

Agenda Item No:



Report To: Cabinet

Date: 30 November 2023

Report Title: Rural England Prosperity Fund Grants Policies

Report Author: Tom Jenkins, Economic Development Manager

Portfolio Holder: Cllr Noel Ovenden, Leader of the Council

Summary:

The council has successfully secured funding from Defra's Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF) which aims to provide support to communities and businesses in rural areas of the Borough. Ashford's Government-approved REPF Plan set out four capital grant schemes to support our corporate aims and deliver on the of REPF objectives. Cabinet approved the REPF Community Amenities Grants policy in July.

The three remaining grants schemes set out in the REPF Plan, for which Cabinet are asked to approve the respective policies, are:

Rural Green Business Grants. Aimed at projects that deliver energy efficiencies or support energy transition for businesses located in rural areas.

Rural EV Charge Points Grants. Aimed at delivering EV Charge Points in publically accessible car parks in rural areas, working primarily with Parish, Town and Community Councils.

Rural Place and Provenance Grants. Aimed at supporting productivity and growth, startup space creation and 'last-mile' solutions, for businesses within the food and drink production, hospitality and tourism sectors.

This report will set out the rationale and details for the above schemes, with £443,381 of REPF funds allocated across the proposed three grant schemes to March 2025.

This report also provides an update to Cabinet on the council's overall progress in relation to its UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) and REPF Plans. Within this Cabinet are also asked to approve in principle the issuing of a tender for the People and Skills activity outlined.

Key Decision: No

Affected Wards: All Wards except Victoria, Stanhope and Beaver. The REPF boundary does not follow ward boundaries and therefore the three named wards are exempt because no part of their area is eligible for REPF funding according to Defra. Wards that

are partially eligible are: Aylesford & East Stour, Norman, Roman, Washford, Singleton East, Singleton West, Weald Central, Godinton, Repton, Bockhanger, Goat Lees, Kennington, Conningbrook & Little Burton Farm, Furley, Willesborough and Highfield. All other wards are wholly eligible for REPF funding.

Recommendations: Cabinet are asked to:-

- I. Note the content of this report and the work undertaken to date to deliver interventions set out in the UKSPF and REPF Plans.**
- II. Approve the Rural Green Business Grants Policy.**
- III. Approve the Rural EV Charging Points Grants Policy.**
- IV. Approve the Rural Place and Provenance Grants Policy.**
- V. Delegate authority to the Chief Executive in consultation with the Portfolio Holder to approve minor amendments to the 3 policies where required**
- VI. Delegate authority to the s151 officer to approve grants and administer the schemes.**
- VII. Approve the issuing of a tender for a provider to undertake the People and Skills activity outlined in Section 15**
- VIII. Delegate to officers to make such changes to the grant terms and conditions as the Council's solicitors advise is appropriate.**

Policy Overview:

The grant schemes outlined in this report support the Council's Corporate Plan 2022-24 by delivering on the following objectives:

- Objective GP1 which aims to "Reduce reliance on fossil fuels in line with our carbon neutral targets".
- Objective TG1 which aims to "Increase productivity and job opportunities and the establishment of sustainable, knowledge based and creative industries in the borough".
- Objective TG3 which aims to "Strengthen local supply chains and increase the resilience of the local economy".
- Objective TG4 which aims to "Support growth in the visitor economy".

Financial Implications:

If the recommendations are approved, the resource implications are involved in dedicating officer time to deliver the proposed activity outlined in Section 23. An overall budget of £443,381 is being sourced from the council's allocation of REPF funding to be spent between December 2023 and March 2025.

Legal Implications:	The requirement to comply with Subsidy Control and Planning or Listed building consent, is considered within each of the grants policies in Appendices A-C (pages 13 – 44). The issuing and use of grant funds is subject to any applicable reporting requirements set out in UKSPF guidance and as set out in the Memorandum of Understanding. Data Protection legislation will apply as the council may be processing personal data for the purposes of the issue of grants.
Risk Assessment	Please see Section 44 within the report.
Equalities Impact Assessment	Supporting businesses to start, grow and be more sustainable in rural areas is a key way of supporting or creating job opportunities for local residents. This could help reduce unemployment and thus inequalities within the Borough. Additionally supporting the transition to lower emissions vehicles, whilst recognising the need for car travel for residents in rural areas, supports mobility and social inclusion.
Exemption Clauses:	N/A
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Purpose of the Report

1. To update Cabinet on UK Shared Prosperity Funding (UKSPF) and Rural England Prosperity Funding (REPF) related activity to date and to propose three new capital grant schemes for 2023-25.

Issue to be Decided

2. Cabinet to approve the proposed Rural Green Business Grants Policy, the proposed Rural EV Charge Points Grants Policy, the proposed Rural Place and Provenance Grants Policy, and note the use of £443,381 of REPF funding to administer these grants schemes.

Background and Context

3. Ashford Borough Council has been successful in securing its' allocation of the UK Government's UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) and Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF). The council's overall allocation is £1,016,512 for UKSPF and £593,508 for REPF.
4. Both funds are linked to the UK Government's Levelling Up White Paper and aim to support interventions in the key themes of Communities & Place, Supporting Local Businesses and People & Skills, Supporting Rural Communities and Supporting Rural Businesses. The funding is allocated for work between 1 April 2022 and 31 March 2025.
5. Allocations are provided yearly, with £123,363 of UKSPF having been provided for 2022-23. Due to delays in issuing the funding, Government allowed Local Authorities to roll any underspent funds from 2022-23 into the current financial year, to add to the planned UKSPF and REPF allocations. Therefore Ashford's allocations for 2023-24 are £319,601 of UKSPF funding and £148,378 of REPF funding. A summary table of the council's allocations and spend is in Appendix 5 (page 45).
6. To secure the funding, Ashford Borough Council has submitted activity and spending plans which have been approved by Government. For UKSPF, the plan outlined 7 areas of activity including town centre improvements, youth crime prevention, supporting the visitor economy and supporting the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) sector as well as employability and skills. For REPF, the plan outlined four key areas of activity including: Community Amenities Grants, Rural Green Business Grants, Electric Vehicle Charging Points and Rural Place and Provenance support.
7. With officers delivering the projects funded by UKSPF and REPF, this report seeks to update Members on progress and seek approval for the remaining activity to be funded by REPF specifically.

Overall UKSPF and REPF Progress

8. Ashford was allocated £123,363 for UKSPF related activity to be delivered in 2022-23. Whilst the funding from Government was delayed, the council ensured that £50,488 (41%) of this allocation was spent within the required time.
9. The funding for 2022-23 supported the delivery of Ashford UnFramed (Ashford's first and highly successful mural festival), the trial of Hello Lampost's engagement service and the commissioning of the very successful Youth Crime Prevention scheme that was delivered by Charlton Athletic Community Trust.
10. All the UKSPF activity planned for 2023-24 is currently underway having undertaken the required reporting to Government and followed the specific procurement requirements. To date the funding has supported the delivery of the Temporary Furniture project in Ashford town centre, the running of the Eat Well Spend Less roadshows and continued the Charlton Athletic Community Trust Youth Crime Prevention scheme.
11. The funding has also enabled the launch of the Community Amenities Grants approved by Cabinet in July 2023. These capital grants will support improvements to community spaces such as community halls and outdoor recreation spaces across the borough.
12. In October the funding enabled the launch of the Ashford and Tenterden Visitor Economy Programme aimed at supporting the borough's tourism destinations and local produce businesses as well as supporting the marketing of Ashford's burgeoning wine sector.
13. Finally the funding has enabled the launch of the Ashford Borough Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) Support Programme aimed at supporting organisations in this important sector to become more financially sustainable, enable growth and support new social enterprises being created.
14. To date the funding has created improvements such as higher footfall levels in Ashford town centre, 17 individuals being diverted from criminal activity and 829 people attending the wellbeing roadshows. By March 2024 the impacts will include at least 15 tourism related businesses being supported, at least 10 organisations in the VCSE sector being supported and improvements to community spaces across the borough.
15. The UKSPF and REPF funding for 2024-25 will continue all the activity outlined above and will include activity relating to employability and skills. Having considered the local skills needs and discussed requirements with the Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce as well as education providers, officers propose to issue a tender early in 2024 for a provider to undertake some areas of activity. The emerging areas that would need UKSPF support include Green skills, short and entry-level courses to support those out of work into jobs, apprenticeships or qualifications. Additionally the tender could seek to support people into key jobs within the education sector where there are transferable skills with the private sector and lastly seek to support volunteering opportunities. Officers

propose to allocate up to £200,000 from the agreed UKSPF budget for People and Skills to tender a provider for this activity.

16. In addition to the above, officers from the Economic Development Team would use up to £50,000 to undertake skills activities aimed at supporting the creative and cultural industries in the borough. This includes events and courses aimed at supporting the film and digital creative sector.
17. This report also focuses on the remaining REPF funding, beside the approved Community Amenities Grants scheme, which will provide additional benefits to rural communities and businesses up to March 2025.

Proposal for the remaining Rural England Prosperity Fund Grants Schemes

18. The Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF) is applicable to the rural areas of the Borough as defined by Defra for the purposes of this fund. A map of eligible areas, sourced from Defra, is in Appendix 4. Therefore only businesses and projects located within these areas are eligible to receive funding through these proposed schemes.
19. This is a capital fund as defined by Defra and therefore no revenue costs or associated work can be eligible through these schemes.
20. Additionally the guidance from Defra states that projects that have already received funding from other Defra schemes or where these projects could be eligible for other Defra funding are not eligible.
21. The funding is available to be spent within yearly allocations up to March 2025. To that end officers would seek to open applications for the grant schemes in December 2023 to the end of January 2024. Thereafter application periods would be set for the 2024-25 financial year's allocation. Applications would be made using an online form on the council's website which allows applicants to provide details of their proposals as well as evidence to support the application.
22. The grant schemes would be administered by officers from the Economic Development Team and Climate Action Team who would assess the applications with the support and advice of colleagues in Planning, Licencing and Property. Decisions would be taken by a panel of senior officers chaired by the Head of Economic Development or Head of Policy and Performance. This will likely require 1 FTE time for officers within the Economic Development Team who would be administering two grant schemes, 0.3 FTE time for officers within the Climate Action Team who will administer one grant scheme, with ad-hoc support from colleagues in the aforementioned teams. This does not account for the additional resource required in the Economic Development Team to administer the wider UKSPF and REPF programmes. This resource has been identified through the Economic Development and Policy and Performance service plans.
23. The grant funding allocated to Ashford Borough Council and approved for these grant schemes as part of the REPF Plan, is outlined in the following table. Underspends in this financial year will impact on the upfront payment of Prosperity Funding for next financial year.

REPF Intervention	Year 1 (23/24)	Year 2 (24/25)	Total Ind. Budget
Rural Green Business Grants	£42,532	£127,595	£170,127
Rural EV Charging Points Grants	£42,532	£127,595	£170,127
Rural Place and Provenance Grants	£25,782	£77,345	£103,127

Rural Green Business Grants

24. Due to the rural nature of the borough, Ashford has a high percentage of businesses located in rural areas. Overall Industry accounted for 165.7 CO2 kt which represented 25% of the borough's CO2 emissions in 2018. Many businesses in rural areas are situated in older and less energy efficient premises, where these businesses rely on off-grid energy sources such as LPG, oil and solid fuels and overconsumption due to lower energy efficiency. The reliance on these fuels also does not support a rural borough such as Ashford to achieve its ambition of being Net Zero by 2050 and costs of transition are often prohibitively expensive.
25. The South East has benefitted from having a long-standing effective scheme to support households and businesses transition to greener energy and processes. Low Carbon Across the South East (LoCASE) has been providing financial support and advice to businesses seeking to undertake this transition. LoCASE has also formed a key part of Kent County Council's delivery of such support through its Low Carbon Kent team. This activity was funded by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and ceased operating in March 2023. Government funding remains available for businesses in particular sectors with high energy use to transition to low carbon technologies. However, there is a gap in support for micro, small and medium businesses to create small scale energy efficiencies and invest in new energy technologies.
26. The proposed policy, detailed in Appendix 1 (page 12), would provide grants to support with 80% of costs of projects that are eligible. This is in line with similar grant schemes in Kent that have been run previously, including LoCASE. The maximum amounts of grants (£5,000 for energy efficiency improvements and £15,000 for new energy technologies) are also in line with previous similar grants and have been considered against likely project costs. It is envisaged that these grants would support projects such as retro-fitting insulation, installing double or secondary glazing, installing Solar PV Panels or Air or Ground Source Heat Pumps for example.
27. Applicants would be required to ensure that they have the necessary match funding to deliver the project as well as having secured all relevant permissions and licences and met any other legal obligations.
28. The grants would be administered by the Economic Development Team, with support from colleagues in other departments such as Finance, but lead by the Climate Action Team who will assess applications. Applications would be decided by a panel of senior officers, chaired by the Deputy Chief Executive (S151 Officer), in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Climate, Environment and Transport. Where required, minor amendments to the policy would be proposed to the Head of Policy and Performance, who in consultation with the Portfolio Holder, would decide on amending the policy.

Rural Electric Vehicle Charging Points Grants

29. Due to the increase in uptake of Electric Vehicles (EVs) across the country and the commitment from the UK Government to end the sale of new petrol and diesel cars/vans from 2035, there is a need for EV charging infrastructure. It is essential that there is a comprehensive and competitive EV charging network in place, one that people can trust and they are confident using – much like filling up with petrol or diesel.
30. Within the Ashford Borough, 65% of residents commute by car, which considering the availability of other sustainable methods of transport in rural areas, underlines the importance of facilitating a transition to EVs.
31. For businesses, Low Carbon Kent has administered the Kent REVS scheme, whereby businesses could rent an EV for up to two months to demonstrate to organisations the benefits of owning and running an electric vehicle and to contribute to the aim of achieving net-zero emissions by 2050 across Kent. Ashford had the highest amount of businesses that used the scheme in the county, with nearly a quarter of the overall businesses being from our borough. The scheme ended in January 2023 and anecdotal feedback from businesses that didn't go on to adopt EV fleets includes the lack of EV charging infrastructure outside urban areas in Kent. This is evidenced further by Zap-Map which shows there are only 4 EV charging points in the Ashford Borough which are publicly accessible 24/7 and where there are no physical restrictions.
32. The Government's Office of Zero Emissions Vehicles (OZEV) has grant funding available to businesses and residents to install charging points at the workplace and at residential addresses. However there is a need for publicly accessible charging infrastructure to support increased uptakes and also to support visitor numbers in rural areas.
33. The proposed policy, detailed in Appendix 2 (page 23), would provide grants to support with 80% of costs of projects that are eligible. This is in line with similar grant schemes in Kent that have been run previously, including LoCASE. The maximum amounts of grants (£12,000) has been considered against likely project costs.
34. The EV charging points would need to be located in publicly accessible car parks. For this reason Ashford Borough Council would work with Parish or Town Councils to deliver the projects funded by these grants. If a site is identified that does not fall under the ownership of a Parish or Town Council or Ashford Borough Council, the applicant would need to demonstrate that the car park is available to the public at no cost and with no restrictions, as well as demonstrating that they would not be eligible for alternative Government funding to install EV charging points.
35. There are a number of operating mechanisms for EV charging points, all of which can be considered by applicants. These could see the applicant taking full ownership of the infrastructure or simply securing the installation and ensuring a service is provided. Applicants would need to clarify what operating model they would be seeking to use as part of the application process. It is not envisaged that this infrastructure would be owned by Ashford Borough Council.

36. Applicants would be required to ensure that they have the necessary match funding to deliver the project as well as having secured all relevant permissions and licences and met any other legal obligations.
37. The grants would be administered by the Economic Development Team and Climate Action Team, with support from colleagues in other departments such as Finance and Property. Applications would be decided by a panel of senior officers, chaired by the Deputy Chief Executive (S151 Officer), in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Climate, Environment and Transport. Where required, minor amendments to the policy would be proposed to the Head of Policy and Performance, who in consultation with the Portfolio Holder, would decide on amending the policy.

Rural Place and Provenance Grants

38. There are about 400 hospitality businesses and food and beverage producers in Ashford, and our tourism sector supports about 4.7 million visitors to the Borough each year, pre-Covid-19. Furthermore food & drink is the most popular product experience on the TripAdvisor and Airbnb platforms. In July 2020 there were approx. 14,000 bookable UK experiences and Kent had just 33 of these (2% of the total UK offer). This provides context for two key challenges faced by these sectors in rural areas of the Ashford Borough. There are lower levels of productivity and start-ups in these sectors in rural areas as well as challenges with connecting visitors coming into Ashford town, to rural destinations.
39. This grant scheme would therefore seek to support smaller projects aimed at boosting productivity and sustainability of tourism, hospitality or food and drink businesses, as well as supporting larger capital investments to create startup spaces for food and drink producers or to address the 'last mile' challenge to connect visitors to rural destinations.
40. The proposed policy, detailed in Appendix 3 (page 32), would provide grants to support with 80% of costs of projects that are eligible. It is considered this provides sufficient incentive for businesses to apply, whilst ensuring commitment with match funding. The maximum amounts of grants (£3,000 for smaller projects and £10,000 for larger investments) are considered to provide sufficient funding for these types of intervention, based on similar schemes. It is envisaged that these grants would support projects such as new IT equipment for a rural restaurant, new signage for a tourism destination, new incubator space for food and drink manufacturers or establishing a transport link between key hubs and rural destinations.
41. Applicants would be required to ensure that they have the necessary match funding to deliver the project as well as having secured all relevant permissions and licences and met any other legal obligations.
42. The grants would be administered by the Economic Development Team, with support from colleagues in other departments such as Finance. Applications would be decided by a panel of senior officers, chaired by the Deputy Chief Executive (S151 Officer), in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Performance and Direction. Where required, minor amendments to the policy would be proposed to the Head of Economic Development, who in consultation with the Portfolio Holder, would decide on amending the policy.

43. Proposed outcomes across the three grant schemes:
- i. Improved energy efficiency for businesses in rural areas
 - ii. Higher levels of rural businesses adopting renewable energy technology
 - iii. Improved usage of Electric Vehicles in the borough leading to lower levels of emissions
 - iv. Higher number of startups in rural areas
 - v. Higher number of businesses experiencing growth
 - vi. Increased numbers of visitors to rural visitor destinations
 - vii. Jobs being created and safeguarded

Risk Assessment

44. The main key risks currently identified are:
- a. A lack of support for micro, small and medium businesses to deliver small scale green interventions could lead to a slower uptake of green technologies particularly in rural areas
 - b. A lack of support for micro, small and medium businesses to deliver small scale green interventions could lead to higher energy bills and thus more businesses in rural areas facing financial difficulties
 - c. The lack of support for EV Charging Points in publicly open and accessible car parks would lead to a slower uptake of EVs and thus a slower reduction of emissions in the borough
 - d. A lack of support for rural businesses that support tourism, hospitality and food and drink production could see these businesses facing logistical, financial or resourcing challenges
 - e. Due to time limitations, a delay in administering this funding will lead to the level of upfront funding for next financial year being limited by Government
 - f. Risks associated with fraud, duplication of funding and deliverability of projects are considered by officers and the proposed policies seek to address these risks
 - g. Business failure has been considered and the terms of each grant scheme seek to mitigate against this risk.
 - h. Contractor failure has also been considered and the terms of each grant scheme allows some flexibilities and mitigates this risk.
 - i. These grant schemes would cease at the end of March 2025. Due to the source of the funding, the ability for Ashford Borough Council to run these schemes is only possible with this, or similar, funding streams. To mitigate the risk of businesses and communities not having the opportunity to apply whilst the funding is available, officers will ensure these are promoted as widely as possible, clarifying that this opportunity may only be available until March 2025.

Options Considered

45. In considering the options for Ashford Borough Council to act, officers have consulted with its UKSPF Local Partnership Group as well as all Parish Councils within the Borough, Kent Action for Local Communities (KALC), the National Farmers' Union (NFU) and the Romney Marsh Partnership. External expressions of interest were also received and considered in the decision to propose these schemes in the REPF Plan approved by Government.

46. The chosen option is to create the three grant schemes outlined above to support the council's objectives within the Corporate Plan as well as supporting the aims of the REPF funding from Defra.

Next Steps in the Process

47. If approved by Members, officers will seek to launch the new grant schemes as outlined in Sections 18-43 to help deliver the objectives in the Corporate Plan. Members are asked to allow delegated authority to the Head of Economic Development and the Head of Policy and Performance, to approve individual grant awards as part of a panel of officers but in consultation with relevant Portfolio Holders.
48. Officers will provide an update to Cabinet for review after a year of the new scheme.

Conclusions

49. The council has successfully secured its allocation of REPF funding from Government with its delivery Plan. This included the proposed schemes to deliver capital grant funding, namely Rural Green Business Grants, Rural Electric Vehicle Charging Points Grants and Rural Place and Provenance Grants. These schemes are aimed at filling a gap in support for businesses and organisations with the ultimate goal of delivering on the council's objectives, and the Government's priorities all within the limitations of the REPF guidance.
50. The proposed grant schemes will ensure that more businesses and organisations can access locally-administered funding to support energy efficiency or transition projects, improved EV Charging Point infrastructure and better support for tourism and hospitality businesses as well as food and drink producers in rural areas of the borough.
51. Part of the consideration around UKSPF and REPF is about ensuring the longevity and legacy of any interventions that are being funded through these programmes. The council's chosen interventions, those undertaken and planned, have considered this and are monitoring the outputs and outcomes of the projects throughout their lifecycle. However there is also the needed consideration of planning for activity beyond March 2025. Officers and Members will need to identify which programmes can be continued at a later stage.

Portfolio Holder's Views

52. "The UK Shared Prosperity Funding and Rural England Prosperity Funding schemes are representing a good avenue for Ashford Borough Council to support our communities and businesses in these challenging times. The report shows that the interventions that officers are undertaking are having a positive impact and will do so into next year, tackling key long-standing issues such as

the Skills Gap locally. Whilst this is short-term funding from Government, Ashford Borough Council is using the money available to it to its full potential to support residents and businesses across the Borough.

53. I am particularly keen to ensure we use the Rural England Prosperity Funding for projects that can be delivered within the strict timelines set by Government but that can have a long-lasting impact and legacy for our residents and enterprises in rural areas. The grant schemes outlined in this report can help tackle some key issues faced in rural parts of the borough, support our move to Net Zero, support businesses and create more opportunities for people outside of the Ashford urban area. I would urge colleagues to approve the recommendations set out in this report and to work with officers to make sure these projects are successful.”

54. Cllr Noel Ovenden, Leader of the Council

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Appendix 1

Ashford Rural Businesses Green Grants Scheme Rural England Prosperity Fund – Green Business Policy to 31 March 2025

Ashford Borough Council – Policy

Background

Due to the rural nature of the borough, Ashford has a high percentage of businesses located in rural areas. Whilst many of these are agricultural businesses (6.4% of the total number of enterprises¹), the highest proportion are Professional, Scientific & Technical (16.3%) and Construction (14.7%). The latter is higher than the average for England of 12.8% and is also a key consumer of fossil fuels to generate energy. Overall Industry accounted for 165.7 CO2 kt which represented 25% of the borough's CO2 emissions in 2018.²

Many businesses in rural areas are situated in older and less energy efficient premises. There are long standing issues for properties (mostly found in rural settlements) which are off the mains gas grid and which rely on heating sources such as LPG, oil, and solid fuels.³ The reliance on these fuels also does not support a rural borough such as Ashford to achieve its ambition of being Net Zero by 2050 and costs of transition are often prohibitively expensive. Supporting businesses to create energy efficiencies in their properties and transitioning from petroleum based or similar heating sources would help deliver UKG's commitment within the Net Zero Strategy 2021, to help households and businesses reduce their energy bills while making buildings healthier.⁴

The South East has benefitted from having a long-standing effective scheme to support households and businesses transition to greener energy and processes. Low Carbon Across the South East (LoCASE) has been providing financial support and advice to businesses seeking to undertake this transition. LoCASE has also formed a key part of Kent County Council's delivery of such support through its Low Carbon Kent team. This activity has been funded to date by the European Regional Development Fund and will cease operating at the same level by March 2023.

Government funding is available through the Industrial Energy Transformation Fund to support businesses with high energy use to transition to low carbon technologies. However, the loss of the LoCASE funding locally creates the prospect of a funding gap for micro, small and medium enterprises in Kent who are seeking capital to create smaller scale energy efficiencies and invest in new energy technologies.

There is an opportunity to provide local grant funding and support, which can leverage private investment into improving business premises' energy efficiency and transition to renewable energy in the immediate years beyond the end of current similar schemes.

¹ Rural Services Network, Sparse Analysis – Business Enterprise Counts 2015-2020.

² Ashford Borough Council, Ashford to Zero Plan, 2021.

³ Rural Services Network, Revitalising Rural – Decarbonising Rural Communities and Economies, May 2021.

⁴ HM Government – BEIS, Net Zero Strategy October 2021, Chapter 3iv Heat & Buildings, p135.

Overview of the scheme

The Ashford Rural Business Green Grant Scheme will provide grants up to £5,000 or £15,000 to support the energy efficiency or energy transition projects in commercial premises in rural parts of the borough.

Applications will open in rounds, with the first round being from December 2023 to January 2024. Applications submitted outside of these times will not be considered subject to significant material considerations and mitigating factors. These dates may vary at short notice depending on the level of applications the council receives.

The council reserves the right to close applications if the funding is likely to be committed, is committed or has been spent.

Once the project is complete and any equipment is installed, the materials and equipment will become the property of the applicant. It is the applicants' responsibility to maintain these accordingly.

Ashford Rural Businesses Green Grant Structure

The scheme will be made up of two grant streams:

- Energy Efficiency Grant: A grant of up to £5,000 for a business that will undertake projects to improve the energy efficiency of its premises.
- Energy Transition Grant: A grant of up to £15,000 for a business that will undertake projects to change the sources of its energy at its premises.

These grants cannot be used in conjunction with each other. For example recipients of the Energy Efficiency Grant cannot access funding from the Energy Transition Grant as well. They can be used in conjunction with other financial support schemes available beyond the two named above, subject to those other schemes allowing this. Applicants that have either received a grant from one of these two schemes, or that have already submitted a grant application which is being assessed, will not be considered.

Energy Efficiency Grant Details

The intention of this grant is to facilitate energy efficiency projects in commercial premises in rural areas of the Ashford Borough.

Eligibility Criteria

1. Micro, Small or Medium businesses with no more than 50 employees working at the subject site.
2. The subject commercial premises must be located within the designated Rural area [as defined under 'Rural England Prosperity Fund' by the Department for Environmental and Rural Affairs \(Defra\)](#). Where the site or the wider land crosses across the designated area the Council reserves the right to assess these on a case by case basis. See Appendix A.
3. The business can demonstrate the need and the expected benefits of the works proposed.
4. Individual landlords are eligible to apply for this funding.

What will the funding help cover

Through this grant, Ashford Borough Council will support the purchase and installation of material or equipment that improves the energy efficiency of a business' commercial property in the rural area.

Examples of capital projects that the grant could support include:

- Retro-fitting insulation
- Installing LED or other energy efficient lighting systems
- Installation of double or secondary glazing

Works that may require Planning Applications (such as Listed Building Consent, Advertising Consent or similar) can be considered. Applicants will need to submit their Planning Application, if required, before submitting the grant application.

Eligible tenants within premises owned by Ashford Borough Council will not be able to apply for the Energy Efficiency Grant if it is for works that are the responsibility of the landlord or are already programmed to be undertaken. If that does not apply, eligible Ashford Borough Council commercial tenants will be able to apply for work that does not benefit the council, which includes:

- Any works from the above-listed that are not the responsibility of Ashford Borough Council as landlord.

What is not covered by the funding

Due to the capital nature of the Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF), some costs associated with these projects may not be eligible for this grant. The applicant will need to show these costs have been considered and they are able to fund these separately. These include but are not limited to:

- Professional fees such as Planning or Legal fees
- Revenue costs such as running costs, subscriptions, licences or promotional activity
- Insurances and ongoing maintenance costs
- Applicant's admin costs

Levels of Grant

Applicants are required to provide fully costed quotes of the works being proposed. The assessment will consider this and, if successful, applicants will receive a grant equivalent to 80% of the cost of works. The maximum level of grant allowed under this scheme is £5,000.

In exceptional circumstances the council reserves the right to award a higher level of grant where this may be necessary and where there is supporting and significant additional evidence have been submitted.

Information and evidence needed for application

- A completed application form
- Evidence that:
 - The applicant is the freeholder or leaseholder or where written consent from the site owner to carry out the work, has been obtained and submitted
 - The applicant has the funds available for their share of the project costs (20%)
 - The applicant should demonstrate they have considered the Planning guidance in relation to their project and have submitted a Planning Application where necessary

- For projects costing up to £3,123 one fully costed quote for the works is necessary. For projects costing more than this, three fully costed quotes will be necessary.
- An energy audit report or EPC assessment undertaken for the property if available
- Recent photos of the site, clearly showing the areas the project will address
- Details of any grants or funding received from a public authority in the previous three years
- Any further information or evidence required or which the applicant considers relevant

Monitoring and Assurances

The grant will be paid to successful applicants once conditions are met such as (but not limited to):

- The works proposed are due to start imminently and be completed in a reasonable time
- Any permissions such as Planning Permission have been successfully obtained

The condition of payment for this grant will be included in the decision notification sent to the applicant and is discretionary (to be applied on a case by case basis). For grant applications requiring a Planning Application, the grant can only be paid if Planning Permission has been received by the applicant.

The council reserves the right to attend the site to monitor the progress of work until the expected end date detailed in the applicant's proposal. The council has the discretion to reclaim the grant funding if the conditions are not met within a reasonable time.

Terms and Conditions

- Quotes for the work must be provided
- Grant applications (and relevant Planning Applications) must be made before work takes place
- Our staff must be allowed to inspect the works and see all relevant documentation
- It is the responsibility of applicants to comply with all relevant regulations and legislation
- It is the responsibility of applicants to check and confirm whether they comply with the Subsidy Control requirements (formerly State Aid)
- Applicants agree to report quarterly to the council on progress of their project and outcomes linked to the REPF guidance.
- Applicants agree to comply with the REPF and UKSPF marketing and branding guidelines linked to their project
- Any grant money awarded, must be repaid within 1 year of the payment if:
 - The applicant removes the materials or equipment within 12 months of receiving the grant (regardless of whether the applicant moves property)
 - The applicant does not maintain the equipment or the utilities connections during the 12 months after receiving the grant
 - Works are undertaken without obtaining the relevant permissions or licences as needed

- The works are not undertaken

Energy Transition Grant Details

The intention of this grant is to facilitate energy transition projects in commercial premises in rural areas of the Ashford Borough.

Eligibility Criteria

1. Micro, Small or Medium businesses with no more than 50 employees working at the subject site.
2. The subject commercial premises must be located within the designated Rural area [as defined under 'Rural England Prosperity Fund' by the Department for Environmental and Rural Affairs \(Defra\)](#). Where the site or the wider land crosses across the designated area the Council reserves the right to assess these on a case by case basis. See Appendix A.
3. The business can demonstrate the need and the expected benefits of the works proposed.
4. Individual landlords are eligible to apply for this funding.

What will the funding help cover

Through this grant, Ashford Borough Council will support the purchase and installation of alternative energy sourcing equipment that improves the carbon footprint of a business' commercial property in the rural area.

Examples of capital projects that the grant could support include:

- Installation of Solar PV panels
- Installation of Air or Ground Source Heat Pumps
- Connecting the property to the grid

Works that may require Planning Applications (such as Listed Building Consent, Advertising Consent or similar) can be considered. Applicants will need to submit their Planning Application, if required, before submitting the grant application.

Eligible tenants within premises owned by Ashford Borough Council will not be able to apply for the Energy Transition Grant if it is for works that are the responsibility of the landlord or are already programmed to be undertaken. If that does not apply, eligible Ashford Borough Council commercial tenants will be able to apply for work that does not benefit the council, which includes:

- Any works from the above-listed that are not the responsibility of Ashford Borough Council as landlord.

What is not covered by the funding

Due to the capital nature of the Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF), some costs associated with these projects may not be eligible for this grant. The applicant will need to show these costs have been considered and they are able to fund these separately. These include but are not limited to:

- Professional fees such as Planning or Legal fees
- Revenue costs such as running costs, subscriptions, licences or promotional activity
- Insurances and ongoing maintenance costs
- Applicant's admin costs

Levels of Grant

Applicants are required to provide a fully costed quote of the works being proposed. The assessment will consider this and, if successful, applicants will receive a grant equivalent to 80% of the cost of works. The maximum level of grant allowed under this scheme is £15,000.

In exceptional circumstances the council reserves the right to award a higher level of grant where this may be necessary and where there is supporting and significant additional evidence have been submitted.

Information and evidence needed for application

- A completed application form
- Evidence that:
 - The applicant is the freeholder or leaseholder or where written consent from the site owner to carry out the work, has been obtained and submitted
 - The applicant has the funds available for their share of the project costs (20%)
 - The applicant should demonstrate they have considered the Planning guidance in relation to their project and have submitted a Planning Application where necessary
- For projects costing up to £3,123 one fully costed quote for the works is necessary. For projects costing more than this, three fully costed quotes will be necessary.
- An energy audit report or EPC assessment undertaken for the property if available
- Recent photos of the site, clearly showing the areas the project will address
- Details of any grants or funding received from a public authority in the previous three years
- Any further information or evidence required or which the applicant considers relevant

Monitoring and Assurances

The grant will be paid to successful applicants once conditions are met such as (but not limited to):

- The works proposed are due to start imminently and be completed in a reasonable time
- Any permissions such as Planning Permission have been successfully obtained

The condition of payment for this grant will be included in the decision notification sent to the applicant and is discretionary (to be applied on a case by case basis). For grant applications requiring a Planning Application, the grant can only be paid if Planning Permission has been received by the applicant.

The council reserves the right to attend the site to monitor the progress of work until the expected end date detailed in the applicant's proposal. The council has the discretion to reclaim the grant funding if the conditions are not met within a reasonable time.

Terms and Conditions

- Quotes for the work must be provided
- Grant applications (and relevant Planning Applications) must be made before work takes place

- Our staff must be allowed to inspect the works and see all relevant documentation
- It is the responsibility of applicants to comply with all relevant regulations and legislation
- It is the responsibility of applicants to check and confirm whether they comply with the Subsidy Control requirements (formerly State Aid)
- Applicants agree to report quarterly to the council on progress of their project and outcomes linked to the REPF guidance.
- Applicants agree to comply with the REPF and UKSPF marketing and branding guidelines linked to their project
- Any grant money awarded, must be repaid if:
 - The applicant removes the materials or equipment within 5 years of receiving the grant (regardless of whether the applicant moves property)
 - The applicant does not maintain the equipment or the utilities connections during the 5 years after receiving the grant
 - Works are undertaken without obtaining the relevant permissions or licences as needed
 - The works are not undertaken

Subsidy Control (formerly State Aid)

A subsidy is where a public authority such as a Local Authority provides support to an enterprise that gives them an economic advantage, meaning equivalent support could not have been obtained on commercial terms.

On 4 January 2023, the UK's new subsidy control regime came into force, implementing a new subsidy regulation framework designed for the post-Brexit era. Underpinned by the [Subsidy Control Act 2022](#) (the "Act"), related statutory instruments and government guidance, the new regime aims to grant public authorities the power to design and award subsidies in an agile way while complying with the UK's international commitments on subsidy control.

For smaller value subsidy awards, Minimal Financial Assistance (MFA) allows financial assistance of up to a maximum limit of £315,000 to be made to a single enterprise within a rolling period of three financial years (consisting of the current financial year and the two previous financial years), without the need to comply with the majority of the subsidy control requirements.

However, MFA requires a written declaration from the beneficiary confirming that the limit has not been exceeded before the subsidy can be awarded. This effectively mirrors the historic EU De Minimis regime but sets the threshold at a fixed sterling amount and at a higher level than previously.

Applicants will therefore be required to provide information and a declaration in relation to subsidies they may have received in the previous three years.

Exclusions to these grant schemes

- For the avoidance of doubt, businesses that are in administration, insolvent or where a striking-off notice has been made, are not eligible for funding under this scheme.
- Projects or work that has already been undertaken will not be eligible. This funding is not retrospective.
- Businesses that have already received grant payments that equal the maximum permitted levels of subsidy will not be eligible to receive funding. (See Subsidy Control section above)
- Project proposals that have already received, or are eligible to apply for, funding from Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) are not eligible.
- Businesses or organisations that have already received funding from another REPF funded grant programme, or projects that are eligible for another REPF grant programme, as administered by Ashford Borough Council, will not be eligible for this scheme. See Appendix B for other REPF programmes administered by Ashford Borough Council.
- Sites that are located outside of the designated Rural area as defined by Defra for the purposes of this funding. See Appendix A.
- This funding should not be used as a wage support mechanism or for revenue costs such as ongoing maintenance or utilities costs.
- This funding cannot be used to pay for costs directly to Ashford Borough Council (for example Planning applications) or for significant work to the Council's land/property that falls within a schedule of maintenance and for which the council is responsible as owner.

Decisions

The funding available for these grant schemes is very limited and the council will likely need to prioritise applications to provide best value for money. Decisions will be taken by a panel on a monthly basis. Each round of decisions will prioritise eligible applications based on the impact of their project as well as the deliverability of their proposal.

Applications will only be taken forward to be decided where all the relevant information and evidence has been submitted by the applicant. The decision to award any grants under this scheme will be taken by a panel chaired by the Head of Policy and Performance. The decision reached by the panel will be final and the council will not consider any appeals submitted. Applicants will subsequently be notified of the outcome of their application. For grant applications requiring Planning, the decision whether to award a grant will be dependent on the approval of Planning Permission. For grant applications during this period that do not require Planning Permission, the decision will be dependent on the content and evidence included in the grant application.

In exceptional circumstances the council reserves the right to accept applications that may not meet all the criteria set out in this policy, where it can be shown that the impact of that proposal would have an exceptionally positive and wider reaching impact.

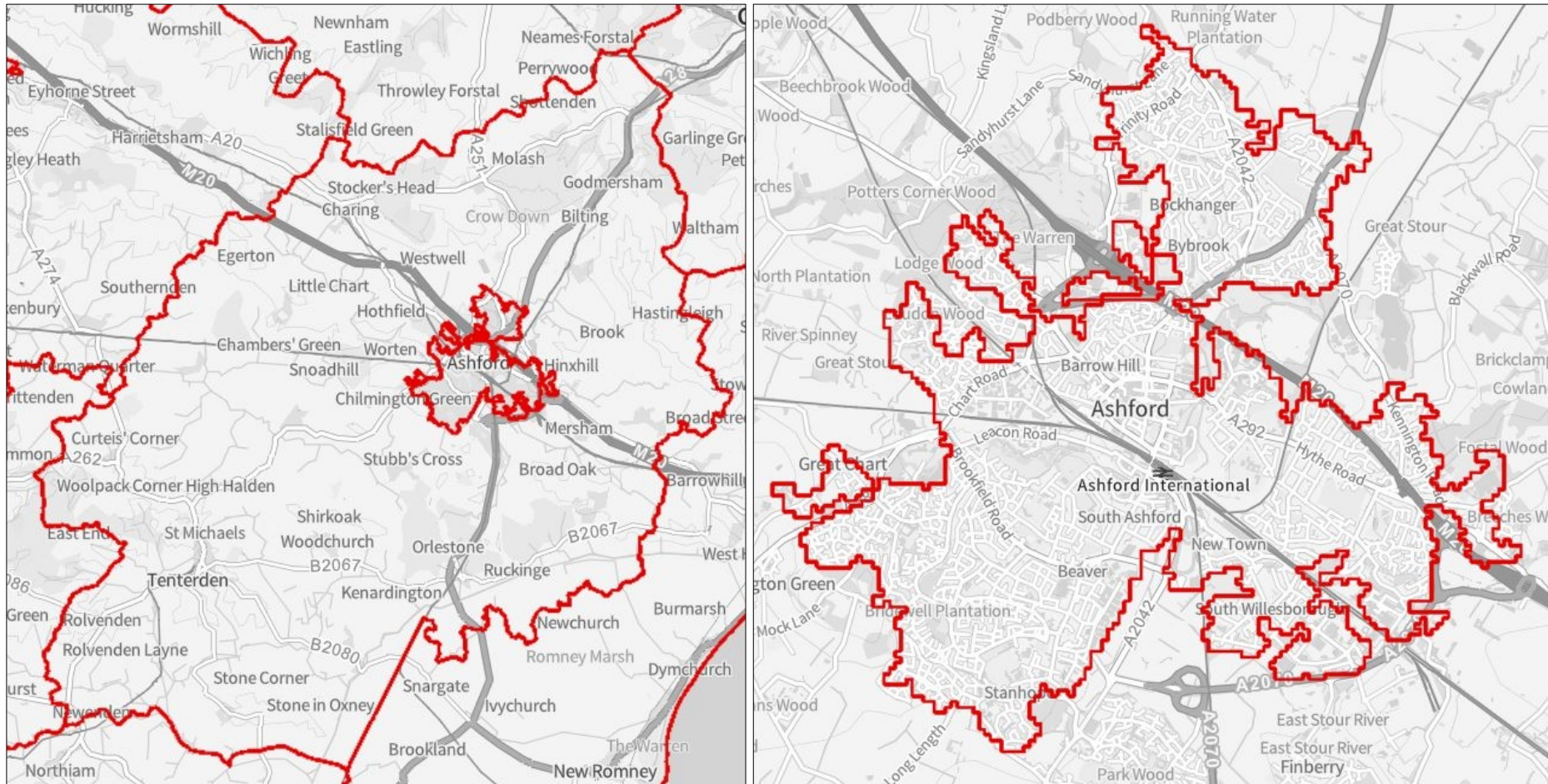
Due to its very limited nature, once the funding is completely allocated there will be no further applications or grants available to interested businesses.

Queries

All enquiries about this grant funding and this policy should contact prosperity.funding@ashford.gov.uk.

Appendix A

Ashford Rural EVCP Grants – Maps



Eligible areas: the areas outside the Ashford Urban Area. An interactive map is available on the Defra website [here](#). In the table of contents please choose Administrative Geographies → Other Administrative Boundaries → Rural England Prosperity Fund)

Appendix B

Ashford REPF Programmes and other Defra Funding

Projects that have received or are eligible for any of the funds listed below (and any other Defra funding not listed) will not be eligible. Applicants who have received or are eligible for the below funds may be eligible subject to the proposed project not being eligible.

Ashford REPF Programmes

- Rural Electric Vehicle Charging Point Grants
- Rural Community Amenities Grants
- Rural Place and Provenance Grants

Defra Funding includes:

- Sustainable Farming Incentive
- Countryside Stewardship
- Landscape Recovery
- SFI Offers
- Species Survival Fund (via Heritage Fund)
- Farming in Protected Landscapes
- Calf Housing for Health and Welfare Grant
- England Woodland Creation Grant
- Woodland Creation Planning Grant
- Tree Health Pilot scheme 2023
- Farming Investment Fund
- Water Management Grant
- Slurry Infrastructure Grant
- Adding Value Grant
- Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) (including delinked payments)

Appendix 2

Ashford Rural Electric Vehicle Charging Points (EVCP) Grants Scheme Rural England Prosperity Fund - EVCP Policy to 31 March 2025

Ashford Borough Council – Policy

Background

Transitioning from petrol and diesel cars to electric vehicles (EVs) is key to reducing emissions and meeting Net Zero. Reflecting this, the UK Government has committed to end the sale of new petrol and diesel cars/vans from 2030. For this to happen, however, it is essential that there is a comprehensive and competitive EV charging network in place, one that people can trust and they are confident using – much like filling up with petrol or diesel. If this is not the case, and the charging network is perceived as inadequate, or as not offering a fair deal to people, that will be a major barrier to EV take-up. The Competition and Markets Authority noted targeted interventions are necessary to kick-start more investment and unlock competition in remote areas, where the commercial case for investment is very weak, which means there's a risk these will be left unserved.

At a local level, Low Carbon Kent has administered the Kent REVS scheme, whereby businesses can rent an EV for up to two months to demonstrate to organisations the benefits of owning and running an electric vehicle and to contribute to the aim of achieving net-zero emissions by 2050 across Kent. Ashford has the highest amount of businesses that have used the scheme in the county, with nearly a quarter of the overall businesses being from our borough. The scheme is due to end in January 2023 and anecdotal feedback so far from businesses that haven't gone on to adopt EV fleets includes the lack of EV charging infrastructure outside urban areas in Kent.

Grant funding has been available from the Office of Zero Emissions Vehicles (OZEV) to contribute to the installation of EV charge points both at residential properties and workplaces. However, especially in rural areas, there is a need for additional options for residents and businesses to incentivise the expansion of the EV charging infrastructure. Data of available EV charging infrastructure from Zap-map shows there are 9 EV charging points (excl. Zaphome). Zap-Map also shows that only 4 of the EVCPs being publicly accessible 24/7 with no physical restrictions, with only 1 of those being in the rural area of the borough. Furthermore 65% of Ashford borough residents commute by car, which considering the availability of other sustainable methods of transport in rural areas, underlines the importance of transitioning to EVs. County Councils Network (CCN) research explains that the slow roll out of charging networks, the travel distances involved, and the general attitude towards Ultra Low Emission Vehicles in rural areas mean that greater challenges exist in achieving the necessary transition to electric vehicles .

The opportunity is thus to provide EV charge points in publicly accessible spaces in rural areas of the borough to allow residents, businesses and visitors to charge EVs. This could include Parish Council car parks or Ashford Borough Council land where car parking is permitted.

Overview of the scheme

The Ashford EVCP Grant Scheme will provide grants up to £12,000 to support the installation of Electric Vehicle Charging Points at publicly accessible parking sites in rural areas of the borough.

The grant can be used in conjunction with other financial support schemes available, subject to those other schemes allowing this. Applicants that have either received a grant from this scheme, or that have already submitted a grant application which is being assessed, will not be considered.

Applications will open in rounds, with the first round being from December 2023 to January 2024. Applications submitted outside of these times will not be considered subject to significant material considerations and mitigating factors. These dates may vary at short notice depending on the level of applications the council receives.

The council reserves the right to close applications if the funding is likely to be committed, is committed or has been spent.

Once the EVCP is installed, the equipment will become the property of the applicant. Depending on the operating model to be adopted, it is the applicants' responsibility to pay any charges for the electricity, the supervision of the spaces, maintaining insurances and upkeeping the equipment itself.

EV Charging Points Grant Details

The intention of this grant is to facilitate the installation of EV Charging Points in rural areas of the Ashford Borough.

Eligibility Criteria

1. Applications are eligible from Parish Councils, Town Councils or Community Councils within the Ashford Borough boundary. In some cases applications may be accepted from other entities where all the eligibility criteria are met.
2. The site for the EVCP(s) must be located within the designated Rural area [as defined under 'Rural England Prosperity Fund' by the Department for Environmental and Rural Affairs \(Defra\)](#). Where the site or the wider land crosses across the designated area the Council reserves the right to assess these on a case by case basis. See Appendix A.
3. The site for the EVCP(s) must be wholly owned by the eligible applicant or Ashford Borough Council. In cases where this may not apply specifically, the applicant will need to evidence the ownership details and submit written approval for this project from the owner(s).
4. The site for the EVCP(s) must be publicly accessible to vehicles 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, and not limit who can park there or charge parking fees unless the charges are payable to a Parish, Town or Community Council or Ashford Borough Council.
5. The EVCP(s) should be sourced from the approved list and meet the specifications detailed in the [Office for Zero Emission Vehicles guidance](#).
6. The EVCP installer should be an approved organisation as detailed in the [Office for Zero Emission Vehicles guidance](#).

What will the funding help cover

Ashford Borough Council will fund the install of the EV Charging Point and then hand over ownership of the charger to the organisation who applied.

The funding will contribute towards the capital costs of installing an EVCP including:

- Purchasing the EVCP(s) and associated equipment
- Installation costs
- Electricity Network connection costs
- Other capital costs directly associated with the installation phase.

What is not covered by the funding

Due to the capital nature of the Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF), some costs associated with installing EVCP(s) may not be eligible for this grant. The applicant will need to show these costs have been considered and they are able to fund these separately. These include but are not limited to:

- Planning or Legal fees
- Electricity supply costs
- Insurances and ongoing maintenance costs
- Ancillary work to improve the accessibility of the site
- Applicant's admin costs

Levels of Grant

Applicants are required to provide a fully costed quote of the works being proposed. The assessment will consider this and, if successful, applicants will receive a grant equivalent to 80% of the cost of works. The maximum level of grant allowed under this scheme is £12,000.

In exceptional circumstances the council reserves the right to award a higher level of grant where this may be necessary and where there is supporting and significant additional evidence have been submitted.

Information and evidence needed for application

- A completed application form
- Evidence that:
 - The applicant is the freeholder or leaseholder or where written consent from the site owner to carry out the work, has been obtained and submitted
 - The applicant has the funds available for their share of the project costs (20%)
 - The applicant should demonstrate they have considered the Planning guidance in relation to their project and have submitted a Planning Application where necessary
- A completed site survey showing the viability and the type of connection that is possible
- At least three fully costed quotes for the work, including at least three quotes for the EVCP equipment from the [approved OZEV model list](#) and at least three quotes for the installation from the [approved OZEV installer list](#).
- Details of any grants or funding received from a public authority in the previous three years
- Recent photos of the site, clearly showing the location proposed for the EVCP and access
- Any further information or evidence required or which the applicant considers relevant

Monitoring and Assurances

The grant will be paid to successful applicants once conditions are met such as (but not limited to):

- The works proposed are due to start imminently and be completed in a reasonable time
- Any permissions such as Planning Permission have been successfully obtained
- The EVCP has been ordered or bought and/or an installer has been appointed

The condition of payment for this grant will be included in the decision notification sent to the applicant and is discretionary (to be applied on a case by case basis). For grant applications requiring a Planning Application, the grant can only be paid if Planning Permission has been received by the applicant.

The council reserves the right to attend the site to monitor the progress of work until the expected end date detailed in the applicant's proposal. The council has the discretion to reclaim the grant funding if the conditions are not met within a reasonable time.

Terms and Conditions

- Grant applications (and relevant Planning Applications) must be made before work takes place
- Our staff must be allowed to inspect the works and see all relevant documentation
- It is the responsibility of applicants to comply with all relevant regulations and legislation
- Applicants agree to comply with the REPF and UKSPF marketing and branding guidelines linked to their project
- The applicant commits to monitoring and reporting on indicators such as the number of sessions (users) at the EVCP for up to 5 years after receiving the grant or the amount of CO2 saved in Kg/Year.
- Any grant money awarded, must be repaid within 3 years of the payment if:
 - The applicant removes or prevents the use of their EVCP(s) within 3 years of receiving the grant
 - The applicant does not maintain the equipment or the utilities connections during the 3 years after receiving the grant
 - Works are undertaken without obtaining the relevant permissions or licences as needed
 - The works are not undertaken

Subsidy Control (formerly State Aid)

A subsidy is where a public authority such as a Local Authority provides support to an enterprise that gives them an economic advantage, meaning equivalent support could not have been obtained on commercial terms.

On 4 January 2023, the UK's new subsidy control regime came into force, implementing a new subsidy regulation framework designed for the post-Brexit era. Underpinned by the [Subsidy Control Act 2022](#) (the "Act"), related statutory instruments and government guidance, the new regime aims to grant public authorities the power to design and award subsidies in an agile way while complying with the UK's international commitments on subsidy control.

For smaller value subsidy awards, Minimal Financial Assistance (MFA) allows financial assistance of up to a maximum limit of £315,000 to be made to a single enterprise within a rolling period of three financial years (consisting of the current financial year and the two previous financial years), without the need to comply with the majority of the subsidy control requirements.

However, MFA requires a written declaration from the beneficiary confirming that the limit has not been exceeded before the subsidy can be awarded. This effectively mirrors the historic EU De Minimis regime but sets the threshold at a fixed sterling amount and at a higher level than previously.

Applicants will therefore be required to provide information and a declaration in relation to subsidies they may have received in the previous three years.

Exclusions to these grant schemes

- Organisations not listed in the eligibility criteria or entities that can access alternative Government funding for the installation of EV charging points.
- Projects or work that has already been undertaken will not be eligible. This funding is not retrospective.
- Sites that are located outside of the designated Rural area as defined by Defra for the purposes of this funding. See Appendix A.
- This funding should not be used as a wage support mechanism or for revenue costs such as ongoing maintenance or utilities costs.
- This funding cannot be used to pay for costs directly to Ashford Borough Council (for example Planning applications) or for significant work to the Council's land/property that falls within a schedule of maintenance and for which the council is responsible as owner.

Decisions

The funding available for these grant schemes is very limited and the council will likely need to prioritise applications to provide best value for money. Decisions will be taken by a panel on a monthly basis. Each round of decisions will prioritise eligible applications based on their location in relation to other EVCPs, the impact of their project as well as the deliverability of their proposal.

Applications will only be taken forward to be decided where all the relevant information and evidence has been submitted by the applicant. The decision to award any grants under this scheme will be taken by a panel chaired by the Head of Policy and Performance. The decision reached by the panel will be final and the council will not consider any appeals submitted. Applicants will subsequently be notified of the outcome of their application. For grant applications requiring Planning, the decision whether to award a grant will be dependent on the approval of Planning Permission.

In exceptional circumstances the council reserves the right to accept applications that may not meet all the criteria set out in this policy, where it can be shown that the impact of that proposal would have an exceptionally positive and wider reaching impact.

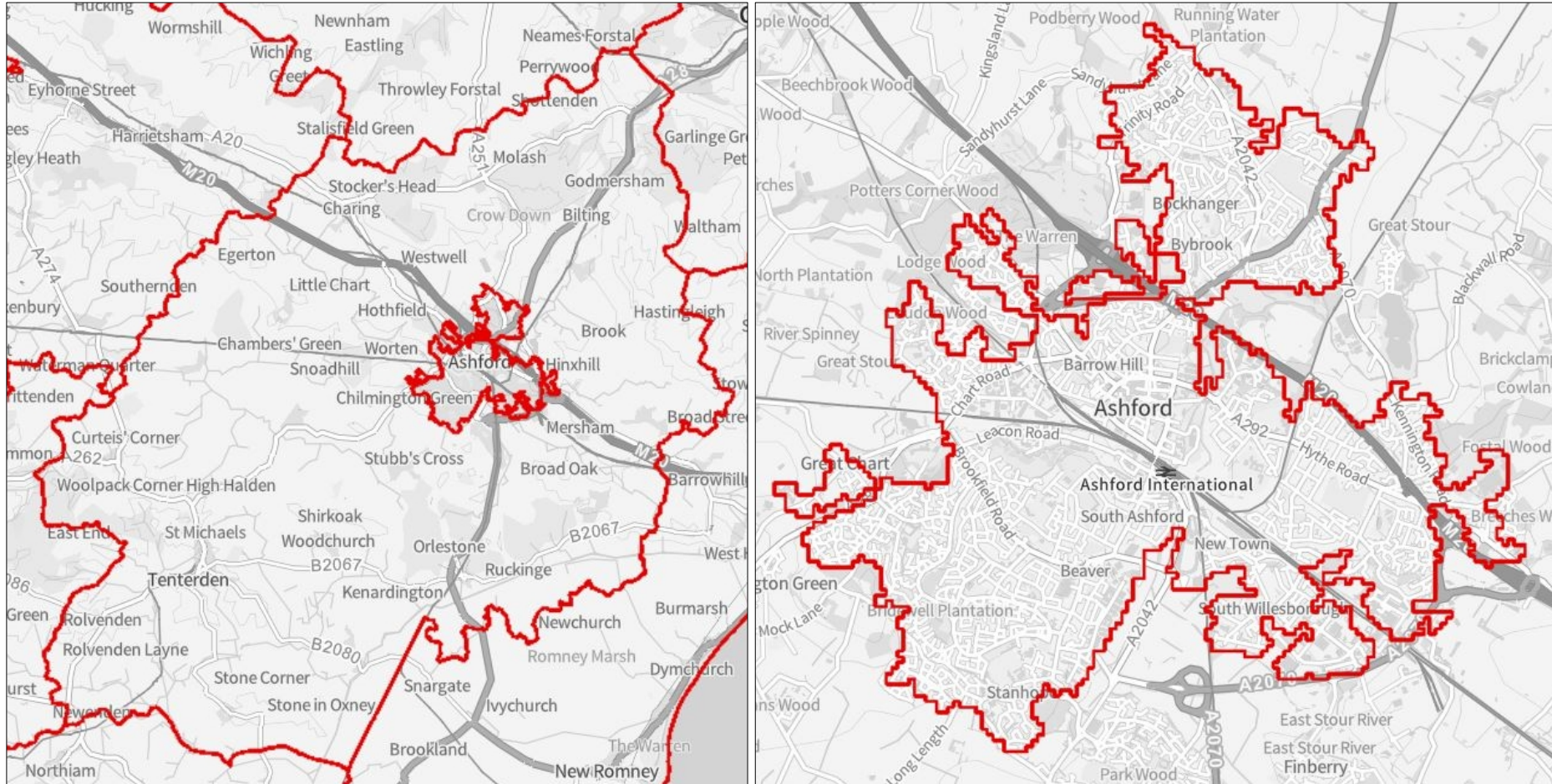
Due to its very limited nature, once the funding is completely allocated there will be no further applications or grants available to interested businesses.

Queries

All enquiries about this grant funding and this policy should contact prosperity.funding@ashford.gov.uk.

Appendix A

Ashford Rural EVCP Grants – Maps



Eligible areas: the areas outside the Ashford Urban Area. An interactive map is available on the Defra website [here](#). In the table of contents please choose Administrative Geographies → Other Administrative Boundaries → Rural England Prosperity Fund)

Appendix B

Ashford REPF Programmes and other Defra Funding

Projects that have received or are eligible for any of the funds listed below (and any other Defra funding not listed) will not be eligible. Applicants who have received or are eligible for the below funds may be eligible subject to the proposed project not being eligible.

Ashford REPF Programmes

- Rural Electric Vehicle Charging Point Grants
- Rural Community Amenities Grants
- Rural Place and Provenance Grants

Defra Funding includes:

- Sustainable Farming Incentive
- Countryside Stewardship
- Landscape Recovery
- SFI Offers
- Species Survival Fund (via Heritage Fund)
- Farming in Protected Landscapes
- Calf Housing for Health and Welfare Grant
- England Woodland Creation Grant
- Woodland Creation Planning Grant
- Tree Health Pilot scheme 2023
- Farming Investment Fund
- Water Management Grant
- Slurry Infrastructure Grant
- Adding Value Grant
- Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) (including delinked payments)

FAQs

Why is my area or site not in the Rural area defined by Defra?

Defra have issued the boundaries for Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF) and there is guidance on the designation of Rural that has been applied on the REPF webpages.

Who pays for the electricity?

Ultimately, the person using the charger could pay for the electricity and, depending on the circumstances, there may be a small profit for the community as well. At the outset, applicants would need to be the liable party for utilities bills, however by choosing an EVCP with payment options, could recover the costs of electricity.

What can we do with the revenue?

Any profit over and above the operation costs should be ring-fenced to cover maintenance of the parking spaces and upkeep of the asset. Depending on usage patterns there may be some revenue stream for the site holder which can be used to promote and publicise the facilities among other possibilities. This should encourage more people to visit and local residents to consider the switch to electric motoring sooner, with the subsequent improvements to the local environment and economy as added benefits.

Who owns the equipment once its installed?

Once the equipment is up and running, it becomes the property of the applicant and they operate it like any other asset. As the site holder or Parish, Town or Community Council will own the chargers, they will therefore be responsible for the cost of the electricity, the supervision of the parking spaces and the insurance of the equipment the same as any other asset they own.

Do we need a maintenance agreement?

We would advise discussing this with the chosen provider along with the relevant insurances required.

Appendix 3

Ashford Rural Place and Provenance Business Grants Scheme Rural England Prosperity Fund – P&P Grants Policy to 31 March 2025

Ashford Borough Council – Policy

Background

There are about 400 hospitality businesses and food and beverage producers in Ashford (the great majority of them micro businesses⁵), and our tourism sector supports about 3.4 million visitors to the Borough each year, since the Covid-19 pandemic⁶.

Furthermore food & drink is the most popular product experience on the TripAdvisor and Airbnb platforms.⁷ In July 2020 there were approx. 14,000 bookable UK experiences and Kent had just 33 of these (2% of the total UK offer)⁸ –so there is huge scope for Kent and in particular for Ashford, with its wealth of vineyards and growing reputation as a wine tourism destination, to capitalise on what visitors are currently looking for - this demand for authentic food and drink experiences.

The above provides context to two key challenges identified in rural areas of the borough:

- Connecting visitors to rural destinations and awareness raising - the food and drink and tourism offer can benefit from shared promotion and development: the quality of the place and the connections between different parts of the offer are fundamental. So there is a strong case for shared action.
- Productivity and support for startups in rural areas - much of the focus on raising productivity in the economy overall focuses on those sectors which offer higher gross value added per job. However there is evidence that there is scope for productivity gain in every sector – with hospitality able to gain through (for example) improved use of digital systems and support for startup food and drink enterprises. We want to encourage this, especially given current labour shortage challenges.

There is an opportunity to provide local grant funding and support, which can leverage private investment into supporting rural business' productivity and the creation of startup space as well as tackling issues with the last-mile challenge and rural accessibility

The scheme is funded by the Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF), which supports the aims of the government's Levelling Up White Paper and Future Farming Programme. You can find out more about REPF on the [Government website](#).

Overview of the scheme

The Ashford Rural Place and Provenance Grant Scheme will provide grants up to £3,000 or up to £10,000 to support rural food & drink producers, hospitality and tourism attractions or venues. Hospitality includes restaurants, cafes, pubs, catering, hotels, campsites and other accommodation. The aim of this grant scheme will be to increase productivity and sustainability for businesses,

⁵ ONS, UK Business Count.

⁶ Visit Kent, Ashford Tourism Economic Impact Study 2021.

⁷ Visit Kent, Ashford Borough Factsheet – The Experiential Offer, September 2020.

⁸ Visit Kent, Experience Options Analysis, September 2020.

increase the number of startups in these sectors in rural areas and increase the number of visitors to rural destinations.

Applications will open in rounds, with the first round being from December 2023 to January 2024. Applications submitted outside of these times will not be considered subject to significant material considerations and mitigating factors. These dates may vary at short notice depending on the level of applications the council receives.

The council reserves the right to close applications if the funding is likely to be committed, is committed or has been spent.

Once the project is complete and any equipment is installed, the materials and equipment will become the property of the applicant. It is the applicants' responsibility to maintain these accordingly.

Ashford Rural Place and Provenance Business Grants Structure

The scheme will be made up of two grant streams:

- Rural Boost Grant: A grant of £500 to £3,000 for a business that will undertake capital projects to grow and improve its productivity and can demonstrate a need for small scale improvements.
- Rural Investment Grant: A grant of £3,000 to £10,000 for a business that will undertake capital projects to create startup spaces or deliver a project that will address the last-mile challenge.

These grants cannot be used in conjunction with each other. For example recipients of the Rural Boost Grant cannot access funding from the Rural Investment Grant as well. They can be used in conjunction with other financial support schemes available beyond the two named above, subject to those other schemes allowing this, except any funding deriving from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra). Applicants that have either received a grant from one of these two schemes, or that have already submitted a grant application which is being assessed, will not be considered.

A summary of the scheme is found in Appendix C of this Policy.

Rural Boost Grant Details

The intention of this grant is to facilitate projects in commercial premises in rural areas of the Ashford Borough that will support that business to improve productivity, operational processes and support its viability and growth.

Eligibility Criteria

1. The applicant is a commercial entity registered in the Ashford Borough. This includes but is not limited to, micro, small and medium businesses.
2. The subject commercial premises must be located within the designated Rural area [as defined under 'Rural England Prosperity Fund' by the Department for Environmental and Rural Affairs \(Defra\)](#). Where the site or the wider land crosses across the designated area the Council reserves the right to assess these on a case by case basis. See Appendix A.
3. The business can demonstrate the need and the expected benefits of the works proposed.

4. Only capital projects for business purposes are eligible.
5. Applications from non-profits or voluntary organisations may be considered subject to the proposal clearly benefitting commercial businesses directly.

What will the funding help cover

Through this grant, Ashford Borough Council will support the purchase and installation of assets such as buildings or equipment that improves a business' productivity and growth in the rural area.

Examples of capital projects that the grant could support include:

- New commercial ovens for a rural bakery
- New signage or interpretation boards for a tourism venue
- Purchase and installation of new IT or epos equipment

Works that may require Planning Applications (such as Listed Building Consent, Advertising Consent or similar) can be considered. Applicants will need to submit their Planning Application, if required, before submitting the grant application.

What is not covered by the funding

Due to the capital nature of the Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF), some costs associated with these projects may not be eligible for this grant. The applicant will need to show these costs have been considered and they are able to fund these separately. These include but are not limited to:

- Professional fees such as Planning or Legal fees
- Revenue costs such as running costs, subscriptions, licences or promotional activity
- Insurances and ongoing maintenance costs
- Applicant's admin costs

Where second hand equipment is being purchased, the grant scheme will not fund elements that cannot demonstrate they have a reasonable useful life remaining.

Levels of Grant

Applicants are required to provide fully costed quotes of the works being proposed. The assessment will consider this and, if successful, applicants will receive a grant equivalent to 80% of the cost of works. The minimum level of grant allowed under this scheme is £500 and the maximum level is £3,000.

In exceptional circumstances the council reserves the right to award a higher level of grant where this may be necessary and where there is supporting and significant additional evidence have been submitted.

Information and evidence needed for application

- A completed application form
- Evidence that:
 - The applicant is the freeholder or leaseholder or where written consent from the site owner to carry out the work, has been obtained and submitted
 - The applicant has the funds available for their share of the project costs (20%)

- The applicant should demonstrate they have considered the Planning guidance in relation to their project and have submitted a Planning Application where necessary
- For projects costing up to £3,123 one fully costed quote for the works is necessary. For projects costing more than this, three fully costed quotes will be necessary.
- Recent photos of the site, clearly showing the areas the project will address
- Details of any grants or funding received from a public authority in the previous three years
- Any further information or evidence required or which the applicant considers relevant

Monitoring and Assurances

The grant will be paid to successful applicants once conditions are met such as (but not limited to):

- The works proposed are due to start imminently and be completed in a reasonable time
- Any permissions such as Planning Permission have been successfully obtained

The condition of payment for this grant will be included in the decision notification sent to the applicant and is discretionary (to be applied on a case by case basis). For grant applications requiring a Planning Application, the grant can only be paid if Planning Permission has been received by the applicant.

The council reserves the right to attend the site to monitor the progress of work until the expected end date detailed in the applicant's proposal. The council has the discretion to reclaim the grant funding if the conditions are not met within a reasonable time.

Terms and Conditions

- Quotes for the work must be provided
- Grant applications (and relevant Planning Applications) must be made before work takes place
- ABC staff must be allowed to inspect the works and see all relevant documentation
- It is the responsibility of applicants to comply with all relevant regulations and legislation
- It is the responsibility of applicants to check and confirm whether they comply with the Subsidy Control requirements (formerly State Aid)
- Applicants agree to report quarterly to the council on progress of their project and outcomes linked to the REPF guidance.
- Applicants agree to comply with the REPF and UKSPF marketing and branding guidelines linked to their project
- Any grant money awarded, must be repaid within 1 year of the payment if:
 - The applicant removes the materials or equipment within 12 months of receiving the grant (regardless of whether the applicant moves property)
 - The applicant does not maintain the asset(s) during the 12 months after receiving the grant

- Works are undertaken without obtaining the relevant permissions or licences as needed
- The works are not undertaken

Rural Investment Grant Details

The intention of this grant is to facilitate projects at commercial sites in rural areas of the Ashford Borough. This grant aims to support the creation and uptake of startup space for food and drink producers, hospitality or tourism businesses or businesses in sectors supporting these industries. Additionally the grant also aims to support projects that will help tackle the last-mile challenge and increase the number of visitors to rural hospitality or tourism destinations.

Eligibility Criteria

1. The applicant is a commercial entity registered in the Ashford Borough. This includes but is not limited to, micro, small and medium businesses, social enterprises or Community Interest Companies (CIC).
2. The subject commercial site must be located within the designated Rural area [as defined under 'Rural England Prosperity Fund' by the Department for Environmental and Rural Affairs \(Defra\)](#). Where the site or the wider land crosses across the designated area the Council reserves the right to assess these on a case by case basis. See Appendix A.
3. The business can demonstrate the need and the expected benefits of the works proposed.
4. Only capital projects for business purposes are eligible.
5. Applications from non-commercial entities may be considered subject to the proposal clearly benefitting commercial businesses directly.

What will the funding help cover

Through this grant, Ashford Borough Council will support the creation of commercial spaces aimed at startups and projects aimed at tackling the last mile challenge.

Examples of capital projects that the grant could support include:

- Construction of new incubator space for food or drink production
- Repurposing vacant or underused commercial premises to establish an outlet for local produce
- Establishing a transport link between key hubs and rural visitor destinations, such as one of the area's vineyards

Works that may require Planning Applications (such as Listed Building Consent, Advertising Consent or similar) can be considered. Applicants will need to submit their Planning Application, if required, before submitting the grant application.

What is not covered by the funding

Due to the capital nature of the Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF), some costs associated with these projects may not be eligible for this grant. The applicant will need to show these costs have been considered and they are able to fund these separately. These include but are not limited to:

- Professional fees such as Planning or Legal fees

- Revenue costs such as running costs, subscriptions, licences or promotional activity
- Insurances and ongoing maintenance costs
- Applicant's admin costs

Costs that are not linked to business-related projects or items Where second hand equipment is being purchased, the grant scheme will not fund elements that cannot demonstrate they have a reasonable useful life remaining.

Levels of Grant

Applicants are required to provide at least three fully costed quotes of the works being proposed. The assessment will consider this and, if successful, applicants will receive a grant equivalent to 80% of the cost of works. The maximum level of grant allowed under this scheme is £10,000.

In exceptional circumstances the council reserves the right to award a higher level of grant where this may be necessary and where there is supporting and significant additional evidence have been submitted.

Information and evidence needed for application

- A completed application form
- Evidence that:
 - The applicant is the freeholder or leaseholder or where written consent from the site owner to carry out the work, has been obtained and submitted
 - The applicant has the funds available for their share of the project costs (20%)
 - The applicant should demonstrate they have considered the Planning guidance in relation to their project and have submitted a Planning Application where necessary
- For projects costing up to £3,123 one fully costed quote for the works is necessary. For projects costing more than this, three fully costed quotes will be necessary.
- Recent photos of the site, clearly showing the areas the project will address
- Details of any grants or funding received from a public authority in the previous three years
- Any further information or evidence required or which the applicant considers relevant

Monitoring and Assurances

The grant will be paid to successful applicants once conditions are met such as (but not limited to):

- The works proposed are due to start imminently and be completed in a reasonable time
- Any permissions such as Planning Permission have been successfully obtained

The condition of payment for this grant will be included in the decision notification sent to the applicant and is discretionary (to be applied on a case by case basis). For grant applications requiring a Planning Application, the grant can only be paid if Planning Permission has been received by the applicant.

The council reserves the right to attend the site to monitor the progress of work until the expected end date detailed in the applicant's proposal. The council has the discretion to reclaim the grant funding if the conditions are not met within a reasonable time.

Terms and Conditions

- Quotes for the work must be provided
- Grant applications (and relevant Planning Applications) must be made before work takes place
- Our staff must be allowed to inspect the works and see all relevant documentation
- It is the responsibility of applicants to comply with all relevant regulations and legislation
- It is the responsibility of applicants to check and confirm whether they comply with the Subsidy Control requirements (formerly State Aid)
- Applicants agree to report quarterly to the council on progress of their project and outcomes linked to the REPF guidance.
- Applicants agree to comply with the REPF and UKSPF marketing and branding guidelines linked to their project
- Any grant money awarded, must be repaid if:
 - The applicant removes the materials or equipment within 3 years of receiving the grant (regardless of whether the applicant moves property)
 - The applicant does not maintain the asset(s) during the 3 years after receiving the grant
 - Works are undertaken without obtaining the relevant permissions or licences as needed
 - The works are not undertaken

Subsidy Control (formerly State Aid)

A subsidy is where a public authority such as a Local Authority provides support to an enterprise that gives them an economic advantage, meaning equivalent support could not have been obtained on commercial terms.

On 4 January 2023, the UK's new subsidy control regime came into force, implementing a new subsidy regulation framework designed for the post-Brexit era. Underpinned by the [Subsidy Control Act 2022](#) (the "Act"), related statutory instruments and government guidance, the new regime aims to grant public authorities the power to design and award subsidies in an agile way while complying with the UK's international commitments on subsidy control.

For smaller value subsidy awards, Minimal Financial Assistance (MFA) allows financial assistance of up to a maximum limit of £315,000 to be made to a single enterprise within a rolling period of three financial years (consisting of the current financial year and the two previous financial years), without the need to comply with the majority of the subsidy control requirements.

However, MFA requires a written declaration from the beneficiary confirming that the limit has not been exceeded before the subsidy can be awarded. This effectively mirrors the historic EU De Minimis regime but sets the threshold at a fixed sterling amount and at a higher level than previously.

Applicants will therefore be required to provide information and a declaration in relation to subsidies they may have received in the previous three years.

Exclusions to these grant schemes

- For the avoidance of doubt, businesses that are in administration, insolvent or where a striking-off notice has been made, are not eligible for funding under this scheme.
- Projects or work that has already been undertaken will not be eligible. This funding is not retrospective.
- Projects or works that have already been carried out before the submission of a grant application
- Businesses that have already received grant payments that equal the maximum permitted levels of subsidy will not be eligible to receive funding. (See Subsidy Control section above)
- Project proposals that have already received, or are eligible to apply for, funding from Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) are not eligible.
- Businesses or organisations that have already received funding from another REPF funded grant programme, or projects that are eligible for another REPF grant programme, as administered by Ashford Borough Council, will not be eligible for this scheme. See Appendix B for other REPF programmes administered by Ashford Borough Council.
- Sites that are located outside of the designated Rural area as defined by Defra for the purposes of this funding. See Appendix A.
- This funding should not be used as a wage support mechanism or for revenue costs such as ongoing maintenance or utilities costs or contributing to VAT costs where applicable.
- This funding cannot be used to pay for costs directly to Ashford Borough Council (for example Planning applications) or for significant work to the Council's land/property that falls within a schedule of maintenance and for which the council is responsible as owner.

Decisions

The funding available for these grant schemes is very limited and the council will likely need to prioritise applications to provide best value for money. Decisions will be taken by a panel on a monthly basis. Each round of decisions will prioritise eligible applications based on the impact of their project as well as the deliverability of their proposal.

Applications will only be taken forward to be decided where all the relevant information and evidence has been submitted by the applicant. The decision to award any grants under this scheme will be taken by a panel chaired by the Head of Economic Development. The decision reached by the panel will be final and the council will not consider any appeals submitted. Applicants will subsequently be notified of the outcome of their application. For grant applications requiring Planning, the decision whether to award a grant will be dependent on the approval of Planning Permission. For grant applications during this period that do not require Planning Permission, the decision will be dependent on the content and evidence included in the grant application.

In exceptional circumstances the council reserves the right to accept applications that may not meet all the criteria set out in this policy, where it can be shown that the impact of that proposal would have an exceptionally positive and wider reaching impact.

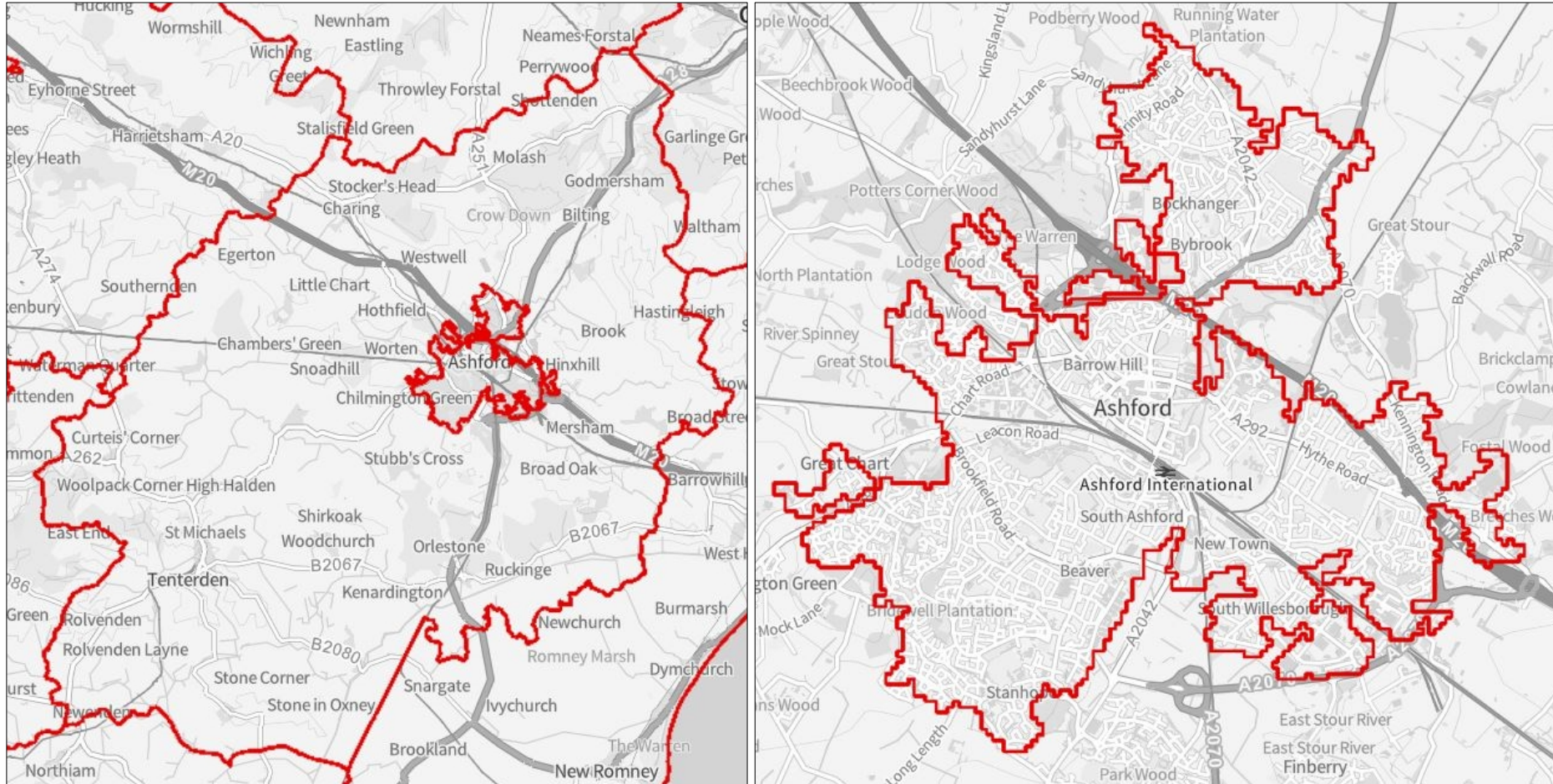
Due to its very limited nature, once the funding is completely allocated there will be no further applications or grants available to interested businesses.

Queries

All enquiries about this grant funding and this policy should contact prosperity.funding@ashford.gov.uk.

Appendix A

Ashford Rural Place and Provenance Grants – Maps



Eligible areas: the areas outside the Ashford Urban Area. An interactive map is available on the Defra website [here](#). In the table of contents please choose Administrative Geographies → Other Administrative Boundaries → Rural England Prosperity Fund)

Appendix B

Ashford REPF Programmes and other Defra Funding

Applicants that have received or are eligible for any of the funds listed below (and any other Defra funding not listed) will not be eligible.

Ashford REPF Programmes

- Rural Electric Vehicle Charging Point rollout
- Rural Community Amenities Grants
- Rural Green Business Grants

Defra Funding includes:

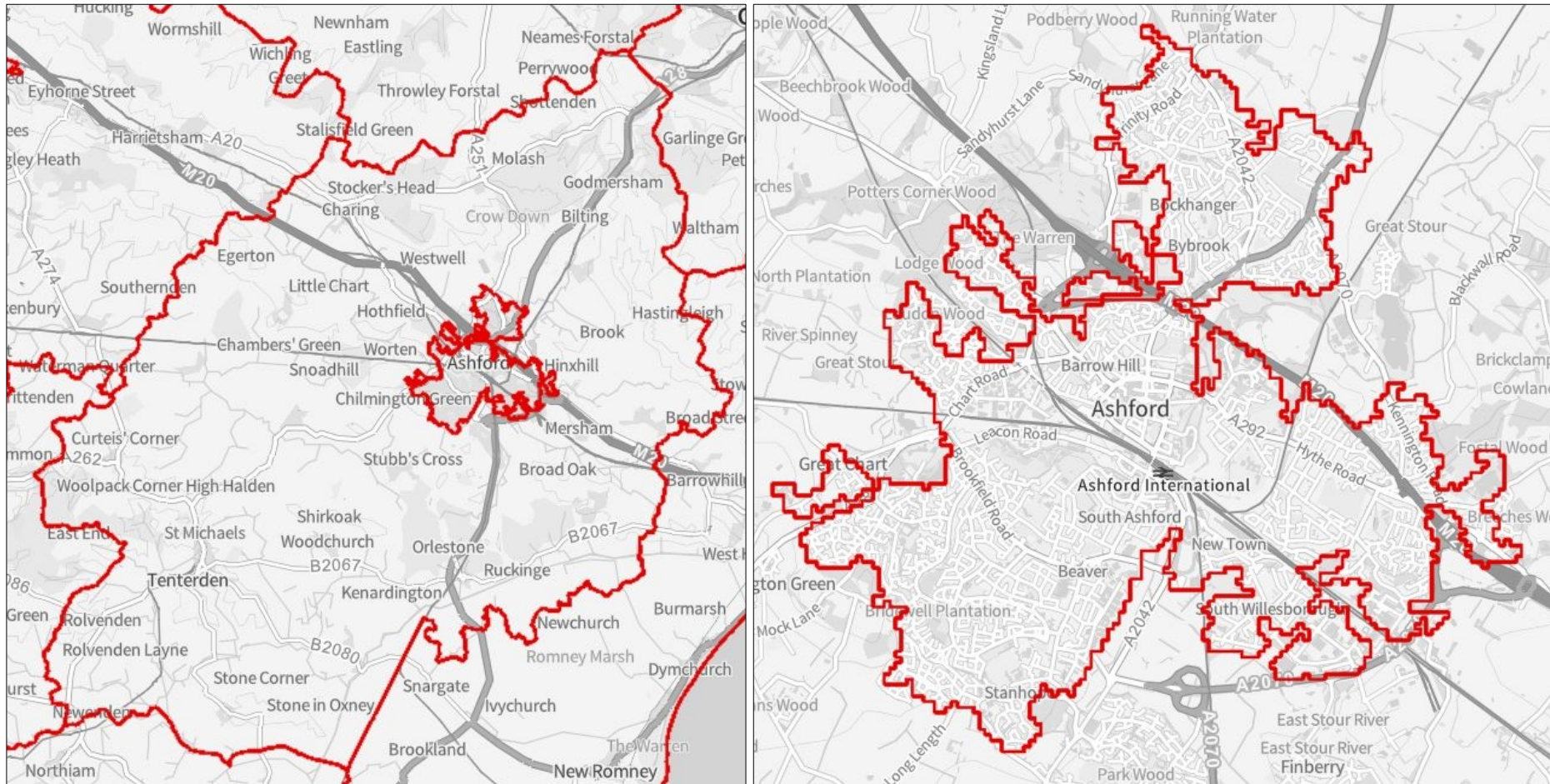
- Sustainable Farming Incentive
- Countryside Stewardship
- Landscape Recovery
- SFI Offers
- Species Survival Fund (via Heritage Fund)
- Farming in Protected Landscapes
- Calf Housing for Health and Welfare Grant
- England Woodland Creation Grant
- Woodland Creation Planning Grant
- Tree Health Pilot scheme 2023
- Farming Investment Fund
- Water Management Grant
- Slurry Infrastructure Grant
- Adding Value Grant
- Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) (including delinked payments)

Appendix C

Summary of Rural Place and Provenance Grants Scheme

	Rural Boost Grant	Rural Investment Grant
Aim	Support productivity and business growth to increase the sustainability of rural businesses in eligible sectors	Create startup spaces for local producers or to showcase local produce and tackle 'last mile' challenge to generate more visitor numbers in rural destinations
Sectors	Food and Drink production, Hospitality, Tourism	Food and Drink production, Hospitality, Tourism
Eligibility	Ashford Borough based organisations where projects are based in Rural areas, that can't be funded by other Defra/REPF grants.	Ashford Borough based organisations where projects are based in Rural areas, that can't be funded by other Defra/REPF grants.
Eligible Works	Capital purchases or projects that will boost productivity and support growth	Capital projects that will support startup producers and projects that will lead to higher visitor numbers in rural destinations
Grant Value	80% of costs with grants at between £500 and £3,000	80% of costs with grants at between £3,000 and £10,000
Quotes	For projects costing £3,123 one quote is necessary. For projects costing more, three quotes are necessary.	Three quotes are necessary.
Example Projects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New commercial ovens for a rural bakery • New signage or interpretation boards for a tourism venue • Purchase and installation of new IT or epos equipment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Construction of new incubator space for food or drink production • Repurposing vacant or underused commercial premises to establish an outlet for local produce • Establishing a transport link between key hubs and rural visitor destinations, such as one of the area's vineyards

Appendix 4



Eligible areas: the areas outside the Ashford Urban Area. An interactive map is available on the Defra website [here](#).

Appendix 5

Summary of the UKSPF and REPF funds spent in 2022-23 and allocated for 2023-24. Unspent funding has been included in the 2023-24 allocation above.

Project	2022-23		2023-24		2024-25	
	Capital (spent)	Revenue (spent)	Capital	Revenue	Capital	Revenue
Ashford Town Centre Improvements	£25,000	£4,410	£46,531	£55,125	£84,304	£63,752
One You Kent Outreach	£0	£0	£0	£56,650	£0	£87,137
Youth Crime Prevention Programme	£0	£16,560	£0	£50,000	£0	£50,000
UKSPF Community Amenities Grants	£0	£0	£30,000	£0	£50,000	£0
Ashford and Tenterden Visitor Economy Programme	£0	£0	£0	£38,224	£0	£18,159
Ashford Borough VCSE Support Programme	£0	£0	£0	£25,000	£0	£25,000
People and Skills					£0	£250,000
REPF Community Amenities Grants			£37,532		£112,595	
Rural Green Business Grants			£42,532		£127,595	
Rural EV Charging Points Grants			£42,532		£127,595	
Rural Place and Provenance Grants			£25,782		£77,345	
UKSPF Management		£4,518		£18,071		£18,071