

<b>Report Title:</b> Rural England Prosperity Fund Grants	
<b>Report to:</b> Dominic Collins, Corporate Director (Growth)	
<b>Date:</b> 9 <sup>th</sup> April 2024	<b>For:</b> Decision
<b>Key Decision:</b> No	<b>Decision Planner Ref No:</b>
<b>Report Presented by:</b> Danielle Estlea, Economic Development Officer	
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## 1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek the approval for the entering into 16 separate Rural England Prosperity Fund Grant agreements with successful business and community applicants.

## 2. Recommendations

- 2.1 To approve the grant funding applications below in accordance with the criteria and to enter into grant agreements for projects:

<b>Business/Community Group</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Grant Requested</b>	<b>Project Details</b>
St. Nicholas Church	Castle Hedingham	£16,910	New church lighting
Fennes Fisheries	Bocking	£49,775	Installation of shower and toilets
Rayne Village Hall	Rayne	£10,000	New fencing
Panfield Parish Council	Panfield	£39,974	Playground
Hedingham Castle	Castle Hedingham	£33,600	New toilet block
Blackmore End Village Hall	Blackmore End	£35,610.64	New sewage system
Pebmarsh Community Pub	Pebmarsh	£50,000	Upgraded toilets
White Colne Parish Council	White Colne	£42,986	Solar panels for village hall
Atlas Social Club	Earls Colne	£35,000	New roof and building improvements
Borley Village Hall	Borley	£16,500	Improve space in village hall
Saling Millenium Hall	Great Saling	£16,500	Solar panels for village hall
Baythorne Hall	Baythorne End	£50,000	Extending the café

Village Green Gym	Great Bardfield	£8,350	New premises for gym
Castle Hedingham Scouts	Castle Hedingham Scouts	£14,500	New toilets
Dynes Cottage Holiday Lets	Finchingfield	£36,500	Upgrading holiday let
Earls Colne Millenium Green Trust	Earls Colne	£22,894	Play area
Tuffon Hall	Sible Hedingham	£34,000	Glamping pod

### 3. Summary of Issues

- 3.1 Braintree District Council (the Council) has been awarded £589,191 of funding from the Government's Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF) to allocate to eligible Businesses and Community Groups supporting the aims of the Government's Levelling Up White Paper and Future Farming Programme.
- 3.2 REPF funds capital projects for small businesses and community infrastructure to help to improve productivity and strengthen the rural economy and rural communities.
- 3.3 The decision making process and eligibility criteria for applications to the Fund was agreed by Cabinet on 10<sup>th</sup> July 2023, with the criteria for the scoring of the applications for funding approved by Councillor Frankie Ricci via a Cabinet Member delegated decision on the 27<sup>th</sup> November 2023. Following central government approval to launch and issue the grants, grant agreements for successful grant applications are required to be entered into to ensure the correct use of the funds and secure future information on the successful delivery and outcomes of the projects awarded funding.
- 3.4 The REPF scheme was promoted and launched for application in October 2023 and was closed in January 2024. All applications were scored against a matrix, and registered highest to lowest on a first come, first served basis. Applications which scored 250 points and above, as per the selection criteria, were approved in receipt order. More applications were successfully judged against the criteria than funding available, so an initial list of projects have been awarded funding up to the amount of grant available with a subsequent waiting list of projects created. Projects on the waiting list may be funded if and when projects initially allocated funding are unable to take up the funds. All applicants have been notified of the success or otherwise of their application.
- 3.5 Grant agreements will not be entered into for those applicants successful in being allocated funding but which have failed to obtain relevant planning permissions by 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024 (or an extended period agreed at the discretion of the Corporate Director for Growth). If this is the case, then the

ringfenced grant funding will be offered to the next successful applicant on the waiting list.

- 3.6 The recommendations set out in this report will help the Council to deliver the following Corporate Objectives:
- A sustainable environment and a great place to live, work and play;
  - A well connected and growing district with high quality homes and infrastructure;
  - A prosperous district that attracts business growth and provides high quality employment opportunities;
  - Residents live well in healthy and resilient communities where residents feel supported;
- 3.7 This is a national scheme that will assist the Council in supporting rural businesses and small scale investment in micro and small enterprises in rural areas. This includes capital funding for net zero infrastructure for rural creation and expansion of rural leisure and tourism businesses/community groups.

#### **4. Consultation**

- 4.1 In accordance with the delegated authority the Head of Housing and Communities was consulted on the applications on 15<sup>th</sup> April 2024.

#### **5. Options**

- 5.1 Option 1 - To approve the grant allocations as set out in the table 2.1, which will deliver inward investment into the Braintree District and support the Levelling Up Agenda through supporting rural economic growth.
- 5.2 Option 2 - To do nothing will be significantly detrimental to the Braintree District as grant awards will not be able to be entered into resulting in reduced inward investment for businesses and community groups, resulting in no support to the rural economy.
- 5.3 Option 1 is the preferred option, and the risk of not allocating all funds in a timely manner is being mitigated through an established waiting list of other successful applicants who have applied, should other applicants withdraw their grant request.

#### **6. Financial Implications**

- 6.1 The total REPF allocation to the Council is £589,191.00.
- 6.2 The grant allocations as per table 2.1 amounts to £513,099.64. An award of £45,000 has been historically agreed and approved by the Head of Planning and Economic Development on 5<sup>th</sup> March 2024, totalling £558,099.64 of this grant funding to be allocated.

- 6.3 Of the remaining balance of £31091.36, some has been allocated to a project awaiting planning permission and the rest will be used to procure plaques celebrating the award of funding from REPF to each recipient, as required by government through its funding agreement with the Council.
- 6.4 Total funds allocated from the REPF scheme will be paid by the Council to the successful applicants on receipt of eligible and approved claims. The funds will then be reimbursed by Government to the Council subsequent to provision of evidence to Government of the funding awards.
- 6.5 Should an applicant fails to provide their retrospective funding claim to the Council by 31<sup>st</sup> March 2025, the grant agreement will cease and monies will not be paid to the applicant.

## **7. Legal Implications**

- 7.1 As set out in section 6.4, all funds will need to be paid by the Council and claimed retrospectively back from DHLUC through the authorised procedure.
- 7.2 Failure to adhere to the procedure including failure to provide requested auditable evidence may result in the Council allocating grant funding without being reimbursed. This risk will be mitigated through the respective funding agreements.

## **8. Source of Authority**

- 8.1 Cabinet delegated authority to the Head of Planning and Economic Growth, in consultation with the Head of Housing and Communities to approve the applications and to enter into grant agreements with successful applicants. Since the granting of the delegation, the role of Head of Planning and Economic Growth has been vacant. In accordance with paragraph 25.1 of the Constitution where there is a vacant post to whom authority as having been delegated, the relevant Corporate Director may exercise that delegated authority.

## **9. Other Implications**

- 9.1 Applicants have limited time to procure and deliver their projects by 31<sup>st</sup> March 2025 and therefore, any delays to issuing grant agreements, may impact on the delivery of projects and increase the risk of claiming monies, which will reduce the integrity of the scheme, limit the funds that both the applicant and the Council can access, and failing to deliver rural economic support.

## **10. Equality and Diversity Implications**

- 10.1 Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 creates the public sector equality duty which requires that when the Council makes decisions it must have regard to the need to:

- (a) Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other behaviour prohibited by the Act
- (b) Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not
- (c) Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not including tackling prejudice and promoting understanding.

10.2 The protected characteristics are age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, gender and sexual orientation. The Act states that 'marriage and civil partnership' is not a relevant protected characteristic for (b) or (c) although it is relevant for (a).

10.3 The Equality Impact Assessment indicates that the proposals in this report will not have a disproportionately adverse impact on any people with a particular characteristic.

## 11. Appendices


11.1 None

## 12. Background Papers

12.1 Report and Minutes of Cabinet - 10th July 2023 (Minute 7)

12.2 Cabinet Member Delegated decision made by the Cabinet Member for Economic Growth and Inward Investment "To agree the criteria for grants awarded under the Rural England Prosperity Funding" – 27th November 2023

12.3 Rural England Prosperity Fund Guidance

<p>I approve the above recommendations for the reasons set out in this report.</p>  <p><b>Dominic Collins, Corporate Director</b></p>	<p><b>Date</b></p> <p>15.4.24</p>
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