

Press release: Natural England backs hedges and boundaries for wildlife and people

The [hedgerows and boundaries grant](#), individually worth up to £5,000, is designed to help farmers and other land managers improve important farmland boundaries.

The application window for the £5 million scheme closes on 28 April. Farmers can apply for a one-off grant towards the restoration of a range of traditional boundaries including hedgerows, dry stone walls, stone-faced banks and earth banks. Nearly 800 applicants were successful last year.

Guy Thompson, Chief Operating Officer of Natural England, said:

Hedgerows, dry stone walls and earth banks are a quintessential part of the English countryside. Not only do they perform a vital agricultural role in protecting crops and livestock from the elements, they help support a variety of wildlife. Increasingly farmland boundaries also play a major role in preventing soil loss as well as reducing pollution and flooding. I'm pleased that this grant will help to support these traditional boundaries and the wider benefits that they bring.

Payment rates are fixed for each item. These include hedge-laying or coppicing, hedgerow restoration through gapping-up, stone-faced bank repair and stone wall restoration, which can include a top wiring supplement.

Like the rest of the Countryside Stewardship scheme, the application process is competitive. Applications score more highly if the business has been in a previous Environmental Stewardship agreement or England Woodland Grant Scheme. Priority is given to smaller holdings and restoring hedges or walls is preferred to stone-faced or earth banks. More points are awarded if the application is for more than £1,000, and if the holding is part of a group receiving Facilitation Fund payments.

Grants are not available on land parcels already within Mid or Higher Tier Countryside Stewardship, a live 2016 Hedgerow and Boundary Grant, Higher Level Stewardship or Uplands Entry Level Stewardship on 31 July 2017. Land parcels in Entry Level Stewardship can be included in applications, as long as other eligibility criteria are met.

Grant offers will be made to successful applicants from July 2017. The deadline for submitting claims to Natural England is 31 December 2018.

Customers can apply by downloading an [application form](#) or by using the new online application process which is expected to be available on the [Rural](#)

[Payments service](#) from early March 2017.

For enquiries (media only) contact: Mary Tomlinson, Senior Press Officer, Natural England. Email: mary.tomlinson@naturalengland.org.uk Telephone: 07771 834 975.

Press release: Lack of controls over cash collections

The Charity Commission ('the Commission') investigated [Al-Hassan Education Centre \(1078159\)](#), a mosque and education centre based in Leeds after it repeatedly failed to file its accounts – see [endnote 1](#). The Commission concluded that the trustees mismanaged the charity.

The Commission uncovered inadequate financial governance at the charity and that the trustees were not able to fully account for the charity's funds in relation to cash collections and charitable expenditure. The charity also failed to submit accounting information for the financial years ending 31 March 2012 and 31 March 2013.

The [inquiry](#) also found that there were wider governance failures within the charity whereby the trustees were not adhering to some of the provisions within their governing document including: failure to hold Annual General Meetings since July 2013 or the required 2 trustee meetings a year and that they had no policies for loans and money laundering. The regulator also concluded there had been mismanagement by the trustees due to a lack of financial controls in relation to cash collected and spent following Friday prayers, and a lack of up to date policies and procedures.

The inquiry considered that the trustees had not acted in the best interests of the charity, put the charity's funds at risk and concluded there was mismanagement and misconduct by the trustees.

On 16 November 2016 the Commission issued an order under the Charities Act to direct the trustees to take certain actions to regularise the charity's governance, submit its outstanding accounting information and review its policies. The trustees have already taken steps to complete the actions, and the Commission will continue to monitor the charity to ensure that its order is complied with.

Carl Mehta, Head of Investigations, Enforcement at the Charity Commission, said:

The trustees in this case failed to take basic steps to ensure that the charity's funds were able to be accounted for. This is simply

not acceptable and I expect the trustees to take measures to speedily correct this.

For many faith groups, collecting funds in cash is likely to be a regular occurrence as part of worship or devotion. Charities must ensure that they have in place effective and proper financial controls to ensure those funds are safeguarded.

Trustees can use the Commission's guidance to implement robust internal financial controls that are appropriate to their charity. [Internal financial controls for charities \(CC8\)](#) is available on GOV.UK. There is also a [self-check-list for trustees](#) available.

The full report is available on [GOV.UK](#).

Ends

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1. The Charity Commission is the independent regulator of charities in England and Wales. To find out more about our work, see our [annual report](#).
 2. Search for charities on our [online register](#)
 3. Details of how the Commission reports on its regulatory work can be found on [GOV.UK](#).

Endnotes

1. The inquiry was opened on the 25 February 2015. The charity was previously part of the [class inquiry](#) in April 2014 for failing to submitting accounting information for the financial years ending 31 March 2012 and 31 March 2013.

[News story: Work to improve disabled access to toilets on trains and at stations is underway](#)

Work to improve disabled access to toilets on trains and at stations is underway following talks between Rail Minister Paul Maynard and senior rail

industry representatives.

The Rail Minister met with senior executives after Paralympian Anne Wafula Strike highlighted the issue. Clearer information will be made available about the availability of accessible toilets in advance of journeys and the Department for Transport will work with train companies to see how staff training can be improved. Where facilities are out of order, we have challenged industry to make sure disabled passengers are informed before the train departs. Maintenance teams will also ensure accessible toilets are more reliable and fix them more quickly when problems arise, ensuring fewer toilets are out of service in the first place.

Rail Minister Paul Maynard said:

I take the issue of accessibility on our railways extremely seriously and these commitments from industry are just one step forward to improve things.

It is vital that all people, including disabled passengers, are able use public transport and I will continue to push train companies on this matter.

Paul Plummer, chief executive of the Rail Delivery Group (RDG), which represents train operators and Network Rail, said:

The rail industry wants to modernise what is often Victorian infrastructure to make it more accessible and to provide far better information to enable people with disabilities to travel with confidence.

When things go wrong, rail companies want to put them right, and we are keen to hear directly from people with disabilities to understand their experiences which is why the industry is already engaging more with disability groups to understand how we can improve.

It has been a requirement since 1999 that all new trains with toilets are built with accessible toilets as standard – all trains built before then must comply by 2020.

The meeting sought to identify and address the reasons behind the lack of provision of accessible toilets, as part of the government's ongoing commitment to reduce barriers to disabled people accessing transport services. The steps were agreed as part of the rail industry's continued strong engagement with disabled advocacy groups.

More than 150 stations have been upgraded under the [Access for All programme](#) to remove barriers to independent travel – this includes installing signs, ramps and lifts. A further 68 are in construction or development.

The Department for Transport will be publish its 'Accessibility action plan' later this year, which will address accessibility across all modes of public transport. In addition, Aviation Minister Lord Ahmad will be holding talks on access to air travel for disabled passengers.

Guidance: Countryside Stewardship: hedgerows and boundaries grant manual 2017

Updated: Option to apply online through Rural Payments service added.

The hedgerows and boundaries grant is a standalone capital grant under Countryside Stewardship. Farmers and other land managers can apply for this grant to help provide environmental and landscape benefits on their land.

Apply for the hedgerows and boundaries grant from 1 February 2017 to 28 April 2017.

The manual provides information about the hedgerows and boundaries grant and how to apply.

You can apply:

- using the [capital grant application form and annex 1: hedgerows and boundaries](#)
- online through the [Rural Payments service](#)

See the main [Countryside Stewardship](#) page for more information.

News story: Toby Wallace report published

From:

First published:

1 February 2017

Fatal man overboard from ocean rowing boat in the North Atlantic Ocean.

MAIB's report on the investigation of the man overboard from the ocean rowing boat Toby Wallace in the North Atlantic Ocean with loss of 1 life on 14 February 2016 is now published.

The report contains details of what happened and the subsequent actions taken:

PDF, 1.95MB, 31 pages

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