by-case basis during the development phase, taking account of the project's likely contribution to achieving the scheme objectives**.**

If your application is successful, your costs will be evaluated in more detail during the development phase. At this point you'll need to provide stronger evidence, such as employee salaries, quotes, or a tendering outcome.

If you do not provide satisfactory evidence, or if certain costs are considered unnecessary, then you may be offered less funding than the amount you applied for. We'll discuss this with you during enrolment.

For further details, including examples of eligible and ineligible costs, see our project development phase payment policy (Annex 2).

10.6 How you'll be paid

Costs and funding for each deliverable and milestone will be agreed in your letter of offer. Payment will be made in arrears at agreed milestones (quarterly) during the project development phase. Your grant funding letter of offer / contract for funding will confirm these details.

You must provide evidence of eligible expenditure and the corresponding work on your deliverables at each milestone. This must illustrate the actual costs incurred, for example original receipts and invoices or records of time spent. You'll be required to keep copies of this evidence for recording and audit purposes. (See Annex 2 for more information).

Once your project has passed a milestone (quarterly), you will be reimbursed for the eligible expenditure. You'll also be able to change your project details, such as the forecasted costs through a formal amendment process. Any amended costs should be approved by the DAERA.

Payment for the Capital bespoke actions will be made on receipt of invoices and with assurances that the invoiced works have been carried out to the required standards.

10.7 Adding or removing land

Applications must cover at least 500ha (or 250 ha if the project objective includes management of a designated site). You might be able to add land to your project area during the project development phase, however this will depend on the overall delivery funding pot available.

If you want to add or remove land you'll need to show that:

- the change in project area will improve the environmental outcomes delivered

- outcomes on the land are comparable to those on the land in the original application

You'll also need to show that expansion will not increase the costs funded by your project development grant. We may consider increased costs in exceptional circumstances - see the guidance on 'departures from original application'.

We'll consider requests to remove land from the project during the project development phase. You'll need to show that your project can still achieve its intended outcomes and will still cover at least 500ha (or 250 ha if the project objective includes management of a designated site).

We may end the project development grant agreement if the removal of land is a significant risk to the project's viability or suitability.

11. Project Delivery phase

This is when you begin to implement your project. We expect the public funding for delivery to last for at least 3 - 4 years, depending on the length of your project's development phase.

The aim is for the maximum number of viable projects to advance from development to delivery.

At the final assessment milestone in the project development phase, any outstanding deliverables and the proposed delivery agreement will be reviewed.

The project will advance to the delivery phase if it passes this milestone and all parties are content to sign the delivery agreement. There is no obligation for projects selected at the initial application stage to proceed into delivery.

The availability of project delivery funding is subject to final budget and spend approvals within DAERA.

11.1 The Delivery Phase Deliverables

The Landscape Project Delivery Plan, including outcomes, will be developed collaboratively during the Project Development stage. Please ensure that any specialist advice or legal support required for this work is accounted for in your project development costs form.

The plan will be tailored to your project, though some terms apply to all projects. Any specialist advice or legal support required for this work should be included in the project development costs form.

11.2 Delivery costs, funding and payments

Project payments for the Delivery phase will be agreed upon during the project development phase.

These outcomes are delivering increased biodiversity and improved habitat connectivity.

Each project's proposals will be on its individual merits and likely contribution towards the priority outcomes.

Public sector investment in your project will need to adhere to the following principles.

Double funding

Any works carried out as part of a collaborative action should complement, rather than duplicate, those being currently carried out under existing schemes.

Agreements must address the risk of any possible double funding.

Double funding refers to receiving payment for actions or outcomes that you are already being paid for or are required to deliver. This could be due to:

- statutory duties
- regulatory requirements
- licence conditions
- agreements you have under another scheme

DAERA will work with you to make sure your delivery agreement fits alongside any existing schemes.

We'll limit our payments to what is necessary to achieve a particular outcome. This will ensure an equal level of access to DAERA funding with payments based on needs and costs.

Value for money

The costs associated with implementing Landscape Projects will be established during the project development phase.

Delivery costs will vary significantly across projects depending on the type of work being carried out.

Quantifiable outcomes

Payments for environmental outcomes will only be issued where they are measurable, quantifiable, and additional to outcomes.

The delivery agreement will detail the terms and conditions around the release of payments, which should be based on robust performance metrics and indicators.

Payment reviews

Delivery agreements must allow for periodic reviews of payment rates. Any subsequent adjustments to payment rates must be evidence-based and agreed to by all parties to the agreement.

Compliance with government obligations

Public payments in Landscape Projects will have to adhere to domestic and international subsidy control obligations. We'll discuss the implications of this with you during the project development phase.

12. Governance and risk management

To achieve long-term environmental action at a large scale, projects will need to put in place suitable governance structures to help:

- coordinate activities
- manage funds
- mitigate risks
- adapt to changes over the length of the delivery agreement

We'll tailor the governance arrangements to each individual project to allow all relevant parties to represent their interests. We will assist you in implementing these measures during the project development phase.

We expect there will be a single Landscape Project Delivery Plan for each project. We think that this will be the best way to manage Landscape Projects and ensure their longevity. We also think that this will be less complicated for projects than a mixture of different DAERA agreements for different parts of the project.

Your project will need to consider and put in place a governance structure and suitable single legal entity to enable this. We will address this matter with you during the development phase and will be open to your proposals.

The governance framework and long-term Delivery Plan agreements should be designed to identify, manage, and mitigate delivery, financial, and reputational risks associated with your project.

You may need to consider risks relating to:

- funding and ownership of environmental outcomes

- sourcing legal and financial expertise
- financial liabilities
- external developments and renegotiation
- stakeholder communication and representation, including in local communities
- transparency in decision making and project investment
- performance metrics for delivery payments
- dispute, arbitration, and exit mechanisms
- future proofing and knowledge retention

12.1 Agreement length and review points

We expect Landscape Project Delivery Plan agreements to be 3 - 4 years.

The agreements might sit alongside other safeguards which could last beyond the length of the funding agreement.

We'll discuss these details during Delivery Plan agreement negotiations. Agreements should involve regular review points, for example annually. The detail of these will be agreed during the Project Development phase.

We expect to assess your project's performance and review delivery payments during these reviews. We may choose to end agreements that are not delivering the agreed outcomes or are not providing good value for money.

13. Scheme-level monitoring, evaluation and learning

You'll be required to take part in scheme-wide monitoring, evaluation and learning to help evidence and understand how the scheme is working, its impacts, and value for money. The insights gained from this learning will enable us to evaluate and improve the scheme.

A scheme-level evaluation framework will be agreed during the Development Phase. This will include evaluation questions, indicators and metrics. Projects will need to identify the questions, indicators and metrics which are relevant to their project and include these in their project-level monitoring and evaluation plans.

14. Complaints and appeals

If you are dissatisfied with the quality of service provided or the way you have been treated, you may submit a complaint.

14.1 Appeals about application outcomes

After outcome notification letters have been issued, there will be a 10-day standstill period to allow applicants to challenge our decisions in relation to the application process.

Review of Decisions

If, after receiving feedback, you still feel that we did not reach the correct decision you have access to DAERA's Review of Decisions Procedure. This provides applicants with a fair, impartial and transparent assessment of a disputed decision in an efficient manner and ensures that the final decision is made within the law and in line with the regulations and Scheme rules.

Information on our Review of Decisions Procedure can be found at the following link Guide to Review of Decisions

14.2 Complaints from enrolment onwards

DAERA's complaints procedure will apply.

15. Annex 1: project development milestones

<u>One Year Development Phase</u>

Quarter 1

- Hold an initial meeting with the Project Coordinator to confirm actions, proposals and commitments outlined in the project application.
- Confirm the project vision, geographic scope, strategic outcomes for nature and alignment with Farming with Nature requirements.
- Complete enrolment requirements, including reference to Section 10 of the Applicant Guidance where relevant.
- Establish programme governance, decision-making arrangements, project management controls and a steering group with farmer representatives.
- Identify core partners, landowners, participating farmers, delivery bodies and technical advisers. Prepare stakeholder mapping and an engagement plan. Begin the landscape project assessment by setting out what the project aims to achieve, what is present now and how delivery could happen.
- Commission baseline evidence review and gap analysis covering habitats, species, hydrology, land use, constraints, risks and dependencies.

Quarter 2

- Develop the Landscape Project Plan, including the project management plan, proposed bespoke actions, proposed habitat restoration works, monitoring and evaluation plan, risk assessment, and consents and approvals required.
- Start baseline habitat mapping and assessment and complete baseline surveys or data collation where seasonal windows allow.
- Undertake opportunity and constraints mapping across the project area.
- Develop and refine a longlist of intervention options, including bespoke actions, habitat restoration works and other nature-based measures where relevant.
- Engage stakeholders, land managers and farmers to test feasibility, appetite, local priorities and delivery constraints.
- Begin regulatory, consent, licensing, planning and screening reviews.
- Hold steering group meetings to review progress and shape the project plan.

Six month review

Quarter 3

- Complete habitat mapping and assessment and use findings to refine project options.

- Shortlist and appraise preferred interventions against environmental, social, technical, financial and deliverability criteria.
- Prepare the outline delivery model, work packages, phasing, resource requirements and funding approach.
- Develop cost estimates and identify any blended finance or funding opportunities where relevant.
- Develop and begin implementing a training plan, including whole-group training where appropriate. Continue steering group meetings and confirm partner, landholder and farmer roles.
- Progress approvals and consents required for implementation.
- Finalise numbers of participating farm businesses and register farmers for participation payments on the Farming with Nature application.
- Refine monitoring, evaluation, learning, risk management, dependencies and implementation assumptions.
- Finalise the number of participating farm businesses.

Quarter 4

- Complete and present the final Landscape Project Plan and development-phase report.
- Finalise the implementation roadmap, first-year delivery pipeline, delivery sequencing and readiness criteria.
- Finalise permissions strategy, procurement approach, funding submissions, partner approvals and governance sign-off.
- Set up monitoring, reporting, data management and adaptive management arrangements for implementation.
- Prepare communications materials for launch and transition into delivery.
- Complete the end-of-development-period review.
- Formal decision to implement the project or end funding.

The actions listed above are not exhaustive.

16. Annex 2: project development phase payment policy

This annex outlines the project development phase payment policy.

16.1 Funding principles

The following principles will be applied to any funding requested in support of the development of your project:

1. Funding is provided on a costs incurred basis, project coordinators and farm businesses should not profit from participation in the scheme.
2. Your funded activities for the project development phase and costs for these activities will be agreed and listed in your letter of offer. Any activities carried out before the project development phase begins will not be funded.
3. You'll need to provide evidence that your project costs are proportionate, justifiable and ensure good value for money before they are incurred.
4. You must keep evidence such as original receipts, records of time spent, and information about who attended workshops or public events. This is to demonstrate costs incurred for recording and audit purposes.
5. Payments will be made in arrears at each assessment milestone (quarterly). Before you are paid the payment team will check evidence of your spending and will make sure all deliverables are in line with what is set out in your letter of offer/ contract for funding.
6. Your project development letter of offer/ contract for funding may only be amended by written agreement by both parties. All changes must follow the change control process, and no retrospective changes will be permitted.
7. We may refuse to reimburse any costs if we do not receive sufficient evidence that your costs or time have been incurred in accordance with your letter of offer/ contract for funding and that your milestones have been met.
8. You'll need to declare that acceptance of any funding offered will not result in double funding.
9. You'll need to follow the procurement process when awarding contracts to suppliers to ensure that your project secures best value for money.

16.2 Examples of eligible and ineligible expenditure for the project development grant

Here are some example costs that could be funded through the project development grant.

You'll need to explain your costs. It's not guaranteed that the costs will be funded, even if they appear in this list.

Example costs include:

- staff costs (gross salaries, employer national insurance and pension contributions only) during the project development phase.
- coordination or facilitation
- project administration, such as project management or project accountancy
- feasibility studies
- essential travel related to project activities
- geospatial data and mapping
- other specialist advice for example in relation to biodiversity, water, peatland, woodland, soil carbon, soil health, climate, air quality, land, landscape, planning, safeguarding, community engagement, access or heritage
- consents, assents and Habitat Regulation Assessments
- planning permission advice and costs
- environmental impact assessments
- advice and costs relating to making existing agreements compatible with Landscape Projects
- land-use options analysis
- monitoring, evaluation and learning, including advice, baseline/monitoring data collection, and analysis
- support for development of indicators/metrics
- general engagement costs, including hire of venues or meeting facilities
- commercial, legal and governance advice

Examples of ineligible costs include:

- physical restoration works
- costs already covered through other funding
- work undertaken and costs incurred before the project development grant commences
- meeting your own legal obligations
- expenses, such as for gifts or entertaining, specifically aimed at influencing government policy
- applicant tax liabilities, including recoverable VAT (reclaimable by the grant recipient from HMRC)
- fines, charges or dividends

- paid-for lobbying to influence the Northern Ireland Assembly, government or political activity, or legislative or regulatory action
- payments for activities of a political or religious nature
- payments to staff relating to previous employment within the organisation, such as redundancy, pensions or TUPE liabilities
- insurance, except employer National Insurance relating to eligible staff costs office accommodation

16.3 Procurement thresholds

When identifying costs for the delivery of services as part of the project development phase, you must follow the following procurement process, which is linked to the value of works being provided:

Value of service provided	Procurement process
£Up to £10,000	Provide evidence that 2 prices have been sought, where this is possible**
£10,000 to £50,000	3 written quotations are sought, where this is possible**
£50,000 to UK Thresholds*	Advertise on eTendersNI
Above UK Thresholds*	Advertise on eTendersNI and Find a Tender service

You'll be required to provide evidence of compliance with the procurement processes outlined above for all costs, prior to the activity starting, either during enrolment or project development phase.

16.4 Reasonableness of costs

You should also demonstrate the additional steps taken to ensure that project costs are reasonable. For example, this could include consideration based on your own knowledge and experience, comparison with the costs of similar projects in the same geographical region, benchmarking against comparable land management schemes, and the use of standard industry rates for labour, materials, contractors or professional services. Evidence that costs have been tested against market rates or similar delivery models will help demonstrate value for money.

16.5 Specialist markets and exceptional circumstances

It may not be possible to obtain the required number of quotes when operating in certain specialist markets where there are a limited number of works contractors, suppliers or service providers. In this case you must also demonstrate the additional steps taken to verify that the project costs are reasonable. For example, production of website screenshots or statements from other service users.

16.6 VAT

You can only include VAT costs in your project if you are unable to reclaim this from HMRC. If you incur irrecoverable (from HMRC) VAT costs in the procurement of activity or items associated with the facilitation of your project, you are eligible to have these costs reimbursed. This may include:

- procurement of external training and trainers
- venue hire, including provision of basic refreshments
- travel and subsistence
- training materials, including guidebooks, external training courses, and samples or studies of land under the fund
- consumable items, including stationery, computer or telephone apps, computer peripherals and monitoring equipment

16.7 Departures from original application

During the project development phase, we may recommend that additional costs, such as specialist advice, are required to help you pass all milestones. You may also identify the need for additional costs once you enter these phases.

We’ll make a judgement on whether to approve an increase to your project development grant based on:

- the magnitude of the cost increase
- your circumstances and justification for the cost increase
- whether the cost increase would have affected your project’s position in the initial competition
- whether budget is available for any cost increases

17. Annex 3: scheme terms & conditions

A copy of the scheme Terms & Conditions is available at Farming with Nature Landscape Projects - Terms & Conditions | Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs

You must confirm on your application that you have read, understood and agree to comply with the terms and conditions of the Farming with Nature Landscape Projects Scheme.

The terms and conditions apply to both project coordinators and participating farm businesses.