

Report to CABINET

Grant Acceptance - High Street Accelerator Green Space Fund

Portfolio Holder:

Cllr Arooj Shah, Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Building a Better Oldham

Officer Contact: Emma Barton, Deputy Chief Executive (Place)

Report Author(s): Paul Clifford, Director of Economy

16th September 2024

Reason for Decision

The purpose of this report is to seek approval to accept Oldham's pilot grant allocation of £500,000 from the Green Spaces Fund held by DLUHC, and to approve the programme of spend for the various projects it will fund.

Recommendations

- (1) To accept an external Green Spaces Fund grant and to expend the funding on progressing the proposed High Street Accelerator programme projects.
- (2) To delegate authority to the Section 151 Officer to finalise and formalise a Memorandum of Understanding with DLUHC with regard to the Green Spaces Fund grant funding arrangements and any other documentation required by DLUHC.
- (3) To delegate authority to the Borough Solicitor to carry out all necessary legal formalities

High Street Accelerator Green Fund Acceptance

1. Background

- 1.1 The Government announced the High Street Accelerator Programme in September 2023 and invited Oldham Council to submit an expression of interest in participating due to the high level of vacant premises in the town centre.
- 1.2 The Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities confirmed ten towns to participate in a High Street Accelerator pilot. Our High Street Nomination Form was completed for Union Street and Yorkshire Street as the pilot high streets for this funding based on existing data, notably:
 - 1.2.1 In 2019, Oldham town centre was identified as one of the top 20 town centres in the country most 'at risk' from key consumer trends (Oldham Economic Review). Geographically, Oldham struggles with leakage of jobs, visitors and spending to central Manchester and surrounding towns, and employment has fallen consistently in recent years, leading to vacant retail and eatery units; according to CACI Retail Footprint Data, the flows to Oldham town centre have retracted significantly and the spend profile for Oldham reduced from £170m in 2010 to £156m in 2017.
 - 1.2.2 The economic challenges facing Oldham have led to increases in anti-social behaviour on the high street and Metrolink network (Union Street). Oldham Town Centre Police Beat has reported the highest level of crime in the Borough (c.1,100 incidents per year), with 51% of incidents identified as violent crime. Between 2021 and 2022, 15.31% of violent crimes are recorded on Union Street and 10.93% on Yorkshire Street, with the majority occurring during the night-time economy hours but some peaks reported during the late afternoon during the week. This is associated with a noticeable lag between the end of the trading day and start of the night-time entertainment offer, and declining footfall, with a fear of crime being cited by citizens.
- 1.3 The High Street Accelerator Programme was formally launched in December 2023 and the two key principles are:
 - A High Street Accelerator is a partnership, it should bring together residents, local businesses, and community organisations to work with the local authority to develop and deliver a long-term vision to regenerate a high street in the area.
 - A High Street Accelerator is a pilot. It is an opportunity to test and trial new ways of working to revitalise the high street and to tackle vacancy.
- 1.4 The High Street Accelerator pilot projects are asked to test two theories:
 - There is High Streets Task Force research and qualitative evidence which indicates a lack of partnership working can be a potential barrier to the success and resilience of a high street. This pilot seeks to test whether the High Street Accelerator model can facilitate partnership working and subsequently support the long-term revival and regeneration of declining high streets.
 - Each accelerator will receive the opportunity to access Green Spaces grant funding. It is evidenced that greening high streets can help to increase their vibrancy and visual appeal. New projects, like a parklet, can provide new social spaces, increasing customers dwell time in the location.

2. Current Position

- 2.1 A requirement of the High Street Accelerator grant funding was the establishment of a High Street Accelerator Partnership. This is to ensure the pilot can test the value of partnerships in driving forward high street improvements. The initial partnership had to comprise of four members: a property owner, a business representative, a community organisation representative and a local authority representative.
- 2.2 During the inaugural meeting in February, the partnership for Oldham appointed Maggie Hughes, a local business and property owner, as its independent chair. This appointment is complementary to the individual's existing role as vice-chair of the Oldham Town Centre Board (the public-facing structure to which the partnership will report).
- 2.3 The partnership has made good initial progress, confirming governance arrangements, committing to expanding the membership base, and submitting the successful expression of interest for a grant to be awarded to Oldham from the £5m Green Spaces Fund.
- 2.4 The partnership received confirmation in May of the award of £500k from the Green Spaces Fund, to be spent by 31 March 2025 and to fund two projects:
- 2.4.1 The first is to introduce planting by encouraging high street businesses on Yorkshire Street and Union Street to take ownership of their immediate public realm – where appropriate. For businesses with the space to have outdoor seating, barrier planters will be provided, ready planted, with guidance and support on caring for the plants. The seating and barriers will be provided to the business with a requirement on them to maintain the planting and ensure the area used is also well kept. Businesses with smaller public realm footprints will be encouraged to apply for hanging planters and green walls, again with the requirement for ongoing maintenance resting with the business / property owner. This will provide some quick wins in terms of improving the look and feel of the streets.
- 2.4.2 The second project is developing options to create a flexible 'green' structure that can be used as a seating space but with the ability to place trading boards into the structure so they can be used as market stalls. Whilst this is part of the accelerator pilot, we proposed this to allow us to test options for integrating market stalls as part of linear park.
- 2.5 Funding breakdown:

Item of Expenditure	CDEL (in £) forecast expenditure	RDEL (in £) forecast expenditure
Barrier planters	£55,000	
Initial planting		£10,000
Design / prototype of multifunctional stall, seating unit	£60,000	
Production of multifunctional units	£300,000	
Install of multifunctional units	£35,000	
Staffing resource		£40,000
Total:	£450,000	£50,000

3. Options/Alternatives

3.1 There are two options:

- Option 1: accept the Green Spaces Fund grant of £500,000 from DLUHC, progress the proposed projects detailed in this report and expend the grant monies as detailed in the funding breakdown.
- Option 2: do not accept the Green Spaces Fund grant of £500,000 from DLUHC and do not progress the proposed projects detailed in this report.

4. Preferred Option

4.1 The preferred option is option 1.

5. Consultation

5.1 The High Street Accelerator activity is being driven by the High Street Accelerator Partnership who are being informed by data gathered and feedback from partners and stakeholders.

5.2 Portfolio holders have been briefed and support the acceptance and expenditure of the grant award.

6. Financial Implications

6.1 Revenue Implications

The acceptance of the High Street Accelerator Grant award of £50,000 revenue will have no adverse financial implications for the Council. The works and staffing elements of the bid total £50,000 with no requirement for any Council match funding. Therefore, all listed revenue costs can and will be fully funded from within the revenue grant allocation.

(John Hoskins)

6.2 Capital Implications

The acceptance of the High Street Accelerator Grant award of £450,000 capital will have no adverse financial implications for the Council.

The works elements of the bid totaling £450,000 will be a charge the Place capital programme and defrayed in by 31 March 2025, with no requirement for any Council match funding. Therefore, will be fully funded from within the capital grant allocation.

(Jit Kara)

7 Legal Implications

7.1 The Council's Contract Procedure Rules do not govern grant awards; however, they must be followed, in part, if a grant agreement is to be put in place with the funder. In this matter a Memorandum of Understanding is to be put in place and signed by the Council's Section 151 Officer.

7.2 Advice from Legal Services should be taken as required in respect of the terms and conditions of the above referenced MoU prior to its completion.

7.3 The Council must be satisfied that it can meet the requirements of DLUHC in respect of the grant funding, including any milestones and delivery dates. This must be confirmed prior to accepting the grant funding.

7.4 In addition, the Council must be satisfied that the subsidy control regime has been satisfied prior to expending any awarded grant funding. Legal Services should be engaged with to confirm all requirements have been met and complied with.

Sarah Orrell – Commercial & Procurement Solicitor

8 **Oldham Equality Impact Assessment, including implications for Children and Young People**

8.1 Yes – see Appendix 1

9 **Key Decision**

9.1 Yes

10 **Key Decision Reference**

10.1 ESR-06-24

11 **Background Papers**

11.1 None

12 **Appendices**

12.1 Appendix 1 – Equality Impact Assessment