

Proposed Water Environment Grant - RDPE Scheme development for Water Environment Improvements

November 2017

Defra, the Environment Agency, Natural England and the Rural Payments Agency are developing a scheme under the Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE) called the Water Environment Grant (WEG) to fund improvements to the water environment. The proposed scheme is being designed to support delivery of projects that are currently funded through the Water Environment Improvement Fund (WEIF).

WEIF is grant-in-aid funding currently allocated to the Environment Agency and Natural England from Defra and used to support delivery of a wide range of projects. The Environment Agency primarily use it to fund delivery of Water Framework Directive objectives and Natural England use it to fund achieving objectives of water dependant protected sites (Natura 2000, Ramsar and SSSI).

The priority for the proposed Water Environment Grant would be the delivery of Water Framework Directive outcomes including those of water dependant designated sites.

Why is the funding changing?

There is continued pressure on grant in aid budgets. In order to maintain investment in environmental improvement we have to look for alternative ways to fund projects. Opening up this new route under RDPE will provide greater options for support of projects. It means we can continue the great work, especially through partnerships, to deliver improvements that benefit rural communities and the environment.

What will the proposed new scheme cover?

The proposed new scheme will be aimed at a wide range of potential projects from river restoration and in-river barrier removal through to advice for landowners and control of invasive species through to work which improves water quality. It would support feasibility studies, information sharing and delivery of catchment scale improvements. Projects likely to receive funding would be those which demonstrate they meet Water Framework Directive objectives as set out in river basin management plans, including those for water dependant protected sites. Eligibility and prioritisation criteria to aid this assessment are currently being developed.

The scheme would allow for up to 100% funding of eligible project work.

How does this proposed scheme fit alongside other RDPE schemes?

The proposed WEG scheme is expected to compliment other RDPE funding streams.

How is this proposed scheme different to support available under Countryside Stewardship?

There are some items available under Countryside Stewardship (CS) which may support delivery of water environment improvements. That, where possible, should be the preferred route for funding to provide agri-environment outcomes. However, the proposed WEG scheme could fund in channel river work that is excluded from CS. Additionally CS is only available to farmers and landowners, whereas WEG would be open to applications from others where outcomes could be clearly linked to providing benefits in rural areas.



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What support would be available?

We're looking at how we can support partners and potential applicants to the scheme. To start this, the Environment Agency with Natural England will be setting up local meetings with Catchment Partnership leads to share and discuss details of the new scheme. Other meetings with stakeholders and partners are also being planned and details will be shared within coming weeks.

Who could apply?

The proposed scheme would be available to a wide range of external applicants for example, land managers and land owners, charities, public sector bodies, farmers or foresters. We expect the scheme would be delivered through those partners who already work closely with the Environment Agency and Natural England, like the Catchment Partnerships, although there is the potential for anyone to apply.

Natural England and the Environment Agency (and other non-governmental departmental bodies) would not be able to apply for the scheme.

Final administration details of the scheme have yet to be determined. Natural England and the Environment Agency would play a central role in determining which projects meet the scheme objectives and are a priority for funding.

What are the timescales?

We are currently planning to open the scheme for applications during the spring (2018), with grants issued during summer 2018. Proposals covering multi-year projects would be accepted. Further details around timescales are still to be confirmed at this time.

How much money would be available? (Is there a minimum or maximum?)

At this time we have not got a confirmed budget within the proposed scheme, nor set maximum or minimum amounts for applications. We have fed back information provided by Catchment Partnerships, other stakeholders, the Environment Agency and Natural England regarding proposals that they may like to deliver through the proposed scheme. We are anticipating more proposals than money available so we are developing prioritisation and eligibility criteria to help set out which proposals would be prioritised for funding.

Where can I get further information?

The Environment Agency and Natural England are planning local meetings during January / February 2018 as an opportunity to discuss the proposed scheme with catchment partners - these meetings will be the best source of information at this time. Further, wider communications are being planned with other stakeholders.

Once guidance and application documents are finalised these will be available on www.gov.uk.



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