

Rural England Prosperity Fund Programme 2025-2026

Delivery Plan for Applicants – ROUND 3

June 2025

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1.0 Introduction

1.1 The aim of the Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF) is to improve productivity and strengthen the rural economy and rural communities.

1.2 The Rural Fund is integrated into the UKSPF which supports productivity and prosperity in places that need it most. For eligible local authorities, the Rural Fund is a rural top-up to UKSPF allocations. It supports activities that specifically address the particular challenges rural areas face. It is complementary to funding used to support rural areas under the UKSPF.

1.3 The REPF will support the following missions:

- Kickstart economic growth
- Break down barriers to opportunity
- Build an NHS fit for the future

1.4 This programme will be delivered across the rural parts of Colchester City Council through the funding **of capital projects** for small businesses and community infrastructure. Projects must meet the key investment priorities and the defined strategic objectives.

1.5 Colchester City Council rural area has a rich mix of heritage and archaeology and open spaces including the Dedham Vale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty with unique communities such as Mersea Island plus nationally recognised cultural offers. Colchester City Council rural area is truly unique and offers a high quality of life. Colchester and the surrounding area are increasingly appreciated by visitors.

1.6 There is no sector or employer that dominates the local economy. 93% of Colchester's businesses are micro/small. The area is one of the fastest growing populations in the country; this growth presents economic opportunities to support and service the new inhabitants.

1.7 Colchester is keen to realise its potential as a city to live, work, study, visit and do business. The delivery of this REPF Programme will support this ambition.

1.8 The key investment priorities are:

- Supporting Local Business
- Community and Place

1.9 The REPF sits alongside other programmes to tackle local inequalities work including the successful £19.2m Towns' Fund bid. The Health Alliance has invested large sums in work to tackle health inequalities such as with our housing partners to improve the standards in

private rented accommodation. Essex also has a Local Delivery Pilot led by Active Essex, to build healthier, more active communities. In addition, the UK Shared Prosperity Fund bid, and Levelling Up Fund bid both contribute significantly to addressing need and market failure.

2.0 The Programme

Eligible Area

2.1 Only projects taking place in locations defined as rural (**within the boundaries of Colchester**) will be considered. The quickest way to confirm whether your project is in a rural location is to check whether the postcode falls within an eligible rural area on the Magic Map application using the link below:

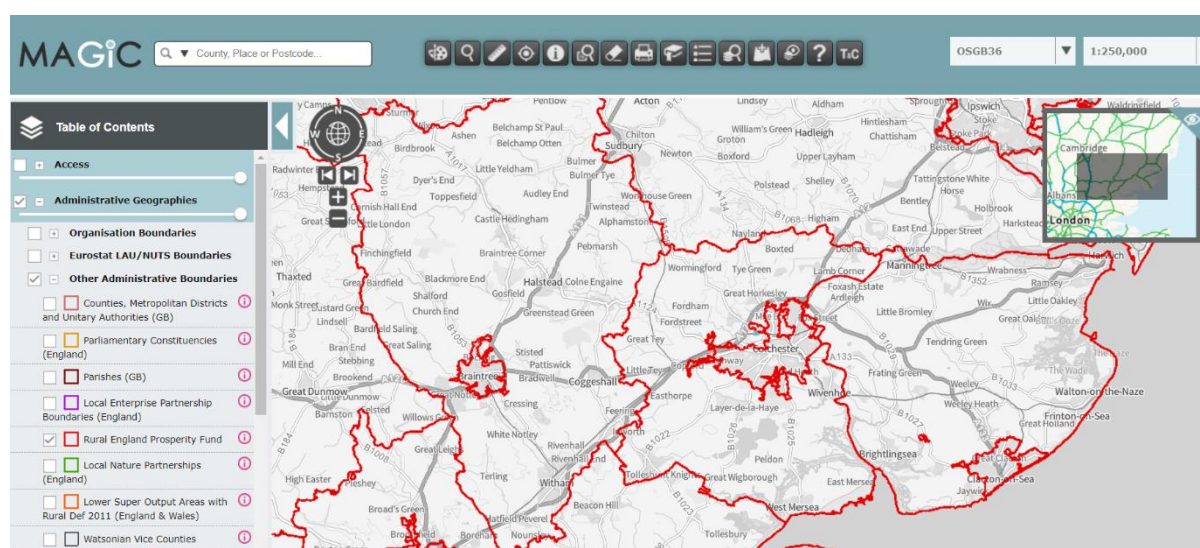
[MAGIC \(defra.gov.uk\)](https://magic.defra.gov.uk)

If it does not, you will not be eligible to apply for the Rural Fund grant.

If you are unsure of whether your project location is eligible, if it falls within multiple postcodes, or if the postcode is not yet known, contact REPF.Applications@colchester.gov.uk for support.

2.2 How to Use Magic Maps:

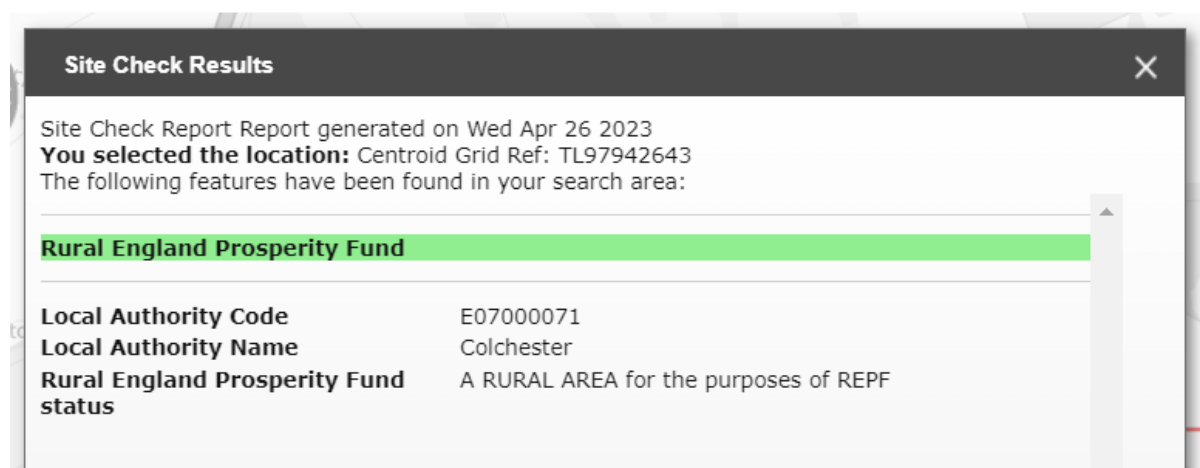
- Click on Get Started
- From the menu on the left-hand side, select “Administrative Geographies” In the drop down beneath select “Other Administrative Boundaries” ().
- From the list that appears, select the Rural England Prosperity Fund (REPF) option. Red boundary lines will appear on the map, marking eligible rural areas.



- Put your project postcode in the search bar at the top, and press enter (return) – ensure you include the space in the postcode (for example, COX XXX, rather than COXXXX).
- Magic map will automatically zoom to the postcode area.
- Once the map has loaded, select the information tool from the icon for “Identify” on the search bar - this will turn the cursor into a cross bar.



- Click in the highlighted postcode area to be given an overview of the area including the Rural Fund eligibility.
- **If your project location is eligible, you will see the phrase ‘A RURAL AREA for the purposes of REPF’ and the Local Authority name will be “Colchester.”**



2.3 Please see the below table to provide an indication of which Wards are likely to have eligible projects located within them (however the only way to be certain is to check as above):

Table 1: Eligible area

Substantively Excluded The majority/all postcodes within these wards sit outside the REPF boundary. There may be a small number of exceptions.	Partially Included: Significant numbers of postcodes within these wards sit within the REPF boundary. There will also be excluded postcodes.	Substantively Included: The majority/all postcodes within these wards sit within the REPF boundary. There may be a small number of exceptions.
Greenstead New Town & Christchurch	Stanway Mile End	Rural North Lexden & Braiswick

Castle Prettygate St Anne's and St Johns (some postcodes included) Highwoods (some postcodes included)	Berechurch Old Heath and the Hythe Shrub End	Marks Tey & Layer Wivenhoe Mersea & Pyefleet Tiptree
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Eligible Applicants

2.4 The below table outlines who is eligible to apply for a grant but is not exhaustive – any organisation with legal status can get funding:

Table 2: Eligible applicants

Business Support Projects	Community Support Projects
Micro, small and medium sized businesses	Rural community groups
Social enterprises	Social enterprises
Sole traders	Charities
Charities	Private entities working in partnership with small and micro business and rural community groups
Farmers, landowners, tenants with landlord permission	Micro, small and medium sized businesses

Programme Aim

2.5 The overall aim of the CCC REPF programme is:

‘To achieve change to improve our rural economy by improving productivity and creating jobs and boosting rural communities, making it more vibrant, self-sustaining and diverse and building on its rich natural and cultural assets.’

Strategic Priorities

2.6 In order to deliver an integrated and innovative plan that will support rural communities and the rural economy, enabling it to grow and diversify in a sustainable manner, applicants will have to meet one of the two Strategic Priorities and at least one of the Strategic Objectives outlined within their respective Priority. This will ensure that the projects will meet the overall Aim of the Programme and will be sustainable in their outputs.

2.7 The key strategic priorities and objectives are:

Priority 1: Supporting Rural Business:

The range of economic activity in rural areas has been constrained. Within Colchester City Council's area there is a high reliance of Micro and SME's. The traditional primary industries of agriculture and forestry have been contracting with reduced workforces and fewer businesses directly associated within the industry. In order to develop and diversify the rural

economy and ensure that the economic base continues to grow, innovative projects will be supported to expand into new areas of economic activity that will focus on encouraging job creation that attract and retain the younger workforce and develop sustainable supply chains.

Strategic Objectives for Priority 1: Supporting Rural Business

In order to achieve the Programme's Supporting Rural Business Priority one or more of the following three Strategic Objectives must be addressed (the strategic priorities are further broken down into CCC REPF objectives):

Table 4: Supporting Rural Business Objectives

REPF Strategic Objectives	CCC REPF Objectives
SO 1.1 To promote small scale investment in micro and small enterprises in rural areas	<p>Support rural micro and small business growth.</p> <p>Support farm diversification enterprises.</p> <p>Support innovation in rural micro and small businesses to improve viability and access new markets through growth and adding value.</p> <p>Support activities in rural businesses that will improve productivity.</p> <p>Support businesses to lower their environmental impact/footprint.</p>
SO 1.2: To grow the local social economy and support innovation	<p>Support development of community hubs (e.g., working kitchens/co-working space/broadband accessibility)</p> <p>Support R&D opportunities within local communities and businesses (including social enterprises).</p>
SO 1.3: To develop and promote the visitor economy	<p>Support growth in the visitor economy away from the core city area.</p> <p>Support new tourism enterprise startups and innovative ways to promote and develop existing visitor experiences.</p> <p>Promote the Districts rich natural assets that attractive to visitors.</p> <p>Support businesses to lower their environmental impact.</p>

For further information on the above (including example activities/projects that fit the Strategic Objectives), please see Table 7. This Table also outlines the priority (low, medium, high) that CCC has assigned to each Strategic Objective.

Priority 2: Supporting Rural Communities

Colchester City Council is situated in one of the UK's fastest-growing towns areas. This has led to a wide disparity in the availability of services, particularly in the more remote rural areas. Support will be given to meet the needs of the disadvantaged and more isolated groups – both young and old - in order to support local communities. Support will also be provided to eligible organisations to lower their environmental impact, for instance by working towards Net Zero and lowering their carbon emissions. Projects with both existing and new service providers will be encouraged so as not to displace existing activity but to add value to it in rural areas where specific need is demonstrated and links to the key themes and vision for the development of Colchester.

Strategic Objectives for Priority 2: Supporting Rural Communities

In order to achieve the Programme's Supporting Rural Communities Priority, one or more of the following objectives must be addressed:

Table 5: Supporting rural communities' objectives.

REPF Strategic Objectives	CCC REPF Objectives
SO 2.1: To provide investment and support for digital infrastructure for local community facilities	Support improvement in community digital infrastructure to support isolated rural communities, e.g., accessing community halls, village shops, pubs, cafes, churches to incorporate in their day-to-day activities.
SO 2.2: To provide investment in capacity building and infrastructure support for local civil society and community groups	Support growth and development of community facilities/hubs to support local services.
SO 2.3: To create and improve local rural green spaces	Support enhancement and development of village green spaces and infrastructure to improve community wellbeing.
SO 2.4: To support and enhance existing cultural, historic and heritage institutions that make up the local cultural heritage offer	Improve 'accessibility for all' to community infrastructure and local cultural, natural and heritage assets through creation or improvement of 'green space'
SO 2.5: To stimulate local arts, cultural, heritage and creative activities	To promote and develop the built environment and heritage
SO 2.6: To support active travel enhancements in the local area	Support investment in facilities to enable improved green travel (foot/bike) and associated infrastructure.
SO 2.7: To promote and generate a rural circular economy.	Support investment that will support projects that will lower carbon emissions within locality and provision of amenities to support community infrastructure.

SO 2.8: To support volunteering and social action projects to develop social and human capital in local places.	Support local community volunteering groups and charities to connect with the local landscape and heritage.
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For further information on the above (including example activities/projects that fit the Strategic Objectives), please see Table 7. This Table also outlines the priority (low, medium, high) that CCC has assigned to each Strategic Objective.

Cross Cutting Objectives

All projects must demonstrate that they contribute to the following principles in a positive manner:

- **Equality and diversity:**
 - Consideration will be given to equality and diversity issues in respect of individual project elements that contribute to the delivery of the Rural England Prosperity Fund programme through the development of the project application. The impacts of equality and diversity must be reflected in the design and delivery of the project.
- **Sustainability:**
 - Colchester City Council has a rich and diverse landscape. These characteristic features can support the social and economic activities in the area which in turn will support their maintenance in the long term. The local and environmental distinctiveness needs to be safeguarded in order for the area to develop and grow. Projects will be supported if they can demonstrate they are mitigating impacts of climate change and moving towards achieving net zero.

Table 6: Summary of Priorities and Objectives

Strategic Priorities	REPF Strategic Objectives
P1: Supporting rural businesses.	1.1: To promote small scale investment in micro and small enterprises in rural areas.
	1.2: To grow the local social economy and support innovation
	1.3: To develop and promote the visitor economy
P2: Supporting rural communities.	2.1: To provide investment and support for digital infrastructure for local community facilities
	2.2: To provide investment in capacity building and infrastructure support for local civil society and community groups
	2.3: To create and improve local rural green spaces
	2.4: To support and enhance existing cultural, historic and heritage institutions that make up the local cultural heritage offer
	2.5: To stimulate local arts, cultural, heritage and creative activities
	2.6: To support active travel enhancements in the local area
	2.7: To promote and generate a rural circular economy.

	2.8: To support volunteering and social action projects to develop social and human capital in local places.
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2.8 The following table sets out how Strategic Priorities, REPF Strategic Objectives and CCC REPF Objectives relate to one another, as well as the Priority Ranking CCC has assigned each Strategic Objective. It also provides Example Activities/Projects and an outline of the relevant Outputs the success of the projects will be judged by.

Table 7: Colchester City Council Rural England Prosperity Fund Programme 2023-2025

Strategic Priority	CCC Priority Ranking	REPF Strategic Objectives	CCC REPF Objectives	Example Activities	Relevant REPF output indicator
Supporting Rural Businesses	High	Support for small scale investment in micro and small enterprises in rural areas	Support rural micro and small business growth.	Conversion of redundant farm buildings to non ag use	Jobs safeguarded
			Support farm diversification enterprises.	Add value and market products through processing.	Jobs created
			Support innovation in rural micro and small businesses to improve viability and access new markets through growth and adding value.	Adding value to existing capacity of processing and/or manufacturing businesses	Numbers of businesses supported.
			Support activities in rural businesses that will improve productivity.	Producing local woodland	Numbers of farm businesses supported
			Support businesses to lower their environmental impact/footprint.		Number of businesses adopting new to the firm technologies or processes.
					Number of businesses with improved productivity
	Medium			Extend the tourist shoulder season.	Number of businesses supported.

		Support for developing and promoting the visitor economy	Support growth in the visitor economy away from the core city area.	Promote and develop experiences to attract the stay-cation/family visitor market	Number of visitor experiences supported.
			Support new tourism enterprise startups and innovative ways to promote and develop existing visitor experiences.	Promote local attractions through wi-fi hub and website.	Number of farm businesses supported.
			Promote the Districts rich natural assets that attractive to visitors.	Promote “cycling” holidays with associated infrastructure –accom – food - trails	Number of micro businesses supported
	Low	Support for growing the local social economy and supporting innovation	Support businesses to lower their environmental impact.		
			Support development of community hubs (e.g., working kitchens/co-working space/broadband accessibility)	Innovative ways to get Broadband for areas with poor coverage	Number of businesses adopting new technologies or processes.
			Support R&D opportunities within local communities and businesses (including social enterprises).	EV charging points	Number of businesses with improved productivity.
Supporting Rural Communities	High	Support investment and support for digital infrastructure for local community facilities	Support improvement in community digital infrastructure to support isolated rural communities, e.g., accessing community halls, village shops,	Community shops	Jobs safeguarded.
					Jobs created.

			pubs, cafes, churches to incorporate in their day-to-day activities.		Increased users of facilities or amenities including cycleways/footpaths
	High	Support investment in capacity building and infrastructure support for local civil society and community groups	Support growth and development of community facilities/hubs to support local services.	Food hub Pub is the hub Child crèches in a village EV charging points	Increased users of facilities or amenities
	Medium	Creation and improvements to local rural green spaces .	Support enhancement and development of village green spaces and infrastructure to improve community wellbeing.	Improvements to pavilions	Numbers of facilities supported
					Numbers of facilities created.
	Medium	Existing cultural, historic and heritage institutions that make up the local cultural heritage offer.	Improve 'accessibility for all' to community infrastructure and local cultural, natural and heritage assets.	Wheelchair access facilities	Increase footfall
					Increase in visitor numbers.
					Jobs created.
					Increase use of facilities.
	Medium	Local arts, cultural, heritage and creative activities.	To promote and develop the built environment and heritage	Promote special interest tours with associated infrastructure	Number of improved space and facilities
	Medium	Active travel enhancements in the local area.	Support investment in facilities to enable improved green travel	Infrastructure (Support for the elderly though community	Improved footpaths/cycleways

			(foot/bike) and associated infrastructure.	activities – clubs – walks (benches etc)	Number of new facilities supported
	Low	Rural circular economy projects	Support investment that will support projects that will lower carbon emissions within locality and provision of amenities to support community infrastructure.	Local repair workshops/clubs Community green energy projects	Numbers of projects supported
	Low	Impactful volunteering and social action and projects to develop social and human capital in local places.	Support local community volunteering groups and charities to connect with the local landscape and heritage.	Purchase of specialist equipment Signage	No. projects supported

3.0 Funding available to applicants

3.1 The amount of funding each applicant is eligible for depends on the project size (by cost) and whether the project is commercially run and intended to make a profit or not.

Table 8: Scheme funding

Grant Type	Min £ Intervention	Max £ Intervention	Max grant rate	Application Process
Business support	£5,000	£50,000	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 50% (Commercial, profit-making project)	One stage
Community Support	£5,000	£50,000	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 80% (Makes some income to offset costs but is not intended to make a profit)• 100% (Generates no income)	

3.2 CCC will fund projects which deliver their expected outcomes between **16th June 2025 and 31 March 2026**.

4.0 Activities that the REPF cannot fund.

4.1 REPF cannot be used to support projects that have received funding from other Defra schemes. This includes:

- [The Farming in Protected Landscapes Programme](#) - funding for farmers and land managers to work in partnership with National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty bodies to deliver projects on climate, nature, people and place.
- [The Farming Investment Fund](#) - grants to improve productivity and bring environmental benefits, covering 2 funds - the Farming Equipment and Technology Fund and the Farming Transformation Fund.
- [The Platinum Jubilee Village Hall Improvement Grant Fund](#) - grant funding over 3 years (to 2025) to support capital improvement projects for village halls, covering extending buildings and modernising facilities.

4.2 REPF can only provide funding (capital grants) for:

- Small scale investment in micro and small enterprises, and community projects in rural areas.

- Where the funding is intended for farm business diversification projects this must be outside of agriculture diversification
- REPF must not be used to fund farm machinery or to diversify within agriculture, as these items are outside the Funds scope.

4.2 The following are not eligible for the grants under any priority. This list is not exhaustive.

General costs:

- any costs incurred before the project start date shown in the grant funding agreement.
- contingency costs
- the cost of getting any permissions or consents, such as planning permission
- any items which you have already had EU or other public funding for (or intend to get EU or other public funding for)
- relocation costs – if the business needs to relocate in order to expand, it can only apply for funding for the cost of the expansion.
- costs associated with the provision of housing.
- projects that are carried out only to meet a domestic legal requirement.

Buildings, land and equipment costs:

- repairs and maintenance of existing buildings, equipment and machinery
- like-for-like replacement of existing items (such as buildings, equipment and machinery)
- machinery or equipment that will not be on the asset register of the business 5 years after payment of your last grant claim.
- the cost of moveable fittings – like soft furnishings, beds, tables, chairs, cutlery and crockery, curtains, televisions and audio equipment, hand tools, small domestic kitchen equipment and utensils
- purchase of land
- purchase of buildings for commercial projects

Business running costs:

- salaries and running costs for commercial projects.
- long term salaries and running costs for community or not for profit projects.
- in-kind contributions (this means the value of donated work or services) such as the cost of using your own labour, vehicle and office space.
- recurring licence fees, subscriptions and service charges
- computers, software and printers used in the general running of the business, like processing orders or accounts.
- mobile phones
- the delivery of training activities

- consumables
- standard, non-specialised domestic vehicles, such as cars, motorbikes

Agricultural business costs:

- standard buildings, machinery and equipment used for growing and harvesting agricultural and horticultural products.
- standard agricultural or horticultural inputs like animals and crops
- the cost of agricultural production rights and payment entitlements
- setting up agricultural businesses.

Financial costs:

- bad debts
- advance payments
- insurance policy costs
- working capital
- financial charges, such as bank charges, fines and interest
- costs connected with a leasing contract, such as a lessor's margin, interest refinancing costs, overheads and insurance charges.
- reclaimable VAT

Purchase of buildings for community use **may** be eligible. In these cases, the purchase of the land on which the building stands may also be eligible, but the cost of the land cannot be more than 10% of the total project costs. Please talk to the LA before submitting an application if your project involves the purchase of a building for community use.

5.0 How to Apply

5.1 Process

We will run a single stage application process.

The application form and associated guidance are found on our website. Please note that there are two forms – one for applications for Community Support and one for applications for Business Support – please ensure you complete the correct form (and associated spreadsheet).

Before you fill in the application form, please read this document carefully as well as the Guidance Notes for making a Full Application for Small Grant Scheme in full.

You must email your completed full application form as a Microsoft Word attachment only to the email address: REPF.Applications@colchester.gov.uk . You must also attach the

completed full application spreadsheet as a Microsoft Excel document and attachments to the email.

Please note that we are unable to accept electronic applications submitted in other formats other than Word. We will not accept handwritten, scanned or PDF application forms.

Timescales for Applications:

Grant Applications Open at 12pm on Monday 16th June 2025

Grant Applications Close at 5pm on Monday 14th July 2025

Grant Applications will be appraised, and eligible projects will then be considered by a Panel in early September 2025. You will be informed of the outcome before the end of September.

Timescales are indicative and subject to change - updates may be published in due course).