



Landowner and Farming Grants Scheme – Guidance Notes 2026

River Chess Smarter Water Catchments Project

Working in partnership



Executive summary

Scope: River Chess Valley

Provided by: Chiltern Conservation Board

Maximum value: Discretionary

Status: Closed call for Applications

Application deadline:

Applications are received through two mechanisms:

- **'Open Call':** Applications are open for submissions year-round, to enable reactive support for opportunities that arise. Decisions aim to be made within four weeks of application.
- **'Closed Call':** Thematic submissions will also be advertised periodically, with given deadlines and clear criteria for content types and topics. This format aims to enable the our community to support engagement with key issues and events within the wider landscape.

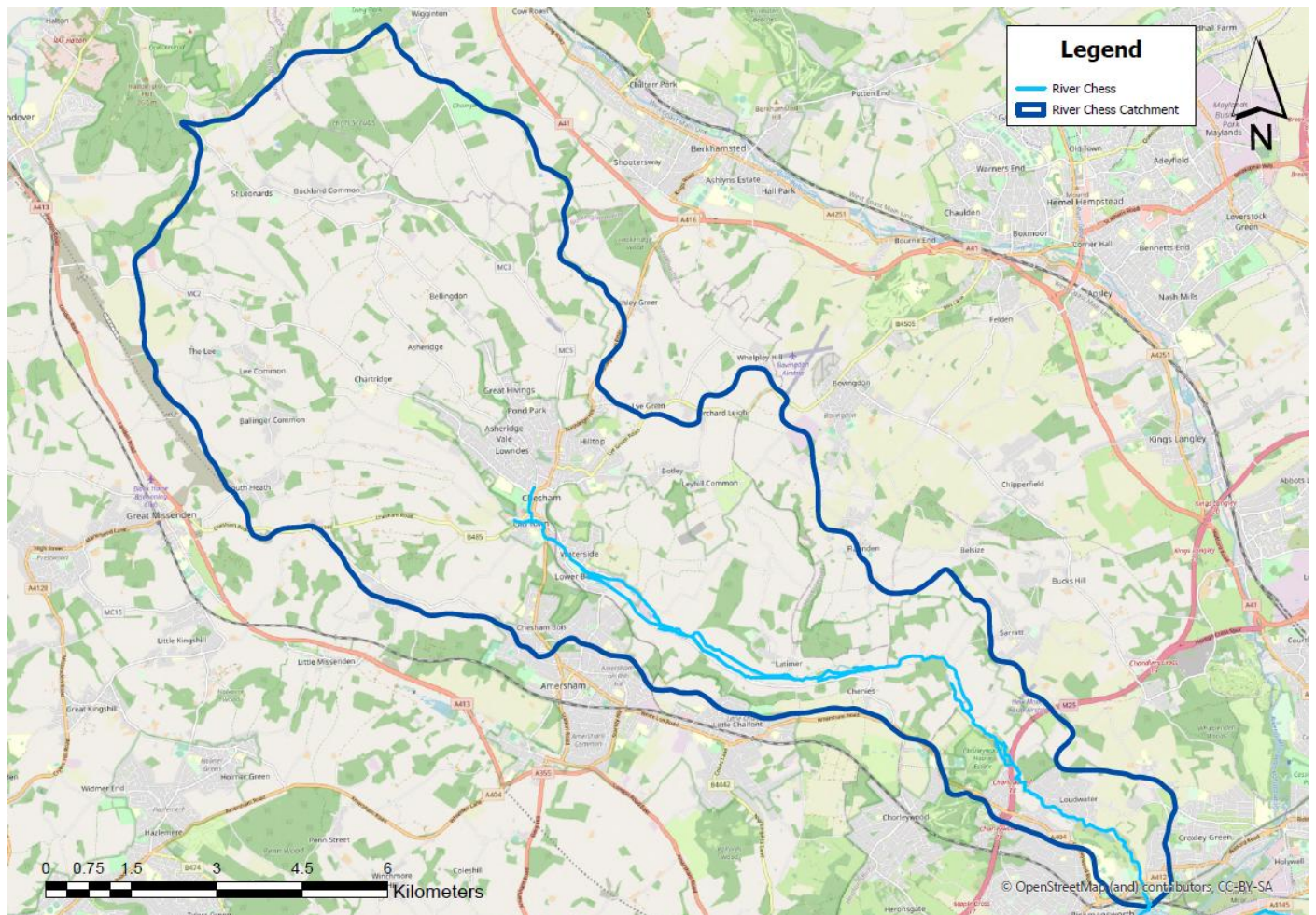
Description: Grants are available for landowners and farmers to support work which enhances the quality of the environment for wildlife, encouraging further biodiversity within the River Chess Catchment.

This work can be co-funded by FiPL and Stewardship Schemes, multi year projects will also be considered.

The Smarter Water Catchment (SWC) is a pilot project funded by Thames Water and delivered by multiple partners within the River Chess Catchment. The aims and objective of the project is to create a place where people are working together to protect and improve the water environment for everyone. From the headwaters in Chesham to the confluence with the River Colne in Rickmansworth, we want to ensure that the River Chess possess the clean, plentiful, flow characteristics of a healthy chalk stream. Many of the issues impacting the River originate outside of it. The SWC and its partners are employing a catchment-based approach, looking at the whole landscape, to holistically tackle these difficulties. We are working towards 4 Themes that will help to deliver these goals and have written a [Catchment Plan](#).

Contents

1	Introduction.....	4
1.1	Funding available	4
1.2	Timeline	5
1.3	Examples the schemes could fund.....	5
1.4	Assessment of applications.....	6
1.5	Panel Roles and Responsibilities	7
1.6	Communication of the scheme	8
2	Conclusion.....	8



1 Introduction

This document sets out the landowner and farmer grants process for the financial year 2026 as part of the Smarter Water Catchments programme. Multiple year projects will be considered.

The grant scheme will be available to landowners and farmers looking to undertake projects that contribute to the following themes of the SWC River Chess Catchment Plan:

- Improving Water Quality
- Managing Flow
- Nature Recovery
- Working Together

This funding stream is available in addition to other payment schemes such as FiPL, providing the opportunity for seed funding enabling projects to progress.

1.1 Funding available

There is £245,000 of funding available for this year for all applications. There is no limit to the amount of funding for each individual, however applicants submitting proposals for large sums of money will be required to demonstrate robustly how the proposal will benefit the 4 SWC themes.

Applicants can apply for funding to cover capital and revenue spend.

Revenue spend is where funding is provided to support management actions which deliver Chess SWC objectives.

Capital spend is where funding is provided to purchase or invest in a physical asset (capital item) to achieve a stated outcome, for example increased business prosperity or improvements to the environment. Capital items can be natural landscape features (such as trees, hedgerows and ponds) or built (such as fencing, water, infrastructure, buildings, machinery and equipment).

Applications will not require match funding to receive funding from the grants process, however it is encouraged to bring in third party investment; as the SWC programme would like to record match funding and in kind support of projects. Applicants are expected to provide information of where match funding and in kind support has been received.

Landowners whose land parcels receive grants from Countryside Stewardship or other public funded schemes, will need to state this, providing the SBI number of the farm would enable the CSWC officers to check these elements. Additionally, information is required if the objectives of the funding will constitute to delivering advised activities as part of an Environment Agency inspection of the land.

Multi-year projects will be considered, and funding is not constrained to individual financial years. However, all funded work must be completed by February 2030. Where multi-year projects are proposed, applicants will be required to provide a financial breakdown across the project period and set out the expected deliverables for each stage of the work.

Fund disbursement

The full £245,000 Grant Funding will be held by the Chilterns Conservation Board (CCB) to be drawn down by the Catchment Project Manager. Due care and diligence responsibilities fall on CCB in terms of data protection, insurance and financial obligations, money laundering protocol etc.

Unless agreed otherwise payments to landowners/farmers will be made by BACS within 60 days (end of month) on receipt of an approved invoice and only on completion of works.

1.2 Timeline

w/c 12th October – Applications open – ‘closed call’

31st December – Applications Close

w/c 18th January – Pannel Meeting

w/c 25th January – Award Notification

February 2030 projects complete

Last Claims 1st February 2030 – Applications will need to have been drawn down from CCB

Upon Application –

Applications will be review when received and clarification sought where necessary.

Payment -

All payments will be made retrospectively once adequate invoices have been provided. On a case-by-case basis CCB reserves the right to waiver this clause should circumstances become a barrier to application.

Reporting -

From project start date until of project end, with periodic monitoring there after preferred.

March 2027 (and March the following years, if a multi year application) –reporting required (end of tax year) (Successful applicants will provide an update on progress, the evidence that can be submitted is invoice / quotes for work, photographs of project) Please note: it is more than acceptable that projects may run across financial years.

1.3 Examples the schemes could fund

Including but not limited to:

- Schemes to reduce sediment run-off/ Farm management – safeguarding soil quality
- Natural flood management measures, such as leaky dams, offline storage areas, floodplain reconnection or attenuation features
- Riverbank restoration, fencing and alternative livestock drinking points to reduce bank erosion and sediment input
- Soil health and land management interventions that reduce compaction, nutrient loss, pesticide run-off or sediment delivery to watercourses
- Wetland, pond, scrape or backwater creation that supports biodiversity, water storage and water quality improvements
- Chalk stream habitat restoration, including marginal planting, berm creation or use of large woody material where appropriate

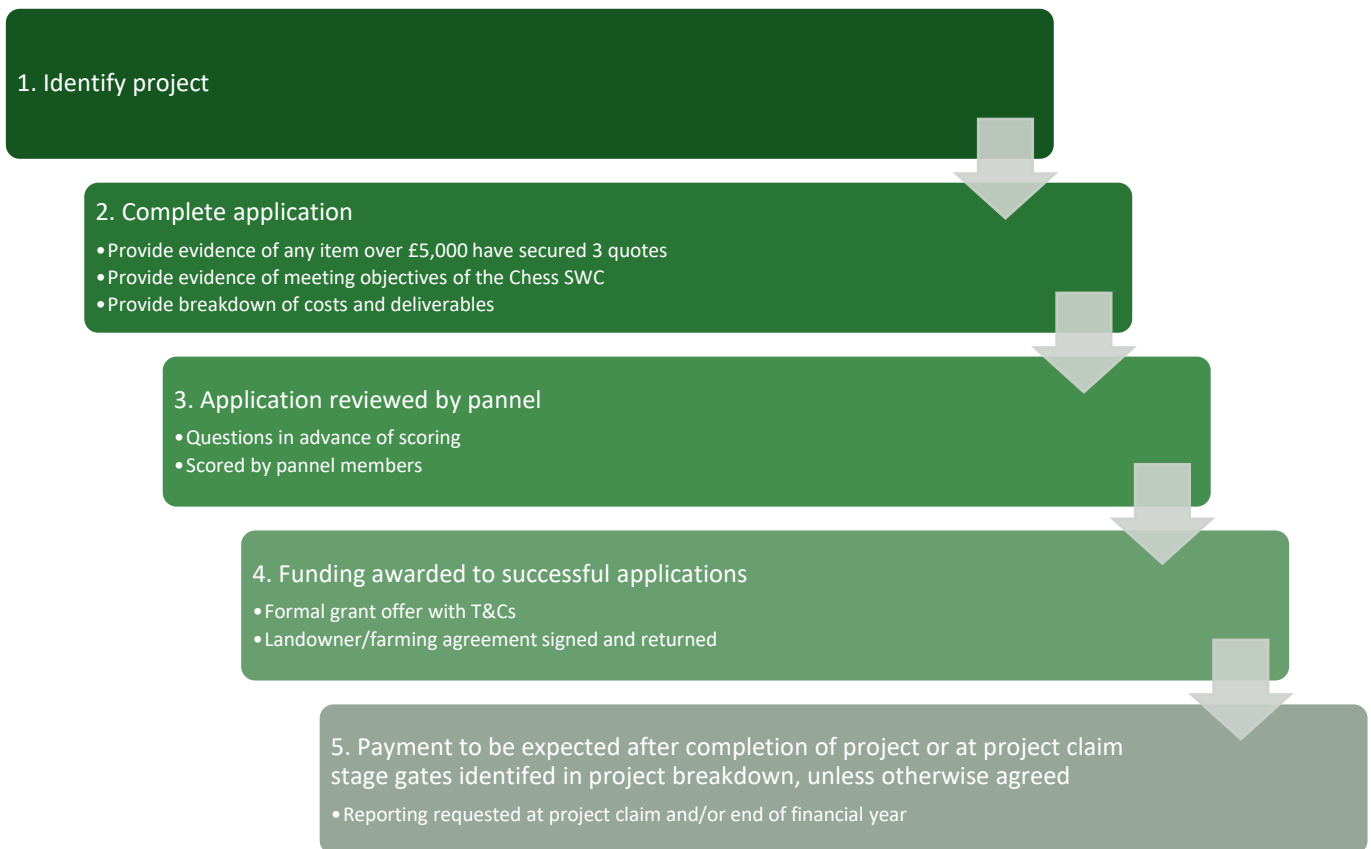
- Targeted habitat connectivity works, such as hedgerow creation, restoration or management, species-rich grassland creation, woodland edge enhancement or wildlife corridors, particularly where these help slow overland flow and reduce run-off or sediment movement into watercourses
- Community or partnership-led projects that improve access, engagement, monitoring, training or long-term stewardship of the River Chess catchment

The scheme will particularly support projects that help deliver the objectives of the Chess Smarter Water Catchment Plan (<https://chesssmarterwatercatchment.org/>), the Chilterns National Landscape Nature Recovery Plan (<https://www.chilterns.org.uk/what-we-do/future-proofing-the-chilterns/nature-recovery-plan/>), and the relevant Local Nature Recovery Strategy for the project location, either Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes (<https://www.buckinghamshire.gov.uk/planning-building-and-environment/nature-climate-change-and-pollution/the-local-nature-recovery-strategy/>) or Hertfordshire (<https://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/about-the-council/how-the-council-works/partnerships/herts-nature-recovery-partnership/local-nature-recovery-strategy.aspx>). Applicants should explain how their proposals contribute to these priorities where relevant.

1.4 Assessment of applications

All projects over will be scored using a common scoring system. They will be scored against the following categories which will be weighted differently for the final score:

- Project outcomes - this includes deliver under the four themes of Water Quality, Flow, Nature Recovery, and Working Together and also fit with the wider Chess Smarter Water Catchment Plan including addressing priorities within the catchment. (40%)
- Value for Money (20%) – this includes demonstrating an efficient use of resources and cost-reasonableness
- Match funding (20%)
- Sustainability / legacy of projects (20%) – this includes demonstrating that benefits could be maintained once the programme funding concludes, and may include the likelihood of behaviour change and increased capacity, as well as more tangible measures.
- Ability to deliver (Y/N) – this includes demonstrating the capability to deliver in the timelines required



There are a number of requirements that must be met for an application to progress and these will be made clear in the application template.

Successful applicants must:

- Complete an application form
- Demonstrate how their project delivers against at least one of the SWC themes and to provide the details of any partners with whom you have chosen to work.
- Provide evidence of any match funding opportunities available
- Provide information including SBI numbers to check for dual funding from Countryside Stewardship, Catchment Sensitive Farming or otherwise.
- Within the grant agreement phase outline a timeline for payment and expected deliverables
- Provide evidence in the form of continuous and/or periodic reporting/monitoring on progress particularly in reference to the status of deliverables.
- Permit or engage monitoring to occur by SWC partners and/or volunteers prior and subsequently to works completion to assess the impact and success of the scheme
- Provide invoices of completed work to enable retrospective payment

1.5 Panel Roles and Responsibilities

The Catchment Project Manager will coordinate the Grant Agreement Preparation Process across the catchment partnership. They will report to the steering group at quarterly meetings of successful applications and completed works to ensure there is transparency across all working groups.

The panel will be made up of the following members:

- Thames Water Representative

- Smarter Water Catchment Host – Chilterns Conservation representative
- Smarter Water Catchment Host – River Chess Association representative
- Affinity Water Representative
- Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust representative

1.6 Communication of the scheme

The Project Manager and Farming Adviser will be engaging directly with partners/farmers/landowners to make them aware of the scheme and suggest they apply. This may be alongside communications (social media, news articles on CCB website etc) via the CCB channels. The scheme will also be advertised on www.chesssmarterwatercatchment.org, the website associated with the project.



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