

**TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL**  
**ECONOMIC REGENERATION ADVISORY BOARD**

**02 September 2020**

**Report of the Chief Executive**

**Part 1- Public**

**Matters for Recommendation to Cabinet - Non-Key Decision (Decision may be taken by the Cabinet Member)**

**1 SHOPFRONT IMPROVEMENTS SCHEME**

**Over the past 18 months, the Borough Council has been running various Shopfront Improvement Schemes to support our local businesses and help improve the look and feel of our town and local centres. This report provides an update on these schemes and sets out next steps.**

**1.1 Background**

1.1.1 A significant amount of progress has been made on these schemes over the past 6-9 months which has resulted in a number of units across the borough being much improved.

**1.2 Town and District Shopfront Improvement Scheme**

1.2.1 In November 2018, a report was considered by this advisory board on the potential for delivering a shopfront improvement scheme in our town and district centres. Having been agreed, the scheme was launched in March 2019 and had the following criteria:

- Grants of up to £5,000 per shop unit were available
- Eligible works were solely external improvements to the shop unit (internal works were ineligible)
- This scheme focussed on – Tonbridge Centre, West Malling, Snodland, Borough Green, Larkfield, Hadlow, Kings Hill, East Peckham, Aylesford and Wrotham.

1.2.2 In addition to support from the Economic Regeneration Team, hands-on help and advice was also available for prospective applicants through Kent Rural Retailers, a branch of Action with Communities in Rural Kent, who were able to provide expert advice on a wide range of issues, including store layout and displays, marketing and promotion as well as practical help with filling in the application forms.

1.2.3 In September 2019, the advisory board agreed to close the scheme to new applications at the end of December 2019. By this time, 23 applications had been received, of which 22 were approved for grant support.

1.2.4 The total amount of grant funding allocated to these 22 schemes was £60,372.90. This grant funding has been at least matched by contributions from the applicants themselves. Further information on the programme is set out in Table 1 below:

Location	Number of Schemes	Value of Grants	Number of Schemes Completed	Spend to Date
Tonbridge	10	£25,427.40	8	£21,626.40
West Malling	6	£20,823.00	2	£12,868.00
Larkfield	3	£8,672.50	0	0
Borough Green	1	£1,700.00	0	£500.00
Kings Hill	1	£1,750.00	1	£1,750.00
Hadlow	1	£2,000.00	1	£2,000.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>£60,372.90</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>£38,744.40</b>

1.2.5 Unfortunately, despite initial interest from businesses in all eligible areas, apart from one ineligible application, no applications were ultimately received from businesses in Snodland, East Peckham, Aylesford or Wrotham.

1.2.6 Whilst 12 schemes have now been completed, and a further 3 (in Borough Green, Larkfield and West Malling) are currently underway, there are 7 schemes which are yet to commence. Although applicants have a year to complete their projects (and extensions have been given to some), it is likely that a number of these schemes have been impacted by the Covid-19 crisis and unfortunately may not now be delivered.

### 1.3 Local Centres and Parades Scheme

1.3.1 The Local Centres and Parades scheme was agreed by the advisory board in September 2019 and launched the same month. Lessons were learnt from the Town and District Shopfront Improvement Scheme and applied to this new scheme. The changes included:

- In reduction in the grant limit down to £3,500 per shop unit
- Eligible expenditure was extended to energy efficiency measures (both internal and external) in order to encourage such improvements to commercial properties in our borough.

1.3.2 To date, there have been 7 applications, amounting to a grant value of £12,251. Further information is provided in Table 2:

Location	Number of Schemes	Value of Grants	Number of Schemes Completed	Spend to Date
East Malling	3	£5,726.00	1	£3,455.00
Tonbridge Local Centres	2	£2,574.00	0	0
Leybourne	1	£2,587.50	1	£2,587.50
Wouldham	1	£1,363.50	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>£12,251.00</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>£6,042.50</b>

1.3.3 To date, no applications have been received from businesses in Burham, Eccles, Greenacres (Aylesford), Hildenborough, Plaxtol, Wateringbury, and Ditton.

1.3.4 Two schemes have now been completed, although again the number of new application submissions and progress with existing projects has been impacted heavily by the Covid-19 crisis. Before lockdown in March 2020, 5 applications had been submitted and approved, but between March and July 2020 there were understandably no new applications. In recent weeks there have been two submissions that have been approved and there is a further application expected in the coming weeks. As such, it does seem like businesses are interested in the scheme now many of them are back and running. However, it is feared that with everything that has happened over recent months, many potential applicants will have forgotten about the scheme. As, such a focus on promoting the scheme in the coming months and setting a deadline for applications of 31 March 2021 would help to increase take up and put a conclusion on the programme to free up resources to focus on other economic recovery measures.

## 1.4 Legal Implications

1.4.1 There are no legal implications arising from this report.

## 1.5 Financial and Value for Money Considerations

1.5.1 £100,000 was set aside from the Business Rates Retention Pilot to cover the cost of these schemes. To date £72,623.90 of grants have been allocated, of which £44,786.90 has been spent. An additional £1,500 has been spent on advice and support through the Kent Rural Retailer.

## 1.6 Risk Assessment

1.6.1 The application process has been designed to minimise risk. Applications are shared with colleagues in a number of departments (Business Rates, Licensing, Planning, Building Control and Environmental Health) before being considered by the panel, and payments are only made once receipted invoices and photographic evidence of works have been provided.

## 1.7 Equality Impact Assessment

1.7.1 The decisions recommended through this paper have a remote or low relevance to the substance of the Equality Act. There is no perceived impact on end users.

## 1.8 Recommendations

1.8.1 An additional promotional exercise to encourage further take-up **BE UNDERTAKEN** in October 2020.

1.8.2 A date of 31 March 2021 **BE AGREED** for the closure of the Local Centres and Parades Scheme for new applications.

The Cabinet Member for Economic Regeneration and the Chief Executive confirm that the proposals contained in the recommendation(s), if approved, will fall within the Council's Budget and Policy Framework.

contact: Jeremy Whittaker,  
Economic Regeneration  
Manager

Julie Beilby  
Chief Executive