



Ashton in Makerfield

Town Centre Building Grant Scheme

Application Advice Notes

The Ashton-in-Makerfield Town Centre Building Grant Scheme is part of the wider Government Funded Capital Regeneration Programme 'Our Future Ashton'.

The aim of the Grant Scheme is to improve and regenerate Ashton by bringing out the best in the historic environment, to increase the attractiveness and vitality of the town centre. A total fund of up to £500,000 will provide grant to deliver a range of repair and conservation work to retail and other business premises within the Conservation Area, particularly on Gerard Street.

The project is planned to complete in March 2026 and all grant funding must be spent by then.

This guidance has been developed to support property owners and commercial tenants in Ashton, to explain the grant process and how to apply successfully for funding to make improvements to buildings on the high street.

1. Eligible Works for grant funding

Funding is available for conservation-led repairs and improvements to commercial properties located within the priority area (see map on page 6). These could include:

- Repairs to existing historic architectural features and decorative details (or reinstatement of details that have been lost where clear evidence exists to inform the historic appearance and details), such as traditional shop fronts, upper floor joinery (including windows, especially sliding sashes, leaded windows, bays, oriels, doors, mock Tudor applied timber details and ornamental barge boards), and terracotta and masonry detailing.
- Removal of overlarge plastic fascias, projecting box signs and external roller-shutters and replacement with sympathetic alternatives, including traditional hand painted signs, hanging signs and traditional fabric awnings. Where appropriate, and with convincing justification, internal security measures may be eligible for grant.
- Other external building repairs which add to the historic character of the area, such as repairs to/reinstatement of lost chimneys, reinstatement of cast iron or timber rainwater goods, leadwork repairs/reinstatement and pointing of masonry.

Works which cannot be funded:

- Complete re-roofing will not normally be eligible for grant. However, minor roof repairs will be considered where there is economic benefit whilst other high-level work is being undertaken at the same time.
- Internal refurbishment and repairs (except where such works are necessary as a consequence of shopfront repair or reinstatement works, to make good the internal fabric, or are necessary for structural stability.)
- Work that has already been started.
- Work that does not have the necessary planning consents and other approvals.

2. Who can apply?

You can apply for funding if you are the owner of a property in Ashton Town Centre (see Priority area map) which is in commercial use, as long as the building / project meets the criteria set out below.

If you are the tenant of commercial property, you can also apply, as long as you have a repairing lease which is not due to expire before the end of March 2026.

There is no limit to the number of applications that an owner or tenant can make, subject to available funding.

Eligibility for grant under this scheme is also conditional upon the grant being designated as Minimal Financial Assistance (MFA) under Section 36 of the Subsidy Control Act 2022. In exceptional circumstances, this condition maybe removed at the sole discretion of the Council, on a case by case where in the sole opinion of the Council the removal of the condition is in compliance with the Subsidy Control Act 2022.

3. Selection Criteria

The following selection criteria will be used in the assessment of applications, may be subject to change in exceptional circumstances:

- Location: the property must be in Ashton Town Centre, within the boundary shown on the attached map. Priority will be given to properties within the Ashton-in-Makerfield Conservation Area, particularly those located on the main high street (Gerard Street).
- Conservation quality of the proposals: will the proposals protect and enhance the character of the Conservation Area to a sufficient degree to warrant funding?
- Environmental sustainability: does the application involve use of appropriate materials and techniques, in line with national conservation standards and with reference to addressing concerns around climate change and environmental sustainability?
- Modest projects and 'quick wins' where small packages of work can have considerable impact.
- Group impact: taking into consideration properties in proximity to other grant-funded buildings, which can create a higher impact by adding critical mass.
- Viability: the future use and sustainability of the building if work is carried out; potential to bring vacant space back into use; supporting an existing business that may be struggling (or supporting a new independent business whose enterprise will add to the vitality and new offer of the town).

- Potential to be a catalyst for change and an exemplar for other buildings / owners.
- Condition of the property, with those buildings in the worst state of repair being given priority.
- Quality of the host building, with those of greater architectural merit being prioritised.
- Social Value: Does the project involve consultants and / or contractors who are located within the Borough? Is there a commitment to use local suppliers on the project?
- Value for money – size of grant request – owners' contribution.

4. How much grant could you receive?

- Grant applicants applying in the first round could receive up to 90% funding towards their project.
- Grants over £100,000 would only be awarded in exceptional circumstances.

Note: Grant percentage rates could be subject to change subject to available budget.

5. Application process

The work required before you can submit an application may take several months. It will involve appointing an architect / appropriate lead consultant, preparing drawings/work specification, obtaining priced tenders from building contractors and applying for statutory permissions. Your application will then have to be assessed and approved by the Project Board. You therefore need to allow plenty of time before work starts on site.

Stage 1: Submit an Expression of Interest Form

Contact the Consultant Project Manager, Kate Mitchell for an initial discussion and site visit. (Email: kate.mitchell@creative-heritage.net) She will explain all aspects of the scheme, including what is eligible for a grant, how the scheme works and its timescales. If appropriate, you will be invited to submit an Expression of Interest (EoI) form. Your proposals will then be reviewed by the Project Manager, who will formally confirm whether your project meets the selection criteria and is eligible for grant funding, enabling you to progress to the next stage.

Stage 2: Appoint a qualified consultant to develop proposals

When you have had formal confirmation that your project can progress to the next stage, you will need to appoint an appropriately qualified and experienced architect or building surveyor to prepare a specification and drawings for the work, obtain statutory consents and manage the tendering process to select an appropriate contractor. Consents include planning permission, listed building consent, advertising consent and building regulations (as applicable).

The consultant must be registered with an appropriate professional body (ARB/RICS) and have relevant previous experience. For work involving historic buildings, conservation expertise is desirable and a conservation accredited architect (either AABC Registered or an RIBA Conservation Architect) or an RICS conservation-accredited surveyor is preferred. Please contact the Consultant Project Manager for a list of consultants who have provided appropriate services in the Borough previously.

Professional fees incurred from the date of submission of your Expression of Interest (including the cost of essential survey work and obtaining statutory consents) will be eligible for funding as part of the

grant scheme, provided there is compliance with subsidy control. **Unfortunately, until you make your full grant application, payment of any fees and associated costs to this stage will be at your own risk - see Section 7.** It is therefore essential that your appointed consultant liaises with the Consultant Project Manager at the earliest opportunity and throughout the design development phase, so that she can help you to develop a successful application and avoid abortive work.

Stage 3: Obtain tenders from suitable contractors

We encourage the use of local contractors and sub-contractors provided they have proven skills in working with historic buildings. We may require evidence to be supplied to confirm these skills. The Consultant Project Manager is able to provide a list of companies who have performed well on similar projects previously.

You must seek three written quotations, based on clear written specifications, covering all grant eligible works.

Stage 4: Submit a full grant application form

The completed application form should be submitted with supporting documents, including a copy of the specification/schedule of works, drawings of the proposed works and the preferred contractor's tender price – see checklist. Your grant will be based on your contractor's price for the works that are eligible for grant. (The project may also include works that are not eligible for grant.) **The Consultant Project Manager can help with completing the application form and advise on the accompanying documentation.**

Stage 5: Decision making

Grant decisions will normally be made within four weeks of the round deadline.

Once the application is received, it will be assessed against the criteria, appraised by the Consultant Project Manager and colleagues from Creative Heritage Consultants Ltd and Wigan Council Officers, and presented to the Project Board with recommendations for consideration. (The Project Board will consist of senior officers from the Wigan Council Regeneration team.) Short listed projects will then be presented to the Ashton Innovation Board for discussion prior to the Project Board making final grant decisions. **No work may be started until written approval is given, or you will not be eligible for grant.**

Stage 6: Grant Award and Offer

Following approval from the Project Board you will receive a Grant Offer letter and Agreement, which must be signed and returned to the Consultant Project Manager. The offer of grant must be accepted in writing within one month of issue and the grant spent by 31 March 2026, unless otherwise agreed in writing. Other clauses will include a commitment to an ongoing Maintenance Plan, to protect the investment that is being made in the property. Request a copy of the full grant application form and standard Grant Offer Conditions for more information. Note however that the Council reserves the right to amend these conditions in exceptional circumstances.

6. Timescales for applications

Grants will not be offered for work that has already begun and cannot be awarded for works that do not have the relevant approvals such as planning permission, advertising consent or listed building

consent. It is vital that applicants plan ahead when preparing applications and allow enough time for submitting supporting documents and obtaining any necessary consents.

Expressions of Interest can be submitted at any time. **Full applications** must be submitted by the following dates:

- Round 1 deadline: 30 June 2024
- Round 2 deadline: Spring 2025 (date to be confirmed; a second round will only take place if there are sufficient grant funds remaining)

All projects must be completed and all grant funding claimed by end March 2026.

7. Grant Payments

Pre-contract costs - *Before the grant is approved and the Grant Agreement is signed, all initial project costs are at the grant applicant's risk.* These pre-contract costs, such as architect's fees, survey costs and planning application fees, must initially be paid by the applicant. If these project costs are deemed eligible for grant funding and the project proceeds, a grant towards these fees will be paid after the Offer Letter and Grant Agreement has been accepted and signed. If the project does not proceed, a grant will not be given for any of these costs.

Costs of eligible works

The grant is claimed against invoices, in arrears. (See separate Checklist of documentation to be provided at each stage of your project.) You or your consultant will need to provide the Consultant Project Manager with relevant invoices for professional fees, surveys and building work, supported by architect's certificates to confirm that work has been undertaken in accordance with the specification and to an appropriate standard. Grant will not be paid for work that does not meet generally accepted standards of quality and accuracy in materials and/or workmanship. Work should be completed by the approved contractor and sub-contractors as per the agreed schedule of works, plans and drawings.

Interim claims can be made as the work progresses on site, with second and subsequent claims being supported by evidence that payments of prior claim invoices have been made to the contractors etc.

Where interim claims are made, each will be paid in full (subject to the provision of the supporting documentation required), until 90% of the grant has been reached.

Where claims for the full amount of the grant or interim claims are submitted, payment of the final 10% of the grant will be withheld until the Consultant Project Manager is satisfied that all works have been completed to the required standard. A completion report from the applicant's lead consultant and a maintenance plan will be required for projects where the grant exceeds £10,000, before the final grant payment will be made.

8. Publicity

Wigan Council will provide publicity banners for display during the building work and may use photographs and details of your project in promotional literature.

Core Area Map

