

Retail Support Initiative Grant Application (Executive Decision)

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Purpose of the Report

For Members to consider the Retail Support Initiative (RSI) grant request detailed below.

Public Interest

Supporting and helping to improve the retail offer in the towns and villages across Area East.

Recommendations

1. That Members consider an award of up to £1,500 as a 22% contribution to Alex Appleton Jewellers, 13 Market Place, Wincanton, towards renovation & redecoration of the shop front; this will comprise:
 - £500 from the Community Development budget revenue element ring-fenced for the RSI
 - £1,000 from the Community Development budget, Wincanton top-up, revenue element ring-fenced for the RSI
2. That Members note the £1,000 also awarded, in respect of this application, under delegated authority, from the Retail Support Initiative budget capital element and the granting of without prejudice permission to commence work.

All awards to be subject to the following standard conditions:

- (a) The grant award may be used by SSDC for promotional/publicity purposes
- (b) Grants are paid for approved works/purchases on production of receipted invoices
- (c) Awards are subject to an interim report (within 9 months) and final report being submitted
- (d) Applicants will normally be expected to draw down the grant within 6 months of the offer
- (e) That appropriate consents are obtained
- (f) Works requiring listed building/planning consents or building regulations will be required to be signed off by the appropriate officer prior to the release of funds
- (g) If, within 3 years of a grant award, the business ceases to trade, the District Council reserves the right to reclaim the grant on the following basis: year one – 100%; year 2 – 75%, year 3 – 45%

Background

This application is being considered under the scheme's operating criteria agreed in July 2014, a copy of which is attached at Appendix 1.

Current Application

This is the first application to be considered for one of the priority properties in Wincanton and is therefore eligible for a 'top up' grant providing for a maximum funding contribution of £2,500.

Applicants to the scheme would not normally be allowed to proceed with works ahead of their grant been considered. Unfortunately, this application was received on 31 March 2015 so it fell at a time when there would not have been a committee to consider the application for approximately 10 weeks - our usual processing time would be up to five weeks depending upon the time a grant is received in relation to the date of the next committee. Officers needed to make a judgement on how best to deal with this application given that waiting for the next committee meeting would have resulted in an unreasonable delay to the works and that it related to one of the target vacant units in Wincanton. In all other respects the application met the criteria of both the basic RSI and the Wincanton 'top-up'.

The full grant requested was £2,500. Following discussion with the applicant this has been dealt with as follows:

- £1,000* awarded under delegation, in consultation with the Chairman and Ward Members
- **Exceptionally** 'without prejudice' permission was given to commence works with the remaining grant being considered at this meeting as though the works had not commenced
- £1,500 now under consideration following without prejudice permission to commence, as above.

*Although the delegated limit for this scheme is £750, the Council's Scheme of Delegation provides for officer delegation up to £1,000, this has been used in this instance

Members may wish to note that, since the introduction of the RSI, there has been only one other occasion on which 'without prejudice' permission to start has been given.

Although the timing of this application fell within purdah, advice suggested that it would have been possible to award the grant up to the end of April if it formed part of the Districtwide portfolios (providing it had not been subject of any publicity until after the election) but unfortunately Area Chairs are not afforded the same powers.

Grant details

Alex Appleton Jewellers, 13 Market Place, Wincanton
Renovation & redecoration of front including scaffold hire

- ❖ Total Project Cost – £6,820
- ❖ Amount requested – £2,500

Other funding – the remaining funding for this project will come from the businesses' own fund.

Assessment score is 77 out of a max of 100.

This figure exceeds the minimum level score (50) required for grant assistance to be considered.

Observations - Prominent unit in Wincanton Market Place in need of redecoration to improve exterior. This unit has been vacant since April 2012. The recommended grant award of £1,500, is in addition to £1,000 which was agreed under delegated terms as above.

Financial Implications

If Members choose to award this grant, the unallocated budget for Retail Support Initiative will be as follows:

	Revenue element	Capital	Wincanton 'top-up'
Unallocated budget 2015/16 as at April 2015*	£9,500	£1,212	£8,700

Corporate Priority Implications

The awarding of grants meets the following corporate aims:

To increase economic vitality and prosperity

Carbon Emissions and Climate Change Implication

This project does not cause any changes to carbon emissions.

Equality and Diversity Implications

None relating to this report.

Background Papers

None.

Retail Support Initiative

Operating criteria

Percentage contributions cannot exceed 50% of costs and no retrospective applications are eligible (i.e. in respect of works which have already been commissioned/started).

Applications over £750 will be considered by Area East Committee on a monthly basis since the Community Regeneration Sub Committee quarterly meetings ceased. Amounts up to £750 may be considered at any time as a delegated grant in consultation with the Chairman and Ward Member(s).

Grant levels:

Maximum 50% of project costs as follows:

Eligible costs:

Shop-front improvements, if they enhance the High Street

Business rates assistance – a contribution to the amount payable for new businesses (which do not compete with another business) in their first two years of trading

Exceptional projects which add to the viability of towns/villages

Process

Applications for Grants are accessed and recommendations made on the basis of a fully completed application form and two 'like for like' quotes. Self-help/DIY schemes may complete the application form and supply a project budget with supporting information.

All grant recipients must accept that the grant may be used for publicity purposes by the District Council. Payment of the grant is done retrospectively, for a completed programme of works on the basis of receipted invoices. Exceptionally officers, in consultation with the Chairman, may release partial payments where there is clear justification for doing so.

The District Council will continue to claw back grants from businesses which cease trading on the following basis: 100% in year one, 75% in year two, 45% in year three.

The existing assessment and current scoring mechanism favours businesses:

- employing more than 2 people
- in prominent places
- key rural stores/Post Offices
- retailers

The award is subject to the following standard conditions:

- The grant award may be used by SSDC for promotional/publicity purposes;
- Grants are paid for approved works/purchases on production of receipted invoices;
- Awards are subject to a summary of the benefit of the scheme being supplied;
- Applicants will normally be expected to draw down the grant within six months of the offer and if not will have to inform us of the reason(s) for the delay. If there is a valid reason, officers can provide a 6 month extension, but beyond this the grant would either be withdrawn or referred Area East Committee to be re-affirmed;
- That appropriate consents are obtained - works requiring listed building/planning consents or building regulation consent will be required to be signed off by the appropriate officer prior to the release of funds.