



Chelmsford City Council Cabinet

12 November 2024

Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF)

Report by:

Cabinet Member for Active Chelmsford

Officer Contact:

Jennifer Gorton – Economic Development Lead

01245 606367, Jennifer.gorton@chelmsford.gov.uk

Purpose

To update Cabinet on the Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF) and provide details of the 2024/25 Grant Scheme. To seek a decision on whether to approve the recommendations made by the Community Funding Panel for the allocation of the 2024/25 REPF monies.

Options

1. To accept the recommendations as set out within this report
2. To make amendments to the recommendations set out within this report
3. To not accept the recommendations within this report

Preferred option and reasons

Option 1 is the preferred option. The Community Funding Panel have discussed the applications made for the 2024/25 REPF grant scheme and have made recommendations for the allocation of this funding, as set out within this report. Due to the tight timeframes involved, any option other than option 1 may jeopardise the ability to spend Chelmsford City Council's allocation of REPF by the 31st March 2025 deadline.

Recommendations

1. To note the update on the Council's allocation of Rural England Prosperity Fund.
2. To approve the recommendations made by the Community Funding Panel for the allocation of the Council's 2024/25 REPF monies as set out in appendix 1.
3. That authority is delegated to the Director of Corporate Services, in consultation with the Community Funding Panel, to take any necessary decisions required in order to ensure that the 2024/25 REPF is spent within the stated timeframes.

1. Background

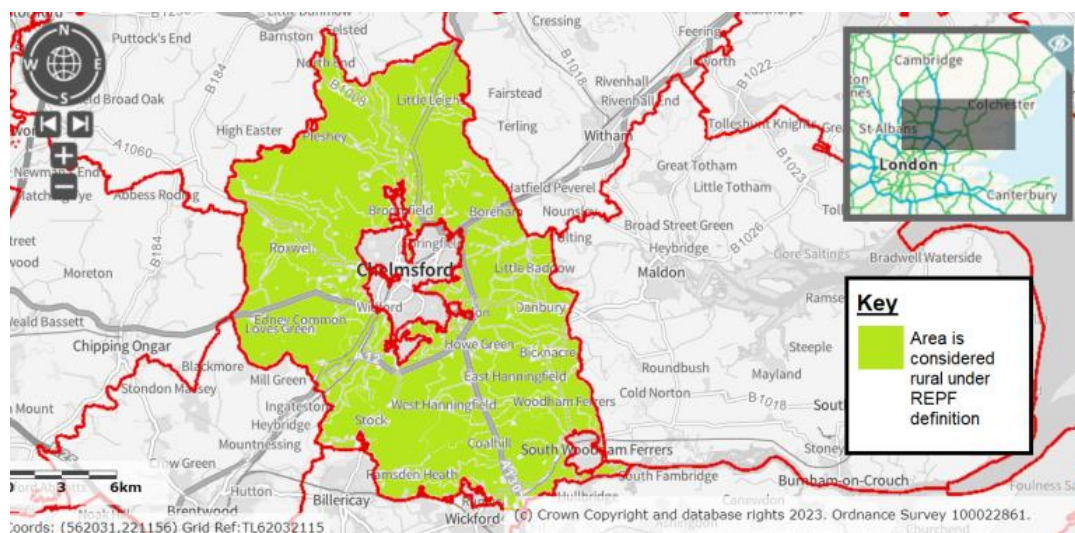
1.1 The Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF) was announced in September 2022. It is a top-up to the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) and succeeds EU Funding from LEADER and the Growth Programme.

1.2 The scheme has been developed to fund capital projects for small businesses and community infrastructure, aimed at improving productivity and strengthening the rural economy and rural communities.

1.3 For the purposes of the Fund, rural areas as defined by DEFRA are:

- Towns, villages and hamlets with populations below 10,000
- Market or 'hub towns' with populations of up to 30,000 that serve their surrounding rural areas as centres of employment and in providing services

1.4 A map showing the Chelmsford areas considered rural under the REPF definition can be seen below:



1.5 Chelmsford has been allocated £400,000 of REPF to cover a two-year period from 2023/24 to 2024/25.

2. Rural England Prosperity Fund Grant Scheme 2023/24

- 2.1 In 2023/24 Chelmsford City Council was able to access £100,000 of its allocated £400,000 of REPF.
- 2.2 Officers engaged with a range of internal and external partners, including the Rural Community Council for Essex (RCCE) and the Country Land and Business Association (CLA) to develop a grant scheme for the fund.
- 2.3 The 2023/24 grant scheme enabled rural businesses and community groups to bid for funding up to the value of £10,000. Projects were required to have 20% match funding in place.
- 2.4 In total nine projects, consisting of six businesses and three community organisations, received REPF funding. Two additional community organisations were allocated REPF funding by the Community Funding Panel, however, were not progressed as they failed to provide the evidence required to secure funding.

3. Rural England Prosperity Fund Grant Scheme 2024/25 (current round)

- 3.1 Chelmsford City Council has been awarded £300,000 in REPF for the financial year 2024/25. Additionally, the unallocated spend from 2023/24 (£15,000) has been authorised by DLUHC / MHCLG to be rolled across, giving Chelmsford City Council a total of £315,000 to allocate in 2024/25.
- 3.2 Once again, a grant scheme was launched inviting applications from rural businesses and rural community organisations to bid for the REPF monies to support capital projects, which meet the aims of the Fund. The scheme invited applications between July and August 2024.
- 3.3 The 2024/25 REPF grant scheme replicated the 2023/24 grant scheme. The main difference with the current grant scheme from the previous year's scheme is that the grant amount on offer has been increased to £20,000. This reflects the larger amount of REPF funding available. A match funding requirement of 20% remained.
- 3.4 In total 54 applications were received. Of those, seven applications were ineligible for funding. The remaining eligible applications had a combined financial request of £776,829 against a REPF grant availability of £315,000.
- 3.5 The greatest number of applications came from the private sector, with 31 applications falling within this category. 12 applications came from voluntary organisations and registered charities, two applications came from Parish Councils, one application from the category of higher and further education institutions and one application classed as 'other'.

4. Projects recommended for funding

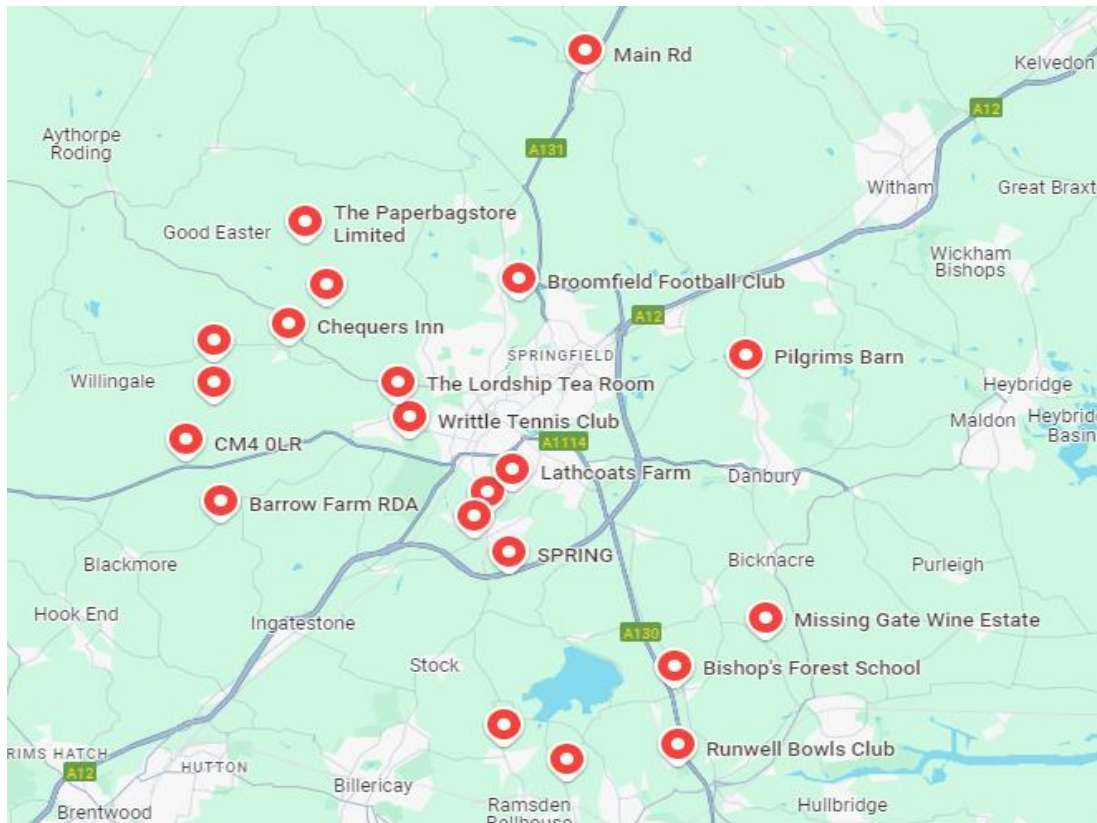
4.1 All eligible applications were scored by members of the Economic Development Team, using a scoring matrix. Once this exercise had been completed, the scores were then moderated and any significant disparities were reviewed and discussed, with a final score agreed upon.

4.2 This information was shared with the Community Funding Panel. The Community Funding Panel consists of:

- The Cabinet Member for an Active Chelmsford (Chair)
- The Cabinet Member for Finance
- The Cabinet Deputy for Sustainable Transport and Climate Ambassador
- Director of Sustainable Communities
- Director of Connected Chelmsford
- Economic Development and Implementation Manager
- External Funding Professional

4.3 The Community Funding Panel met on the 7th October 2024. The Panel reviewed the applications and discussed the options for allocating funding. The recommendations of the Panel for the allocation of the 2024/25 REPF monies are set out in appendix 1. The Panel are recommending allocating funding to 21 projects. In many instances, the grant funding is allocated to a specific aspect of a broader project.

4.4 The map below shows the geographical spread of the projects that the Panel are recommending to allocate REPF funding to. Of the 21 applications being recommended for funding, 11 are from the private sector, eight are from community / charity organisations, one is from a parish council and one is from a higher education institution.



4.5 Appendix 1 highlights two projects that have been pre-approved, under an officer delegation in consultation with the Community Funding Panel, which enables grants of £10,000 and under to be awarded. These projects are Broomfield Football Club (project 2) and the Roxwell Chequers Community Society (project 6). The decision to pre-approve these two projects under delegated authority was taken, as both are time sensitive and both organisations needed the funding commitments in order to secure additional funding from other sources or to meet other key requirements. Without timely approval there was a risk to the overall projects.

5. Checks and Due Diligence

5.1 Work has begun to carry out checks on all of the organisations that have been recommended by the Community Funding Panel to receive REPF funding. These include financial checks and checks with internal teams including business rates, planning, food safety, parks and leisure as appropriate.

5.2 If Cabinet approve the recommendations set out within this report, once the checks are satisfactorily completed, funding contracts will be drawn up and issued, in line with both Council and Government (REPF) requirements. Reporting requirements will be set out within these contracts.

5.3 Prior to funding being issued, quotes for the work, invoices, financial details and other relevant information will be obtained.

5.4 In line with the REPF funding timetable, all funding needs to be transferred and spent by the 31st March 2025.

6. Conclusion

6.1 The REPF was launched in September 2022 and allocated £400,000 to Chelmsford to support the rural economy and rural communities. £100,000 of the Fund was available in 2023/24 with the remainder being made available to allocate in 2024/25.

6.2 Chelmsford City Council launched a grant scheme in 2024/25 inviting rural business and community organisations to apply for funding of up to £20,000 to support capital projects which strengthen the rural economy and support local rural communities. A match fund of 20% was required.

6.3 54 applications were received from the grant round. The Community Funding Panel are recommending 21 projects are approved and allocated REPF monies.

List of appendices:

Appendix 1 – Community Funding Panel Recommended Projects

Background papers:

REPF Prospectus - [Rural England Prosperity Fund: prospectus - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/114444/Rural_England_Prospersity_Fund_prospectus.pdf)

REPF Allocations - [Rural England Prosperity Fund: allocations - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/114444/Rural_England_Prospersity_Fund_allocations.pdf)

REPF Interventions, objectives and outputs and outcomes list - [Rural England Prosperity Fund interventions objectives outputs and outcomes list.pdf \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/114444/Rural_England_Prospersity_Fund_interventions_objectives_outputs_and_outcomes_list.pdf)

Corporate Implications

Legal/Constitutional: The terms of reference for the Community Funding Panel within the Council's constitution include the officer delegation for awards of up to £10,000 in consultation with the Panel, referred to in the report. The decision as to whether to make any award at any level can be made by Cabinet as an executive matter. The matters that should be considered by Cabinet in making the final decision as to whether any awards should be made are set out in the report.

Financial: £400,000 REPF funding has been awarded to Chelmsford City Council for

the period 2023/24 and 2024/25. Any unspent funding remaining on the 31st March 2025, will need to be returned to MHCLG.

Potential impact on climate change and the environment: A number of the projects recommended for funding by the Community Funding Panel have positive environmental impacts and work towards reducing carbon footprint. All applications were required to address the environmental impact of the proposed project and detail any mitigations that would be put in place.

Personnel: Delivery of the REPF requires significant staff resources from the Economic Development Team, as well as other Council departments.

Risk Management: As with the UKSPF, there will be an ongoing need for robust programme management to ensure that the projects identified are delivered.

Equality and Diversity: The REPF has been introduced with the aims of creating stronger communities and increasing life chances across the country. The delivery of the REPF will have a positive impact in this area.

Health and Safety: None

Digital: None

Other: None

Consultees:

- Director of Sustainable Communities
- Director of Connected Chelmsford
- The Economic Development Team
- The Cabinet Member for an Active Chelmsford
- The Cabinet Member for Finance
- The Cabinet Deputy for Sustainable Transport
- Lorraine Jarvis – CVS

Relevant Policies and Strategies:

Our Chelmsford Our Plan - [Our Chelmsford, Our Plan](#)

Appendix 1 – Community Funding Panel Recommended Projects

	<u>Project Name</u>	<u>Organisation</u>	<u>Brief Description</u>	<u>Recommended Allocation</u>
1	Bishop's Forest School development (Rettendon)	Bishop's Forest School	To improve access path, purchase pre-school equipment and plant trees to open pre-school in Spring 2025.	£20,000
2	Broomfield Football Club (Broomfield)	Broomfield Football Club	To install pitch rail to enable the men's team to participate in the Essex Olympian League	£10,000
3	Business Machinery Enhancement and Growth (Roxwell)	Cookies and Koalas	To purchase two additional print machines to enable business to grow	£20,000
4	CCTV Installation/upgrade (Roxwell)	Essex County Scout Council/ Skreens Park Activity Centre	To install a high-quality CCTV system	£10,500
5	Downham Dairy Barn (South Hanningfield)	NJ & GM Lambert	To regenerate unused farm to create a Food Hall and animal experience area	£20,000
6	Energy efficient appliances for new commercial kitchen (Roxwell)	Roxwell Chequers Community Benefit Society	To equip a new commercial kitchen at the community owned Chequers Inn allowing a regular food offering	£9,970
7	Farm Shop and Food Education Centre (Writtle)	Anglia Ruskin University	To create a market garden and farm shop	£20,000
8	Galleywood Heritage Centre Replacement Windows and Damp Proofing (Galleywood)	Galleywood Heritage Centre	To replace windows to improve security, protect archive room and reduce energy loss	£20,000
9	Growing Writtle Sunflowers: Phase Two (Writtle)	D R Metson & Partners LLP	To install a shop front to sell locally made craft goods	£13,000
10	Mini Basketball Court (South Hanningfield)	South Hanningfield Parish Council	To provide a recreational basketball court in the village centre	£5,000
11	Missing Gate Wine Estate Wine Tasting (Woodham Ferrers and Bicknacre)	Missing Gate Vineyard (Food Physics Limited)	To purchase a pavilion to enable wine tasting events to take place	£19,542
12	Pilgrims Barn "B&B" (Little Baddow)	Pilgrims Barn "Bed and Breakfast" (B&B)	To install EV charging, improve lighting and fenestration	£6,827
13	Plan BEE (Great and Little Leighs)	Plan BEE	To grow business installing honey bee colonies / bee hives in businesses around Essex	£10,000

Agenda Item 6.1

14	Playing Field Clubhouse (Galleywood)	Galleywood Playing Field Management Committee	To replace existing clubhouse, which would enable new veteran team, futsal team, female teams to be introduced	£20,000
15	Productivity Automation improvement (Roxwell)	Thepaperbagstore Limited	To purchase new equipment to increase productivity	£20,000
16	Purchase of horse box for Riding for the Disabled (Highwood)	Barrow Farm Riding and Carriage Driving for the Disabled	To purchase a horse box to enable riders to compete	£20,000
17	Radio City Beer Works (Highwood)	Radio City Beer Works	To purchase kegs and a keg cleaning machine to reduce carbon footprint and grow business	£14,992
18	Runwell bowls club roof fund (Runwell)	Runwell Hospital Bowls Club part of Runwell Hospital Sports & Social Club Ltd	To make urgent repairs to the roof of the building	£5,000
19	SPRING Automotation & Capacity Growth (Galleywood)	Spring Food Ltd	To further increase capacity to keep up with demand and potentially sell to Ocado and Waitrose	£13,000
20	Table Top System at Lathcoats Farm (Galleywood)	W Lawrence Taylor Ltd	To develop the 'pick your own' tourism offer	£17,169
21	Writtle Tennis Club - New Clubhouse (Writtle)	Writtle Tennis Club	To replace existing clubhouse, with a fully accessible building enabling wheelchair tennis to be played at the club	£20,000
Total				£315,000