

Appendix 3

Ashford Rural Place and Provenance Business Grants Scheme Rural England Prosperity Fund – P&P Grants Policy to 31 March 2025

Ashford Borough Council – Policy

Background

There are about 400 hospitality businesses and food and beverage producers in Ashford (the great majority of them micro businesses⁵), and our tourism sector supports about 3.4 million visitors to the Borough each year, since the Covid-19 pandemic⁶.

Furthermore food & drink is the most popular product experience on the TripAdvisor and Airbnb platforms.⁷ In July 2020 there were approx. 14,000 bookable UK experiences and Kent had just 33 of these (2% of the total UK offer)⁸ –so there is huge scope for Kent and in particular for Ashford, with its wealth of vineyards and growing reputation as a wine tourism destination, to capitalise on what visitors are currently looking for - this demand for authentic food and drink experiences.

The above provides context to two key challenges identified in rural areas of the borough:

- Connecting visitors to rural destinations and awareness raising - the food and drink and tourism offer can benefit from shared promotion and development: the quality of the place and the connections between different parts of the offer are fundamental. So there is a strong case for shared action.
- Productivity and support for startups in rural areas - much of the focus on raising productivity in the economy overall focuses on those sectors which offer higher gross value added per job. However there is evidence that there is scope for productivity gain in every sector – with hospitality able to gain through (for example) improved use of digital systems and support for startup food and drink enterprises. We want to encourage this, especially given current labour shortage challenges.

There is an opportunity to provide local grant funding and support, which can leverage private investment into supporting rural business' productivity and the creation of startup space as well as tackling issues with the last-mile challenge and rural accessibility

The scheme is funded by the Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF), which supports the aims of the government's Levelling Up White Paper and Future Farming Programme. You can find out more about REPF on the [Government website](#).

Overview of the scheme

The Ashford Rural Place and Provenance Grant Scheme will provide grants up to £3,000 or up to £10,000 to support rural food & drink producers, hospitality and tourism attractions or venues. Hospitality includes restaurants, cafes, pubs, catering, hotels, campsites and other accommodation. The aim of this grant scheme will be to increase productivity and sustainability for businesses,

⁵ ONS, UK Business Count.

⁶ Visit Kent, Ashford Tourism Economic Impact Study 2021.

⁷ Visit Kent, Ashford Borough Factsheet – The Experiential Offer, September 2020.

⁸ Visit Kent, Experience Options Analysis, September 2020.

increase the number of startups in these sectors in rural areas and increase the number of visitors to rural destinations.

Applications will open in rounds, with the first round being from December 2023 to January 2024. Applications submitted outside of these times will not be considered subject to significant material considerations and mitigating factors. These dates may vary at short notice depending on the level of applications the council receives.

The council reserves the right to close applications if the funding is likely to be committed, is committed or has been spent.

Once the project is complete and any equipment is installed, the materials and equipment will become the property of the applicant. It is the applicants' responsibility to maintain these accordingly.

Ashford Rural Place and Provenance Business Grants Structure

The scheme will be made up of two grant streams:

- Rural Boost Grant: A grant of £500 to £3,000 for a business that will undertake capital projects to grow and improve its productivity and can demonstrate a need for small scale improvements.
- Rural Investment Grant: A grant of £3,000 to £10,000 for a business that will undertake capital projects to create startup spaces or deliver a project that will address the last-mile challenge.

These grants cannot be used in conjunction with each other. For example recipients of the Rural Boost Grant cannot access funding from the Rural Investment Grant as well. They can be used in conjunction with other financial support schemes available beyond the two named above, subject to those other schemes allowing this, except any funding deriving from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra). Applicants that have either received a grant from one of these two schemes, or that have already submitted a grant application which is being assessed, will not be considered.

A summary of the scheme is found in Appendix C of this Policy.

Rural Boost Grant Details

The intention of this grant is to facilitate projects in commercial premises in rural areas of the Ashford Borough that will support that business to improve productivity, operational processes and support its viability and growth.

Eligibility Criteria

1. The applicant is a commercial entity registered in the Ashford Borough. This includes but is not limited to, micro, small and medium businesses.
2. The subject commercial premises must be located within the designated Rural area [as defined under 'Rural England Prosperity Fund' by the Department for Environmental and Rural Affairs \(Defra\)](#). Where the site or the wider land crosses across the designated area the Council reserves the right to assess these on a case by case basis. See Appendix A.
3. The business can demonstrate the need and the expected benefits of the works proposed.

4. Only capital projects for business purposes are eligible.
5. Applications from non-profits or voluntary organisations may be considered subject to the proposal clearly benefitting commercial businesses directly.

What will the funding help cover

Through this grant, Ashford Borough Council will support the purchase and installation of assets such as buildings or equipment that improves a business' productivity and growth in the rural area.

Examples of capital projects that the grant could support include:

- New commercial ovens for a rural bakery
- New signage or interpretation boards for a tourism venue
- Purchase and installation of new IT or epos equipment

Works that may require Planning Applications (such as Listed Building Consent, Advertising Consent or similar) can be considered. Applicants will need to submit their Planning Application, if required, before submitting the grant application.

What is not covered by the funding

Due to the capital nature of the Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF), some costs associated with these projects may not be eligible for this grant. The applicant will need to show these costs have been considered and they are able to fund these separately. These include but are not limited to:

- Professional fees such as Planning or Legal fees
- Revenue costs such as running costs, subscriptions, licences or promotional activity
- Insurances and ongoing maintenance costs
- Applicant's admin costs

Where second hand equipment is being purchased, the grant scheme will not fund elements that cannot demonstrate they have a reasonable useful life remaining.

Levels of Grant

Applicants are required to provide fully costed quotes of the works being proposed. The assessment will consider this and, if successful, applicants will receive a grant equivalent to 80% of the cost of works. The minimum level of grant allowed under this scheme is £500 and the maximum level is £3,000.

In exceptional circumstances the council reserves the right to award a higher level of grant where this may be necessary and where there is supporting and significant additional evidence have been submitted.

Information and evidence needed for application

- A completed application form
- Evidence that:
 - The applicant is the freeholder or leaseholder or where written consent from the site owner to carry out the work, has been obtained and submitted
 - The applicant has the funds available for their share of the project costs (20%)

- The applicant should demonstrate they have considered the Planning guidance in relation to their project and have submitted a Planning Application where necessary
- For projects costing up to £3,123 one fully costed quote for the works is necessary. For projects costing more than this, three fully costed quotes will be necessary.
- Recent photos of the site, clearly showing the areas the project will address
- Details of any grants or funding received from a public authority in the previous three years
- Any further information or evidence required or which the applicant considers relevant

Monitoring and Assurances

The grant will be paid to successful applicants once conditions are met such as (but not limited to):

- The works proposed are due to start imminently and be completed in a reasonable time
- Any permissions such as Planning Permission have been successfully obtained

The condition of payment for this grant will be included in the decision notification sent to the applicant and is discretionary (to be applied on a case by case basis). For grant applications requiring a Planning Application, the grant can only be paid if Planning Permission has been received by the applicant.

The council reserves the right to attend the site to monitor the progress of work until the expected end date detailed in the applicant's proposal. The council has the discretion to reclaim the grant funding if the conditions are not met within a reasonable time.

Terms and Conditions

- Quotes for the work must be provided
- Grant applications (and relevant Planning Applications) must be made before work takes place
- ABC staff must be allowed to inspect the works and see all relevant documentation
- It is the responsibility of applicants to comply with all relevant regulations and legislation
- It is the responsibility of applicants to check and confirm whether they comply with the Subsidy Control requirements (formerly State Aid)
- Applicants agree to report quarterly to the council on progress of their project and outcomes linked to the REPF guidance.
- Applicants agree to comply with the REPF and UKSPF marketing and branding guidelines linked to their project
- Any grant money awarded, must be repaid within 1 year of the payment if:
 - The applicant removes the materials or equipment within 12 months of receiving the grant (regardless of whether the applicant moves property)
 - The applicant does not maintain the asset(s) during the 12 months after receiving the grant

- Works are undertaken without obtaining the relevant permissions or licences as needed
- The works are not undertaken

Rural Investment Grant Details

The intention of this grant is to facilitate projects at commercial sites in rural areas of the Ashford Borough. This grant aims to support the creation and uptake of startup space for food and drink producers, hospitality or tourism businesses or businesses in sectors supporting these industries. Additionally the grant also aims to support projects that will help tackle the last-mile challenge and increase the number of visitors to rural hospitality or tourism destinations.

Eligibility Criteria

1. The applicant is a commercial entity registered in the Ashford Borough. This includes but is not limited to, micro, small and medium businesses, social enterprises or Community Interest Companies (CIC).
2. The subject commercial site must be located within the designated Rural area [as defined under 'Rural England Prosperity Fund' by the Department for Environmental and Rural Affairs \(Defra\)](#). Where the site or the wider land crosses across the designated area the Council reserves the right to assess these on a case by case basis. See Appendix A.
3. The business can demonstrate the need and the expected benefits of the works proposed.
4. Only capital projects for business purposes are eligible.
5. Applications from non-commercial entities may be considered subject to the proposal clearly benefitting commercial businesses directly.

What will the funding help cover

Through this grant, Ashford Borough Council will support the creation of commercial spaces aimed at startups and projects aimed at tackling the last mile challenge.

Examples of capital projects that the grant could support include:

- Construction of new incubator space for food or drink production
- Repurposing vacant or underused commercial premises to establish an outlet for local produce
- Establishing a transport link between key hubs and rural visitor destinations, such as one of the area's vineyards

Works that may require Planning Applications (such as Listed Building Consent, Advertising Consent or similar) can be considered. Applicants will need to submit their Planning Application, if required, before submitting the grant application.

What is not covered by the funding

Due to the capital nature of the Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF), some costs associated with these projects may not be eligible for this grant. The applicant will need to show these costs have been considered and they are able to fund these separately. These include but are not limited to:

- Professional fees such as Planning or Legal fees

- Revenue costs such as running costs, subscriptions, licences or promotional activity
- Insurances and ongoing maintenance costs
- Applicant's admin costs

Costs that are not linked to business-related projects or items Where second hand equipment is being purchased, the grant scheme will not fund elements that cannot demonstrate they have a reasonable useful life remaining.

Levels of Grant

Applicants are required to provide at least three fully costed quotes of the works being proposed. The assessment will consider this and, if successful, applicants will receive a grant equivalent to 80% of the cost of works. The maximum level of grant allowed under this scheme is £10,000.

In exceptional circumstances the council reserves the right to award a higher level of grant where this may be necessary and where there is supporting and significant additional evidence have been submitted.

Information and evidence needed for application

- A completed application form
- Evidence that:
 - The applicant is the freeholder or leaseholder or where written consent from the site owner to carry out the work, has been obtained and submitted
 - The applicant has the funds available for their share of the project costs (20%)
 - The applicant should demonstrate they have considered the Planning guidance in relation to their project and have submitted a Planning Application where necessary
- For projects costing up to £3,123 one fully costed quote for the works is necessary. For projects costing more than this, three fully costed quotes will be necessary.
- Recent photos of the site, clearly showing the areas the project will address
- Details of any grants or funding received from a public authority in the previous three years
- Any further information or evidence required or which the applicant considers relevant

Monitoring and Assurances

The grant will be paid to successful applicants once conditions are met such as (but not limited to):

- The works proposed are due to start imminently and be completed in a reasonable time
- Any permissions such as Planning Permission have been successfully obtained

The condition of payment for this grant will be included in the decision notification sent to the applicant and is discretionary (to be applied on a case by case basis). For grant applications requiring a Planning Application, the grant can only be paid if Planning Permission has been received by the applicant.

The council reserves the right to attend the site to monitor the progress of work until the expected end date detailed in the applicant's proposal. The council has the discretion to reclaim the grant funding if the conditions are not met within a reasonable time.

Terms and Conditions

- Quotes for the work must be provided
- Grant applications (and relevant Planning Applications) must be made before work takes place
- Our staff must be allowed to inspect the works and see all relevant documentation
- It is the responsibility of applicants to comply with all relevant regulations and legislation
- It is the responsibility of applicants to check and confirm whether they comply with the Subsidy Control requirements (formerly State Aid)
- Applicants agree to report quarterly to the council on progress of their project and outcomes linked to the REPF guidance.
- Applicants agree to comply with the REPF and UKSPF marketing and branding guidelines linked to their project
- Any grant money awarded, must be repaid if:
 - The applicant removes the materials or equipment within 3 years of receiving the grant (regardless of whether the applicant moves property)
 - The applicant does not maintain the asset(s) during the 3 years after receiving the grant
 - Works are undertaken without obtaining the relevant permissions or licences as needed
 - The works are not undertaken

Subsidy Control (formerly State Aid)

A subsidy is where a public authority such as a Local Authority provides support to an enterprise that gives them an economic advantage, meaning equivalent support could not have been obtained on commercial terms.

On 4 January 2023, the UK's new subsidy control regime came into force, implementing a new subsidy regulation framework designed for the post-Brexit era. Underpinned by the [Subsidy Control Act 2022](#) (the "Act"), related statutory instruments and government guidance, the new regime aims to grant public authorities the power to design and award subsidies in an agile way while complying with the UK's international commitments on subsidy control.

For smaller value subsidy awards, Minimal Financial Assistance (MFA) allows financial assistance of up to a maximum limit of £315,000 to be made to a single enterprise within a rolling period of three financial years (consisting of the current financial year and the two previous financial years), without the need to comply with the majority of the subsidy control requirements.

However, MFA requires a written declaration from the beneficiary confirming that the limit has not been exceeded before the subsidy can be awarded. This effectively mirrors the historic EU De Minimis regime but sets the threshold at a fixed sterling amount and at a higher level than previously.

Applicants will therefore be required to provide information and a declaration in relation to subsidies they may have received in the previous three years.

Exclusions to these grant schemes

- For the avoidance of doubt, businesses that are in administration, insolvent or where a striking-off notice has been made, are not eligible for funding under this scheme.
- Projects or work that has already been undertaken will not be eligible. This funding is not retrospective.
- Projects or works that have already been carried out before the submission of a grant application
- Businesses that have already received grant payments that equal the maximum permitted levels of subsidy will not be eligible to receive funding. (See Subsidy Control section above)
- Project proposals that have already received, or are eligible to apply for, funding from Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) are not eligible.
- Businesses or organisations that have already received funding from another REPF funded grant programme, or projects that are eligible for another REPF grant programme, as administered by Ashford Borough Council, will not be eligible for this scheme. See Appendix B for other REPF programmes administered by Ashford Borough Council.
- Sites that are located outside of the designated Rural area as defined by Defra for the purposes of this funding. See Appendix A.
- This funding should not be used as a wage support mechanism or for revenue costs such as ongoing maintenance or utilities costs or contributing to VAT costs where applicable.
- This funding cannot be used to pay for costs directly to Ashford Borough Council (for example Planning applications) or for significant work to the Council's land/property that falls within a schedule of maintenance and for which the council is responsible as owner.

Decisions

The funding available for these grant schemes is very limited and the council will likely need to prioritise applications to provide best value for money. Decisions will be taken by a panel on a monthly basis. Each round of decisions will prioritise eligible applications based on the impact of their project as well as the deliverability of their proposal.

Applications will only be taken forward to be decided where all the relevant information and evidence has been submitted by the applicant. The decision to award any grants under this scheme will be taken by a panel chaired by the Head of Economic Development. The decision reached by the panel will be final and the council will not consider any appeals submitted. Applicants will subsequently be notified of the outcome of their application. For grant applications requiring Planning, the decision whether to award a grant will be dependent on the approval of Planning Permission. For grant applications during this period that do not require Planning Permission, the decision will be dependent on the content and evidence included in the grant application.

In exceptional circumstances the council reserves the right to accept applications that may not meet all the criteria set out in this policy, where it can be shown that the impact of that proposal would have an exceptionally positive and wider reaching impact.

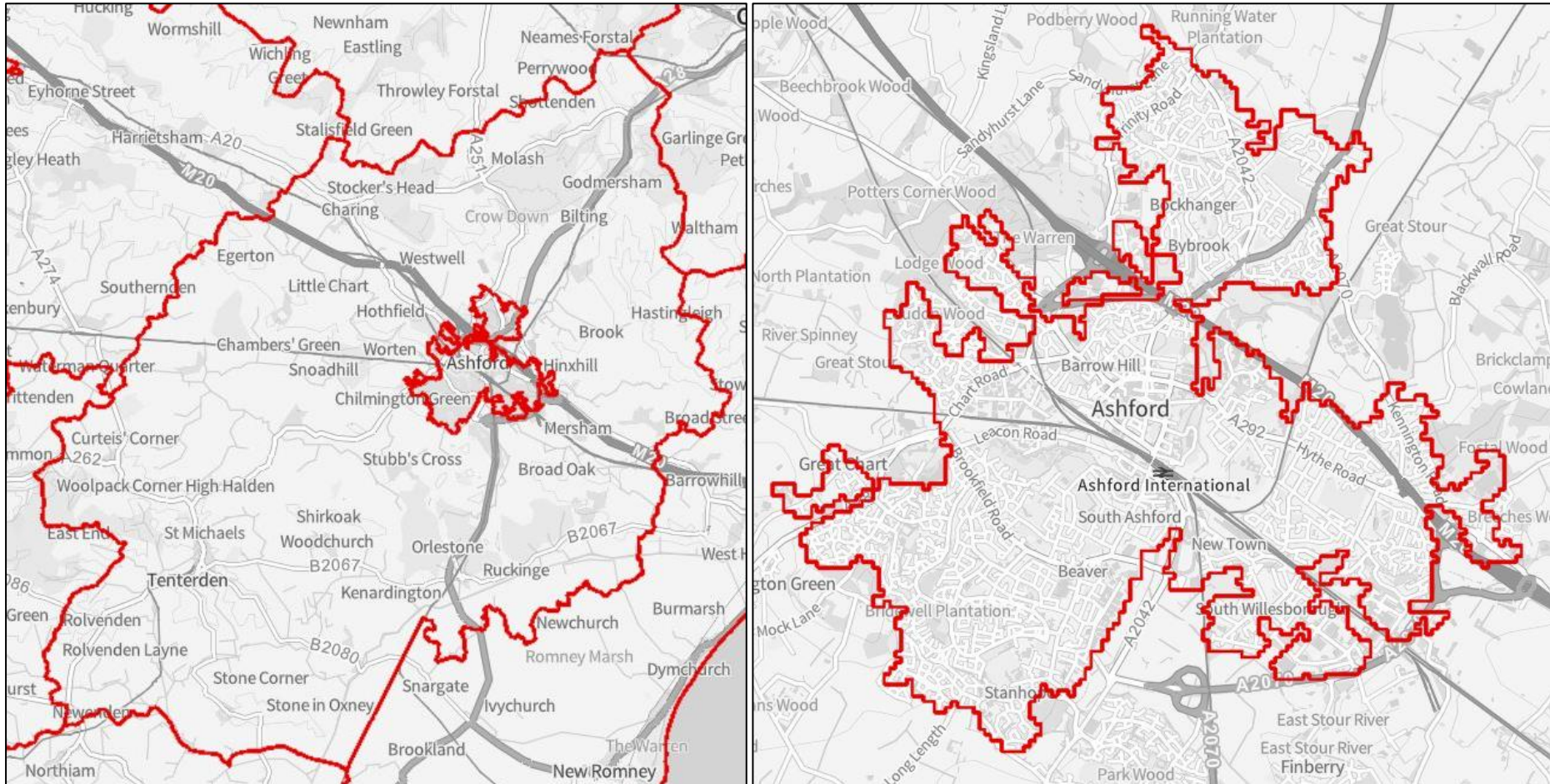
Due to its very limited nature, once the funding is completely allocated there will be no further applications or grants available to interested businesses.

Queries

All enquiries about this grant funding and this policy should contact prosperity.funding@ashford.gov.uk.

Appendix A

Ashford Rural Place and Provenance Grants – Maps



Eligible areas: the areas outside the Ashford Urban Area. An interactive map is available on the Defra website [here](#). In the table of contents please choose Administrative Geographies → Other Administrative Boundaries → Rural England Prosperity Fund)

Appendix B

Ashford REPF Programmes and other Defra Funding

Applicants that have received or are eligible for any of the funds listed below (and any other Defra funding not listed) will not be eligible.

Ashford REPF Programmes

- Rural Electric Vehicle Charging Point rollout
- Rural Community Amenities Grants
- Rural Green Business Grants

Defra Funding includes:

- Sustainable Farming Incentive
- Countryside Stewardship
- Landscape Recovery
- SFI Offers
- Species Survival Fund (via Heritage Fund)
- Farming in Protected Landscapes
- Calf Housing for Health and Welfare Grant
- England Woodland Creation Grant
- Woodland Creation Planning Grant
- Tree Health Pilot scheme 2023
- Farming Investment Fund
- Water Management Grant
- Slurry Infrastructure Grant
- Adding Value Grant
- Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) (including delinked payments)

Appendix C

Summary of Rural Place and Provenance Grants Scheme

	Rural Boost Grant	Rural Investment Grant
Aim	Support productivity and business growth to increase the sustainability of rural businesses in eligible sectors	Create startup spaces for local producers or to showcase local produce and tackle 'last mile' challenge to generate more visitor numbers in rural destinations
Sectors	Food and Drink production, Hospitality, Tourism	Food and Drink production, Hospitality, Tourism
Eligibility	Ashford Borough based organisations where projects are based in Rural areas, that can't be funded by other Defra/REPF grants.	Ashford Borough based organisations where projects are based in Rural areas, that can't be funded by other Defra/REPF grants.
Eligible Works	Capital purchases or projects that will boost productivity and support growth	Capital projects that will support startup producers and projects that will lead to higher visitor numbers in rural destinations
Grant Value	80% of costs with grants at between £500 and £3,000	80% of costs with grants at between £3,000 and £10,000
Quotes	For projects costing £3,123 one quote is necessary. For projects costing more, three quotes are necessary.	Three quotes are necessary.
Example Projects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New commercial ovens for a rural bakery • New signage or interpretation boards for a tourism venue • Purchase and installation of new IT or epos equipment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Construction of new incubator space for food or drink production • Repurposing vacant or underused commercial premises to establish an outlet for local produce • Establishing a transport link between key hubs and rural visitor destinations, such as one of the area's vineyards