

Thurrock Council Shop Front Improvement Scheme

Guidance Notes

Thurrock Council, Civic Offices, New Road, Grays, Essex, RM17 6SL

July 2015

1. Introduction

The purpose of the guidelines is to steer you through the complete process; from the initial contact stage with the Council through to the completion of the works and the final payment of the grant.

2. What is the scheme?

Shop Fronts make an impact on the appearance of a shopping area and contribute to people's impression of an area. High quality shop fronts make an area feel more welcoming to local residents and visitors, improve its image, contribute towards a stronger sense of identity and encourage a greater number of shopping visits.

The Thurrock Shop Front Improvement Scheme aims to improve shop fronts as a way of supporting the growth of local businesses, improving the local environment and raising the image of the area amongst local residents and visitors.

3. Who can apply?

The Thurrock Shop Front Improvement Scheme is available to both existing independent businesses and owners of vacant units that are located within the following retail areas:

- Aveley
- Socketts Heath
- South Ockendon
- Stanford-Le-Hope
- Grays Town Centre*

*Shops located in the outside of the High street (excluding the precinct), and surrounding roads such as Orestt Road and Cromwell Road

The scheme allows tenants of properties to apply for a grant as well as property owners, as long as the terms of their current lease agreement on the property is appropriate and the lease has a minimum of five years remaining.

Applications from groups of businesses/individuals seeking to improve joint-frontage or a communal area are welcomed. However, a single applicant must be nominated that will bear overall responsibility for the grant. Joint projects will be evaluated on their ability to reduce shop-vacancy and improve the appearance of retail properties in the borough.

Please note that the grants are discretionary and subject to the availability of funds. The inclusion of a building within an eligible area does not give any automatic entitlement to a grant.

The scheme will not support works that have already been undertaken or any works which are started prior to a formal offer of grant funding being made.

Businesses which have more than five outlets nationally will not be eligible to apply.

Properties that do not face onto main retail areas (i.e. those that are in side streets off these roads) will not be supported.

If you are unsure of whether your business will qualify for a grant you should contact the scheme officer on 01375 652 271.

4. How much is the grant for?

Businesses can apply for a grant of up to £3,000 towards the external renovation or improvement of ground floor and upper floor retail units. Please note that the **grant will cover up to 75% of the cost; to a maximum value of £3,000.**

The Council will welcome applications for grant funding towards projects with a total value of over £4000, but will only be able to offer a grant to a maximum of £3000.

5. How do I apply?

In order to apply for the Shop Front Improvement Scheme, you must complete and return the application form, available from the Thurrock Council website, www.thurrock.gov.uk/shop-front-improvement.

Please note that grant availability is subject to limited resources for a limited period of time only. Grant applications will be reviewed on a first-come, first-served basis.

6. What will the scheme fund?

Not all improvement works will be eligible for a Shop Front Improvement Grant. The grant will only fund 'eligible works'.

The following work will generally be considered as eligible for support:

- New shop fronts
- Repair and reinstatement of all or any part of a shop front fixture that is visible from the street, including the first and second floors of premises where they are used for commercial activities
- Repainting of shop fronts in suitable colours
- Signage
- External lighting
- Internal security grilles and/or security glazing

The scheme will generally not fund the following:

- Lighting within window displays
- Professional fees associated with the development and delivery of the project, including planning application fees, consultancy fees and advisory services
- Window display products and equipment
- Pedestrian access improvements
- Re-painting
- Repair of external stonework and brickwork
- Repair and reinstatement of guttering and down-pipes
- Externally mounted security features

Project Example:

Item	Description	Cost £ (exc. VAT)	Grant %	Grant £
1	Signage	800	75%	600
2	Lighting	2,000	75%	1500
3	Painting	1,000	75%	750
4	Planning & Agents Fees	400	0%	0
Total		4200		2850

Please note that although the project cost is £4,200, only £3,800 (the figures in bold) are eligible costs that qualify for the 75% grant. This results in a total grant of £2,850, which is within the maximum grant limit of £3,000.

7. Will I require planning approval?

Virtually all works that change the exterior of buildings will require planning permission. A separate planning application and scale drawings prepared by a professional agent will be required to show the extent of all new work. If you are using a professional agent, they will be able to advise you about any statutory consent that is required.

If you would like to discuss whether your proposals require planning approval please contact the Council's Planning Department via email on development.management@thurrock.gov.uk.

For more information, go to www.thurrock.gov.uk/planning.

8. What does your application aim to achieve?

Because of the limited funding available, applications will be assessed by a Grants Panel that will consider whether the application:

- Will make a positive impact on the local area
- Offers value for money
- Is sympathetic to the local built environment and will improve the look of the shop front in line with the look and feel of the area
- Guarantees that works will be carried out to a high standard and by a registered contractor
- Is in a prominent location
- Is located within a priority area

9. What do I have to supply with my application?

In order to consider your application we require the following:

- Completed application form: you must complete a grant application form. This contains basic information about your proposals.
- Schedule of works: full details of the improvement works that you intend to carry out. You should submit a 'schedule of works' which gives a description of any work to be carried out.

- Sketch drawings: depending on the extent of the proposed works, drawings will be required showing your proposals.
- Proof of ownership/lease: if you do not own the property, you will need to have permission from the owner to carry out the works. The building owner must countersign your application to show that they have given permission for the works to be carried out.
- Cost estimates including quotes and fees
- Evidence that you have obtained **three quotes** from contractors, you should state which of the three contractors you would like to employ and why.
- Please note that any grant offer would usually be based on the lowest quotation received.

The following information must be contained in each quote:

- A breakdown of the individual cost of each element of the scheme
- Total price for the whole scheme (remember to also include project support costs and VAT as separate items and any ineligible works) for the purpose of grant calculation and monitoring.
- A programme of works from the builder

10. How long will it take to make a decision on my application?

We will try and make a decision on your application within three weeks of receiving a fully complete application.

If your project requires planning permission and your grant is approved we will write to you making an offer in principle of funding. We will then issue a formal offer letter as soon as planning permission is granted.

11. Who will decide whether my application is approved?

Applications will be considered by a panel made up of Council Officers and members of the local business community.

The grant scheme will be administered by Thurrock Council.

12. What conditions will apply to the grant?

All grant offers will be made in writing. Full details of the conditions that apply to the grant will be set out in a grant offer letter.

All grants will be conditional on you securing appropriate planning consent.

The scheme operates independently of the planning process and any offer of a grant does not imply in any way that planning consent will be granted.

You will be required to maintain the property to a satisfactory standard for a minimum of three years.

13. When will the grant be paid?

Grants will be paid on production of invoices from contractors showing a detailed breakdown of costs. Payments will be made after all works are completed.

14. Application form and advice

Application forms and advice regarding the scheme are available from:

business@thurrock.gov.uk

Shop Front Improvement Scheme
Economic Development Team
Thurrock Council
Civic Offices
New Road
Grays
Essex
RM17 6SL

The Application Process

I want to install or alter a shop front - Can I get funding and design advice?

Check if your property is in the area by contacting Billy Masters at Thurrock Council: 01375 652 271

What permission do I need?

1. Get early advice from the Planning Department on the Thurrock Council website: <http://www.thurrock.gov.uk/planning/development/>. A written response to follow up on the advice will be issued within **10 working days**.
2. Prepare planning application for submission, including appropriate plans, application forms and relevant fees.
3. Submit planning application to Thurrock Council Planning Department.
4. Please note duration of **5 to 8 weeks** for the planning process.
5. Submit grant application (with 3 quotes), planning application and other consents to:

Regeneration Dept
Thurrock Council
Grays
Essex
RM17 6LY

IF APPROVED:

1. Formal Grant Offer letter issued
2. Make building regulations application and other consents, if necessary
3. Work starts on site
4. Works complete, submit grant claim form and invoices
5. Checks made to see if works have been completed and invoices verified. Council Officer approves the works.
6. **Grant Paid**

DATA PROTECTION ACT 1998

Thurrock Council is the data controller for the purposes of the Data Protection Act.

We will use the information you give in this form, and in any supporting evidence you send, to process your application for grant assistance and, if your application is successful, to process your claim for grant payment. We will not give information about you to anyone else, or use information about you for other purposes without your permission, unless required by law to do so.

If you have any queries about or want access to personal information that we may hold, please write to:

Information Management
Thurrock Council
Grays
Essex
RM17 6SL
Information.matters@thurrock.gov.uk
01375 652 652

This authority is under a duty to protect the public funds it administers, and to this end may use the information you have provided for the prevention and detection of fraud. It may also share this information with other bodies responsible for auditing or administering public funds for these purposes. Further information is available on the website at http://www.thurrock.gov.uk/foi/pdf/ictpolicy_data_protection.pdf

Terms and Conditions

Businesses/organisations accepting grant offers from the Thurrock Shop Front Scheme will be required to abide by and agree to the following terms and conditions:

1. The approval or refusal of a grant is at the absolute discretion of Thurrock Council and there will be no right to appeal process.
2. Grants will not be given for expenditure incurred prior to the grant offer being made and the contract signed.
3. The grant is not payable to an un-discharged bankrupt
4. The grant must be used for the purpose intended as outlined in the Grant Offer letter (this will be supported by producing original invoices for the grant claim).
5. In the case of tenants, payment of the grant requires the building owner's approval and providing proof of a minimum of five year lease for the building.
6. If the business/organisation ceases trading/operating within 12 months of the payment of the grant or the building is sold, the applicant must notify Thurrock Council within 14 days and in such circumstances The Council may require the applicant(s) to repay, in whole or part of the grant paid.
7. The grant must not be used for improvements to residential property, structural repairs including re-roofing, internal repairs and alterations, external security features, CCTV systems or recoverable VAT.
8. If the applicant is registered for VAT this must be declared on the application form. If at any point the organisation/business becomes VAT registered, the applicant must inform Thurrock Council and discuss repayment of VAT expenses claimed.
9. The grant will only be paid to proposals which have been granted planning permission. Nothing in the agreement or negotiation of the grant will affect Thurrock Council's decision over planning permission. An offer of agreement in principle will be made until planning permission has been granted. Only then may a Grant Offer letter be issued and works commence.
10. All works are to be undertaken strictly in accordance with the specification and schedule of works agreed with the Council.
11. The Council's written approval must be obtained in advance of any amendment to the approved specification and schedule of works. Amendments include the omission or variation of the agreed works and the execution of additional works. Failure to comply with this condition may invalidate the grant offer even if the additional work is not grant aided.
12. Representatives of the Council must be allowed access to the property to carry out interim inspections of the works in progress, by appointment at any reasonable time.
13. There is no obligation upon the Council to increase the grant if the cost of work increases, or if any additional work is undertaken.
14. A proportional reduction will be made in the grant if the actual cost of the eligible work proves to be less than estimated. If at any point the organisation/business becomes VAT registered, the applicant must inform Thurrock Council and discuss repayment of VAT expenses claimed. Payment will be made in arrears upon the production of the grant claim form along with supporting documentation (e.g. paid invoices).
15. The grant will only be paid against proposals which have been granted planning permission - if required. Nothing in the agreement or negotiation of the grant will affect the Council's decision over planning permission. An offer of agreement in principle will be made until planning permission has been granted. Only then may a Grant Offer letter be issued and works commence.
16. The applicant must inform Thurrock Council of any changes to the business or changes of business address and telephone number.
17. The grant is made on the condition that the property will be maintained to a satisfactory standard for a minimum of three years.
18. Any grant must be taken up within the period stated in the Grant Offer letter.
19. Payments of grants to successful applicants will be made in arrears, in one sum on the receipt by the Council of evidence that the applicant has incurred the expenditure. A supporting statement should show how the expenditure relates to the individual items in the approved schedule of works.
20. Expenditure must be incurred using a debit/credit card or cheque and evidenced through a bank statement. Payments of grants will not be made towards expenditure incurred using the payment method of cash.

21. Grants are dependent on applicants being required to complete a short questionnaire evaluation 6 months after the receipt of the grant.
22. The Council reserves the right to publish illustrations, photographs or other details of your project in promotional literature and other documents associated with Council grant schemes.
23. Applicants will need to sign the contract within 4 weeks from the date offered otherwise the offer will be withdrawn.
24. If the applicant undertakes any work that, in the opinion of the Council, significantly alters or removes any elements of the grant aided work, the Council shall have the right to recover such proportion of the grant as it sees fit. This condition shall apply for a period of five years starting on the day on which the final grant payment is made.
25. Under s58(4) of the Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990, if any grant condition is contravened or not complied with, the Council reserves the right to recover the grant, or such part of it as the Council see fit.