

Zero Carbon Communities Grant Scheme 2026-2027 Application Guidance



Introduction and overview

This document is designed to help you prepare a strong application: it explains the key assessment criteria and guides you through the online application form. It should be read alongside the *Information Document*, which sets out the purpose of the scheme, eligibility, and what can and cannot be funded.

The online application form, *Information document*, and further details can be found on our grant webpage: <https://www.scambs.gov.uk/climate-and-environment/zero-carbon-communities/zero-carbon-communities-grant>. If you have questions after reading both documents, or would like to hear from groups that have delivered similar projects, please contact the ZCC team at zcc@scambs.gov.uk.

The ZCC grant is competitive and regularly over-subscribed, so please use the criteria table below along with additional information and scoring weightings provided in the *Information Document* to help structure your responses. Strong applications are well planned, measurable, aligned with the scheme's objectives for communities, carbon and nature, and demonstrate good value for money.

We strongly encourage applicants to make use of the free support and resources available from [Support Cambridgeshire](https://supportcambridgeshire.org.uk) (formerly *Cambridge Council for Voluntary Service*). They provide guidance on applying for funding, identifying suitable funding sources, strengthening applications, and accessing useful tools for community groups. Their support can be extremely helpful in preparing a high-quality application. Website: <https://supportcambridgeshire.org.uk>; Email: info@supportcambridgeshire.org.uk. Phone: 01480 420601.

Assessment Criteria

Criteria	Description – how to maximise scoring
The project must align with one of the two Themes	<p>Theme 1: Carbon emission reduction or locking up carbon Theme 2: Community engagement on climate change and nature</p> <p>The application form only allows you to select one Theme. Applicants should demonstrate that the chosen theme is central to the project, not incidental. Applications which clearly align with the chosen theme will score more highly. Nature-based projects can feature in both Themes.</p> <p><i>Tip: Applications that sit ambiguously between themes or do not clearly prioritise one may score lower.</i></p>
Measurement and impact	<p>The application should provide clear, proportionate and realistic impact including a projected measurement for the difference that the project will make.</p> <p>For Theme 1: A calculated projected reduction in CO₂e emissions, or a clear explanation of how, and how much, carbon will be captured or stored.</p> <p>For Theme 2: the projected number of individuals that will be meaningfully engaged, the anticipated behaviour change, and explanation of how impact will be measured.</p> <p>For both themes, include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What the anticipated benefits to the community will be • How benefits to the community will be communicated • How impacts will be measured <p>For nature themes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clearly show what the benefit to nature/environment will be. Quantify where possible e.g. number, size, species of trees being planted; habitat improvement from type x to type y; land area improved using area-based metrics such as m² or hectares, or length of wildlife corridor/connectivity etc. <p><i>Tip: Show clear calculations following the guidance provided where relevant</i> <i>Tip: Remember to refer to and attach any expert advice such as Energy Performance reports, Ecology surveys etc.</i></p>
Project plan and delivery capacity	<p>The grant panel are looking for a clear project description, identifying what the applicant wants to do and what the project will achieve. The plan must set out:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a clear project plan, realistic timescales, appropriate governance and management arrangements, • how the project will obtain the necessary people, support and resources, • that any required planning permission or regulatory consents have been

	<p>secured or are demonstrably in progress.</p> <p>Tip: Remember to include clear sketches, plans e.g. planting plan, visuals, relevant attachments to support your application (using 'upload' feature at the end of the form)</p> <p>Tip: Applications relying on un-started consent processes or unclear delivery arrangements may score lower due to delivery risk.</p>
Value and co-benefits	<p>Does the project represent value for money – is there a good impact for the amount of money requested? Applicants should demonstrate:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the scale of carbon savings or engagement achieved or nature outcome relative to funding requested. • evidence of match funding or in-kind contributions (encouraged but not mandatory). • wider co-benefits such as biodiversity improvement, health and wellbeing, social cohesion or skills development. • efficient and proportionate use of public funds. <p>Tip: ZCC Grants are typically oversubscribed. Applications demonstrating match funding/funding from other sources will be prioritised.</p> <p>Tip: Applications showing strong co-benefits are likely to score more highly.</p>
Alignment with Climate and Nature Strategy	<p>Projects are encouraged to align with the South Cambridgeshire Climate and Nature Strategy 2026-2030. For nature-based projects, reference to alignment with the Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) is recommended.</p> <p>Tip: Applications showing strong alignment with strategic objectives, demonstrating contribution to local priorities, showing why the location and scale are appropriate, are likely to score more highly.</p>
Sustainability and Lifetime Impact	<p>The project should demonstrate long-term sustainability beyond the initial grant period. Applicants should explain: How the project will be measured and maintained; how they will demonstrate the objectives have been met; how benefits will continue after the funding ends; any ongoing funding, volunteer or management arrangements; how long-term impact will be monitored.</p>
Project Reporting	<p>Please note that all projects will be required to submit two reports:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) An end-of project report on progress within one calendar year from the award of funding. 2) A one-year post-completion update report outlining longer-term outcomes

Completing the Application Form

The Application Form is an online document accessed here: <https://www.scambs.gov.uk/climate-and-environment/zero-carbon-communities/zero-carbon-communities-grant>.

The information below identifies the sections and questions that applicants will come across when completing the online form, and useful pointers to help you prepare and respond.

Before filling in the online application form, it is best to prepare answers to the questions separately e.g. in a Word document, following the guidance below, so that you can paste them into the online version. Note that when completing the online form, your progress can be saved so that you don't have to complete it all in one go, and your application will have a unique 8-letter reference so you can come back to it. There is an 'upload' feature at the end of the form to attach documents.

Section A. Contact Details

Add the contact details here for someone in your organisation who can discuss the application. This would normally be the person responsible for how the grant would be used. Please provide a telephone number and email address to enable us to contact you if there are queries relating to your application.

Section B. About your organisation

1. What does your organisation do?

This should be a summary of the work your organisation does rather than the project you want a grant for. Please give a brief account of the aim of your organisation, the services or activities you provide, who they are provided for. If you are a new group, please state what you intend to achieve. For community groups, please tell us how many people use the services you provide.

2. Is your organisation a charity?

Please answer **Yes/No**

→ **If yes**, please provide your charity number. This can be found using the link:

<https://www.gov.uk/find-charity-information>

3. Is your organisation VAT registered?

Please answer **Yes/No**

→ **If yes**, please provide your registration number and confirm if your organisation will be able to recover the VAT incurred in relation to the project?

→ **If no**, is your organisation still able to recover VAT incurred in relation to the project?

→ Please answer **Yes/No**

The following organisations may be able to use a VAT126 form to recover the VAT incurred from non-business activities (even if not VAT registered):

- local authorities or similar bodies such as parish/town councils

- academy schools or multi-academy trusts (MAT)
- charities in palliative care, air ambulance, medical or search and rescue
- a non-departmental body or similar body not registered for VAT

For further information please use the link: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/claim-a-vat-refund-as-an-organisation-not-registered-for-vat>

4. Does your organisation have a bank account?

Please answer **Yes/No**

→ **If no**, please note your application will not be eligible for funding until a bank account is set up. To receive funding for your group you will need to open a bank account. Having a bank account is the best and safest way to look after your organisation's money. The account should be opened in the name of your organisation, and you will need at least two members to act as signatories. Most banks and building societies offer special accounts for small voluntary and community organisations. They also usually offer free banking as long as your account is in credit. Further information can be found using the link:

<https://www.resourcecentre.org.uk/information/bank-accounts-for-community-and-voluntary-organisations/>

5. Does your organisation or project have a website?

Please answer **Yes/No**

→ **If yes**, please provide the full weblink.

This is the website address of your organisation, or the website address for the project if there is one.

6. Is your organisation affiliated to another body?

Please answer **Yes/No**

→ **If yes**, please give details of any national or local bodies to which your organisation belongs.

7. Safeguarding. Does your organisation work with children, young people and/or vulnerable adults?

Please answer **Yes/No**

→ **If yes**, please upload a copy of your safeguarding policy using the upload feature at the end of this form.

Please note, the Council requires organisations working with children, young people and/or vulnerable adults to have appropriate safeguarding procedures in place. If you do not have a safeguarding policy, further information can be found using the link:

<https://supportcambridgeshire.org.uk/support/safeguarding/>

8. Equal Opportunities. Does your organisation have an equal opportunities Policy?

Please answer **Yes/No**

→ **If yes**, please upload a copy of your Equal Opportunities policy using the upload feature at the end of this form.

9. Insurance. Does your organisation have appropriate insurance in place for your project?

Please answer **Yes/No**

→ **If no-** we would recommend you have adequate insurance in place for your project. For more information follow the link: <https://supportcambridgeshire.org.uk/bite-size-training/insurance-for-small-charity-and-voluntary-groups/>

Section C. About your proposal

10. Please select your project type (only one of the two Themes can be selected):

Theme 1: Projects which reduce carbon emissions or lock up carbon

1. Please provide a short summary of your project (max 50 words) then in the next section, describe your project.

Keep the information here clear and in summary form.

2. Please describe your project

This is your opportunity to 'sell' your project idea to us. Help us understand why we should fund your project. Include in this section what your project is, why it is important, what the benefits will be (to e.g. carbon/community/nature). How does it align with the South Cambridgeshire Climate and Nature Strategy 2026-2030, and local priorities e.g. parish/town/ neighbourhood plan, Local Nature Recovery Strategy LNRS as appropriate? For nature related elements under this theme, include appropriate quantities/metrics e.g. land area improved in m² or hectares.

You may find it helpful to return to this section at the end and add any key points or strengths of your project that align with the assessment criteria but are not covered elsewhere in the form.

3. Please provide the location of your proposed project, how is the land/building currently used?

Please provide a postcode or What3Words of the project. This can be found using the following link: <https://what3words.com>. Clarify that the location of your project has open access to the community in this section.

4. Please provide details of the ownership of the land/building

If your organisation does not own the land, please state if you have written landowner permission for the measures to be undertaken. If you have written permission, please provide a copy of this in your supporting information. If you have not, please note that we will require written permission from the landowner before funding your project. If there is a lease in place there must be at least 21 years left to run on the lease. Please provide a copy of this in your supporting information.

5. Does your project require any regulatory consents?

If your project requires planning permission, listed building consent, faculty approval, landowner consent, or any other regulatory approval or permit, this must be either secured before submission, or clearly evidenced as in progress at the point of submission.

Applicants that rely on future, un-started consent processes may score lower due to delivery risk. Note the ZCC team can provide signposting but cannot obtain permissions for you.

6. What, if any, actions to reduce carbon emissions or lock up carbon, have already been undertaken by your group?

This could be measures to promote energy conservation, install energy efficiency measures, plant trees etc.

7. Have you obtained any expert advice on your proposal?

Please answer **Yes/No**

→ **If yes**, please give details.

Are your proposals informed by an energy survey or advice from a specialist consultant e.g. ecologist? If the measures have been suggested as the result of a formal report, please include a copy of this (upload at end).

8. Please provide information, using the guidance below, on the carbon savings resulting from your project. You must use the methodology provided in the Grant Guidance and Criteria to make your estimate unless you can clearly evidence another method of calculation.

Please provide the projected carbon savings. If the measures have been suggested as the result of an energy survey, please include a copy of this in the appendix, and the projected reduction in CO₂e emissions below. If you did not receive an energy survey, please calculate the projected reductions in CO₂e emissions using the calculations below and show your workings. Alternatively, please refer to the Carbon Trust Website for more information:

<https://www.carbontrust.com/resources/carbon-footprinting-guide>

Community Buildings

To calculate your reduction in CO₂e emissions you will need to refer to energy bills from the past year. This symbol * indicates the conversion factor provided by the UK Government.

1. Calculate how much energy you have used this year using the example below.

Nov 2021 usage: 4582kWh

Nov 2020 usage: 1345kWh

$$4582 - 1345 = 3237\text{kWh}$$

2. Multiply your annual usage in kWh by the conversion factor* of **0.233** to work out the annual kgCO₂e produced.

$$3237 \times 0.233 = 754.22\text{kgCO}_2\text{e}$$

3. Multiply your projected annual usage in kWh by the conversion factor of 0.233 to work out the projected annual kgCO₂e produced.

$$2237 \times 0.233 = 521.22\text{kgCO}_2\text{e}$$

4. Minus your projected annual kgCO₂e emissions produced from your current annual kgCO₂e emissions to calculate your annual savings.

$$754.22 - 521.22 = 233\text{kgCO}_2\text{e}$$

Solar Panels

For this calculation you will need the projected size of your solar panel installation e.g. 4kW. This symbol ^ indicates the conversion factor taken from Solar Together Cambridgeshire Scheme.

1. Multiply your system by **2.343**[^] for the kWh per day produced

$$4 \times 2.343 = 9.372\text{kWh}$$

2. Multiply kWh per day produced by **365** for the annual kWh.

$$9.372 \times 365 = 3,420.78\text{kWh}$$

3. Multiply by the conversion factor of **0.233** to calculate the kgCO₂e saved per year.

$$3,420.78 \times 0.233 = 797.04\text{kgCO}_2\text{e}$$

Nature

For trees, please include number and sizes of trees to be planted, with their associated carbon savings (these can be estimates).

A useful guide on calculating the carbon savings of your tree project can be found on The Woodland Carbon Code website: <https://woodlandcarboncode.org.uk/standard-and-guidance/3-carbon-sequestration/3-3-project-carbon-sequestration> under the 'Accounting for project carbon sequestration' section.

For peatland restoration and other nature projects with carbon reduction, clearly justify the reason for choosing a given method, evidence and reference the method of calculation, and provide the projected carbon savings.

8. Have you experience in delivering similar projects?

Please provide details

9. Are you working with any other organisations on this project?

Please answer **Yes/No**

→ **If yes**, please give details.

Are there any other organisations directly involved with delivering this project? If so, how are the project work streams divided? Include any evidence that working in partnership on this project will contribute more widely to strengthening community networks.

10. Please indicate how the changes that you make through the project will be lasting and sustainable.

What resources will you have for maintenance once the project is completed? (e.g. how will volunteer programmes be sustained?) What are the long-term prospects for the site? i.e. tree maintenance or ensuring proper usage of community building energy measures by the people using the hall.

11. What additional value do you think your project provides?

Please provide details of any co-benefits resulting from your project.

12. How will your project be communicated to the local community and wider?

Please explain how you will share the details of your project with your local community and wider i.e. through a presentation to your parish/town council, through social media, through a newsletter.

Theme 2: Community engagement on climate change and nature

1. Please provide a short summary of your project, (max 50 words). Then in next section, describe your project.

Keep the information here clear and in summary form.

2. Please describe your project.

This is your opportunity to 'sell' your project idea to us. Help us understand why we should fund your project. Include in this section what your project is, why it is important and what the benefits will be (to carbon/community/nature). For location-specific projects (e.g. community orchard) please provide a location postcode or What3Words of the project. This can be found using the following link: <https://what3words.com>.

How does the project align with the South Cambridgeshire Climate and Nature Strategy 2026-2030, and local priorities e.g. parish/town/neighbourhood plan, Local Nature Recovery Strategy LNRS as appropriate? For nature related elements under this theme, include appropriate quantities/metrics e.g. land area improved in m² or hectares.

You may find it helpful to return to this section at the end and add any key points or strengths of your project that align with the assessment criteria but are not covered elsewhere in the form.

3. How will the project achieve community engagement and behaviour change around climate change?

How will the project promote behaviour change in reducing carbon emissions?

- How has the community been involved in drawing up these proposals?
- What difference will the project make to your community?
- How will your project inspire and encourage others to do similar projects?

4. How many people are expected to make a difference in their lives as a result of the project?

Please ensure that this is more than how many people are expected to attend sessions.

- How many people are expected to volunteer or get involved with running the project?
- What plans are there for community involvement in the project in future?

5. How many people will be exposed to your project?

How many people do you expect to engage on a superficial level i.e. How many people will you reach through social media? How many people have attended your events in the past? How much traffic does your website get?

6. Have you experience in delivering similar projects?

Please answer **Yes/No**

→ **If yes**, please give details.

7. Are you working with any other organisations on this project?

Are there any other organisations directly involved with delivering this project? If so, how are the project work streams divided? In particular include any evidence that working in partnership on this project will contribute more widely to strengthening community networks.

8. Please indicate how the changes that you make through the project will be lasting and sustainable.

What resources will you have for maintenance once the project is completed? (e.g. how will volunteer programmes be sustained?). How will you ensure that people remain engaged on the topic of climate change? Please demonstrate how your project fits with the priorities and action plans of your local parish/town/neighbourhood plan.

9. What additional value do you think your project provides?

Please provide details of any co-benefits resulting from your project.

10. How will you ensure equality of access to the project?

Please provide details.

Section D. Financing your project

For projects requesting more than £5,000 we would encourage applicants to seek match funding/ part funding/in kind contributions in order to score highly.

1. Is your parish/town council able to contribute part-funding for your project?

Please answer **Yes/No/Not made contact**.

→ **If yes**, please give details.

We encourage you to approach your parish/town council, especially if it is one of the larger councils, for part-funding of any applications you make. They may have a local fund available for small projects, or monies from building developments (s106) that could be used for your project. Applications with part-funding in place will be looked upon favourably.

Contact information for parish councils can be found using the link below:

<https://scamb.southcambs.gov.uk/mqParishCouncilDetails.aspx?LS=17&SLS=4&bcr=1>

2. Do you hope to have other sources of funding?

Please answer **Yes/No**.

→ **If yes**, please give details. This could include match funding, part-funding through your own fundraising, other grants or sponsorship. Please list other funders to whom you are applying, detailing when you submitted your application, or plan to, and a date by which you should be informed of the decision. If any applications were refused, please provide details. If there is a shortfall in funding, what steps will you take to overcome this?

3. Please give a breakdown of project costs.

Please give as much detail as possible and include ALL costs. The breakdown should be for the whole cost and not just the amount you are asking for funding for. Please make it clear what part of the project you are specifically asking for funding for and ensure that the amount you are requesting related directly to at least one of your quotes. If you do not provide accurate information, this may jeopardise your application's success.

4. For solar PV projects - please provide details of the three quotes you received for this project and indicate the reasons for your final choice.

Please provide details.

5. What is the total project cost?

This should be the total cost of the project, including parts of it that others will be funding. Please use: net cost figures if your organisation is able to reclaim VAT or if the VAT is not payable for any reason; and gross cost figures if you are unable to reclaim VAT. You should also include any in-kind contributions to the total project cost figure to give a full account of the whole scheme. The figure should be entered as a whole number, **without** commas or a decimal point.

6. How much are you asking for from the Zero Carbon Communities grant?

This can be up to 100% of project costs. Please use: net cost figures if your organisation is able to reclaim VAT or if the VAT is not payable for any reason; and gross cost figures if you are unable to reclaim VAT. You should also include any in-kind contributions to the total project cost figure to give a full account of the whole scheme. The figure should be entered as a whole number, **without** commas or a decimal point.

7. Please describe how your project demonstrates value for money.

Give details on how the project cost will provide the greatest return, in terms of energy savings, carbon emission reduction, cost reduction, community engagement, wider community benefits etc.

Section E. Reporting and Measurement

How will your project measure and report on its progress?

Please provide details on how the project will measure and report on its progress and outcomes.

Section F. Support from your District Councillor

Is your District Councillor in favour of the project?

Please give details. We encourage applicants to inform their district councillors about their project. Contact Information can be found using the link below:
<https://scambs.moderngov.co.uk/mgFindMember.aspx>

Checklist and declaration

Please read the declaration and go through the checklist to attach relevant documents.

You may find it helpful to return to the 'Please describe your project' section of the application to add any key points or strengths of your project that align with the assessment criteria but that you have not covered elsewhere in the form.

Enter your name, Position and Date prior to hitting 'submit'.

Once submitted you will receive a pdf copy of the form which will be sent to us for scoring. It is useful to keep the 8-letter reference number for your application to hand and use this in any further correspondence with us.

Contact us

- Contact the ZCC team via our email: zcc@scambs.gov.uk
- Be added onto the quarterly circulation of our ZCC Newsletter: zcc@scambs.gov.uk
- Check out the ZCC website: [Zero Carbon Communities Grant - South Cambs District Council](#)
- Follow us on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/SouthCambsZCC/>