

Taking action for pollinators in the West of England

West of England Mayoral Combined Authority

Wednesday 22 November 2023

Summary

The £1m Community Pollinator Fund was created to support community-led ecology projects that enhance biodiversity and pollinator habitats across the West of England region. The Fund has two main objectives; to create and enhance habitats for pollinators and to raise awareness, empowering communities to take action to address the ecological emergency declared in the region.

"I'm proud that I've made bees a priority for the West of England Mayoral Combined Authority I lead.

Because they're absolutely vital – not least in terms of making sure our crops are pollinated and we have food to eat year-round. But the last few years have been tough - pollinator numbers are dropping rapidly, and that spells disaster for my region, and our country.

That's why I'm determined my Mayoral Combined Authority sets an example, and I'm proud we are leading and showing other regions what can be done to support this country's vital pollinator friends, including delivering the key habitats for bees we need at scale and speed.

The £1 million West of England Pollinator Fund is already making such a huge difference transforming over 312,000 square metres of land across the region, and my annual Bee Bold Awards showcases the West's best 'bee buddy' organisations.

Through this important community-led work, my Mayoral Combined Authority is also inspiring others to take action, and they're also all really important steps to meet my commitment to make our amazing West of England the bee and pollinator capital of the whole country."

— Metro Mayor Dan Norris



The West of England Metro Mayor Dan Norris meets with members of Radstock Town Council at the Southfield Recreation Ground to break ground on their bee-friendly community garden.

The problem

Action to create, protect and enhance biodiversity and pollinator habitats was considered an essential part of addressing the climate and ecological emergencies in the West of England, and it was recognised that action will be needed at all levels – from individuals ‘doing their bit’ to large landscape-scale initiatives.

The £ 1 million Community Pollinator Fund (the ‘Fund’) was conceived as a way to contribute to the region’s targets to combat the ecological emergency as well as providing other environmental and societal benefits.

The Metro Mayor of the West of England Combined Authority Dan Norris was highly supportive of the Fund from its inception, having pledged to make the West of England the ‘pollinator capital’ of the UK. The Fund also received strong support from the three local authorities that make up the Combined Authority (Bath and North-East Somerset, Bristol, and South Gloucestershire councils).

The funding offered grants from £1,000 - £100,000 and the projects were required to be within the West of England Mayoral Combined Authority area. The Metro Mayor was also a strong advocate of ensuring the funding was as accessible as possible to the widest range of community-based organisations, including youth and volunteer groups, charities, councils, schools, and buildings of worship.

The two main objectives of the fund were:

1. To create and enhance the biodiversity in the area with an emphasis on improving pollinator habitats to contribute towards the regional ambition to increase the abundance of wildlife by 2030
2. To raise awareness and empower communities to take action to address the ecological emergency

The option to aim the Fund at a small-scale action was chosen above three other options considered at the project development stage against four criteria: create and enhance biodiversity, empower communities, deliverability at pace and offer benefits across the West of England Mayoral Combined Authority region.

It was felt that the community-led approach provided the best opportunity for a broad range of communities (including more deprived areas and disadvantaged groups) to access green infrastructure and nature on their doorstep, the projects could be established quickly following receipt of funding and it would empower communities to deliver public goods.

The Fund contributes to the West of England Mayoral Combined Authority's Climate and Ecological Strategy and Action Plan which outlines Nature Recovery as one of the six priority areas. The Fund also helps to contribute to key national targets set out in the Government's 25-year environment plan including policies to connect people with the environment to improve health and well-being, recover nature and enhance the beauty of landscapes.

Timeline

Dan Norris was elected Metro Mayor in May 2021 and prioritised climate change and nature, with an emphasis on action for pollinators in response to residents' requests. The Community Pollinator Fund was established soon after, with mobilisation activities running from April 2022.

The first round of applications opened in the summer of 2022, with projects awarded funding in December 2022. A second round of funding opened in February 2023, with a long application period to enable engagement with applicants. Round 2 projects were awarded funding in summer 2023. A third round was originally planned, but due to the high number and high quality of applications, this was not necessary, with the original £1m being fully utilised after the second round.

There were delays in recruiting the project team for the Fund, due in part to capacity within the West of England Mayoral Combined Authority, with many internal changes happening at the time to support increased ambition on climate and nature. This did not prevent the rest of the Fund from progressing but did delay the appointment of an ecological contractor to undertake monitoring surveys of the funded projects.



The West of England Metro Mayor Dan Norris and members of the local community help to plant plug plants at Siston Common, South Gloucestershire as part of a mass-planting event to create a new wildflower meadow.

Stakeholders

As the West of England Mayoral Combined Authority does not own any land/ estates, it was key to work in partnership with various stakeholders to gain support for the Community Pollinator Fund. This involved consulting during the planning stages of the Fund with the unitary authorities, conservation charities such as Avon Wildlife Trust and the Natural History Consortium, as well as the West of England Nature Partnership.

The applications received were reviewed and scored by a panel of assessors. This panel was drawn from across different departments within the West of England Mayoral Combined Authority, as well as members from the Environment Officers Steering Group and Green Infrastructure Working Group. Other stakeholders involved in the panel assessment stage included expertise from the Avon Wildlife Trust and the Natural History Consortium. An ecologist also reviewed the projects to provide technical expertise to quality assurance and assess the ecological value of the proposals.

Engagement with local community, volunteer and charity groups was also undertaken in the build-up to the second round of funding. The Fund team hosted an online webinar for those who had registered their interest in applying for funding, which included a Q&A about the fund, along with presentations from nature and ecology experts and round 1 projects. Applicants were also engaged via social media and email.

For the development of the small grants (£1,000 - £10,000), the Fund team consulted with organisations that had run similar-sized nature-themed grants, including local government bodies and charitable organisations, to learn lessons and gain insights.

Impact

Projects are forecast to have created 55.3 hectares of new and improved pollinator habitats (roughly equivalent to 77.5 football pitches) in the West of England region by 2025, whilst engaging around 6,500 community members across 51,000 hours of practical action. The habitats will provide both food and refuge habitats for pollinators and help to reverse the decline of these species within the region. The habitat creation and improvement will also create wider co-benefits for biodiversity including pollination services, food and refuge resources. Other environmental, social, and ecosystem service benefits will also include water purification, air quality improvements, climate mitigation and adaptation as well as space for recreation and engagement with nature.

These projections all significantly exceed the targets set at the inception of the Community Pollinator Fund. It is anticipated that there will be beneficial impacts on the health and well-being of those involved in the projects, as well as the public who are able to access the higher quality green spaces. By targeting small-scale, community initiatives, it is hoped that the funded projects will also provide increased opportunities for people from protected and disadvantaged groups to engage with nature, whilst inspiring people to take action for pollinators in their own spaces.

Through the projects involving education providers and schools, the funding will help to provide opportunities for young people to be exposed to, and learn about, pollinators and nature and hopefully provide a long-lasting legacy.

Lessons learned

By having multiple application rounds, it allowed the team to reflect on what had worked and what needed improving to make the next application process smoother for both applicants and the Fund team itself. Many organisations in Round 1 were keen to do something positive for pollinators but lacked the capacity and knowledge to design a suitable pollinator project. Earlier, better, and more direct engagement with organisations in round 2 meant that applications were of a much higher quality, with the project design and deliverables better aligned with the Fund objectives. In particular, calls and/ or site visits with potential applicants, along with linking projects with nature and ecology experts helped support organisations to design projects which were more tailored to their sites and therefore offer better long-term benefits.

Small community-based organisations often faced barriers to participating in the fund due to complexities around the application processes and due diligence processes, along with a lack of capital to deliver projects when payments are in arrears. The Fund team worked closely with the governance and due diligence functions within the Combined Authority to develop flexible and proportionate approaches to analysing the risks posed by each project, along with offering proportionate, flexible payment arrangements which helped support a wider range of organisations to participate. In addition, application forms were designed in a tiered manner to avoid small groups being discouraged by complex application documents.

Having a panel made up of experts from different departments to assess the submitted applications was also a great success of the Fund. It provided the breadth of knowledge to objectively analyse the projects, giving fairer assessments of both ecological and societal elements of the different projects.

Funding for nature recovery in all aspects requires greater investment on a local, regional, and national scale for lasting impacts to biodiversity to take place.

Finances

The Combined Authority allocated £1.45m to the overall Community Pollinator Fund, with £1m of that total allocated for grants to the projects themselves. The remaining funding covered staff costs, marketing, and

monitoring and evaluation. The funding for the Community Pollinator Fund was allocated from the West of England Mayoral Combined Authority 'Green Recovery Fund' - a £36m investment from the combined authority, created to help us meet our climate and ecology ambitions. An additional £800,000 was allocated to the project in summer 2023, with the majority of this additional funding expected to be used to fund projects in strategic locations in the region.

All funded projects were also required to match-fund at least 20% of the grant requested, with this match being cash or in-kind (e.g., staff/volunteer time).

Finances

Finances

The Combined Authority allocated £1.45m to the overall Community Pollinator Fund, with £1m of that total allocated for grants to the projects themselves. The remaining funding covered staff costs, marketing, and monitoring and evaluation. The funding for the Community Pollinator Fund was allocated from the West of England Mayoral Combined Authority 'Green Recovery Fund' - a £36m investment from the combined authority, created to help us meet our climate and ecology ambitions. An additional £800,000 was allocated to the project in summer 2023, with the majority of this additional funding expected to be used to fund projects in strategic locations in the region.

All funded projects were also required to match-fund at least 20% of the grant requested, with this match being cash or in-kind (e.g., staff/volunteer time).

The Community Pollinator Fund has a fixed three-year delivery window, with projects required to be completed by set deadlines within this timeframe. Funded projects were required to demonstrate how the habitats created and/or improved with the funding would be maintained and continue to deliver benefits to both pollinators and people beyond the initial funding period. In many cases, changes to cutting or planting regimes were incorporated into standard practices by organisations (for example local council parks management plans), or staff time relating to project management were incorporated into roles on an ongoing basis to provide future maintenance.

We are showcasing the projects funded through the Community Pollinator Fund on the [West of England Mayoral Combined Authority website](#), to provide case studies to other organisations which may want to take action for pollinators. Lesson sharing between the different projects will also take place – particularly between the different unitary authorities in the West of England Mayoral Combined Authority and their approaches to parks and green space management.

The West of England Mayoral Combined Authority also hosts an annual 'Bee Bold Awards' which recognises and celebrates businesses, organisations and schools that are already taking positive action to support bees and pollinators. This provides an ongoing opportunity to showcase different techniques and share knowledge, as well as educating the public on the importance of pollinators.

All of this will contribute to ensuring the Metro Mayor's pledge for the West of England region to become the pollinator capital of the UK.

Links, contacts, and credits

- Website: <https://www.westofengland-ca.gov.uk/community-pollinator-fund/>
- Contact email for further detail: peter.charles@westofengland-ca.gov.uk

