

Guidance and Information

Sustainable Tourism Grant Scheme

Background

Funded by the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, the Sustainable Tourism Grant Scheme aims to help visitor economy businesses in West Oxfordshire make capital improvements to make their businesses more eco-friendly and climate conscious.

A total funding pot of £75,000 has been allocated, aiming to provide funding for at least 12 businesses.

There are two levels of grants available:

Level 1 – Grants of between £1,000 & £5,000

Level 2 – Grants of between £5,000 & £10,000

Grants will be available to support capital investments that improve businesses' sustainability, such as solar, secure bike storage, EV charging points, rainwater harvesting systems, habitat creation or restoration, green roofs, and living walls.

Eligibility

Grant applications are being sought from any micro-sized or SME independent visitor economy business based in West Oxfordshire. Please see the detailed criteria in the table below.

Criteria	Requirements
Location	The business must be located within West Oxfordshire district.
Business size	<p>Only micro and small to medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are eligible. These are generally defined as follows:</p> <p>Microbusiness: Fewer than 10 employees and an annual turnover or balance sheet total of no more than £2 million.</p> <p>Small business: Fewer than 50 employees and an annual turnover or balance sheet total of no more than £10 million.</p>

	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 .
Business type	Business must operate in a sector of the visitor economy: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accommodation • Activity provider • Attraction • Independent food & beverage • Independent retail
Timescale	All projects must be completed by 31 March 2026.
Previous or multiple applications	<p>Applicants must indicate whether they have received grant funding from 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 considered during assessment.</p>

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
- Places of worship

Match Funding Requirement

The level of match funding required depends on the scheme level applied for:

Level 1 - Match funding is not compulsory but will be scored favourably when assessing grant applications.

Level 2 – Applicants must contribute at least 25% towards purchases.

Eligible Costs

Eligible capital expenses must be one-off, long-term investments that improve the sustainable practices of the business.

Examples of eligible costs:

- Energy efficiency measures, including those to minimise energy demand and improve building fabric
- Solar panels
- Secure bike storage
- Electric buggy
- EV charging points
- Rainwater harvesting systems
- Creation or restoration of habitats such as wildflower meadows, ponds, hedgerows, orchards, woodlands, and the installation of features such as bird and bat boxes
- Green roof and/or living walls
- Resilience measures to reduce climate change impacts, for example sun sails/solar shading, sustainable drainage, tree planting.

This is not an exhaustive list.

Note: All work is subject to planning and regulatory approvals. Find out more at: <https://www.westoxon.gov.uk/planning-and-building/>

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. roof repairs)

- Professional/architect fees
- Revenue/operational costs (e.g. salaries)
- 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 Monday 22 September to Monday 6 October 2025.

Applicants should complete the online application form and submit the following information:

- At least two written quotes for each capital item for Level 1 grants and at least three written quotes for each capital item for Level 2 grants.
- Business account details and the six most recent months of bank statements.
- Tenancy or lease agreement and written consent from the landlord (if applicable).
- Schedule of proposed works, including a detailed specification for any planned habitat creation and/or restoration (e.g. a report and accompanying drawing(s) prepared by competent ecologist and/or landscape architect covering ground preparation establishment, maintenance and long-term management of all habitats and wildlife features).
- Business rates account number (if applicable).
- VAT registration number or Unique Taxpayer Reference (UTR).
- Planning approval or application reference number (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
- Listed building consent
- Landlord's consent

Incomplete applications will not be considered.

Stage 2 – Assessment

Applications will be reviewed by a Review Panel.

Applications will be assessed against the following criteria:

- Match funding – the level of match funding committed by the business.
- Commitment to sustainability – the level of commitment to sustainable practices evidenced by the business e.g. carbon action plan/climate change strategy, carbon assessment, ethical purchasing policy, nature recovery policy or plan (or similar e.g. biodiversity, wildlife or natural environment).
- Impact on business – the level of impact the funding will have on the business, including the business' sustainable practices and carbon footprint and the impetus to the business' sustainability journey.
- Long-term maintenance plan.

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 three months of the grant award.

Grants are paid in arrears, so you must cover full costs upfront.

Stage 5 – Provide Evidence of Expenditure

Submit evidence within one 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)
- Details of all works – a report detailing what has been implemented with before and after photographs

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

- All works must be completed and funds spent by 28 February 2026.
- Public acknowledgment of the funding e.g. on business website, display on site.
- Applications must comply with the Council's procurement rules (two quotes required for Level 1 grants and 3 quotes required for Level 2 grants).
- 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.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/subsidy-control-bill-guide-to-the-rules>

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.

Habitat Creation and Restoration

- Habitat creation and restoration must be informed by an adequate ecological survey and data obtained from the Thames Valley Environmental Records

Centre (TVERC) to ensure that the proposed project is designed to provide an appropriate enhancement to the site for wildlife (i.e. that it will not result in the loss of existing valuable habitat or disturbance to protected species)

- Ecological surveys must be carried out by a competent ecologist (with relevant professional membership, e.g. Chartered Institute of Ecology and Environmental Management, CIEEM)
- It is recommended that habitat creation and enhancement projects are informed by the Oxfordshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy if possible, this can be accessed at <https://letstalk.oxfordshire.gov.uk/lnrs-phase3-consultation> and the interactive map is available at <https://oxfordshire.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=8d1906c05f1941f585491fd63ee06e92>
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Further Support – Low Carbon Hub's Green Fund

If you are keen to reduce your energy consumption, 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

To request a free energy assessment, visit: energysolutionsoxfordshire.org/free-energy-assessment

Contact and Support

If you have any queries, please contact us at tourism@westoxon.gov.uk.