

COMMERCIAL BUILDINGS ENHANCEMENT GRANT DUNDEE CITY CENTRE Application Guidance

Invitation to bid opens	22 April 2025
Invitation to bid closes	Once all funding is allocated
Minimum application level	Exterior improvements - £10,000 Interior improvements - £50,000
Maximum application level	Exterior improvements - £20,000 Interior improvements - £150,000
Match Funding	All projects will be required to provide match funding of at least 25%.
Timescales	Projects must complete by 31 March 2026.
Application process	Submit an Expression of Interest (EOI) form to provide basic information about your project. If eligible, you will be provided with a full application form. Projects will be assessed and applicants informed within 6-8 weeks of submission (this may be extended if there are a significant number of applicants to be assessed at any given time).

Background

Dundee City Council has secured funding from the UK Government through the Community Regeneration Partnerships to support the development of the city centre. Funding was awarded to enable Dundee City Council to take forward key objectives of the City Centre Strategic Investment Plan, which incorporates a range of potentially significant investment opportunities and prioritises the need to make the city centre an attractive place for both businesses and residents alike.

In order to achieve this, the Council has established the Commercial Buildings Enhancement Grant scheme, with two distinct parts. The first will focus on **shopfront repairs and enhancements** for occupied premises, and the second scheme offers grants to support **internal refurbishment/upgrading for vacant premises or with newly appointed tenants**, to bring them back into productive use. This is a capital programme.

This scheme is for premises located in the city centre only. Please refer to [the map](#) in the annex of this document to ensure your property is within the eligible project zone.

Overview

The first scheme will support **external** improvements to units which are currently occupied. The second scheme will support **internal** improvements to units which are unoccupied or subject to a

newly signed lease. Some external improvements can also be included as part of the project, as long as the main refurbishments will be on the interior of the property.

The main aims of the scheme are as follows:

- Boost occupancy rates in vacant retail units within Dundee city centre by making internal and/or external enhancements
- Encourage private investment to repurpose and revive vacant shops in the city centre
- Improve the visual appearance of shop fronts in the city centre enhancing civic pride and the attractiveness of the city.
- Enhance activity and footfall in and around the city centre, including commercial activity
- Generate employment opportunities and additional social value benefits
- Elevate perceptions and confidence among local residents, visitors, businesses, and investors.

Who can apply?

- Businesses (including sole traders, community enterprises and charities) that take on new leases of previously vacant commercial premises in Dundee city centre.
- The term of your lease and proposed works may impact on the level of grant that you will be awarded.
- If a new leaseholder or tenant is making the application, the property owner must provide a supporting letter confirming their consent for the grant application
- Property owners, or their representatives, of vacant city centre premises. If an application is made on behalf of the owner, evidence must be provided showing that the organisation is authorised to act on the owner's behalf and can enter into a legal agreement with Dundee City Council regarding the grant. It is also expected that property owners have a new tenant lined up for the premises or are in the process of securing one.
- Operational commercial units/existing tenants may apply for visual shop front enhancements, including signage, windows, vinyls, or similar displays. Properties do not have to have traditional shop frontages to be considered for this scheme.

Funding available

Exterior improvements and enhancements	
Minimum Project Size	£10,000
Maximum Project Size – larger projects may be considered but must engage with DCC in advance of an application	£50,000
Match Funding	Minimum of 25%

Interior improvements and enhancements	
Minimum Project Size	£20,000
Maximum Project Size – larger projects may be considered but must engage with DCC in advance of an application	£150,000
Match Funding	Minimum of 25%

Larger (or smaller) applications may be considered on a case-by-case basis – based on evidence of need. Please contact the team via the Expression of Interest form and a member of the project delivery team will review your information.

If a property owner or agent wishes to undertake projects on multiple properties in their ownership/management, the Council will consider a joint bid, particularly where costs for each individual property may be under the £10,000 minimum. Please outline your planned approach in the EOI.

Timescales

The fund opened for applications on 22 April 2025, with applications being assessed on an ongoing basis. Projects will be assessed and applicants informed within 6-8 weeks of submission (this may be extended if there are a significant number of applicants to be assessed at any given time). The programme will close once all funding has been allocated. Projects must be completed and funding spent by 31st March 2026.

What will this funding support?

This is a capital funding programme. Grants are available for the internal or external enhancement or alteration of commercial and retail buildings.

Examples of activities:

Exterior

- Shopfronts and traditional signwriting.
- Enhancing existing historic features e.g. windows, doors, brickwork, timber details, etc
- High level joinery
- Awnings
- Works to property entrance to create access/enhance accessibility
- Window /door replacement
- External Lighting (e.g. decorative or security lighting)
- Repairs to frontages
- Professional fees

Interior

- Electrical upgrades
- Updating floors and ceilings
- Accessibility improvements
- Net Zero energy installations
- Installation of fixtures and fittings
- Professional fees

Application process

1. Submit an [Expression of Interest](#). Eligible/viable projects will then receive a copy of the application form.
2. If eligible, submit your full application ensuring that all required documents are included.
3. Scoring panel assesses the applications.
4. Feedback to applicants/additional information requested.
5. Further assessment following receipt of additional information.
6. Due diligence checks on projects progressing to this stage
 - Fraud checks
 - Finance checks
 - Lease/ownership checks – evidence of agreement as required
7. Decision made and communicated to applicants.

Applicants should note that any works which have begun prior to the grant offer letter being signed will not be eligible for this scheme.

Grants will be paid in arrears, following submission of a grant claim with evidence of eligible costs.

Planning permissions and consents

Planning permission is necessary for any works that involve significant changes to the external appearance of a building. This includes alterations to the shop fronts, windows or doorways, changes in the type of materials used, and the installation of awnings, blinds, or security shutters. You may also need planning permission for changes in the use of the property.

Key outputs and objectives

Key outputs and outcomes which will be measured include:

- Number of building facades improved
- Number of spaces made more lettable through investment
- Areas of frontage/facades improved
- Number of companies receiving financial support/grants
- Amount of commercial buildings development or improved (m2)
- Increased footfall in key city centre streets
- Increased visitor numbers
- Improved perceptions of the city
- Reduction in CO2 emissions from the improved units.

The funding will also support the key priorities of City Centre Strategic Investment Plan outcomes:

- Stimulate investment in high-quality workplaces in the city centre
- Develop a wider range of activities for locals and visitors of all ages including leisure, entertainment, cultural, live music, and evening economy initiatives
- Target key building frontages with a façade enhancement scheme, including Union Street, Reform Street and the Murraygate

- The council will work proactively with the private sector to explore the viability of further commercial spaces

Required documents

Please submit the following documents with your application:

- Proof of ownership or proof of lease
- Supporting Letter indicating consent of the grant application and work from landlord (mandatory if tenant applicant)
- Proof of additional project funding secured (mandatory – a signed confirmation letter or similar)
- Business plan (if new tenant)
- Latest annual accounts
- Bank statements for the past three months
- Proof of business status
- Quotes and evidence of costs
- Cash flow forecast for the next 12 months
- Photographs, plans, drawings, if available

Need for the grant scheme

Placemaking is a key tool in economic development, using local assets to create unique and appealing places where people want to live, work and play. The quality of place is often a key differentiator in being able to encourage people to spend time in an area (in this case, the city centre), to retain/recruit staff and to attract visitors. The Centre for Cities Outlook 2024 highlighted that Dundee's population have much less money in their pockets than if disposable incomes had grown at pre-2010 rates (-£17,730), compared to a national level of -£10,200. Dundee has the lowest employment rate of all UK cities (ONS 2023). All of this impacts on spend in the city centre and in turn on investment in the city centre. We need to encourage people to invest in their properties to make the city centre a more attractive place, whilst also supporting wider economic growth.

Vacant and under-used properties in the city centre causing blight, making the city centre a less attractive place to visit, in turn perpetuating a spiral of decline. Recent changes to the way rates are collected in Scotland means that there is no grace period for vacant premises and owners are liable from rates for day 1. This also now includes listed buildings which had previously been exempt of rates for any vacant period. This may mean that owners are now more likely to be considering investment or to let on a short-term basis. The challenges relate to both building facades of both occupied and vacant premises but also to the internal infrastructure of vacant spaces some of which haven't been occupied for many years and require work to bring them up to a usable quality. For example, there are retail units on Reform Street and Exchange Street which have been empty for over 10 years.

Further information

- [Dundee City Council Community Regeneration Partnerships](#)

Annex

Eligible project zone (within the red boundary)

