

Committee:	Cabinet	Date: Tuesday,
Title:	Zero Carbon Communities Grant Fund	20 February 2024
Portfolio Holder:	Cllr Neil Reeve, Portfolio Holder for Environment and Climate Change	
Report Author:	Vicky Reed, Lead Office, Climate Change	Key decision: Yes

Summary

1. The Climate Change programme agreed an allocation of £300,000 over two years to enable funding of community projects that will support the delivery of priorities within the Council's Climate Change Strategy.
2. The ambition for the fund is to be able to stimulate engagement within the community about climate action, to share project ideas, success and learning.
3. The Zero Carbon Communities Fund launched in October 2022 with £150,000 available in the first round of funding. A total of £125,426 grant funding was awarded, with eleven projects selected to receive grant awards in 2023.
4. Applications were invited for the second round of funding in September 2023. Community groups, parish and town councils were able to apply for grants between the value of £1k, and up to £35k. Applications were invited under the themes of carbon emission reduction; biodiversity restoration and enhancement; and community engagement in climate change.
5. The evaluation and selection of projects for second round funding took place in December 2023. Applications were independently evaluated and scored by Councillor Reeves, Councillor Pavitt, and Councillor Lemon. After collation of scoring by UDC officers, a moderation meeting was held on 19th December and fifteen projects were approved to receive grant awards.

Recommendations

6. To note the evaluation and selection process that has been undertaken to determine the successful projects in this funding round.
7. To approve the list of successful projects agreed by the selection panel as listed in *Appendix 2*.
8. To note that five of the successful applications (*Appendix 2*, nos. 1, 2, 10, 12, 15) meet the Rural England Prosperity Fund criteria for capital funding, for community net zero infrastructure projects. These projects are to receive full funding.

Financial Implications

9. A total of £185,666 grant funding has been awarded in Round 2.
10. Funding of £84,371.15 is agreed from the Rural England Prosperity Fund for projects that meet criteria for community net zero infrastructure.
11. A total of £101,294.85 funding will be used from the Climate reserve to fund projects in Round 2.
12. Grant payments will only be released to a project when Officers are in receipt of a signed agreement and any other requested information, to confirm that conditions of the funding have been accepted and/or met by the applicant.
13. A review of the Zero Carbon Communities grant fund will be undertaken in Q2 to develop and agree a proposal for Round 3 of the grant scheme, subject to funds remaining in the Climate reserve.

Background Papers

14. The following papers were referred to by the author in the preparation of this report and are available for inspection from the author of the report:
 - The [Council Climate Change Strategy](#)
 - The Zero Carbon Communities Grant Fund Criteria (*see Appendix 3.*)

Impact

15.

Communication/Consultation	The delivery model for the Zero Carbon Communities Grant Fund was reviewed by the Energy and Climate Change Working Group.
Community Safety	n/a
Equalities	Grant funding will be allocated so that we can support as wide a range of projects as possible across the district. All projects will need to demonstrate how they will engage with others within their community.
Health and Safety	n/a
Human Rights/Legal	Applicants will need to ensure any required

Implications	permissions are gained ahead of installation of infrastructure projects such as solar panels.
Sustainability	The fund specifically supports enabling community groups to deliver sustainability and carbon reduction projects aligned to the Council Climate Change priorities.
Ward-specific impacts	n/a
Workforce/Workplace	n/a

Situation

16. The closing date for the second round of grant applications was 4th December 2023.
17. Applications for grants were invited under three themes:
 - 1) Carbon Emission Reduction
 - 2) Biodiversity Restoration and Enhancement
 - 3) Community Engagement in Climate Change
18. All projects were asked to provide a method for how they would evaluate and measure the impact of their project. For projects delivering interventions to reduce carbon emissions, the impact needed to be quantifiable.
19. At the closing date, a total of twenty-one applications for funding were received. Please see a breakdown of applications received in *Appendix 1*.
20. The selection panel independently scored and assessed each application ahead of a moderation meeting held on 19th December, where all applications were discussed, and the successful grant awards agreed.
21. A traffic light system was used to evaluate each application against the grant award criteria, please see further details at *Appendix 3*. Panel members were asked to declare any interests ahead of the moderation process, to ensure transparency and fairness in the assessment of projects.
22. Fifteen projects were selected to receive a grant award this year, see *Appendix 2*.
23. The grant provides an opportunity for the Council to support a programme of community engagement on climate action. The Climate Change team will monitor and engage with projects over the next 12 months, sharing stories and details of their implementation, via the UDC Net Zero Webpage.
24. Key milestones to be aware of are set out in the table below:

Activity/Milestone	Key Dates
<i>Cabinet Approval</i>	20 th February 2024
<i>Publication of Grant Awards</i>	21 st February 2024
<i>Outcome letters issued to applicants</i>	21 st February 2024
<i>Grant Award Funding Released</i>	1 st March 2024 onwards
<i>Proposal agreed Round 3 Zero Carbon Communities Grant Scheme</i>	30 th June 2024
<i>Applications invited Round 3 Zero Carbon Communities Grant Scheme</i>	30 th September 2024

Risk Analysis

25.

Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigating actions
That the demand for grants cannot be met by the funding available, leading to projects not being delivered, and community climate action plans being delayed in delivery, and the disengagement of community groups.	2	2	<p>Detailed feedback will be given to all applicants on the outcome of their proposal. Arising themes from applications will be reviewed to look at where other grants or resources could be utilised to support delivery.</p> <p>Other suitable grant funds will continue to be publicised which provides a further opportunity for community groups.</p> <p>A proposal for a round 3 of the Zero Carbon Communities grant scheme will be considered.</p>

<p>There is a risk that project impact measurements are not quantifiable, which means the contribution of projects to the reduction of carbon emissions cannot be monitored or understood, leading to a failure of the fund to achieve its aims.</p>	<p>3</p>	<p>3</p>	<p>Available and recognised community carbon calculation resources and methodology are shared with applicants and projects.</p>
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1 = Little or no risk or impact

2 = Some risk or impact – action may be necessary.

3 = Significant risk or impact – action required

4 = Near certainty of risk occurring, catastrophic effect or failure of project.

Appendix 1 Summary of Applications

Total grants requested: **£327,090.46**

By Ward	No of Applications	Total Value
Stort Valley	1	£14,000.00
Elsenham & Henham	2	£29,155.46
Takeley Ward	1	£16,500.00
Saffron Walden	4	£87,000.00
Littlebury, Chesterford & Wenden Lofts	2	£36,204.00
Felsted & Stebbing	1	£3,800.00
Ashdon	2	£20,318.00
Newport	3	£46,331.00
Broad oak & The Hallingburys	1	£35,000.00
High Easter & The Rodings	1	£15,000.00
Stansted North	3	£23,782.00

Theme	No of Applications	Total Value
Carbon Emission Reduction Only	12	£195,950.46
Biodiversity Only	4	£51,640.00
Community Engagement & Behaviour Change Only	1	£30,000.00
Projects encapsulating combined themes	4	£49,500.00

Organisation Type	No of Applications
Parish or Town Council	7
Village Hall/Scout Hall	6
Recreational Group	4
Other	4

Appendix 2 List of Successful Projects

No.	Applicant Name	Grant Theme	Project	Panel Award
1	Saffron Walden Rugby Football Club Ltd*	Carbon Emission Reduction	Solar Panels at Saffron Walden Rugby Football Club	28155.46
2	Little Canfield Village Hall & Recreation Ground*	Carbon Emission Reduction	Solar panels on Village Hall	16500.00
3	Felsted Parish Council	Biodiversity	Wildflower Meadows / Habitat Creation	3800.00
4	Young Wilders CIC	Biodiversity	Youngwilders - Pounce Hall Youth-Led Rewilding Project 2024/25	10728.00
5	Newport Parish Council	Biodiversity	Newport River Group - restoration project, Belmont Woods wetlands project	12500.00
6	Elsenham Parish Council	Biodiversity	Rewilding Elsenham - nature restoration project	1000.00
7	Saffron Hall Trust	Carbon Emission Reduction	Saffron Hall stage light replacement with LED	20000.00
8	Thames 21	Biodiversity	To develop and establish the Roding and West Essex farm cluster; engagement activities and studies	20000.00
9	Saffron Walden Town Council	Carbon Emission Reduction	Golden Acre solar panel installation, LED lighting and triple glazed windows	16700.00
10	High Easter Village Hall*	Carbon Emission Reduction	Installation of solar panels on the village hall	15000.00
11	Stansted Parish Council	Biodiversity	Wildflower project: creating a biodiverse stansted mountfitchet	2112.00
12	Stansted Tennis Club*	Carbon Emission Reduction	Tennis Court Floodlights - Conversion to LED	17760.00
13	Sustainable Stansted	Biodiversity and Community Engagement (Energy Advice)	Project 1 (Biodiversity study): Project 2 (Tailored energy saving information for residents)	3910.00
14	Hadstock Parish Council	Biodiversity and Community Energy	Sustainable Hadstock - Low Carbon, High Biodiversity (Community Energy Project and Project to create Hadstock habitat map and nature strategy)	9590.00
15	Widdington Village Hall*	Carbon Emission Reduction	Lets lower our carbon emissions in the Village Hall (loft insulation, replacement of windows, lighting)	7910.00
Total Grant Awards				185665.46
* project nos 1, 2, 10, 12 and 15 to receive funding from the Rural England Prosperity Fund				



Assessment Criteria

You need to read each application form and supporting documents to assess the following:

PROJECT PLAN

- Is there a clear project description, have they identified what the group wants to do and what the project will achieve?
- Has the plan clearly set out how the project will get the necessary people, support and resources? Do you understand the project objectives? Do the project objective/s align well to the grant theme?
- Did they submit a quote? Are you confident there is readiness and capacity to deliver the project?

VALUE

- Does the project represent value for money – is there a good impact for the amount of money requested?
- Does the project contribute additional value? this might include any of the following: other funding contributions; volunteer time/expertise from other sources; collaboration between organisations, and/or evidence of local support; communication of the project to the local community

MEASUREMENT AND IMPACT

- Has the applicant set out how they will measure and assess the difference that the project will make? For carbon emission reduction projects this should be quantifiable.
- To what extent will the project have a lasting impact on the local community?



Your Score and Comments

- For each application on the spreadsheet please complete Columns 'H' and 'I'.
- In column H: select one of the following to indicate your assessment of the application: **Green**, **Red** or **Amber**
- In column I: provide any brief notes and comments to support your assessment.

Quality Criteria – Traffic Light Assessment	
Please select your evaluation score (either RED , AMBER or GREEN)	
GREEN	The project meets all the requirements of the grant criteria The answers provided are regarded as excellent and fully relevant to the project outlined. I have full confidence in the capabilities or capacity of the applicant.
AMBER	The responses meet all the requirements of the grant criteria. The answers provided are regarded as good and are in part relevant to the project outlined. I have a good level of confidence in the capabilities or capacity of the applicant
RED	The responses meet some requirements of the grant criteria. The answers provided are of low quality. I have some doubts about the capabilities or capacity of the applicant.