



West Oxfordshire UKSPF Investment Plan Summary

The UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) is a three year Government funding programme to 'build pride in place, improve the places in which people live and support individuals and businesses to thrive'.

West Oxfordshire has been allocated £1m through the fund. The District Council submitted an Investment Plan setting out how we will use the funds and this plan was approved in January 2023. The Plan was submitted as an online form on a Government portal. This document summarises the key points from the Plan.

Funding profile

The Government stipulates the funding profile i.e. how much of the funds are available in each of the three years. The table below shows that the majority of the funding will not be available until the financial year 2024/25.

| 2022-23 | 2023-24 | 2024-25 | Total |
|---------|----------|----------|------------|
| £70,467 | £140,935 | £788,598 | £1,000,000 |

Challenges

We consulted local stakeholders while developing the Investment Plan and the following are the prioritised challenges that fit the three UKSPF themes of 'Community and Place', 'Local Business' and 'People & Skills':

- Help town centres and their businesses to remain vibrant and successful in challenging economic times
- Ensure our towns are clean, attractive and welcoming, that they are clearly signed for visitors and that the markets which are so important for footfall are at their best.
- Help communities to protect their key rural services
- Ensure there is support for businesses when the funded business plan for the Oxfordshire LEP Growth Hub ends in March 2024
- Ensure that local people have the right skills that are needed by local businesses
- Ensure that there is appropriate local training for 'green skills', in particular the installation of green energy systems

How these challenges will be addressed

The Investment Plan sets out how the funding will be used:

£202,760 is allocated to 'Community and Place' with a focus on town centres and high streets, rural services and local green spaces.

£484,740 is allocated to 'Local Business', the bulk of which will be available in the financial year 2024/25.

£312,500 is allocated to 'People and Skills. This is only available in 2024/25 and will be split between ensuring local skills match local businesses' needs and 'green skills' training.

Projects underway

The Investment Plan set out the projects that would start in the first year. These are:

Biodiversity Toolkit

WODC frequently receives requests from local parish and town councils (in addition to schools and other small landowners) for information on how to manage their land better for biodiversity. The toolkit will provide clear and simple information on how local parish councils can manage the land they own in a way that helps them to respond to the current ecological emergency.

Deerpark South Access Project

Deer Park South is an underused public open greenspace in Witney. A 1000-unit residential development adjacent to the site is currently being built and the site will therefore receive a significant increase in visitors either passing through the site or visiting to walk and spend time in nature. The site has no formal bridges where pathways cross the Colwell Brook, a small stream that runs through the middle of the site. Carrying out access infrastructure improvements will allow visitors to safely enter and enjoy the site all year round.

Market Towns Feasibility Study

The work will be commissioned to understand how West Oxfordshire's market towns are functioning in light of Covid and the changing nature of their role. It will identify issues that can be addressed in each of the key market towns and help inform the best use of UKSPF funds (as well as any potential match funding) to support their long term vitality.

Carterton Strategic Plan

Carterton is home to RAF Brize Norton. The town has expanded considerably in terms of housing numbers but investment in the town centre, leisure and culture facilities, community space and business opportunities have not kept pace. There is a need for a strategic plan for the town to deal with these issues as well as to determine the best way to maximise the economic benefit of the RAF's largest airbase for the town and immediate area.

Rural Services Feasibility Study

West Oxfordshire is the second most rural district in the south east. Rural services such as shops, pubs and post offices are often the key focal point that holds communities together. We know from existing council work as well as from stakeholder consultation that many rural services are potentially at risk. The last county wide report into rural services was undertaken by Community First Oxfordshire (CFO) in 2020. A district focussed update of this report is needed to ensure future work is focussed on where it is most effective at safeguarding crucial village services.

Future projects

The council will launch programmes for years two and three that organisations will be able to bid for to deliver the required interventions and outputs. The details of these schemes will be based on the outcome of feasibility work currently being undertaken. The schemes will be announced in the local press, on the Council's website and via the Council's Business Matters newsletter.

Governance

Our Governance Structure set out below includes a Local Partnership and a Delivery Team. The Delivery Team is responsible for operational decision making while the Local Partnership provides strategic oversight and scrutiny:

The Local Partnership

The Local Partnership provides the representation of the local area and ensures that the implementation of the programme meets local priorities. It reviews and inputs into the scope of grant schemes established in West Oxfordshire under the UKSPF and REPF programme, receives progress reports from the Delivery Team and fulfils a scrutiny function.

The following are being invited to join our Local Partnership:

- West Oxfordshire District Council (WODC) Leader
- WODC Executive Member for Economic Development
- WODC Executive Member for Stronger Healthy Communities
- WODC S151 Officer
- Cotswolds Tourism
- OxLEP
- Abingdon & Witney College
- JobCentre Plus
- Plunkett Foundation
- Oxfordshire Community & Voluntary Action (OCVA)
- Oxfordshire Association of Local Councils (OALC)
- Community First Oxfordshire (CFO)
- North East Cotswolds Farmers Group
- Witney Chamber of Commerce

In attendance

- WODC Economic Development officer
- WODC Communities officer
- WODC Climate Change and Sustainability officer

Delivery Team

The Delivery Team is responsible for operational decision making and management of the programme (project funding awards, review and monitoring of programme performance). Assessment of funding applications will use an assessment tool to ensure rigour and consistency, with robust checks to ensure the delivery organisations are financially sound and that projects meet the UKSPF criteria including compliance with subsidy control and additionality. Regular updates will be presented and discussed with the Local Partnership and the Council's Executive.

The Delivery Team is as follows:

- WODC S151 - Chair
- WODC Executive Member for Economic Development
- WODC Executive Member for Stronger Healthy Communities
- WODC Economic Development
- WODC Communities
- WODC Climate Change and Sustainability
- Cotswolds Tourism

For further information on West Oxfordshire's UKSPF programme, please see www.westoxon.gov.uk/spf