

Tonbridge & Malling UK Shared Prosperity Fund

Shopfront and Vacant Unit Improvement Scheme

Guidance Notes and Sample Application Form

November 2023

PLEASE READ THESE GUIDANCE NOTES BEFORE COMMENCING THE APPLICATION FORM. AN INCOMPLETE SUBMISSION WILL CAUSE UNNECESSARY DELAYS IN DECIDING YOUR APPLICATION.

Free Business Advice Service to help with your application - contact info@ldbgroup.co.uk. In the previous round, businesses that used this service had a much higher success rate with their application.

1. Introduction

The purpose of these guidance notes is to help guide you through the complete process – from the initial contact stage with the Council, through to the completion of the works and the final payment of the grant.

This scheme is part-funded through the Government's UK Shared Prosperity fund (UKSPF). The UKSPF is a central pillar of the UK government's Levelling Up agenda and provides £2.6 billion of funding for local investment by March 2025. The Fund aims to improve pride in place and increase life chances across the UK investing in communities and place, supporting local business, and people and skills. For more information, visit <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-shared-prosperity-fund-prospectus>

The UKSPF is a mix of revenue and capital funding that can be used to support a wide range of interventions to build pride in place and improve life chances.

2. What is the scheme?

The condition of our high streets has a significant impact on people's impressions of an area. Whilst street improvements can go some way to addressing this issue, high quality frontages and vibrant shops also make an area feel more welcoming to local residents and visitors,

improve its image, contribute towards a stronger sense of identity, and encourage a greater number of visits.

This scheme aims to improve shop frontages and reduce the number of void units thus supporting the growth of local businesses, improving the local environment and raising the image of the area amongst local residents and visitors.

3. Who can apply?

This scheme only covers commercial premises within Tonbridge & Malling borough.

It is available to both existing independent businesses that fall under the category of “retail” or “food and drink establishments” and owners of units that accommodate such businesses (or aspire to accommodate such businesses).

Whilst this scheme is open to all existing businesses in the Borough that fall within the above categories, the Council has decided that in the event of over-subscription applications from the following four (4) areas will be given priority.

- Tonbridge Town Centre
- Snodland Town Centre
- West Malling High Street
- Borough Green High Street

The scheme allows for tenants of properties to apply for a grant as well as property owners, as long as the terms of their current lease agreement on the property is appropriate and the lease has a minimum of 2 years remaining.

Applications from groups of businesses/individuals seeking to improve joint-frontages or a communal area are welcomed. However, a single applicant must be nominated that will bear overall responsibility for the grant, and act as the point of contact. Joint projects will be evaluated on their ability to improve the appearance of commercial properties in the borough.

Please note that all grants are discretionary and subject to the availability of funds. Once all the funding has been allocated, this programme will close. The inclusion of a building within an eligible area does not give any automatic entitlement to a grant.

The scheme will not support works that have already been undertaken or any works which are started prior to a formal offer of grant funding being made.

Retail businesses which are national chains or franchises will not be eligible to apply.

If you are unsure of whether your business is eligible to apply for a grant, or if you need support in pulling together an application, you should contact our free advice service which is provided by **Let's Do Business Group** – they can be contacted via email on info@ldbgroup.co.uk.

4. How much is the grant for?

Businesses can apply for a grant of up to 60% of eligible costs subject to a maximum of **£5,000** towards the external renovation or improvement of ground floor and upper floor retail premises.

5. How do I apply?

In order to apply for the scheme, you should **first make sure that you have read the guidance notes and contacted the free advice service for any support**. Having gathered the required information, you will then need to apply via <https://www.tmbc.gov.uk/business/shopfront-grant> ahead of the **26 February 2024** deadline.

6. What will the scheme fund?

Not all improvement works will be eligible for a grant through this scheme. The grant will only fund “eligible works”.

The following work will be considered as eligible for support:

- New shop fronts that noticeably improve the look and feel of the building.
- New or replacement awnings.
- Repair, restoration and re-instatement of all or any part of a shop front fixture that is visible from the street, including the first and second floors or premises where they are used for commercial activities.
- Stonework repairs and rendering (using traditional materials as and when necessary)
- Repainting of frontages in suitable colours
- Signage and external lighting
- Replacement only of external shutters with internal security grilles and/or security glazing.
- Temporary measures such as window vinyls and colourful hoardings used to improve the appearance of vacant units.
- Internal improvements that either enable the occupation of a vacant shop unit or increase the energy efficiency of the property, such as upgrading to LED lighting.

The scheme will **not** fund the following:

- **Works that have already been carried out before the submission of an application.**
- Professional fees associated with the development and delivery of the project, including planning application fees, consultancy fees and advisory services.

- Window display products and equipment
- Installation of external shutters
- Improvements that solely aim to conform to requirements set out in the Equality Act under the duty to make reasonable adjustments and nothing more.
- Internal improvements that have a negative or negligible effect on energy efficiency.

7. Will I require Planning (including advertisement) Consent and Building Regulations Approval?

Works that change the exterior of buildings will likely require planning permission, there are additional requirements for Listed Buildings and buildings within Conservation Areas.

If permission is required, a separate planning application and scale drawings prepared by a professional agent will be necessary to show the extent of all new work. If you are using a professional agent, they will be able to advise you about any statutory consent that is required.

As part of this grant application process, applicants will initially be required to comment on their permission requirements and, subsequently, will need to provide proof that all permissions have been received prior to any grant payment being made.

For further information, go to <https://www.tmbc.gov.uk/planning-applications-appeals/apply-planning-permission>

The purpose of Building Regulations is to ensure that a shop satisfies its functional requirements, and the building provides reasonable health and safety for shoppers and staff. While minor works to a shopfront often do not require the submission of an application for approval, one is required if the proposed changes are structural or involve moving or altering the width of an entrance. The existing standard of provision must not be made any worse. For additional information, go to <https://www.tmbc.gov.uk/planning/find-building-control>

The Equality Act requires that reasonable provision be made to enable access for all to services provided in a shop. If alterations are being carried out to the shopfront, the opportunity to improve the access should be fully considered. Enforcing or funding compliance with the Equality Act is not the responsibility of the Council.

8. What does your application aim to achieve?

Because of the limited funding available, applications will be assessed by a Grants Panel that will consider whether the application:

- Will make a positive impact on the local area.
- Offers value for money.
- Is sympathetic to and in-keeping with the local built environment and will improve the building in line with the look and feel of the area.
- Guarantees that work will be carried out to a high standard and by a registered contractor.
- Where applicable, improves the energy efficiency of the property.
- Can be delivered in a timely manner and no later than March 2025.
- Is located within one of the priority areas in the event of the fund being over-subscribed.

9. What do I have to supply with my application?

In order to consider a proposal, the following are required:

- Completed application form – this contains basic information about your proposals together with confirmation of any public subsidiary received over the last three years (see Appendix 1 for example application form).
 - Photographs showing current condition of the premises.
 - Sketch drawings – depending on the extent of the proposed works, drawings may be required showing your proposals.
 - Cost estimates including quotes.
 - Latest Bank Statements.
 - Evidence that you have sourced **at least three quotes** from contractors, you should state which contractor is preferred and why.
 - The following information must be obtained in any quote:
 - A breakdown of individual cost of each element of the scheme
 - Total price of the whole scheme (remember to also include project support costs and VAT as separate items as well as any ineligible works) for the purpose of grant calculation and monitoring.
 - A programme of works from the contractor.
- (Please note that any grant offer would usually be based on the lowest quotation received).

10. How long will it take to decide on my application?

We will try and decide on your application within four weeks after the deadline has passed, providing that the submission has been fully completed.

If planning approval is required and has not been granted by the time a decision on your grant application is made, then any offer will be conditional on securing the required permissions.

If your application is submitted without all of the necessary information, then this will delay the process and may result in the applicant not receiving an award.

11. Who will decide whether my application is approved?

Applications will initially be assessed by a panel made up of Council Officers (from Planning, Building Control, Licencing, Environmental Health, Finance and Economic Regeneration). Once assessed, a recommendation will be made to the Leader of the Council, the Cabinet Member for Climate Change, Regeneration and Property and the Cabinet Member for Finance and Housing

The grant scheme will be administered by Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council.

12. What conditions will apply to the grant?

All grant offers will be made in writing setting out conditions, including a timeframe of a **maximum of 12 months** from the date of the grant offer letter to deliver the project. Full details of the conditions that apply to the grant will be set out in the Grant Offer Letter.

All grants will be conditional on you securing appropriate planning consent where required.

The scheme operates independently of the planning process and as such securing planning permission does not imply in any way that a grant application will be approved or vice versa.

After the completion of any grant-funded works, you will be required to maintain the property to a satisfactory standard for a minimum of two years.

13. When will the grant be paid?

Grant contribution payments will be made retrospectively (once completed) and on production of:

- I. Receipted invoices from contractors showing a detailed breakdown of costs,
- II. Satisfactory proof that, where required, planning and any other permissions have been obtained and
- III. Proof all works have been completed (photographic evidence is sufficient).
- IV. Confirmation that the business Bank details are as per the original application form.

In exceptional circumstances, the Borough Council will consider providing stage payments in order to help with cash flow.

THE APPLICATION PROCESS

1. Where required, engage with our free retail advice service for support with your project idea and completion of the application form.
2. Fully complete application form online and submit for consideration ahead of the deadline via <https://www.tmbc.gov.uk/business/shopfront-grant>
3. The application is considered by the panel (in accordance with Section 11) and a decision made.
4. If approved, a formal Grant Offer Letter is issued giving the applicant a maximum of 12 months to complete their project (if planning permission is required but not yet secured, the grant offer will be conditional on achieving the required permission).
5. If refused, the applicant will receive feedback explaining the decision of the panel.
6. As stated in Section 7, advice should be sought from the Planning Department if you are uncertain as to whether permission is required. This can be done through the submission of a Lawful Development Certificate proposal. Please note, this service is subject to a fee.
7. If permission is required, prepare the planning/other permissions application(s) (including appropriate plans, application forms and relevant fees) and submit to Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council Planning Dept. (**Please note duration of at least 8 weeks for determining a planning application**).
8. Before work starts on site, please contact us to advise timetable of works (*expected start/completion dates*).
9. Work starts on site.
10. Works complete.
11. Submit evidence of completion, including photographs, receipted invoices, and confirmation of permissions together with Bank details.
12. Checks will be made by the Council to verify the works have been completed and that the documentation provided is correct and in order.
13. Council Officer approves the works.
14. Grant paid retrospectively (unless stage payments have been agreed).

Summary of Scheme	
Eligible Sectors	'Retail' and 'Food and Drink' businesses
Types of eligible businesses	Independent businesses. National chains and franchises are ineligible.
Location	All areas in the borough can apply BUT if over-subscribed priority areas are Tonbridge, Snodland, West Malling and Borough Green.
Tenure	Commercial property owners or tenants with a minimum of 2 years remaining on their lease.
Eligible Works	External shopfront improvements and internal works that help to bring vacant shop units back into use or improve energy efficiency.
Grant Value	Up to 60% of eligible costs, with a maximum grant of £5,000.
Quotes	Evidence that at least three quotes have been sourced from contractors, together with a comment on which contractor is preferred and why.
Planning Permissions	Commentary if Planning Permissions are necessary for your works will be required before your application can be considered. Upon approval of the Grant request the Applicant will obtain formal Permission(s) as required.
Timeframe to Deliver Project	If an applicant is successful in accessing a grant, they will have a maximum of 12 months (from the date of the Grant Offer Letter) in which to deliver their project
Payments	These will be made retrospectively on receipt of paid receipted invoices, proof that any necessary permissions have been obtained and photographic evidence that the works have completed. In some exceptional circumstances, the Borough Council will consider stage payments.

TERMS AND CONDITIONS

Businesses/organisations accepting grant offers from this Scheme will be required to abide by and agree to the following terms and conditions:

1. The approval or refusal of a grant is at the absolute discretion of Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council ('the Council') and there will be no right to an appeal process.
2. Grants will not be given for expenditure incurred prior to the grant offer being made and the Grant Offer Letter signed.
3. The grant is not payable to an un-discharged bankrupt.
4. The grant must be used for the purpose intended as outlined in the Grant Offer Letter (this will be supported by producing original invoices for the grant claim).
5. In the case of tenants, payment of grant requires the building owner's approval and providing proof of a minimum of a two-year lease for the building.
6. If the business/organisation ceases trading/operating within 12 months of the payment of the grant or the building is sold, the applicant must notify the Council within 14 days and in such circumstances The Council may require the applicant(s) to repay, in whole or part of, the grant paid.
7. The grant must not be used for improvements to residential property, external security features, CCTV systems or recoverable VAT.
8. If the applicant is registered for VAT this must be declared on the application form. If at any point the business/organisation becomes VAT registered, the applicant must inform The Council and discuss repayment of VAT expenses claimed.
9. **The Grant will only be paid to proposals which, where required, have been granted all relevant permissions (Planning/Advertising etc).** Nothing in the agreement or negotiation of the grant will affect the Council's decision over planning permission. Failure to provide satisfactory proof will result in a delay in payment being made and could result in Grant forfeiture.
10. All works are to be undertaken strictly in accordance with the specification and schedule of works agreed with the Council.
11. The Council's written approval must be obtained in advance of any amendments to the approved specification and schedule of works. Amendments include the omission or variation of the agreed works and the execution of additional works. Failure to comply with this condition may invalidate the grant offer even if the additional work is not grant aided.
12. Representatives of the Council must be allowed access to the property to carry out interim inspections of the works in progress, by appointment at any reasonable time.
13. There is no obligation on the Council to increase the grant if the costs of works increase, or if any additional work is undertaken.
14. A proportional reduction will be made in the grant if the actual cost of the eligible work proves to be less than estimated. Payment will be made in arrears upon the production of the grant claim form along with supporting documentation (e.g., paid invoices) subject to the percentage criteria.
15. The applicant must inform the Council of any changes to the business/organisation or changes of business address and/or telephone number.
16. The grant is made on the condition that the property will be maintained to a satisfactory standard for a minimum of two years.
17. Any grant must be taken up within the period stated in the Grant Offer Letter or the offer will lapse.
18. Payments of grants to successful applicants will be made in arrears, in one sum on the receipt by the Council of evidence that the applicant has incurred the expenditure. A supporting statement should show how the expenditure relates to the individual items in the approved schedule of works together with all relevant supporting evidence.
19. Expenditure must be incurred using a debit/credit card or cheque and evidenced through a bank statement. Payments of grants will not be made towards expenditure incurred using the payment method of cash.

20. Grants are dependent on applicants being required to complete a short questionnaire evaluation 6 months after the receipt of the grant.
21. The Council reserves the right to publish illustrations, photographs, or other details of your project in promotional literature and other documents associated with Council grant schemes.
22. Applicants will need to sign the Grant offer within 28 days from the date offered otherwise the offer will be withdrawn.
23. If the applicant undertakes any work that, in the opinion of the Council, significantly alters or removes any elements of the grant aided work, the Council shall have the right to recover such proportion of the grant as it sees fit. This condition shall apply for a period of five years starting on the day on which the final grant payment is made.
24. Under s58(4) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, if any grant condition is contravened or not complied with, the Council reserves the right to recover the grant, or such part of it as the Council sees fit.

Appendix 1

This example form has been provided to help you to prepare your online submission.

SHOPFRONT AND VACANT UNIT IMPROVEMENT SCHEME EXAMPLE APPLICATION FORM

Declaration

Name of person making declaration

Position in the business

I confirm that within the past 5 years my organisation or any person who has powers of representation, decision or control in the organisation has not been convicted anywhere in the world of any offence listed in the List of Mandatory and Discretionary Exclusions document. ☐

I confirm that in the last 5 years, my organisation has not been subject to formal investigation which resulted in a proven case of 'blacklisting'. ☐

I confirm that my organisation has relevant policies and procedures in place to prevent Tax Evasion to ensure the elimination of offences covered by the Criminal Finances Act 2017 from my organisation supply chains. ☐

I confirm that I have read the requirements for the Scheme and am authorised to submit this application form on behalf of this business. ☐

I declare that my business meets the criteria for the grant I am applying for, and the information I have provided is complete and accurate. If any circumstances change, I will notify the Council of this change immediately. ☐

I confirm that, including the payment of this grant, my business will not breach state subsidy regulations. ☐

I confirm that I authorise the Economic Regeneration Team at Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council to make any enquiries it considers necessary for the assessment of the application. ☐



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DETAILS

Have you contacted our advice service before filling in this application form? We recommend you contact our advice service – info@ldbgroup.co.uk – to ensure your project proposal has the best chance of a successful outcome.

Yes/No

Contact Name	
Contact Address	
Name of Business	
Business Address	
Company Registration Number (CRN) (where applicable)	
Business Rates Number (where applicable)	
Telephone Number	
Email Address	
Type of Business	

Is your business VAT registered? (Please tick one)

Yes

☐

No

☐

Your interest in the property (please tick one)

Owner

☐

Tenant

☐

Other (please specify)



UK Government



www.tmbc.gov.uk

If you are a tenant, please provide the following:

Number of years left on your lease (please note there must be a minimum of two years remaining):

Do you have consent from the property owner to carry out the proposed works?

Yes ☐ No ☐

Contact Details of the Landlord:

PROJECT OVERVIEW

Please provide an overview of your proposed project:

STATEMENT OF WORKS

Please describe the changes that you propose to make including:

- Reference to whether doors, windows or entrances are to change.
- The nature of changes to the frontage including details of features you wish to add or remove.
- Details of colours and styles to be employed.
- Whether any energy efficiency measures are included in the works (either internally or externally)

Description of Work	Quoted Costs
<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>

TOTAL COST	
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Please upload a photo of your shopfront and any sketches/plans of your proposed works.

Please state which companies you have approached for quotes, and which one is preferred, along with the reasons why.

--

Please upload three quotes (up to 3 documents)

What is your expected start date for the work?

--

When do you expect to complete the work?

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Do you require any of the following permissions? (Please refer to Section 7 of the Guidance as you will need to opine whether your proposals require planning permission before submitting your application)

Type of Permission	Y/N/ TBC	Comment (<i>required for all options</i>)
Planning Permission		
Building Control Approval		
Listed Building Consent		
Advertising Consent		

Have you or the applicant business applied for or received any public sector funds within the last three years? Yes/No

If yes, what is the total amount you have received over the past three years? ((this should include all payments, such as Job Retention Scheme (furlough scheme), Self-Employment Income Support Scheme, Covid-19 Grants and other sources of State Aid)



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LEVELLING
— UP —



www.tmbc.gov.uk

Name of bank or building society

Account holder's name

Account number

Sort code

Please upload copy of recent bank statement (within last three months)

EXAMPLE ONLY - DO NOT COMPLETE