

National River Walks Competitive Grant

Clarification questions and responses document

Grant Scheme: C34447

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How to use this document

References within this document to defined terms are to those contained in the 'Glossary' at Section A (*Particulars and conditions of application*) of the Invitation to Apply for the National River Walks Competitive Grant.

This document is intended to support applicants preparing an application to the National River Walks Competitive Grant (the "**Grant**").

This document outlines in:

- **Section 1:** the Authority's anticipated general question(s) and the Authority's correlating response(s); and
- **Section 2:** clarification questions received directly by the River Walks inbox during the application period and the Authority's correlating responses.

These questions and responses are published to ensure all applicants have access to the same information.

Only information contained within the published 'Invitation to Apply' documents and this document should be relied upon when preparing an application for the Grant.

Section 1: Anticipated general questions and responses

No.	Anticipated general question	Authority response
1.	In the Find a Grant Application form in the 'Funding Section', one of the questions asks: 'Where will this funding be spent?' and gives a list of regions to select from. This list differs from the one detailed in the Invitation to Apply guidance. What should I do?	The 'Where will this funding be spent?' question is mandated by Cabinet Office and is for information purposes only. You should select the region or regions that best fit your application. Please note that the next section of the Application form 'National River Walks – Eligibility' is scheme specific and includes the question 'What region of England will the river walk be located in?'. You must select the single primary region from the drop-down list.

PLEASE SEE NEXT PAGE FOR SECTION 2 (CLARIFICATION QUESTIONS AND RESPONSES)

Section 2: Clarification questions and responses

No.	Date received	Clarification question	Authority response
1.	09/07/2026	Is the North West region not considered for this grant?	Please refer to section A – Particulars and Conditions of application, paragraph 1. One river walk has already been delivered in the North West region. The manifesto commitment is to deliver one walk in each region of the country. As such, we are not looking for further applications from the North West.
2.	10/07/2026	Can you please advise whether this fund also supports walks along canals.	Please refer to Section B: The National River Walks programme – Eligible location paragraph of the Invitation to Apply guidance. No. To be eligible for funding under the Grant, the proposed route must run alongside a river (either a main river or ordinary watercourse) and be adjacent to or functionally connected to the river corridor. Canal-only routes are therefore not eligible under the current criteria. Where a route includes canal sections but remains primarily a river walk that meets all eligibility requirements, applicants should explain this clearly within their application.
3.	10/07/2026	I'm wondering if you'd be able to advise on the level of involvement that Environment Agency employees can contribute to River Walk partnership applications and project delivery if the application is successful. We understand that we	You are correct that central government departments and their arm's length bodies (including the Environment Agency) are not eligible to apply. Such bodies are permitted to be a partner to the lead applicant for delivery of a river walk. However, any advice given to the lead applicant with respect to their application should be limited to the body's involvement in delivery of

		would not be eligible to apply as a lead applicant, however would welcome some advice on how much we can contribute to a partnership project.	the river walk. The advice should therefore be targeted and limited in scope.
4.	14/07/2026	As the guidance states that routes "must run alongside a river", can you confirm whether the XX Walk would meet the eligibility criteria in its current form, given that while it broadly follows the River XX corridor, there are substantial sections where the river is not visible from the path?	As stated in the Invitation to Apply Document, the route must run alongside a river. Whilst it is not a specified requirement that the river must be visible from all sections of the route, we would expect it to be visible from the majority of the route, ie more than 50%.
5.	20/07/2027	The guidance states that eligible routes must run alongside a river, either a "main river" or an "ordinary watercourse". Could you please confirm whether routes alongside navigable canals would be considered eligible where:	Please refer to Section B: The National River Walks programme – Eligible location paragraph of the Invitation to Apply guidance. To be eligible for funding under the Grant, the proposed route must run alongside a river (either a main river or ordinary watercourse) and be adjacent to or functionally connected to the river corridor. A canal that has been designated a main river and forms part of a river corridor would be eligible under the terms of the ITA. Applicants

		- the canal is designated as a Main River, and/or - the canal forms part of a navigable river corridor or river navigation.	should make it clear in their applications how much of the route is along a designated main river
6.	20/07/2026	We note that up to 4 Walks are to be funded for delivery by March 2028 with a further round to follow presumably for delivery by 2030? Does that mean that a River Walk project could in principle submit an application for phased funding and delivery over both calls up to the limit of £1.35 m or will they be allowed only one bid ? Will bids unsuccessful in Round 1 be allowed to re-apply to Round 2?	Projects that receive funding through the current National River Walks competition will not be eligible to receive funding through a future National River Walks competition. There is also no option for phased funding and delivery across competitions; this competition and any future competition should be regarded as separate and distinct. This is to ensure that the programme can deliver its planned targets within the available funding allocation. Unsuccessful applicants will not be excluded for future competition solely because they applied for this competition and have been unsuccessful, provided their region has not already secured funding for a River Walk through the current competition or in the North West (see the beginning of Section B: The National River Walks Programme of the Invitation to Apply). Notwithstanding this,

		Is funding for the remaining four regions in the second round ring-fenced?	unsuccessful applicants that apply for the future competition will still need to satisfy the eligibility criteria for that future competition. Funding in a future competition will be targeted towards regions that have not received funding. in the first competition. Further information on future competitions will be provided when the next competition launches.
7.	20/07/2026	Is there the opportunity to arrange a short call with potential applicants to discuss some questions about our application.	Unfortunately, we cannot arrange individual meetings or calls with prospective applicants. However, we are very happy to answer any questions you may have via this inbox.
8.	21/07/2026	To what extent does a proposed river walk route need to be developed at the application stage? For example, can an application be submitted where the broad area, rivers, communities, partners,	Applicants should identify a clear proposed route at the application stage and provide sufficient information for the proposal to be assessed against the published eligibility and assessment criteria, including route location, length, proposed works and spatial route data. Applicants may continue to refine aspects of the route through community engagement and co-design during delivery where

		project plan and estimated costs have been identified, but the final route has not yet been determined because it will be co-designed with volunteers, community groups and partners during the delivery phase? Additionally, will there be a further round of National River Walks funding available after the current application round?	appropriate; however, the application must contain sufficient detail to enable a robust assessment of the proposal. Please refer to Section B of the Invitation to Apply, which states that Defra aims to select four proposals for delivery by 31 March 2028 and that a further competition will be launched in the future to deliver the remaining four walks.
9.	22/07/2026	Does the route need to be continuous, or can it incorporate carriageway (footway) links? Or are you looking for a continuous route off the carriage way with sufficient links to existing networks	Please refer to Section B – Eligibility of the Invitation to Apply guidance. The proposed work must deliver new or upgraded linear access and may include sections of link routes where this improves access overall. Applications should clearly explain how the proposed route functions as a coherent River Walk, including any on-road or footway sections, and how these contribute to connectivity, accessibility and the overall user experience. All applications will be assessed against the published eligibility and assessment criteria.
10.	22/07/2026	Can funding awarded through the National River Walks programme be used to establish a small sub-grant scheme for community	Please refer to heading ‘Eligible Applicants’ of Section B: The National River Walks Programme of the Invitation to Apply The National River Walks Invitation to Apply does not specifically provide for the establishment of a sub-grant scheme. However,

		groups? As part of our proposed project, we are considering creating an open application process through which local community groups could apply for funding to deliver events and activities associated with the wider River Walk project. The lead applicant would be responsible for administering the process, assessing applications, and distributing the funding. Could you please confirm whether this approach is permitted under the programme's Terms and Conditions, and whether grant funding can be passed on to third-party organisations in this way.	partnership working and the involvement of third-party organisations in project delivery are permitted, provided the proposed activities contribute directly to the delivery of the approved River Walk project and represent eligible expenditure. Where applicants propose to pass funding to community groups or other third-party organisations, the lead applicant must retain overall responsibility for administration of the grant, project delivery, financial management, monitoring, reporting and compliance with the grant funding agreement. Any proposal involving the distribution of funding to third parties should clearly explain: how the funded activities will contribute to the National River Walk project objectives; the governance, assessment and oversight arrangements that will be used; how value for money will be achieved; how delivery and expenditure will be monitored; and how risks will be managed. Applicants must also ensure that any funding provided to third
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			parties does not result in double funding, duplicate funding of the same activity, or expenditure that would be ineligible under the Grant Funding Agreement (please refer to Annex A of the National River Walks Invitation to Apply). Any such proposal will be considered as part of the overall application and assessed against the published eligibility and assessment criteria.
11.	22/07/2026	Can National River Walks funding be used to support feasibility studies, options appraisals, design work and landholder investigations for sections of a proposed route that are not expected to be constructed within the National River Walks funding period?	The Invitation to Apply states that eligible project delivery and management costs may include project design, planning, engagement with landowners and partners, surveys, research and solution development where these activities are required to support the delivery of the proposed National River Walk. Applicants may include costs associated with feasibility studies, options appraisals, design work and landholder investigations where these activities are directly necessary for the delivery of the National River Walk proposal being funded through this programme and are clearly justified within the application. National River Walks funding is intended to support the development and delivery of the proposed National River Walk project. It should not be used to fund feasibility studies, options appraisals, design work or landholder investigations for route sections that are outside

			the scope of the proposed National River Walk or that are intended solely to inform potential future phases of development beyond the funded project. Applicants should demonstrate a clear and direct link between all proposed activities and the delivery of the National River Walk for which funding is sought. All applications will be assessed against the published eligibility and assessment criteria, including Value for Money and Project Management. The final determination of whether proposed activities and costs are eligible and represent value for money will be made as part of the assessment process.
12.	24/07/2026	Question 1 – Estuaries Can routes alongside estuaries form part of a National River Walk proposal? If so, how should applicants determine where a river transitions into an estuary for the purposes of eligibility?	An estuary may form part of a proposed River Walk where applicants can demonstrate that it forms part of the wider river corridor and contributes meaningfully to the objectives of the National River Walks programme. Applications should clearly explain the rationale for the proposed route and how any estuarine section contributes to the overall River Walk experience. Proposed routes will be assessed against the published eligibility and assessment criteria, including whether they deliver a coherent River Walk that runs alongside a river and supports the objectives of the programme.
13.	24/07/2026	Question 2 – Definition of Disadvantage The ITA refers to routes running	See sub-section ‘Eligible Location’ of Section B: The National River Walks Programme of the Invitation to Apply. For the purposes of this competition:

		through or close to disadvantaged areas. For the purposes of the National River Walks programme, should applicants use the Index of Multiple Deprivation definition set out in the ITA, or can a wider definition of disadvantage be applied?	• 'disadvantaged areas' are defined as areas within the top 30% (Decile 3) for overall deprivation according to the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD).; and • Rivers which run 'close to' a disadvantaged area are defined as rivers which run within 1km of the disadvantaged area. Applicants should use these definitions when considering eligibility.
14.	24/07/2026	Question 3 – Measuring the 1km Criterion The ITA states that rivers running within 1km of a disadvantaged area are eligible. How should this 1km distance be measured — as a straight-line distance ("as the crow flies") or via the public highway, rights of way, or other walking routes?	See sub-section C2.2 Eligibility checks (Stage 1) of Section C: How to apply and assessment criteria. The Invitation to Apply states that eligible routes must run through or within 1km of an eligible deprived area and defines this as "a 15 minute walk as defined by the Green Infrastructure standards". Applicants should therefore consider the accessibility of the route in terms of reasonable walking access rather than relying solely on a straight-line ("as the crow flies") measurement. Applications should clearly explain how the proposed route meets this requirement and provide supporting mapping where appropriate
15.	24/07/2026	Can part of the grant be allocated to feasibility studies for future improvements along the river walk	Part 1 – Please refer to the Authority's response to Q11

		where those improvements cannot realistically be delivered by March 2028? For example, where statutory consents are unlikely to be secured in time or where complex interventions require feasibility work before delivery. Where feasibility studies are eligible, should these costs be treated as capital or resource expenditure?	Part 2 – Please refer to the ‘Funding Criteria’ sub-section of Section B: The National River Walks Programme of the Invitation to Apply. The Invitation to Apply defines capital funding as funding used to create or enhance tangible or intangible assets, while resource funding supports day-to-day delivery and administration activities. However, capital expenditure includes each of: project design; planning and communication of plans with landowners, partners, contractors and other affected parties; surveys; research; and solution development, where these activities relate directly to project delivery and management. The Invitation to Apply defines capital funding as funding used to create or enhance tangible or intangible assets, while resource funding supports day-to-day delivery and administration activities. It also notes that project delivery and management activities, including project design, planning, surveys, research and solution
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			development, may fall within eligible expenditure categories depending on the nature of the activity being undertaken. Applicants should therefore categorise feasibility studies and related preparatory work according to the nature of the activity and in line with the definitions and cost categories set out in the Invitation to Apply and Budget Plan Template. All proposed costs will be reviewed as part of the assessment process, including consideration of eligibility, value for money and whether expenditure has been appropriately categorised
16.	2707/2026	An applicant asks whether community co-design activities undertaken specifically to inform the design and delivery of capital works should be classified as Resource expenditure under "community engagement & participation" or whether they may be treated as Capital expenditure where they form an integral part of route design and pre-construction activities.	Please refer to the Funding Criteria sub-section of Section B: The National River Walks Programme of the Invitation to Apply. The Invitation to Apply does not provide a specific category for community co-design activities. Applicants should categorise costs according to the nature of the activity and the cost category definitions set out in the ITA and Budget Plan Template. Where community engagement activities are undertaken to inform route design, planning or delivery, applicants should explain how those activities support the delivery of the proposed National River Walk and why the proposed categorisation is appropriate. The final determination of whether costs are eligible and correctly categorised will be made as part of the assessment process.

17.	27/07/2026	Question 1: Is the proposed River XX route eligible for the National River Walks programme? Question 2: Is a newly established Community Interest Company (CIC) eligible to apply? Question 3: Is a project at an early stage likely to be sufficiently developed to apply? Question 4: Would a project still be eligible if landowner permissions have not yet been secured? Question 5: Would improvements to an existing route, a new route, or a hybrid route be eligible? Question 6: Does the presence of deprivation within X suggest the project could meet the deprivation requirement? Question 7: Are there organisations that Defra would recommend partnering with? Question 8: Is there support	Q1: The National River Walks programme is intended to support new or upgraded linear access routes that run alongside a river, either a main river or ordinary watercourse. Routes should run through or close to disadvantaged areas, with "close to" defined as within 1km of an area in the top 30% most deprived areas according to the Index of Multiple Deprivation. Land must also be adjacent to or functionally connected to the river corridor. Applicants may wish to review the sub-sections titled Eligibility, Eligible Location, and TQ1 – Access to Nature when considering whether their project meets the published requirements. Q2: Community Interest Companies (CICs) are listed as eligible applicants under the programme. The ITA also welcomes partnership applications where a lead organisation is nominated and assumes responsibility for delivery and grant management. Further information can be found in the Eligible Applicants sub-section of Section B: The National River Walks Programme of the Invitation to Apply. Q3: Please refer to the Authority's response to Q8. Q4 Applicants must demonstrate that they have secured, or are actively securing, the land access arrangements necessary to
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		available to help develop or prepare an application? Question 9: Are there other funding sources that could support project development? Question 10: How can a newly established CIC demonstrate sufficient capacity and capability?	deliver the project. The ITA states that eligible routes must run through land where there is either already public access or where there is evidence that landowners are willing to allow free public access. Applicants should explain what permissions or agreements have already been secured, what remains outstanding, and how any remaining approvals will be obtained. Relevant information is provided in sub-sections Eligibility Checks (Stage 1) and TQ6 – Project Management. Q5: The programme supports both new access and substantial upgrades to existing access. The ITA states that proposals should deliver "new or upgraded linear access" and also notes that link routes may be included where they improve overall access. Further information is available within Eligibility and TQ1 – Access to Nature. Q6: Defra would not be able to provide a definitive eligibility assessment for a specific project outside the assessment process. The ITA requires proposed routes to run through or within 1km of areas within the top 30% most deprived areas nationally, based on the Index of Multiple Deprivation. Applicants are responsible for demonstrating this as part of their application using the evidence sources identified within the ITA. Relevant information can be found in Eligible Location and Eligibility Checks (Stage 1).
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			Q7: The ITA welcomes partnership applications and requires applicants to demonstrate appropriate delivery arrangements and capability. However, the ITA does not identify or recommend specific organisations that applicants should partner with. Applicants are responsible for determining their own partnership arrangements and selecting partners that can support successful delivery of the project. Q8: Applicants should refer to the published ITA and may submit clarification questions through the published clarification process. The programme will publish responses to clarification questions so that all applicants have access to the same information. Information on the clarification process is available within Clarifications Sought by Applicants and C1.3 Clarification Questions. There is no additional support provided. Q9: The National River Walks Invitation to Apply (ITA) only sets out the requirements and funding available through the National River Walks programme and does not provide advice on, endorse or recommend alternative funding sources. Applicants are responsible for identifying and securing any additional funding that may support their project. Applicants may choose to use other funding sources or match
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		funding alongside a National River Walks grant where this is permitted by the terms of those funding sources and where the funding contributes to the delivery of the proposed project. However, applicants must ensure that funding is not used to pay for the same activity, output or cost more than once. The ITA states that double funding is not permitted. Where match funding is included, applicants should ensure that it is necessary, reasonable, directly related to the project objectives, and can be evidenced and audited. The ITA explains that match funding may be provided as cash contributions or eligible in-kind contributions and must be supported by appropriate documentation. Applicants should clearly identify all sources of project funding within their application and explain how the National River Walks grant will enable, enhance or accelerate project delivery rather than duplicate funding already in place. All applications will be assessed against the published eligibility, value for money and additionality requirements. Q10: The Invitation to Apply (ITA) does not set a minimum organisational age and Community Interest Companies (CICs) are listed as eligible applicants. However, all applicants must demonstrate that they have the capacity, capability and financial standing necessary to deliver the proposed project.
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			As part of the application process, applicants are required to complete the Standard Qualification Questions, including questions relating to financial information and organisational due diligence. Applications will be subject to financial and other due diligence checks as part of the assessment process. Where an organisation has only recently been established and does not have a long financial history, it should provide the financial accounts, statements or other financial information requested as part of the application and explain its arrangements for project delivery, governance and financial management. Applicants should also provide evidence of relevant experience, delivery capability, partnership arrangements and key personnel where appropriate. Applications will be assessed against the published criteria, including organisational capability, project management arrangements, deliverability, governance, risk management and financial standing. The outcome of any due diligence assessment will be considered alongside the application as a whole.
18.	30/07/2026	Can the lead applicant allocate project management costs between capital and resource expenditure where the role includes	Please refer to the Staff Costs and Funding Criteria sections of the Invitation to Apply. The Invitation to Apply states that eligible project delivery and management staff costs (Capital) include project management,

		both: coordination and management activities directly supporting capital delivery; and grant administration, partnership management, monitoring and reporting? Alternatively, should all project management costs incurred by the lead applicant be treated as resource expenditure?	project design, planning and communication with landowners, partners and contractors, contractor management, supervision of delivery activities, and other activities directly supporting project delivery. The ITA also identifies finance and administrative staff costs (Resource), including grant administration, financial management, reporting, claims preparation and similar day-to-day administration activities. Applicants should therefore categorise staff costs according to the nature of the activity being undertaken rather than the job title of the individual. Where a project manager is undertaking activities directly related to the delivery and management of capital works, those costs may be allocated to capital expenditure. Where the role relates to grant administration, partnership management, financial management, reporting or other administrative functions, those costs would normally be allocated to resource expenditure. Applicants should clearly explain and justify any proposed split of staff time within their application and budget plan. All proposed costs and their categorisation will be reviewed as part of the assessment process.
19.	30/07/2026	The National River Walks Invitation to Apply states that eligible projects	Q1: Please refer to the Authority's response to Q017(part 5). The Authority has previously clarified that the programme supports both

		may deliver either new or upgraded linear access routes. Q1: Could you please confirm whether proposals focused primarily on upgrading an existing long-distance riverside route would be eligible for funding, provided they meet the published eligibility and assessment criteria? Q2: In addition, does the programme support costs associated with the longer-term management and maintenance of existing riverside routes, such as staff costs, vegetation management, routine maintenance, and minor repair works, or is funding intended solely for the delivery of the proposed National River Walk project?	new access and substantial upgrades to existing access, and that link routes may be included where they improve overall access. Applicants should clearly demonstrate how the proposed works deliver new access or substantial upgrades to existing access and how the proposal meets the published eligibility and assessment criteria. Q2: Refer to sub-section 'Obligation Period' of Section B: The National River Walks Programme. The Invitation to Apply requires applicants to provide a costed and funded maintenance plan for at least 10 years and explain how benefits will be sustained beyond the funded period. This is called the "Obligation Period", and Applicants must demonstrate how ongoing maintenance and management obligations will be met throughout the Obligation Period as part of their application. However, as specified in the ITA, due to restrictions on funding, the Authority is not able to pay for costs incurred during the Obligation Period.
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