



# COTSWOLD

District Council

Council name	<b>COTSWOLD DISTRICT COUNCIL</b>
Name and date of Committee	<b>ANNUAL COUNCIL 21 MAY 2025</b>
Subject	<b>RURAL ENGLAND PROSPERITY FUND (REPF) UPDATE</b>
Wards affected	All
Accountable member	Councillor Tristan Wilkinson Cabinet Member for Economy and Environment Email: <a href="mailto:tristan.wilkinson@cotswold.gov.uk">tristan.wilkinson@cotswold.gov.uk</a>
Accountable officer	Helen Martin, Director of Communities and Place Email: <a href="mailto:helen.martin@cotswold.gov.uk">helen.martin@cotswold.gov.uk</a>
Report author	Paul James, Economic Development Lead Email: <a href="mailto:paul.james@cotswold.gov.uk">paul.james@cotswold.gov.uk</a>
Summary/Purpose	To update Council on the award of Rural England Prosperity Funding for 2025/26, to seek approval for the approach to delivery of REPF projects in 2025/26 and to agree the necessary delegations.
Annexes	None.
Recommendation(s)	That Council RESOLVES to: <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Amend the capital programme for 2025/26 to include the Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF) scheme capital budget of £229,240, which is fully funded from the 2025/26 REPF grant allocation.</li><li>2. Approve the provisional allocations as set out in para 3.1.</li><li>3. Delegate authority to the Chief Executive in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Economy and Environment and the Council's Section 151 Officer to allocate the funding, having regard to the recommendations of the REPF Assessment Panel.</li></ol>



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Corporate priorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Responding to the climate emergency</li><li>• Supporting communities</li><li>• Supporting the Economy</li></ul>
Key Decision	NO
Exempt	NO
Consultees/ Consultation	Consultation has taken place throughout the running of the REPF programme, through the Cotswold Economic Advisory Group, the UKSPF/REPF Assessment Panel and the UKSPF/REPF Partnership Group, all of which contain key stakeholders.



## **1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

- 1.1** The Council was awarded £764,292 from the Rural England Prosperity Fund over two years (2023-24 and 2024-25). This funding has been used to provide grants to businesses, village halls and community buildings, heritage and cultural buildings and active travel schemes. The use of the funding was set out in detail in a report to Cabinet in [February 2025](#) and the accompanying [annex](#). The end of project figures are being finalised and will be made available on the Council's website.
- 1.2** In March 2025, it was announced that the Government had allocated a further £229,240 to the Council for 2025-26. This report sets out the proposed use of the funding in the current financial year, along with the process for allocating funding and seeks the necessary delegations to enable efficient decision-making.

## **2. BACKGROUND**

- 2.1** The Council was awarded £764,292 in September 2022 from the Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF), which is a fund targeted at improving rural productivity and connectivity and is essentially a 'rural top-up' to the UK Shared Prosperity Fund. This was subject to approval of an addendum to the Local Investment Plan, which took place in April 2023.
- 2.2** At the beginning of March 2025, the Government announced that a further £33 million had been allocated to the Rural England Prosperity Fund. At the end of March 2025, it was announced that Cotswold District Council's allocation was £229,240.
- 2.3** Cabinet has received reports on the REPF, in [November 2022](#) and [July 2023](#) as well as joints report with the UK Shared Prosperity Fund in [January 2024](#) and [February 2025](#). The REPF funding was used in a number of different ways, as follows:

**Business Grants** – Over £410,000 was allocated for business grants. Individual grants were for between £5,000 and £50,000 and applicants were required to give a minimum of 50% match funding.

**Community Infrastructure Grants** – Over £90,000 was allocated for improvements to village halls and community buildings across the district, with a particular focus on sustainability. Projects have included solar panels, improved lighting and insulation.

**Active Travel** – A number of active travel schemes have been supported, including improving and extending paths in Lechlade and Fairford.



**Cultural and heritage buildings** – A number of schemes have been delivered for cultural and heritage buildings, including a new heating system for Holy Ascension Church at Oddington and solar panels at Bowmoor Sailing Club in Lechlade.

- 2.4** The REPF [prospectus](#) has been updated to reflect the new Government's missions. The REPF supports the missions to "kickstart economic growth", "break down barriers to opportunity" and "build an NHS fit for the future". It supports two of the three UKSPF priorities – 'Communities and Place' and 'Supporting Local Business'. Flowing from that, there are four relevant sub-themes – 'Advice and support to business', 'Development of the visitor economy', 'Bringing communities together, tackling homelessness' and 'Improving health and wellbeing'.

### **3. PROPOSED APPROACH FOR 2025-26**

- 3.1** The Council is required to produce a forecast of how the funding will be spent and the outcomes and outputs it will deliver, based on the four sub-themes listed in para 2.4 above. It is proposed that, based on the experience from the previous two years of administering the REPF that funding is allocated as follows:

Advice and support to business – 40%

Development of the visitor economy – 20%

Bringing communities together – 20%

Improve health and wellbeing – 20%

It should be noted that these are merely forecast/indicative figures, which can be amended depending on the composition of the applications approved.

- 3.2** Cabinet will be aware that an open application process has been run for the approximately £120,000 of unallocated UK Shared Prosperity Fund money for 2025-26. Many of the projects that applied would be eligible for funding from the REPF. It is therefore proposed that eligible applications already received during the UKSPF application window are automatically considered for REPF funding, but that a reasonable additional period of time of three weeks is allowed for any other applications to come forward.

- 3.3** On the advice of the UKSPF Partnership Group, applicants for UKSPF funding for 2025-26 were given guidance that ordinarily grant awards would be between £5,000 and £25,000 and that a minimum of 20% match funding would be required, but that



a higher level of funding would strengthen the application. It is proposed to follow the same approach for the REPF.

- 3.4** During 2023-24 and 2024-25, a Rural Business Grant scheme as part of the REPF was administered by ALP Synergy Ltd on the Council's behalf and a Community Infrastructure Grant scheme, for villages halls and community buildings, was administered by GRCC on the Council's behalf. It is proposed that, given the reduced amount of funding available and the knowledge and experience gathered over the last two years, that all applications are dealt with in-house.
- 3.5** As before, it is proposed that an Assessment Panel, made up of internal and external stakeholders, reviews applications and makes recommendations to the Chief Executive for decision in consultation with the Cabinet Member for the Economy and Environment.

#### **4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS**

- 4.1** The Council could choose not to undertake an open application process, but that would not be sufficiently transparent and would not enable the widest range of potential projects to be considered.
- 4.2** The Council could outsource the administration of grant schemes under the REPF. Given the smaller amount of money available in 2025-26 and the knowledge and experience gained over the last two years, it is recommended that all applications are dealt with in-house.

#### **5. CONCLUSIONS**

- 5.1** The REPF has been a valuable source of funding for the Cotswold district over the past two years, supporting a significant number of projects within the district, leveraging in additional investment, safeguarding and creating jobs helping the Council towards its climate objectives.
- 5.2** The extension of the REPF for another year is also welcome and will enable the Council to support projects that will bring benefits to businesses, communities and individuals in the district.

#### **6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1** The REPF allocation will be added to the capital programme, subject to formal approval by Full Council. Projects will be funded from the Council's allocation of



funding from the Government. All funding will need to be spent by 31st March 2026 otherwise any unspent portion will need to be returned to Central Government. Regular monitoring of spend and reporting to Government is being undertaken by the UKSPF/REPF Project Manager in conjunction with the Economic Development Lead and other relevant Officers.

## **7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1** The Council will continue to require external project promoters to enter into a legal agreement with the Council. The Council undertakes due diligence before grants are awarded. The Council also ensures that grants are awarded in line with rules on Subsidy Control (formerly State Aid). It can take up to two months to complete all necessary checks and finalise the details of grant agreements. This should be factored into the decision when to seek input from Legal Services.

## **8. RISK ASSESSMENT**

- 8.1** Each project will be assessed in terms of risks and managed using the Project Management Framework.

## **9. EQUALITIES IMPACT**

- 9.1** Each project supported by the REPF will be assessed for its equalities impact.

## **10. CLIMATE AND ECOLOGICAL EMERGENCIES IMPLICATIONS**

- 10.1** The REPF prospectus state that councils should consider how any investments from the funds contribute to nature recovery and Net Zero objectives, including reaching Net Zero by 2050, resilience to natural hazards and the 25 Year Environment Plan. Applicants will be asked to demonstrate how their projects contribute to delivery of the Council's climate change objectives and form part of the consideration of application by the Assessment Panels, using a scoring matrix.

## **11. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- 11.1** None.