

Report Title: Rural England Prosperity Fund Grants Additional Applicants	
Report to: Dominic Collins, Corporate Director (Growth)	
Date: 01/05/24	For: Decision
Key Decision: No	Ref No: n/a
Report Presented by: Danielle Estlea, Economic Development Officer	
Enquiries to: Danielle Estlea, Economic Development Officer danielle.estlea@braintree.gov.uk	

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 Following the approved Delegated Decision report dated 15th April 2024, the purpose of this report is to seek the approval for the entering into 2 additional separate Rural England Prosperity Fund Grant agreements with successful business and community applicants and the amendment of 2 approved agreements.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 To approve the 2 additional grant funding applications below in accordance with the criteria and to enter into grant agreements for projects:

Business/Community Group	Location	Grant Requested	Project Details
Barnfield Weddings	Barnfield	£28,000	Refurb of wedding venue
Gray and Dale	Great Yeldham	£21,746.36	Refurbishment of barn

- 2.2 To approve the 2 amended grant funding applications below in accordance with the criteria and to enter into grant agreements for projects:

Business / Community Group	Location	Original Grant Requested	Revised Grant Variation Requested	Reason for Grant Variation	Project Details
Borley Village Hall	Borley	£16,500	£16,845	Increase cost of materials since quotation.	Improve space in village hall
Tuffon Hall	Sible Hedingham	£34,000	£50,000	Additional REPF funds	Glamping pod

				made available following withdrawal of an application.	
--	--	--	--	--	--

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 10th 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 27th 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 31st 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 15th April 2024.

5. Options

5.1 Option 1 - To approve the grant allocations and variations as set out in the tables 2.1 and 2.2, 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, 2.2 and historically granted applications now total the full REPF financial allocation of £589,191.00.

6.3 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.

- 6.4 Should an applicant fails to provide their retrospective funding claim to the Council by 31st 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 31st 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
- 12.4 Delegated Decision Report dated 9th April 2024, titled Rural England Prosperity Fund Grants.

<p>I approve the above recommendations for the reasons set out in this report.</p>  <p>Dominic Collins Corporate Director for Growth</p>	<p>Date</p> <p>7.5.24</p>
---	---