

# Transforming Places Through Heritage Programme Guide

# What is the Transforming Places Through Heritage programme?

We want to support projects that will contribute to the transformation of high streets and town centres in England, helping them become thriving places, strengthening local communities and encouraging local economies to prosper. Our programme is part of a wider initiative to revive heritage high streets in England, alongside Historic England's High Street Heritage Action Zones. Together, these programmes form part of the Future High Streets Fund, administered by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government.

Our programme is for individual heritage buildings in or transferring to community ownership or that of charitable/social enterprise organisations. We will provide funding and expert help to charities and social enterprises developing projects with the potential to bring new life to high streets by creating alternative uses for redundant or underused historic buildings in town centres.

**These notes are designed to help you decide if our support is right for you and guide you in making an application, with support from our Team. Please read them in full. If you think your plans have potential to fit this programme or you would like further advice, please complete our [Online Enquiry Form](#).**

## You can apply if:

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- Your project involves a heritage building located in a high street or town centre in England, **and:**
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- This location is the focus of a wider strategy or initiative which aims to revitalise the high street or town centre - a place-based initiative, **and:**
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- You are a not-for-private-profit organisation.
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**The work you would like us to fund must not start until after we have taken a decision to award a grant. Please refer to our website for application deadlines and decision dates.**

# Which of our grants could be right for you?

## Stage you have reached

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### Just Starting Out

You may be thinking about forming an organisation or have recently constituted, or be a longstanding organisation tackling a new project. You have identified a building - either already in your ownership or one you have a reasonable prospect of owning. You may have some ideas about how the building could be restored and used, but are wanting to explore the options and test whether these will work.

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### Ready to Move Forward

You have already completed the feasibility and viability work needed, but you need to do more detailed work to develop your plans and secure capital funding to deliver your project.

You would need to be set up as a Community Benefit Society to apply for the Shares Booster.

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### Ready to Restore Your Building

Your plans will be close to being fully developed and some of your delivery capital funding will already be in place, but there is a funding gap you need to fill.

## Grant scheme

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### Project Viability

up to £15,000

### Project Development

up to £100,000

### Crowdfunding Challenge

up to £25,000

### Community Shares Booster

development grants up to £10,000

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### Crowdfunding Challenge

up to £25,000

### Community Shares Booster

equity investments up to £50,000

### Transformational Projects

up to £350,000

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At least 100 individual projects will be supported by our programme. The majority of our grants will be in the first two categories above. Transformational Project Grants for project delivery (capital work including repair and conversion of buildings) will be limited to 10 -15 in total over the 4 year life of the programme.

# Why has the Transforming Places Through Heritage Programme been created?

**This explains the problems we want to solve and the impact we want to achieve. This will help you consider whether your project has the potential to contribute to Transforming Places.**

High Streets are a focal point for communities, places where people meet and access the services and goods they need for daily life. They are often the historic heart of a place, with a concentration of heritage buildings, or individual notable buildings, and a townscape that has evolved over time. This combination makes them important to local identity, central to their communities. However, they are also places facing significant change and challenge, as the retail industry, the mainstay of most town centres, is re-shaped, moving out-of-town and online. In future, retail use is likely to play a smaller part in the vitality of a town centre, whilst other services for people such as entertainment, health, arts, and education can provide a new reason to visit. Housing and new spaces for businesses can help re-populate town centres.

Not-for-private-profit organisations are ideally placed to help make our high streets fit for the future, with new ideas for bringing life back to old buildings, increasing the mix of uses and diversifying ownership. We want to showcase these projects and support more organisations to take ownership of heritage assets and deliver innovative schemes with the potential to revitalise town centres as places for people, re-imagined and renewed.

Because the issues affecting places are interlinked, the solutions need to be too. This has been widely recognised by national and local government, heritage and community organisations, leading to new initiatives to help reverse the decline of high streets and town centres. Rather than supporting projects in isolation, we want to invest in projects that are part of wider plans that bring local agencies, community-led organisations and people together to revitalise the locality. We will therefore be investing only in projects where there is a place-based initiative.

## The aims of Transforming Places Through Heritage are to:

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- Maximise regeneration benefits of local areas and high streets, assisting in making high streets and town centres fit for the future.
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- Protect, enhance and safeguard historic buildings across England, offering viable new uses for disused and underutilised high street properties.

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- Build capacity within local community groups, social enterprise, and charities.
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- Pilot innovative, alternative uses, ownership structures and investment models to facilitate long term regeneration.
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- To maximise the positive social impact that results from restoring historic buildings.
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In considering your application, we will want to understand how it will contribute to the successful achievement of these aims. As well as the strategic context, we will consider the circumstances and heritage value of your building, the urgency of intervention, financial need, sustainability of your plans for the building, and your organisational capacity.

## Which high streets or town centres can be considered?

We want to invest in places that are or have the potential to be a hub for their community, providing services to a wide catchment population. **They will typically include a variety of uses, including retail, and be recognised by local people as their town centre or high street.** The central business district of a major city is not a priority under this programme, nor is a single parade of shops serving a suburb or local neighbourhood within a city. However, distinct towns centres and high streets within large cities may be considered. Small village high streets will not qualify, but we will consider rural settlements that are notable centres within a district, providing services for a wide hinterland that includes smaller villages. Provided the location is within a place-based initiative we do not require that a high street or town centre is within a conservation area, although this will often be the case.

# How to find out if there is a place-based initiative for your town centre

In your application, you will need to tell us about how your project fits within a wider place-based initiative, strategy or action plan for the high street or town centre where your project is located.

Place-based initiatives are likely to be led by the local authority, neighbourhood planning group or a community-led organisation, such as a civic society or community land trust.

## Some examples are:

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- **Future High Streets Fund**  
This scheme provides funding to local authorities. Contact your Town Centre Manager or local authority Economic Regeneration or Development Team, or your ward Councillor to find out if there is a FHSF scheme in place or planned.

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- **Heritage Action Zone**  
This scheme run by Historic England provides funding for town centre conservation area initiatives. Contact your local authority Heritage or Conservation Officer, or the contacts suggested above.

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- **Neighbourhood Plan**  
Many communities are now developing Neighbourhood Plans to help shape future development such as housing. This alone would not fit with our Programme. If the Plan also identifies priorities and measures that will revitalise the heart of a town, and your project has the potential to contribute to this, then this could be considered. Contact your Town or Parish Council or Neighbourhood Plan group to find out.

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- **Other**  
There could be other more local initiatives directed at the regeneration of the town centre or high street where your building is located. This might be the development of masterplan or an economic strategy for a town centre, Business Improvement District or local community-led initiative, such as establishing a Community Land Trust. There may be other area-based grant schemes running or recently completed such as a Townscape Heritage programme.

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If you have difficulty in finding out what initiatives are planned in your area, we will advise further when you submit an online enquiry. We may be able to advise if a local initiative is planned and put you in touch with relevant contacts.

# Who can apply?

**Your organisation must be one of the following not-for-private-profit organisations or lowest tiers of local government:**

- Unincorporated charities (for Project Viability Grants only)
- Charitable Incorporated Organisations (CIOs)
- Charitable Companies Limited by Guarantee
- Charitable Community Benefit Societies
- Community Benefit Societies
- Not-for-private-profit Companies Limited by Guarantee
- Community Interest Companies (CICs) Limited by Guarantee
- Co-operatives
- Parish and Town Councils

## We will not fund:

- Private individuals
- Local authorities and other public sector bodies other than Parish and Town Councils (unless applying on behalf of an organisation still in formation)
- Universities, colleges and other mainstream educational institutions including independent schools
- For-profit companies, unless in a partnership led by a not-for-profit organisation
- Unincorporated organisations (e.g. charitable trusts and associations) that are not intending to incorporate
- Organisations with fewer than three Trustees or Directors. If there are only three Trustees/Directors, none of these should be spouses or otherwise related to one another.
- Limited liability partnerships
- Churches or other places of worship, where the building will remain in use primarily as a place of religious worship – defined as hosting more than six religious services per year.

# What buildings can be considered?

Your building needs to meet these tests.

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- **Potential for positive change.**

A change of use and/or change of ownership is proposed, or you have recently acquired the building. With a new use or by being brought into community ownership, the building and your vision for it must have the potential to increase the vitality of the place – increasing footfall, extending the hours when social and economic activity is taking place, creating a new offer for residents or visitors. We want to see that projects have potential to deliver heritage and both economic and social outcomes. This will include job and business creation, plus floor space brought back into use. Social potential can include an increase in volunteering, people developing new skills, increased pride of place, and improved wellbeing.

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- **Ownership.**

Your organisations should have, or be intending to acquire, the freehold or a long lease on the project building. Your lease (existing or proposed) must be a full repairing, fully assignable lease of the kind registered with the Land Registry. There should be at least 25 years left to run following project completion. In exceptional cases and where meanwhile uses are planned in preparing a longer term proposal, we may be able to consider projects with a shorter lease: if you are in this position then you need to discuss this with us before applying.

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- **Heritage value.**

Your building should be of special architectural or historic interest and your proposals should be heritage-led. It will be nationally listed Grade I, II or II\*, included in a local list maintained by your local authority or, if it is unlisted, located within a conservation area. In this last case, you will need to show that the building makes a positive contribution to the character and appearance of the conservation area. Unlisted buildings not in conservation areas will be considered for support if a convincing case can be made for their heritage value to local people.

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# What funding does Transforming Places provide?

We can help you from the very beginning through each of the stages, through a series of grants, subject to the availability of our funds. Please refer to the table at the beginning of these notes to see which grant scheme fits best with the stage you have reached, then read the detailed notes on the individual grants below.

In considering which one best fits the stage you have reached in building design terms, you may find it helpful to refer to the Royal Institute of British Architect's Plan of Work. This may help you in discussing your requirements with your architect and professional team and developing briefs for their work. A summary guide to the RIBA stages can be found [here](#) and the relevant Plan stages are noted in the tables below.

## Please also note:

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- There is an overall limit of £150,000 on the total funding we will provide for developing any one project, excluding Transformational Project grants.
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- If your project is selected for a Transformational Project grant, then the overall maximum is £500,000 (made up of £150,000 in development funding and £350,000 capital).
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We strongly encourage applications for less than the maximum grant for each programme: applicants who are able to provide partnership funding from their own or other sources will have a greater chance of success.

**Please note that our grants cannot be used to fund work that is being grant-aided through a Future High Streets Fund or Heritage Action Zone programme. These strands of funding cannot partner each other, but will fund projects that are complementary. These strands of funding may also separately fund different stages of one project.**

In addition to grants, we can provide advice and help if this is needed. Our Team includes specialists who can mentor and guide groups through their project development.

# Project Viability Grants

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**£15,000 maximum, up to 100% of the cost of work involved.**

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## What is this for?

To explore the different options for re-use, or to test a single option.

This typically involves an initial assessment of the building's condition and repair needs, outline design solutions sympathetic to its heritage value that can accommodate the uses under consideration, and the outline cost of the works needed to repair and convert the building. It will also involve considering the outline business case for the possible uses, based on research and consultation, and how the project could be funded. In some cases, it may be necessary to obtain an independent property valuation, for example if the funding strategy may include Social Investment (loan finance) or to identify the conservation deficit, which is where the cost of the project will exceed the value of the restored building.

*Equivalent to RIBA Plan of Work stages 0 - 2*

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## Points to note

If you do not already own the building, you will need to provide evidence that you have a reasonable prospect of securing ownership, for example, the owner has agreed to allow you time to raise the necessary funds.

You should generally be already constituted as one of the organisational types listed above, but if part of your work is to explore the best type to set up as, we will accept applications in advance of formally registering your group. We will want to see that you have an initial governing structure and constitution.

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## What will this grant help you achieve?

At the end of the funded work, you will need to bring the results together to produce a Project Viability Appraisal. This will help you decide whether to commit to further cost, risk and effort in developing the project and provide a route map for the next steps. It will also be a document you can present to potential funders and supporters to help explain your plans.

# Project Development Grants

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**£100,000 maximum, up to 90% of the cost of work involved.**

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## What is this for?

To enable you to take forward the development of your capital project to the next stage.

This could include developing the technical and design details, additional support such as a project manager, refining your business plan, building community engagement and preparing funding bids. Within the maximum above, this could be more than one grant over time, enabling you to move forward in stages.

*Equivalent to RIBA Plan of Work stages 2 - 3*

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## Points to note

If you do not already own the building, you will need to provide evidence that you have a formal agreement to acquire it, such as Heads of Terms, which the owner cannot rescind without good cause.

You should be set up formally, as one of the organisational types listed above.

If you have not completed a Project Viability Appraisal funded by us, you will need to provide details of the work you have done to test the viability of your plans. We will consider how likely it is that your project will be able to go on to attract the capital funding required.

You will need to show that the proposals will be sympathetic to and not harm the historic character of the building. We want to know that there is no reason in principle why planning permission and listed building consent would not be granted. This will need to be backed by evidence that you have taken appropriate advice.

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## What will this grant help you achieve?

At the end of the funded work, or series of grants if more than one, you would be expected to reach the stage of securing capital funding to enable the delivery of your project.

# Crowdfunding Challenge Grants

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**Up to £25,000, to match the amount raised through a crowdfunding campaign. We will match the amount raised from your supporters £ for £, so that you could achieve £50,000 in total.**

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## What is this for?

To enable you to develop your plans for the project, once viability has been demonstrated, or to deliver your project (capital work), or a combination of the two.

*Equivalent to RIBA Plan of Work stages 2 - 5*

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## Points to note

You will need to have a defined project proposal, having already completed a Project Viability Appraisal or otherwise be able to show that you have tested that your proposals for the building are potentially viable. These grants cannot support crowdfunding for early stage work such as viability or options appraisals and getting set up as an organisation.

You will need to show that your fundraising target is realistic.

You may choose which crowdfunding platform to use. (You can find some helpful guidance [here](#).) You will need to submit your application in sufficient time for us to be able to make a decision before your campaign ends. The grant will match the total raised, subject to the maximum above, by the agreed end date for the campaign. If you do not achieve your full target figure, provided the crowdfunding platform allows you to retain the reduced sum raised, the grant amount will be reduced accordingly. We will want to agree to any resulting changes to the scope of the work you propose to undertake.

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## What will this grant help you achieve?

You will have increased your ability to move your project forward, with increased public awareness of your plans and a stronger community of supporters, plus funding that you can use flexibly to finalise your plans or help deliver your project.

# Community Shares Booster Grants

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**Development grants up to £10,000 to develop community share offers and equity investments up to £50,000 to match the amount raised in Community Shares investment.**

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## What is this for?

To enable Community Benefit Societies and Cooperatives to boost the amount of investment they raise from their supporters. This could enable you to develop your community share offer for the project, once viability has been demonstrated, or to deliver your project (capital work), or a combination of the two.

*Equivalent to RIBA Plan of Work stages 2 - 5*

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## Points to note

Community Benefit Societies and Cooperatives are the only types of organisations able to issue Community Shares. This programme will be run by our programme partner, Co-operatives UK.

You will need to have a defined project proposal, having already completed a Project Viability Appraisal or otherwise be able to show that you have tested that your proposals for the building are potentially viable.

You must apply for a grant before the launch of the share issue.

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## What will this grant help you achieve?

You will have increased your ability to move your project forward, with increased public awareness of your plans and a stronger community of supporters, plus funding that you can use flexibly to finalise your plans or help deliver your project.

# What viability and development work can be funded?

You may already have undertaken or commissioned some of this work at the point you contact us, but still have some gaps to fill in or you may be starting from the beginning in looking at possible options. Our funding can help you to complete the picture or to move forward, but we cannot fund any work that has started or costs you have incurred before we issue a grant offer letter.

Any work that is essential for taking the project forward towards the goal of revitalising an historic building will be considered. Applicants must explain how a particular piece of work or activity will enable this.

## Examples include:

- Employment of a project co-ordinator (either someone appointed externally on a consultancy basis or an existing employee(s) working additional hours or on this specific project).
- Fees for consultants needed to help progress plans (e.g. architect, quantity surveyor, structural engineer, mechanical & electrical engineer).
- Property valuation by a RICS registered valuer.
- Fundraising consultants.
- Business planning consultants.
- Costs associated with developing a bid to the National Lottery Heritage Fund or other capital funders (e.g. Activity Plan, Training Plan, Conservation Management Plan).
- Costs of community engagement work (e.g. outreach, pop-up events, consultations).
- Legal costs where this is critical in establishing ownership or the viability of proposed uses (e.g. advice on restrictive covenants) or for advice on governance (e.g. to determine the appropriate constitutional model for delivering the project and operating the building following completion).
- Specialist VAT advice to help identify the most tax efficient approach to the project.
- VAT costs that cannot be reclaimed.
- Organisational overheads/administration costs.
- Costs associated with converting an existing charity or social enterprise into a Community Benefit Society.

# Transformational Project Grants

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**Up to £350,000 for the repair, restoration and adaptation of a building to bring it into use, up to 80% of the cost of work involved**

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## What is this for?

The grant can fund the cost of building acquisition, repair and conservation work and associated fees as well as work required to enable 'meanwhile' use or change of use, including services and fit-out.

*Equivalent to RIBA Plan of Work stages 4 - 5*

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## Points to note

Your project will need to have the clear potential to deliver exemplars of alternative uses and/or ownership structures and investment models to facilitate long term regeneration of the building and place where it is located.

This programme can support only 10 to 15 projects that we identify as the best examples of what the Transforming Places programme aims to achieve. We will take an overview to arrive at a balanced portfolio and geographical spread of exemplar projects to support.

Ideally, your project will need to be capable of completion within 3 years. You may wish to discuss the timeframe for your project with us before applying.

It must have a positive impact on the vitality and distinctiveness of the local area, with potential to act as a catalyst for other owners and a model transferable to other places.

Your design proposals must offer a creative and high-quality adaptation for new use of the building, whilst achieving exemplary conservation standards.

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## What will this grant help you achieve?

You will have or be in a position to secure the final piece of funding to be able to start building work. This will enable you to deliver a high quality, imaginative project that provides a transferable exemplar of how a community-led project can transform our high streets and town centres, by bringing new uses, and/or innovative models whether of ownership, operation or funding.

## Please refer to [Application Help Notes](#) for next steps.

You will need to complete an online application form. Please download the Application Help Notes to guide you in completing the form. Please also refer to the application deadlines in the Enquire or Apply section of our website.

## What happens when a grant has been awarded?

You will receive a formal grant offer letter, which includes terms and conditions. You will then need to confirm that you accept these before you start the funded work.

We provide additional guidance for grantholders, but key points to note at this stage are:

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- Our grants are normally valid for one year, but where the work is expected to take longer to complete, for example the Transformational Projects, we will set a longer deadline. Where work is not completed within the time limit on the grant, we may withdraw the funding, unless we have agreed to a request from you to extend the time limit.
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- You will need to make regular progress reports during the work. Following completion, we will ask you to provide updates for up to 5 years, so that we can understand the outcomes our funding has helped you to achieve.
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- We will ask you to publicise our support for your project, as a condition of the grant.
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- Grant payments are made in arrears, once work has completed: you will need to submit an online claim form and upload copies of invoices and evidence of work completed. For larger grants, we will be able to pay in stages. For Project Viability Grants we pay on completion of the Viability Appraisal, once this has been reviewed and agreed by our Team. You will need to plan how you will cover your costs until the grant can be claimed.
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