

Fermanagh and Omagh District Council

VACANT TO OCCUPIED PROPOSALS

GUIDANCE NOTES

Introduction

Fermanagh and Omagh District Council wishes to invite applications from property owners and lease holders to bring vacant commercial spaces in villages and rural settlements in the district back into use and support the revitalisation of their areas.

The aim of the Vacant to Occupied project is to encourage the use of currently vacant commercial premises. The capital grant is expected to improve individual commercial premises but also contribute towards improved streetscapes, village and rural settlement vibrancy, and the creation and sustainment of employment in the area.

The Application Form can be accessed from www.fermanaghomagh.com.

Completed forms should be submitted through the Grants Management System no later than **12 noon on Thursday 30 June 2022**.

Applications received after the closing date and time will be deemed ineligible.

For further information on the Application Form process please contact the Rural Development Team on 0300 303 1777.

Background

The Covid Recovery Small Settlement Regeneration Programme (CRSSRP) is aimed at regenerating settlements with a population of below 5,000. It is funded in partnership by Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA), Department for Communities (DfC) and Department for Infrastructure (DfI). This partnership funding will complement the recently delivered COVID-19 Recovery Revitalisation Programme and provide a mechanism for investing in rural areas to aid recovery from the pandemic.

The CRSSRP will provide **capital** funding to support the regeneration and development of villages and rural settlements in ways which support their important social and economic roles. It aims to encourage owners of vacant commercial premises to invest in their buildings, enhance the aesthetics of the village/rural settlement, attract tenants, reduce long term vacancy and create local employment.

Fermanagh and Omagh District Council wishes to invite applications from owners/lease holders of commercial premises that fulfil the following eligibility criteria:

- Vacant premises must be within settlement limits (settlements below 5,000 population) within the Fermanagh and Omagh District Council area – within 30mph zone
- Applicants must have a freehold or long term leasehold in excess of 20 years in the premises.
- The entire premises must be vacant for a period greater than three years. Documentary evidence of this will be requested and could include rates bills for the previous three years.
- The project must have an eligible total capital spend of more than £25,000 inclusive of professional fees. The maximum grant available is £40,000.
- The premises must be occupied for commercial use or made available for let at or below open market rent following completion of the project. Please note that works to an existing home / private dwelling or to create a home / private dwelling are not eligible.
- The Applicant will agree to the premises being surveyed and assessed by the Council's Professional Advisors.
- The Applicant must agree to actively market the premises and work to try and secure a tenant for the premises for a least 24 months following the completion of any works.
- The Applicant must provide an independent estimate of the project costs.
- The Applicant must provide a comprehensive photographic survey of the existing building including interior and exterior photographs.
- The Applicant must provide a statement outlining the type of tenants they anticipate will occupy the premises following completion of the works.
- It is anticipated that projects will be located across the five rural District Electoral Areas (DEAs) and this will be considered as part of the assessment process.

Funding Options

The funding will be administered as support for up to 15 stand-alone projects, with project funding up to £40,000 (maximum) at a rate of 80% per project. The minimum project funding is £25,000.

The Application Form is designed to identify Vacant to Occupied premises and the following areas will be assessed:

1. Value for Money (cost versus benefit)
2. Need for the Project (market need, need for specific capital works, benefits to the local economy)
3. State of Readiness (position of statutory approvals)
4. Route to Occupancy (Clear assessment and plan to secure occupation of the premises)
5. Impact on the appearance of village/rural settlement streetscape and vitality and prominence in village/rural settlement (extent of positive impact)
6. Location of projects and anticipated spread across the five rural DEAs or outside the towns of Omagh and Enniskillen. Projects will be scored in ranking order within their DEA.

Further to this, a scoping study to assess socio-economic need will be carried out by Council. The scoping study will collate a statistical evidence base and undertake analysis to assess the socio-economic need at a village/settlement level. It will be a desk based exercise, utilising readily available data.

Successful applicants will be awarded a Letter of Offer which will include a requirement for progress reporting to Council.

Payment of Grant

Please note this grant award is retrospective and only paid on completion of works and a fully vouched claim. Phased payments can be requested and considered. Advance payments are not eligible.

The Grant will be paid in up to three instalments based on the following percentages:

- 90%: Once the works associated with your Project is complete. This may be split into two phased payments, subject to agreement with Council.
- 10%: Once you have successfully secured a Tenant and they have occupied the premises or, if this has not been possible, once you have demonstrated that you have actively marketed the premises for a continuous period of two years and have constructively worked with the Council's Advisors to try and secure a Tenant.