

SUBJECT:	PLACEMAKING GRANT PROGRAMME 2025/26-2026/27
MEETING:	CABINET
DATE:	21 MAY 2025
DIVISION/WARDS AFFECTED:	ABERGAVENNY, CALDICOT, CHEPSTOW, MAGOR WITH UNDY, MONMOUTH, USK

1. PURPOSE:

- 1.1. This report seeks Cabinet's agreement to an indicative programme for delivery of town centre regeneration projects in Monmouthshire in 2025/26 and 2026/27 using funding allocated from the Welsh Government's Transforming Towns Placemaking Grant.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 2.1. That Cabinet agrees the proposed indicative Placemaking Grant programme for delivery in 2025/26 and 2026/27, and authorises the Chief Officer, Place, to prioritise and adjust the programme as needed in liaison with the Cabinet Member and informed by consultation with local placemaking steering and delivery groups.

3. KEY ISSUES:

- 3.1. Placemaking Grant is one of a number of funding streams which comprise the Welsh Government's Transforming Towns programme for regeneration and placemaking delivery in town centres. Placemaking Grant provides capital funding to support a range of types of regeneration projects requiring up to £300,000 of Welsh Government funding.
- 3.2. Six town centres in Monmouthshire are eligible for Transforming Towns funding. These are in Abergavenny, Caldicot, Chepstow, Magor with Undy, Monmouth and Usk.
- 3.3. To access Transforming Towns funding, The Welsh Government requires a placemaking plan – a strategy which offers a vision for the town centre, considers the challenges and opportunities it faces, and propose actions and interventions to realise the vision and address the challenges and opportunities – or equivalent document to be in place or in development for the town centre.
- 3.4. The Council has worked with town councils and other stakeholders to develop placemaking plans for each town centre in the county. The status of these placemaking plans is as follows

- Abergavenny: placemaking plan currently in development, expected to be adopted late 2025.
- Caldicot: Town Centre Regeneration Framework published 2018. Replacement placemaking plan to be developed in 2025/26
- Chepstow: Transforming Chepstow Masterplan adopted 2023.
- Magor with Undy: placemaking plan currently in development, expected to be adopted late 2025.
- Monmouth: placemaking plan currently in development, expected to be adopted late 2025.
- Usk: Usk & Woodside Improvement Masterplan adopted 2022.

- 3.5. Local placemaking steering and delivery groups have been established in each of the six towns to oversee the development and implementation of placemaking plans. These groups comprise elected members from the town and county councils and are each chaired by a representative from the town council.
- 3.6. A three-year Placemaking Grant programme ran from 2022/23 to 2024/25. Funding for that period was allocated through an application process in the early part of 2022/23. As a result of that process Monmouthshire County Council was allocated £1,137,252 in Placemaking Grant over the three years. Opportunities for additional project delivery in Monmouthshire, along underspends in other local authorities in south east Wales, meant that the Council was able to slightly increase its allocation (to £1,319,954) and draw down additional funding over the period.
- 3.7. Placemaking Grant delivery in Monmouthshire during the 2022/23 to 2024/25 programme focused on two main types of project: improvements to buildings in town centres, and small-scale town centre public realm/connectivity improvements.
- 3.8. In relation to buildings in town centres, the Council has used Placemaking Grant to provide a flexible grants scheme which has enabled building owners and businesses to bring vacant commercial space back into use and improve the functionality, performance and appearance of town centre buildings. 17 buildings or commercial units in town centres across the county have benefited from this grant. Key projects completed to date include:
- 43 Frogmore Street, Abergavenny (Air Ambulance shop): reinstatement of historic shopfront.
 - The Zone, Caldicot: external improvements to youth centre, including timber and stone cladding, lighting, and replacement roof.
 - Caldicot Post Office: refurbishment of longstanding vacant unit in town centre to provide new Post Office facility.
 - Holman House, Caldicot: external improvements to prominent town centre building, including new shopfronts to retail units on ground floor and cladding/external wall insulation to first floor flats, delivered in partnership with MHA.
 - 38 Moor Street, Chepstow: refurbishment of prominent town centre building, previously in very poor condition, home to Rainbow Trust Café which hosts two local food projects, Chepstow Community Fridge and Chepstow Food Club.

- Drill Hall, Chepstow: replacement roof and internal improvements/reconfiguration to allow increased use of community/arts buildings. Delivered in partnership with Chepstow Town Council.
 - 15 Monnow Street, Monmouth: refurbishment of large vacant building (formerly occupied by Natwest bank branch) to provide three flats, as well as improved ground floor commercial space which is expected to be leased shortly.
- 3.9. Building grants projects delivered in 2024/25 levered over £800k of third party match funding against £680k of Placemaking Grant and £152k of MCC capital investment.
- 3.10. Town centre public realm/connectivity projects funded with Placemaking Grant have included:
- St Thomas Garden, Monmouth: New natural stone paving, benches, lockable bin store for nearby commercial properties, new waste monitoring sensor bins use. Planting with pollinator friendly plants to enhance biodiversity. Information board telling the story of the historic Monnow Bridge.
 - The Dell, Chepstow: installation of steps and walkways improving connectivity between the town centre, play park and Chepstow Castle; widening of existing connecting walkway around the play park to improve accessibility for wheelchair users and pushchairs.
 - Magor Undy Community Hub/town centre link: footway repair, refurbishment of footbridge and installation of ramps for DDA compliance, installation of safety fencing around the stream, moving field gate to improve accessibility to/from town, planting of fruit trees, repairs to unsightly car park surface.
 - Church Road, Caldicot: public realm improvements, traffic calming and green infrastructure (principally funded through Active Travel, with additional funding from Placemaking Grant)
- 3.11. The Welsh Government has extended the current Transforming Towns programme for two more years, 2025/26 and 2026/27. In January 2025 local authorities were invited to submit a request for funding for that period supported by a project pipeline to evidence deliverability.
- 3.12. As a result of that process Monmouthshire was awarded £700,000 Placemaking Grant per year for each of the two years. An indicative delivery programme, based on the project pipeline submitted to Welsh Government and revised in light of the level of funding allocated, is attached at Appendix A. The proposed delivery programme reflects priorities identified in the local placemaking plans (adopted and emerging) and through consultation with local placemaking steering and delivery groups.
- 3.13. It is proposed that, as in the previous programme period from 2022/23 to 2024/25, Placemaking Grant-funded delivery in Monmouthshire will focus on improvements to buildings in town centres and small scale public realm improvements, responding to priorities identified in adopted and emerging placemaking plans or equivalents.

- 3.14. The proposed building grants scheme will continue and expand on the grants offered in previous years and in 2024/25 in particular, with a focus on bringing vacant commercial space back into use, improving the condition of town centre buildings in a condition which has significant negative impact on the streetscape, and maintaining the historic fabric of the town centres. As before, grants will be made available via a call for expressions of interest open to businesses and building owners, alongside a targeted approach focusing on town centre buildings identified as priorities in the Council's Buildings at Risk Strategy and in consultation with local placemaking steering and delivery groups.
- 3.15. Small scale public realm improvement projects will be developed in partnership with local placemaking steering and delivery groups, responding to priorities identified in local placemaking plans. It is anticipated that these may include both standalone schemes and projects which constitute an initial phase of potentially larger public realm initiatives, delivering early "quick wins" in advance of detailed design and funding for the full scheme.
- 3.16. The delivery programme presented here is indicative. Flexibility in delivery will be required to enable the Council and partners to respond to opportunities that may arise (for example through the call for expressions of interest for building improvement grants) and to ensure that the programme can respond to emerging priorities which may be identified by local placemaking steering and delivery groups. Because the placemaking plans for Abergavenny, Magor with Undy and Monmouth are not yet finalised, and in anticipation of the development a new placemaking plan for Caldicot in 2025/26, it is not yet possible to specify the projects which the funding will support in those towns.
- 3.17. Cabinet is therefore requested to authorise the Chief Officer, Place, to prioritise and adjust the programme as needed in liaison with the Cabinet Member and informed by consultation with local placemaking steering and delivery groups. The role of the placemaking steering and delivery groups in each town will be vital in ensuring that funded projects respond to local needs and priorities.

4. EQUALITY AND FUTURE GENERATIONS EVALUATION (INCLUDES SOCIAL JUSTICE, SAFEGUARDING AND CORPORATE PARENTING):

- 4.1. The main impacts/findings of the proposal identified in the evaluation are:
- Potential positive impacts on the protected characteristics of age, disability, pregnancy/maternity and sex.
 - Potential positive impacts in relation to socio-economic duty arising from investment in town centres and benefits this may bring in particular to people in poverty.
 - Positive impacts on all the well-being goals.
 - The development of the proposal meets the sustainable development principles.
 - No impact on safeguarding or corporate parenting.
- 4.2. The full evaluation accompanies this report.

5. OPTIONS APPRAISAL

- 5.1. The table below provides an options appraisal for the proposed Placemaking Grant indicative delivery plan.

Options	Benefits	Risks
Do nothing.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">No requirement for officer input or match funding.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Limited or no delivery in 2025/26 or 2026/27 against placemaking plans in most towns.Placemaking Grant funding allocated by Welsh Government would not be used, reducing resources available to the Council and potential prejudicing future funding awards.
Develop an alternative programme for delivery using the allocated funding.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Allows for further consultation on delivery programme, but with associated risks as set out.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Will cause delay in delivery, leading to risk that full grant funding cannot be used.Programme may not align with local needs/priorities identified in placemaking plans and by local placemaking steering/delivery groups.Any further consultation is likely to duplicate recent consultation on placemaking plans, leading to consultation fatigue/disengagement.
Agree the indicative programme as recommended here.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Allows delivery to begin rapidly, maximising potential to use full grant funding allocatedProgramme responds to local needs/priorities identified in placemaking plans and by local placemaking steering/delivery groupsProgramme is builds on delivery in previous years, providing assurance on deliverability.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Funding and resource limitations means that delivery of all elements of placemaking plans will not be delivered in two year funding period.

6. EVALUATION CRITERIA

- 6.1. The Placemaking Grant programme will be evaluated at the end of the current funding period, which covers 2025/26 and 2026/27. Evaluation will focus on relevant measures defined by the Welsh Government in relation to the Transforming Towns programme, supplemented by additional local measures as appropriate. Relevant measures include:

- Number of Jobs accommodated (enabled through regeneration investment)
- Enterprises accommodated
- Non-residential Premises created or refurbished (sqm)
- Non-residential Premises created or refurbished (number)
- Number of additional market housing units (Built or ready for Occupation - as a direct result of TT support)
- Number of additional social housing units delivered (Built or ready for Occupation - as a direct result of TT support)
- Number of additional intermediate housing units delivered (Built or ready for Occupation - as a direct result of TT support)
- Number of non-residential units brought back into use
- Creation of habitat (square metres)
- New and/or improved accessible green public space (square metres)
- New and/or improved recreational space (square metres)
- Level of Match Funding (£)
- Meanwhile use space (square metres)

7. REASONS:

- 7.1. The decision is required to allow Welsh Government Placemaking Grant funding allocated to Monmouthshire for 2025/26 and 2026/27 to be used to support the delivery of regeneration and placemaking projects in town centres in the county.

8. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

- 8.1. The Welsh Government requires at least 30% match funding for most types of Placemaking Grant project. The indicative delivery plan provided at Appendix A sets out anticipated sources of match funding, including resource implications in terms of capital match funding for the Council.
- 8.2. Programme management and project delivery capacity will be provided by existing staff within the Regeneration team, working with delivery partners on individual projects.

9. CONSULTEES:

- 9.1. The adopted and emerging placemaking plans which are the basis for the proposed Placemaking Grant programme have been coproduced with town councils and with extensive engagement and consultation with wider stakeholders and local communities as well as input from MCC officers.
- 9.2. In addition the following have been consulted.
- Cabinet

- SLT
- MCC Economic Development and Planning/Heritage officers

10. BACKGROUND PAPERS:

10.1. The indicative Placemaking Grant delivery plan is provided at Appendix A.

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APPENDIX A: PLACEMAKING GRANT INDICATIVE DELIVERY PROGRAMME

Indicative project description	Funding – 2025/26 and 2026/27			
	Placemaking Grant	Match funding: MCC capital	Match funding: third party (grant recipient)	TOTAL
Town centre small scale public realm/quick wins - all towns Delivery of small scale public realm and other projects identified in placemaking plans and in consultation with local placemaking groups. <i>For example*</i> : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Abergavenny Gabb Square phase 1 • Caldicot town centre public realm “quick wins” • Chepstow St Mary’s Priory public realm connectivity • Magor with Undy Magor Square phase 1 • Monmouth bus station public realm • Usk Bridge Street/Twyn Square phase 1 	£700,000	£300,000	£0	£1,000,000
Town centre building grants - all towns Flexible grants scheme targeting (a) bringing vacant space back into use (b) improvements to town centre buildings in a condition which has significant negative impact on the streetscape/environment.	£700,000	£100,000	£200,000	£1,000,000
TOTAL	£1,400,000	£400,000	£200,000	£2,000,000

- ***Projects to be agreed with local placemaking steering groups***

