



Retail Improvement Grant Scheme

Guidelines for applicants

1. Introduction

The purpose of the guidelines is to steer you through the complete process from the initial contact stage with Alton Town Council through to the completion of the works and the final payment of the grant.

This Scheme is jointly provided and funded by Alton Town Council and East Hampshire District Council and will be administered by Alton Town Council.

2. What is the Scheme?

Retail is a lynchpin of the town. Not only is the appearance of the town important, but also the displays created to entice customers in and the approach of the staff to encourage repeat custom.

Building frontages, especially shop fronts, make a significant impact on the appearance of the town. High quality well maintained frontages make an area feel more welcoming to local residents and visitors, improve the area's image, contribute towards a stronger sense of identity, enhance commercial values, and encourage more visitors.

It is important that the retail experience continues and that this Scheme also supports applications which focus on professional mentoring or training which improves the attractiveness of an offering and supports staff in their continuing development in customer care.

The Retail Improvement Grant Scheme aims to stimulate the improvement of shop fronts and building facades, retail appearance and customer care - and hence support the work for the economic vitality of the area. This work supports Alton's Neighbourhood Plan, published in November 2015.

This Scheme is not designed to help finance day-to-day expenditure or activities the business would otherwise engage in.

3. Who can apply?

The Retail Improvement Grant Scheme is available to:

- freeholder owners, or
- leaseholders tenants as long as the terms of their current lease agreement on the property are appropriate and they have owner's consent
AND
- is only available to rateable commercial retail buildings in the parish of Alton and Holybourne (whether or not exemptions are applied and rates are paid as a result)

The Scheme will prioritise small and independent businesses, and priority will be given to those businesses with fewer than three business locations in the UK.

Please note that the grants are discretionary, available for a limited period of time and subject to the availability of funds. The inclusion of a building within an eligible area does not give any automatic entitlement to a grant.

The Scheme will not support works that have already been undertaken or any works which are started prior to a formal offer of grant funding being made.

If you are unsure whether your business will qualify for a grant you should contact Julie McLatch on 01420 83986 or at business@alton.gov.uk.

4. How much is the grant for?

Businesses can apply for a grant of up to £1,000 towards the external renovation or improvement of ground floor and upper floor premise facades, or for training or mentoring relevant to their business. The grant will cover up to **50%** of the cost up to a maximum of **£1,000**.

Please note that alterations should be made in accordance with any planning or conservation constraints and will not be contrary to the requirements of Alton's Town Design Statement. The Scheme encourages the use of good quality materials, appropriate detailing and a design that respects the building as a whole.

5. How do I apply?

In order to apply for the Retail Improvement Grant, you must complete the application form and supply the requested documentation. The completed application form must be received by the Business Development Manager at Alton Town Council by Wednesday 31st October 2018.

6. What will the scheme fund?

Not all the improvement works will be eligible for a Retail Improvement Grant. The Grant will only fund 'eligible works'.

The following work will generally be considered eligible for support:

- New shop fronts and fascias
- Repair and reinstatement of all or any part of a shop front fixture that is visible from the street, including the first and second floors of premises where they are used for commercial activities. This includes windows, columns/pilasters, doors/ doorways, blinds/canopies, security grilles or glazing/shutters,
- Repainting of shop fronts in suitable colours
- Signage
- External lighting
- Professional fees associated with the development and delivery of the project, including planning application fees, consultancy fees and advisory services.
- Repair of external stonework and brickwork
- Repair and reinstatement of guttering and down-pipes
- Improvements designed to assist accessibility
- Training or mentoring relating to visual retail appearance and/or customer experience.

7. Will I require planning approval?

Virtually all works that change the exterior of buildings will require planning permission. A separate planning application and scale drawings prepared by a professional agent will be required to show the extent of all new work. If you are using a professional agent, they will be able to advise you about any statutory consents that are required. If you would like to discuss whether your proposals require planning approval please contact the District Council's Planning Team on 01730 266551.

8. What does your application aim to achieve?

Because of the limited funding available, applications will be assessed and scored by a Grants Panel that will consider whether the application:

- Is value for money
- Is sympathetic to the local built environment and significantly improves the look of the street and is in keeping with the historic nature of the area
- Proposes works to be carried out that will be of a high standard
- Proposes work that will have a positive impact on the local area and street scene, and improves the customer experience
- Assists in the economic development of the town
- Is in keeping with the aims and objectives of the Neighbourhood Plan

9. What do I have to supply with my application?

In order to consider your application we require the following:

- Completed application form – You must complete a grant application form. This contains basic information about your proposals.
- Schedule of works – full details of the improvement works that you intend to carry out. You should submit a 'schedule of works' which gives a description of any work to be carried out.
- Sketch drawings – depending on the extent of the proposed works, drawings will be required showing your proposals.
- Proof of ownership/lease – If you do not own the property, you will need to provide proof that you have permission from the owner to carry out the works. The building owner must countersign your application to show that they have given permission for the works to be carried out.
- Cost estimates including quotes and fees
- Evidence that you have obtained three **quotes** from contractors, you should state which of the three contractors you would like to employ and why

Please note that any grant offer would usually be based on the lowest quote.

The following information must be contained in each quote:

- A breakdown of the individual cost of each element of the scheme
- Total price for the whole scheme (remember to also include project support costs and VAT as separate items and any ineligible works) for the purpose of grant calculation and monitoring.
- A programme of works from the builder

10. How long will it take to make a decision on my application?

We will try and make a decision on your application within three weeks of the application deadline date, provided we have received a fully completed application.

If your project required planning permission and your grant is approved we will write to you making an offer in principle of funding. We will then issue a formal offer letter as soon as planning permission is granted.

11. Who will decide whether my application is approved?

Applications will be considered by a panel made up of at least two council officers. The Business Development Manager for Alton will lead the assessment process. The Chairman of the Town Council and the relevant Portfolio Holder at the District Council will be consulted.

12. What conditions will apply to the grant?

All grant offers will be made in writing.

Full details of the conditions that apply to the grant will be set out in a grant offer letter.

All grants will be conditional on you securing appropriate planning consent.

The scheme operates independently of the planning process and any offer of a grant does not imply in any way that planning consent will be granted.

You will be required to maintain the property to a satisfactory standard for a minimum of three years.

13. When will the grant be paid?

Grants will be paid on production of invoices from contractors showing a detailed breakdown of costs, and following inspection of the works by a council officer. Payments will be made after all works are completed.

14. Application form and advice

Application forms and advice regarding the scheme are available from: Julie McLatch, 01420 83986, business@alton.gov.uk