

# Tree Council grants open to support community planting projects

To: Local authorities in England, Scotland and Wales

## 1 Overview

In May 2026, The Tree Council reopened a range of grant programmes to support community-led tree, hedgerow and orchard planting projects across the UK.<sup>1</sup>

The funding is intended to support planting in parks, streets, and community spaces, delivering environmental improvements alongside wider social benefits such as health, wellbeing and community cohesion.

Current funding streams include:

- **Branching Out Fund:** £250–£2,500 (UK-wide)
- **Network Rail Community Tree Planting Fund:** £2,500–£10,000 (England, Scotland, Wales)
- **SP Energy Networks Fund:** £2,500–£10,000 (Scotland)

These schemes are designed to support projects of varying scale, with an emphasis on community involvement and long-term environmental impact.

## 2 Background

Tree planting plays a growing role in addressing key environmental challenges, including:

- Flood risk management and urban cooling.
- Habitat creation and biodiversity net gain.
- Climate change mitigation and carbon sequestration.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://treecouncil.org.uk/apply-now-for-tree-council-grants-to-support-your-community-planting-project/>

This aligns closely with APSE's State of the Market on Parks and Greenspaces 2026, which found that:

- 95% of councils consider biodiversity a priority.
- 66% identify climate change as a key focus.
- Nearly half expect growth in conservation and climate management activity.<sup>2</sup>

As a result, tree planting schemes are increasingly central to how parks and greenspaces contribute to wider environmental strategies.

### **3 Implication for councils**

#### **3.1 Delivering biodiversity and climate objectives**

The funding provides a practical mechanism for councils and partners to deliver against biodiversity and climate targets, including Biodiversity Net Gain and local climate action plans.

APSE's research highlights that parks are increasingly recognised as core green infrastructure assets, supporting carbon capture, habitat restoration and climate adaptation.

Tree Council grants can help scale up this work by enabling targeted planting projects in parks and wider public spaces.

#### **3.2 Delivering biodiversity and climate objectives**

The grants are particularly relevant in the context of ongoing financial pressures:

- 57% of councils expect revenue budgets to decrease.
- 48% expect capital budgets to decrease.

APSE evidence shows councils are increasingly reliant on external grant funding and partnerships to deliver improvements.

Tree Council funding offers a relatively accessible route to support projects that might otherwise be unaffordable, particularly smaller-scale community planting initiatives.

#### **3.3 Strengthening community engagement**

The strong emphasis on community involvement reflects broader sector trends:

- 66% of authorities expect community engagement to grow.

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- 76% report existing Friends of Parks or similar groups.

Tree planting schemes can act as a catalyst for:

- Volunteer activity and stewardship.
- Community ownership of local spaces.
- Education and wellbeing initiatives.

This aligns with APSE's finding that long-term sustainability depends on both leadership support and resident buy-in.

## **4 APSE Comment**

The reopening of The Tree Council's grant programmes comes at a critical time for local authority parks and greenspaces.

APSE's 2026 State of the Market highlights a sector under financial pressure but increasingly positioned at the forefront of climate action and biodiversity delivery.

Tree Council funding aligns well with these trends by:

- Supporting nature-based solutions to environmental challenges.
- Providing additional funding streams in a constrained financial climate.
- Encouraging community participation in green spaces.

Tree planting schemes represent a highly visible and accessible form of environmental action, delivering multiple benefits – including improved biodiversity, flood mitigation, public health and community cohesion.

However, their success will depend on:

- Effective aftercare and long-term maintenance
- Strong alignment with local strategies and priorities
- Meaningful community engagement and stewardship

In this context, The Tree Council's grants provide a valuable opportunity for councils and their partners to expand green infrastructure and enhance local environments.

## How can APSE help?

APSE will be exploring these opportunities further through an upcoming Parks, Horticulture and Grounds Maintenance Network meeting with The Tree Council on 24 June, focussing on tree funding, care and establishment. Members can attend free of charge and are encouraged to sign up via the APSE networks page [here](#).

### *Training*

APSE Training has also designed several special interactive online course for parks professionals:

1. **Introduction to Parks Management (CPD)**. This preliminary course provides an introduction to the key issues and principles of parks management. If you are looking to move towards a more senior position, or you want to grow the skills to understand, develop, and cope with the demands faced by managers, this course will provide a robust overview. You can book your place on the course [here](#).
2. **Advanced Parks Management: Sustainable Finance (CPD)**. This particular course is the first in what is expected to become a suite of advanced modules for senior parks professionals. Focussing on sustainable funding, it provides an insight into the key issues and best practice techniques for creating a more sustainable basis for future funding. You can book your place on the course [here](#).

### *Benchmarking*

APSE Performance Networks is the largest voluntary public sector benchmarking organisation in the UK. With over 200 authorities in membership, Performance Networks assists local councils by:

- Demonstrating progression on carbon reduction/ecological actions
- Helping to set a clear baseline on which competitiveness, efficiency and value for money can be measured in a systematic manner.
- Identifying the impact of service changes and interventions for your own local authorities and for others.
- Assessing the quality, cost and competitiveness of the services that councils provide on a regular basis.
- Helping to report data in meaningful ways to both elected members and the public.
- Identifying direction of travel and pace of change with regard to service delivery.

For more information about how your parks service can benefit from Performance Networks membership, click [here](#).

**Matt Ellis**  
**APSE Principal Advisor**

## Sign up for APSE membership to enjoy a whole range of benefits

APSE member authorities have access to a range of membership resources to assist in delivering council services. This includes our regular network meetings, specifically designed to bring together elected members, directors, managers and heads of service, together with trade union representatives to discuss service specific issues, innovation and new ways of delivering continuous improvement. The networks are an excellent forum for sharing ideas and discussing topical service issues with colleagues from other councils throughout the UK.

Networks are a free service included as part of your authority's membership of APSE and all end with an informal lunch to facilitate networking with peers in other councils. If you do not currently receive details about APSE Network meetings and would like to be added to our list of contacts for your service area please email [enquiries@apse.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@apse.org.uk).

Our national networks include:-

- FM and Building Cleaning
- Catering (School Meals)
- Cemeteries and Crematoria
- Highways and Street Lighting
- Housing, Construction and Building Maintenance
- Social Value, Procurement and Commercialisation Network
- Parks, Horticulture and Grounds Maintenance
- Renewables and Climate Change
- Roads, Highways and Street Lighting
- Sports and Leisure Management
- Vehicle Maintenance and Transport
- Veterans and Military Champions Network
- Local Government Reorganisation Network
- Waste Management, Recycling and Street Cleansing

Visit [www.apse.org.uk](http://www.apse.org.uk) for more details.



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