

# **Supporting Thriving High Streets Empty to Energised Pilot Grant Scheme**

## **Applicant Guidance Notes**

**Closing Date: 12 noon, Monday 16<sup>th</sup> February  
2026**

## Our Vision

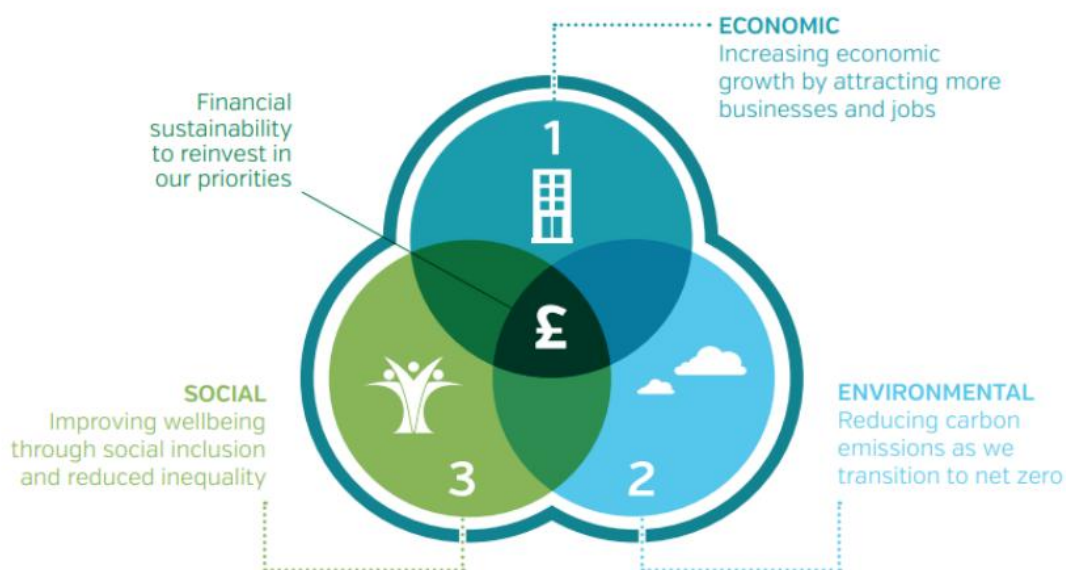
Our vision is that Ards and North Down will be a Sustainable Borough.

The Big Plan (Community Plan) uses an outcomes-based approach and seeks to enable all people in Ards and North Down to:

- Fulfil their lifelong potential
- Enjoy good health and wellbeing
- Live in communities where they are respected, are safe and feel secure
- Benefit from a prosperous economy
- Feel pride from having access to a well-managed sustainable environment.

The Corporate Plan aligns with the Big Plan with a vision for the Council to become a Sustainable Borough by way of three pillars: Economic, Environmental and Social.

Three Corporate Priorities align with these pillars of sustainable development:



Further information about the Council can be found on the Council's website at [www.ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk](http://www.ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk)

## Table of Contents

Section	Title	Page
1	Introduction	4
2	Applicant Eligibility	6
3	Eligible Works	7
4	Statutory Consent	8
5	Risks and Insurance	9
6	Funding	10
7	Application and Assessment	11
8	Letter of Offer	13
9	Works Commence	13
10	Works Complete	13
11	Payment	13
12	Timescales	15
13	Non-eligible and Unsuccessful Applications	16
14	Appeals Process	17
15	Monitoring and Evaluation	17
16	Data Protection	17
17	Contact Information	18

*Appendix 1 – Boundary Maps*

*Appendix 2 – Project Description Guidance Notes*

*Appendix 3 – Assessment Matrix*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The **Empty to Energised Pilot Grant Scheme** has a value of £460,000 over 3 years and is being delivered under the Supporting Thriving High Streets Programme and is funded by the Council. It will provide financial assistance to vacant property owners who want to renovate vacant/derelict properties and introduce new commercial uses. It is hoped that the scheme will assist in creating buildings that are fit for purpose and ready to occupy and help to attract long-term tenants which will impact positively on increasing footfall.

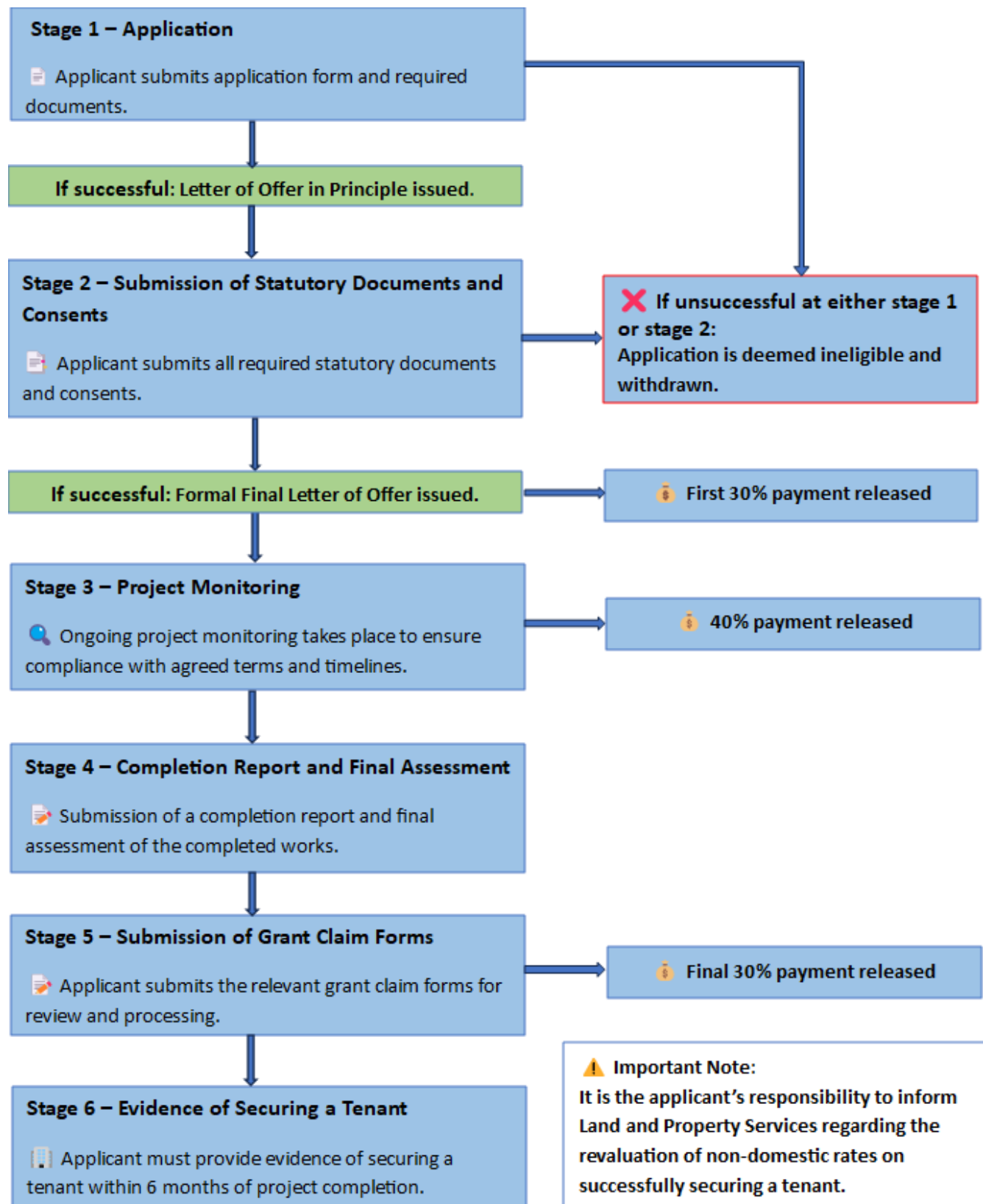
This is the first time a scheme of this nature has been available in Ards and North Down – it will be piloted in Bangor and Newtownards, and if successful may be expanded throughout the Borough.

The scheme will provide financial assistance to vacant property owners in order to achieve the following grant scheme objectives.

### Grant Scheme Objectives

- Tackle prominent long-term vacant/derelict properties.
- Create buildings that are fit for purpose and ready to occupy.
- Bring vacant floor space back into use.
- Create potential to attract long-term tenants.
- Impact positively on the streetscape with high quality internal/external works.
- Contribute to the vibrancy of the city/town centre with a view to increase footfall in the area.
- Create new and local employment either directly or indirectly.
- Promote sustainability within the project.

## Application Process



## 2. APPLICANT ELIGIBILITY

### **Who can apply:**

Vacant property owners who want to renovate vacant/derelict properties and introduce new commercial uses.

- The property must be a vacant/derelict premises or vacant/derelict space within a property, that is located within Bangor city or Newtownards town (refer to Appendix 1 – Boundary Maps).
- Property must be in Applicants' ownership at point of application.
- Both Freehold and Leasehold property owners can apply.
- The property must not have been in occupation for a period of 12 months at the time of application.
- Can deliver the project outlined in the application within 12 months on signing and return of the formal final Letter of Offer.
- The Applicant is the named person to receive Grant. The Applicant must remain the same throughout the process and will be the person responsible for making and receiving payments.
- Applications are limited to a maximum Grant of £25,000 per property over the lifetime of the scheme.
- A minimum 20% contribution is required from the Applicant.
- Applications are limited to one per property. Where a building is subdivided with multiple owners, each property owner may submit a separate application, provided it meets the scheme criteria.
- Property owners must make every reasonable effort to secure a tenant within 6 months from completion of the project and must be willing to accept short term leases.
- Applicants are limited to 2 active applications at any one time.
- Applicant must be 18 years or over at the time of application.

### **We will not fund applications that are;**

- Closing an existing unit in the city/town centre to open an alternative premise (unless evidence can be provided to demonstrate current premises is not fit for purpose).
- Not prepared to share learning from their project with us and other relevant groups.
- Unable to evidence match funding.
- Not located in Bangor city or Newtownards town (refer to Appendix 1 – Boundary Maps).
- Multiple applications for the same space (only one application can be submitted per property).
- Seeking funding for works that have already taken place or are already under way at the time of the assessment.
- Requiring additional capital funding from Council.
- Not prepared to provide an outline project description, project budget.

- Not prepared to provide an outline marketing plan to secure a tenant at application stage.
- Proposing the purchase of land/property or for land/property which is to be sold within 12 months from the receipt of final payment of Grant aid and could result in full repayment of Grant to Council (refer to section 11).
- Located in an industrial park (an area zoned for the purpose of industrial development).
- Providing tourist accommodation/residential accommodation.
- Sports clubs, retail parks, Charity shops.
- Commercial properties that are rates exempt.
- Not paying business rates.
- Projects which are of a party-political nature or promote a particular religion.
- Not prepared to make every reasonable effort to secure a tenant within 6 months from completion of project.

The Council will have ultimate discretion in determining the projects that qualify for funding.

### 3. ELIGIBLE WORKS

Only capital items which are an improvement to the interior or exterior of the vacant/derelict building are eligible. On the application form, Applicants must demonstrate how the proposed project will enhance the vacant/derelict premises to assist with meeting the objectives of the pilot Grant scheme.

Examples of eligible capital items:

- Access improvements.
- Internal/external Improvements/fitting out vacant/derelict premises.
- Upgrading internal/external fixtures and fit.
- Internal/external lighting.
- Catering equipment.
- Customer facilities.
- Improved security features.

This list is not exhaustive and can include other capital works/items that can be demonstrated as an improvement to the vacant/derelict property.

All items and/or works must comply with all statutory obligations and consider Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

Applicants should consider sustainable methods such as eco-friendly materials, energy efficiency and designing for durability.

## 4. STATUTORY CONSENT

It is the responsibility of the Applicant to make enquiries as to whether any statutory consent, e.g. planning permission, advertising consent, building control, listed building consent etc, is required for their planned works and subsequently to ensure that the relevant applications are made.

Applicants must comply with all statutory obligations associated with their capital proposals e.g. disability considerations, environmental health, licensing.

For proposed applications which include works that require statutory approvals e.g., planning permission, building control approval, it is the Applicant's responsibility to ensure they have all necessary approvals in place. Applicant must submit a timeline for delivery of their projects, projects must be completed within 12 months of the formal final Letter of Offer and return of Acceptance by Applicant. Ensure this time constraint is taken into consideration when developing any proposal.

Applicants are expected to adhere to listed building guidelines when completing works on such properties. **It is the responsibility of the Applicant to ensure that all statutory approvals required are lawfully complied with.**

Some external works to a building (excluding a listed building) can be carried out without the need for planning permission. Details of those works that are deemed to be 'permitted development' can be found in the Schedule to [The Planning \(General Permitted Development\) Order \(Northern Ireland\) 2015](#), under Part 34 – Shops, Financial and Professional Services Establishments, and Part 35 – Office Buildings.

A formal final Letter of Offer will only be issued when statutory consents are received and a copy provided.

The Empty to Energised Pilot Grant operates independently of statutory consent(s) and any Offer in Principle does not imply in any way that statutory consent(s) will be forthcoming.

### **Building Control**

Alteration of buildings and entrances are likely to require a Building Control application. Contact the Building Control office on the details below for further guidance.

It is the Applicant's responsibility to ensure statutory consents are attained prior to the commencement of works, and that copies of the approvals are made available to the Council.

It is the Applicant's responsibility to ensure the relevant approvals from building control and planning etc, evidence of this will be required.



Grant funding will only be paid when the relevant approvals are granted and evidence of this is provided.

Note – Consultancy and statutory application fees for obtaining necessary approvals are not grant eligible under this scheme.

**Relevant contacts:**

Ards and North Down Borough Council

Planning Department, 2 Church Street, Newtownards, BT23 4AP

Tel: 0300 013 3333 Email: [planning@ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk](mailto:planning@ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk)

Mon-Fri 9.00am – 3.00pm

[Planning Applications Information - Ards and North Down Borough Council](#)

Ards and North Down Borough Council Building Control Department

City Hall, The Castle, Bangor, BT20 4BT

Tel: 028 9120 8015 Email: [buildingcontrol@ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk](mailto:buildingcontrol@ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk)

Mon-Thu 9.00am – 5.00pm and Friday 9.00am – 4.45pm

[Building Control - Ards and North Down Borough Council](#)

During application assessment, officers will request the Applicant to provide evidence that they have contacted the relevant agencies. A copy of correspondence may be required to verify the need for statutory approvals. It is suggested that enquiries are made in writing.

## 5. RISK AND INSURANCE

The Applicant, agent and/or contractor is responsible for all risks in connection with public or employer liability associated with the works.

The Council does not and will not accept liability or responsibility in respect of the Grant aided work carried out to the Applicant's property; accordingly the Applicant should not rely on the inspection or payment of Grant monies by the Council as any proof or guarantee that the contractor engaged to execute the works has completed the said works to a proper standard prior to payment; the Applicant is strongly advised to satisfy themselves that the works have been carried out to a satisfactory standard.

The best value for money must be secured and the successful supplier(s) and/or contractor(s) must be properly qualified to undertake the works, meeting health and safety requirements in relation to the individuals performing the works and for members of the public.

## 6. FUNDING

The grant offered will fund 80% of total project costs up to a maximum grant of £25,000. A contribution of 20% will be required from the Applicant. The Applicant will be responsible for any additional costs over and above the maximum grant threshold (£25,000).

Note - There is a minimum level of £10,000 grant award.

Examples below:

<b>Total Cost of Project</b>	<b>Applicant Contribution</b>	<b>Grant Award</b>
£12,500	£2,500	£10,000
£18,000	£3,600	£14,400
£21,600	£4,320	£17,280
£25,000	£5,000	£20,000
£30,000	£6,000	£24,000
£50,000	£25,000	£25,000

### The grant will not fund:

- Rent, rates, utilities or other running or administration costs.
- Professional fees such as Planning or Building Control or for specialist advice on bringing the premises back into use.
- Legal costs.
- Any costs which someone else is paying for, whether in cash or in kind.
- Routine repairs and maintenance to buildings or ongoing maintenance costs.
- Maintenance equipment or office equipment which is not essential to the project.
- Any transport that is necessary for the project.
- Running costs for the building/proposal after the project is complete.
- Work that has already taken place or is underway prior to an offer of funding.
- The cost of any consumable items e.g., masks/ gloves/ visors.
- Debt, retrospective costs.
- Websites or training costs.
- Purchase of stock for general trading.
- Gifts, gratuities, and hospitality.
- Costs which are not clearly linked to the project.
- Costs that are already covered by other funding or income sources.
- VAT - applicable to businesses that are VAT registered.
- General Upkeep.
- Marketing and Advertising.

This list is not exhaustive, should the Applicant have any queries regarding eligible costs/items for funding contact: [emptytoenergised@ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk](mailto:emptytoenergised@ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk).

The Council will have ultimate discretion in determining the types of costs that are eligible for grant funding assistance. This will be assessed on a case-by-case basis.

## 7. APPLICATION AND ASSESSMENT

The Scheme has a limited budget, and grants will be awarded through a competitive assessment process. The assessment panel will be made up of Council officers, and external specialists will be consulted if required. Eligible applications will be ranked in score order and awarded a grant amount until the available funding is reached, i.e. based on ranked scores. Applications must achieve a minimum score of 50% (refer to Appendix 3 - Assessment Matrix).

Failure to provide sufficient detail will be considered as an unsatisfactory response. Applications deemed unsuccessful in the pilot grant scheme will not proceed.

In order to apply for the Empty to Energised Pilot Grant, Applicants must complete and return the online application no later than 12 noon, Monday 16<sup>th</sup> February 2026.

### Stage 1

Requires Applicants to submit an online application form. This will be assessed in the first instance and must satisfy all basic eligibility (refer to Appendix 2 – Project Description Guidance Notes).

<b>Assessment Criterion</b> <b>Basic Eligibility</b>	<b>Score Range</b> <b>PASS/FAIL</b>
<b>Application Submitted in full</b> Online application submitted in full	PASS/FAIL
<b>Vacancy Duration</b> Property must not have been occupied for a period of 12 months	PASS/FAIL
<b>Property location</b> Property located in Bangor or Newtownards Scheme Boundary, site location map submitted	PASS/FAIL
<b>Current Condition</b> Current condition photographs submitted	PASS/FAIL
<b>Property ownership</b> Applicant can evidence ownership	PASS/FAIL
<b>Match Funding</b> Proof of matched funding submitted	PASS/FAIL

## **Project Assessment**

Applicants must provide a detailed summary of project including a proposal on how they intend to market and promote the property detailing how they propose to secure a tenant within 6 months (refer to Appendix 2 - Project Description Guidance Notes).

Applicants must evidence best value for money and provide an accurate cost breakdown as the figures and evidence presented as part of the application submission are what Council will detail on the Final Formal Letter of Offer should the application be successful. (refer to Appendix 2 - Project Description Guidance Notes).

If an Applicant receiving grant funding is later held to account for any breaches relating to those improvements, the funding could be held back or if paid then claimed back from the recipient through claw back proceedings (refer to section 11).

Submission of documentation must be sent via email to [emptytoenergised@ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk](mailto:emptytoenergised@ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk). Include Applicant name and first line of the vacant/derelict property address in the subject line.

## **IMPORTANT**

Applications are only deemed as submitted in full when both the online application form has been completed, and the stage 1 supporting documentation has been received.

**These criteria are mandatory, failure to meet will result in the application being deemed ineligible and will not progress any further in the assessment process.**

## **Stage 2**

Successful Applicants at stage 1 will be awarded a Letter of Offer in Principle from the Council which will set out the maximum grant award available based on the proposed works outlined in the application form. This is not a formal offer of grant and is conditional on the Applicant submitting proof of all necessary supporting documentation.

Applicants will then be required to submit the following:

- Proof of all relevant statutory consents (refer to section 4).
- And any other relevant documentation.
- A full and final cost schedule for works.
- Applicants that have not progressed to stage 2 within 12 months of receipt of the letter of offer in principle will be invited for a review of application in order to progress or withdraw application.

Successful Applicants at stage 2 will then be awarded a formal final Letter of Offer. This formal final Letter of Offer will set out the final maximum grant amount and terms and conditions of the grant offer and cannot change from this point forward.

Work agreed to be funded in the formal final Letter of Offer should not commence until Council have given permission.

External specialists will be consulted if required.

## 8. LETTER OF OFFER

Applicants cannot start works until a formal final Letter of Offer for the grant has been issued and the acceptance form is returned within 7 working days to the Council.

The Council will not retrospectively fund projects started prior to acceptance of formal final Letter of Offer.

## 9. WORKS COMMENCE

The Council will contact the Applicant via email following the receipt of the completed acceptance form of the formal final Letter of Offer and any statutory consent documents required to confirm that works can commence.

Regular updates to Council officers will be a requirement of the scheme. Council reserve the right to inspect works at any time during the time of project delivery.

## 10. WORKS COMPLETE

Works must be completed in accordance with that listed on the application form, and for which a formal final Letter of Offer has been issued. Where alternative works or additional works is undertaken, no payment will be made unless the Council's approval has been obtained prior to works commencing. The grant may be reduced or withheld if the grant eligible work proves to be less than estimated.

## 11. PAYMENT

Funding to successful applicants will be paid out in instalments:

Allocated funding from Council	30%
Allocated funding from Council	40%
Allocated funding from Council	30%

30% of grant funding will only be released for payment following return of signed acceptance of formal final Letter of Offer and the council has issued an email following receipt to confirm approval to proceed.

40% will be offered further to successful submission of claim documentation evidencing the expenditure against 30% upfront payment.

Final 30% will be paid on completion once we have received a satisfactorily completed monitoring form and completed with all requested evidence/documentation verifying spend against the formal final Letter of Offer requirement.

Note; Applicants cannot start any work or purchase any items of equipment until they receive their formal final Letter of Offer. Work or purchases made prior to receipt of the formal final Letter of Offer will not be eligible.

Grant funding will be paid directly to the Applicant within 28 days of receipt of the Applicant's completed claim form along with the following documentation:

- Original invoice(s)/receipt(s) for works and materials which must be dated and provide the supplier/contractor details.
- Copy of cheque/ BACS/ bank transfer/ debit card/ credit card payment to contractor(s) and/or supplier(s).
- Copy of bank statement showing associated payment leaving the Applicant's account. With the name of the Applicant clearly visible on the statement.
- Screenshots of online banking is acceptable; however, the full name of the Applicant must be visible (pending payments will not be accepted).
- Where a credit card is used to make payment, a copy of the statement showing the transaction and a copy of the relevant bank statement from the Applicants account reflecting the amount being paid to the credit card will be required for verification.

Applicants must provide all the evidence requested, if requested documentation is not supplied, payment will be withheld. Do not apply for funding if these items cannot be supplied.

Payment of grant will be made to the Applicant via direct BACS payment.

Applicants are responsible for paying the supplier(s) and/or contractor(s) and claiming back VAT, if applicable.

### **Claw back**

The Applicant must continue to own or control the property and keep exclusive control over what happens to it for a minimum of 5 years following the final payment of the grant.

Property owners who propose the purchase of land/property or for land/property which is to be sold within 12 months from the receipt of final payment of grant aid could result in full repayment of grant to Council.

<b>Date of selling property</b>	<b>Claw back</b>
12 months	100%
2 years	80%
3 years	50%
4 years	25%
5 years	10%

Applicants must repay to us immediately any grant that we have paid (and we will stop any future instalments of the grant) if they:

- no longer operate, or are declared bankrupt or placed into administration, receivership or liquidation.
- have, in our opinion, given us fraudulent, incorrect or misleading information.
- have acted negligently in any significant matter or fraudulently in connection with the Approved Project or the Approved Usage.
- or any competent authority directs the repayment of the grant.
- have a significant change in their status.
- have knowingly withheld information that is relevant to the content of the Application.
- do anything that brings us into disrepute, or which we consider for any reason puts public funds at risk, or we terminate or suspend any other grant we have given them.
- fail to make good progress with the Project or are unlikely in our view to complete the Project or achieve the Approved Usage agreed with us.
- fail to keep to any of the Standard Terms and conditions of the formal final Letter of Offer of the grant.

If the Applicant, or a business of which the Applicant is an owner/ partner/ director, or a family member, intend to supply goods, services, or works for the project for which the Applicant has been offered funding, contact the Council immediately for advice. Failure to comply with this requirement will deem the Project as ineligible.

## 12. TIMESCALES

The following timescales will be adhered to for this grant:

<b>Grant advertised</b>	Thursday 13 <sup>th</sup> November 2025
<b>Online Information Sessions</b>	Wednesday 3 <sup>rd</sup> December 6:00pm and Thursday 4 <sup>th</sup> December 10:00am and 2:00pm
<b>Grant open for applications</b>	12 noon, Monday 5 <sup>th</sup> January 2026
<b>Grant close for applications</b>	12 noon, Monday 16 <sup>th</sup> February 2026

<b>Letter of Offer in Principle</b>	March 2026
<b>Final date for all works to be completed</b>	12 Months post formal final Letter of Offer acceptance received
<b>Final date for all claims and evaluation to be submitted</b>	As detailed in the formal final Letter of Offer

The Empty to Energised Pilot Grant will open for applications from **12 noon, Monday 5<sup>th</sup> January 2026**.

Online applications and Stage 1 supporting documentation must be returned by the below deadline.

**The closing date for applications is 12 noon, Monday 16<sup>th</sup> February 2026.**

This scheme is an online process. If the Applicant is unable to complete the application and provide the supporting information online, contact [emptytoenergised@ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk](mailto:emptytoenergised@ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk) to arrange an alternative method.

Supporting documentation to be sent to [emptytoenergised@ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk](mailto:emptytoenergised@ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk)

An acknowledgement email will be issued upon receipt of the application; this will provide the application reference number. Reference number provided should be used in the subject line of all further correspondence.

## 13. NON-ELIGIBLE AND UNSUCCESSFUL APPLICATIONS

### Non-eligible

- Applicants who have previously received funding that was not managed satisfactorily or was not completed. This includes if they did not return monitoring or evaluation forms within the agreed timescale.
- Applications (including all essential documents requested) that are not fully complete or submitted after the grant closure deadline.
- Businesses/organisations implementing projects which are not compliant with grant's aims and objectives.
- Retrospective expenditure where works/items have already been obtained and paid for prior to the formal final Letter of Offer.

### Unsuccessful Applications

Unsuccessful Applicants will be informed in writing (in hard copy or by email) of the outcome of their application and the reasons clearly stated.



Appeals can only be made where an Applicant can evidence that the process of assessment was not followed in accordance with the criteria detailed in the application pack. The aim of the appeals process is to ensure a fair and transparent process for the assessment of Grant applications. Grants will be assessed based on the criteria set out in the guidance notes as part of the Grants Application Pack.

## 14. APPEALS PROCESS

Appeals can only be made where an applicant can evidence that the process of assessment was not followed in accordance with the criteria detailed in the assessment matrix.

The aim of the appeals process is to ensure a fair and transparent process for the assessment of grant applications.

Full details of the Appeals Process can be accessed on the Council website by following the link: [Ards and North Down Grants Appeals Process - Ards and North Down Borough Council](#).

## 15. MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Any record, financial or otherwise, premises and/or equipment used for the project shall be open to inspection at any time by the Council or its duly authorised officers. In addition, the organisation shall comply promptly with any requests by the Council for information concerning the progress, administration, monitoring and evaluation of the project.

The Council is required to monitor the progress of all projects supported through grant aid. The recipient therefore must complete the Project Evaluation Report provided within the timescale outlined within the formal final Letter of Offer.

## 16. DATA PROTECTION

Ards and North Down Borough Council value your right to personal privacy. We comply with the Data Protection Act 2018 / UK General Data Protection Regulation, ensuring that information is collected fairly and lawfully, is accurate, adequate, secure, up to date and not held any longer than necessary.

The personal information provided will be used for the purposes of managing the Grant, including sending of letters of offer and processing claims.

This information will be held for seven years from the conclusion of the program when it will be securely destroyed. Information you provide may be shared with external statutory or regulatory bodies, such as the Northern Ireland Audit Office or relevant Government Department, when there is a necessary and legitimate need to do so, but any personal information you provide to the Council is held securely and used only for Council purposes.

For further information, our Privacy Statement can be viewed at <https://www.ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk/privacy-and-cookies> or contact the Data Protection Officer at [dataprotection@ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk](mailto:dataprotection@ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk)

## 17. CONTACT INFORMATION

If you have any queries regarding an application or would like assistance in ensuring that you can obtain all the required information, contact:

Email: [emptytoenergised@ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk](mailto:emptytoenergised@ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk)

Telephone: 0300 013 3333 ext. 40670 & 40893

**This scheme is fully funded by Ards and North Down  
Borough Council**

**Document end.**