

# GUIDANCE AND INFORMATION

## Shopfront Improvement Grant Scheme

### Background

The Shopfront Improvement Grant Scheme is funded by the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and the Rural England Prosperity Fund. A total budget of £45,000 has been allocated, aiming to award a minimum of 45 grants of up to £1,000 each. Additional grants may be available if applications of less than £1,000 are received

Grants are available to support capital investments that improve the external appearance and accessibility of eligible business premises—such as signage, lighting, outdoor furniture, or substantial shopfront repairs.

The aim of this scheme is to:

- Revitalise the appearance of towns and neighbourhood centres
- Increase footfall to these area
- Safeguard local jobs
- Support the long-term sustainability of businesses through high-quality improvements

### Eligibility

Grant applications are being sought from any micro-sized independent customer-facing business (including those in the retail or service sector) based in West Oxfordshire, including those operating through a franchise arrangement. The bigger retail chains, who have a centralised head office, will not be eligible to apply.

Criteria	Requirements
<b>Location</b>	The business must be located within West Oxfordshire
<b>Priority Areas</b>	Town centre locations are prioritised: Burford, Carterton, Charlbury, Chipping Norton, Eynsham, Witney, and Woodstock. Other locations may still be considered.
<b>Business Size</b>	Only micro and small to medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are eligible. These are generally defined as follows: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Microbusiness: Fewer than 10 employees and an annual turnover or balance sheet total of no more than £2 million</li><li>• Small business: Fewer than 50 employees and an annual turnover or balance sheet total of no more than £10 million</li><li>• Medium-sized business: Fewer than 250 employees and an annual turnover of no more than £50 million or a balance sheet total of no more than £43 million</li></ul>
<b>Business type</b>	Must be open to the public without appointment. Priority will be given to retail and hospitality businesses.

<b>Previous or Multiple Applications</b>	<p>Applicants must indicate whether they have received a grant funded by the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF) or Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF) in 2025–26.</p> <p>While multiple applications are permitted, limited funding means it is unlikely that more than one award will be made. Previous or concurrent applications may be taken into account during assessment.</p>
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### Ineligible Applicants:

- National chains and online-only businesses
- Charities and non-profits
- Gambling establishments
- Adult/private shops
- Membership-only venues
- Businesses trading for less than 6 months
- Businesses in breach of regulations or in insolvency
- Those exceeding subsidy limits under the Subsidy Control Act
- Buildings primarily offering community services

### Match Funding Requirement

Applicants must contribute at least 50% toward purchases.

The maximum grant award is £1,000. For example,

Item Cost	You Contribute	Grant Provided
£800	£400	£400
£2,500	£1,500	£1000

### Eligible Costs

Eligible capital expenses must be long-term investments that enhance the functionality, accessibility, or appearance of the shopfront.

### Examples of eligible costs:

- Access improvements for accessibility
- External signage and lighting (with approvals)
- Awnings, canopies, umbrellas
- Outdoor tables and chairs
- Outdoor heating\*
- Planters and decorative street-level features
- New shopfront doors/windows
- Decorative cladding or tiling

- Waste/recycling bin enclosures
- External solar shading systems

\* Did, you know? Infrared heaters are more efficient because they directly heat people and objects, rather than heating the surrounding air!

**Note:** All work is subject to planning and regulatory approvals. Refer to West Oxfordshire's [Design Guide 17: Shop Front Design](#) for guidance.

You can also check whether your building has Listed Building Status or is located in a Conservation Area by visiting our [interactive map](#).

### Ineligible Costs

The following list is not designed to be exhaustive but should illustrate the types of expenditures that would not be eligible for support:

- Works already started or completed before funding approval
- Structural/internal repairs (e.g., re-roofing, internal refurbishments)
- Rear or side-facing works
- Professional/architect fees
- Temporary signage or internal fixtures
- Business running costs or routine maintenance
- Cash payments or personal account use
- Works required by enforcement (e.g. statutory repairs, compliance with notices)

### Application Process

#### Stage 1 – Submit Application and Documents

The application window will be open from **8 – 14 September 2025**. Applicants should complete the online application form and submit the following information:

- At least two written quotes for each capital item
- Business account details and the six most recent months of bank statements
- For new businesses or self-employed applicants:
  - Latest tax return,
  - Management accounts, or
  - A statement from an accountant outlining expected income and operating expenses
- Tenancy or lease agreement and written consent from the landlord (if applicable)
- Schedule of proposed works
- Photos of the current shopfront

- Business rates account number (if applicable)
- VAT registration number or Unique Taxpayer Reference (UTR)
- Planning approval or application reference number (if applicable)
- Pavement licence reference number or proof of application (if applicable)

Before applying, please ensure you have the necessary permissions in place – you will be required to provide evidence that this is in place. Permissions may include (but are not limited to):

- [Planning permission](#)
- [Pavement licence](#)
- [Listed building consent](#)
- Landlord's consent

Incomplete applications will not be considered.

### **Stage 2 – Assessment**

- Applications will be reviewed by an Assessment Panel.
- Applications will be assessed against the following criteria:
  - Visual impact – how much the proposed works improve the appearance of the shopfront and surrounding area.
  - Business impact – whether the changes will help sustain or grow the business.
  - Business type – priority will be given to businesses in the retail and hospitality sectors.
  - Location – priority will be given to businesses located in town centres
  - Sustainability – inclusion of environmentally friendly or sustainable features.
  - Creativity and originality – the distinctiveness or innovative nature of the proposal.
- Decisions are final and cannot be appealed.

### **Stage 3 – Grant Offer**

- Successful applicants will receive a grant agreement.
- You must not begin any work before receiving this agreement.

### **Stage 4 – Complete the Project**

- Purchases must be completed within 3 months of the grant award.
- Grants are paid in arrears, so you must cover full costs upfront.

### **Stage 5 – Provide Evidence of Expenditure**

Submit within evidence within 1 month of purchase:

- Invoices must be dated after the grant award

- Matching bank statements
- Only listed and approved items will be reimbursed
- No cash purchases; all payments must be traceable (e.g., card or bank transfer)

### **Stage 6 – Receive Funds**

- Grants paid via BACS to the business's commercial trading account.
- Personal or current accounts are not eligible.

### **Stage 7 – Feedback and Monitoring**

- Successful applicants must complete a feedback survey.
- You **will** be contacted for follow-up **and** outcomes monitoring.

### **Grant Conditions**

- Works must be completed and funds spent by 31 March 2026
- UKSPF branding must be displayed on your shopfront (branding templates will be provided)
- Applications must comply with the Council's procurement rules (2 quotes required)
- All work must meet planning, licensing, and conservation standards
- A post-completion inspection may be required
- The Council may reclaim funds if terms are not met or funds are misused
- Applications from agents or consultants will not be accepted
- The Council will not tolerate fraud. Any business found to have falsified information to obtain a grant may face prosecution, and any funds awarded—whether fraudulently or in error—may be recovered.

### **Subsidy Control**

Grants will be provided under the Minimum Financial Assistance (MFA) exemption of the UK Subsidy Control Act 2022.

You must declare all public funding received over the current and past two financial years. The total must not exceed £315,000.

Further guidance is available on the [UK Government's subsidy control pages](#).

### **Additional Information**

- There is a limited amount of money available for this scheme, and once it has been allocated no further funding will be made available.
- Please note that grants are discretionary and subject to availability of funds.

- If West Oxfordshire District Council find that the fund has been used inappropriately, we can require the full grant amount to be repaid immediately.
- Applications submitted by Agents or Consultants will not be accepted. All applications must be submitted by the applicant.

### **Further Support – Low Carbon Hub’s Green Fund**

If you're keen to reduce your energy consumption as part of your shopfront improvements, you may be eligible for additional support through the Low Carbon Hub’s Green Fund.

SMEs in West Oxfordshire can currently access a free ESOx energy assessment, funded by the UK Shared Prosperity Fund. Based on the assessment’s recommendations, you can apply for a grant covering 25% of the cost of implementing energy-saving measures, up to £10,000. Multiple measures can be included, but projects already underway or completed are not eligible. The remaining 75% must be covered by your own funding, a loan, or another grant.

For more information and application deadlines (Sept 2025, Dec 2025, and March 2026), visit:

[energysolutionsoxfordshire.org/get-match-funding-with-our-green-fund](https://energysolutionsoxfordshire.org/get-match-funding-with-our-green-fund)

To request a free energy assessment, visit:

[energysolutionsoxfordshire.org/free-energy-assessment](https://energysolutionsoxfordshire.org/free-energy-assessment)

### **Contact and Support**

If you have any queries, please contact us at [business@westoxon.gov.uk](mailto:business@westoxon.gov.uk)