

RURAL ENGLAND PROSPERITY FUND  
2025-2026

**Winchester District Rural England Prosperity Fund**  
**Guidance 2025-26**

This guidance note provides details for applicants interested in apply for funding under the one year extension to the **Winchester District Rural England Prosperity Fund**.

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**About the Rural England Prosperity Fund**

Prospectus: [Rural England Prosperity Fund: prospectus - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/118111/rural-england-prosperity-fund-prospectus-2025-26.pdf)

Government created the Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF) to supplement the UK Shared Prosperity Fund because “rural areas often face specific challenges” including:

- lower productivity rates
- poorer connectivity
- poorer access to key services.

The REPF funds **capital** projects for small businesses and community infrastructure. One of its principal aims is to support new and existing rural businesses in the development of products and facilities. Another is to create or improve assets and services that benefit the community and the local economy. Farm businesses are eligible for this fund if their project represents a true departure from their core activity (e.g. campsites, rural accommodation, event spaces etc). Where a project constitutes an enhancement to traditional farming practices, such as equipment that improves productivity, it might be possible to fund this through other government programmes. More information on funding available from DEFRA can be found on the government website: [Funding for farmers, growers and land managers - GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/funding-for-farmers-growers-and-land-managers)

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REPF grants must be used for **capital** projects and spent on lasting assets such as buildings or equipment. All projects must account for the ongoing maintenance costs and responsibility for this will remain with the asset owner. No asset liability shall be transferred to the council because of any grant funding.

Projects must be in a rural areas and for REPF purposes, rural areas are defined as:

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

**This means that the city centre (town wards) is excluded from this fund as well as areas around Whiteley**

To see whether you are located within an eligible area for REPF, open the link to [DEFRA's Magic Map](#) and follow the instructions below:

- From the options at the top right, select "Maps"
- From the drop down menu, select "Interactive Map"
- From the column to the left, select the first icon "Map Layers"
- Select "Administrative Geographies" and display options
- Select "Other Administrative Boundaries" and display options
- Select "Rural England Prosperity Fund"
- Search for the location by entering the postcode within the search bar (top left of page) or manually zoom in on a location
- You will find a toolbar of icons above the map. Select the 'Identify' icon and click on the location of your project on the map. A pop-up box will appear notifying you if the area is considered rural for the purposes of REPF

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**Initial information**

The Rural Fund is integrated into the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) which supports productivity and prosperity in places that need it most. The Rural England Prosperity Fund is a top-up to UKSPF allocations. It supports activities that specifically address the particular challenges rural areas face. It is complementary to funding used to support rural areas under the UKSPF.

We have received an allocation of £223,489 for 2025/2026

We particularly welcome applications for grant awards in the £25,000 to £50,000 range but we are open to requests for smaller or larger sums and encourage you to contact [prosperity@winchester.gov.uk](mailto:prosperity@winchester.gov.uk) for a preliminary discussion, regardless of the size of your project.

**Opening date: Tuesday 22 April 2025 at 3pm**

**Closing date: Wednesday 11 June at 9am**

**Applicants notified: July 2025**

**All grant funding to be spent by: 28 February 2026**

- Any enquiries regarding the fund or submission of an application should be directed to our economy team at [prosperity@winchester.gov.uk](mailto:prosperity@winchester.gov.uk) with the name of your business and the grant you are applying for in the subject line
- This is a competitive fund and applications will be assessed against the published evaluation criteria provided in this guidance note.
- Only one application can be made per organisation, per year.
- We will prioritise applications from businesses and organisations that have not been funded under previous rounds (from 2022 to 2025) of this funding programme.

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**Investment priorities, themes and sub-themes**

The Rural England Prosperity Fund supports two government priorities.

**Supporting local business:**

- advice and support to business

**Communities and place:**

- thriving places:
  - development of the visitor economy
- healthy, safe and inclusive communities:
  - inclusive
  - healthy

This infographic summarises the themes and interventions under each priority.

Priority	Theme	Subtheme	Intervention
Supporting Local Business	Support for Business	Advice and support to business  	Growing the local social economy and supporting innovation
			Small scale investment in micro and small enterprises in rural areas
Communities and Place	Thriving Places	Development of the visitor economy  	The development and promotion of the visitor economy
			Existing cultural, historic and heritage institutions that make up the local heritage offer
			Local arts, cultural, heritage and creative activities
	Healthy, Safe and Inclusive Communities	Inclusive: Bringing communities together, tackling homelessness.  	Investment in capacity building and infrastructure support for local civil society and community groups
			Rural circular economy projects
			Impactful volunteering and social action projects to develop social and human capital
			Investment and support for digital infrastructure for local community facilities
		Healthy: Improve health and wellbeing  	Creation of and improvements to local rural green spaces
			Active travel enhancements in the local area

 Kickstart Economic Growth
  Break Down Barriers to Opportunity
  Build an NHS fit for the future

## RURAL ENGLAND PROSPERITY FUND 2025-2026

We are looking for businesses and not-for-profit organisations, working on projects that meet at least one of themes reflected in the table above and detailed below. We have indicated the amount of funding nominally allocated for each theme, but reserve the right to adjust this based on the demand from project applications.

### **Supporting local businesses** - £120,000 minimum provision (around 55% of available fund)

We are looking for projects that help businesses to grow by becoming more productive, sustainable and/or digital. Examples could involve initiatives that:

- Provide business advice and support activities, workshops etc. that target a specific sectors, productivity improvement, resource or opportunity issues.
- Offer start up support and growth advice for creative businesses, entrepreneurs and freelancers.
- Improve business premises through energy efficiency/generation and or digital connectivity.
- Support land-based businesses and/or farmers to diversify into new areas of activity.

### **Communities and place** – £100,000 minimum provision (around 45% of available fund)

In this theme, we particularly welcome projects that tackle isolation by bringing communities together, build community cohesion and support those most in need as well as those that improve our high streets and support the development of the visitor economy.

Projects should seek to deliver outcomes that:

Thriving places:

Develop the Visitor Economy:

- Encourage visitors to the district, especially if they are using sustainable transport to support the viability of our visitor economy assets.
- Promote and develop our unique cultural, heritage and natural environment assets across the district.
- Increase the accessibility of attractions so a wider range of people can visit.
- Activities and facilities that keep our town centres lively and attractive.
- Revitalise our street markets and support local festivals.

Healthy, safe and inclusive communities:

Inclusive:

- Improve and broaden the use of community centres, village halls and other buildings that advance community cohesion, especially where they improve digital connectivity and introduce energy efficient measures.
- Reduces and reuses waste e.g. a Scarpe store, Repair Café or Library of tools and equipment that encourages residents to loan, donate or share resources.
- Volunteering and engagement in local life that builds life skills and reduces isolation.

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Healthy:

- Improve health and wellbeing through increased participation in physical activities.
- Increase access to green and open spaces.
- Improve community safety.
- Involve local food production and healthy nutrition initiatives.

**Projects can cover more than one of the themes or sub-themes outlined above – for example: developing the visitor economy through business support.**

**Eligibility - Who can apply**

Individuals may not apply unless they are sole traders and can demonstrate that they run a business or plan to do so. We may ask for a business plan that demonstrates market demand.

Any organisation with legal status can receive funding. This may include:

- local authorities / Parish Councils,
- public sector organisations,
- higher and further education institutions,
- private sector companies,
- registered charities and community interest companies limited by guarantee.

Organisations based outside the Winchester district can apply but all project activity, beneficiaries and outcomes must be within the district.

Businesses are required to match fund their project as set out here:

<b>Size of business</b>	<b>Description/criteria</b>	<b>Match funding required *</b>
Sole trader / freelancer	A self-employed person who owns and runs their own business as an individual.	None
Social enterprise	A business with specific social objectives among its primary purpose	
Community interest company	A special type of limited company that exists to benefit the community rather than private shareholders	
Under the Companies Act 2006 a business must satisfy two or more of the following requirements:		
Micro business	Turnover: not more than £632,000 Balance sheet total: not more than £316,000 Number of employees: a headcount of staff of not more than 10	10%
Small business	Turnover: not more than £10.2 million Balance sheet total: not more than £5.1million Number of employees: a headcount of staff of less than 50	25%
Medium business	Turnover: not more than £36 million Balance sheet total: not more than £18 million Number of employees: a headcount of staff of less than 250	50%

\* We will accept revenue as a match funding contribution

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What we are unable to fund:

We are not able to fund projects that are or could be supported through the following Defra funds:

- The Farming in Protected Landscapes Programme
- The Farming Investment Fund
- The Platinum Jubilee Village Hall Improvement Grant Fund

The following are ineligible for funding:

<u>Organisations</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organisations whose main objective is to raise funds for other charitable organisations</li> <li>• Political organisations</li> </ul>
<u>Activities</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Local or national appeals and fundraising activities</li> <li>• Activities which are of a wholly and exclusively political or religious nature, or organisations supporting political activism</li> <li>• Payments for activities of a party political or exclusively religious nature</li> <li>• Paid for lobbying, entertaining, petitioning or challenging decisions, which means using the Fund to lobby (via an external firm or in-house staff) in order to undertake activities intended to influence or attempt to influence Parliament, government or political activity including the receipt of UKSPF funding; or attempting to influence legislative or regulatory action</li> <li>• VAT reclaimable from HMRC</li> <li>• Gifts, or payments for gifts or donations</li> <li>• Statutory fines, criminal fines or penalties</li> <li>• Payments for works or activities which the lead local authority, project deliverer, end beneficiary, or any member of their partnership has a statutory duty to undertake, or that are fully funded by other sources</li> <li>• Contingencies and contingent liabilities</li> <li>• Dividends</li> <li>• Bad debts, costs resulting from the deferral of payments to creditors, or winding up a company</li> <li>• Expenses in respect of litigation, unfair dismissal or other compensation</li> <li>• Costs incurred by individuals in setting up and contributing towards private pension schemes</li> </ul>

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### Subsidy Control

You are required to consider the UK Subsidy Control Scheme as part of your application. [UK subsidy control regime - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/uk-subsidy-control-regime)

### Financial Sustainability

Applicants must be able to demonstrate the financial sustainability of their organisation. The council has the right to withdraw any offer of grant aid if, on scrutiny, it becomes apparent that the organisation is not financially sustainable.

To this end the council will undertake financial due diligence by carrying out a Dunn & Bradstreet check on the organisation making the application.

### Planning permissions and licences

If your project involves the development of land or buildings, including the refurbishment of premises, it is likely that it may require permission. You can find out if your project requires planning permission please contact our planning team [here](#).

The process of applying for planning consent can be lengthy and might affect your ability to complete your project by the end of February 2026. If your project requires planning consent, please do not apply for any grant under the UK Shared Prosperity / Rural England Funds until consent is granted. Where the project does not require planning consent we will need you to provide written confirmation from our planning team that you do not require permission.

### Policies and Insurances

Organisations should have the relevant policies and permissions in place in order to operate, deliver projects and or provide their service. Where relevant, these may include:

- a Adequate Third Party Public Liability and Employers' Liability Insurance.
- b Data Protection Policy
- c Conflict of Interest Policy
- d Antislavery Policy
- e Anti-fraud Policy
- f Environmental Policy
- g Equality and Diversity Policy
- h Health and Safety Policy
- i Volunteer Policy
- j Safeguarding Policy

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If you have these policies, please upload them with your application. If you do not have one of these policies in place, we ask you to explain why, or a date by which you commit to introducing the policy.

Organisations working with children, young people or vulnerable adults must have a robust protection policy in place and ensure that all active staff and volunteers have undertaken a DBS check.

### **Delivery timeline**

Activity can start once a signed funding agreement is in place. We anticipate that this is likely to be July 2025. We cannot retrospectively fund work that has taken place. **All financial project activity must end by 28 February 2026.** We reserve the right to amend this date if for example the government makes changes to the UKSPF and or REPF programme.

### **Submitting your application**

Applications should be made via the official application form and submitted by the agreed deadline found [on our website](#).

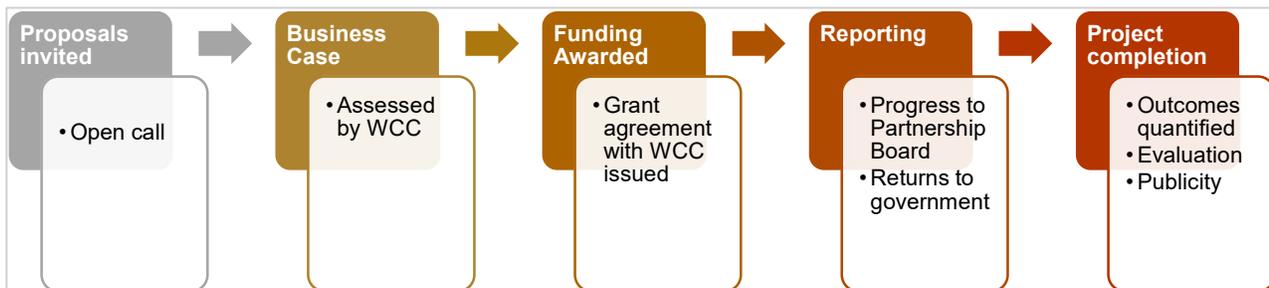
We use an online system called Flexigrant to manage the grant application process. You will need to register with Flexigrant if you have not made a previous application with Winchester City Council. Guidance is available alongside the questions, but if you require any additional support please contact [prosperity@winchester.gov.uk](mailto:prosperity@winchester.gov.uk).

### **Evaluation and grant award process**

#### Grants (investment funding) process for project investments

Proposal Invited

- Project £24,999 – Simplified business case application
- Projects £25,000+ Detailed business case application



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Grant (investment funding) eligibility and award criteria

This is a competitive fund and each application will be assessed and scored against the grant eligibility and criteria by a panel of officers.

**When your application is submitted, to enable the council to assess it fully, all sections must be completed with all the information you wish considered together with all the documents requested.** There will not be a further opportunity to provide additional details.

There are a number of pass or fail questions in the application form. If any of these are scored as a fail, the application will not be considered any further. In addition to these the application will be tested against the criteria outlined below and considered either acceptable or unacceptable. In the instance that the assessment is deemed unacceptable the application will not be considered any further.

All applicants will be advised of the outcome in writing. The council's decisions with regards to funding are final and no appeals process is available.

Successful applicants will be required to sign a grant funding agreement with Winchester City Council.

Applicants must be ready to start delivery immediately after signing the funding agreement. Please do not start your project or commit to any expenditure before this is signed.

All applications will be assessed and evaluated using a consistent approach and scored against the criteria set out below.

Assessment area	Responses to the following questions will be assessed	Scoring weighting
Achievement of fund priorities, outputs and outcomes	4.1 project details 4.2 project impacts <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• beneficiaries</li> <li>• equality and diversity</li> <li>• sustainability</li> </ul> 4.3 outputs and outcomes	50%
Deliverability	4.4 project delivery <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• dates and milestones</li> <li>• experience and capacity</li> <li>• risks</li> </ul>	20%
Monitoring and Evaluation	4.5 monitoring and evaluation	10%
Funding	5.1 project costs 5.1 finance plan <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• value for money &amp; affordability</li> </ul>	20%

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<b>Score</b>	Each assessment area will be scored in accordance with the following scoring model.
<b>5 – Excellent</b>	The response exceeds the required standard, answers the area of assessment with precision and relevance, and adds value and innovation as appropriate. Exceptional demonstration by the applicant of the relevant ability, understanding, skills, and quality measures required to provide meet the requirements of the fund. Strong evidence to support the proposal is provided, where appropriate.
<b>4 – Good</b>	The response meets the required standard, answers the areas of assessment fully and with relevance. Good demonstration by the applicant of the relevant ability, understanding, skills, and quality measures required to meet the requirements of the fund. Good evidence to support the proposal, where appropriate.
<b>3 – Satisfactory</b>	The response meets the minimum required standard in an acceptable level of detail. Satisfactory demonstration by the applicant of the relevant ability, understanding, skills and quality measures required to meet the requirements of the fund. Standard or generic evidence is provided to support the proposal, where appropriate.
<b>2 – Minor Reservations</b>	The response partially meets the minimum required standard and relevance but with some detail missing or not answered. Contains minor shortcomings in the demonstration by the applicant of the relevant ability, understanding, skills and quality measures required to deliver the requirements of the fund. Limited evidence is provided to support the response, where appropriate.
<b>1 – Serious Reservations</b>	The response fails to meet the minimum required standard. Inadequate detail is provided, which is not relevant to the requirements of the area of assessment or there are significant omissions meaning there are considerable reservations of the applicant’s relevant ability, understanding, skills, and quality measures required to meet the requirements of the fund. Little or no evidence to support the response is provided and raises many concerns.
<b>0 – no score – Fail</b>	<b>Applications that ‘Fail’ will not be considered further</b> No response or information is provided to allow proper evaluation, ability is not evidenced.

**The council reserves the right to reject the application entirely if it receives scores of ‘2 - minor reservations’ or ‘1’ – serious reservations’.**

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**Payments**

The grant will be paid to you in arrears upon receipt of proof of defrayal (payments) and an end of project report including outcomes and outputs achieved. This will all be managed through the same online system that manages your application. Claims can be made as soon as eligible expenditure is incurred, with a maximum of three staged payments.

**Reporting requirements**

Applicants must ensure that governance is in place to achieve the reporting requirements of the fund, including expenditure, outputs and outcomes. Applicants will be expected to submit reports when they make claims. Indicative (flexible) dates for these are as follows:

15 August 2025

15 November 2025

15 February 2026

28 February 2026 (end of project report)

**Publicity**

Applicants must adhere to the published branding and marketing requirements of UK Shared Prosperity Fund which will be included in contract information.

**Procurement**

All grant spend must follow the below procurement guidance. Any costs not following this guidance will not be permitted.

<b>Value of contract</b>	<b>Minimum procedure</b>	
£0 - £2,499	Direct award	Obtain single verbal or written quotation, or use suitable framework agreement
£2,500 - £24,999	3 written quotes or prices sought from relevant suppliers of goods, works and / or services	Determine the evaluation criteria and model Invite a minimum of three written quotations
Over £25,000	Formal tender process	Formal competitive tenders have been invited by Public Invitation to Tender (Open Tender)