

RIBBLE VALLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL REPORT TO POLICY AND FINANCE COMMITTEE

meeting date: TUESDAY 20 JUNE 2023
title: RURAL ENGLAND PROSPERITY FUND (REPF)
submitted by: DIRECTOR OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND PLANNING
principal author: HASSAN DITTA – SENIOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OFFICER

1 PURPOSE

1.1 To update Members on the Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF) and seek approval for the suggested grant scheme.

1.2 Relevance to the Council's ambitions and priorities:

- Community Ambitions-
 - To sustain a strong and prosperous Ribble Valley
 - To help make people's lives safer and healthier
- Corporate Objectives –
 - To work with our partners to ensure that the infrastructure in the Ribble Valley is improved
 - To promote stronger, more confident, and more active communities throughout the borough

2 BACKGROUND

2.1 On 3rd September 2022 the Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF) was launched. This fund is complementary to the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) and is a top-up to the UKSPF available to eligible local authorities in England.

2.2 The following interventions were approved at Policy & Finance Committee on 8 November 2022 which formed the basis the addendum and steered the proposed spend for REPF;

SUPPORTING LOCAL BUSINESSES PRIORITY

Funding (capital grants) for growing the local social economy and supporting innovation. This includes:

- community businesses
- cooperatives and social enterprises
- research and development sites

This intervention corresponds to the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) intervention E26.

Funding (capital grants) for the development and promotion (both trade and consumer) of the visitor economy, such as:

- local attractions
- trails
- tourism products more generally

This intervention corresponds to the UKSPF intervention E17.

COMMUNITY AND PLACE PRIORITY

Funding (capital grants) for investment and support for digital infrastructure for local community facilities. This intervention corresponds to the UKSPF intervention E15.

Funding (capital grants) for investment in capacity building and infrastructure support for local civil society and community groups. This intervention corresponds to the UKSPF intervention E11.

Funding (capital grants) for creation of and improvements to local rural green spaces. This intervention corresponds to the UKSPF intervention E3.

Funding (capital grants) for existing cultural, historic and heritage institutions that make up the local cultural heritage offer. This intervention corresponds to the UKSPF intervention E4.

2.3 Council Officers met with the REPF Partnership Group to discuss the potential projects that would meet the interventions agreed by members and meet the funding criteria set out by Central Government. Feedback from the partnership meeting was used to form the addendum to the UKSPF Investment Plan.

2.4 Following on from the Partnership Meeting, Ribble Valley Borough Council successfully submitted an addendum to the UKSPF investment plan which has resulted in the award of £433,680 capital funding which is to be invested in rural capital projects over the next two financial years. £75,000 is available in the current financial year (2023/24) with a further £358,680 available in 2024/25.

3 PROPOSED GRANT SCHEME

3.1 Given the interventions identified and the direction given to Officers by members, a grant scheme is considered the best option to spend the funding within the timeframe of the funding programme.

3.2 The grant scheme has been devised inline with the proposed investment plan and is a similar approach that is being taken by other authorities in England who have secured REPF.

3.3 The proposed full grant criteria is attached at Appendix 1 and will be administered by Ribble Valley Council Officers.

3.4 To filter applications, there will be an initial expression of interest form (EOI) for relevant organisations to complete (Appendix 2). The Expression of Interest form will allow Officers to filter potential applications to ensure the proposed project is in line with the grant funding.

3.5 All EOI's will be presented to the UKSPF Members Working Group for consideration. Recommendations as to which projects will be supported will be brought back to this Committee. Successful applicants will then be invited to complete a full application which will follow the grant process set out in Appendix 3.

3.6 Full applications will be scored on various factors including the outputs and outcomes expected from the scheme. The outputs and outcomes have been provided and are required to be included as part of the Councils' return to Central Government (Appendix

4). Extra weighting will be given to those applicants who can demonstrate they have secured match funding.

3.7 As part of the ongoing monitoring process, applicants will provide biannual updates on progress made towards the pre-agreed outputs and outcomes. The updates will be used to complete returns to.

3.8 An additional Partnership Meeting was held on 30th May to discuss the proposed grant criteria. The grant criteria was received positively by members who attended the meeting. An additional comment was submitted regarding the lack of support for businesses.

4 RISK ASSESSMENT

4.1 The approval of this report may have the following implications:

- Resources – REPF will provide Ribble Valley Borough Council with £433,680 funding which will be spent on this programme. Grants will be paid out retrospectively (unless otherwise agreed in writing with Ribble Valley Borough Council) once it has been confirmed the scheme receiving the grant funding meets the criteria of the funding providers. Ongoing monitoring will ensure outputs and outcomes are recorded.

- Technical, Environmental and Legal – Work outlined in this report fits in with the Council's Corporate Strategy (2019-2023) Ambition 2 – to sustain a strong and prosperous Ribble Valley and Ambition 3 – to help make people's lives safer and healthier.

Legal have been consulted and their comment are incorporated into the report. Suitable agreements and assurances will be put in place in respect of administering the scheme.

- Political – N/A

- Reputation – N/A

- Equality and Diversity – work in relation to this report supports the Council's aim in delivering a sustainable local economy to the benefit of all its community.

5 RECOMMEND THAT COMMITTEE

5.1 Approve grant criteria for the REPF capital grant scheme.

5.2 Approve the grant process for the REPF capital grant scheme.

5.3 Authorise the Director of Economic Development and Planning to deliver the scheme in line with the criteria.

HASSAN DITTA
SENIOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
OFFICER

NICOLA HOPKINS
DIRECTOR OF ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT AND PLANNING

BACKGROUND PAPERS

None.

For further information please ask for Hassan Ditta, extension 4424

Appendix 1 – Grant Criteria

Ribble Valley Borough Council has been awarded £433,680 of capital funding from the Government's Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF) which is to be invested in rural capital projects over the next two financial years. £75,000 is available in the current financial year (2023/24) with a further £358,680 available in 2024/25.

Objectives of the Scheme

This grant scheme intends to improve productivity and strengthen the Borough's rural economy and rural communities by funding capital projects for small businesses and community infrastructure.

Amount of grant

Grants of up to £50,000 are available to eligible organisations. Schemes that have secured match funding of up to 50% will be scored favourably.

All successful projects applicants must have completed their capital project and spent all of the grant by 1st March 2025 at the latest.

Project Monitoring

Applicants will be required to submit to requested site visits from Ribble Valley Borough Council officers during and upon completion of the agreed project, and to provide updates on progress towards the achievement of fund/ project priorities, outputs and outcomes at timescales agreed in advance of project commencement.

Who can apply

The following organisations/ groups with legal status can apply:

- parish councils
- registered charity/community association
- charitable incorporated organisation (CIO)
- community benefit society (Bencom)
- constituted community groups
- faith groups, where the activity is not promoting religion
- public sector organisations
- higher and further education institutions

The project must be located in a Tier 1 or Tier 2 village settlement as defined in the adopted Core Strategy. A breakdown of the villages in these Tiers can be found [here](#).

Example projects

- Community energy schemes such as scaled up biomass, heat pumps or solar.
- Capital grants for sustainable kitchens in community hubs which can support food and drink entrepreneurs to get accreditation for food production
- Capital grants to establish or enhance community gardens and green spaces
- Capital grants to develop, restore or refurbish local natural, cultural and heritage assets and sites
- Improving visitor experience and accessibility such as providing all terrain wheelchairs
- Capital grants to enable the provision of venues to host creative events
- Creation/improvement of footpaths and cycle paths
- Capital grants to set up community led cafes or workshops including tools and equipment

- Capital grants to purchase equipment for local volunteering groups
- Installing EV charging points for the local community
- Installation of superfast broadband infrastructure to communities
- Retrofitting community buildings to reduce energy consumption and emissions e.g., installing insulation, double glazing etc.
- Drainage of playing fields/playing equipment (park)

We cannot support projects that have received funding from other Defra schemes in line with Government guidance. This includes:

- The Farming in Protected Landscapes Programme - funding for farmers and land managers to work in partnership with National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty bodies to deliver projects on climate, nature, people and place
- The Farming Investment Fund - grants to improve productivity and bring environmental benefits, covering 2 funds - the Farming Equipment and Technology Fund and the Farming Transformation Fund
- The Platinum Jubilee Village Hall Improvement Grant Fund - grant funding over 3 years (to 2025) to support capital improvement projects for village halls, covering extending buildings and modernising facilities. More details on how to apply will be available shortly
- We cannot support projects or costs where there is a statutory duty to provide them.

What could the local benefits of REPF investment be?

- EV Charging Points
- Visitors or locals using charging points
- Community energy projects
- Improved cycleways or paths
- Increased use of cycleways or paths from improved paths and cycleways
- Local events or activities supported
- Green or blue infrastructure created or improved
- Number of facilities supported or created
- Increased users of facilities or amenities
- Improved engagement numbers
- Volunteering numbers as a result of the support
- Reducing carbon footprint and greater access to charging points

General

- 1) Applicants must demonstrate that they support or develop community action in a way that is sustainable and contributes to local community life.
- 2) Applications will only be accepted from properly constituted organisations. A valid constitution or memorandum and articles of association must accompany all applications.
- 3) Applicants should demonstrate that they abide by the rules of their constitution, they are democratic and make efforts to involve users in a significant way in the decision making process of their organisation. The organisation must be able to demonstrate that membership of their organisation is open to all members of the community and that the organisation does not discriminate unfairly against anyone on the grounds of race, gender, creed, ethnic origin, sexual orientation, age or disability.
- 4) Applicants should demonstrate that their organisation is financially sound and well managed and that any project or proposed project is properly planned and organised. Applicants must demonstrate value for money and evidence of their own fund raising activity and ability to attract funds from other sources. Applicants should demonstrate that they have planned for the longer-term financial sustainability of their

organisation as a whole and for any specific activity or project that they are applying for, i.e. they should have a business plan.

- 5) Applications will only be considered if they include a statement showing how much an organisation has in all its bank accounts. If the organisation has significant balances and/or generates significant surpluses then a full justification for the amount of grant being sought will be required.
- 6) Applicants seeking grants will be required to submit the organisation's most recent set of accounts that have either been approved by an independent examiner, or auditor (based on your annual income levels).
- 7) The grant scheme will not normally fund the following:
 - Capital projects on which work has already started or in aid of expenditure already committed or paid.
 - Commercial organisations/businesses (including CICs).
 - Any activity that is designed to promote political party politics or influence government policies.
 - Applications from the County Council or other government agencies.
- 8) Applications should not contravene the policies and principles of this Council. Organisations receiving grant support will have to provide details as to how they will publicise the Council's support.
- 9) Applicants who have received funding from the Council should provide, if required, a year-end report to the Council showing how the grant has been used.
- 10) Applicants who receive funding from the Council agree to notify and repay the Council any unspent grant balances.
- 11) Grant funding is subject to UK subsidy control legislation and as such all applicants will be required to complete and return a subsidy declaration to be considered for the scheme.

Capital Grants

Note: Capital grants refers to buildings infrastructure or equipment with a life expectancy of not less than two years and a purchase value of not less than £1,000.

- 1) The level of grant awarded from the fund for any individual capital project will not normally exceed £50,000. The Council may review these limits under exceptional circumstances.
- 2) Premises, land or equipment in respect of which a grant is given must either be in the ownership of the applicant or secured by a long-term lease (not less than 10 years).
- 3) Applicants must demonstrate that all licences and consents have been obtained, including planning and building control approvals, and that the balance of funding is in place (or soon will be).
- 4) Applicants must demonstrate that provision has been made for ongoing running and maintenance costs once the project has been completed.
- 5) Applicants will need to provide three written estimates of building and/or purchase costs.
- 6) Capital grants will be paid in arrears and net of VAT (where applicants are required to register for VAT with HMRC), following satisfactory completion of the project and submission of receipts or invoices.

Express an interest in the REPF programme

Ribble Valley Borough Council will be inviting Expressions of Interest for the REPF grant programme from July 2023, for eligible CAPITAL projects. You will need to submit an Expression of Interest via our online form. If you are successful, you will be invited to complete a full application. Supporting evidence will be required at full application. Applications will be reviewed in order of receipt.

Outputs and outcomes will be agreed in advance of grant receipt to ensure the project funded will deliver the required investment priorities.

Appendix 2 – Expression of Interest Form

GENERAL	
1)	Name of Organisation
2)	Charity number (If applicable)
3)	Contact name
4)	Contact address
5)	Daytime telephone number
6)	E-mail address
7)	Please state the aims and objectives of your organisation.
8)	Please give a brief description and history of your organisation.
9)	How does the work of your organisation benefit the residents of Ribble Valley?
10)	Size of organisation
11)	Justification for application
12)	Please tell us how you think the proposed investment or project will positively impact the rural economy in Ribble Valley and/or contribute to Net Zero. We are looking for information on reductions in carbon footprint, energy efficiency savings, visitor numbers etc. (please note the attached spreadsheets to indicate which outcomes and outputs you expect your scheme to deliver)
REQUESTED GRANT	
13)	Purpose for which the grant is requested
14)	Is this a new application or have you been supported you previously?
15)	If previously supported please give details.
16)	Please describe who will benefit from this grant
17)	How many people will the grant benefit?
18)	Please give an indication of the number of Ribble Valley residents that will specifically be supported.
FINANCIAL INFORMATION (Please note if the amount you require is greater than £10,000, we will require a 3-year financial plan.)	

19)	Please specify the estimated level of grant you need – please note precise figures with appropriate quotations or invoices will be required at the time of application.	
20)	Total investment required: What is the total cost of your project? Please give details of any additional match funding required to complete the project. Match funding is your own capital or funds from another source available to deliver the total investment required. Proof that any additional funding is secured will be necessary at application stage. Match funding is not a requirement of REPF but schemes that have secured match funding will be scored favourably.	
21)	Please briefly give details of precisely how any capital grant award will be invested. Please note the grant can only be used for capital expenditure and revenue items such as salaries or stock are excluded.	
22)	2.REPF is subject to State subsidy regulation. Please tell us if your organisation has received any other grant funding or subsidy, including COVID-19 Grants in the last 5 years. Please supply details of any other applications for grant aid that have been made to any other organisations or other Ribble Valley Borough Council grant schemes.	
23)	Name of auditors	
24)	Address of auditors	
25)	Please give us any information you feel is important	
SUPPORTING INFORMATION		
26)	Do you have a copy of your latest audited accounts?	YES/ NO
27)	Please provide a reason for not uploading your latest audited accounts?	
28)	Do you have your organisations most recent bank statement?	YES/ NO
29)	Please provide a reason for not uploading your most recent bank statement	
30)	Do you have a 3 year financial plan?	
31)	Please provide a reason for not uploading a 3yr plan	YES/ NO
32)	Do you have a valid constitution or memorandum?	
33)	Please provide a reason for not uploading a constitution or memorandum?	

ELIGIBLE FOR GRANT FUNDING	NOT ELIGIBLE FOR GRANT FUNDING
Capital expenditure	Revenue expenditure (professional fees e.g. planning and building regulation fees)
Equipment and machinery purchase including computers but excluding vehicles	Staffing costs
Solar panels, investments in energy efficiency that will contribute towards Net Zero	Stock for resale
Building conversions or improvement/alterations (3 Quotations, plans and planning permission will be required at application)	Software licenses or franchises
Website build or Bespoke App	Marketing or advertising expenditure
Land or Property (subject to planning permission where required)	Cash flow
Digital infrastructure and broadband	Rental, Hire Purchase or other Contract hire agreements
	Rent and rates (NNDR)

OUTPUTS	E3: Creation of and improvements to local green spaces	E4: Enhancing existing cultural, historic & heritage institutions offer	E11: Capacity building & infrastructure support local groups	E15: Investment and support for digital connectivity for local community facilities	E17: Development & promotion of visitor economy
Number of businesses supported (Number of businesses)					
Number of farm businesses supported (Number of businesses)					
Number of farm diversification projects supported (Number of projects)					
Number of micro businesses supported (Number of businesses)					
Number of organisations receiving grants (Number of organisations)					
Number of facilities supported, created or installed (Number of facilities)					
Number of EV charging points (Number of charging points)					
Number of visitors or locals using charging points (Number of users)					
Number of community energy projects funded (Number of projects)					
Amount of rehabilitated land (M2)					
Number of rehabilitated premises (Number of premises)					
Amount of land made wheelchair accessible/step-free (M2)					
Amount of public realm created or improved (M2)					
Amount of green or blue space created or improved (M2)					
Number of tourism, culture or heritage assets created or improved (Number of assets)					

Number of potential entrepreneurs assisted to be enterprise ready (Number of entrepreneurs)					
Number of events/participatory programmes (Number of events/participatory programmes)					
Total length of new or improved cycle ways or foot paths (KM)					
Number of new or improved cycle ways or footpaths (Number of cycle ways or footpaths)					
Number of people reached (Number of people)					
Number of projects successfully completed (Number of projects)					

Outcome					
	E3: Creation of and improvements to local green spaces	E4: Enhancing existing cultural, historic & heritage institutions offer	E11: Capacity building & infrastructure support local groups	E15: Investment and support for digital connectivity for local community facilities	E17: Development & promotion of visitor economy
Jobs created as a result of support (Number of Full time equivalent (FTE))					
Jobs safeguarded as a result of support (Number of full time equivalent (FTE))					
Number of new enterprises created as a result of support (Number of new enterprises)					
Increased number of enterprises supported (Number of enterprises)					
Number of enterprises adopting new to the firm technologies or processes (Number of enterprises)					
Number of enterprises with improved productivity (Number of enterprises)					
Number of enterprises experiencing growth (Number of enterprises)					

Number of enterprises increasing their export capability (Number of enterprises)					
Number of enterprises increasing their turnover (Number of Enterprises)					
Increased users of facilities or amenities (Number of users)					
Improved perception of facility or infrastructure project (Number of users)					
Improved perception of facilities/amenities (Number of people)					
Improved perceived/experienced accessibility (Number of people)					
Increased footfall (Number of people)					
Increased visitor numbers (Number of people)					
Increased use of cycleways or footpaths (Number of cyclists or pedestrians)					
Improved engagement numbers (Number of people)					
Number of community-led arts, cultural, heritage and creative programmes as a result of support (Number of programmes)					
Improved perception of events (Number of people)					
Number of community-led programmes as a result of support (Number of Programmes)					
Number of volunteering opportunities created as a result of support (Number of volunteering roles created)					

Appendix 3

Grant Process

- 1.Applicants will need to arrange for an initial site visit from the Ribble Valley Borough Council Officer before completing the application form.
- 2.All applicants must complete a grant application form and provide additional documentation.
- 3.All grants are discretionary and will be assessed by a panel. The panel will consist of a minimum of 1 council officer and a nominated Working Group made up of elected members.
- 4.All applicants will receive a letter informing them of the grant decision.
- 5.This decision will be final and no further correspondence will be entered into.

The following documents must be submitted in support of the application:

- 3 x itemised quotations based on a common specification will be required for all aspects of the proposed investment (where appropriate).
- 1 x schedule of works on which the three quotations are based (where applicable).
- Layout and evaluation plans (where applicable).
- A copy of the lease for the property (where applicable)
- A letter of support from the Land (where applicable)
- A copy of the relevant planning permission (where applicable) and/or building regulations approval.
- Evidence of match funding (where applicable)

Payment of grant

- All grants will be paid retrospectively on evidence of expenditure/payment defrayed by the applicant (unless otherwise agreed in writing with Ribble Valley Borough Council)
- Only on production of evidence of payment will Ribble Valley Borough Council reimburse the applicant for the pre-agreed grant amount.
- Only payments for services/products by the applicant made **after the date of the offer letter** will be eligible. Grant will not be paid for any activity undertaken prior to the offer letter date.
- The project may not start until the grant offer, and any conditions, are accepted in writing. Otherwise, payment will not be made.

Appendix 4 – Outputs and Outcomes

Outputs

- 1.Number of businesses supported (Number of businesses)
- 2.Number of farm businesses supported (Number of businesses)
- 3.Number of farm diversification projects supported (Number of projects)
- 4.Number of micro businesses supported (Number of businesses)
- 5.Number of organisations receiving grants (Number of organisations)
- 6.Number of facilities supported, created or installed (Number of facilities)
- 7.Number of EV charging points (Number of charging points)
- 8.Number of visitors or locals using charging points (Number of users)
- 9.Number of community energy projects funded (Number of projects)
- 10.Amount of rehabilitated land (M2)
- 11.Number of rehabilitated premises (Number of premises)
- 12.Amount of land made wheelchair accessible/step-free (M2)
- 13.Amount of public realm created or improved (M2)
- 14.Amount of green or blue space created or improved (M2)
- 15.Number of tourism, culture or heritage assets created or improved (Number of assets)
- 16.Number of potential entrepreneurs assisted to be enterprise ready (Number of entrepreneurs)
- 17.Number of events/participatory programmes (Number of events/participatory programmes)
- 18.Total length of new or improved cycle ways or foot paths (KM)
- 19.Number of new or improved cycle ways or footpaths (Number of cycle ways or footpaths)
- 20.Number of people reached (Number of people)
- 21.Number of projects successfully completed (Number of projects)

Outcomes

- 1.Jobs created as a result of support (Number of Full time equivalent (FTE))
- 2.Jobs safeguarded as a result of support (Number of full time equivalent (FTE))
- 3.Number of new enterprises created as a result of support (Number of new enterprises)
- 4.Increased number of enterprises supported (Number of enterprises)
- 5.Number of enterprises adopting new to the firm technologies or processes (Number of enterprises)
- 6.Number of enterprises with improved productivity (Number of enterprises)
- 7.Number of enterprises experiencing growth (Number of enterprises)
- 8.Number of enterprises increasing their export capability (Number of enterprises)
- 9.Number of enterprises increasing their turnover (Number of Enterprises)
- 10.Increased users of facilities or amenities (Number of users)
- 11.Improved perception of facility or infrastructure project (Number of users)
- 12.Improved perception of facilities/amenities (Number of people)
- 13.Improved perceived/experienced accessibility (Number of people)
- 14.Increased footfall (Number of people)
- 15.Increased visitor numbers (Number of people)
- 16.Increased use of cycleways or footpaths (Number of cyclists or pedestrians)
- 17.Improved engagement numbers (Number of people)
- 18.Number of community-led arts, cultural, heritage and creative programmes as a result of support (Number of programmes)
- 19.Improved perception of events (Number of people)
- 20.Number of community-led programmes as a result of support (Number of Programmes)
- 21.Number of volunteering opportunities created as a result of support (Number of volunteering roles created)