

Ards and North Down Borough Council is offering two grant opportunities to help bring eligible vacant spaces into productive commercial use: the Vacant Premises Internal **Fit-Out Grant** and the borough-wide **Empty to Energised Grant**. These FAQs summarise the main requirements. Please read the relevant scheme guidance and application checklist before applying.

The Supporting Thriving High Streets Programme has expanded to become the **Supporting Thriving High Streets AND Places Programme**, reflecting continued support for town and city-centres alongside borough-wide opportunities through Empty to Energised.

Frequently Asked Questions

Who Can Apply?
Internal Fit-Out Grant: new businesses and businesses expanding into eligible vacant premises within the approved town-centre boundaries. Refer to the scheme guidance and maps to check eligibility.

Empty to Energised Grant: eligible property owners of derelict, vacant or under-used property or sites within the Ards and North Down borough, or applicants with a qualifying leasehold interest with at least 10 years remaining. Agents or representatives should check the applicant requirements with the Council before applying on an owner's behalf.

What do the Grants Support?
Internal Fit-Out Grant: eligible internal fit-out works in vacant town and city-centre premises, as set out in the approved guidance.

Empty to Energised Grant: eligible works to bring derelict, vacant or under-used property or sites back into commercial use across the borough, as set out in the approved guidance.

What are the Key Dates?
Both grants open: Tuesday 10 November 2026.
Both grants close: Monday 07 December 2026.

When do projects need to be completed?
Internal Fit-Out Grant: March 2027
Empty to Energised Grant: March 2028

How do I apply?
Choose your scheme and read the application guidance document:

- ★ Internal Fit-Out Internal Fit Out Grant - Ards and North Down Borough Council
- ★ Empty to Energised Empty to Energised Borough Wide - Ards and North Down Borough Council

To request an application pack, email
supportingthrivinghighstreets@ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk

What are the grant rates and maximum awards? Is a contribution required?
Internal Fit-Out Grant: up to 80% of eligible project costs, capped at £25,000 per property. Total eligible project costs must be between £10,000 and £50,000. You must contribute at least 20% of eligible costs, plus all ineligible or additional costs. Your contribution will be higher where the £25,000 grant cap applies.

Empty to Energised Grant: grants between £10,000 and £40,000, covering up to 80% of eligible project costs. Total project costs must not exceed £50,000. You must demonstrate that you can fund at least 20% of eligible costs and meet any ineligible or additional costs. For example, an approved £50,000 eligible project could receive a £40,000 grant, with a £10,000 applicant contribution.

I need help completing my application, who should I contact?
Contact a member of the team at
supportingthrivinghighstreets@ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk

We can provide online support, one-to-one in-person assistance and answers to queries by email. Contact the team before the closing date if you need help accessing or completing the application.

When can I start my project?
Do not start grant-funded works until the Council has issued a Letter of Offer, you have accepted its terms and conditions, and the Council has emailed written permission to start. Submitting an application does not authorise you to begin work.

Will I receive the grant award upfront?
No. Grants are paid in arrears against completed eligible works and a completed claim pack. You will need to pay suppliers and contractors before claiming reimbursement, so plan your cash flow accordingly. Staged claims may be available where agreed by the Council and permitted by your Letter of Offer. Confirm the arrangements for your scheme before starting work.

Can I apply for retrospective works?
No, retrospective works are not eligible for grant funding.

How do I choose the right scheme?
Internal Fit-Out Grant supports eligible new or expanding businesses fitting out vacant premises within the approved town and city-centre boundaries.
The Empty to Energised Grant supports eligible owners or qualifying leaseholders bringing derelict, vacant or under-used property or sites back into commercial use across the borough.
The applicant, location, vacancy, tenure and works requirements differ. Contact the team if you are unsure which scheme fits your project.

How long must the property have been vacant?
Internal Fit-Out Grant: at least three consecutive months of continuous vacancy immediately before the lease commencement date, supported by evidence.
Empty to Energised Grant: the property or site must have been vacant, derelict or underused for at least 12 consecutive months.

Do I need planning permission or other statutory approvals?
Grant funding does not replace any statutory permission.
Internal Fit-Out Grant: Excludes projects that require planning consent because of the delivery timescales. Please check whether your planned works will require building control or listed building consents.
Empty to Energised Grant: Please check whether your planned works need any statutory consents, such as planning permission, advertising consent, building control approval or listed building consent. You are responsible for making these enquiries and submitting any applications required.

Does meeting the eligibility criteria guarantee funding?
No. Funding is subject to assessment, available budget and the conditions of the relevant scheme.
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For signposting and enquiries, contact
supportingthrivinghighstreets@ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk

For further information visit
Supporting Thriving High Streets and Places

The Internal Fit-Out Grant is funded by the Department for Communities and Ards and North Down Borough Council. Empty to Energised is funded by the Department for the Economy and Ards and North Down Borough Council.

Please note: A larger grant scheme will be made available early 2027, with grants ranging from £50,000 to £300,000. To register your interest, contact supportingthrivinghighstreets@ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk