

Havant Town Centre Vacant Shop Scheme

Criteria and Guidance Notes for Applicants

1. Introduction

Our town centres have faced a number of economic challenges over recent years, with changes in consumer behaviour and the rise of online purchasing leading to a decline in centres and increased vacancy rates. For town centres to continue to be successful, they must become flexible and resilient to future economic challenges and changes.

Our town centres are social spaces and provide an important community function, especially for the elderly and those reliant on public transport and it is important that they are supported to remain welcoming and well used. Our town centres need to diversify by attracting independent retailers and provide other uses such as health, fitness, leisure, and entertainment.

A barrier to making this happen is the investment cost required to bring an empty unit back into use. To help potential businesses overcome this barrier, Havant Borough Council is implementing a grant scheme to cover the refurbishment and fit-out costs of vacant units to bring them back into use in Havant town centre. A map of the Havant town centre Vacant Shop Scheme Zone Area can be found at Appendix A.

Business will be able to apply for grants to cover identified refurbishment costs of between £1,000 - £50,000 depending on the size of vacant property.

Free business support advice is available to interested parties throughout the application process to support the development of a robust proposal. Applicants can email [economic development@havant.gov.uk](mailto:economic_development@havant.gov.uk) to access this support.

We would like to encourage applications from business start-ups and strongly advise such applicants to speak with our business support advisers early in the process.

There is no requirement to repay the funding.

Privacy Statement

With your consent, the personal data you provide enables us to process your Expression of Interest and Full Application for Grant Funding. If you do not give us your consent, we will be unable to process your application. You have the right to withdraw your consent, if you do, we will not be able to continue your application. You have a number of rights on how your data is used, including the right to object. For more information on how your personal information is used please see our [privacy policy](#).

2. Summary of Grant Scheme

You **must** read through this document before submitting your expression of interest and or full application to the Vacant Shop Scheme.

Havant Borough Council will award **capital** grants from £1,000 to a maximum of £50,000 to bring empty shop premises in the vacant shop zone back into long-term use.

1. Applicants seeking to lease smaller units up to 1,000 sqft. can apply for a grant of up to £10,000.
2. Applicants seeking to bring medium sized vacant units of between 1,001 - 3,000 sqft. back into use can apply for a grant of up to £30,000.
3. Applicants seeking to bring larger vacant units over 3,001 sqft. back into use can apply for a grant of up to £50,000.

The amount requested should reflect and be in proportion to the capital investment required to renovate the premises in line with its proposed future use.

The grant cannot be used to fund the running costs of the business.

Applications can only be for premises within the Havant town centre vacant shop scheme zone, as set out in appendix A at the end of this guidance.

The grant scheme will launch on **19th January 2026 and will run on a rolling basis until the fund is fully committed or until the end of the programme on 31 March 2027, whichever is the soonest.**

The grant scheme will operate on a first come first served basis and Havant Borough Council reserves the right to close the scheme ahead of the **31 March 2027**, should the grant funding available be fully allocated ahead of this date.

Successful applicants will enter into a grant funding agreement with Havant Borough Council.

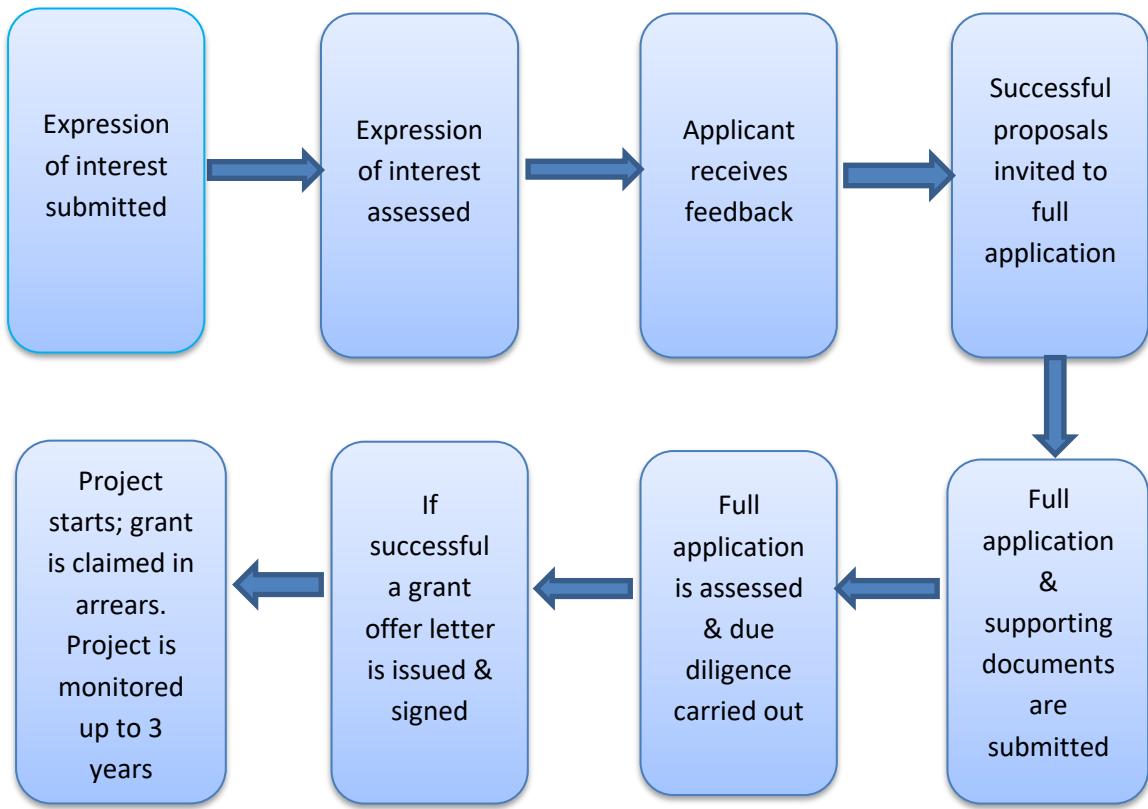
Projects will be monitored for up to three years from the date of the signed grant offer letter.

3. Application Process and Assessment

The grant scheme will operate a two staged process.

- Expression of interest
- Full application

3.1 Application Flow Chart



3.2 Expression of Interest Stage

The expression of interest stage (EoI) will determine whether the proposal is eligible to progress to a full application.

A link to the Expression of Interest form can be found on our [website](#)

Free business support advice is available to interested parties at both stages to support the development of a robust proposal. Applicants can email economic_development@havant.gov.uk to access this support.

We would like to encourage applications from business start-ups and strongly advise such applicants to speak with our business support advisers early in the process.

You should submit an Expression of Interest before being invited to progress to full application stage. The Council will provide a response within two weeks after you have submitted your expression of interest.

If you are successful at EoI stage, you will have until **18 December 2026 to submit a full application**. Full applications received after 18 December 2026 will not be considered.

The Expression of Interest (EoI) stage requires you to provide a summary of your business proposal. We will ask you to provide the following information:

1. The proposed business use.
2. The size of premises and or floorspace to be converted, if known.
3. An estimate of the grant required to complete the refurbishment works.
4. Your progress towards developing a business plan for your project.
5. A draft timeline for the completion of the work and when you expect to be open for business.
6. Your experience.

You are not required to submit a fully costed business plan at this stage; however, this is a mandatory requirement at full application stage.

If you would like to discuss your proposal with a member of the Havant Borough Council economic development team ahead of submitting an Expression of Interest, please email [economic development@havant.gov.uk](mailto:economic_development@havant.gov.uk)

It should be noted that an invitation to work up a full application is **not a guarantee that grant funding will be awarded**. On this basis we strongly recommend you read this guidance fully and make yourself aware of the level of detail required at full application stage, and the due diligence the Council is required to undertake at full application stage before you submit your Expression of Interest.

If you are unsuccessful, you will be offered the opportunity to book a feedback call with the programme manager if you wish to do so and may resubmit your EoI as a result of the feedback.

3.3 Stage 2 Full Application

The grant scheme will accept full applications up to **18 December 2026**. As soon as you are ready you can submit your full application and supporting documentation for assessment.

We understand that applicants will be at varying stages of developing their business proposal, so for that reason we are not providing a pre-determined timescale for applicants to submit the full stage application to us, (other than the final deadline). We hope that this flexibility will allow applicants the time to develop a fully costed and commercially viable proposal.

A full application form can be downloaded from our [website](#)

An incomplete application, (application form and supporting documentation) **cannot be considered for assessment**, so please check you have provided all the necessary information before you submit your application. A checklist is provided at the end of the full application.

Again, it is strongly advised that you contact economic_development@havant.gov.uk if you are unsure what is required at full application stage.

The final deadline will be **midnight on 18 December 2026** for any applications to be considered. Applications received after this time **will not be accepted**.

During the assessment process the programme manager may contact you to discuss your application.

Applications will be assessed against the criteria outlined in section 4 below.

As part of the assessment process, to ensure the appropriate use of public funds, Havant Borough Council will carry out standard due diligence procedures, including credit checks and county court judgements.

In the event that the Havant Town Centre Vacant Shop Scheme is oversubscribed, applications with the greatest potential to meet the criteria will be prioritised until the funding is fully allocated.

Should applications fail to meet the minimum criteria for funding, or the full programme funds are not allocated, Havant Borough Council reserves the right to extend the scheme.

The Havant Town Centre Vacant Shop Scheme Zone area is defined as units within the area as set out in Appendix A.

Applicants will receive **notification** on the success or otherwise of their full application within **six working weeks** from the date of their submission, providing information supplied is of sufficient detail.

Successful applicants will be required to enter into a funding agreement with Havant Borough Council, and successful projects will be monitored up to a maximum of three years. Further details are set out in section 5 of this guidance.

Unsuccessful applicants will be offered the opportunity to book a feedback call with the programme manager should they wish to do so.

4. Havant Town Centre Vacant Shop Scheme Assessment Process and Criteria

To be eligible for the capital grant the proposed operating business must meet the following criteria.

As part of the assessment process, the Havant Town Centre Vacant Shop Scheme programme manager may contact you for clarification around your proposal and its potential impact on existing businesses within the scheme area.

- 4.1 The business will operate out of a vacant property in the Havant Town Centre Vacant Shop Scheme zone, as shown in appendix A.
- 4.2 The business is either:
 - 4.2.1 A new business or an expanding business who are new to the defined locality as set out in Appendix A.
 - 4.2.2 A business which is already trading in the scheme areas and is either taking on additional or larger premises, or where the grant supports the retention of a viable existing business through relocation.
- 4.3 The application is for capital costs only. **Salaries, business rates or rent or any other ongoing costs cannot be included.**
- 4.4 The application demonstrates the commercial viability of the business proposal through a fully costed business plan and a cashflow forecast for the business, including the renovation works. The business plan must demonstrate that the business or project is sustainable for a minimum of three years in the identified retail unit.
- 4.5 Where the vacant shop scheme grant is to part fund capital costs, the application and business plan will set out how you are financing the remaining capital costs. Evidence to show that funds are in place for the remainder of the works is required.
- 4.6 If additional funding is required, the application should demonstrate that these funds are in place to strengthen the viability of the business proposal. The

amount of grant applied for is fully evidenced and is proportionate to the total investment requirements set out in the business plan and represents value for money.

- 4.7 The business plan sets out the number of full-time equivalent (FTE) jobs that will be created or where applicable, retained through the scheme investment. If you are an expanding business, you need to set out the number of current jobs and any additional ones created because of the expansion. For the purposes of this application, FTE is a minimum of 30 hours per week. Part time jobs can be counted (for example, creation of 2 x 15 hour a week jobs would qualify as 1 FTE job in the assessment process).
- 4.8 The business plan will identify the vacant premises being brought back into use and the lease arrangements. The applicant will negotiate their own lease with the property owner or agent of the vacant property.
- 4.9 The business plan sets out clear and reasonable implementation timescales.
- 4.10 If this is a start-up and or a new business venture, your assumptions will be clearly set out within your business plan and evidenced as far as possible. Section 6 below provides further guidance on completing your business plan.
- 4.11 The grant awarded will be issued as a Minimal Financial Assistance (MFA), under the Subsidy Control Act 2022, which governs the provision of financial assistance by public authorities. The MFA allows public authorities such as Havant Borough Council to award low value subsidies, as long as the total value of subsidies from the Council or from any other public body, the individual or business are receiving is below £315,000 over a three-year period. Applicants will need to confirm that any public subsidies or grants received over the last three years in total are below this figure.
- 4.12 For purposes of this grant scheme, eligible capital expenditure costs may include things like architectural/design fees, preparing the site for construction, checks and surveys, labour costs, bricks, mortar, walls, flooring, wiring,

plumbing, ducting, sinks, basins, toilet bowls, renovation, repair and other conversion costs.

Applications not supported by the scheme are:

- 4.13 Applications which do not add value to existing town centre uses and which could be considered to unintentionally disadvantage the existing businesses. An example of this would be an application to open a business where a number of existing businesses in that sector already exist in the locality.
- 4.14 Applications from businesses in poorly regulated or unlicenced sectors. For example, the fund will not support application from businesses in the non-surgical cosmetics sector.
- 4.15 Applications which do not align to broader corporate priorities around health and well-being or may impact negatively on the reputation of Havant Borough Council. For example, a vape business.

As part of the assessment process at full application, the Council will undertake due diligence for outstanding or previous county court judgements, previous criminal convictions, and check whether the applicant, or any directors of the business, or interested parties have ever been declared bankrupt or declared voluntary insolvency. The full application asks for details of previous directorships held, and the name of the company and company registration number.

5. Grant Agreement Claim and Monitoring Process

- 5.1 The Havant Town Centre Vacant Shop scheme is a grant award. There is no requirement to repay the funding.
- 5.2 You may apply for grants of between £1,000 - £50,000 per application, depending on the size of the unit and the cost of bringing the unit back into use.
- 5.3 The maximum grant available is dependent on the area of commercial floor space being brought back into use.
 - a. Small vacant units under 1,000sqft will be eligible for grants up to a maximum of £10,000.
 - b. Medium vacant units between 1,001sqft and 3,000sqft are eligible for a grant of up to £30,000.
 - c. Large vacant units over 3,001sqft are eligible for grants up to £50,000.
- 5.4 If successful, you will be required to enter into a Grant Funding Agreement (GFA). This will state the amount of grant offered and the terms and conditions under which it is issued.
- 5.5 Payments will be made against eligible project expenditure incurred after project commencement date as set out in the Funding Agreement.
- 5.6 You have **10 working days** from the date of the agreement to complete and return it to Havant Borough Council.
- 5.7 Grant payments are issued as a reimbursement of eligible expenditure (i.e., paid in arrears) incurred by the business and will be paid on production of relevant evidence, i.e. copies of invoices for approved eligible costs and bank statements to evidence the payments. All documents submitted as part of a grant claim should clearly state "Certified as a true copy of the original" and be signed and dated". Any documents submitted without this will be returned and reimbursement will be delayed. All documents required to make a claim should be sent by e-mail to the programme manager.
- 5.8 Grants payments can be claimed either at the completion of your project or by instalments. This will be set out in the Grant Funding Agreement.
- 5.9 Grant claims cannot include recoverable VAT. Proof of VAT registration status will be required.

- 5.10 Grant payments will only be made directly to your business's bank account using details supplied on the new vendor form, which we will issue to you once the GFA is in place.
- 5.11 Grant payments will not be made to third parties.
- 5.12 The applicant will be bound by the terms of the agreement, and Havant Borough Council reserves the right to recover the grant should the terms on which the grant is awarded are no longer satisfied.
- 5.13 Financial support provided to your business through the Havant Town Centre Vacant Shop Scheme is considered a Subsidy Allowance (the replacement of previous State Aid schemes as of 4th March 2021). As part of the grant agreement, you must declare if you are in receipt of any other state subsidies for this or any other projects.
- 5.14 When you have submitted your last claim, a programme manager will arrange a verification visit. The Council may also wish to issue their own communications to highlight the support provided. This is likely to involve taking photographs of the conversion work undertaken and new equipment. On this basis it is suggested that applicants document the progress of the project, with for example, a series of before and after photos / floorplans of the renovations.
- 5.15 Havant Borough Council may also wish to create some case studies to highlight the scheme. We would expect successful applicants to work with us to develop case studies.
- 5.16 Havant Borough Council will monitor the outputs and outcomes from the project on a regular basis for up to three years after the grant offer letter is signed. These will reflect the outputs included in your business plan, so may include for example, the number of jobs you have created, increased turnover, an increase in customers, the development of new products/services, or simply that the business is still trading.
- 5.17 For projects creating new jobs, applicants may be required to submit the new employee's contracts and a copy of the HR records or payroll printout as part of the monitoring process.
- 5.18 When producing marketing collateral for your business, such as brochures, websites, advertisements, flyers newsletters, social media campaigns etc, you should acknowledge Havant Borough Council as the source of the grant funding within any items you produce, wherever practical.

6. Business Plan and Supporting Documentation

A fully costed business plan should be submitted along with the application form. There is no prescribed format for the business plan, however it should clearly explain your business proposal and set out what you are seeking grant funding for. Given the range of grant funding available, we expect business plans to be proportionate to the grant being sought. We suggest however that as a minimum it covers the following topics as appropriate:

- 6.1 Provide a brief overview of the business. We suggest you include information on the business ownership structure and management, when it began and present location if appropriate. The current number of employees and a summary income statement.
- 6.2 It should cover your objectives and the timeframes in which you will achieve them i.e., short-term 0-6 months, medium term 1-2 years and long-term 3+ years.
- 6.3 The business plan should include detail on any jobs created, and any other outputs generated as a result of the investment grant.
- 6.4 We would encourage you to set out the business aims. Providing information on the type of work the business undertakes or intends to undertake if it is a start-up.
- 6.5 Provide details of your current markets and where appropriate the details of existing customers. Or if a start-up, the target markets and or customers. You may wish to provide evidence as to why you have chosen Havant Town Centre as a good location for your business.
- 6.6 Provide information on how you currently or propose to advertise and market your business.
- 6.7 We would expect you to demonstrate that you have given thought to both the financial and operational viability of the business, especially if it is a start-up. So, for example, you have thought about a pricing strategy and cash-flow. You have thought about local competitors. If appropriate, that you are aware of the required regulatory licenses and understand building control requirements, especially if you are intending to operate a food and beverage business.

- 6.8 You should set out a timeline or programme of work for the conversion work to be completed and when you anticipate trading to commence.
- 6.9 The business plan should include a detailed financial section, setting out the financial performance of the business, (current or estimated turnover, profit and loss) as well as a current and projected operating cash-flow covering the next 36 months.
- 6.10 Within this we require a clear capital investment plan, which will set out details of how the grant will be used.

7. Timescales

Stage	Date
Scheme launch	Monday 19 th January 2026
Deadline for full applications*	Midnight Friday 18 December 2026*
Scheme closes**	Wednesday 31 st March 2027

*The programme will run until the funding is fully committed or the dates outlined above, whichever is the soonest.

**expenditure incurred after this date may not be eligible under the scheme

8. Contact Details

Full Applications and accompanying documentation should be submitted electronically to economic_development@havant.gov.uk

If you have any questions or points of clarification ahead of submitting your full application, please send your enquires and contact details through to economic_development@havant.gov.uk and a dedicated officer will be in touch.

Appendix A

Havant Town Centre Vacant Shop Scheme Zone Area

