

# Oadby and Wigston Borough Council

## Shopfront Improvement Scheme

### **Information and Guidance**

This project is funded by the UK Government through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund



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## **Background**

Oadby and Wigston Borough Council is keen to promote all businesses that are customer facing in the borough. The Council recognises the economic, environmental and social importance of local businesses in the borough. This project is funded by the UK Government through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.

This is a discretionary grant to be offered on a first come, first served basis, subject to applications meeting the criteria for eligible works and there being funds available. Funding will be available annually and the fund will remain open until the annual allocation is spent. It will then reopen the following year.

The following guidelines are to advise you on the best way to achieve a successful improvement for your retail property or business. Oadby and Wigston Borough Council administers this grant scheme and these guidelines outline the entire process from initial contact within the Council to the final payment of the grant.

## **What does the Shop Front Improvement Scheme aim to achieve?**

The Shop Front Improvement Scheme aims to bring about substantial improvement in the physical appearance and condition of shop fronts and, more generally, the front elevation. This should subsequently improve the vitality and viability of the Borough's Town and District Centres.

Shop fronts are the most noticeable part of a building's façade. They make a big impact on the appearance of an area and contribute to people's first impressions. High quality shop fronts make an area feel more welcoming to locals and visitors, improve its image, contribute towards a stronger sense of identity, and importantly encourage footfall and spend in these areas.

The Shop Front Improvement Scheme aims to improve shop fronts in the Borough as a means of supporting the growth of local businesses, improving the local environment, and raising the image of the shopping locally amongst locals and visitors.

The Borough Council must also ensure that businesses supported meet all current legal and regulatory requirements in respect of their business and their employment of staff.

## **What will the scheme fund?**

The scheme will operate in the Oadby, Wigston and South Wigston boundaries, primarily focussed on Town and District centres however we will review on a case by case basis. Premises outside of this area may be considered on their merits and the impact any work has on the look and feel of the area.

## **Design Principles**

### **What constitutes a good shop front design?**

The scheme is not intended to create a uniform style to shop front design, as this would result in an uninteresting landscape. Within the scheme we wish to encourage diversity and distinctiveness in terms of designs, details and colours whilst retaining the principles of good design. We recognise that some buildings may require more modern shop fronts and that high quality modern design can add significant value. As a general principle, projects should seek to balance imaginative design with the historic context of the building and the wider area.

### Will I require planning approval?

A separate planning application may 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 consent that is required. It takes the Council about **two** months to decide on a planning application, advertising consent or other statutory consent. You need to build this into your timetable for carrying out your project.

### Grant Availability

The Shop Front Improvement Grant Scheme will only provide grants to commercial premises. Please note that grants are discretionary and subject to 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 which have already been undertaken or any works which are started prior to a formal offer of grant funding being made.

The scheme will run annually and remain open until available funds for that year have been spent. Applications can be made at any time. The funding will cease on 31 March 2025. Applicants should be aware that the funding may be competitive if multiple applications are received.

### What types of premises are eligible?

The grant is available to support independent retail businesses. If you are unsure of whether your business will qualify for a grant you should contact the Borough Council.

### Who can apply?

Both tenants and building owners can apply. In the case of a tenant, you must have the building owner's approval and hold at least a five-year lease for the building. The business must be an independent retailer with no more than five shops.

### Levels of funding

It is recognised that in some cases significant improvements can be made through fairly minor and relatively inexpensive work, for example redecoration and basic repairs. In other cases more significant levels of work are required. To reflect this, no minimum level of grant has been set however the maximum grant will be £2,000 and has been set in order to maximise the resources available.

The owner or tenant would also be expected to make a minimum contribution to the project of at least 50%. Therefore, in order to receive a maximum grant of £2,000 the works would need to total at least £4,000.

### Is funding available to help me develop my ideas before I apply?

Due to the nature of the grant and the grant levels there is no development funding available.

### When will I be paid the grant?

All grants offered will require a guarantee of match-funding from the business owner. Payment of the grant, of up to £2,000, will only be made on completion of the works and evidence being provided that the full payment has been made to the contractor.

### Do I need to appoint a professional agent?

This will depend on the scale of your proposals. You may need expert advice from a suitably qualified agent to help identify potential options, prepare initial sketch designs, advise on costs, support the preparation of planning applications, prepare detailed designs and oversee the work.

### What will the scheme fund?

The following work will generally be considered as eligible for support. It is by no means an exhaustive list and all proposed works will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

- External lighting
- New shop fronts (see below)
- Repainting of shop fronts in suitable colours
- Signage
- Internal security grilles and/or security glazing (see below)
- Repair and reinstatement of all or any part of a shop front fixture that is visible from the street, including the first and second floor of premises where these are in commercial use

#### Examples of non-eligible works:

- Lighting within window displays
- Window display equipment
- Pedestrian access improvements
- Externally mounted security features
- Repair and reinstatement of guttering and downpipes
- Professional fees associated with the delivery of the project such as planning application fees, consultancy fees, advisory fees etc.

#### New Shop Frontages

Retention of original shop fronts and reinstatement of original features will be encouraged. Modern designs will also be supported; however, these must use high-quality materials and be sympathetic to the immediate area.

#### Security

Externally mounted security shutters detract from the appearance and image of an area. The scheme will not support externally mounted security features. The scheme will support the costs of replacing external shutters with internal security grilles and/or security glazing (e.g., laminated or strengthened glass).

#### Reinstatement of original architectural features

We wish to encourage the reinstatement of architectural or historical features that have formed part of the buildings design and character but may have been lost or damaged over time.

### What is the process for application?

Application forms are available on-line. Once completed and with the relevant information they should be emailed to [ukspf@oadby-wigston.gov.uk](mailto:ukspf@oadby-wigston.gov.uk)

#### What do I have to supply with my application?

In order to consider your application, we require the following to be submitted:

- A completed application form. You must complete the application form as this contains basic information about your proposal.
- Sketch drawings of your proposed work and a photo of how it looks now.
- 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 should countersign your application to show that they have given permission for the works to be carried out.
- At least three comparable cost estimates including fees.

### How long will it take to make a decision?

A decision will be made as quickly as possible on your application, as long as the above information is submitted. If your application requires planning permission and your grant is approved, you will be given an 'in principle' offer of funding. A formal grant offer letter will be issued once planning permission has been granted. In the intervening time you should not commence any works.

### Who will decide?

Applications will be considered by a panel of relevant officers within the Council with decisions reported to the Head of Service for sign off. All confidential financial information will not be included in any public documents.

### What are the conditions of the grant?

All grant offers will be made in writing with the conditions included. Standard conditions are attached at Appendix 2. All grants will be made conditional on you securing any consents required. The scheme runs 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 condition for a minimum of three years.

## Appendix 2: Grant Terms and Conditions

### Oadby and Wigston Shop Front Improvement Scheme Terms and Conditions

The agreement is between Oadby and Wigston Borough Council and the Applicant(s) as named in the offer letter. Businesses/Organisations accepting grant offers from the Shop Front Scheme will be required to abide by and agree to the following terms and conditions:

#### General Terms and Conditions

- The grant is not payable to an undischarged bankrupt.
- The grant must be used for the purpose intended as outlined in the Grant Offer Letter. [NB: this will be vouched by the production of original invoices in respect of the grant claim.]
- The grant may not be used to fund retrospective work.
- In the case of tenants, payment of the grant requires the building owner's approval and furnishing proof of a minimum 5 years lease of the building.
- If the business/organisation ceases trading/operating within 12 months of the payment of the grant or the building is sold, the applicant must notify the Borough Council within 14 days and in such circumstances Oadby and Wigston Borough Council may require the applicant(s) to repay, in whole or part, the grant paid.
- The grant must not be used for improvements to residential property, cleaning of buildings for purely cosmetic purposes, structural repairs including re-roofing, internal repairs and alteration, external security features, CCTV systems or recoverable VAT.
- If at any point the organisation/business becomes VAT registered, the applicant must inform Oadby and Wigston Borough Council and discuss repayment of VAT expenses claimed.
- The grant will only be paid to proposals which have been granted planning permission. Nothing in the agreement or negotiation of the grant will affect the District Council's decision over planning permission. An offer of agreement in principle will be made until planning permission has been granted. Only then may a Grant Offer letter be issued and works commence.
- The applicant must inform Oadby and Wigston Borough Council of any changes to the business or changes of business address and telephone number.
- The grant is made on the condition that the property will be maintained to a satisfactory standard for a minimum of three years.
- Any grant must be taken up within the period stated in the Grant Offer Letter unless a prior arrangement is made.
- Payment will be made in arrears upon production of the grant claim form along with supporting documentation (e.g. copy of invoices).
- All claims to be addressed to UKSPF Team, Oadby and Wigston Borough Council: [ukspf@oadby-wigston.gov.uk](mailto:ukspf@oadby-wigston.gov.uk)