

The Great Grid Upgrade

Bramford to Twinstead

Shaping your Community Fund

How feedback is reflected in plans
to deliver community benefits

nationalgrid



“The insight and time given by residents, community groups and organisations across Suffolk and Essex has been invaluable.

This is the first National Grid project to deliver a Community Fund under the Government’s guidance. It marks the start of a targeted programme to help ensure lasting benefits for the people and places that host our infrastructure, shaped by those who engaged with us.”

Emma Turner

Head of Socioeconomic and Community Benefit, National Grid

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Introduction

Communities are at the heart of the UK's transition to more secure, cleaner, home-grown energy from more affordable sources.

We want to ensure lasting benefits are delivered for the people and places that host critical new energy infrastructure.

the Bramford to Twinstead Community Fund reflects local needs and can make a lasting positive impact.

The Bramford to Twinstead Reinforcement is a new overhead electricity line and underground cable route that will meet future demand in the area, boost energy security and help the nation become more self-sufficient.

More than 180 stakeholders, including local residents, community groups, parish councils and local authorities have participated in interviews, briefings and a survey to help us better understand what matters most locally.

As part of the project we will deliver a Community Fund worth more than £4.2 million to benefit communities in Suffolk and Essex.

Feedback has helped us understand where investment can make a difference. This has directly informed funding priorities and how we will deliver community benefits through a dedicated Community Fund in a fair and transparent way.

We will deliver this funding through:

- **a Local Fund:** providing local-level grants that directly benefit communities closest to the route
- **a Strategic Fund:** offering longer-term investment to address shared local and regional priorities.

This document explains why the Bramford to Twinstead Community Fund has been created, how we engaged with local communities and what we learnt. It also sets out how those insights have shaped the design and focus of the Local Fund and provided a starting point for how longer-term, regional investment will be delivered through the Strategic Fund.

Since Autumn 2025 we have been carrying out research and engagement to ensure

Community Fund at a glance



Two components:
a Local Fund and a Strategic Fund

80% 

of people who completed our survey told us that delivering environmental benefits was a top priority



180

individuals and organisations engaged directly through meetings, briefings and research interviews to-date



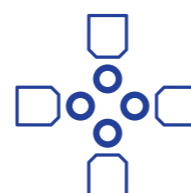
A Community Fund worth more than
£4.2 million

Why is this fund being created?


Where we are delivering new above ground electricity infrastructure, National Grid will provide dedicated community funds.


Shaped by the community, for the community, these funds will be designed to reflect local needs and developed in line with government guidance.

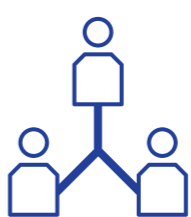
Our approach



Focused on lasting impact
Supporting long-term benefits for communities



Open and transparent
Clear governance and decision-making 



Evidence-based
Grounded in data, insight and community feedback

Shaped with communities
Informed by local voices and priorities

Together, these principles provide a clear foundation for funding.

Engaging with local communities

We wanted to understand what matters most to people who live and work along the project route.

Since Autumn 2025 we have:

- reviewed local and regional data, including community plans, to understand needs in the area
- hosted workshops and meetings with community groups, charities, councils and local representatives
- held online briefing sessions
- published a survey open to residents and community groups.



9 meetings with the host authorities



10 sessions with local organisations and charities



137 survey responses



8 parish and town councils consulted in-depth*

* We invited all parish and town councils local to the project to take part in meetings and briefings on the proposed Community Fund, of which 8 ultimately attended.

Funding themes

Before approaching residents, community organisations and local councils, we researched the types of projects that could benefit from the Community Fund. You fed back on these themes and they were refined in response to your comments.



Protecting the environment and green spaces

to support biodiversity, local landscapes and access to nature for communities.



Physical health and activity initiatives

to create inclusive opportunities for exercise, recreation and use of outdoor spaces.



Community spaces and energy efficiency measures

to improve local halls and hubs, making them more accessible, affordable and sustainable.



Education and STEM opportunities

to support young people to access learning, skills and career pathways, particularly in rural communities.



Cost of living and employment support

to help people build financial resilience, improve access to work and reduce everyday costs.



Mental health and wellbeing support

to reduce isolation and strengthen community connection.

These funding themes were further developed and refined in response to feedback during consultation. This is reflected in the next section.

What you said

Communities across Suffolk and Essex want investment that reflects the rural nature of the area, responds to local priorities and delivers a lasting positive legacy.

Using the six funding themes, we've identified the key areas where communities feel funding would have the greatest impact. These are summarised on the following pages.



Protecting the environment and ensuring access to green spaces

You told us

Protecting the natural environment emerged as the strongest shared priority for communities along the project route.

Residents and stakeholders highlighted that landscape, biodiversity and access to nature are important to local identity, wellbeing and quality of life, with particular emphasis on the Dedham Vale National Landscape and the Stour Valley.

Communities expressed concern about the cumulative impacts of major infrastructure projects, alongside wider pressures on habitats, footpaths and rural tranquillity.

There was strong support for initiatives that enhance local environments, improve access to green spaces, and support nature recovery. This feedback is shaping how we approach the environment across the project - beyond the Community Fund - including through our environmental commitments and practical measures such as volunteering and access improvements.

What funding could support

- Improvements to footpaths and green corridors
- Initiatives to make it easier for people to access nature
- Conservation activity delivered by community groups
- Improving the skills and equipment for volunteers
- Community projects that connect people to nature, such as climate education, outdoor skills sessions and community gardens.

80%
of survey respondents said protecting nature and access to green spaces was their top priority.

“Improving footpaths and bridleways would be of benefit to all the community.”

Extract from survey response



Improving community spaces and saving energy



96 out of 137

survey respondents selected improving local community spaces as a priority, making it the second highest priority for local residents.

You told us

Village halls, community centres, sports clubs and other shared spaces are central to everyday life in rural areas. These places host activities, services and support that brings people together.

Demand for these spaces is increasing while financial pressures are growing. Many buildings are ageing, costly to run and rely heavily on volunteers to stay open.

Rising energy costs and maintenance needs are putting strain on volunteer-run facilities.

What funding could support

- Repairs, upgrades and accessibility improvements to community buildings
- Energy efficiency measures to reduce running costs
- New facilities and equipment to encourage community use.

“Energy prices cripple the charity so I would love funds for solar panels...”

Extract from survey response

Physical health, wellbeing, and social connection

You told us

Physical health, mental wellbeing and social connection are closely linked. People value opportunities to stay active, get out locally and feel connected to others.

Local organisations highlighted challenges linked to an ageing population, long term health conditions and rural isolation. This is reflected in local health and demographic data provided by the local NHS trust, which shows that 17 per cent of residents report that their day to day activities are limited by a health condition or disability.

Loneliness and isolation were raised as particular concerns, especially for older residents, carers and people without access to transport. NHS data shows that social isolation is the number one reason for a healthcare referral in this area.

Disruption to travel routes during major construction activity can make it harder for some people to attend health appointments, particularly in rural areas where journeys are already longer.

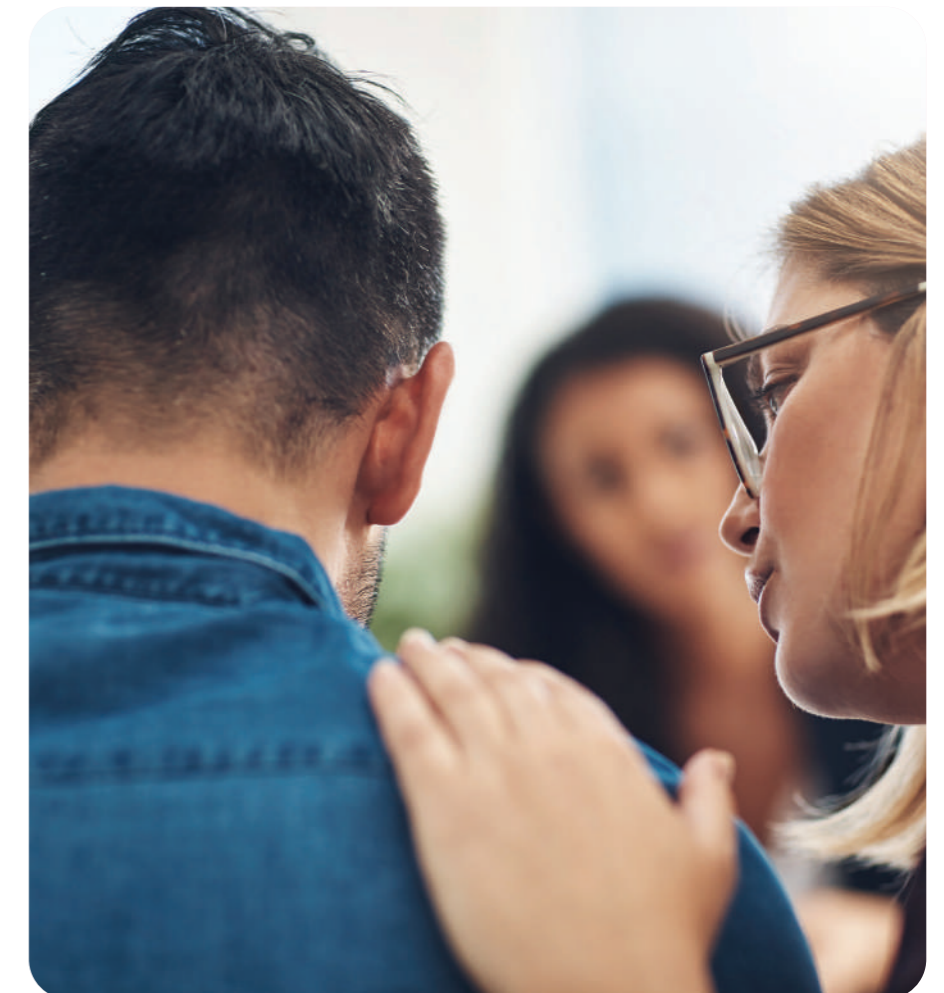
Although addressing some wider health challenges would sit beyond the scope of a community fund, communities and local organisations emphasised the value of preventative, community-based activity. Local, accessible initiatives can help people stay connected, support everyday wellbeing and build resilience.

What funding could support

- Community wellbeing activities and social connection initiatives
- Support to help more people get online and build confidence in technology
- Inclusive, accessible programmes for older people, carers, and those at risk of isolation, designed and delivered in rural communities.

“Hubs for those in rural areas to meet and activities could be arranged...”

Extract from survey response



Cost of living pressures



You told us

Rising living costs are putting increasing pressure on households and local organisations. Local groups described growing demand for financial support, higher energy costs for homes, and an increasing strain on voluntary and community organisations. NHS data shows that concern about finances is amongst the top reasons for a healthcare referral in this area.

Fuel poverty and affordability are particular concerns in rural areas, with communities living alongside some sections of the project route having an above-average rate of fuel poverty. Housing quality, lower energy efficiency and limited access to advice can make it harder for people to manage rising costs and reduce energy use.

Communities emphasised the importance of practical support that helps people manage costs and build resilience over time, rather than relying on crisis support alone.

While addressing wider cost of living challenges sits beyond the scope of a community fund, communities highlighted the value of preventative, practical support. Local initiatives that help people reduce costs, improve energy efficiency and access trusted advice can make a meaningful difference.

What funding could support

- Organisations that provide advice, outreach and support to vulnerable households
- Community led responses to fuel poverty and financial hardship.

“The village hall is looking to invest in solar panels to try to offset the huge increase in electricity charges...”

Extract from survey response

Transport, access and wellbeing

You told us

Mental health and wellbeing support was suggested as one of the six initial funding themes. Your feedback made clear that isolation, in particular that caused by lack of public transport links, was a key negative influence on mental health.

Transport is an overarching challenge in rural areas. Many villages have very limited public transport, with infrequent services, changes to routes and few alternatives for people who don't drive.

People described how this affects everyday life, making it harder to get to healthcare appointments, work, education, social activities and local support. Older residents, young people and those with disabilities were regularly highlighted as being most affected.

While transport infrastructure itself often sits outside the scope of community funding, communities highlighted

the value of locally delivered solutions to help address gaps in provision. In some villages, residents rely on a single daily bus service, leaving little flexibility when services change or are disrupted.

Communities emphasised the importance of small scale, practical solutions that help people stay connected.

Locally delivered approaches, such as community transport or targeted shuttle services, can make a meaningful difference in rural areas where alternatives are limited.

What funding could support

- Community transport and volunteer driver schemes
- Local solutions that improve access to activities and services
- Initiatives that reduce isolation linked to lack of mobility
- Partnership projects that complement existing transport provision.



“Trusts set up to provide long term community transport solutions for elderly people living in villages...”

Extract from survey response

Access to opportunities for young people

You told us

Education and STEM opportunities were suggested as one of the six initial funding themes. Your feedback included broader comments on opportunities for young people.

Young people and organisations working with them consistently highlighted that access to opportunities is limited in rural areas. Transport constraints, cost and capacity pressures were repeatedly raised as barriers to participation in activities, enrichment and skills development.

Local people and some of the organisations we spoke with highlighted a lack of clear, visible pathways into jobs, training and green careers. Young people value safe, affordable local spaces where they can meet others, build confidence and feel supported.

What funding could support

- Bringing services and support closer to local communities, reducing the need to travel
- Youth services and safe local spaces, including youth clubs, activities and outreach delivered within communities
- Skills, employability and careers support delivered locally, such as training, mentoring, work experience and apprenticeships
- Support to reduce transport barriers, including community or locally delivered transport solutions
- Volunteering, leadership and confidence-building opportunities rooted in local places.



“Youth programmes – they are being cut left, right and centre despite being proven to improve educational outcomes and reduce crime”

Extract from survey response

“Rural villages need investment in their amenities, village halls and parks need support.”

Extract from survey response



What communities want from a community fund

Across all engagement, communities were clear about what ‘good’ looks like.

Focus on those closest to the project

While the Bramford to Twinstead Community Fund will bring benefits across the full route, communities told us that its design and decision-making should prioritise those living nearest to the works, reflecting their role in hosting this critical infrastructure.

Fair and accessible

Communities told us that the Fund needs to work for a wide range of organisations, particularly small, volunteer led groups with limited time and capacity. Many operate on modest budgets, rely on volunteers, and balance delivery alongside governance, fundraising and compliance. Community organisations also stressed the importance around ensuring application windows built in sufficient time for groups to prepare and submit applications.

Complex application processes, match funding requirements or disproportionate reporting requirements were seen as barriers that can unintentionally exclude the very groups most embedded in their communities. There was strong support for a proportionate approach, with simple applications, clear guidance and realistic expectations that reflect how volunteer led organisations operate.

Communities value:

- simple, clearly explained application processes and timeframes
- practical support for groups without specialist bid writing skills
- opportunities to ask questions and speak to real people through drop-in sessions or surgeries.



“Improving disabled access to the war memorial and the schoolroom at Little Cornard Church”

Extract from survey response



Flexible and realistic

Local organisations (and prospective applicants) emphasised the importance of flexibility, particularly in rural areas where projects can take longer to deliver and costs can be higher.

Communities value:

- support for both small-scale and larger initiatives
- recognition of rural delivery challenges, including limited suppliers and longer timescales
- the ability to fund core costs as well as capital and project activity.

Transparent and well communicated

Clear communication was seen as essential to building trust and confidence in the Fund. Communities highlighted the importance of having enough time to apply, recognising that volunteer led groups need time to consult trustees, gather quotes and prepare applications alongside day-to-day commitments.

Communities also stressed the need for transparency in how decisions are made and for receiving clear, meaningful feedback on outcomes.

Communities value:

- clear communication of funding rounds and timeframes
- transparent decision-making and constructive feedback
- processes that minimise duplication and unnecessary administrative burden for applicants.

Locally led

Communities want to feel heard. They want funding decisions to be grounded in the priorities residents themselves have identified – not assumptions made on their behalf.

Several community groups supported the Fund being available throughout the project’s construction window and National Grid’s commitment to ongoing visibility, outreach and practical volunteering support.

What the Bramford to Twinstead Community Fund offers

The Community Fund is a multi-year investment of more than £4.2 million.

It recognises the role local communities play in hosting a nationally significant infrastructure project and aims to ensure the benefits are felt locally, now and into the future.

The Fund will support people who live, work and volunteer in the areas near to the project.

Each year, we will publish a clear summary showing:

- how funding has been allocated
- what projects and organisations have been supported
- the outcomes and impact delivered for communities.

Residents and community organisations (including applicant organisations) will be able to clearly see how the Fund is working and the difference it is making across Suffolk and Essex.



How the Fund will be structured

The Community Fund has two parts, designed to support both immediate local needs and longer-term priorities:

- **Local Fund:** local-level grants that directly benefit communities closest to the route
- **Strategic Fund:** longer-term investment addressing shared local and regional priorities.

Local Fund – direct support for the closest communities

The Local Fund is designed to make a direct and immediate difference to communities closest to the project, supporting grassroots projects that align to its themes and local priorities.

Funding will support projects that:

- improve community spaces and save energy
- support physical health, mental wellbeing and social connection
- protect the environment and increase access to green spaces
- create opportunities for young people, education and skills
- help communities respond to cost of living pressures.

The Fund will be delivered through an independent grant making partner, with a simple and accessible application process designed to work for organisations of all sizes.

Three grant sizes will be available, up to **£5,000**, **£10,000** or **£20,000**, depending on the type and scale of the project.

Who is the Local Fund for?

Responding to feedback received, this fund will be specifically suited to:

- village halls and community venues needing upgrades or repairs
- local clubs, charities, volunteer groups and parish councils
- small, community-led projects with clear local impact.

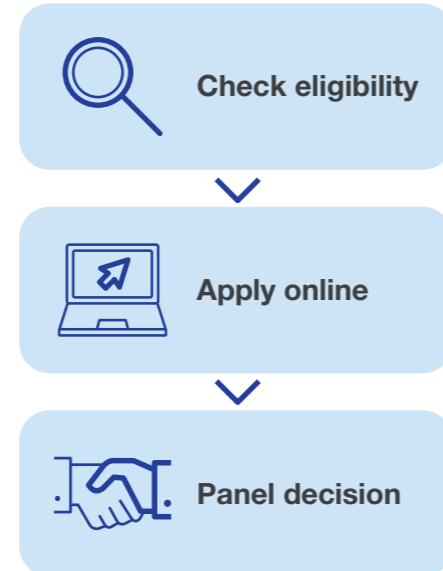
Who can apply?

The Local Fund is open to non-profit, community-focused organisations delivering projects in communities closest to the project, including parish councils.

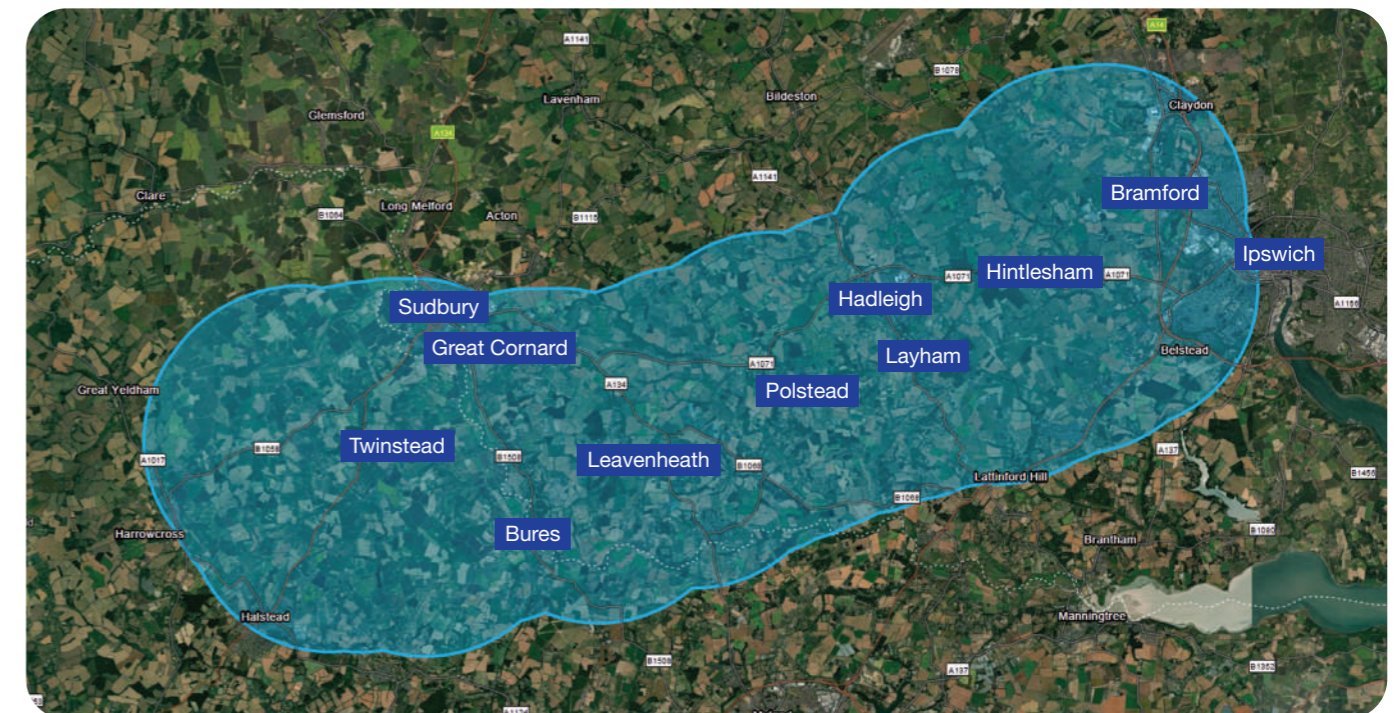
Full eligibility details and guidance, including a postcode checker to confirm whether a project is within the eligible area, is available at localgiving.org/bramford-to-twinstead-community-fund.



How to apply:



Eligible area



Sources: Esri, TomTom, Garmin, FAO, NOAA, USGS, © OpenStreetMap contributors, and the GIS User Community, Earthstar Geographics

You can view a larger version of this map on our website at nationalgrid.com/bramford-twinstead.

How to check eligibility and apply

The Local Fund will operate throughout the construction period. The Local Fund webpage, localgiving.org/bramford-to-twinstead-community-fund, sets out how organisations can apply for funding.

To support applicants, the webpage provides clear guidance, including eligibility criteria, FAQs and an online application portal.

Administering the Fund

The Local Fund is application-based and being delivered with our partners at Localgiving.

Applications will be assessed against clear criteria, including proximity to the project route, community benefit and alignment with the Fund's themes. Funding decisions will be made quarterly, with feedback provided to applicants. This approach is intended to provide a fair, consistent and accessible route for local organisations of all sizes.

How decisions will be made

We want communities to feel confident that decisions about the Local Fund are fair, transparent and shaped by what people have told us matters most. Our approach is designed to be clear, proportionate and easy to understand, while recognising the different purposes of the Local and Strategic Funds.

Our guiding principles

All funding decisions will be guided by a shared set of principles:

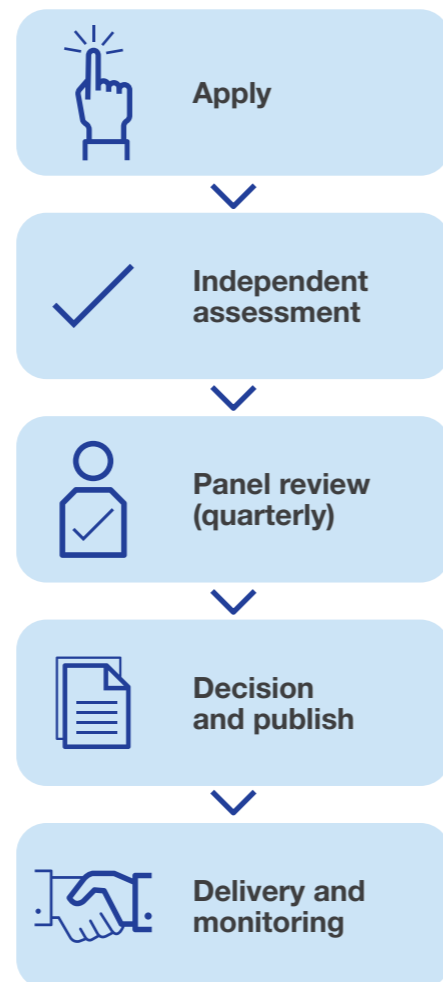
- **Fairness** – funding should be targeted where it can deliver the greatest benefit for communities hosting the project
- **Transparency** – communities should be able to see how decisions are made and how funding is allocated
- **Community benefit** – investment should respond to local needs and priorities identified through engagement
- **Value for money** – funding should be used responsibly and aim to ensure lasting benefits.

These principles provide a consistent foundation for decision-making across the Local Fund, even where delivery approaches differ.

Openness and accountability

We are committed to being open about how the Local Fund operates and where funding is going. Information about funded activity will be published, alongside updates on delivery and impact, so communities can see how the Local Fund is working and the difference it is making.

Governance flow:



Key dates

May 2026 Local Fund launches

June 2026 First application window closes

July 2026 Panel review

Late 2026 Engagement with regional partners on Strategic Fund

Strategic Fund – longer-term, regional support

The Strategic Fund will support larger scale, longer-term projects that benefit more than one community.

It will aim to address shared priorities across a wider area, where working at scale and investing over time can help deliver greater and more lasting impact than smaller, local grants alone.

The Strategic Fund complements the Local Fund by supporting initiatives that need sustained investment to make a meaningful difference.

While our engagement to date has focused primarily on shaping the Local Fund, it has also provided a starting point for thinking about longer-term, regional investment. Work to shape the Strategic Fund will be developed further over the coming months.

What the Strategic Fund could support

Based on our insights to date, the Strategic Fund could support:

- initiatives that benefit multiple communities
- longer-term programmes addressing shared social, environmental or economic challenges
- partnership projects involving organisations working across communities
- activity that requires sustained investment to deliver lasting outcomes.

Strategic investments may be developed at different points over the lifetime of the Fund, allowing flexibility as priorities and opportunities evolve.



“In rural areas it is important to ensure education and community spaces are maintained”

Extract from survey response



Emerging themes

Initial research and engagement have highlighted a number of potential shared themes. These are not fixed priorities but provide a starting point for further discussion and engagement.

They include:

- **skills development and training**, particularly in STEM and green sectors
- **fuel poverty and energy affordability**, including initiatives that help reduce running costs for households and community facilities
- **rural isolation and access to services**, linked to transport challenges, ageing populations and loneliness.

These themes will be tested, refined and built on through further engagement during 2026.

How the Strategic Fund will be shaped

The Strategic Fund will be informed through research, data and ongoing engagement with communities, partners and stakeholders to understand where longer-term investment could make the greatest difference.

To support this, we plan to establish an Independent Advisory Network later this year.

The Network will bring together people with knowledge of the local region and specialist expertise to help inform priorities, themes and approaches for the Strategic Fund.

Further details will be shared once the Network is established and its initial focus areas are confirmed.

Supporting information

Fairness, accessibility and inclusion

We are committed to making the Community Fund fair, accessible and easy to understand. All application forms and guidance will be written in plain English, with clear information to help organisations apply with confidence. Support will be available when applications open, including opportunities to ask questions and get help where needed. Additional accessibility support will be available on request, such as hard-copy materials or translated information.

Data protection and privacy

Applications and monitoring data will be managed in line with data protection legislation, National Grid's data retention policies and published privacy notices, which can be found at nationalgrid.com/privacy-policy.

While we may share learning and impact at an overall level, personal information will not be shared without consent.

Distinction from other activity

The Community Fund is separate from statutory mitigation, development consent order obligations and the project's day-to-day construction communications and outreach. It provides additional, community-led investment, shaped by local priorities and designed to deliver lasting positive impact.



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