



**FUTURE HIGH STREETS FUND TROWBRIDGE**



**Trowbridge  
Vacant Commercial Units Fund  
Guidance Notes for Applicants**



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# 1

## About the scheme

### Guidance notes

These guidance notes have been created to help people understand the aims of this grant scheme before making an application for funding to Wiltshire Council.

Please read the notes carefully and ensure you've understood them before starting on your application form and sending it to us.

Applications are expected from business owners, directors, property owners or landlords.

If you would like support to help you understand the guidance notes or feel you are not able to complete the application form on your own, please email the Future High Streets team on [fhsf@wiltshire.gov.uk](mailto:fhsf@wiltshire.gov.uk) You can also email the team for help if:

- You would find it easier to speak about this grant over the phone. (Please tell us this in your email and include your telephone number)
- You require a reasonable adjustment to make your application. (Please tell us more about your requirements in your email)
- You would like someone else to speak with us about this grant on your behalf. (Please tell us more about the situation in your email).

Wiltshire Council is committed to supporting all enquiries and applicants through the application process, however if your query is not related to the Future High Street Fund please do not use the [fhsf@wiltshire.gov.uk](mailto:fhsf@wiltshire.gov.uk) email to contact us.

We will continue to work with successful applicants to monitor how the grant has been spent for up to three years from the date of a grant offer letter being issued.

### Summary of grant process:

- You will be an independent business, a charity or social enterprise, a property owner or landlord, either registered or sole trader.
- Your application will form part of your investment plan for improving a vacant premises located in the eligible area.
- The improvements will open-up premises for new commercial activity or residences.
- Your full application, investment budget and supporting information will be assessed for deliverability and to ensure it fits with scheme purpose and intervention aims.
- If successful you will be awarded a grant and a contract will be offered with terms and conditions for expenditure of the grant.

- You will need to manage and deliver works, purchase items and equipment based on the specification and costs that were given in your grant application and confirmed in your grant contract. Failure to deliver the plan, or breach of contract will result in the grant being reduced, withdrawn or clawed-back.
- Grant will be paid in arrears on presentation of a claim containing information on expenditure and performance. Expenditure is made at own risk.
- You may need to provide information about the grant's impact for up to three years.

**If you are planning for more than one investment, please make one application for each separate property.**



# 2

## Your application for VCUF grant

### Why is Wiltshire Council offering this grant?

The Vacant Commercial Unit Fund (VCUF) is funded by Wiltshire Council ("the council") from its Future High Streets Fund for Trowbridge. The scheme aims to support the improvement of Trowbridge town centre.

Wiltshire Council has launched the VCUF scheme in Trowbridge to award grants to:

- bring empty commercial spaces back into use
- support investments to convert upper floors of commercial premises to residential use.

The scheme should reduce the number of vacant properties in the town centre and create new jobs for local people.

### Scheme purpose

Trowbridge currently has a below average representation of restaurants, pubs and cafes which leads to a weak experiential offer. The town centre offer might also be helped by a more diverse set of experiential businesses from independent retailers and personal services for leisure, therapy, health and care, alongside a better night-time experience.

The scheme will focus on bringing new types of businesses, creative and cultural activities, services, and community uses into the town centre. Supporting new and existing businesses by improving premises will help to strengthen and diversify the area, helping to boost footfall and create new jobs. Making better use of premises by opening-up properties for residential use will enhance the sustainability of the town centre.

Our work with landowners has identified that there is often a viability gap to meet the initial costs of converting a vacant unit or an upper floor into more viable uses, such as residential uses. The purpose of the grants is to redress this situation by helping landlords and high street businesses make investments that are financially unviable.

Overall, the intervention aims to:

- achieve a more resilient and vibrant high street
- encourage the diversification and revitalisation of the town centre through direct investment to deliver new homes, workspace and space for emerging and independent businesses on the high street.

The scheme will support a range of investments made on the basis of:

- a new business to Trowbridge town centre with lease or heads of terms on lease, or as a property owner, investing in a currently vacant unit for use as a commercial premises
- a current business relocating within Trowbridge town centre, with lease or heads of terms on lease, or as a property owner, particularly from Town Hall Market
- Place or other temporary location, and investing in a currently vacant unit use as a commercial premises
- a landlord of vacant commercial premises within the town centre, investing in a currently vacant unit to improve it for further use as a commercial premise
- a landlord of vacant upper floors of commercial premises within the town centre, investing to convert for residential use.

## Business type

VCUF grants will support businesses who wish to establish trade in a currently vacant commercial property located within Trowbridge town centre.

It will also help landlords of vacant commercial units to improve the premises or convert redundant upper floors to residential.

Applicants will need to be one of the following to qualify:

- A registered business
- A registered charity
- A community interest company or other registered social enterprise
- A sole trader or self-employed person.



You need to show that your business is financially stable by submitting your accounts. For all businesses, particularly sole traders and new businesses, the council may need to carry out credit check and due diligence.

You are asked to submit your most recent financial accounts including a profit and loss (turnover) for the most recent trading period. Please include any financial projections for

future trade. If you are sole trader, please submit your most recent tax return relating to the business, but please note, you will probably be asked for further information as part of assessment of your application.

If you started trading less than 12 months ago, please state on the application your total turnover to date. If you are pre-income, please state when you will commence trading.

## Non-eligible businesses

Regardless of the type of business and the circumstances for the investment, some types of businesses, organisations or types of activity will not be eligible for this grant scheme, including:

- betting shops, pawn brokers, amusement arcades, tobacconists / vape shops / shisha bars and any other shops or venues wholly or mainly offering goods or services of an adult or sexual nature
- businesses or activities for political purposes or gain, for activities promoting religious beliefs or to proscribed organisations or organisations that support radicalisation or terrorism. This is not an

exhaustive list, and we retain the right to add to it at any time

- businesses that have or will exceed the Subsidy Control special drawings limits (of around £315,000 of public support over the past 3 years)
- applicants or businesses that are in administration, insolvent or where a striking-off notice has been made are not eligible for the grant.

Applicants need to be in good standing with the council, including being fully paid up on any money owed to the council such as for business rates.

## Eligible area

Properties that will be improved using grants must be located in Trowbridge town centre, which for the purpose of the VCUF scheme is defined as the eligible area and is shown in the map overleaf.

The eligible area is broadly based on the Trowbridge Masterplan (2014) and following consultations and a mapping exercise that made sense of the area on the ground.

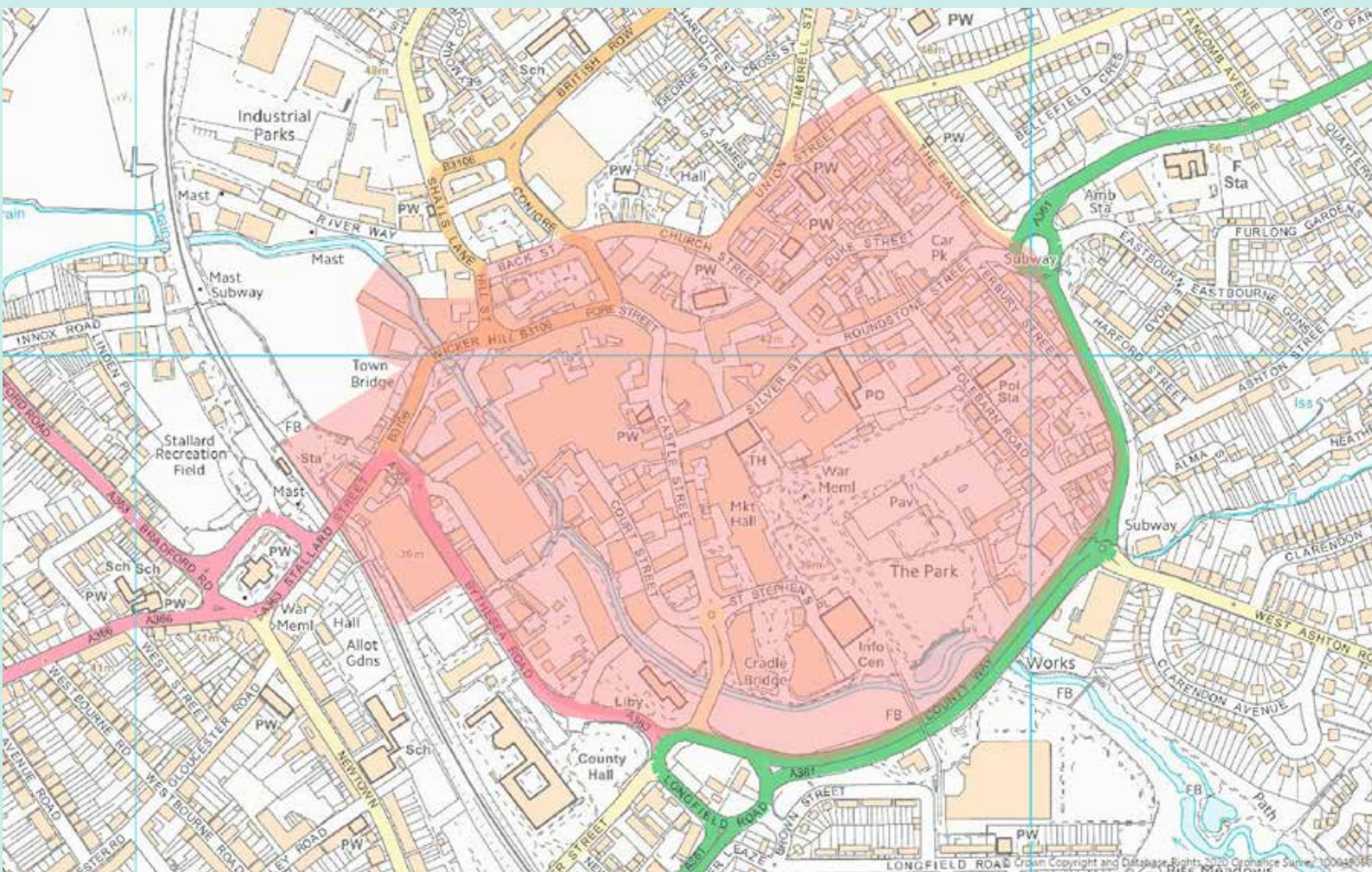
The streets forming the eligible area are all, or sections of: Back Street, Bythesea Road, Castle Street, Church Street, Court Street, Duke Street, Fore Street, Manvers Street, Market Street, Mill Street, Park Road, Polebarn Road, Roundstone Street, Silver Street, Stallard Street, The Halve, Union Street and Wicker Hill.

Please check the map (below) to see if the property is within the eligible area.

If your property is located outside of the eligible area it is unlikely to be supported. However, the council will consider an application to improve a property laying outside of the eligible area if it is:

- Sufficiently close to the boundary to be considered as part of Trowbridge town centre, and could still achieve a more resilient and vibrant high street
- The property and proposal for improvements encourage the diversification and revitalisation of the town centre by delivering new homes, workspace or space for independent businesses.

If you do wish to make an application for a property outside the eligible area please contact the team at [fhsf@wiltshire.gov.uk](mailto:fhsf@wiltshire.gov.uk) before making your application.





## Managing the project

You must be able to provide proof that the property owner approves of any improvements and works.

**You should not start any works or purchase any equipment proposed in your application until you have signed your grant offer letter. All work is at your own risk and any works commenced before you have offer of grant will not be eligible as part of the investment.**

The application asks about how you will manage the project, so we are confident the investment will be completed in good time and grant has the desired impact

Wiltshire Council reserves the right to recover, reduce or withdraw the grant in full or in part if the grant agreement conditions are breached.



## How much funding is available and what can it be used for?

The council has allocated £1.2 million to this grant scheme.

The grant award amounts will be in two ranges:

- Small grant awards between £2,500 and £24,999
- Large grant awards from £25,000 and £100,000
- If you are planning an investment that will exceed the £100,000 upper grant limit please contact us to discuss your plan via [fhsf@wiltshire.gov.uk](mailto:fhsf@wiltshire.gov.uk)

## Eligible costs

The grant should be used to pay for the improvements to properties in the eligible area.

You should use the investment budget spreadsheet to set out all project costs.

All costs are capital costs, and no revenue (operational, running) costs can be granted. This includes payments for staff, however, it does not prevent some of the grant being used to pay for contracts for professional services, such as surveyors or architects involved in the project.

Your proposal should set out the types of improvements you intend to make, the costs of works, items, equipment and installations that you will purchase with the grant.

The proposal should show a planned approach which will be cost effective and obtains best value for the public funds granted. If successful a timetable will be required.

You must be able to explain how all works and equipment support your business to trade and provide services and / or improve the premises.

Works and items should be specified in advance so that you can achieve best value. If you have not specified the cost, please indicate the accuracy on the investment budget.

For larger capital projects you may need to provide an updated budget with firm quotes once a decision to award a grant on condition has been made. This is to ensure that costs are accurately reflected in grant contract.

The grant is to support future expenditure and is not able to cover the costs of work which have already begun. Expenditure in advance of being awarded a grant contract, will be at your own risk and will not be supported by the grant.

## Costing up your investment

If your grant request is for less than £25,000 – a small grant - you will need to show just one quote for each individual item of works or equipment on the investment budget spreadsheet and submit this with your application form.

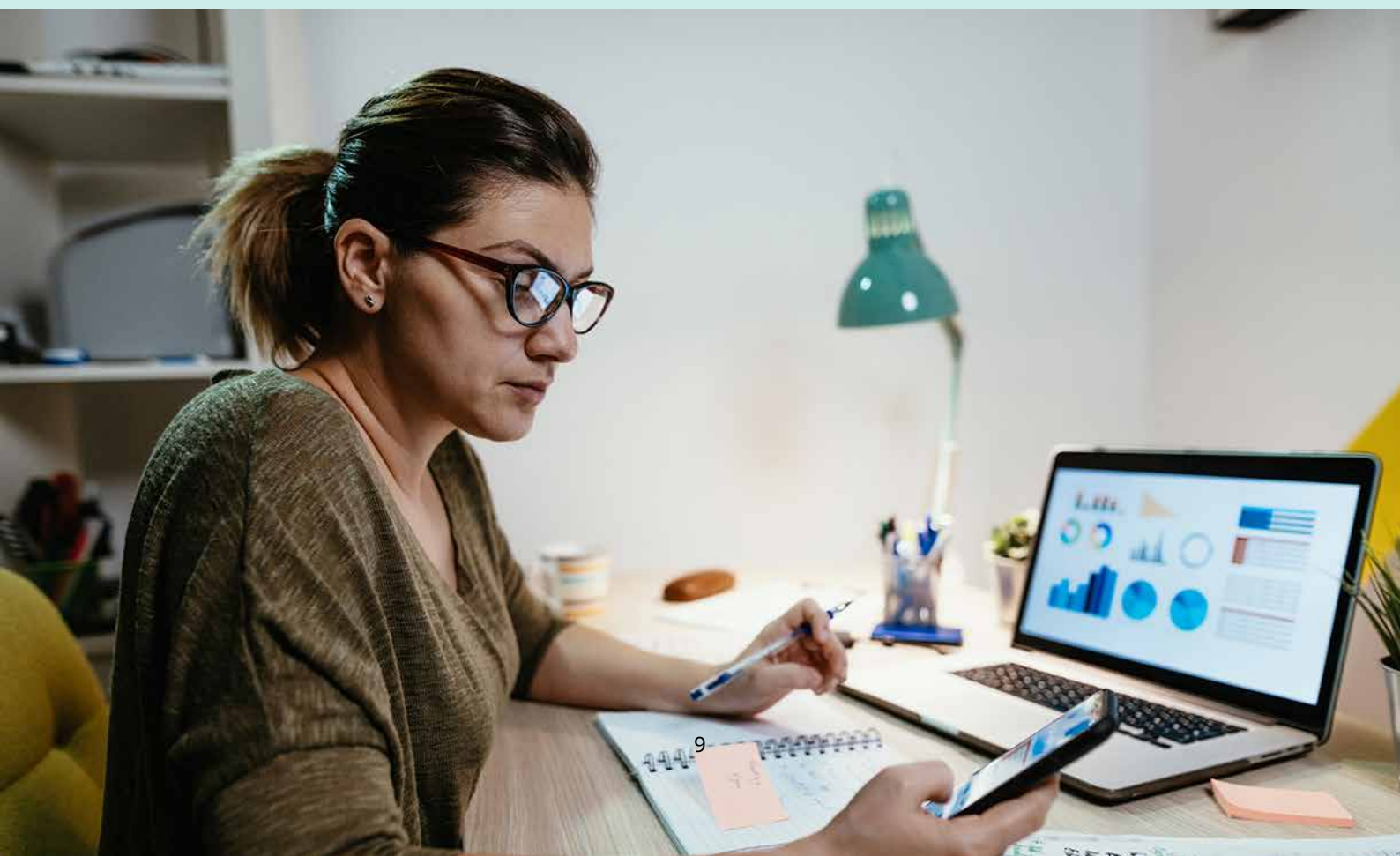
If your grant request is for more than £25,000 – a large grant - you will need to show at least two quotes for each individual item, contract for works or equipment on the investment budget spreadsheet and submit this with your application form.

Please keep all written quotes in a project folder and have them ready to submit in support of your proposal. We will not need to see all quotes, but we will request them when assessing your proposal if necessary.

Single quotes for smaller items of equipment can be screenshots showing the item from an online retailer.

You will need to keep all quotes for at least three years as your project may be fully audited in due course, and this information may be necessary.

If you select a quote that is more expensive than the lowest cost quote, we will ask you to explain why the more expensive quote or item is necessary and how the added cost significantly benefits your business. If you have an existing supplier it may be that you prefer to use this supplier and this is usually acceptable. If we do not agree with your justification, we may reject this item or offer to fund a lower cost item. We may also ask for evidence of regular supply from the chosen supplier.



## Your contribution to the investment

You should ensure that the total costs of the improvements are affordable to your business with the support of a grant. The costs should be as accurate as possible, with larger items specified so that written quotes can be obtained which are comparable.

Applicants must contribute at least 25% of the total costs of the investment. The investment budget calculates the amount of grant available once you have inputted all your investment costs.

For example, where a total cost of the improvements is £30,000, the maximum grant that you should apply for is £22,500 (75% of total costs), and you would need to contribute £7,500 (25% of total costs) as 'match funding' from your own funds.

The council will not make grants where there is no evidence of need, or the costs are not reasonably certain or based on written quotations.

Importantly, the assessment will look at whether your business is able to make the investment on the basis of the grant being paid in arrears. You may be asked to prove your ability to contribute the match funding of 25% to the investment.

Match funds can be from a range of sources, including your business reserves, loans, equity or other funds raised for investment, or from other third parties. Staff costs and other ineligible costs cannot be considered for match funding purposes.

## Planning considerations

You must also confirm whether you require planning permission when submitting your application. Please provide a planning application reference number if you have one.

Planning permission is required for works that involve a material change to the external appearance of a shop or building. Examples of this are alterations to the fascia, the windows or the doorway, changes to the type of material used or the installation of awnings, blinds or security shutters. Advertisement consent is required for the display of certain types of signs. You may also require planning permission for change of use to the property.

If you are converting an upstairs property to residential use there may be other considerations for planning.

If you do not need planning permission, such as for a simple change of use, please explain the steps you have taken, and will take.

If you are unsure whether your works require planning permission, you should seek further guidance from the planning service. Please go to [Planning and building control - Wiltshire Council](#) to begin your planning application and receive accurate information.

As you may be making changes to the building, you should also take advice about building control regulations and ensure that you have the correct permissions from [Building control - Wiltshire Council](#).

If you are planning on selling food or drink you should ensure the premises are registered under the food and safety hygiene regulations, following [New food business advice - Wiltshire Council](#).

The VCUF scheme operates independently of the planning process and any offer of a grant does not imply that planning consent will be granted, and vice versa. Please do not request information about planning from the Future High Streets Fund team as we will not be able to provide accurate advice or information about your planning application.



## Subsidy control

As a public authority, Wiltshire Council is subject to the UK subsidy control regime, which applies limits on levels of funding to grant recipients. When completing the

application form, you are asked to provide information about receiving funding in the past. The council will check your circumstances and notify you about the subsidy.

## Payment of grant

Your grant will be paid in arrears following a satisfactory claim. This means:

- you will arrange for and then pay for works and items purchased for the project
- you will make a claim showing the expenditure on standard form
- council officers will check to ensure that the expenditure is eligible under the scheme and fits with the scheme purpose

- if satisfied, the council will pay the grant.

The council will offer all projects the ability to make 'interim' claims. This will help you manage the project's finances by receiving grant in stages, as you make a interim claims at staged intervals.

## Eligible expenditure

Eligible expenditure can include (not an exhaustive list):

- the extension, improvement, or modification of commercial buildings (to include the conversion to accommodation on upper floors)
- building works including replacing shop fronts, new roofs, windows, doors, rendering, stone / brick cleaning, electrical works, floors and ceilings etc, including for heritage enhancements
- equipment and machinery and installations relevant to the investment
- fixtures and fittings and electrical appliances, and other similar one-off items to help occupy the currently vacant unit (This does not include white goods or similar fittings for residential conversions)
- any other reasonable cost associated with the re-establishment of the premises for the purpose intended in the proposal, subject to the exclusions listed overleaf
- costs associated with steps to achieve a net zero trading environment.



## Net zero

Wiltshire Council wants to help businesses take steps to reduce the greenhouse gas emissions of their businesses. By making greener choices now applicants will help tackle climate change, benefit from saving on running costs, and give themselves a reputational boost with customers. A more energy efficient workplace can often be a better working environment. It is expected that proposals will focus expenditure on items which provide for lower energy usage, energy efficiency and local generation storage or distribution of low carbon energy. Eligible items can include (not an exhaustive list):

- LED lighting and other lighting controls
- boilers / heating plant (including systems shared by more than one property)
- heating / cooling controls
- more efficient refrigeration equipment (for commercial use)
- heat recovery systems
- insulation – loft, wall, pipework
- Window coating
- solar installations and other micro-generation methods (providing no feed-in-tariffs are claimed)
- alterations which increase natural light, or shading, dependent on need.

## Ineligible costs

The grant may not be used for (not an exhaustive list):

- costs associated with obtaining planning permission or consent including building completion certificates, and food and drink registration
- contingency costs on capital projects should not be included project budget
- recurring revenue costs (including staff salaries, stock, rent, utility charges, insurance, business rates, subscriptions for broadband, etc)
- new equipment that is not integral to the investment (such as day-to-day consumables, small equipment for staff rooms) (for example, items that depreciate to zero within 12 months etc)
- repaying existing loans or debts
- fines or charges
- white goods and other fittings normally applicable to a residence
- promotional and marketing materials or activities
- activities that may bring Wiltshire Council into disrepute.

VAT will not be payable by grant. All costs in your investment budget should be exclusive of VAT.

If you are unsure if your requested works or equipment are eligible, please email the team at [fhsf@wiltshire.gov.uk](mailto:fhsf@wiltshire.gov.uk).





## Payment of grant claim

Businesses will need to make a claim to receive the grant by providing proof of costs incurred (invoices) and payments for the works completed before any grant payment is made. The claim form is designed to help manage the information over interim claims if required.

All costs must be invoiced or receipted and shown as paid out on a bank statement before reimbursement of grant.

Following receipt of your grant claim the following checks will be made. Where satisfactory, the grant will be paid directly to your account using BACS wherever possible

The key areas points of claim checks are:

- to ensure expenditure is consistent with proposal
- to ensure expenditure is not in a non-eligible category
- to record any discrepancies between proposal and expenditure and bring them to attention of the Future High Streets Fund team for consideration of contract variation or breach
- to check evidence and record achievements of scheme outputs, such as jobs created.

The claim checking process is inexhaustive and may include requests for further evidence such as photograph or a site inspection when necessary.

The council reserves the right to withhold grant payments if works are not completed within agreed timeframes.

The council reserves the right to recover financial assistance in full or in part if the grant agreement conditions are breached.

On satisfaction of the claim, the grant is paid by the council directly to the business (up to the amount claimed where interim claims are necessary).



# 4

## How does the council decide whether to award this grant?

Future High Streets Fund team will work directly with applicants throughout the application process to ensure the best opportunity is given to you for a successful proposal.

Only one assessment will be made of your proposal based on the information in your application and supporting documentation. An assessor from the team will recommend to a grants panel if your proposal should be supported with grant or be rejected.

Before concluding the assessment, if the assessor feels more information could positively support your proposal you will be requested to provide the information. If it is not forthcoming without explanation your application will be rejected.

If the assessor concludes that the application is not eligible or not aligned with scheme purpose and aims, prior to the recommendation of rejection is made to the grants panel, the assessor will contact you to see if there is anything further that can be added in support of the application. This may mean you have to make significant changes to your application.

The grants panel's decision on your application is final, and if your application is rejected, you will be informed it will not progress any further.

The grant panel is made up of senior officers from the council. Decisions made by the grant panel on applications to the scheme will be final.

There is no appeal process. However, if you feel the council has not treated any aspect of your application to the VCUF scheme with fairness, you are able to make complaints to [complaints@wiltshire.gov.uk](mailto:complaints@wiltshire.gov.uk)

The council reserves the right to change the terms, conditions, and nature of this scheme at any time without notice – though we will endeavour to publicise the changes with revisions to this guidance.

Grants are discretionary and subject to availability of funds. Once all funds are committed to projects, the scheme will close to new applications.

Inclusion of a building within an eligible area does not give automatic entitlement to a grant.



# 5

## My application is dependent on having a lease, but there is no point to in obtaining the lease without a grant ...

In most circumstances, we would expect you to have a lease or rental agreement for at least 12 months, but to have not commenced trading or running any aspect of your business from this property.

However, we also recognise the circumstances where you do not have a lease nor planning consent on a property, but on being awarded a grant you would be able to take up the lease. If this is the case, you will need to submit information such as heads of terms or correspondence on negotiations with a landlord that shows clear intent.

Similarly, you may not know the full amount of the investment until you pay for an architect or other professional to complete plans, but which you will not wish to do until a grant is confirmed.

In this type of situation you should indicate this on the application form, and explain the background to your application in the email

used to submit the application so that the assessor is aware of your situation.

You can request help by explaining the issues in an email to [fhsf@wiltshire.gov.uk](mailto:fhsf@wiltshire.gov.uk)

The grants panel can make a decision with conditions of funding, such as for completion of the lease agreement, full costing of works from a professional, or for other incomplete proposals which otherwise appear supportable. For build projects it is normal for costs to be confirmed after an initial decision on funding is made, and the council expects to work with applicants before, during and after making an application to ensure that conditions for awarding a grant are met and projects are well managed.

Once you fulfil the conditions of funding, such as providing a signed lease or rental agreement, or proof of planning consent, the offer of grant award will be made.



# 6

## If my application is successful what happens after I accept my grant award?



If your grant application is successful, you will be offered a formal grant agreement which will set out general and specific terms and conditions relating to the grant. This agreement will be between you and Wiltshire Council.

As you are offered the formal grant agreement, you will be contacted by the team to set-up the project with an initial project visit to go through paperwork and agree a claim schedule that is appropriate for your needs.

The Future High Street Fund team will be in contact with you to ensure progress is being made to bring the vacant property back into use.

Towards the end of the project, you will be contacted by the team to ensure that you are able to realise the aims of the project. This final project inspection should confirm all project costs and plan any further engagement regarding monitoring progress and publicity. The timing will depend on the number of interim claims and contact there has been throughout the project investment period.

You may be asked by the Future High Street Fund team to publicise details of the grant

and works that it has funded as part of the promotional activity for the scheme. This may include photographs of you, the applicant, internal and external photographs of the property, and quotes from you on how the grant scheme has supported your business.

The council is keen to measure impact of the Future High Street Fund and has obligations to report progress to the ultimate funder, the Department of Levelling-Up Communities and Housing. We will ask you to report on specific outputs that have been agreed from your proposal, such as if you think you will create any new employment, or to confirm the amount of space that has been improved. We will ask you to report with your grant claim, and we may contact you at six monthly intervals for up to a maximum of three years to report progress.

You may also be asked more broadly about the scheme and how it has helped your business as part of the council's evaluation of the Future High Street Fund programme. This is not likely to occur until after April 2024.

# 7

## I've read these guidance notes, how do I apply?

Please complete an application form and investment budget which is found on the Wiltshire Council website at: <https://www.wiltshire.gov.uk/vacant-commercial-units-fund>

Please use this checklist to ensure that you make a full application to the VCUF scheme.

- Fully completed, dated application form.
- Fully completed investment budget spreadsheet.
- Where applicable, a copy of your lease or rental agreement with start and end date and the signatures of all parties.
- Written confirmation from your landlord that they consent to your proposed changes to the property.
- You have copies of the written quotes reported on the investment budget spreadsheet stored on your files and available on request.

- You have provided your latest set of business accounts with a profit and loss, or as a sole trader, you have provided your most recent tax return.
- In support of your application, please include a small number of photographs showing the interior and exterior parts of property that will be improved. Alternatively, or in addition, please support your application with any plans that show the space that will be improved. (If this information is available online as part of a planning application or consent, please indicate).

Your application form and all necessary supporting information should be sent by email to [fhsf@wiltshire.gov.uk](mailto:fhsf@wiltshire.gov.uk)



## Help with your business

As with this scheme, Wiltshire Council is keen to promote the local economy and support all local businesses to thrive. To find out what help is available please visit [business support directory - Wiltshire Council](#) and you can also sign-up for the Wiltshire Council business support newsletter at [Business Newsletter Request](#)

If you need to take advice on trading standards please visit our [Advice to business- pages](#).

For information about local shopping and the offer in Trowbridge, please visit [Trowbridge shop local directory - Wiltshire Council](#)

For the full range of support available you are also advised to visit [Gateway To Business Success | Home | GrowthHub \(swlep.co.uk\)](#)

## Closing date

Please make your applications as soon as you can as the scheme will close when all VCUF funds are committed to projects. If funds are still available the closing date for applications for Vacant Commercial Units grants fund

scheme will be **Friday 24 November 2023**.  
Local press and websites will be updated.

All projects must be completed and funds paid to applicants by **31 March 2024**.

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