

Epping Forest District Council Town & Village Centres Opportunities Fund Policy 2016/17 (Draft)

We have a fantastic mix of vibrant town and village centres here in Epping Forest District. These centres are vital in providing residents with access to shops and services locally and have a broader function in contributing to the quality of life of our residents. Our town and village centres are key in providing significant local employment and injecting money into our local economy. In some cases there is also real scope to support our centres and further our local economic development by capitalising on a currently underexploited visitor economy.

The Town & Village Centres Opportunities Fund is intended to encourage partners to think creatively about how they can sustainably promote their centres and develop initiatives that have a lasting impact on their town or village centre's economy.

If you are keen to explore this opportunity but are unsure of whether your project or group will be eligible it will help to contact us about your plans. We'll be glad to help.

Purpose of the Fund:

In providing the fund we are looking for creative bids to deliver initiatives that will:

- Ensure people are aware of what our centres have to offer and encourage more visits
- Enhance the visitor experience and encourage people to stay longer
- Support our existing small businesses and help to encourage new investment and fill empty shops/business units

The Fund covers the following town and village centres:

Abridge	Nazeing
Buckhurst Hill	North Weald
Chigwell	Ongar
Epping	Roydon
Loughton Broadway	Theydon Bois
Loughton High Road	Waltham Abbey

Any bid will also need to demonstrate how the project contributes towards the delivery of one or more of the Council's Economic Development priorities. As a District Council we currently have ten agreed key economic development priorities for the district and its economy. These are:

- 1/ providing support for local food production
- 2/ marketing our tourism offer to the visitor economy
- 3/ infrastructure needs including superfast broadband and transport
- 4/ enhancing the local level of skills attainment
- 5/ exploiting interesting development opportunities at North Weald Airfield
- 6/ analysing and understanding our business base
- 7/ making links to the West Essex Enterprise Zone
- 8/ promoting the district's unique character
- 9/ developing plans for our council-owned assets
- 10/ linking with sources of inward investment

To help ensure that we make best use of available funds, we encourage bids which seek to have impact across the Epping Forest District area, enhancing more than one town centre and involving more than one group working together.

There is a second element to the fund which we refer to as **one-off seed funding**. Only the Town Centre Partnerships may submit a bid to this element of the fund and, specifically, only Town Centre Partnerships that are experiencing acute difficulties in continuing to operate. Under the seed funding element, partnerships are able to bid for monies which will enable them to buy-in practical, professional and independent guidance to help them re-establish and reinvigorate their partnership. It should be stressed that the emphasis here will be on any concerned partnership securing active support (rather than, for example, commissioning a consultancy study) and that there is a core group of representatives with the commitment to help take forward recommendations and actions. If you are considering a bid to this element of the scheme please contact us to discuss.

Please note that, should a partnership seek to access this seed funding, it is not considered appropriate that they simultaneously bid for support funding for other projects given the implied difficulties they are facing elsewhere.

Who can apply?

Funding is available to local voluntary groups and associations that are appropriately established with a constitution and bank account for their association to receive funds. Funds are not paid to an individual. Organisations eligible for assistance under the scheme include the following:

- Town Centre Partnerships
- Local Voluntary, Community and Not-for-profit business groups including district-wide organisations
- Arts and Culture Groups
- Social Enterprises
- Community Interest Groups with a specific focus, written into their constitution, on the economic wellbeing of the town or village centre

It is acknowledged that there may often be more than one organisation or group in a town or village that is concerned with the economic wellbeing of the town or village and that this may therefore lead to competing bids for funding. Whilst competition for funding is acceptable, we do not wish to create a situation where proposals duplicate, conflict or work against the ongoing work or planned projects of other local organisations. As part of the application process we will therefore be looking to see evidence that the group has consulted with or liaised with other local organisations in preparing their bid. The support and involvement of other organisations will strengthen the likelihood of the project's success and could also contribute towards the match-funding contribution element of the bid.

It has also been agreed that Economic Development Officers at Epping Forest District Council may submit bids to the fund for proposed projects and that these will be assessed and judged against the same criteria as all other proposed projects. Joint applications between any combination of the above groups, including projects supported by and developed with the Economic Development Officers at Epping Forest District Council, will also be acceptable.

It should be noted that a copy of the constitution of any bidding organisation will need to be supplied and where this does not permit the organisation to be involved in projects to support town centre activity they will not be awarded any funding.

In applying to the fund, it is expected that all organisations:

- Are properly governed by a constitution and managed through the appointment of elected post-holders and regular meetings

- Have been established for at least one full year with a full set of accounts and AGM minutes
- Operate on a charitable or non-profit-making basis
- Are based or are primarily active in Epping Forest District, specifically in one or more of the listed town and village centres
- Offer their services, events and facilities to all eligible local businesses and residents
- Have no unfair restrictions on membership or participation
- Are able to show a clear need for financial support
- Have a bank or building society account in the name of the applicant organisation
- Have not been established solely in order to apply to this fund

What the fund does not cover

- The fund is not open for applications from individual people or businesses.
- The fund will not directly support Christmas decorations/lights and/or contribute towards costs associated with lights switch-on Christmas functions in any town or village centre.
- Epping Forest District Council operates a scheme called 'Grants for Sports, Arts, Leisure and Community Groups'. This scheme is open to voluntary and community groups. In some instances a potential town/village centre project might fit better under the criteria for this scheme rather than the Town and Village Centres Opportunities Fund – see link for more details - <http://www.eppingforestdc.gov.uk/index.php/out-and-about/our-activities/community-development/grants-for-sports-arts-leisure-and-community-groups>

How much can you apply for?

The total fund available each year is £35,000. There is no defined upper or lower limit to the amount of funding that can be applied for, however, support is provided on a 'match-funding' basis and we will provide up to a maximum of 50% of the total cost of your proposed initiative, matching each pound that you raise locally, although in some circumstances we may be able to apply discretion. (In exceptional instances where the amount requested exceeds 50%, applicants will be required to provide extra justification as to why EFDC support is integral to the project moving forward and how it represents best value for money to the local resident council tax payer).

Volunteer time and in-kind support can be taken into account as match-funding and should be outlined in the application form. We would generally expect applications to range from several hundred pounds up to a few thousand pounds, depending on the nature of the proposed initiative.

Payment of Grant Funding

Please note that payment of funding will normally be made on receipt of evidence of expenditure such as copies of receipted invoices related to works carried out on the scheme or project concerned. As such, the organisation will need to be able to fund the works until funding is received. However, we acknowledge that many projects occur in stages and it may be possible, with prior agreement, to allow staged funding whereby funding is paid on the reaching of agreed milestones and the provision of receipted invoices relevant to that stage of the project.

Grant Decision

Your application will be considered by the Council's Portfolio Holder that has responsibility for deciding Town & Village Centres Opportunities Fund applications.

Once we have received your application we will write to you acknowledging receipt and requesting any information which may have been omitted. The initial consideration by the Portfolio Holder will usually take place within six weeks of receipt of the application. At that stage your application may be approved (subject to certain conditions in some instances), refused or deferred pending the

receipt of further information. Usually, deferred applications will be considered within a further six week period.

We will advise you of all additional information required and, in any event, liaise with you regarding our information requirements on an ongoing basis.

Once the decision has been made there is a 'call-in period' of approximately two weeks during which District Councillors have the right to 'call-in' and review the decision being made. We will then write to confirm the decision and, if successful, request invoices before payment is made.

If we refuse a grant we will let you know the reasons for the decision. If appropriate, we will give you information of other funding organisations that may be able to help.

Decision-making criteria

- We will assess bids to see how well they reflect the three stated purposes of the funding scheme.
- We will also consider how bids actively contribute towards the delivery of one or more of the Council's Economic Development priorities. Greater priority is likely to be given to bids that meet the greatest number of our ED priorities and purposes of the fund.
- We encourage bids which are district-wide or which involve several centres in order that the economic impact of investment can have a broader reach. Groups receiving funding should commit to sharing perspectives and learning with other groups locally via established networks and greater priority will be given to projects that can be easily replicated in other areas.
- We will be looking for evidence that the group has consulted with or liaised with other local organisations or groups in preparing the bid to ensure the project is locally supported and does not conflict with other ongoing work. If appropriate, we may require further consultation and liaison with other local groups prior to final approval of a bid.
- We encourage centres to apply for funding to deliver new initiatives rather than necessarily repeating previous ones.
- Any bid to deliver an event or activity on a given day or days must demonstrate how the project will continue to have an impact after the day.
- Any bid to deliver an initiative which will have ongoing operational or maintenance costs must indicate how these will be met.
- Where initiatives proposed are ongoing they should aim to become self-sustaining over a reasonable time.
- We will also consider the track record of past projects funded through the scheme both in terms of the experience of their delivery and the impact that any outstanding projects may have on an organisation's capacity to deliver new projects.
- All decisions on funding are made for the projects specifically as detailed within the application. Any significant proposed changes to the project must be notified to the Council whether before or after a decision has been made. Failure to do so could affect the decision to provide funding.

If, for any reason, a project is not delivered or cancelled, the funding cannot be allocated to a substitute project without a full application being made which will be assessed as if a new bid was being made.

Grant Conditions

On receipt of your funding and completion of your project, you will be required to incorporate some form of acknowledgement that the project has been funded in part by Epping Forest District Council.

This will vary depending on the nature of your project and should be discussed with the District Council prior to completion of the project.

If you have an official launch of your project we will expect an invitation addressed to the appropriate Council official(s). We will expect you to keep the District Council informed of the progress and achievements of your initiative and to complete an End of Grant form setting out how the grant was spent and what was achieved.

How to apply

Each year we will invite bids in two stages as follows:

A deadline will be set for the first round of bids. This will be announced at the time of the launch of the fund for that year and will be open to any constituted voluntary groups and associations, including Town Centre Partnerships, that wish to undertake projects in one or more of the 12 town and village centres covered by this Fund. Subject to available funding, initiatives may be proposed by Epping Forest District Council Economic Development Officers and these would be considered in the same manner as all other applications. All applications received before this deadline will be considered together and in the event that the fund is oversubscribed some bids may be prioritised over other bids that might otherwise have been successful. It may also be that a reduced amount of funding is offered. (Please note there is a degree of flexibility with regard to accepting bids ahead of this deadline where the timing is crucial to your project – please contact us to discuss.)

Thereafter, (allowing a period of six weeks for the first round applications to be considered and providing monies are still left after the first round) **the fund will continue on a rolling basis until the end of the year with all applications considered as and when they are received.**

In the first instance it will help to contact us about your plans. We'll be glad to help:

Email: economicdevelopment@eppingforestdc.gov.uk / Telephone: 01992 564339

To take your application forward there will be a short form to complete that asks you to briefly set out your plans, including how much funding you are asking for and how much you will raise locally. Following approval, we will then send a letter of agreement for you to sign and return. We will then pay you on production of an invoice or invoices.

As outlined above we are inviting bids in two stages for 2016/17 with the deadline for the first round applications to be announced when the scheme is launched.

Please note there is a degree of flexibility with regard to accepting bids outside of these deadlines where this is crucial to your project – please contact us to discuss.

Monitoring

We would like to keep in touch to understand how plans are progressing. We may ask for you to share evidence of your local match-funding and how you've spent the funds. The funding agreement letter will set out any other requirements.

Events equipment - Please note that staging equipment for events was procured in 2014 for the use and benefit of all Town Centre Partnerships. If you would like to use this for your event please contact the Chair of Loughton Broadway Town Centre Partnership on admin@broadwaypartnership.org.uk