

# Zero Carbon Communities Grant Scheme 2026-2027 Information Document



## Introduction and overview

The Zero Carbon Communities Grant Scheme supports communities in South Cambridgeshire to take action on climate change. This *Information Document* explains the purpose of the grant, the criteria and eligibility requirements, to help you decide whether your project is suitable.

For further details including how to apply and prepare a strong application, see the *Application Guidance* document, which is on our grant webpage along with other useful information: <https://www.scambs.gov.uk/climate-and-environment/zero-carbon-communities/zero-carbon-communities-grant>.

If you have any questions after reading both documents, or would like to hear from groups which have undertaken a similar project to your proposal, contact the ZCC team: [zcc@scambs.gov.uk](mailto:zcc@scambs.gov.uk).

### Grant overview Table

Applications are invited from	Parish/town councils and Community groups (see criteria page 7)
Total available	£152,000
Min/max grant	£2,000 - £19,500
Grant scheme open	Monday 25 May 2026
Application deadline	Friday 24 July 2026 5pm

Applications are invited for projects under two main themes:

**Theme 1: Carbon emissions reduction or locking up carbon.**

**Theme 2: Community engagement on climate change and nature.**

The fund will operate on a 50:50 split between the two themes. 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 geographical and thematic spread of funding across the district.

We strongly encourage applicants to make use of the free support and resources available from *Support Cambridgeshire* (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](mailto:info@supportcambridgeshire.org.uk). Phone: 01480 420601.

## 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. Scoring weightings are provided below under each theme heading. Scoring will be based on:

- Fit to theme
- Measurement and impact
- Project plan and capacity
- Value for money including match funding and co-benefits
- Alignment with the South Cambridgeshire Climate and Nature Strategy 2026-2030 (and consideration of Local Nature Recovery Strategy LNRS as appropriate).
- Sustainability and lifetime impact

A Grant Funding Agreement (GFA) will be prepared for all successful applicants. This will include arrangements for payment of the grant. Applicants will be required to measure and report on their progress via two reports: 1) An end of project report one calendar year from the award of the grant; and 2) a one-year post completion update report outlining longer-term outcomes. This allows us to continue to review the effectiveness of the scheme and to report on the annual impact.

## Theme 1: Carbon Emission Reduction or Locking Up Carbon

### Project Objectives and scoring weighting (%)

1. **(31%)** The project must reduce carbon emissions or capture or store carbon, and demonstrate measurable\* carbon impact.
2. **(31%)** The project contributes additional value and co-benefits (e.g. funding contributions or match funding; 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).
3. **(31%)** The project is sustainable, demonstrates long-term arrangements, and will have a 'lifetime' impact on the local and wider community
4. **(7%)** The project aligns with the aims of South Cambridgeshire District Council's Climate and Nature Strategy 2026-2030 (and consideration is given to Local Nature Recovery Strategy LNRS priorities as appropriate).

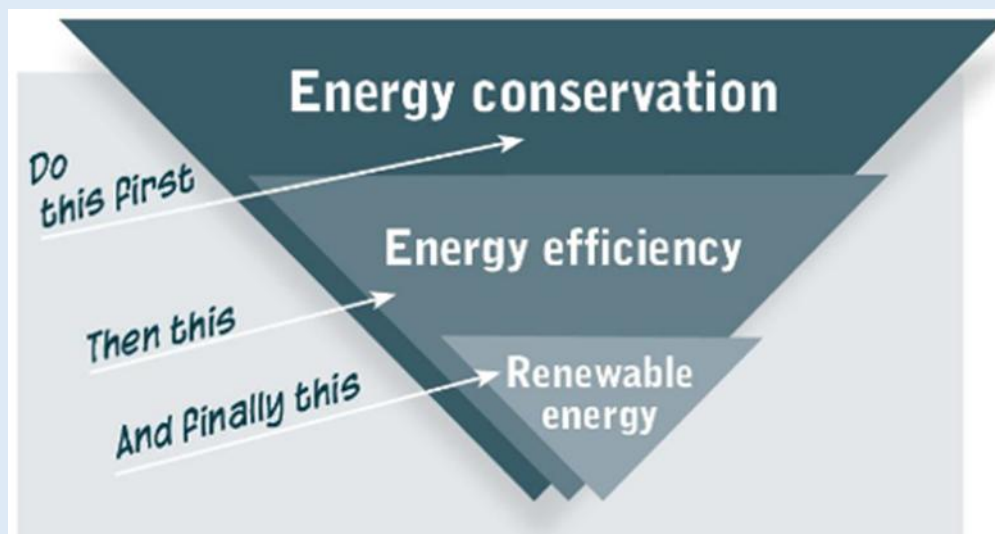
\*Applicants will be required to calculate the reduction in carbon emissions resulting from the project. Further information is provided in the *Application Guidance* document.

## 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. Image shows a hierarchy of measures: energy conservation comes first, then efficiency, then renewable.

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 organisations

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

Note that nature projects may be eligible under Theme 1 or Theme 2, depending on their core focus – examples of both are given below.

Examples include projects involving tree-planting, habitat restoration, peatland restoration, rewilding or biodiversity enhancement, and other nature-based solutions to help combat climate change and increase biodiversity.

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 maximise carbon savings, considering how carbon will be captured from the atmosphere or prevented from release, whilst at the same time creating or restoring natural habitats.
- 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, applicants are advised to consider alignment with the [Local Nature Recovery Strategy](#) goals.

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. Consider Right of Way consent that may be required. 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
- Habitat creation or improvement
- Rewilding or biodiversity enhancement e.g. pond creation, wildflower meadow
- Small-scale restoration of peatland
- Hedge or larger village-wide tree canopy project
- Wildlife corridors providing habitat and connectivity

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.

For biodiversity projects involving introduced vegetation, it must be of native (ideally local) origin, and appropriate to the soil/conditions, to maximise success of the project.

Note that projects delivering statutory Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) requirements are not eligible.

## Theme 2: Community Engagement on Climate Change and nature

### Project Objectives and scoring weighting (%)

1. **(31%)** Achieving wider community engagement and behaviour change around climate change and nature.
2. **(31%)** The project contributes additional value and co-benefits (e.g. funding contributions or match funding; 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).
3. **(31%)** The project is sustainable, demonstrates long-term arrangements, and will have a 'lifetime' impact on the local and wider community.
4. **(7%)** The project aligns with the aims of South Cambridgeshire District Council's Climate and Nature Strategy 2026-2030 (and consideration is given to Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) priorities as appropriate).

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, climate change and nature 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.

Examples include:

- 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.

Electric Vehicle Charging Infrastructure may be supported through this scheme where it clearly demonstrates community benefit and alignment with objectives of the chosen theme. Please also check [our website](#), or email our ZCC team via [zcc@scambs.gov.uk](mailto: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 e.g. waste and recycling, diet, or increase biodiversity and 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 and volunteering in nature:** to encourage people to get out into 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.
- **Nature and wellbeing:** to improve health by creating or improving access to nature and green spaces

## Nature

Note that nature projects may be eligible under Theme 1 or Theme 2, depending on their core focus. Please refer to 'Nature' section as above under Theme 1 for further information.

## 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/town 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 (i.e. not profit-making).

**Sports and membership-based organisations** (e.g. bowls clubs) are eligible where the project demonstrates wider community benefit beyond members, such as supporting mental wellbeing, inclusion, or community cohesion.

- 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 insurance/protection policies**. Parish/town 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 *Support Cambridgeshire* (formerly *Cambridge Council for Voluntary Service*) for advice in meeting these requirements. Website: <https://supportcambridgeshire.org.uk>; Email: [info@supportcambridgeshire.org.uk](mailto:info@supportcambridgeshire.org.uk)  
Phone: 01480 420601.

- **Schools** and other educational organisations can apply for a grant for a project which is accessible to the community and not just for educational purposes. PTA's and school-based groups are eligible where the project delivers a clear benefit to the wider community and is not solely for educational curriculum purposes. Note that **school buildings** are not eligible for funding through this grant scheme.
- 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 available 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 (see above).

### **Applicants will be required to confirm:**

- That no person involved in the delivery of the project has any unspent criminal convictions relevant to the project
- That the organisation is not subject to bankruptcy or insolvency proceedings
- That any required planning permission or regulatory consent has either been secured or is demonstrably in progress prior to submission. Note that the ZCC team can provide signposting regarding consents but cannot obtain permissions on behalf of applicants.

## **Frequently Asked Questions**

### **What can be funded under ZCC grants?**

- Capital costs
- 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)

### **What cannot be funded under ZCC Grants?**

- Activities, events or services which have already taken place, including staff development time.
- Activities that benefit individuals, rather than the wider community
- Projects that do not demonstrate wider community benefit
- Activities that generate profits for private gain
- Projects delivering statutory Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) obligations
- 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)
- 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.

### **What are the conditions of funding?**

Organisations that are awarded a grant will be expected to sign a Grant Funding Agreement (GFA) and 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
- Two reports are required at the end of the project: 1) An end of project report with photographs must be submitted to the Council one calendar year after the grant award; 2) a one-year post-completion update report must be submitted to the Council outlining longer-term outcomes and impact.

### What will help with my application?

Applicants are encouraged to:

- Seek support for their application from their local Member.
- Read case studies of ZCC funded projects published in our Zero Carbon Communities newsletters and on our website. If you would like any help or advice from our previous applicants, please email [zcc@scambs.gov.uk](mailto:zcc@scambs.gov.uk) for more details.
- Where appropriate seek part-funding/match funding from other sources including their parish/town council. There is no requirement for this, but if as expected, the fund is oversubscribed, proposals including match funding or funding from other sources will be prioritised. Part-funding can include your own fundraising and can be of monetary and/or in-kind value. This is particularly encouraged for projects requesting more than £5,000, in order to score highly.
- Plan ahead - check and apply for any consents or planning requirements or other regulatory approval or permit prior to submitting your application.
- We strongly encourage applicants to make use of the free support and resources available from *Support Cambridgeshire* (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](mailto:info@supportcambridgeshire.org.uk). Phone: 01480 420601.

### Can ZCC grants support projects requiring less than £2,000?

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/town councils)
- A copy of your latest accounts (audited if available)

- A copy of your organisation's safeguarding and equal opportunities policy (where relevant)
- Any quotes received for the project
- Written evidence of landowner permission (where relevant)
- Copy of any lease in place (where relevant)
- Specialist reports e.g. ecology survey, energy survey.
- Sketches / plans of your project.

#### **How do I find out more about the ZCC scheme?**

- Contact the ZCC team via our email: [zcc@scambs.gov.uk](mailto:zcc@scambs.gov.uk)
- Be added onto the quarterly circulation of our ZCC Newsletter: [zcc@scambs.gov.uk](mailto: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/>