

Community Tree Planting Grant

Application Evaluation Criteria

This document sets out the key considerations that the Community Tree Planting Grant evaluation board will consider when assessing applications. The aim is to support consistent, transparent decision-making and to prioritise projects that deliver environmental, community and climate resilience benefits.

Core Evaluation Considerations

- Applications should demonstrate that tree species and planting locations have been selected using a “right tree, right place” approach. Proposals do not need to be limited to the existing tree palette where there is a clear justification for alternative species that better meet site conditions or project outcomes.
- Reviewers should consider how well each proposal supports climate resilience, including drought tolerance, flood resilience, and the ability of selected species to thrive under changing local conditions.
- Proposals should also be assessed for their contribution to biodiversity. This may include the use of native or high-value species, such as oak, as well as appropriate opportunities to introduce a wider range of species that increase habitat value and ecological resilience.
- Applications should identify how planting will benefit the community for example by supporting community gardens, or providing shade and cooling, or by placement in areas where people spend time or move through the landscape, such as footpaths, play areas and public spaces. Higher canopy cover and broad-canopied species should be prioritised where appropriate.
- Reviewers should consider whether proposed planting will help manage water run-off or reduce flood risk. Species suited to wetter ground, such as willows, may be appropriate in flood-prone locations where they are compatible with the site and wider management requirements.
- Applications should consider air quality benefits, including the potential for trees to absorb particulates and nitrogen-related pollutants. Species selection should be appropriate to the site and should avoid creating unintended maintenance or nuisance issues.

Weighting Priorities

When scoring applications, the board will also give additional weighting to proposals that deliver one or more of the following priority outcomes:

- Use of local suppliers, where this supports local economic benefit, practical delivery, and appropriate tree provenance.
- Planting that delivers higher canopy cover, increased shade, and cooling benefits.
- Planting in flood-risk areas where trees can contribute to water management and resilience.
- Projects with clear educational, community engagement or awareness-raising benefits.

- Planting that strengthens biodiversity, including appropriate opportunities to introduce new or under-represented species.
- Planting schedules, maintenance and survivability .

Scoring Matrix

The evaluation board will score each criterion from 0 to 5, then apply the weighting shown below. A short comment will be recorded for each score to support transparency and consistency.

Criterion	Weighting	Score	Weighted score	Scoring guidance
Biodiversity and species value	15%	0–5	Score × 15	Higher scores should be awarded where the proposal strengthens biodiversity, uses suitable native or trees from the Essex Tree Palette, increases the habitat value, and demonstrates species diversity.
Climate resilience and site suitability	15%	0–5	Score × 15	Higher scores should be awarded where the proposal demonstrates a strong “right tree, right place” approach, including suitability for drought, changing climate conditions and long-term establishment.
Canopy cover, shade, and cooling	15%	0–5	Score × 15	Higher scores should be awarded where the proposal will increase canopy cover, provide shade and deliver cooling benefits in locations where people live, work, travel or gather.
Flood resilience and water management	15%	0–5	Score × 15	Higher scores should be awarded where planting contributes to water management, run-off reduction, or flood resilience, particularly in locations with identified flood risk.
Community, education, and awareness benefits	10%	0–5	Score × 10	Higher scores should be awarded where the project includes meaningful community involvement, education, engagement, or awareness-raising activity.
Maintenance and survivability	10%	0–5	Score × 10	Higher scores should be awarded where the applicant provides a clear watering, maintenance and monitoring plan for at least the first three years, identifies who is responsible for aftercare, budgets for early-years maintenance and explains how tree losses will be managed or replaced.
Local suppliers and practical delivery	10%	0–5	Score × 10	Higher scores should be awarded where the project supports local suppliers, uses appropriate tree provenance, and demonstrates a practical, deliverable approach.

Scoring scale: 0 = no evidence or does not meet the criterion; 1 = very limited evidence; 2 = limited evidence; 3 = adequate evidence; 4 = strong evidence; 5 = excellent evidence with clear, well-supported benefits.

Total score: Add the weighted scores together to give an overall maximum weighted out of 500. Applications may then be compared by total score, while also taking account of deliverability, value for money and any additional board discussion.

Suggested interpretation: 400–500 = high priority for funding; 300–399 = suitable for funding if budget allows; 200–299 = requires further clarification or improvement; below 200 = low priority or not recommended for funding.

Please note that there will be no right of appeal to the decision made by the Officer Evaluation Panel

Overall Assessment

The strongest applications will clearly explain why the proposed species and locations are suitable, how the project will be delivered and maintained, and what benefits it will provide for climate adaptation, biodiversity, air quality, flood resilience, and local communities.

Project Planning Timeline

Stage	Indicative timing	Key activities	Outputs / decisions
1. Scheme preparation	June to July	Develop application questions, eligibility, scoring criteria, terms and conditions, grant agreement, information pack and webform.	Approved application pack, live webform, agreed assessment method and communications plan.
2. Grant launch and promotion	20 th August 2026	Open the grant window and promote to parish councils, community groups, tree groups, schools, and other local partners. Provide clear guidance on eligible costs, permissions, planting standards, maintenance expectations, and reporting requirements.	Grant open for applications, applicant enquiries managed, promotional activity completed.
3. Application support and clarification	Throughout August and September 2026	Respond to applicant questions, signpost to species, site preparation, and aftercare guidance, and encourage applicants to confirm landowner permissions, site constraints, public access, biodiversity benefits, and long-term maintenance responsibilities.	Applicants submit stronger, more complete proposals with fewer gaps at assessment stage.
4. Application close eligibility check	Midnight on Sunday 4 th October 2026	Close the application window, log submissions, check mandatory documents, confirm eligibility, request missing information where appropriate and remove applications that cannot proceed.	Eligible applications ready for full evaluation.

5. Evaluation and scoring	5 th to 10 th October 2026	Assess applications against agreed criteria, including deliverability, biodiversity, canopy cover/shading, climate resilience, flood-risk benefit, educational/community value, local supplier use and strength of aftercare plan.	Ranked recommendations and proposed grant awards.
6. Award approval and grant agreements	17 th October – 31 st October 2026	Confirm award decisions, issue offer letters, complete grant agreements, confirm payment arrangements and ensure permissions, insurance and any site constraints are resolved before planting.	Signed grant agreements and confirmed delivery requirements.
7. Procurement and delivery planning	November 2026	Applicants order trees and materials, confirm contractors or volunteer arrangements, plan planting days, prepare risk assessments, schedule site preparation, and agree communications or photo opportunities.	Planting plans, materials, and delivery responsibilities confirmed.
8. Planting delivery	November 2026 to March 2027 planting season	Carry out planting during the winter planting season where appropriate, using suitable tree stock, protection, mulch, and watering arrangements. Capture photos, planting numbers, species planted and location evidence.	Planting completed and initial completion evidence submitted.
9. Completion reporting and payment close-out	After planting, by agreed deadline	Review completion evidence, confirm eligible spend, process any final payments, and record outputs such as number of trees planted, area enhanced, public access and community involvement.	Project closed administratively with outputs recorded.
10. Establishment, aftercare, and monitoring	Years 1 to 2 after planting	Applicants implement watering, weeding, mulching, guard checks, replacement planting where needed and annual survival monitoring. Request annual updates with photos, survival rates, lessons learned and any community outcomes.	Improved tree establishment, evidence of survival and learning for future grant rounds.