

Cheshire East Council

Cabinet Member for Regeneration

Date of Meeting: 06th February 2017

Report of: Executive Director of Place

Subject/Title: Macclesfield Town Centre Shop Front Grant Scheme

Portfolio Holder: Cllr Don Stockton

1. Report Summary

- 1.1. The purpose of this report is to seek approval to launch and deliver the Macclesfield Town Centre Shop Front Grants Scheme up to a total cost of £50,000 utilising funding from the existing Regeneration and Development Programme budget. It seeks delegated authority to the Project Director Macclesfield Regeneration for the approval of individual grants as part of that scheme up to a maximum of £2,000 per individual grant.
- 1.2. The Shop Front Grant Scheme will lead to enhancements in the town centre environment supporting a number of Residents First Outcomes, in particular supporting the resilience of the economy (Outcome 2) and the sustainability of place (Outcome 4). The scheme will also significantly contribute to the Council's Quality of Place Agenda.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1. It is recommended that the Portfolio Holder for Regeneration:
 - i) Approve the documented grant scheme (attached);
 - ii) Agree to the implementation of the Macclesfield Town Centre Shop Front Grant to a total cost of up to £50,000 of the Regeneration and Development Programme Budget;
 - iii) Delegate authority to the Project Director Macclesfield Regeneration for the approval of individual grants in a manner and in accordance with the process set out in the documented grant scheme procedure up to a maximum of £2,000 per individual grant.

3. Other Options Considered

- 3.1 The option of not proceeding with the grant scheme now devised has been considered, however, given that the Council's intention to devise a grant scheme has been made public this would be likely to lead to considerable criticism from various local stakeholders.
- 3.2 Options for different upper thresholds for grants as well as different levels of match funding have been considered. The £2,000 limit with a requirement of 25% match funding is suggested having regard to experience of take up of different grant schemes. The intention is to allow for grants sufficient in size and match funding requirements sufficiently low to be attractive to shop owners and occupiers, whilst not so large as to unnecessarily limit the number of potential properties which could be improved, with a view to maximising benefits for the town centre environment.

4. Reasons for Recommendation

- 4.1. The Council is committed to the revitalisation of Macclesfield Town Centre and the Macclesfield Regeneration Team has delivered a number of regeneration projects aimed at improving the town centre environment and facilitating investment.
- 4.2. In 2015 a series of shop front improvements were funded by the Council in the vicinity of Market Place and Chestergate in Macclesfield Town Centre. Not only did that investment enhance the appearance of that area of the town, following that investment a number of formerly vacant properties in that area have been reoccupied and there has been a noticeable degree of private sector investment in shop units in that area.
- 4.3. Given the success of this previous shop enhancement scheme, in October 2015 the Executive Director of Growth and Prosperity in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Regeneration and Assets and the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Assets agreed to the mobilisation of resources to allow the development of a number of projects focused on the regeneration of the town centre including a Shop Front Grant Scheme for the southern part of the town centre around the lower Mill Street area, for which £50,000 was set aside within the Regeneration Capital Budget.
- 4.4. Officers have now developed a Grant Scheme ready to be launched. After consideration of the size of the target area, and having regard to the take up levels and thresholds of former grant schemes it is proposed that the Grant Scheme would allow payments of up to £2,000 to be made to individual shop owners/occupiers for upgrading the exteriors of their premises subject to a 25% match funding requirement.
- 4.5. Under the terms of the current version of the Constitution (25th August 2016), grants of up to £50,000 shall be for the decision of the relevant Portfolio Holder and grants over £50,000 shall be approved by Cabinet. It

is therefore necessary to seek formal Portfolio Holder approval for the proposed Shop Front Grant Scheme. In order to allow officers to implement the scheme without further reference to the Portfolio Holder for individual grant applications, it is also necessary to gain delegated authority to named officer(s) to sign off grant applications to the maximum amount of £2,000 per grant in accordance with the procedure set out in the scheme.

5. Background/Chronology

- 5.1. The importance of protecting the vitality and viability of town centres is well recognised and the need to revitalise Macclesfield town centre; which has seen an increasing number of vacant properties, decreased footfall and a reducing retail market share, is set out in many Council documents. Indeed, Macclesfield has been specifically identified in recent national research as a town where the town centre offer is lagging behind the aspirations of the population living nearby, with potential for a far more aspirational retail offer if perceptions of the centre can be changed.
- 5.2. A number of projects are being pursued with the aim of regenerating Macclesfield Town Centre. Public Realm enhancement projects at Sparrow Park, the Middlewood Way and the Silk Road underpass have now been delivered. The sale of Churchill way Car Park is proceeding to enable the development of a leisure led scheme. Concept designs are being procured for the enhancement of the public realm on Exchange Street, Castle Street and the pedestrianised upper section of Mill Street.
- 5.3. Following the successful of enhancement of a number of shop fronts in the Chestergate/Market Place area at the northern end of the town centre core, to complement the aforementioned projects it is proposed to introduce a Shop Front Grant Scheme for the lower Mill Street area. This part of the town centre is characterised by independent smaller shop units. £50,000 funding has been set aside for this purpose within the has been identified within the Regeneration capital budget.
- 5.4 Officers have spent some time developing a documented grant scheme procedure with associated guidance, application forms and governance. That scheme is now ready to be introduced.

6. Wards Affected and Local Ward Members

- 6.1. The area of the proposed scheme falls within Macclesfield Central ward, represented by Cllrs Dooley and Jackson. Both are aware of the proposed scheme and are supportive.

7. Implications of Recommendation

7.1. Policy Implications

- 7.1.1. The Shop Front Grant Scheme will lead to enhancements in the town centre environment supporting a number of the Council's policy ambitions

and the Council's Quality of Place Agenda. Strategic Priority 1 of the Cheshire East Local Plan Strategy for example states that the Council will promote economic prosperity by creating conditions for business growth including by supporting regeneration schemes which improve environmental quality in Macclesfield Town Centre.

7.2. Legal Implications

7.2.1. The Council has the power to award grants using its general power of competence in section 1 of the Localism Act 2011. In exercising the power the Council must satisfy its public law duties. In essence this means that in making the decision the Council must have taken into account only relevant considerations, followed procedural requirements, acted for proper motives and not acted unreasonably. A grant scheme is a clear statement of the criteria that the Council is applying and is essential if the Council is to defend any challenge to its decision making process.

7.2.2. The Constitution (Part 4 Finance Procedure Rules Section E – External Organisations) states that the Cabinet Member agrees policies setting down the approach for allocating grant funding and approves payment of grants by the Authority in accordance with those policies and which are up to and including £50,000 (E.24 and E.25).

7.2.3. The Macclesfield Shop Front Improvement Grant Scheme deals with the allocation of grants which are awarded to eligible applicants following an application process, and against a set criteria. There are conditions requiring recipients to report back to the Council upon expenditure of the grant and to enable further appropriate conditions to be imposed. The decision to approve the overall operation of the scheme is made the Portfolio Holder and all individual grants will be limited to £2,000 and awarded pursuant to that approved procedure to ensure that decisions can be made expeditiously and at the appropriate level.

7.2.4. The award of grant funding based on the application of the Council's grant policy satisfies the Council's public law duties. A competitive grants process is an open, transparent and fair means to afford all eligible organisations the opportunity to compete for and obtain grant funding from the Council.

7.3. Financial Implications

7.3.1. Section E of Part 4 - Procedure Rules, as set out on Page 324 of the current version of the Constitution (25 August 2016), states that grants up to £50,000 shall be for the decision of the relevant Portfolio Holder subject to there being adequate provision in service budgets and the appropriate approvals being sought.

7.3.2. Capital Funding has already been approved and allocated for public realm enhancement projects within the Regeneration and Development

Programme budget. The £50,000 for this grant scheme would be taken from this available budget.

7.4. Equality Implications

7.4.1. The documented Shop Front Grant Operating Procedure has been designed to ensure fairness and transparency to the awarding of the Shop Front Grants with no identified equality implications.

7.5. Rural Community Implications

7.5.1. None

7.6. Human Resources Implications

7.6.1. None

7.7. Public Health Implications

7.7.1. None

7.8. Implications for Children and Young People

7.8.1. None

8. Risk Management

8.1 There is a risk that the Shop Front Grants scheme may not be taken up by shop owners but this can be mitigated by working collaboratively with local businesses and key local landlords to ensure the grant scheme is well publicised and take up encouraged.

8.2 There may also be a risk that the Shop Front Grants scheme is too successful and that the demand outweighs the budget. In order to minimise disappointment and criticism, an operating procedure including clear publicity of the assessment process has been devised.

8.3 Determining not to proceed with the grants scheme would pose its own risk to the the Council's reputation locally given that there is an expectation that this scheme will be delivered.

9. Access to Information/Bibliography

9.1. None

10. Contact Information

10.1 Contact details for this report are as follows:

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