

Urban Tree Challenge Fund (UTCF) Grant Manual

Purpose

This Grant Manual presents guidance to applicants for the Urban Tree Challenge Fund.

Change log

Version	Publication Date	Key changes
3.1	30/11/2023	Updated to provide additional information about public access and mapping standards. Proofread.
3.0	01/07/2023	Updated for round 6 of UTCF, revising available planting years and incorporating the biosecure procurement requirement.
2.0	31/01/2023	Updated for 2023, incorporating additional standard cost items, changes to application thresholds and scoring, and removal of application windows.
1.0	02/03/2022	First version.

Contents

Purpose	1
Change log	1
Contents	2
1 Introduction	4
1.1 The Urban Tree Challenge Fund offer	4
1.2 Customer and land registration	4
1.3 Important information	4
1.4 Disclaimer	5
1.5 Guarding against fraud	5
2 Overview	6
2.1 Tree supply and biosecurity	6
2.2 The UTCf Agreement	7
2.2.1 Agreement duration	8
2.3 How applications are selected	8
2.4 What the grant cannot pay for	9
3 Who can apply and what land is eligible	9
3.1 Eligible land	10
3.1.1 What land can be entered into the scheme?	10
3.1.2 Public access	10
3.1.3 Ineligible land	10
3.2 Management control	10
3.2.1 Tenants	11
3.2.2 Landlords	11
3.2.3 Partnerships	11
3.2.4 Licensors	11
3.2.5 Licensees	11
3.2.6 Land owned by public bodies	11
3.2.7 Joint applications and consortia	12
3.2.8 Compatibility with the Basic Payment Scheme	12
3.3 Land receiving other funding or under other agreements	13
3.4 Business viability test	13
4 How it works	14
4.1 Eligibility requirements	15
4.1.1 Planting design and species selection	15
4.1.2 Biosecurity	16
4.1.3 Environmental Impact Assessment	16
4.2 Payments	17
4.2.1 Standard costs for eligible expenditure	17
4.2.2 Match funding	19
4.3 Scoring applications	19

4.4 Application maps.....	21
4.5 Authorising an agent	21
4.6 Your Agreement Commencement Date	21
5 How to apply	21
5.1 Register with the Rural Payments service	21
5.2 Complete your application.....	22
5.2.1 Confidentiality	23
5.3 Submitting your application	23
5.4 Working with us on your application	23
5.5 Accepting your Agreement	23
5.6 Where to get help	23
5.7 Getting consent	24
5.7.1 Other considerations.....	24
5.8 Withdrawing your application	24
5.9 Disputes, appeals and complaints	24
6 Mapping Standards	24
6.1 Preparing a map for your application	24
6.2 How to create a map	25
6.3 Minimum mapping standards	25
7 Scheme requirements and Agreement management	28
7.1 Entering into an Agreement	28
7.1.1 Agreement amendments	28
7.1.2 Changes of ownership (transfers) and management.....	28
7.2 Making claims.....	29
7.3 Inspections	29
7.4 Evidence and record keeping.....	29
7.5 Photographic evidence quality	30
7.5.1 Labelling photographs.....	31
7.6 Publicity requirements	31
7.7 Force majeure	31

1 Introduction

This Grant Manual explains how the Urban Tree Challenge Fund (UTCF) works and how to apply. It also explains the requirements and processes that you must follow if your application is successful.

1.1 The Urban Tree Challenge Fund offer

UTCF supports tree planting in urban and peri-urban areas and is administered by the Forestry Commission (FC). It is funded by the Exchequer through the Nature for Climate Fund (NCF) to plant more trees in and around England's towns and cities, delivering natural capital benefits, such as climate change adaptation, flood risk management, improved health and wellbeing and urban biodiversity.

When UTCF first opened in 2019, the fund supported the planting of both large and small trees. The design of the fund changed in 2021 to only support the planting of large 'standard' trees. UTCF provides capital payments for tree planting, followed by 3 years of establishment payments. In 2023, UTCF was updated to include an extended range of standard cost items, including trial pits and reinstatement work, and a higher payment rate for planting in hard surfaces.

1.2 Customer and land registration

You must be registered on [Rural Payments](#) and have a Single Business Identifier (SBI) before you can apply to UTCF. Please note you do not need to be a business to register. If you want to direct your UTCF payments to an authorised agent, they must also be registered on Rural Payments. You do **not** need to register your land to apply to UTCF.

1.3 Important information

UTCF is provided under domestic legislation. You may need to keep evidence and provide it when requested. Check [Section 7.4](#) for evidence and record-keeping requirements before you apply.

We reserve the right to:

- not award grant funding for some or all of the activities for which applications are invited
- amend add or withdraw the elements of UTCF at any time. Where such changes affect a current application, the applicant will be notified of the change and how it affects their application

1.4 Disclaimer

We make every effort to ensure this Grant Manual and associated Application Forms are accurate. However, neither the FC nor its respective advisers, officers, delivery partners, employees, other staff, or agents:

- makes any representation or warranty (express or implied) as to the accuracy, reasonableness or completeness of this documentation
- accepts any responsibility for the information contained in the documentation or for the fairness, accuracy, or completeness of that information. Nor shall any of them be liable for any loss or damage (other than in respect of fraudulent misrepresentation) arising as a result of reliance on such information or any subsequent communication

1.5 Guarding against fraud

Fraudsters may target land managers who receive grant payments. We are aware that in the past some customers have received emails, texts and telephone calls claiming to be from the Forestry Commission, the Rural Payments Agency (RPA) or Defra. Remember:

- never discuss your bank account details with someone you do not know
- we will not ask you to make a payment over the phone
- delete any emails or texts you do not believe are genuine, and do not open any links. Our main email addresses are:
 - UTCF@forestrycommission.gov.uk
 - ruralpayments@defra.gov.uk
 - RPA@notifications.service.gov.uk
- be cautious about what information you share externally, particularly on social media

If you suspect attempted fraud or feel you have been the subject of fraud, you can contact:

- [Action Fraud](#) (the UK's national reporting centre for fraud and cyber-crime) online or on 0300 123 2040
- if the attempt relates to information held by the RPA or claimed to be from the RPA, contact the RPA's Fraud Referral Team on 0800 347 347 or FraudInConfidence@rpa.gov.uk

We apply controls to guard against fraud and monitor all financial transactions for potential instances of fraud. Any circumstances where we believe there could be an attempt to obtain grant funds by deception will be fully investigated.

2 Overview

UTCF is open year-round. Please note that it could take 3 to 5 months from the point of us receiving a valid and complete application to an Agreement being offered. Therefore, it is advised that applications are submitted no later than 30 June 2024 for tree planting in the 2024/25 planting season.

There are thresholds that must be met:

- minimum application value: £10,000
- minimum application size: for street trees, parkland trees (planted as specimens singly or in groups), orchard and other planting. Minimum block size of 10 standard trees
- Maximum application value: no upper limit

Applications received from 1 July 2023 onward can only schedule tree planting to take place in 2024/25, the last year of the fund.

2.1 Tree supply and biosecurity

You should speak to a tree nursery to ensure sufficient planting stock will be available for your project.

It is important that the plants and trees you use are free from pests and diseases. All applications received from 1 July 2023 onward will be included in a Biosecure Procurement Requirement Pilot. To be eligible for support under UTCF during this pilot phase you must source your plants from suppliers who can provide evidence that they meet the requirements set out in the Plant Health Management Standard, available at: <https://planthealthy.org.uk/>.

This evidence should be provided in one of two ways:

- current membership of the Plant Healthy Certification scheme (provision of a Certification Number) or have officially applied to become certified (provision of an Application Number). For nurseries who are not current members of Plant Healthy certification, this should be achieved within 12 months
- successful Ready to Plant (RtP) assessment (provision of a RtP Assessment Voucher with a unique Reference Number) associated with the grant agreement number

You will be asked to provide this evidence (one or more of the above Numbers) when you claim for your trees. You will also be asked about your intended supply at point of application, but you are not obliged to stick with your initial choice.

It is your responsibility to ensure that the trees you source are compliant with this procurement requirement. You need to confirm that the supplier is an official applicant or certified business / organisation under the Plant Healthy scheme by checking [Plant Healthy's Directory of Certified Businesses and Organisations](#). If the supplier does not appear on the Directory, then it is not covered by the scheme.

Alternatively, you must obtain a RtP Assessment Voucher from the supplier for the stock you are purchasing from them. **Failure to adhere to the procurement requirement may result in a reduction in the payment of your claim.**

The RtP assessment allows suppliers who are not Plant Healthy certified to demonstrate that their plants comply with the requirements of the Plant Health Management Standard. The assessment only applies for each specific grant agreement so you will need to give your UTCF reference number to each nursery when ordering your stock. Each nursery will need to apply for a RtP assessment if they are not members of Plant Healthy. Suppliers who wish to supply more than one grant agreement will need to apply for a Ready to Plant assessment for each one. Find out more about [Ready to Plant](#).

A selection of grant recipients will be contacted by the Animal and Plant Health Agency's (APHA) Plant Health and Seeds Inspectorate for a post-planting inspection approximately 18 months after the trees have been planted. If APHA issue a notice to remove the trees, the Grant Recipient will be expected to claim force majeure under the terms of their grant agreement.

If you are not purchasing your trees from a commercial supplier, you will be exempt from this requirement during the pilot phase. It is recommended that exemptions are requested at application stage. You must wait for us to approve the exemption in writing, prior to sourcing the trees, to ensure your claims are valid. When you apply for your exemption, you must provide a summary of how and where your trees were sourced, and the biosecurity measures that were in place to reduce the risks to those trees from diseases and insect pests. To apply for an exemption, please complete and submit a UTCF Biosecure Procurement Exemption form.

See [Forest Research's pest and disease resources](#) for useful information on control measures.

2.2 The UTCF Agreement

If your application is eligible and successful, you will be offered a UTCF Grant. If you accept the offer, you will enter into an Agreement with the Forestry Commission.

This Agreement will consist of:

- UTCF grant funding agreement terms and conditions (or simply, 'terms and conditions')
- grant recipient's application form and annex
- agreement map
- grant offer letter
- acceptance letter

Your agreement duration will include two periods: a **Grant Funding Period** and a **Maintenance Period**.

2.2.1 Agreement duration

The **Grant Funding Period** for capital payments for tree planting ends on 31 March 2025. The Grant Funding Period may not run for this full period if you finish the work before then. During this period, you must complete all tree planting according to the schedule in your Grant Agreement.

The Grant Funding Period for capital payments for watering, weeding, and checking trees will end a maximum of 3 years from the date of the final capital payment for tree planting.

You must not submit a claim for payment until you have paid for the capital items in the claim and the payment has left your bank account. You must not begin capital works before you have formally accepted your UTCF Agreement.

You must:

- maintain any capital items funded through the scheme for 5 years from the date of the final grant payment. This is called the **Maintenance Period** of the Agreement. Your Agreement may be subject to inspection during the Maintenance Period
- have management control of the land for the length of the Agreement (the Grant Funding Period to undertake the capital work and Obligation Period). [Section 3.2](#) explains how this requirement applies if you are a landlord or a tenant

2.3 How applications are selected

UTCF is a criteria-based competitive scheme, with funding offered on a first come, first served basis. Applicants need to score their applications and we will review this. We will offer Agreements to applicants whose proposal's score meets or exceeds the threshold score. The threshold score is set based on the available budget and is reviewed every three months. The current score is shown on the [UTCF gov.uk webpage](https://www.uctf.gov.uk).

You need to score your application first using the application annex. We will review and confirm your score. If your application has a score equal to or greater than the threshold score that applied at the time of your application, there is sufficient budget available, and all other eligibility criteria have been met, we will offer you an Agreement. Points will be awarded based on the proportion of trees in the total application that are within the Priority People layer and Priority Places layer. You will also score points for proximity to health and education facilities.

Canvassing FC staff (communicating with us with the intention of influencing UTCF funding decisions or obtaining information that is not available to other applicants) is strictly prohibited. Applications from those found to have canvassed our staff will be rejected.

2.4 What the grant cannot pay for

UTCF cannot be used to pay for the cost of any of the following, which are not considered Eligible Expenditure:

- any capital works (tree planting) initiated before the Agreement Commencement Date
- planning application fees or other transactional fees
- meeting legal requirements, including planning conditions
- planting of replacement trees

The full list of ineligible expenditure is set out in part 5 of the UTCF Terms and Conditions. Eligible expenditure is described in [section 4.2.1](#).

3 Who can apply and what land is eligible

To confirm your eligibility for UTCF you will need to complete the declaration on the UTCF Application Form. You must also confirm your commitment to abide by the [Code of Conduct for Recipients of Government General Grants](#). If you do not do this or if, during our processing of your application we find any part of your application is not eligible, we will reject part or all your application.

If they have control of all the land and all the activities needed to meet the obligations of the Grant for the full duration of the Agreement, UTCF is open to land managers who are:

- an owner occupier
- a tenant
- a landlord
- a licensor

On tenanted land both tenants and landlords will need to agree to the proposal. Any individual or organisation can submit one application to UTCF in a single financial year.

We will use the government's 'Spotlight' system to undertake due diligence checks on applicants and to ensure the safe award of UTCF funds. Spotlight enables the checking of information on grant applicants from across government to reduce the risk of fraud, dual-funding and the mismanagement of grant aid.

3.1 Eligible land

3.1.1 What land can be entered into the scheme?

Land included in a UTCF application must fall within an urban area. An urban area, as defined for the purposes of the UTCF, is a built-up area (based on Office of National Statistics data) with a population of at least 2,000 people, and a buffer of 1km to account for peri-urban planting. This can be identified on the [Forestry Commission map browser](#) using the 'UTCF Trees Close to People' layer located in the Targeting and Scoring list of map layers. You must confirm in your application that your land falls entirely within this map layer.

3.1.2 Public access

The land on which the trees are going to be planted must be freely accessible to the public unless this is not possible due to health and safety reasons such as planting on school grounds. In open space, public access can include a public footpath running through the planting site, it is not necessarily always the case that members of the public would be able to physically touch the planted trees. Sites with paid entry fees and memberships do not meet this requirement.

3.1.3 Ineligible land

The following land is not eligible for UTCF and you cannot include it in your application:

- any land which is not entirely within England
- land that is already part of another obligation which is incompatible with UTCF
- land where you do not have management control for the duration of the Agreement
- land that is subject to a dispute between a landlord and tenants
- land that is currently in an agri-environment agreement

3.2 Management control

You must have management control of the land and all activities needed to meet the requirements of the UTCF Agreement for its full duration (see [Section 2.2.1](#)). If you do

not, you must get the written consent of all other parties who have management control of the land and activities to undertake these activities for the duration of the Agreement.

3.2.1 Tenants

If you are a tenant applying for an Agreement in your name, you must have:

- control of all the activities needed to meet the scheme requirements
- security of tenure for the duration of the Agreement
- management control of all the Agreement land for the duration of the Agreement
- agreement from your landlord to enter into the Agreement (your landlord must countersign the UTCF Application Form). If you are not able to do this, you cannot include that area of land in your application

If the landlord takes over a UTCF Agreement from you once your tenancy has ended, they must be eligible to do so. Tenants should seek legal advice on their position should their tenancy cease unexpectedly before the end of any UTCF Agreement.

If you are a tenant, including under the Agricultural Holdings Act 1986, the Agricultural Tenancies Act 1995 (a Farm Business Tenancy) or equivalent, it is your responsibility to check that you do not breach the terms of your tenancy by joining UTCF.

3.2.2 Landlords

Landlords will not be able to apply for funding on any land that is or has been subject to dispute within the last 12 months, for example, a contested notice to quit.

3.2.3 Partnerships

If you are in a business partnership, you can apply to UTCF.

3.2.4 Licensors

If you are a licensor, you can apply to UTCF. It is your responsibility to make sure that the licensee does not breach the Terms and Conditions of the UTCF Agreement. You must make sure that the licensee is aware of the requirements of the Agreement, as relevant to the licence, and include these in the licence agreement.

3.2.5 Licensees

If you are a licensee, you may be eligible for UTCF in certain circumstances if you can demonstrate full management control of the land for the duration of the Agreement.

3.2.6 Land owned by public bodies

Land owned or run by a public body is eligible for UTCF where tree planting is not already required or paid for through:

- payment from EU and Exchequer funds

- grant aid from any other public body
- any other form of legally binding obligation, including tenancies

3.2.7 Joint applications and consortia

Applications from multiple land managers are eligible for UTCf.

Once potential applicants have read this Grant Manual and have decided to pursue a joint UTCf application, they will need to agree on the person who will make the application on their behalf – the 'lead applicant'. If the application is successful, the lead applicant will become the named Grant Recipient on behalf of the land managers. They will be responsible for all requirements of the Agreement. We will need all the land managers to countersign the UTCf Application Form confirming their consent that the lead applicant can act on their behalf, including entering into a UTCf Agreement.

The lead applicant will be the main business contact for the UTCf application and subsequent UTCf Agreement. This person will sign the UTCf Agreement on behalf of all the land managers, act on behalf of the land managers and receive UTCf payments. Any action to recover grant funding under a UTCf Agreement will also be with the lead applicant. The Single Business Identifier (SBI) of the lead applicant will be used and they may authorise an agent to act on their behalf.

An agreement to collaborate between the land managers will have to be established to support the UTCf application and meet the requirements of any subsequent UTCf Agreement. This should ensure compliance with the UTCf Agreement will be the shared responsibility of those who are party to the agreement to collaborate. Day-to-day administration will be the responsibility of the lead applicant. It will also need to apportion payments to the land managers, and arrangements to reimburse the lead applicant if the recovery of grant funds is required. We will not be involved in the drafting, production or any disputes related to this private agreement, but you will need to provide evidence of these arrangements to us if asked.

3.2.8 Compatibility with the Basic Payment Scheme

Although it is unlikely that projects will be undertaken on areas that currently receive payments from the Basic Payments Scheme (BPS) under the CAP, this could happen. If you currently receive BPS payments, you will need to discuss this with the Forestry Commission and the RPA. Together we can identify if your project will be eligible to continue receiving these payments if you enter into a UTCf Agreement. This will be explored on a case-by-case basis.

3.3 Land receiving other funding or under other agreements

You cannot use UTCF funding to carry out capital works that are required under other agreements. For example, work might be required as part of a tenancy agreement or grant schemes such as:

- Local Authority Treescape Fund
- Green Recovery Challenge Fund
- Trees Call to Action Fund
- other funding streams that are part of the NCF
- other grant schemes from the FC and woodland creation partnerships

You may not use grant funding from the above sources as match funding for your UTCF application. You must declare that any work proposed as part of your application does not breach the conditions of any other agreement. We will carry out checks to make sure that capital works are not funded twice from public money. If we find a UTCF application would result in dual funding or a conflict between multiple sources of government funding, we will reject the application. If this is found to be the case after an Agreement is in place, we may recover the UTCF Grant funds paid to date and close the Agreement.

3.4 Business viability test

We will complete due diligence checks on applications and applicants, including checks on previous grant performance and the background of the potential grant recipient, plus basic financial checks. If we assess your application as not financially viable, we may not offer you an Agreement. Applications involving capital expenditure for tree planting over certain limits will require additional evidence and undergo additional checks, as shown below. You must provide the required evidence with your application form.

Table 1. Evidence of business viability

Value of tree planting over £50k	Value of tree planting over £150k	Value of tree planting over £500k
Sole trader, partnership or trust		
Savings statements, bank statements	Accountant’s letter confirming applicant has sufficient funds to complete capital works and the source of those funds (loan, savings or other)	Accountant’s letter and the 2 previous years’ tax returns (annual returns, if trust)

Company – charitable, private or public		
Accountant's certificate – via company secretary or access to accountant	Accountant's letter and previous year's accounts	3 years' accounts
Local Authority or public body		
Departmental letter of authority to spend on capital items in agreement	Departmental letter of authority to spend on capital items in agreement	FC access to 3 years' accounts (can be online)

Requesting the above information is to confirm that the business or SBI has the resources from trading profits, reserves, or loans to undertake the work proposed in the application. If this is required, we will need this before we can offer an Agreement.

Where confirmation from an accountant is needed, they will need to provide a letter on headed paper, dated within the last 3 months, that confirms at least that they:

- are a chartered accountant and act as the accountant for the applicant
- can confirm that the applicant has sufficient finances to complete the capital works (tree planting) in the application and how these funds will be sourced (for example, savings or loan)
- understand the total value of the capital works in the application

4 How it works

This section provides information about the main elements of UTCF.

UTCF is open year-round, but it takes 3 to 5 months from receiving a valid and complete application to an Agreement being offered. Therefore, the planting year 2023/24 is no longer available to new applications, the only available planting year is 2024/25.

Applications are assessed year-round, if you want to plant trees in 2024/25, your application needs to be submitted no later than 11:59pm on 30 June 2024. A Forestry Commission Administration Officer will assess your application to make sure that it is complete, and that all eligibility requirements have been met. Your self-score will be checked and verified.

If the process or application requirements for UTCF change, the UTCF gov.uk page will be updated, and we will notify current applicants in writing within 14 days.

If you wish to clarify any application requirements or the application process, please email UTCF@forestrycommission.gov.uk.

If we consider requests for information or support relevant to all applicants, we will provide additional guidance to potential applicants via an eAlert to our subscriber mailing list. These emails will go directly to those who have already applied (via the contact information provided for or by the lead applicant), to ensure fairness and openness. You can [subscribe to our eAlert mailing list](#) today.

We may be unable to respond to other requests due to the competitive application process. We will consider the commercial sensitivity of all requests received before providing additional guidance to all applicants. If relating information is relevant to all applicants and considered commercially sensitive, we will discuss with the enquiring applicant before releasing any information. In this case, we may be unable to support the request due to the competitive application process. We reserve the right not to answer questions that we deem could prejudice our Commercial interests.

Canvassing FC staff (communicating with us with the intention of influencing UTCF funding decisions or obtaining information that is not available to other applicants) is strictly prohibited. Applications from those found to have canvassed our staff will be rejected.

To ensure that proposed planting is appropriate to the site, we will undertake pre-agreement site visits. The site visits will assess the suitability of proposed planting to the site and ensure there are no trees present already or evidence of trees being there in the past 3 years. This will be carried out before agreements are awarded.

If your application is unsuccessful, we will let you know as soon as possible and explain why it has not been successful.

4.1 Eligibility requirements

4.1.1 Planting design and species selection

To be eligible for UTCF, each planting site must contain a minimum of 10 trees. To ensure that a good mix of trees is included, urban foresters frequently apply the '10, 20, 30 Rule'. This states that an urban tree population target should be no more than:

- 10% of a particular species
- 20% of a particular genus
- 30% of a particular family

When applying this rule, you must consider the existing species present in the proposed planting location. This rule helps to build resilience into the urban forest.

For large tree planting, exotic species as well as native species are acceptable, particularly where the environment is considered hostile and vigorous growth and resilient characteristics are required. Further guidance and information can be found in [The Urban Tree Manual](#).

The planting should be adequately considered and designed so that it is suitable for the location that trees are being planted. The Urban Tree Manual sets out the basic principles to consider when developing a planting plan. You should seek and follow expert advice to ensure that the correct approach is used when planting in urban areas, particularly in relation to street tree planting where utility apparatus and highway regulations require special consideration. When planting on street and in park locations, the local authority tree officer must be consulted before making an application.

4.1.2 Biosecurity

The species you select for planting must take into account any phytosanitary (plant health) restrictions or measures in place. These could relate to preventing the introduction and spread of invasive tree pests and diseases, as well as the potential impact of existing threats. You must also consider how you can implement appropriate biosecurity measures for the project and site, such as procuring trees for planting from pest and disease-free areas (see [Section 2.1](#)). You can find information on [Tree pests and diseases](#) and biosecurity in [Prevent the introduction and spread of tree pests and diseases](#) guides on gov.uk.

4.1.3 Environmental Impact Assessment

The Urban Tree Challenge Fund will only support large 'standard' trees planted over an area of less than 0.5ha. Therefore, applications received will sit below the EIA threshold and will not require screening for potential environmental impacts.

However, if a project is located on or adjacent to land that is designated, in keeping with good practice you need to contact the relevant stakeholder. For example, if the land is a Site of Special Scientific Interest you will need to contact Natural England. Most designations can be checked on MAGIC or the FC's [Land Information Search](#). To find out about Local Wildlife Sites, you need to check with your Local Environment Records Centre.

While rare in urban locations, it may be that some tree planting takes place in areas of archaeological significance or landscape importance, or both. The applicant is expected to ensure they are aware of any restrictions in place on the locations they have chosen and they comply with the relevant authority's requirements (for example, Historic England or Natural England). Applicants are also required to inform the Forestry

Commission of these special circumstances so it can undertake the necessary consultations.

4.2 Payments

There are two types of payments available under UTCF:

- support for the **capital items and activities** to plant new trees
- 3 years of **establishment payments** to help establish the young trees once the capital works are complete

Both types of payments are subject to fixed 'standard costs', paid at a fixed intervention rate.

4.2.1 Standard costs for eligible expenditure

The Urban Tree Challenge Fund provides 80% funding of standard costs for planting large trees and their establishment costs for 3 years following planting. The funding supports the cost of buying a tree, planting in grass or hard surfaces, the cost of basic protection and the labour required to plant it. See below for a description of the eligible expenditure for UTCF. In 2023, payments for trial pits were introduced to check for the presence of services. The number of trial pits that will receive funding is capped at 10% of the total number of trees in the application. For example, if you are applying to plant a total of 100 trees you could also apply for 10 trial pits. Where trial pits are required, these need to be listed in the application annex.

Establishment payments support the cost of weeding, watering, and checking trees during multiple visits over a 3-year period.

The funding rate available per item is 80% of the fixed standard costs described below, this is the amount of money that you will receive. We will not fund anything above this value.

Standard costs for eligible expenditure

Supply and plant a tree in grass

Supply a standard tree, with a clear stem up to 1.8m from ground level with a head of branches. Standards come in a range of sizes and age is dependent on species and growth rate. Funding is based on a 14-16cm standard. Prepare a tree pit in grass verge, with local authority approved pit edging. Plant tree with twin stakes, watering tube and mulch. Supply a lightweight steel mesh tree guard (the protection must be suitable for the planting location).

Standard cost: £270.45

Funding rate: £216.36

Supply and plant a tree in a hard surface

Supply a standard tree, with a clear stem up to 1.8m from ground level with a head of branches. Standards come in a range of sizes and age is dependent on species and growth rate. Funding is based on a 14-16cm standard. Prepare a tree pit in hard surface (pavement, tarmac, concrete), with Local Authority approved pit edging. Plant tree with twin stakes, watering tube and mulch. Supply a lightweight steel mesh tree guard (the protection must be suitable for the planting location).

Standard cost: £339.48

Funding rate: £271.58

Trial pit hard surface

Excavate trial pit for services check in hard surface, backfill with topsoil. Rate includes contribution toward reinstating aborted pit to match existing surface if required.

Standard cost: £348.96

Funding rate: £279.17

Trial pit in grass

Excavate trial pit for services check in grass, backfill with topsoil. Rate includes contribution toward reinstating aborted pit to match existing surface if required.

Standard cost: £195.97

Funding rate: £156.78

Establishment

Water young tree in pit via tube applying a minimum of 60 litres per visit, 14 visits per season. Weed and check stake and ties, 7 visits per season.

Standard cost: £189 per year for 3 years

Funding rate: £151.20 per year for 3 years

Protection measures, including the type of guard used, must be appropriate for the planting location. Anything more than those listed above will have to be funded separately as part of match funding. You will be required to detail this information in the application form annex.

Once the work has been completed, you will need to submit a claim form to receive payment.

Payments will be made in a minimum of 4 instalments. The first instalment will cover the supply and planting of the tree, there will be a second instalment if planting takes place over two years. This will be followed by 3 further annual claims for the remaining establishment costs.

4.2.2 Match funding

Fund recipients must secure 20% match funding in the form of money (stated in pounds sterling) or labour. The funding rate has been calculated based on paying an 80% contribution towards the standard cost of a given item and the cost of establishment, such as weeding and watering.

From 2023, you will not need to provide evidence of match funding with your application.

Match funding from other NCF workstreams (such as the Local Authority Treescapes Fund or Trees Call to Action Fund) is not acceptable.

4.3 Scoring applications

Scoring is based on 4 criteria:

- **Priority People** – this is where the planting locations have been identified in an area of deprivation
- **Priority Places** – this is where planting locations have been identified in an area of low tree canopy cover
- **Proximity to healthcare establishments** – planting within 50 meters of a hospital or GP surgery
- **Proximity to educational establishments** – planting within 50 meters of a primary or secondary school

Self-scoring should be carried out for each project within an application. For planting in areas of deprivation and assessing canopy cover you must use the scoring layers available on the [Forestry Commission map browser](#) to identify your score. The scoring layers, located in the Targeting and Scoring list of map layers, are:

- UTCf – Priority People
- UTCf – Priority Places

Proximity to a primary school, secondary school, GP surgery or hospital is based on your knowledge of the local area. We will confirm this as part of the application checks. The distance of 50 meters can be based on a straight point to point measurement, or 'as the crow flies' from the planting location to the curtilage of the healthcare or educational facility.

For deprivation and canopy cover, points will be awarded based on the proportion of trees in the total application that are within the Priority People layer and Priority Places layer. Priority People and Priority Places are evenly weighted, with the same number of points available for each.

See Table 2 – Maximum points available for scoring your application below.

Priority People is based on the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) and shows areas in the top 40% (the most deprived areas in England). Your project will receive a score if it is within or touches the Priority People layer. You will need to state 'yes' or 'no' for each project to identify if it is within or touching the Priority People layer. The application annex will calculate an overall score for the whole application based on these answers. Projects not within this layer will still be accepted in an application but will not score. Priority Places will also be based on a mapping layer available on the Forestry Commission map browser. This layer is a 'low canopy cover' dataset that identifies tree canopy cover in built-up areas. Applicants will need to assess each project and identify whether the project is within the data layer and classed as 'low', 'medium', 'high' or 'not applicable'. These values reflect tree canopy cover for targeted areas using the categories low, medium, or high as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Tree Canopy Cover values for UTCF Priority Places map layer

Tree Canopy Cover Category	Average canopy Cover
Low	0-9% average canopy cover
Medium	10-20% average canopy cover
High	20%+ average canopy cover
Not applicable	outside of the targeting layer

Applicants will receive more points where there is lower tree canopy cover in their project. Where a project sits across 2 values of the targeting layer (for example, low and medium), you can select the lower value in your application, which will receive a higher score. Areas not within this layer will still be accepted in an application but will not score.

The UTCF Priority Places layer has been updated since the fund first launched and now shows an average value of tree canopy cover across small geographic areas. Therefore, we will not accept other methods of calculating canopy cover.

The scoring threshold is 100 points, your application must be equal to or above this score to be accepted.

Table 2. Maximum points available for scoring your application

Criteria	Points available
Priority People	
Yes	100
No	0
Priority Places	
Low	100
Medium	50

High	0
Not applicable	0
Proximity to healthcare establishments	
Within 50m of hospital or GP surgery	100
Not within 50m of hospital or GP surgery	0
Proximity to educational establishments	
Within 50m of primary or secondary school	100
Not within 50m of primary or secondary school	0

4.4 Application maps

You need to provide a map that shows the location of your proposed tree planting with your application. If your application is successful and we offer you an Agreement, the map you sent with the application will become the 'Agreement Map'. It needs to be clear, legible, and meet the standards in [Section 6](#).

4.5 Authorising an agent

You can complete the application and make a claim yourself or authorise an agent to do so on your behalf.

If an agent will be acting on your behalf to complete an application or claim forms, you need to give them the appropriate permission levels by completing an [Forestry Commission Agent Authority Form](#). If you have already authorised your agent to act on your behalf with us and wish these existing permissions to apply to your UTCF application, you need to confirm this on your UTCF Application Form.

4.6 Your Agreement Commencement Date

The Agreement will start on the date you sign your Grant Offer Acceptance Letter (the Commencement Date).

5 How to apply

To apply, you need to take the following steps.

5.1 Register with the Rural Payments service

You must be registered on the [Rural Payments service](#) before you can apply to UTCF. Once you're registered, you will receive a Customer Reference Number (CRN), a Firm

Reference Number (FRN) and a Single Business Identifier (SBI). These numbers must be supplied where specified in the UTCF application. This is to conduct due diligence checks on all applications and to enable payments. If you want to direct your UTCF payments to an authorised agent, they must also be registered on Rural Payments.

You do **not** need to register your land on the [Rural Payments service](#).

5.2 Complete your application

Before making your application, please read the Grant Funding Agreement Terms and Conditions. You will need to confirm you have read and understand the Terms and Conditions for us to consider your application.

To make an application you will need to complete and submit:

- UTCF application form and annex
- application map showing where tree planting will take place (see [Section 6](#) for details)
- a copy of your tenancy agreement (where applicable)
- FC agent authority form (where applicable)
- evidence of business viability (where applicable)

You will need to have any necessary permissions or consent in place before you carry out any work and provide evidence of this if we request it to support an inspection. You do not need to provide it with your application.

You must complete your application in English. If you do not complete a question or make the required declarations in the UTCF Application Form, or if you provide an answer that shows your application is not eligible for UTCF, we will reject your application.

You can find the application forms on the gov.uk [Urban Tree Challenge Fund guidance](#) webpage.

If you cannot download the forms, please contact us by email at UTCF@forestrycommission.gov.uk or by post:

Urban Tree Challenge Fund - UTCF
Forestry Commission
National Office, England
620 Bristol Business Park
Coldharbour Lane
Bristol, BS16 1EJ

5.2.1 Confidentiality

If any elements of your application should be treated as confidential, please let us know. You can do this with an additional document supporting your application setting out which information is confidential and why.

5.3 Submitting your application

You can apply to UTCF at any time. Due to the time needed to process your application we recommended submitting it no later than 30 June 2024 to get an agreement in time for planting in the 2024/25 planting season. You should email your completed application forms and supporting documents to UTCF@forestrycommission.gov.uk or you can contact us by post at the address above. If you have submitted your application and wish to make a change this can be done prior to the application deadline by sending the revision to UTCF@forestrycommission.gov.uk.

5.4 Working with us on your application

We will carry out checks to make sure your application is complete and eligible. If it is incomplete or we need to clarify parts of the application, we will contact you to request the additional information. If this is not provided the application will be rejected. We will also check the application's score. If these checks are passed, a selection of planting sites will be visited to check their suitability.

5.5 Accepting your Agreement

After all FC checks have been completed, you will be notified of the outcome of your application. If you are successful, we will write to you to offer you a UTCF Agreement. You can accept or reject the Agreement offer by signing the Acceptance Letter and returning it to us using the contact details in [Section 5.2](#).

We will accept wet signatures and Qualified Electronic Signatures (QES) for your final Agreement. If you accept the Agreement, you will be confirming that you have read, understand, and accept the UTCF Grant Funding Agreement Terms and Conditions.

5.6 Where to get help

We will not provide technical advice for your application. It is up to you to source expert advice from a competent person to ensure your planting proposal meets best practice. We suggest you follow the best practice advice found in the [Urban Tree Manual](#).

We consider experts to include persons with membership to a professional body. Examples of this can include, but are not limited to:

- Institute of Chartered Foresters

- Arboricultural Association
- London Tree Officers Association
- Municipal Tree Officers Association
- Association of Tree Officers

For non-technical advice about the fund and how it works please email UTCF@forestrycommission.gov.uk.

5.7 Getting consent

It is your responsibility to get all consents, approvals, or permissions that you may need to carry out the work funded under your Agreement. These consents, approvals and permissions must remain effective for the duration of the Agreement and we may ask for evidence of this.

5.7.1 Other considerations

When you carry out work under the Agreement, remember that you must not breach any other rules or laws, such as:

- breaking byelaws
- obstructing public rights of way
- blocking or restricting access to 'open access' land

5.8 Withdrawing your application

You can withdraw your application at any time by emailing or writing to us using the details in [Section 5.2](#). Please explain the reason(s) why you are withdrawing your application. This feedback will help us improve UTCF and our service.

5.9 Disputes, appeals and complaints

If you are unhappy with a decision we have taken about your application or Agreement, you can make an appeal. If you are unhappy with the service you have had from the FC, you can email, write, or call us. Full guidance about [how to make a compliant or appeal](#) is available online.

6 Mapping Standards

6.1 Preparing a map for your application

You must provide a map with your UTCF application showing the location of your proposed tree planting. For example, we understand that it might not be possible to provide the exact location of each individual tree at the application stage. But to

complete our due diligence checks and for scoring to take place, as a minimum we need to know the approximate location. For example, the street(s), park, or road along which tree planting is proposed to take place.

If the application is successful and we offer you an Agreement, the map supplied with the application will become the 'Agreement Map'. It therefore needs to be clear, legible, and meet the standards set out below (see Section 6.3). When submitting a claim for payment, you must include maps that show the exact location of where the trees have been planted. A proportion of sites will be inspected prior to claims being paid, and having accurate maps helps to expediate this process.

6.2 How to create a map

Maps should be produced at a scale of 1:1,250. Where application areas are in more than one geographical area, we require a map for each.

We encourage you to produce maps using GIS data shape files and submit these. However, we will accept paper maps where necessary. If you require a paper map for your application, we can provide one free of charge for your application through our [Map Request Service](#). Please specify on the map request form that you require the scale to be 1:1,250. If you need a map from our Map Request Service please request it as early as possible.

The UTCF is not part of the Rural Development Programme. This means landowners and applicants do not need to register the land to apply and field parcels do not need to be shown on maps. However, all planting sites named in the application must be shown on the application maps and be clearly labelled. The maps must match with the planting sites recorded in the annex to enable easy identification.

6.3 Minimum mapping standards

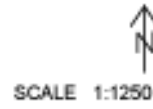
When creating an Application Map, you must comply with the following rules:

- map number and the total number of maps (for example, 1 of 3) must be visible
- planting site name (as detailed on the application annex) must be shown
- include the name of the business or applicant
- include a six figure OS grid reference for the centre of the map
- if a mistake is made do not use correction fluid, strike through the error instead

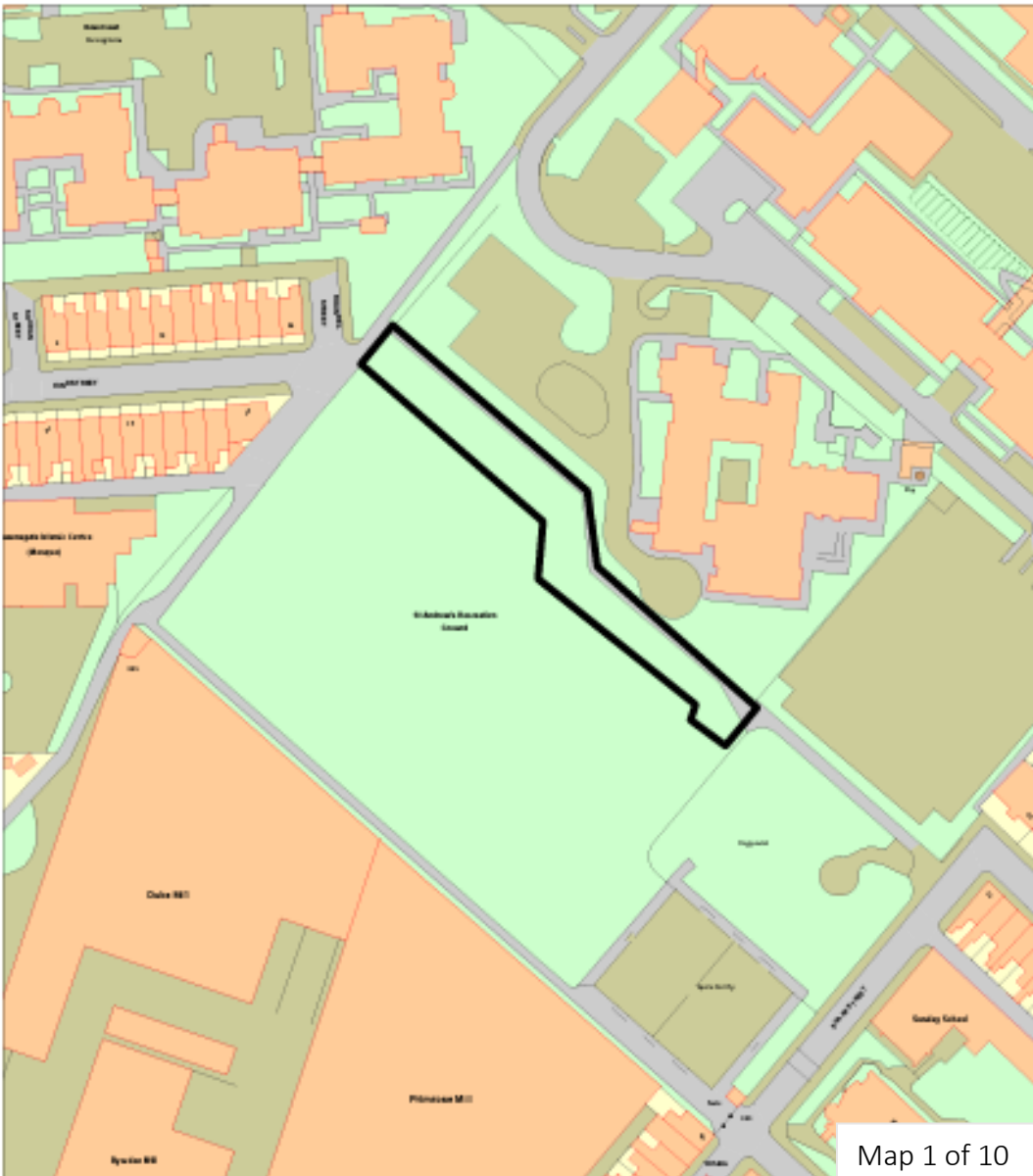
Example application map



Head of Service Unit :
2 Rakehead SD848346



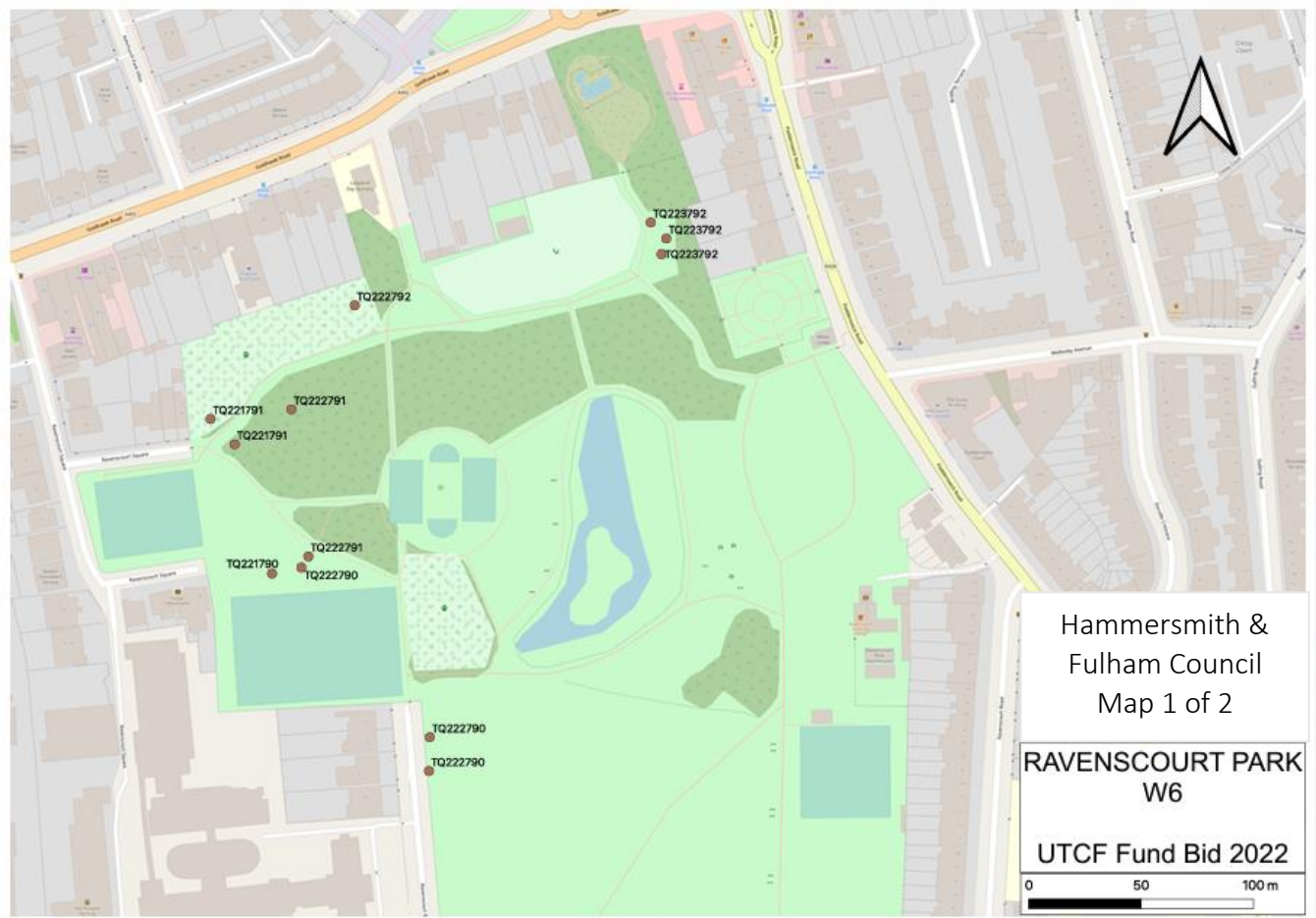
Location :



(C) Crown copyright. All rights reserved.
Substitute your Council Name here
LA 999999 (OS Licence number here)
1000

Date Printed: 04 July 2023

Example claim map



7 Scheme requirements and Agreement management

You must read and meet the requirements detailed in this section as these are mandatory for all UTCf Grant Recipients. 'Grant Recipient' means the person (whether an individual, company or other entity) who has entered into the UTCf Agreement as defined in the Grant Funding Agreement.

7.1 Entering into an Agreement

If your application is successful, we will send you a Grant Offer Letter. If you want to accept a UTCf Agreement, you must return the signed Acceptance Letter to us within 15 working days of the date of the Grant Offer Letter. If you do not accept your offer within this time, we will withdraw it.

7.1.1 Agreement amendments

We will consider changes to planting year and works but this will be at our discretion and based on available budget. We make no guarantee that a change will be possible. We may terminate the Agreement, or reclaim or reduce payments, where we consider the changes will not deliver the objectives of the UTCf Agreement.

7.1.2 Changes of ownership (transfers) and management

We may allow transfers of UTCf Agreements and accept changes in management control. Part-transfers may also be considered.

If we allow a transfer or change in management control, we will pay the new landowner the remaining Grant due if they take on and comply with the Agreement. However, we will reclaim any Grant funds paid to the previous owner, even after any land sale, if the Terms and Conditions of the Agreement are not met. If you want to manage this liability, you must put in place an Agreement with the new landowner.

You must notify us of a transfer or any change in the management control that may affect the Agreement within 3 months of a change taking place, using the contact details in [Section 5.2](#). If you do not, the UTCf Agreement will be terminated, and the Grant recovered.

At the point of a transfer or change of management control, we have the right to terminate the Agreement and may at that time recover the Grant if the objectives of the Agreement have not been met. Further information about transfers can be found in the [Forestry Commission Operations Note 57](#).

7.2 Making claims

Send your claim forms to us using the contact details in [Section 5.2](#). Claims for tree planting must be received by 31 March in the year that the planting work is scheduled to be completed (as set out in the Agreement document) unless we agree an amendment to extend the Grant Funding Period. You must have paid for the capital items that you are claiming for, and the payment must have left your bank account.

A claim form will be provided with your Grant Agreement or can be requested from us using the contact details in [Section 5.2](#). We will accept one grant claim per year for your agreement.

7.3 Inspections

Agreements are subject to inspection to verify that the requirements of the Agreement, including completion of all tree planting, have been met. This will include inspections during the Maintenance Period. You will receive 48 hours' notice of an inspection. You must allow authorised inspectors to access the land under the Terms and Conditions of your Agreement. A selection of claims for grant payment will be subject to inspection and payment will not be made until after a satisfactory inspection outcome.

7.4 Evidence and record keeping

The information below explains the evidence you will need to supply to support a UTCF claim, when this is required, whether you need to retain a record and for how long.

Evidence of expenditure: for example, invoices, till receipts, bank statements, delivery notes, evidence of using your own labour

Checks:

- required upon request to support claims
- all records kept must be dated on or after the Agreement Commencement Date
- we will reject claims and will not pay them if, during an inspection, we find that you ordered or bought items before the start of the Agreement or that you carried out part or all of the work before, or after, the Agreement period

Record keeping:

- you must retain these documents for a period of 7 years after the final payment of grant
- we will retain this evidence for our records until your obligations under the UTCF Agreement expire

Evidence of consent to undertake work

Checks:

- we may ask to see this evidence at inspection.

Record keeping:

- to be kept for at least 7 years after the final payment of grant

Photographs of each planting area

Checks:

- we may ask for photo evidence of standard costs items or activities to confirm site details if a site visit or inspection cannot be arranged
- if requested, the photos must be supplied within 5 days working days
- failure to provide this may result in your claim being delayed or withheld

Record keeping:

- we will retain this evidence for our records until your obligations under the UTCF Agreement expire

7.5 Photographic evidence quality

Whether digital or paper photographs, requirements are the same. All photos must meet the following standards:

1. Photographs must be in focus and clearly show the relevant capital item or environmental feature. If you send your images by email, please send as JPEG files. Digital images should not be smaller than 600 x 400 pixels and ideally the image file size no larger than 400KB. Printed photographs must be no smaller than 15cm x 10cm.
2. Photograph to identify the tree planting concerned or evidence of trial pit – it is your responsibility to have sufficient evidence that the investment or required management has taken place. For example, more than one photograph may be needed where the work exceeds the frame or is not clearly evident from a single photograph.
3. Where possible, include a significant feature to provide authenticity (for example, building, road, pathway).
4. Mark the photographed feature's location, and direction from which the photograph has been taken, with an 'X' and an arrow on a copy of a map (or map extract) of the Agreement area.
5. Take pictures consistently from the same spot for before and after photographs of the tree planting.

7.5.1 Labelling photographs

Label photographs with the Ordnance Survey (OS) National Grid reference and planting site name or ID. Give the UTCF Agreement reference and the date. If you are sending more than one image, also include the image number.

7.6 Publicity requirements

The Terms and Conditions require you to comply with all instructions and guidance relating to acknowledging and publicising the support provided. We may publicise in the press information about the grant and funded activities to assist with promotion of the fund.

7.7 Force majeure

You may be unable to meet your requirements under the Agreement because of force majeure or exceptional circumstances. If this happens, you must write to tell us within 15 days from the date on which you (or any person authorised to act for you) identify the issue. You will need to provide evidence in writing to show:

- what has happened
- how the event meant you were unable to meet the scheme rules

Force majeure or exceptional circumstances may include, but are not limited to:

- the death or long-term professional incapacity of the Grant Recipient
- a severe natural disaster seriously affecting the holding
- a plant disease affecting part or all of the Grant Recipient's trees
- expropriation of all or a large part of the holding (provided that the expropriation could not have been anticipated at the time of the application)

We will consider the facts to decide whether the Grant Recipient is relieved of all or part of their obligations under the Agreement, and whether all or part of the Grant should be withheld or repaid. If you are aware of the issue when entering into your Agreement, then it is unlikely to fall under force majeure or exceptional circumstances.