

Zero Carbon Communities Grant Scheme 2025-2026 Information Document



The Zero Carbon Communities Grant Scheme supports communities in South Cambridgeshire to take action on climate change.

Applications invited from	Parish councils and Community groups (see full list of eligibility criteria page 5-6)
Total available	£125,000
Min/max grant	£2,000 - £15,000
Grant scheme open	Monday 5 May 2025
Application deadline	5pm Tuesday 1 July 2025

Applications are invited for projects under two main themes – Reducing Carbon Emissions and Engaging the Community on Climate Change. Applicants are welcome to apply for more than one project, although it should be noted that allocation of funding will take into account the aim of achieving a good spread of funding across the district.

How is the Grant Awarded?

All eligible grant applications will be reviewed by the Grants Advisory Committee, who will make recommendations to the lead Cabinet Member for Finance for decision. We aim to let applicants know of the decision within two months of the application deadline.

Project proposals will be scored and prioritised for funding based on how well the answers to the questions fulfil the objectives given for each theme. Each theme will be scored differently as set out in the sections below.

A funding agreement will be prepared for all successful applicants. This will include arrangements for payment of the grant. Projects will be required to measure and report on their progress one calendar year from the award of the grant. This allows us to continue to report on the annual impact of the grant.

Carbon Emission Reduction or Locking Up Carbon

Objectives

- I. The project reduces the production of carbon emissions or reduces carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. (33%)
- II. The project contributes additional value (e.g. funding contributions; volunteer time/expertise from other sources; collaboration between organisations, and/or evidence of local and/or Member support; communication of the project to the local community). (33%)
- III. The project is sustainable and will have a ‘lifetime’ impact on the local and wider community. (33%)

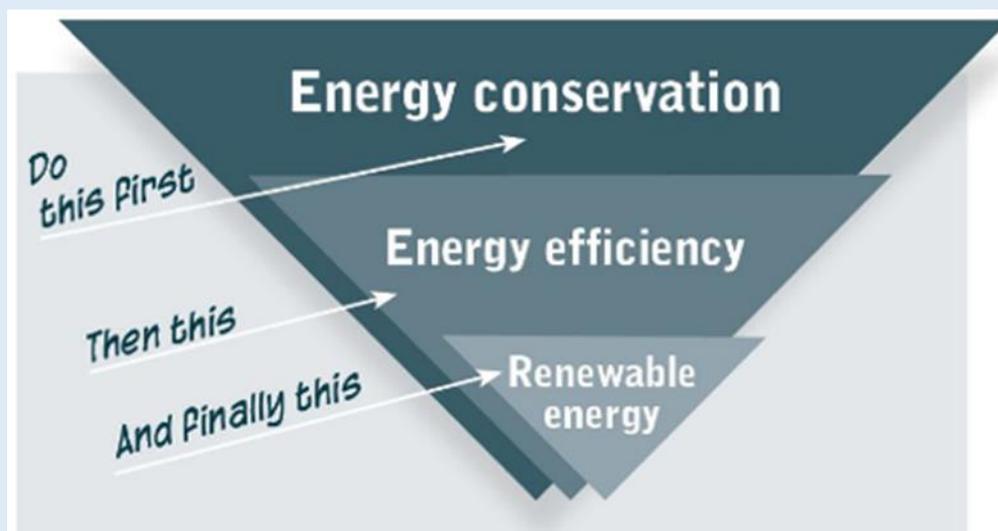
In your application, you will be required to calculate the reduction in carbon emissions that will result from your project. Further information is provided in the Application Guidance.

Examples

Community Buildings

Projects which provide improvements to community buildings to reduce its carbon emissions (e.g. the need for grid electricity, gas or oil).

Projects which take a whole-building approach are preferred, considering the ‘energy hierarchy’ (see below), which ranks the stages of using less energy in a building. We recommend that projects receive an energy survey before applying to the grant.



Credit: Centre for Sustainable Energy

We recommend reading the Centre for Sustainable Energy’s guidance on [improving energy efficiency in buildings](#).

Projects which provide additional value by communicating the value of energy efficiency improvements are recommended.

Advice on planning permissions should be sought before applying for the grant.

Ideas for Community Buildings Projects:

- **Energy conservation measures:** Draught proofing, insulation of walls, ceilings, roofs, floors and pipes and replacing doors or windows.
- **Energy efficiency measures:** Lighting upgrades, smart heating control units or infrared heating. We will prioritise these where they have been recommended on an energy survey.
- **Solar PV and/or battery storage system for solar PV:** feasible energy conservation and efficiency measures must have already been undertaken or be planned to be undertaken. We will prioritise schemes where a significant proportion of electricity generated will be used on-site (either through daytime use of the building or through battery storage). We require organizations looking to fund solar PV with the grant to get three separate quotes and provide details of the quotes in their application. This helps ensure value for money.

For guidance on measures which can be taken for historic buildings and churches, please visit the [Historic England website](#).

Nature

Projects involving tree-planting and other nature-based solutions to help combat climate change and increase biodiversity.

Projects should consider how carbon will be captured from the atmosphere or prevent its release, whilst at the same time creating or restoring natural habitats.

Applications for nature projects should first consider if their project is more suited to the [Community Chest Biodiversity pot](#), or other funding sources intended solely for nature projects. To score well, nature projects seeking funding from the ZCC grant should consider how they will make their chosen theme central to the project. Under the carbon theme, projects should work to maximize carbon savings, considering how carbon will be captured from the atmosphere or prevented from release. Projects which provide additional value by communicating the value of nature-based solutions are recommended. Nature projects might also apply under the community engagement theme but would need to ensure engagement and education was central to the project and not a secondary benefit.

When designing the project, we recommend that groups look at Natural Cambridgeshire's [Local Nature Recovery Toolkit](#) for guidance.

Applicants will be expected to have explored the possibility of obtaining free trees through other sources such as the <https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/>.

Where tree planting is on private land, consideration must be given to the ways in which the community will benefit, for example by way of access or landscape value. We would also like to see how the trees will be preserved in the future if land ownership changes.

Ideas for nature projects:

- Planting of a landmark tree/tree populations
- Community orchard project
- Community tree nursery project
- Small-scale restoration of peatland
- Hedge or larger village-wide tree canopy project

Project proposals where funding will be put towards the capital purchase of land could be considered, although we would expect the cost of land to be very high and as such it would probably be better if the grant was to pay for planting, equipment and sundries.

Community Engagement on Climate Change

Objectives

- I. Achieving wider community engagement and behaviour change around climate change (33%)
- II. The project contributes additional value (e.g. funding contributions; volunteer time/expertise from other sources; collaboration between organisations, and/or evidence of local and/or Member support; communication of the project to the local community). (33%)
- III. The project is sustainable and will have a 'lifetime' impact on the local and wider community. (33%)

In your application, you will be required to provide information on the number of individuals engaged as a result of your project. Further information is provided in the Application Guidance.

In this theme we encourage projects which engage the community on climate change which therefore reduces carbon emissions. We encourage bold, ambitious and imaginative projects that are able to fulfil the above objectives to a high standard.

We want the grant to stimulate wider engagement around what zero carbon means in each local community. Applications showing this is more than just publicity, but something that will help change behaviour e.g. through meetings and surveys will be well received.

Transport

Projects which engage the community to reduce the reliance on car travel, encouraging walking, cycling and low carbon transport.

Projects which can demonstrate how they will encourage people to walk or cycle more with the installation of structures, as well as the need and demand for the project.

- Community cycling events: funding for events or projects that promote sustainable lifestyle choices, or cycling.
- Cycle shelters or stands: Cycling infrastructure improvements which encourage cycling connectivity around the district on publicly accessible land. The cost of installation can be included. Advice on planning permissions required for the shelter must be sought prior to applying.

We cannot fund Electric Vehicle Charging Points through this scheme but please visit [our website](#), or email zcc@scambs.gov.uk for more information on grants available for charging points.

Events, Campaigns and Education

Projects which engage the community to encourage them to reduce their carbon emissions through waste and recycling, diet or interacting with nature.

Projects which can demonstrate how they can engage people and evidence a change in behaviours through volunteering etc.

- **Food waste reduction projects:** such as recycling or composting campaigns.
- **Community allotment projects:** to encourage people to grow their own food and engage with nature.
- **Biodiversity mapping:** to encourage people to get out into nature and engage with nature, or to understand what they can do in their own gardens.
- **Climate Festival:** to showcase climate action and engage others to take action.

Eligibility Criteria

Applicants must:

- Be a non-profit group or organisation based in South Cambridgeshire or benefiting South Cambridgeshire residents, OR a South Cambridgeshire parish council.

Non-profit organisations could include registered charities, companies limited by guarantee, unincorporated associations or clubs, community interest companies, charitable incorporated organisations, community benefit societies, social enterprises, established voluntary sector organisations and community shops with an appropriate legal structure (ie not profit-making).

Schools and any other organisations can apply for a grant for a project which is accessible to the community and not just for educational purposes.

Applications from informal community groups and local businesses are also encouraged provided they partner with an eligible non-profit organisation as listed above. The lead applicant must be the non-profit organisation and as such will be required to demonstrate an appropriate level of involvement in the project. Commercial businesses are not eligible to apply.

- Buildings must be open to the whole community, for example village halls. Multi-purpose church buildings or halls and Scout and Guide buildings are eligible where clearly advertised as multi-purpose. Applicants should have a freehold or leasehold interest in the hall in place. If there is a lease in place there must be at least 21 years left to run on the lease. School buildings are not eligible for funding through this grant scheme.
- Have a written constitution or mission statement
- Have an elected committee or representative steering group
- Have a bank account
- Be able to provide an up-to-date copy of their accounts and any relevant protection policies. Parish councils can signpost us to relevant online documentation and do not need to submit hard copies.

If your organisation does not have a written constitution, bank account, mission statement and/or relevant protection policies/insurance, please contact Cambridge Council for Voluntary Service for advice in meeting these requirements.

Contact: 01223 464696 or email enquiries@cambridgecvs.org.uk

Frequently Asked Questions

What can be funded?

As well as capital costs we can fund:

- Salaries of project workers
- Salaries of management staff who supervise project staff. These should be in proportion to the staff time spent on the project
- Reasonable expenses of project staff and volunteers
- Marketing and publicity for the project (as appropriate)

We cannot pay for the following:

- Activities, events or services which have already taken place, including staff development time.
- Activities that benefit individuals, rather than the wider community
- Activities that generate profits for private gain
- Religious activity or content (although we are able to fund religious organisations if they are providing benefit for the wider community)
- Activities that replace or supplement government funding (for example, we can only fund school activities that are additional to the curriculum)
- EV charging points. Government grants are available to install chargers, as well as our [Electric Vehicle Charge Point \(ECVP\) grant](#).
- Renewable energy installations where it is intended to claim Renewable Heat Incentive payments or any other payments where the use of public grants renders the installation ineligible for such payments.

- Loan repayments.

Where funds allocated through the scheme can be spent on local businesses this is welcomed.

What are the conditions of funding?

Organisations that are awarded a grant will be expected to comply with the following conditions as a minimum:

- Funding must only be used for the agreed purpose and must be spent within 12-months of the award being made except where exceptional circumstances apply, and an extension is agreed with the grants officer in writing.
- Where a proposal anticipates financial savings or income, the applicant will need to show this will be for the benefit of the community.
- Publicity must take place acknowledging the award provided by South Cambridgeshire District Council.
- Any unused grant must be returned to South Cambridgeshire District Council
- An end of project report with photographs must be submitted to the Council one calendar year after the grant award.

Applicants are encouraged to seek support for their application from their local Member.

Applicants are encouraged to read case studies of ZCC funded projects published in our Zero Carbon Communities newsletters. If you would like any help or advice from our previous applicants, please email zcc@scambs.gov.uk for more details.

Where appropriate, applicants are encouraged to seek part-funding from other sources including their parish council. There is no requirement for this, but if as expected, the fund is oversubscribed, proposals including funding from other sources will be prioritised. Part-funding can include your own fundraising and can be of monetary and/or in-kind value.

Applicants seeking less than £2,000 are encouraged to apply to the Community Chest for funding if the project involves improvements to community buildings, group 'start-up' costs or the purchase of equipment or materials. More information, including eligibility criteria, can be found [here](#).

What supporting documentation is required?

- A copy of your organisation's constitution or mission statement (except parish councils)
- A copy of your latest accounts (audited if available)
- A copy of your organisation's safeguarding and equal opportunities policy
- Any quotes received for the project

For further information please contact: zcc@scambs.gov.uk