

NEW CREDITON SHOPFRONT ENHANCEMENT SCHEME

Cabinet Member(s): Cllr Richard Chesterton, Cabinet Member for Planning and Economic Regeneration

Responsible Officer: Richard Marsh, Director of Place

Reason for Report: The purpose of this report is to inform Members about the new Crediton Shopfront Enhancement Scheme launching in December 2022 and to request approval for the revised Scheme.

Recommendation: That the new Crediton Shopfront Enhancement Scheme is approved by the Cabinet and three Crediton Ward Members are nominated to be part of the Funding Panel for the Scheme.

Financial Implications: There is £15,000 funding committed from Earmarked reserves to go towards a shopfront enhancement scheme in Crediton. There is a staffing resource requirement to administer the scheme which will be met through existing provision.

Budget and Policy Framework: Funding for year one is committed from the existing Economic Development budget. Subject to approval, continuation for year two and three have been included in the Shared Prosperity Fund investment plan under the Love your Town Centre Initiative. The Mid Devon Economy Strategy includes the objectives of “towns and villages are vibrant, prosperous and have a positive atmosphere”; the shop front enhancement scheme will help to maintain the competitiveness of retailers within the town centre. It will also help achieve key outcomes for Place as outlined in the Economy Strategy.

Legal Implications: Previously, schemes have received approval from Legal Services and the revisions to this scheme are minor changes that do not alter the main criteria and are in line with recommended best practice. Therefore, it is not considered that there are not any significant legal implications of extending the Scheme.

Risk Assessment: It is not envisaged that there are any significant risks with regard to running this scheme. There is a risk that by not providing the shopfront enhancement scheme that the appearance of Crediton town centre could be compromised and this in turn could affect the success of the local economy.

Equality Impact Assessment: The grant guidelines and criteria protect applicants and the Council by ensuring a consistent and fair approach to all applications based purely on the strength of the Scheme rather than anything relating to the applicant.

Relationship to Corporate Plan: This supports the Corporate Plan priority of ‘Economy’, in particular: “Identify strategic and tactical interventions to create economic and community confidence and pride in the places we live. This includes a continued focus on Town Centre Regeneration”.

Impact on Climate Change: No direct impacts anticipated.

1.0 Introduction/Background

- 1.1 It is recognised that the visual attractiveness of a town centre is an important element in consumers' choices about where to shop and spend leisure time. The state of repair and decorative condition of shopfronts is an important element of this visual impact and therefore a major contributor to a town's vitality and economic success.
- 1.2 Over the past few years, the Council has administered several shopfront enhancement schemes across the District: in Crediton (2002-2005) as part of a Heritage Economic Regeneration Scheme, in Cullompton (2011-present) as part of a previous scheme to support the regeneration in the town centre and more recently as part of the Heritage Action Zone project, and in Tiverton (2015-2020) as part of the High Street Innovation Fund. A report came to Economy PDG in January 2019 supporting the reinstatement of shopfront enhancement schemes for the three main market towns in the District. We have a current Scheme running in Cullompton and a Scheme launching in Tiverton shortly. The intention is to run a parallel Scheme to Tiverton's in Crediton.
- 1.3 The Growth, Economy and Delivery Team recognises the value of shopfront enhancement schemes in maintaining the visual attractiveness of town centres, supporting the preservation of conservation areas and as a means of engaging with business owners and encouraging them to update and redecorate their properties at a time when they are potentially experiencing financial difficulties and therefore less likely to invest in their properties. With businesses still recovering from the impact of the pandemic, the economic challenges facing retailers are increased further with the recent inflation rises and the subsequent cut on spending due to customers having less disposable income. Therefore, it is even more opportune to launch this scheme to support our businesses.
- 1.4 We have secured allocated funding from the ED budget to run a new Shopfront Enhancement Scheme in Crediton and are ready to launch this new Scheme in December 2022 under the umbrella of the Love Your Town Centre Funding scheme. Funding for year two and three has been included in the Shared Prosperity Fund investment plan.

2.0 Scheme Process and Criteria

- 2.1 The Crediton Shopfront Enhancement Scheme mirrors the Scheme launching in Tiverton so that the two Schemes will run simultaneously. The main criteria points are highlighted below:
- The scheme will offer a single grant of up to £2,500 with the requirement for 50% match-funding of the total project costs.
 - There will be an open-application style approach with no set deadlines throughout the year, meaning applications will be determined on their own eligibility and merit on a first-come, first-served basis. This is in anticipation of heavier demand in year one and ensuring we can maximise the benefit of the scheme quickly and support as many businesses as possible at the time of their need. Funding opportunities to be able to run the scheme for a further two years are being explored.

- As with the Tiverton Shopfront Enhancement Scheme, applications are also allowed from upper-floor/basement businesses to improve their signage and visibility from the front of the building. Therefore, instead of just 'shopfronts', the Scheme will now support enhancement work for anything that faces the street as long as it has a street-level repair need and relates to the commercial usage of the building. In some cases, the rear of buildings are the sides that face the street, therefore applications will be determined on a case-by-case basis against this criteria.
- 2.2 The launch of the Scheme will follow a Communication Plan to ensure that the businesses within the Town Centre boundary are informed.
- 2.3 As with the previous Scheme, a Funding Panel will be set up consisting of the Scheme Administrator (the Growth and Regeneration Officer for Crediton), a Conservation Officer (or other suitable representative) and three Crediton Ward Members. The role of the Panel is to ensure that decisions are made in accordance with the criteria and to act as ambassadors for the Scheme in Crediton.
- 2.4 Following the end of each financial year, a summary report outlining how the funding has been used will be presented to the Economy PDG for their information.
- 2.5 The Growth, Economy and Delivery Team is therefore seeking approval for the new Scheme and the nomination of three Member representatives to sit on the Panel.

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Circulation of the Report: Cabinet Member, Leadership Team

List of Background Papers:

- New Crediton Shopfront Enhancement Scheme Criteria
- Crediton Town Centre Boundary Map