

FENLAND DISTRICT COUNCIL

PRESS RELEASE

1 April 2022

Grant scheme launched to help regenerate empty town centre units

The first of two new grant schemes aimed at boosting regeneration in March has been launched by Fenland District Council.

Expressions of interest are being sought for the Council's Vacant Unit Activation Scheme, which will offer grants to incentivise property owners to bring empty commercial units in the town centre back into use and support revitalisation.

The grant is the first to launch as part of the town's £8.4m Future High Streets Fund (FHSF) project, with a Flats Over Shops grant programme to encourage the conversion of upper floors of commercial premises into residential accommodation, to follow later in the year.

The Vacant Unit Activation Scheme, which will offer capital grants of up to £25,000, will support the refurbishment of vacant units with renovations such as replacement shop fronts, windows and doors, replacement signage and reconfiguring internal layouts.

It is hoped the scheme will reduce vacancy rates in the town, encourage independent businesses and start-ups to rent units and further improve the look of the town centre as other FHSF improvements come to fruition.

Cllr Chris Seaton, Fenland District Council's Portfolio Holder for Social Mobility and Heritage, said: "The face of the High Street has changed over recent years, with the pandemic highlighting the unique importance of them in delivering vital services for our communities. I'm delighted that this grant funding is being made available through our Future High Streets Fund project as it will not only bring empty units back into use, but it will help the town centre to flourish and thrive as we continue to build back better from the pandemic."

The March FHSF programme, which is being led by Fenland District Council with support from the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority, has been made possible thanks to £6.4million from the Government's Future High Streets Fund (FHSF) and £2million from the Combined Authority.

The project will deliver five projects by the end of March 2024. They are:

- Transformation of Broad Street, to create a welcoming pedestrianised open space in the centre of town
- Opening up the riverside areas into Broad Street, to improve visibility and access
- Redevelop the historic Market Place, re-instating historic features close to the town hall and refreshing the car park
- Regeneration of the Acre Road area, creating a new gateway development to link existing historic assets with the town centre
- Deliver a Vacant Unit Activation Scheme and a Flats Over Shops programme

The projects will work in conjunction with the March Area Transport Strategy (MATS) work, which will improve traffic flow and allow the town centre to become greener and safer, especially for pedestrians and cyclists.

- Letters have been sent to property owners in March town centre seeking expressions of interest for the Vacant Unit Activation Scheme. If you own a vacant shop in March town centre and think you may qualify for the grant, please email the Council's High Streets Project Officer Matt Wright on: mwright@fenland.gov.uk
- For more information on the March Future High Streets Fund project, visit: www.fenland.gov.uk/MFHSE

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Notes to Editors

For media enquiries, please contact the Fenland District Council press office on 01354 622226 or email: communications@fenland.gov.uk