

The logo for 'Levelling Up' features the words 'LEVELLING' and 'UP' in white, uppercase letters on a dark blue rectangular background. Two horizontal white lines are positioned above and below the text.

# Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF) Grants Policy 2023 - 2025

## Introduction

The Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF) supports the aims of the government's Levelling Up White Paper and Future Farming Programme. It funds capital projects for small businesses and community infrastructure. This will help to improve the productivity and strengthen the rural economy and rural communities.

REPF will provide capital funding to:

- Support new and existing rural businesses to develop new products and facilities that will be of wider benefit to the local economy. This includes farm businesses looking to diversify income streams.
- Support new and improved community infrastructure, providing essential community services and assets for local people and businesses to benefit the local economy.

Projects must take place in a rural area, for REPF purposes rural areas are defined as:

- towns, villages and hamlets with populations below 10,000 and the wider countryside
- market or 'hub towns' with populations of up to 30,000 that serve their surrounding rural areas as centres of employment and in providing services.

**Eligibility for the scheme is based on project location and will be determined through DEFRA's Magic Maps. If a project is not in an eligible area, applicants will be informed that we are unable to proceed with the application.**

Applicants can apply online through the council's website, where full guidance is available to help the applicant submit the best possible application.

## What type of project will the scheme fund?

The funding must be used on capital projects. This means the grant funds must be spent on lasting assets such as a building or equipment. For further details of what constitutes capital costs for REPF purposes please see our Identifying Capital Expenditure for Grant Purposes guidance [here](#). The grant funds cannot be spent on running costs or promotional activities. We will not award grants towards loans, mortgages and revenue costs for example maintenance, rent, clothing or salaries.

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We will not fund projects which could directly, or indirectly have a negative impact on supporting the council to achieve its Corporate Plan aims.

This is likely to be a highly competitive grant scheme, and therefore it will not always be possible to fund every eligible application. Due to the time constraints on this funding, it is critical that projects have all the required match funding and relevant planning permissions in place prior to applying for this scheme. Should match funding not be secured the application may be deferred until later funding rounds (budget permitting).

We will consider applications for projects that have already started. However, **we will only fund costs under projects that won't be completed until after our decision is made**, as REPF cannot fund any retrospective costs. We will only consider funding for work that will be completed before the scheme deadline of 31 March 2025.

### Who can apply to the scheme?

- Town and Parish Councils
- Public sector organisations
- Higher and further education institutions
- Private sector companies
- Registered charities
- Social enterprises for example CIC's
- Arms-length bodies of government

### Who is not eligible?

- We cannot support projects that have received funding from other Defra schemes. This includes:
  - [The Farming in Protected Landscapes Programme](#) - funding for farmers and land managers to work in partnership with National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty bodies to deliver projects on climate, nature, people and place.
  - [The Farming Investment Fund](#) - grants to improve productivity and bring environmental benefits, covering 2 funds - the Farming Equipment and Technology Fund and the Farming Transformation Fund
  - [The Platinum Jubilee Village Hall Improvement Grant Fund](#) - grant funding over 3 years (to 2025) to support capital improvement projects for village halls, covering extending buildings and modernising facilities. More details on how to apply will be available shortly.

REPF funding is intended for funding farm business diversification projects outside of agriculture for example, creating rural leisure and tourism facilities. There are other Defra schemes that fund the purchase of farm equipment and provide funding support for farmer owned businesses diversifying within agriculture. More information on the Farm Investment

Fund can be found here: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/farming-investment-fund>.

- We cannot fund projects or costs where there is a statutory duty to provide them.
- We cannot fund projects that take place outside of the South Oxfordshire District Council REPF area, as defined by the Magic Maps boundaries.

### **What are the minimum and maximum amounts for the scheme?**

The Council has a budget of £733,000, which is divided into three elements over two years.

- **Capital grants for small scale investment in micro and small enterprises in rural areas.**

Budget

2023/24: **£91,655**

2024/25: **£274,965.**

Example projects include:

- Diversification of farm buildings outside of agriculture (conversion of buildings)
- Net-zero infrastructure for businesses
- Creation / expansion of rural tourism businesses
- Purchase of equipment for food processing
- Funding for resilience infrastructure and nature based solutions that protect local businesses and community areas from natural hazards (such as flooding or drought)

- **Capital grants for growing the local social economy and supporting innovation.**

Budget

2023/24: **£45,828**

2024/25: **£137,483**

Example projects include:

- Creation of multi-functional rural business hubs
- Business infrastructure such as broadband or EV charging points
- Establishment of rural community businesses, for example: community shops
- Equipment to support the promotion of local food and drink products.

- **Capital grants for investment in capacity building and infrastructure support for local civil society and community groups.**

Budget

2023/24: **£45,828**

2024/25: **£137,483**

Example projects include:

- Net -zero infrastructure to support rural communities/rural tourism.
- Community energy schemes
- Kitchens in community hubs, (capable of supporting food and drink entrepreneurs)
- Funding for resilience infrastructure and nature based solutions that protect local businesses and community areas from natural hazards (such as flooding)

Organisations can request a minimum of £1,000 and up to 75 per cent of their total project costs, capped to maximum request of £75,000 if available. In exceptional cases, like a major funder pulling out of a project that offers significant benefit to our residents we may consider a request of funding for more than 75 per cent of the project. We also have discretion to fully fund projects under the value of £10,000.

To request an exceptional amount, applicants must get approval from us (via the economic development team) before applying.

We will not award more than the amount requested.

The maximum an applicant can request from the fund is £75,000. However, the maximum award is not available for the funding year 2023/24.

## **Opening and closing dates**

The scheme will open mid-October 2023 until mid-November 2023 for the 2023/24 funding round. Funding for 2024/25 will open in May 2024 until end of June 2024. In the event that we have remaining budget to allocate, a further funding round will open in September 2024 and close in October 2024.

Funding decisions will be made in January/February 2024, August 2024 and, if applicable, November/December 2024. Funding for 2024/25 is subject to the council receiving funding from central government, and no funding decisions will be made until the Council has confirmation that we have received our government allocation.

## **Scheme eligibility criteria**

In addition to meeting the requirements above, applicants must provide:

- A copy of the latest statements for any bank/building society accounts in the name of the organisation, as identified in the application and on their constitution or company documentation.

- Evidence that the organisation is located within an eligible REPF area. This could be official correspondence (utility bill, bank statement, HMRC letters etc) in the organisations name with a Magic Maps eligible address and postcode shown.
- Two quotes for the project or a professional estimate for any building work
- A breakdown of the budget for the project
- Evidence of the secured match funding for the project. This could be bank statements showing the funds available, or grant offer letters showing the amount of funding offered.
- Charities and community organisations must provide a constitution that demonstrates that the project they are applying for matches the organisation objectives. They are a 'not for profit organisation' and the trustees don't receive benefits (except parish or town councils, churches or similar organisations that are governed by a central body and therefore don't have their own constitution).
- Private sector companies must provide either a UTR number or a company registration number, and evidence they are actively trading.

And must confirm:

- They will sign up to our [standard conditions](#) before proceeding with the application. These are available to download from the website and grants system.
- They have the correct authority in place for their representatives to apply and enter into the Grant Agreement and legally bind the organisation. Parochial Church Councils and Parish Councils have own governing arrangements for this, which should be followed.
- The project won't complete before a decision has been made, which is usually 8 - 10 weeks from the closing date, as we cannot pay for retrospective costs.
- They have all the necessary consents such as planning permission, listed building consent, Diocese faculty, landlord or head lease consent, compliance with any restrictions on the property title etc. and could provide these on request. Please note, we cannot fund planning permission and building regulations.
- They have not received any Minimal Financial Assistance, in excess of £315,000 (this may also have been called De Minimis State aid if you received it prior to 1 January 2021) in this financial year and/or in the previous two financial years. The organisation is to provide relevant evidence if a subsidy/ Minimal Financial Assistance has been received.
- They will provide additional information to help us evaluate their application on request.

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Applicants requesting more than £10,000 but below £25,000 must also provide:

- Copies of any necessary planning, listed building, Diocese faculty, landlord or Head lease consent, compliance with any restrictions on the property title and other relevant permissions.
- For land or building applications, confirmation of property ownership either a freehold interest or a lease with at least five years remaining, and any break clause within that period.
- Their most recent financial accounts or their working budget and financial plan for the year if they're a new organisation. Parish Councils are required to submit their full accounts.
- A project plan including ongoing maintenance arrangements.

For land or buildings, applicants requesting over £25,000 must also provide:

- evidence of ownership of the property, either a freehold interest in the property, or a lease with at least ten years remaining, including a copy of the Land Registry title register and plan of no more than 3 months old. If the property is leased, or the Land Registry documents show another organisation has a claim on the title, please provide valid permission for the works from the third party (freeholder) / landlord.

The Head of Development and Corporate Landlord can decide to accept applications that don't meet all the above criteria and will do this on a case-by-case basis. Applicants must give clear reasons why they can't meet a particular criterion for an exception to be considered. For example, where there would be a significant impact to the community if the project were not able to go ahead, an exception may be considered.

Organisations must formally accept the grant offer within four weeks of the date of offer letter otherwise the offer will be withdrawn.

All projects must complete before March 2025.

## **Decision making**

### **Economic Development Team**

The Economic Development Team will review the eligibility of every application before using the scoring matrix in appendix one to suggest scores to the Grants Panel. They will also flag any concerns or issues for additional consideration, in order to support the panel's decision making.

## Head of service

The Council's Head of Development and Corporate Landlord and when relevant, in consultation with the Cabinet member for Economic Development and Regeneration (using delegated powers) will decide:

- if we will accept requests for over 75 per cent of the total project cost
- if we will accept applications that don't meet all the eligibility criteria
- whether to amend award percentages beyond what was originally agreed, as requested by applicants. Increases will stay within the 75 per cent maximum limit for the scheme.

## Grants Panel

The Grant Panel considers officers' suggested scores and comments for each application under the relevant theme and makes funding decisions.

Competition for the fund means that not all worthy and eligible projects can receive funding in each round. Where possible, any applications that the Council did not have budget to fund will roll forward into the next round, should applicants want to continue with their application.

Even if an application scores enough points, the panel can recommend **not funding** it if they:

- have serious concerns around the management of the project now or in the future.
- believe the applicant has sufficient unrestricted reserves to fund the project themselves.
- have serious concerns about the appropriateness of the project or its financial viability, such as if the organisation has not demonstrated they have secured the remaining required funding for the project.
- believe the project doesn't meet the criteria or help deliver or is detrimental to the council's Corporate Plan aims.
- Strongly believe that the project will not complete prior to the March 2025 deadline.

Should the application not receive enough points to be awarded any funding, the Grant Panel also have the discretion to **recommend a grant award of up to £10,000** if:

- an award can be justified as an important project for the community.
- there are concerns that failure to fund the project or activity could result in a net disbenefit to the wider community.

The Grant Panel recommendations are then presented to the Council's Head of Development and Corporate Landlord who in consultation with the Cabinet member for Economic Development and Regeneration will consider and decide which grants to award.

## **Standard conditions for all grant awards**

All organisations are required to sign up to our standard conditions before proceeding with the application.

We may add extra conditions to any grant if we consider it necessary. These conditions will be determined using a risk matrix in consultation with the Cabinet member for any projects that appear to present a medium or high risk. They will then be presented to the Grant Panel and the Cabinet member for Economic Development and Regeneration for consideration.

The Head of Development and Corporate Landlord has delegated authority to remove any agreed grant conditions.

We will confirm applicants have met all the conditions before making any payment. Failure to meet all the agreed conditions may delay payment or, in extreme cases, result in us withdrawing our grant offer.

## **Payment of grants**

We will only pay towards costs incurred after the date of the Council's decision to award a grant.

We pay the grants in full when we receive a valid signed acceptance form and standard conditions. We will request a project update in January 2025, and will require before and after project photo's to be uploaded, along with a short report on your project's outputs and outcomes.



## Scoring and award matrix for Capital Grant applications

<b>Suggested Scores</b>	<b>Scores:</b> The scoring thresholds which identify what priority level the project falls into can be amended, depending on the number of applications received and potential allocation of funds to ensure maximum community benefit. As agreed by the Cabinet Member.
7 - 12	Project is recommended for funding
0 - 6	Project is not recommended for funding

**Projects MUST score at least one point in the Project outputs/outcomes section in order to be recommended for funding.**

### Need for project.

Points		
0	No evidence of need for project has been provided	
1	Limited evidence for need for project has been provided	A small scale survey of employees or service users has been carried out.
2	Good evidence of need for project has been provided	A larger scale survey has been carried out asking the wider community
3	Detailed evidence of need for project has been provided	A full business plan or formal community consultation have been provided.
+ 1	If no other projects like this are located locally	Is there a similar facility or business within a reasonable distance or not. For example, EV charging points, will the project provide the only charging point in a village, or are there already several public charging points available in the village.

## Climate Action

Points		
-1	The project will negatively impact on the council's climate agenda,	The project will have a detrimental effect on the local environment without any mitigation in place, this could be via destruction of green space and wildlife habitat, increase in greenhouse gas emissions, installation of non-energy efficient equipment, or purchase of new diesel or petrol vehicles etc.
0	The project has not considered its impact on the environment, or not provided any information in this area.	No evidence of environmental impact of the project has been provided in the application form.
1	The project will have some positive impact on the council's climate agenda	Small scale improvements such as replacing some lightbulbs with energy efficient ones, installing bike racks, implementing an energy smart meter
2	The project will have a positive impact on the council's climate agenda	Installation of EV charging points, renewable energy systems, creation of green spaces for nature, creation of new cycle paths or active travel routes.
+ 1	The organisation applying has a sustainability/climate action forward plan or strategy in place	Evidence of a climate action policy has been provided

## Social Action

Points		
0	The project has no wider community benefits	The project only benefits the immediate applicants, such as a private business e.g. installation of equipment to cut costs for the business
1	The project has limited wider community benefits	The project will benefit a small number of groups or individuals, less than 50 people
2	The project has several wider community benefits	The project will benefit a large number of community groups or more than 50 people

**Projects MUST score at least one point in one of the following sections.**

**Projects outputs/outcomes**

Applications applying for **Capital grants for small scale investment in micro and small enterprises in rural areas** will be assessed against the following outputs/outcomes. Please note, projects will be scored against their highest achieving output i.e. if a project will increase productivity by over 10% and safeguard 3 jobs it will score 3 points. The jobs safeguarded will be brought to the grant panels attention but not scored.

Points	Jobs safe-guarded	Adoption of new to the firm technology or process	number of firms with improved productivity
0	0 jobs safe-guarded	Adoption of 0 new to firm technology or processes	Expected 0% increase in productivity
1	1-5 jobs safe-guarded	Adoption of 1 new to firm technology or processes	Expected 1%-5% increase in productivity
2	6-10 jobs safe-guarded	Adoption of 2 new to firm technologies or processes	Expected in 6%-10% increase in productivity
3	10+ jobs safe-guarded	Adoption of 3 or more new to firm technologies or processes	Expected over 10% increase in productivity

Applications applying for **Capital grants for growing the local social economy and supporting innovation areas** will be assessed against the following outputs/outcomes. Please note, projects will be scored against their highest achieving output i.e. if a project will create a new business and create 3 jobs it will score 3 points. The jobs created will be brought to the grant panels attention but not scored.

Points	Jobs created	Number of new businesses created
1	1-5 jobs created	
2	6-10 jobs created	
3	10+ jobs created	New business created

Applications applying for **Capital grants for investment in capacity building and infrastructure support for local civil society and community groups** will be assessed against the following outputs/outcomes. Please note, projects will be scored against their highest achieving output i.e. if a project will increase user numbers by over 50% and increase perceptions of facilities by 20% it will score 3 points. The increase in perceptions will be brought to the grant panels attention but not scored.

Points	Expected improved perceptions of facilities or amenities	Increase users of facilities or amenities
1	1-25% expected increase in perception of facilities or amenities	1-25% expected increase in user numbers
2	26-50% expected increase in perception of facilities or amenities	26-50% expected increase in user numbers
3	50%+ expected increase in perception of facilities or amenities	50% + expected increase in user numbers