

Councillor Community Grant Scheme – 2024/2025

Every South Oxfordshire District Councillor has a budget of £5,000 to award to projects. The aim of the Councillor Community Grant scheme is to fund community projects and initiatives that will deliver better outcomes for South Oxfordshire residents as well as contributing to the achievement of the council's Corporate Plan priorities.

Basic rules of the scheme

- Projects must benefit the communities in the councillor's ward.
- The minimum grant is £250 and the maximum £5,000 for each councillor (budget permitting).
- For wards with multiple councillors, applications may be considered by all ward councillors together to determine funding. The maximum number of wards that can be applied to is five.
- The total project cost of applications for capital projects must be £15,000 or less, (revenue projects have no such maximum).
- A councillor can fund up to 100 per cent of the total cost of a project (budget permitting).
- The project must complete within 12 months of the award decision.
- Any unallocated budgets at the end of the financial year will return to the council's general reserves.
- The scheme will usually open for one round.
- Councillors will make their decision when the scheme closes. Urgent/time critical applications can be considered by exception with written agreement from the ward councillor(s). Please note we are unable to consider urgent/time critical multiward applications.

Who is eligible?

- Town/parish councils and parish meetings
- Town/parish councils can collaborate with local unconstituted groups and apply on their behalf.
- Not for profit preschools and PTAs for local authority run schools or Academy's, can apply for non-statutory elements of the education programme.
- Local 'not for profit' organisations, this can include a company limited by guarantee which does not distribute any surplus it makes to its member, whose primary purpose is to **benefit** the residents of South Oxfordshire who can:
 - Confirm they have a bank account in the name of the organisation applying.

- Provide on request a copy of their governing document (like a constitution, set of rules, articles of association etc) that demonstrates they are a 'not for profit organisation' and the project they are applying for matches the organisation objectives. *Please note parish meetings and town and parish councils are eligible to apply but we would not request a copy of their governing document.*
- Confirm they have all the necessary consents **before applying** 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.
- Confirm their organisation has named officers, members, or trustees on a management committee/board.

To mitigate against any misuse of a grant or to the council's reputation from this relaxed criterion to apply for a grant, officers will ask previous applicants if there have been any changes to the governance documents mentioned above for every 20th application, and a copy of these from any organisations who have not received council funding previously.

Who is not eligible?

- Other local authorities/public sector bodies (for example Oxfordshire County Council, NHS trusts). Please note: Town/parish councils and parish meetings are eligible to apply.
- Groups who raise funds on behalf of or will improve/create facilities that will predominately benefit an ineligible organisation.
- Individuals (this includes making any payments to individuals on behalf of community groups).
- Profit-based businesses (private businesses).
- Political and lobbying groups.
- Nationwide organisations (except where they have a local constitution and/or local bank account. We may also make exceptions if a project clearly relates to a local hub/branch of the organisation).

What kind of work/services can we fund?

We will fund projects that deliver better outcomes for South Oxfordshire residents as well as contributing to the achievement of the council's Corporate Plan priorities.

Applications should focus on projects that deliver a clear and demonstrable **benefit** to the people and environment of South Oxfordshire, specifically in the ward of the district councillor(s) considering the request.

Appropriate projects could include, but are not limited to:

- Replacement equipment or improvements to community centres/halls.
- Initial design/creation of a community newsletter, walking routes/tourist trails, where to buy local produce, community website or digital archive, or maps (but not ongoing publishing, maintenance, or hosting costs).
- Improvements to community facilities for older people and minority groups (for example accessibility improvements and hearing loops).

- Buying and installing community play, community playgrounds, and exercise equipment.
- Buying equipment the community can use like anti-flooding equipment, marquees/gazebos, defibrillators, equipment banks or IT equipment. (All equipment must remain the property of the organisation funded).
- Community festivals and annual event costs that benefit community cohesion and/or reduce rural loneliness and isolation.
- Initiatives to improve the energy efficiency of community buildings, for example energy audit of a community centre/hall or implementation of energy audit recommendations.
- Projects that help protect the health of local waterways, lakes, and rivers or use in a sustainable way.
- Improvement of sporting facilities or activities to encourage healthy communities.
- Sustainability projects to protect and restore our natural world, such as tree planting projects (with the appropriate permissions in place) or improving biodiversity within your community.
- Initiatives to reduce rural loneliness and isolation e.g., community transport schemes.
- Volunteer training costs, or specialist equipment, that would enable more volunteers help or take on more responsibilities within an organisation.
- Using parish land to create an accessible green space for activities or community growing or edible landscapes.
- Educating on providing healthy food.
- Personal protective equipment (PPE) for groups (not individuals) to meet the requirements for a community initiative.
- To support extra-curricular mental health activities for school students and environmental education projects (e.g., forest schools, outdoor planting).
- To purchase equipment for preschools e.g., cycle racks, a defibrillator
- Projects that encourage reuse/recycling and/or sharing equipment in the community.
- One-off hire costs (for example, excavator hire for a project or coach hire for a specific, one-off trip).
- One-off revenue costs, like feasibility studies, consultancy fees and seed funding for new organisations. Please note we will not fund costs that relate to other council services e.g. planning applications, building regulation, legal or property fees.
- One-off major repairs, like repairing a section of flat roof or major boiler repairs, where low carbon alternatives are not an option (but not routine servicing) to community buildings.

The council is committed to promoting equality and diversity and welcomes applications from all sectors of the community, regardless of race, gender, disability, sexual orientation, age, status, religion, or belief.

We encourage all applicants to make their projects inclusive and accessible to all. Applicants must also consider the climate and ecological implications of their project. This may include the use of sustainable materials or other climate-friendly options to reduce energy use where appropriate.

What will we not fund?

- Retrospective funding for work/projects that will complete before our decision is made (We will consider projects that have started; however, we will not be able to fund any retrospective costs.)
- Projects that do not demonstrate a clear benefit to the community in which they are taking place.
- Statutory activities/requirements that either the council or another public-sector organisation is responsible for delivering, such as schools, public highways, public rights of way and road safety measures. We will consider activities that a parish council has the powers to deliver, but not a statutory duty to provide.
- Recurring revenue costs, like salaries, rent, rates and maintenance (like boiler servicing). We will consider salaries for a one-off pilot project – lasting no longer than three to six months.
- Costs that relate to other council services e.g. planning applications, building regulation, legal or property fees.
- Ongoing or regular hire fees for example, weekly hire of a cricket pitch roller, unless it's the most sustainable option for your activity.
- Alcoholic refreshments.
- Clothing, including uniforms and sports kit.
- Projects that specifically benefit private businesses.
- Political activities, lobbying or campaigning.
- Projects that are contrary to the Equality Act 2010 and/or councils Diversity and Inclusion Strategy, or the councils net zero ambitions.
- We may not fund projects which could directly, or indirectly have a negative impact on supporting the council to achieve its Corporate Plan aims.

Opening and closing dates

The scheme will usually be open for a minimum of 14 weeks. We will publicise the dates on our website, in our newsletters and through our social media platforms.

In the event there is an unexpected by-election for a district councillor, we will hold any new applications for that vacancy during the pre-election period (as long as the scheme will still be open when the post is filled). If not, applications will be considered (along with any still in progress) by the next elected ward councillor in the area the project benefits. If there is only one councillor in the ward, then the Cabinet member will consider the application (s).

Application and Award Process

1. Organisations apply using the council's online grants management system, accessible from our website www.southoxon.gov.uk/grants. They will select up to five wards they wish to apply to when completing their application. Applicants should read the guidance notes on our website before completing an application.
2. Council officers will check the eligibility of the application (including additional checks if required) and liaise with the applicant, if necessary, to establish eligibility.

If eligible, officers will prepare a short summary of the application for the councillors including key information from the application, concerns and any recommended payment terms and/or special conditions and send it to the councillor's southoxon.gov.uk email address.

3. We will not be able to fund your project, if the value of the application together with other funds received from the council exceed the total project costs.
4. The district councillor(s) will review the summary provided by the community enablement team, and if appropriate (multi councillor wards), will discuss with the other ward councillors, to make a decision.
5. Councillors will reply to grants@southandvale.gov.uk using their official council email address confirming:
 - their award decision
 - any pecuniary interests relating to the application – see process below
 - any other conflicts of interests relating to the application – see process below

The councillor/s can request additional information (via the community enablement team) before making their decision if necessary.

Applications can only be considered for the amount requested by the applicant and not based on the remaining ward budget available.

6. Once the community enablement team receive the councillor's decision by email, they will save it on the grants system, and either;
 - a. Send a grant offer letter to the applicant that will include our standard (and any special) conditions. The applicant will then accept or decline the grant award confirming they will meet the conditions via the online grants system.
 - b. Inform the applicant that they were unsuccessful.

The relevant head of service or the service manager when authorised to act on behalf of the head of service will approve the award decisions via the online grants system (except for those application where a conflict of interest has been established – please see process below)

7. On receipt of the acceptance the community enablement team will release the grant payment in line with the offer letter, following agreement from the relevant head of service or the service manager when authorised to act on behalf of the head of service. **All payments must be made by BACs to an account in the name of the organisation making the grant application.**

8. All decisions will be published on the council's website in summary once the scheme closes.

Process for dealing with conflicts of interest and changes to councillors

Declaration of interest	When a declaration of interest is declared, officers will consult the service manager and if necessary , the section 151 officer and monitoring officer. If as a result a conflict is confirmed, and there is no other ward councillor who could fund the project, the head of service can approve the councillor's decision to award the application, in accordance with the officer scheme of delegation in the council's constitution.
Pecuniary interests	When a pecuniary interest is declared, officers will consult the section 151 officer and monitoring officer. If confirmed, and there is no other ward councillor who could fund the project, the council will not be able to determine the application. In multi councillor wards, the councillor declaring the pecuniary interest, would not take part in the decision making.
Changes to funding requests, when the original councillor is no longer in post	Will be considered by the Community Enablement team in line with the policy in consultation with the head of service.

Standard conditions

- The organisation must 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.
- The organisation must spend the grant on the project listed in their application and within 12 months from the decision to award a grant or they will return the funding.
- If requested, the organisation will return a proportionate amount of the grant if the project costs less than expected or they receive additional funding towards the project. The minimum request will be £150.
- The funding is non-transferrable unless agreed by the council in writing in advance of any spending. Any unspent funds will be returned to the council upon request. The minimum request will be £150.
- The organisation will comply with all relevant statutes and regulations related to its status, objectives, and delivery of its core activities.
- The organisation must have appropriate policies in place to safeguard children, young people, and vulnerable adults, and comply with equalities, GDPR, and any other relevant legislation.

- The organisation must consult the community enablement team before making changes to the project/work covered by the grant and officers will confirm with the councillor(s) that they agree to these changes before responding to the applicant.
- Confirmation the organisation has not received any Minimal Financial Assistance, in excess of (or which when taken together with this grant would exceed) £315,000 in the elapsed part of the current Financial Year and in the two Financial Years immediately preceding the current Financial Year. 'Financial Year' means a period of twelve (12) months ending with 31 March. Providing relevant evidence if subsidy has been paid.
- The organisation will acknowledge the council's support in any press, publicity or promotion of the project.
- The applicant will submit photos and a short monitoring form upon completion of the project.
- The organisation acknowledges the council accepts no liability or responsibility for any of the projects funded by this grant scheme or any activities that take place as a result now or in the future.

Monitoring the grants

- The grants system will record all applications, decisions and remaining balances. We will publish grants awarded on the council's website.
- The community enablement team will monitor every grant awarded to ensure spending is appropriate.
- If the awarded project has not started by the expiry date (12 months from the award date) the councillor(s) can, at their discretion allow a single, six-month extension to the grant, by which time work/spending must be completed. The relevant head of service or the service manager when authorised to act on behalf of the head of service can at their discretion allow an extension to the grant term for longer than six months.
- All grant repayments will return to the council's general reserves.
- Any councillor budget not awarded by 31 March will return to the council's general reserves as carry forwards are not allowed.
- If repayments are necessary, the community enablement team will liaise with the organisation to recover the funds, keeping the relevant ward councillor informed.
- Future applications to the councillor grant scheme could be at risk if organisations have not completed and submitted the project monitoring form.

For more information about the scheme, advice on potential projects and other possible funding sources please contact the community enablement team on 01235 422405 or grants@southandvale.gov.uk.

If you would like this policy in an alternative format please contact the equalities team via equalities@southandvale.gov.uk.