

## **Retail Support Initiative Grant Application - (Executive Decision)**

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### **Purpose of the Report**

For Members to consider the Retail Support Initiative (RSI) grant request detailed below.

### **Public Interest**

Supporting and helping to improve the retail offer in the towns and villages across Area East.

### **Recommendation**

To award £2,500 from the Area East revenue reserve budget, RSI element, ring-fenced for the Wincanton Top-up scheme, as a 40% contribution to the exterior improvements at 14 Market Place, Wincanton.

All grants are subject to the standard condition contained at the end of Appendix A.

### **Background**

This application is being considered as an exception to policy under the Retail Support Initiative's operating criteria for 2019-20 which was approved by Area East Committee in July 2019. A copy of this is attached at Appendix A.

The RSI was originally set up across Area East in 2006; for many years it has proved to be an effective way of supporting and engaging with a wide range of retail and service outlets across the Area.

During this period a number of refinements have been made to the funding levels and how the scheme is operated/targeted. Annual performance reports are brought back to this Committee in June.

Members will have an opportunity to consider this scheme as part of a budget priorities workshop for Area East councillors in March

### **Grant details**

This application relates to 14 Market Place, one of the former bank premises in Wincanton, which has been empty since the bank operation ceased during 2017. The Police have entered into an agreement with the current owner of the building and an extensive programme of interior and exterior refurbishment to the premises is underway which will result in new Police accommodation in the town centre. The owner of the building is requesting financial support for exterior works to the front of the premises, including:

- Restoration of stonework including stone architraves, coping stones etc
- Repair and redecoration of front door and windows
- Scaffolding

These works have not yet commenced

The current owner acquired the premises when they were marketed after the bank closure. There hasn't been any previous RSI awards for 14 Market Place but the owner has received grants for other

buildings which he owns in the town. If this application is approved, it would therefore represent an exception to policy because the owner has a number of premises in the town.

The funding request is:

- ❖ Total Project Cost – £6,150
- ❖ Amount requested – £2,500

The balance required to complete the project will come from the owner's own fund.

The reason this report is brought forward as a recommendation to support is that the assessment score is 65 (out of a maximum of 100) and therefore exceeds the minimum level score of 50 which is required for grant assistance to be considered. It has scored well because of the future use of the premises by the Police.

### **Financial Implications**

If Members choose to award this grant, the unallocated budget in the Area East Revenue Reserve, ringfenced for the Retail Support Initiative (Wincanton top-up element), will be £7,500.

### **Council Plan Implications**

Complementing the economy theme which seeks to support our town centres in adapting to the changes in high streets and consumer trends

### **Other Implications**

None

**Background Papers:** *Area East Committee Agenda and Minutes July 2019*

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### Operating criteria 2019/20

Percentage contributions cannot exceed 50% of costs and **no** retrospective applications are eligible (i.e. in respect of works that have already been commissioned/started).

Applications over £1000 will be considered by Area East Committee on a monthly basis. Amounts up to £1000 may be considered at any time as a delegated grant in consultation with the Chairman & Ward Member(s).

Area-wide grant levels: **£1,500 to a maximum 50% of project costs as follows:**

#### Eligible costs:

- Shop-front improvements, if they enhance the High Street
- Business rates assistance – a contribution to the amount payable for new businesses (which do not compete with another business) in their first 2 years of trading
- Exceptional projects which add to viability of towns/villages

#### Wincanton top-up

In addition to the area-wide scheme, the 'top-up' scheme for Wincanton also offers:

- Maximum grant £1,000 for businesses wishing to move into one of the eligible units in the town **which have been empty for at least six months prior to receiving an application.**

Grants are only available to proprietors/owners with one business/premise and will not exceed 50% of project cost.

#### Process

Applications for grants are assessed and recommendations made on the basis of a fully completed application form and 2 'like for like' quotes. Self-help/DIY schemes may complete the application form and supply a project budget with supporting information.

All grant recipients must accept that the grant may be used for publicity purposes by the District Council. Payment of the grant is done retrospectively, for a completed programme of works on the basis of receipted invoices. Exceptionally officers, in consultation with the Chairman, may release partial payments where there is clear justification for doing so.

The existing assessment and current scoring mechanism favours businesses:

- Employing more than 2 people
- In prominent places
- Key rural stores/Post Offices
- Retailers

#### The award is subject to the following standard conditions:

- The grant award may be used by SSDC for promotional/publicity purposes
- Grants are paid for approved works/purchases on production of receipted invoices

- Awards are subject to a summary of the benefit of the scheme being supplied
- Applicants will normally be expected to draw down the grant within 6 months of the offer and if not will have to inform us of the reason(s) for the delay. If there is a valid reason, officers can provide a 6-month extension, but beyond this the grant would either be withdrawn or referred to Area East Committee to be reaffirmed
- That appropriate consents are obtained
- Works requiring listed building/planning consents or building regulation consent will be required to be signed off by the appropriate officer prior to the release of funds
- If, within 3 years of a grant award the business ceases to trade, the District Council reserves the right to reclaim the grant on the following basis: year one –100%, year 2 – 75%, year 3 – 45%