

Supporting Thriving High Streets Empty to Energised Pilot Grant Scheme Applicant Guidance Notes

**Closing Date: 12 noon, Monday 16th February
2026**

Our Vision

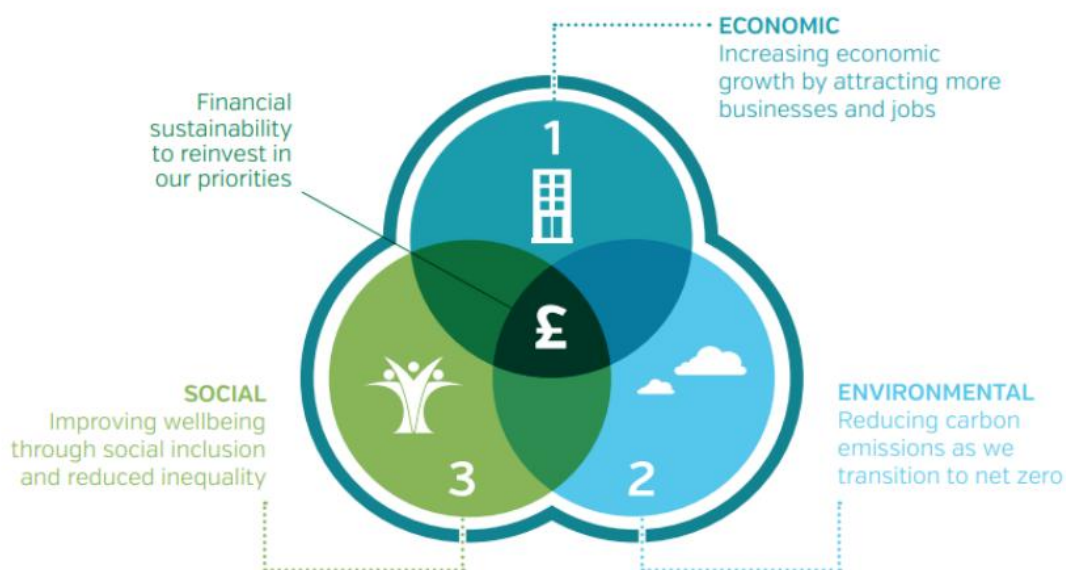
Our vision is that Ards and North Down will be a Sustainable Borough.

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

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1. INTRODUCTION

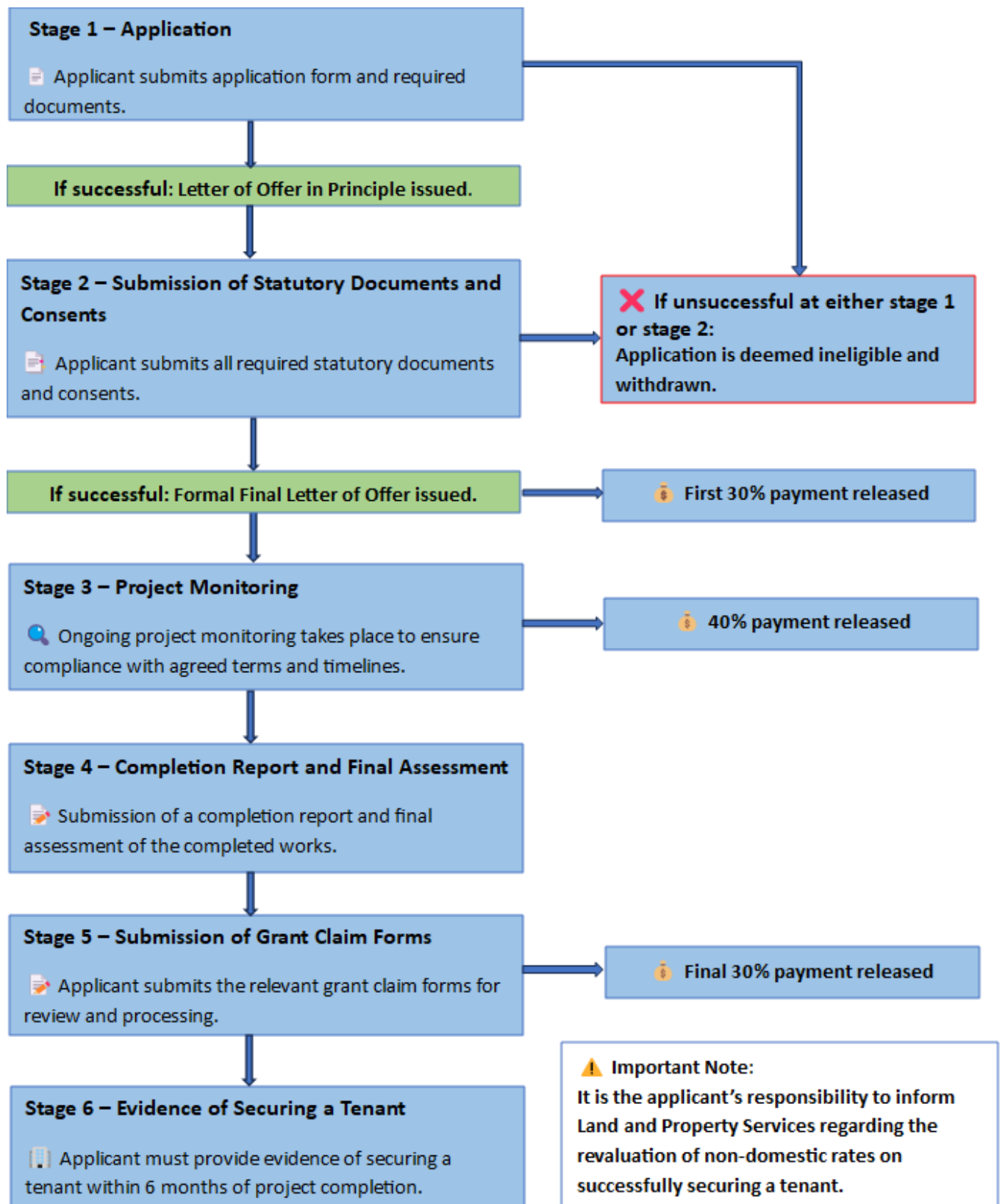
The **Empty to Energised Pilot Grant Scheme** has a value of £460,000 over 3 years, is being delivered under the Supporting Thriving High Streets Programme and is funded by the Council. It will provide financial assistance to vacant property owners who want to renovate vacant and/or derelict properties 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.

- Tackle prominent long-term vacant and/or 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 increasing footfall in the area.
- Create new and local employment either directly or indirectly.
- Promote sustainability within the project.

Grant Scheme Process



2. APPLICANT ELIGIBILITY

Who can apply

Property owners who want to renovate vacant and/or derelict properties and introduce new commercial uses, and meet the below conditions:

- The property must be a vacant and/or derelict premises or vacant and/or derelict space within a property, that is located within Bangor city or Newtownards town (refer to Appendix 1 – Grant Specific Area Maps).
- Property must be in Applicants' ownership at the point of application.
- Both freehold and leasehold property owners can apply.
- The property must not have been in occupation for a minimum period of 12 months at the time of submitting the application.
- 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.
- Applicant must be 18 years or over at the time of submitting their application.

Grant Conditions

Applicants must agree to the following grant conditions:

- 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*.
- Successful applicants 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.
- The applicant can deliver the project outlined in the application within 12 months from the date of accepting the grant offer.
- Applicants are limited to a maximum of two active applications at any one time.
- Properties must be paying non-domestic rates and must be able to demonstrate this.
- Applicants are required to participate in a post project evaluation which may include an online survey, 1-1 interview, workshop and press coverage.

*Where a building is subdivided with multiple owners, each property owner is permitted to submit a separate application for their respective portion, provided it meets the scheme criteria.

We will not fund projects that are:

- Closing an existing unit in the city/town centre to open an alternative premise (unless evidence can be provided to demonstrate that the current premises is not fit for purpose).
- Not prepared to share learning from the project with us and other relevant groups.
- Unable to evidence match funding.

- Not located within the defined area of Bangor city or Newtownards town (refer to Appendix 1 – Grant Specific Area Maps).
- Multiple applications for the same address, 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 the 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.
- Within Sports clubs, retail parks, Charity shops.
- Commercial properties that are rates exempt.
- Not paying business rates.
- Of a political or religious nature.
- 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. Should you have any queries regarding eligibility, please contact emptytoenergised@ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk.

3. ELIGIBLE WORKS

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

Examples of eligible capital items:

External

- Access improvements.
- New or improved lighting
- Replacement/upgrade of windows/doors

Internal

- Improvements such as fitting out, upgrading fixtures and fittings

- New or improved 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 and/or 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 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. The Applicant must submit a timeline for delivery of their projects and projects must be completed within 12 months from the date of accepting the grant offer. 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 all statutory consents are received and a copy provided.

The Empty to Energised Pilot Grant Scheme 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

[Planning - 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

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

Ards and North Down Borough Council - Environmental Health Department

2 Church Street, Newtownards, BT23 4AP

Tel: 0300 013 3333

Email: env.health@ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk

[Environmental Health - 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 the 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 of £25,000.

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

Examples below:

Total Cost of Project	Applicant Contribution	Grant Award
£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/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.

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 Empty to Energised Pilot Grant 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 as 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).

In order to apply for the Empty to Energised Pilot Grant Scheme, Applicants must complete the online application no later than 12 noon, Monday 16th February 2026.

Failure to provide sufficient detail will be considered as an unsatisfactory response. Applications deemed unsuccessful in the pilot grant scheme will not proceed. However, all eligible applications will be considered carefully and assessed.

The Empty to Energised Pilot Grant Scheme is assessed at two stages:

- **Stage 1 – Letter of Offer in Principle**
- **Stage 2 – Formal Final Letter of Offer**

Stage 1 – Letter of Offer in Principle

Stage 1 assessment will be conducted in two parts:

Part 1 – Basic Eligibility

Part 2 – Scored Assessment

Only applicants who pass all requirements in Part 1, will move to Part 2.

Only applicants who successfully pass both parts 1 and 2, will be issued a Letter of Offer in Principle.

Refer to Appendix 3 for Assessment Matrix.

Note - 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. Include Applicant name and first line of the vacant and/or 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.

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 at Stage 2.

Stage 2 – formal final Letter of Offer

To progress from Stage 1 Letter of Offer in Principle to a formal final Letter of Offer at Stage 2, Applicants will be required to submit the following:

- Proof of all relevant statutory consents (refer to section 4).
- And any other relevant documentation as requested.
- 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 their application in order to progress or withdraw the 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 maximum grant amount and terms and conditions of the Grant

offer. Work outlined in the formal final Letter of Offer should not commence until the Council have granted permission.

Note - 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 the 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 released 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 the signed acceptance of the 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 the 30% upfront payment.

The final 30% will be paid upon completion and submission of the monitoring form with all requested evidence/documentation verifying spend against the formal final Letter of Offer award.

Note - Applicants cannot start any work or purchase any items of equipment until they receive a 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.

Date of selling property	Claw back
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:

Grant advertised	Thursday 13 th November 2025
Online Information Sessions	Wednesday 3 rd December 6:00pm and Thursday 4 th December 10:00am and 2:00pm

Grant opens for applications	Monday 5 th January 2026
Grant closes for applications	12 noon, Monday 16 th February 2026
Letter of Offer in Principle	March 2026
Final date for all works to be completed	12 months post formal final Letter of Offer acceptance received
Final date for all claims and evaluation to be submitted	As detailed in the formal final Letter of Offer

The Empty to Energised Pilot Grant Scheme will open for applications from **Monday 5th January 2026**.

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

The closing date for applications is 12 noon on Monday 16th 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 to arrange an alternative method.

Supporting documentation to be sent to emptytoenergised@ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk. Include Applicant name and first line of the vacant and/or derelict property address in the subject line.

An acknowledgement email will be issued upon receipt of the application; this will provide the application reference number. The 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.

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 Post Project Evaluation Report provided within the timescale outlined within the formal final Letter of Offer and participate in any post project evaluation activity as requested..

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

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

Telephone: 0300 013 3333 ext. 40670 & 40893

**The Empty to Energised Pilot Grant Scheme is fully funded
by Ards and North Down Borough Council**

Document end.