

National Lottery Good Causes Team
Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport
lottery-good-causes@dcms.gov.uk
By email

Wednesday 23 September 2026

Dear National Lottery Good Causes Team,

Re: National Lottery Good Causes – Fund What Matters To You

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the call for evidence on the future of National Lottery Good Causes funding.

The National Lottery plays an essential role in supporting the places, communities and causes that matter to people across the UK. National Lottery funding has been instrumental in supporting the Rivers Trust Movement to restore rivers, enhance habitats and deliver lasting benefits for communities and the natural environment that statutory funding has not provided.

We strongly support the Government's ambition to make Good Causes funding more locally focused, less bureaucratic and better aligned with the priorities and needs of communities. We welcome the proposed changes to devolve decision-making closer to the communities that funding is intended to benefit, enabling local expertise and priorities to shape how resources are allocated.

However, based on our experience of delivering projects supported by National Lottery funding, we have identified three key areas in the call for evidence that raise concerns and on which we would like to provide evidence.

1. Environmental projects deliver benefits across multiple Good Causes.

The call for evidence asks respondents to consider what the future priorities for Good Causes funding should be, identifying several potential priorities, including community-led initiatives, health and wellbeing, education and skills, and the environment. In doing so, it presents 'the environment' as a distinct funding theme, with examples including local nature restoration, urban green spaces and tackling the climate crisis.

We strongly support the inclusion of the environment as a priority for funding. However, we are concerned that presenting it as a separate theme entirely risks underestimating the importance and reach of nature-based projects beyond environmental outcomes.

Nature-based projects frequently deliver multiple Good Causes at the same time. The benefits of restoring a river, for example, do not stop at improving ecological condition. River restoration can strengthen community wellbeing and social cohesion, create opportunities for volunteering and education, improve access to nature, connect people with their local heritage, increase flood resilience, and support both physical and mental health.

Example: A Wilder Walkmill – West Cumbria Rivers Trust

Funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund.

A Wilder Walkmill is demonstrating how nature-based projects can deliver far more than environmental improvements. While the project is restoring habitats through river restoration, wetland creation, woodland management, wildflower meadows and biodiversity monitoring, it is also generating significant social and community benefits. More than 2,300 people have participated in activities ranging from conservation volunteering and citizen science to wellbeing walks, family events and outdoor learning, with over 700 local school pupils engaged. The project has recorded improvements in participant wellbeing, reduced social isolation, strengthened community connections, created apprenticeships and training opportunities, and built local stewardship through the Friends of Walkmill group. The programme is reaching people in one of the UK's most deprived areas, with evidence showing strong engagement from disadvantaged communities.

"I grew up at Moresby and think it's great that people get to enjoy what a beautiful place it is. My son loved the event, and we will be visiting Walkmill during the day to see all the wildlife and ponds." - Walkmill event attendee



This is important in terms of how evidence gathered through this call is interpreted and how funding is ultimately allocated following it. If respondents are asked to select their preferred priorities from separate categories, they may understandably select healthy, education, community or heritage without necessarily identifying nature as the mechanism through which many of those outcomes can be achieved. Conversely, someone choosing 'the environment' may be expressing a priority that encompasses a much wider range of outcomes.

Currently, for example, the National Lottery Community Fund already recognises that environmental action delivers wider co-benefits, as reflected in its [research on community action for the environment](#) and [research on the benefits of community-led climate action](#). However, these co-benefits are not yet consistently reflected in all funding criteria, and the approach taken within the call for evidence does not seem to align with this previous learning. All funds should give greater weight to the full range of benefits generated by nature-based projects.

2. 'Heritage' should include natural heritage.

The call for evidence asks respondents to consider which areas should be prioritised for National Lottery Good Causes funding. In Question 6, the call for evidence presents 'Heritage' and 'The environment' as separate potential priorities. Heritage is described through examples including historic buildings, public parks and community archaeology, while the environment is described through local nature restoration, urban green spaces and tackling the climate crisis. Question 8 similarly presents heritage and the environment as separate areas.

We believe the way these questions are framed risks completely overlooking natural heritage. Rivers, wetlands, floodplains, lakes and catchments are part of the heritage of the places in which people live. They have shaped landscapes, communities, economies and identities over generations, and often contain layers of cultural value alongside their ecological value. Work in river environments can, for example, simultaneously:

- Reconnect communities with their local landscape;
- Protect historic features;
- Provide opportunities for education and volunteering; and
- Strengthen people's sense of connection to and ownership of their local place.

The National Lottery Heritage Fund has already shown it can support project which recognise these deep connections. The call for evidence itself highlights a project where heritage investment is being used to support wider community outcomes. We therefore recommend that the future Good Causes framework explicitly indicate that natural assets are an integral part of heritage, alongside built and cultural assets.

Example: Aire Rivers Trust – Roots in the River (Aire Rivers Trust)

Funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund.

The [Roots in the River project](#) connects communities in Keighley and west Bradford with the natural and industrial heritage of the River Worth and its becks. Through river walks, talks, creative workshops, volunteering and citizen science, it helps people understand the history and continuing importance of local waterways while building the skills and confidence to care for them. The project has delivered 33 walks, 27 talks and workshops, 60 volunteer days and 20 citizen science events, engaging more than 800 people and attracting 36 new volunteers since August 2025. Participant feedback also points to improved wellbeing, stronger connections with nature and renewed appreciation of local landscapes and heritage.

"I never knew this was here. It's so hidden." - Attendee, talking about a riverside path in the centre of Keighley, near their home, which they discovered through Roots in the River.



Example: Rivers4Life – Yorkshire Dales Rivers Trust

Funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund

The three-year Rivers4Life project uses rivers and wildlife as a focus for creative engagement, bringing together schools, community groups and artists through workshops, exhibitions, theatre, music, photography and guided walks. By helping people connect with the rivers of the Yorkshire Dales, the project is fostering a stronger sense of place, increasing understanding of environmental challenges, and inspiring long-term stewardship of local waterways. Since January 2025, the project has engaged over 2,100 children, 35 schools and 12 community groups. The initiative shows how important it is to conserve our natural heritage and how powerful natural assets are for education, wellbeing, community cohesion and inspiring future environmental action.



3. Funding allocation should reflect need and the geography of environmental challenges.

The call for evidence asks how Good Causes funding should be distributed and whether it should primarily focus on the greatest need (Question 11) or on areas selling a greater number of Lottery tickets (Question 12).

We strongly support a needs-based approach and do not believe that the number of Lottery tickets sold in an area should determine how much Good Causes funding a community receives. The purpose of Good Causes funding is to create additional public benefit; it should therefore be directed towards communities and places where investment can make the greatest difference as allocating funding according to local ticket sales risks reinforcing existing inequalities.

There is also a particular issue for environmental investment as environmental challenges do not respect arbitrary boundaries. In the case of rivers, rivers systems operate at the scale of whole catchments. The condition of a river in one community is often affected by what happens upstream and downstream. A hyper-local approach to funding distribution, such as based on ticket sales, is in this sense problematic: the community that benefits from an intervention may not be the same community in which the work takes place. For example, investment in natural flood management or wetland restoration can reduce flood risk for communities downstream. Restoring habitats in one location can benefit wildlife and ecological health across an entire river system.

Recommendations

Drawing on the evidence and experience outlined above, we recommend that the future National Lottery Good Causes framework:

- Recognises the full range of co-benefits delivered by nature-based projects, including health and wellbeing, education and skills, community cohesion, and stronger local places;
- Formally recognises natural heritage, ensuring that rivers, wetlands, landscapes and other natural assets are valued alongside built and culture heritage.
- Allocates funding according to need and potential impact, rather than the number of Lottery tickets sold in an area, while supporting locally led action at the appropriate geographical scale.

We also believe that care should be taken when interpreting the findings for this call for evidence recognising that responses to individual questions will not necessarily capture the full range of benefits and priorities represented in the evidence due to formatting choices. We recommend that results should not be treated as simple rankings of competing causes given that there is significant overlap between outcomes.

Your sincerely,

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(NLHF projects delivered: *Living Heritage of the River Don, Hidden Heritage Secret Streams, All Hands on the Don*)

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