

Invest West Kent



West Kent Rural Grants

Funded by UK Government through the Rural England Prosperity Fund

Administered by Sevenoaks District Council
in partnership with Tonbridge and Malling and Tunbridge Wells Borough Councils

Guidance for applications 2025-26



**Funded by
UK Government**



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1 Introduction

- 1.1. The purpose of these guidance notes is to help you through the application process. Please read the guidance; you will be asked to confirm that you have read and understood the guidance prior to completing the application form. If you have any questions, please contact ruralgrants@sevenoaks.gov.uk.
- 1.2. This guidance, the application form and a map of eligible rural areas as defined by Defra can be viewed on our [West Kent Rural Grants webpage](#).
- 1.3. This is a rolling call for applications, this means there is no deadline.
- 1.4. **Please note:** once all funding has been allocated, this programme will close.

2 What is the West Kent Rural Grants scheme?

- 2.1 This is a **capital** only grant scheme for rural businesses and community organisations in Sevenoaks District Council, Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council and Tunbridge Wells Borough Council local authority areas, known as West Kent.
- 2.2 The scheme is competitive and is only open to those in eligible areas as defined by Defra. Being in an eligible area as defined by Defra or meeting the scheme's criteria **does not** automatically entitle you to a grant award. The scheme is competitive, awards are made at the Panel's discretion and the Panel's decision is final.
- 2.3 It aims to provide capital in order to fund the adoption of new technologies and processes for businesses, and the improvement or creation of community assets.
- 2.4 Grants will range from a minimum of £5,000 to a maximum of £20,000.
- 2.5 The scheme is funded by UK Government through the Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF), which supports the missions of the Government's Plan for Change. You can find the REPF prospectus at [REPF.gov.uk](https://www.repf.gov.uk).
- 2.6 The REPF has two investment priorities:
 - supporting local business
 - supporting community and place

2.7 Specific aims include:

Support for new and existing rural businesses to develop new products and facilities that will be of wider benefit to the local economy.

Support for new and improved community infrastructure, providing essential community services and assets for local people and businesses to benefit the local economy

3 Eligibility: Who can apply?

3.1 This scheme only covers businesses and community organisations within eligible areas of Sevenoaks District Council; Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council; and Tunbridge Wells Borough Council local authority areas. Please [check your council](#).

3.2 Organisations that are eligible to apply for this fund include:

- sole traders
- CIC / social enterprises
- limited companies
- business partnerships
- Community Interest Organisations (CIO)
- community, voluntary or business groups
- registered charities
- village hall/recreation ground committees
- town and parish councils

3.3 Projects must be in an area classed as rural by Defra. You can check the [Defra Magic Map](#) or download a [PDF of our eligible areas](#). Please contact ruralgrants@sevenoaks.gov.uk if you need any help using the Magic Map.

3.4 Broadly, eligible areas include:

- 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

3.5 Applications from groups of businesses/individuals seeking to improve shared facilities or communal areas are welcomed. However, a single applicant must be nominated that will bear overall responsibility for the grant, and act as the point of contact. The total grant awarded to a group will remain limited to no more than £20,000.

3.6 We cannot support applications for projects that are eligible for, or have received funding from these other Defra schemes:

- [The Farming in Protected Landscapes programme](#)
- [The Farming Investment Fund](#)
- [The Platinum Jubilee Village Hall Improvement Grant Fund](#)
- in addition, projects where there is a statutory duty to provide them cannot be supported

3.7 The scheme will not support works that have already been undertaken or any works which are started prior to a formal offer of grant funding being made; this includes placing an order. However, where planning permission is required, it is expected that this and other permissions will have been obtained ahead of the application.

4 Eligible projects

4.1 Eligible projects should meet one or more of your local authority's prioritised areas of intervention.

- small scale investment in micro and small enterprises in rural areas
- developing and promoting the visitor economy
- creation and improvements to local rural green spaces
- existing cultural, historic and heritage institutions that make up the local cultural heritage offer
- active travel enhancements in the local area
- rural circular economy projects (sustainable, repair, reuse, recycle)

4.2 In relation to the aims of the scheme, the following can be supported:

Aim 1 - Support for new and existing rural businesses to develop new products and facilities that will be of wider benefit to the local economy.

Eligible projects include:

- Equipment purchases and/or building work that increases productivity.
- Equipment purchases and/or building work that allow companies to adopt new to firm technologies or processes.
- Equipment purchases and/or building work that allow enterprises to engage in new markets.

Aim 2 - Support for new and improved community infrastructure, providing essential community services and assets for local people and businesses to benefit the local economy

Eligible projects include:

- Equipment purchases and/or building work to deliver new or improved community-led arts, cultural, heritage or creative programmes.
- Equipment purchases and/or building work that (a) creates new visitor destinations or (b) improves the visitor offer at tourism destinations.
- Equipment purchases and/or building work that improve or create new community green spaces.
- Equipment purchases and/or building work that improve or create new community amenities/facilities.

4.3 Small and micro enterprises should have no more than 50 employees

4.4 Eligible projects should be able to show how they will contribute to the priority areas outlined above. View [further details regarding the objectives, outputs and outcomes of the above interventions](#).

4.5 Proposals should also demonstrate value for money and consider how they contribute to net zero and nature recovery objectives which include:

- the UK's commitment to cut greenhouse gas emissions to net zero by 2050
- wider environmental considerations, such as resilience to natural hazards
- the [25 Year Environment Plan](#) commitments.

4.6 The application is for **capital** investment only.

4.7 Please note that all grants are discretionary and subject to the availability of funds. Once all the funding has been allocated, this programme will close.
Meeting the eligibility criteria does not automatically entitle you to a grant award.

5 How much is the scheme offering?

5.1 Grants will range from a minimum of £5,000 up to a maximum of £20,000.

5.2 Grants require you to fund a minimum of 50% of your project. There is no limit to how much of the project you fund yourself.

5.3 We may consider funding up to 80% of your project in exceptional circumstances.

5.4 What are exceptional circumstances?

- **Applicant:** must be a community group or start-up/micro-business
- **Impact of project:** must have high impact on job creation or improving quality of life for local communities
- **Proposal:** the proposed project innovative or trying something new
- **Financial:** limited ability to provide match funding (evidence required)
- **Priority Areas:** you can check if your project is in the 30% most deprived areas using the [Indices of Multiple Deprivation](#).

N.B. A minimum of four of these categories must be met.

If you think your proposal is an exceptional circumstance, you will need to submit supporting information with your application form explaining why you think your proposal should qualify as exceptional. The more categories you meet the stronger your case for exceptional circumstances will be.

It is at the discretion of local authority officers as to whether an application ultimately qualifies as having exceptional circumstances and receives a higher contribution rate.

6 What will the scheme fund?

- 6.1 Funding is only for **capital** projects. This means you must spend grants on lasting assets such as a building or equipment. In addition, grants will only be available for business or community purposes.

The scheme can fund the following:

Support for new and existing rural businesses to develop new products and facilities that will be of wider benefit to the local economy.

- Equipment purchases and/or building work that increases productivity.
- Equipment purchases and/or building work that allow companies to adopt new to firm technologies or processes.
- Equipment purchases and/or building work that allow enterprises to engage in new markets.

Support for new and improved community infrastructure, providing essential community services and assets for local people and businesses to benefit the local economy

- Equipment purchases and/or building work to deliver new or improved community-led arts, cultural, heritage or creative programmes.
- Equipment purchases and/or building work that (a) creates new visitor destinations or (b) improves the visitor offer at tourism destinations.
- Equipment purchases and/or building work that improve or create new community green spaces.
- Equipment purchases and/or building work that improve or create new community amenities/facilities.

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

- works that have already been carried out before the submission of an application
- domestic property improvements or to buy private vehicles
- revenue costs such as running costs or promotional activities
- professional fees associated with the development and delivery of the project, including planning application fees, consultancy and advisory fees
- improvements that solely aim to conform to requirements set out in the Equality Act under the duty to make reasonable adjustments
- internal improvements that have a negative effect on energy efficiency

- VAT for eligible VAT registered businesses
- Projects that are eligible for other [Defra Schemes \(see 6.1\)](#)

7 What information will the funding application ask for?

- 7.1 Please see sections 9 and 11 for application criteria and a checklist of attachments to include with your application
- 7.2 You should read the application guidance and the application form questions (found on the scheme webpage) before you start your online application. You will need to complete the online application in one session so please have your answers ready.
- 7.3 Please keep a record of your answers in a separate document as **you will not be able to save progress on the form.**
- 7.4 Please see [government subsidy regulations](#). You will be asked to confirm that you will not exceed public subsidy limits if successful in your grant application.

9 How will my application be assessed (criteria)?

- 9.1 Applications will be assessed by a panel.
- 9.2 Applications will be assessed according to the following criteria. Please consider these when filling in your application form:
 - how your project fits within your Council's interventions as listed in 4.1
 - how your project will add economic and / or community value
 - why is it needed? what difference grant aid will make when compared to what would happen without grant aid
 - supporting the project won't harm other similar local businesses and/or other similar community organisations
 - whether your project and project outcomes are deliverable
 - evidence that your project offers value for money (minimum of three quotes)
 - guarantees that work will be carried out to a high standard by a registered contractor (if applicable)

- evidence of commitment to maintain the capital investment
- the proposed project is within your local authority's eligible areas as defined by [Defra's Magic Map](#)
- can deliver the project in full with submission of final receipted invoice by 31 December 2025 to comply with government funding deadlines - please consider your timescales carefully
- financial performance: the viability of the underlying business and the proposed project
- how the project proposer has considered the environmental impact of the project and how the project contributes towards net zero
- complies with [subsidy regulations](#).

10 Who will decide whether my application is approved?

- 10.1 Applications will initially be assessed to ensure the application is complete and eligible
- 10.2 Applications of £5,000 to £20,000 will be considered by a Grants Panel consisting of:
- rural business and community representatives
 - a cabinet member or senior representative from each local authority member within Invest West Kent

11 Evidence to attach with your application

11.1 Please use this as a checklist prior to submitting your application.

- three quotes or tenders, dated within the last three months (if more than one item, this means three quotes for each item)
- any relevant photographs, maps, architect drawings, plans or specifications including specifications for machinery or equipment

11.2 Financial accounts for the applicant's business

Applicants must send copies of two years' accounts for the business or organisation applying for the grant. These must include all the following:

- title and introduction pages
- profit and loss statements
- balance sheets; and any account notes pages

New businesses that do not have accounts covering the two years required must send **one** of the following:

- draft accounts
- latest tax returns
- management accounts or
- an opening statement from an accountant that includes expected income and operating expenses

11.3 In the case of the purchase of **second-hand equipment**, please download, fill in, sign and upload the 'second-hand equipment' form found underneath the scheme guidance at www.sevenoaks.gov.uk/westkentruralgrants. This will ask for:

- the original proof of purchase
- confirmation it hasn't been bought using public funds in the last 7 years
- it meets health and safety legislation
- it has at least five years useful life remaining from the date of the final grant payment
- it doesn't cost more than the market value for new equipment

- 11.4 Tenants: If the activity involves investments in immovable assets and **the applicant is a tenant**,
- the landlord's written permission for the improvements must be obtained where this is a condition of the tenancy
 - in addition, the applicant must provide written evidence of the tenancy agreement in the form of copies of sections that show: the holding address; tenant; landlord; signatures; and for fixed term agreements, the tenancy term
 - your local authority may request to see a copy of the full tenancy agreement
- 11.5 If applicable, statement and evidence why you think your project is **exceptional**, referring to section 5 of the guidance
- 11.6 Recent bank statement (within the last three months)

12 How long will it take to make a decision on my application?

- 12.1 We aim to make a decision on your application within three weeks of a panel meeting

13 What conditions will apply to the grant?

- 13.1 Full details of the conditions that apply to the grant will be set out in the grant offer letter

Conditions include but are not limited to the following:

- 13.3 Planning and building permissions and other statutory consents and licenses must have been secured at the time of application.
- 13.4 Projects will need to engage in quarterly reporting (depending on length of project) to enable your awarding council to comply with government reporting requirements.
- 13.5 Photographs of progress and completion must be provided
- 13.6 A variety of bodies are entitled to inspect projects and project documentation upon request to the Council. As well as council officers, these include the National Audit Office and Defra. In an inspection, they'll check that projects meet all terms, conditions and timings from the grant funding agreement.

- 13.7 Projects must agree to publicity and branding guidelines issued by the government, this may include displaying a plaque; [please view the Government branding guidelines.](#)
- 13.8 [Applicants will need to confirm that in receiving the grant they are compliant with Minimal Financial Assistance \(MFA\) regulations.](#)
- 13.9 Please read full terms and conditions included at the end of the application form.

14 When will the grant be paid?

- 14.1 In most instances, payment will be made in arrears on satisfactory completion of the project, with evidence of a receipted invoice and photographs showing project completion, copy of a bank statement showing the spend and re-confirmation of bank details.
- 14.2 However, in exceptional circumstances, where an applicant is unable to be paid fully in arrears, stage payments may be considered. Applicants will need to explain why they cannot be paid fully in arrears and submit an argument for 'exceptional circumstances' as set out in section 5.4.

If awarded stage payments, applicants will be expected to use their contribution (match funding) on the project prior to receiving grant payments. Evidence in the form of a receipted invoice and bank statement showing spend will be required.

Grant payments will then be staged, on production of receipted invoices, copy of bank statement showing spend and photographic evidence of progress.

- 14.4 Please note final invoices must be received no later than 31 December 2025 for the funding period

15 How do I apply?

- 15.1 First, please make sure that you have read and understood the guidance notes in their entirety. You will be asked to confirm that you have done so at the beginning of the application form.
- 15.2 Fully complete the online application form, with all required uploads / attachments and submit for consideration.
- 15.3 Applications must be complete, with all necessary information, to be considered by the panel.

- 15.4 Please contact ruralgrants@sevenoaks.gov.uk if you need any assistance accessing the application form or need any further guidance.
- 15.5 Your application is considered by the panel (in accordance with sections 9 and 10).
- 15.6 Panel dates are indicated on the scheme web page (and may be subject to change, for example if funding is fully allocated.)
www.sevenoaks.gov.uk/westkentruralgrants.
- 15.7 If approved, a formal Grant Offer Letter will be issued, with conditions.
- 15.8 If refused, the applicant will receive a letter explaining the decision.

Please see the following page for the scheme summary.

16 Summary of scheme

Key elements	Summary
Types of eligible business and community projects	Independent rural businesses, not for profit, community enterprises.
Location	Projects must be in a rural area as defined by Defra. Please check the Magic map .
Eligible Works	Funding is only for capital projects. This means you must spend grants on lasting assets such as a building or equipment. In addition, grants must be for business or community purposes only.
Grant Value	Grants of 5,000 to £20,000 with a standard grant contribution level of 50%, with an increase in very exceptional circumstances.
Quotes	A minimum of three quotes needed to demonstrate value for money (if this is not possible you will need to explain why).
Permissions / consents e.g. Planning and Building Control	Confirm whether permissions are necessary for your works.
Timeframe to deliver project	Projects must be complete by 31 December 2025 for funding to comply with government funding deadlines. Please consider your timescales carefully.
Payments	Will be released on presentation of a receipted invoice and photos of your completed project.