

# Evaluation of the Flintshire Supporting Tourism Business and Sector Key Fund (Shared Prosperity Fund)

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A report to Cadwyn Clwyd

February 2025

# Contents

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Executive Summary	1
1. Introduction and methodology	3
2. Project design	5
3. Effectiveness of project delivery	8
4. Outcomes & impact	16
5. Conclusions and recommendations	21

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# Executive Summary

## Introduction

The Flintshire Supporting Tourism Business and Sector Key Fund aimed to support micro and small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Flintshire's tourism and experience economy. The project, funded by £679,000 from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF), sought to create jobs, boost community cohesion, and increase private sector investment. The evaluation of the Fund, conducted by York Consulting between October 2023 and February 2025, assessed the project's delivery and progress against its intended outcomes and impacts.

## Project design

The project provided financial support through two main components:

1. **Tourism Business Infrastructure Grants:** These grants covered 70% of project costs, up to a maximum of £17,500, for SMEs in the tourism sector. The grants aimed to support new-to-firm innovation, improve visitor experiences, and targeting of new markets.
2. **Tourism Sector Feasibility Fund:** This fund supported the development of feasibility studies for tourism infrastructure projects, targeting third sector organisations, local authorities, and community groups.

The project was delivered by Cadwyn Clwyd, a social enterprise, in collaboration with Business Wales and Flintshire County Council.

## Project delivery

The project was managed by a project officer from Cadwyn Clwyd, with additional support from a Flintshire County Council tourism officer and a Business Wales advisor. Promotion efforts included outreach to existing SME networks, social media and web-based campaigns, and via business forums. The application process involved initial expressions of interest (EOIs) and pre-eligibility forms, followed by full applications, with support provided throughout by the project officers and Business Wales. The project received 51 EOIs resulting in 36 approved applications.

Key aspects of project delivery included:

- **Grant management:** A grant panel reviewed applications and made decisions on grant awards.
- **Promotion and engagement:** Effective promotion through various channels led to a high number of EOIs and applications.
- **Support and guidance:** Continuous support from project officers and Business Wales helped businesses navigate the application process and successfully implement their projects.

## Outcomes

The project exceeded its target outcomes, demonstrating effective and successful delivery:

- **Number of enterprises supported:** 36 businesses received grants and non-financial support, surpassing the target of 26.
- **Tourism, culture, or heritage assets:** 36 assets were created or improved, exceeding the target of 26.
- **Feasibility studies:** Six feasibility studies were developed, surpassing the target of four.

The project supported a diverse range of businesses, including those in the food and drink, accommodation, events and education, retail and services, and recreation and leisure sectors. This broad reach helped maximize the project's impact on local communities by improving a wide range of services, venues, and tourism opportunities.

## Impacts

The project had several positive impacts, including:

- **Job creation and safeguarding:** 15.5 jobs were created and 164 jobs were safeguarded, exceeding initial targets for these outcomes.
- **Business development:** 36 businesses adopted new or improved products or services, demonstrating the project's effectiveness in fostering innovation and growth.
- **Increased investment:** The project facilitated increased private sector investment, contributing to economic growth.
- **Community and economic benefits:** The project enhanced local services, venues, and tourism opportunities, contributing to community cohesion and economic development.
- **Environmental and cultural contributions:** Some projects contributed to net zero goals and promoting the Welsh language, highlighting the project's broader social and environmental impact.

The project demonstrated a high level of additionality, filling a gap in funding availability for SMEs in Flintshire and enabling businesses to accelerate their development plans. The wrap-around support model and strong partnerships were key enablers of the project's success.

## Conclusions and recommendations

Delivery of the Flintshire Supporting Tourism Business and Sector Key Fund has been highly effective, with the model of wrap-around support adding significant value to the grant management process. Overall, the funding was highly valued by businesses, filling a gap in funding availability for SMEs in Flintshire and enabling them to achieve many positive outcomes.

The evaluations findings have informed a range of project specific recommendations related to the application process and match funding model.

# 1. Introduction and methodology

York Consulting LLP was commissioned by Cadwyn Clwyd to evaluate the Flintshire Supporting Tourism Business and Sector Key Fund – a project focused on supporting micro and small and medium enterprises (SMEs) operating in the tourism and experience economy within Flintshire to create jobs, boost community cohesion and increase private sector investment.

The project received £679,000 from the UK Government through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF). The £2.6 billion UK SPF aims to build pride in place and increase life chances across the UK, through investment in three priority areas:

- Communities and place.
- Support for local businesses.
- People and skills.

The project aimed to deliver against the ‘support for local businesses’ investment priority by providing capital funding to projects seeking to undertake new-to-firm innovation, invest in improving visitor experiences and target new markets.

The objectives of the evaluation were to assess the delivery of the Flintshire Supporting Tourism Business and Sector Key Fund and review progress against its intended outcomes and impacts.

## Methodology

The evaluation methodology included a review of key documents, analysis of management information, consultations with key stakeholders and grant managers, and a survey of grant recipients followed by in-depth interviews with a selection of grantees.

### Document review

A document review, in conjunction with project inception, was undertaken to inform the fieldwork with stakeholders and grant recipients. The following documents were reviewed:

- Cadwyn Clwyd’s SPF bid documentation.
- Promotional materials for the Funds, application forms and guidance documents.
- Data-collection mechanisms developed for the monitoring of outputs, outcomes and impact.

The insight drawn from the document review and inception meeting was instilled into the logic model for the Flintshire Supporting Tourism Business and Sector Key Fund (Figure 2.1).

### Management information analysis

The analysis of management information was carried out to understand the project’s performance against targets. This involved reviewing:

- Grant applications.
- Grant award panel meeting minutes.
- Quarterly progress reports.
- Project and grant recipient claim forms.

## Fieldwork

Table 1.1 summarises the fieldwork completed during the evaluation of the Flintshire Supporting Tourism Business and Sector Key Fund between October 2023 and December 2025.

**Table 1.1: Summary of completed fieldwork**

Component	Fieldwork
Consultations with stakeholders	Consultations with the Cadwyn Clwyd project officer (1) and Flintshire County Council tourism officer (1).
Survey of grant recipients	Distributed to 35 grant recipients. Received 35 responses (100% response rate) with 28 agreeing to participate in a follow-up consultation.
Interviews with grant recipients	Completed 12 online or telephone interviews with grantees.

## 2. Project design

The Supporting Tourism Business and Sector Key Fund project offered a 70% grant up to £17,500 in grant value (£25,000 project value) to SMEs operating in the tourism and visitor economy within Flintshire. The project also supported the development of four feasibility studies. The project was delivered by Cadwyn Clwyd – a social enterprise which provides guidance and support to communities and enterprises in North East Wales and further afield – in collaboration with a Flintshire County Council who supported in a strategic capacity. Delivered between June 2023 and February 2025, the project aimed to:

- Create jobs and boost community cohesion through investments that build on existing industries and institutions.
- Increase private sector investment in growth-enhancing activities, through targeted support for micro and small businesses to undertake new-to-firm innovation, enhance productivity, and increase sales and revenue.

There were two strands to the project:

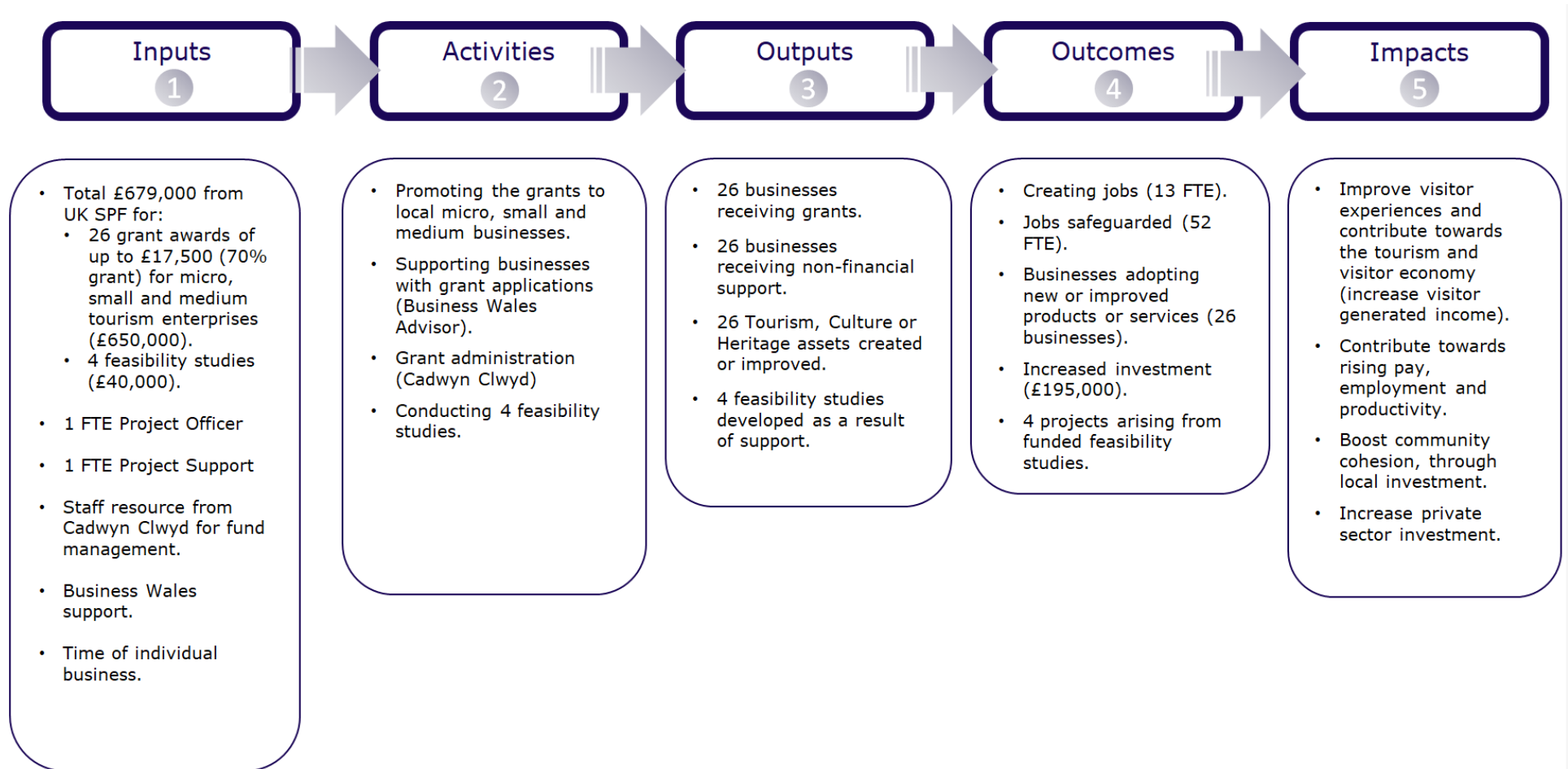
- **Tourism Business Infrastructure Grants:** A 70% grant up to the value of £17,500 (£25,000 project value) was available for SMEs.
- **Tourism Sector Feasibility Fund:** This was designed to support third sector, Local Authority (LA), and community groups to develop relevant feasibility studies, targeting the development of tourism infrastructure and the visitor economy.

In addition to providing grant funding, the project offered a wrap-around support function, including project officer support and guidance, and support from Business Wales to help businesses access the Funds.

### Logic model

The project logic model (Figure 2.1) was developed by York Consulting and informed by a review of project documentation and conversations with key stakeholders. It sets out the activities, outputs, outcomes and impacts of the project. The logic model was used to develop the evaluation questions which informed the design of evaluation research tools and analysis of project data.

**Figure 2.1: Supporting Tourism Business and Sector Key Fund Logic Model**





## Key progress indicators

The key progress indicators outlined in Cadwyn Clwyd’s SPF bid are set out in the following tables. They include target outputs and outcomes, as well as project expenditure.

**Figure 2.2: Planned outputs**

Output indicator	Target
Number of enterprises receiving grants	26
Number of enterprises receiving non-financial support	26
Number of tourism, culture or heritage assets created or improved	26
Number of feasibility studies developed as a result of support	4

*Source: Supporting Tourism Business and Sector Key Fund SPF bid*

**Figure 2.3: Planned outcomes**

Outcome indicator	Target
Jobs created as a result of support	13
Jobs safeguarded as a result of support	52
Number of enterprises adopting new or improved products or services	26
Increased amount of investment	£200,541.46

*Source: Supporting Tourism Business and Sector Key Fund SPF bid*

## Project budget

The project was awarded £679,000 in SPF funding. Figure 2.4 outlines how the planned project budget was allocated.

**Figure 2.4: Supporting Tourism Business and Sector Key Fund project budget**

Cost	Amount
Grants	£672,000
Consultancy	£56,913
Project delivery staff – Cadwyn Clwyd	£60,727
Marketing and publicity	£9,360
Evaluation	£12,000
Overheads – accommodation (Cadwyn Clwyd)	£33,000
Project management, administration, and evaluation	£30,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>£874,000.00</b>

*Source: Supporting Tourism Business and Sector Key Fund SPF bid*

### 3. Effectiveness of project delivery

#### Grant management

##### Staffing

The Flintshire Supporting Tourism Business and Sector Key Fund was overseen by a project officer from Cadwyn Clwyd. The project initially tried to recruit a full-time project support officer, however, there were challenges in recruiting for this post due to the short nature of the project. The project officer was supported by a tourism officer from Flintshire County Council who was able to support with marketing and promotion, and Business Wales advisors who supported applicants with producing the required cashflow forecasts and business plans. A grant panel made up of representatives from Cadwyn Clwyd and Flintshire County Council reviewed the submitted applications and made decisions on grant awards.

##### Promotion and initial engagement

Both Cadwyn Clwyd and Flintshire County Council supported promotion of the fund by reaching out to their existing networks of SMEs, including those they had previously worked with. Both organisations also promoted the Funds via social media and held drop-in sessions for businesses to discuss how the project could best support them. Other methods of promotion included sharing promotional materials with various business forums, including the Flintshire Tourist Association, food and drink groups and the regeneration team based in then LA.



Feedback from 12 grantees interviewed for the evaluation indicates that businesses found out about the Fund through various routes, most commonly word of mouth, followed by the Flintshire Tourist Association and social media.

Promotion of the Key Fund was clearly effective, as evidenced by the 51 EOIs received – almost double the target number of grant awards (26).

The feasibility fund was designed to support business groups, town councils and social enterprises, where commissioning a specialist would support them to advance their development plans. There was interest from certain groups prior to the Fund being launched, therefore promotion for this Fund was more targeted, utilising existing connections.

##### Expression of interest and application

Businesses were asked to complete an initial expression of interest and complete a pre-eligibility form. If eligible, they were then invited to complete a full application with support from the project officer and Business Wales. Assessment of the EOIs was completed by

Cadwyn Clwyd team members. Over the course of the project, 51 EOIs were received, of which 36 were invited to make applications.

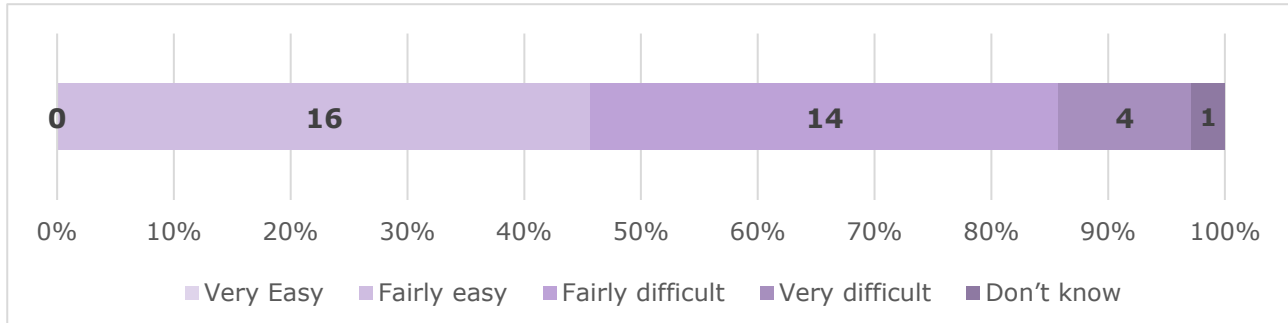
Reasons for EOIs not progressing to a full application were varied. They included the EOI detailing ineligible costs that did not align with the tourism and visitor economy ambitions of the project, EOIs made from outside of Flintshire and businesses being unable to pay the upfront costs or not having the time or capacity to complete a full application.

The Tourism Sector Feasibility Fund received six EOIs. After reprofiling staffing costs, the project was able to support all six applications, increasing the initial value of feasibility funds from £40,000 to £58,228.

The support available from Cadwyn Clwyd and Business Wales was designed to help businesses collate the necessary information for the application and develop a business plan, which was a requirement for the grants. The project officer also supported businesses, especially those with limited experience of applying for grant funding, to make improvements to their applications. This enabled smaller and less experienced businesses to successfully apply for the grants.

As shown in Figure 3.1, the survey of grant recipients showed that there were mixed views in response to how they found the application process. Of the 35 respondents, 16 found the process 'fairly easy', 14 found it 'fairly difficult' and four found it 'very difficult'. Of those who took part in a qualitative interview, most described the process as complex, especially producing the required cash flow forecasts.

**Figure 3.1: Ease of the application process**



*Source: Survey of grant recipients (n=35)*

### **Award process**

Applications were submitted to the grant steering group panel, comprising of representatives from Cadwyn Clwyd (2) and Flintshire County Council (2). The Cadwyn Clwyd project officer also sat on the panel in a non-voting capacity. Prior to the meeting, members of the panel scored each application by the following factors:

- Innovation
- Economic benefit
- Outcomes
- Value for money.

Projects above a certain scoring threshold were subsequently discussed at the panel meetings. The grant funding panel received 36 applications in total, all of which were approved. This was

due to the project officer filtering out ineligible businesses at the EOI stage, through reviewing the EOI and having a conversation with the interested businesses.

### Project delivery support

The project officer continued to support the businesses throughout the delivery of their projects, which was clearly valued by the grant recipients. Survey responses indicate that all found the support from Cadwyn Clwyd either 'very useful' (27/34) or 'fairly useful' (7/34), and interviewees praised the project officer for their responsiveness, helpfulness and knowledge.

***"I can't praise [the project officer] enough, she was so helpful, I wouldn't have got through the process without her." – Grantee.***

The support from Business Wales was generally viewed positively by grant recipients, with most finding the support either 'very useful' (24/34) or 'fairly useful' (8/24). Two grant recipients stated that they found the support from Business Wales 'fairly unhelpful'. A small number of businesses reported experiencing difficulties in arranging time to speak with their allocated Business Wales advisor, due to one of the advisors only working one day per week.

#### Case study 1 – Beaufort Park Hotel

Beaufort Park Hotel, located in Mold, applied for grant funding to upgrade 60 hotel room windows. The primary motivation for the work was increased energy efficiency, which in turn would reduce energy costs and result in financial savings for the hotel. The grant funding was used to upgrade 60 wooden windows to energy-efficient, double-glazed windows. The account manager reported that, following the upgrades to the windows, the hotel had seen reduced energy costs and improved guest satisfaction due to the new modernised feel and increased comfort levels.

### Outputs

As shown in Table 3.1, the project exceeded all its target outputs, demonstrating effective and successful delivery. Specifically, 36 businesses received grants and non-financial support, surpassing the target of 26. Additionally, 36 tourism, culture, or heritage assets were created or improved, again exceeding the target of 26. Finally, six feasibility studies were developed as a result of the support, surpassing the target of four.

**Table 3.1: Progress against planned outputs**

Output indicator	Target	Actual
Number of enterprises receiving grants	26	36
Number of enterprises receiving non-financial support	26	36
Number of tourism, culture or heritage assets created or improved	26	36
Number of feasibility studies developed as a result of support	4	6

*Source: Supporting Tourism Business and Sector Key Fund – SPF claim form February 2025*

The Supporting Tourism Business and Sector Key Fund has supported a wide array of businesses in the following sectors:

- Food and drink (11 projects)
- Accommodation (7 projects)
- Events and education (6 projects)
- Retail and services (5 projects)
- Recreation and leisure (4 projects).

This broad reach of the Fund has enabled the project to maximise its impact across the Flintshire tourism sector, supporting varied services, venues and tourism opportunities.

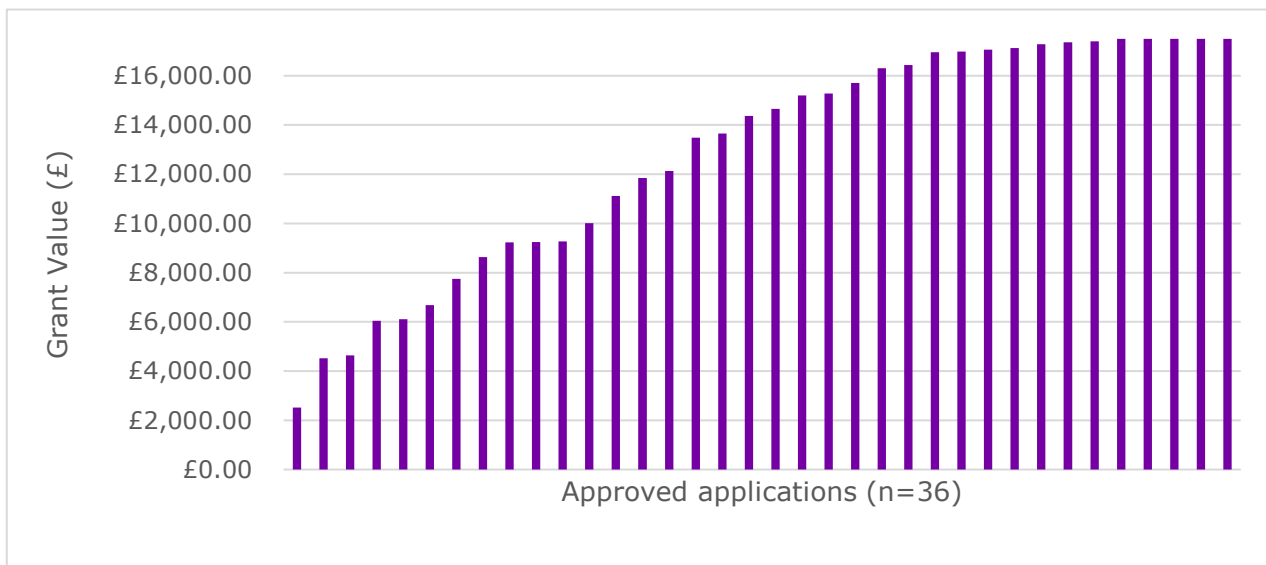
The Tourism Sector Feasibility Fund successfully engaged with a range of initiatives, highlighting the diverse efforts to boost tourism and heritage in the region. The project supported the following six projects:

1. **Holywell Town Council – ‘Putting Holywell on the Map’:** This Pilot project consisted of two main components, a feasibility assessment of what Holywell has to offer as a tourist destination and a marketing and destination strategy.
2. **Northop Heritage Group – ‘Northop Old Grammar School’:** A project to investigate the feasibility of creating a central interpretive hub (visitor centre) located in the Northop Grammar School within the grounds of the St. Eurgain and St. Peter church.
3. **Bettisfield Colliery Community Interest Company – ‘Bettisfield Colliery Feasibility Study’:** The feasibility study detailed recommendations, operational models and provisional costings for transforming the historic Bettisfield Colliery Winding House into a publicly accessible historic site for local communities and visitors with an interest in the industrial and social history of the North Wales coastal area.
4. **Greenfield Valley Heritage Park – ‘Greenfield Valley – Understanding our Visitors’:** The study provided an operational plan and five-year business plan for the sustainable operation of the proposed new visitor hub, which is a key component of the Greenfield Valley 10 year strategy to boost visitor numbers from approximately 20,000 to 100,000.
5. **Flintshire Tourism Association – ‘Flintshire Sculpture Trails – to develop and deliver a promotional campaign’:** The pilot project developed and implemented a sculpture trail within Flintshire, monitored and evaluated its effectiveness through a project report and assessed the feasibility of expanding and widening the network across the county.
6. **Hope Community Council – ‘A feasibility study to explore current and future opportunities for the Hope community related to tourism and the anticipated North East Wales National Park’:** The project aimed to produce a feasibility study, with specific actions over a three-year period, to best position the community for the National Park’s creation (anticipated by 2026), bringing economic benefits to micro and SME businesses in the area.

Awarded grants totalled £462,527. Figure 3.2 outlines the distribution of grant awards for each business. Many of the supported projects required less than the full amount of the small or

large grant, meaning that a larger number of businesses could be supported with smaller amounts of funding per grant than initially envisaged.

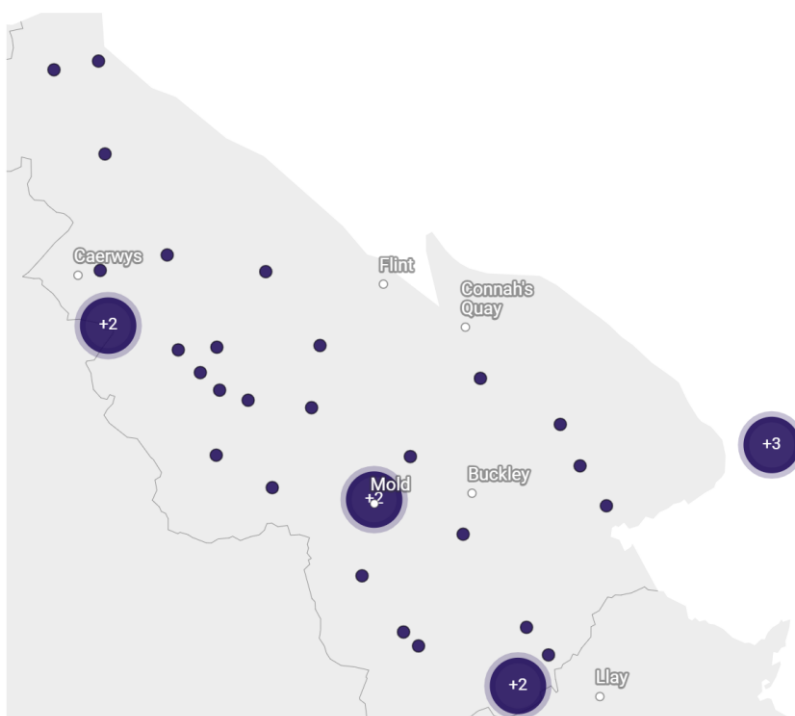
**Figure 3.2: Distribution of approved projects by value**



Source: Supporting Tourism Business and Sector Key Fund - Outputs & outcomes February 2025

Figure 3.3 shows that the geographical range of the supported projects spans several towns across Flintshire, as well as more rural areas. This distribution suggests a broad and diverse impact across the county.

**Figure 3.3: Geographical distribution of projects<sup>1</sup>**



Source: YCL analysis of funded organisations, February 2025

<sup>1</sup> A small number of businesses had registered addresses in Cheshire West.

## Challenges and enablers

Challenges described by Supporting Tourism Business and Sector Key Fund stakeholders and beneficiaries included:

- **Short timescales:** Project Officers and grant recipients alike identified short timescales – during both the application and delivery phases – as challenging. An extended project delivery period would have provided Cadwyn Clwyd and Business Wales with more time to support businesses with their grant applications and delivery phases, which may have enabled businesses to increase the scope of their grant requests.
- **Complexity of the application form:** Grant recipients in the qualitative interviews found the application process “complex and confusing”, especially creating the business plan and cash flow forecasts. Many noted they had to rely on support from Business Wales and Cadwyn Clwyd, which delayed the application process. Cadwyn Clwyd also noted the cash flow forecast created a bottleneck within the application process, which delayed the number of applications getting to the grant panel and shortened the delivery phases for a small number of projects. Businesses also noted that not all members of the project staff were aware of their progress, and suggested having a grant process portal might support information sharing about progress amongst support staff. Other recommendations included an increased number of Business Wales Advisors to support with questions and queries promptly.
- **Proportionality of grant application and claims processes:** Some grant recipients found the length of the application form and extent of the monitoring and claims processes to be disproportionate to the amount of grant funding they received. Grant recipients in the qualitative interviews found the monitoring and claims process overly burdensome, especially where a high number of products had been purchased with the grant funding. The most common suggestion for improving the grant process was to produce more guidance for the application process, by creating an example application or a guide for completing the forms.

***“The process was quite burdensome, especially in proportion to the money that were getting.” – Grantee***

***“Sadly I feel the process is not the easiest, it takes such a lot of work to prepare all of the quotes and application form. This takes hours out of our valuable work day and as a small independent business this is very stressful. The process is not user friendly for anyone with any dyslexia traits and the application and claim forms are not the easiest to navigate.”  
– Grantee***

- **Flexibility of claims process tailored towards small businesses:** Some businesses found the claims and match funding process financially constraining, particularly for those operating in tourism and hospitality industries where cash flow fluctuates. Suggestions included a risk assessment model, such as credit checks, to ease upfront financial pressure. The project team acknowledged that businesses having to front the cost in advance was a deterrent to applying for the grant.

***“Match funding is very difficult. Most businesses who apply for grants do so as they don't have cashflow or reserves in the first instance.” – Grantee***

## Case study 2 – Stand-up Paddle (SUP) Lass Paddle Adventures

SUP Lass Paddle Adventures Park is based in Northeast Wales, offering various paddle boarding excursions. They have been operating for nearly five years and aim to make adventure accessible, with a unique focus on getting women into outdoor activities.

The owner heard about the grant through local connections and decided to apply as they believed it would help them grow their services. The project involved purchasing various equipment, including a roof rack for carrying more SUP boards, a hot tent awning for events, an iPad and storage solutions, as well as participation in a bushcraft course for one member of staff and marketing materials (stickers for vehicles).

Numerous benefits of the grant funding were highlighted, including increased efficiency through the automation of consent forms and waiver letters (using iPads), increased capacity as a result of the new equipment purchased, an enhanced professional image of the business, and making the overall client experience richer, safer and more professional. Future plans include expanding their activity offering with the new skills they have acquired from the bushcraft course. The business owner anticipated that these improvements would lead to higher profitability and the possibility of taking on more staff or freelance partners in the future.

Enablers described by Supporting Tourism Business and Sector Key Fund stakeholders and beneficiaries included:

- **Wrap-around support:** Grant recipients clearly valued the support provided by the project throughout the application process. Grant recipients noted the support from the project officer was instrumental in them successfully completing the application process. Additional support provided by Business Wales was also viewed as helpful. Interview feedback indicates that the support enabled those with less grant application experience to access and make full use of the funding.

***"Everyone we have been dealing with throughout the application process has been truly amazing, so supportive and helpful. We have spent a lot of time speaking to [project officer] and Cadwyn Clwyd and she deserves huge credit for her hard work and dedication." – Grantee***

- **Partner relationships:** The strong working relationship between Cadwyn Clwyd, Business Wales and Flintshire County Council facilitated successful delivery, which was crucial given the short timescales. In particular, Flintshire County Council supported with marketing and the grant panel process whilst Business Wales supported the application process.
- **Promotion:** The promotion of the fund was wide ranging and effective, as evidenced by the 51 expressions of interest received (for an initial target of 26 awards). Both Cadwyn Clwyd and Flintshire County Council clearly have strong relationships with local businesses that enabled this level of engagement with the fund.



### Case study 3 – Trelan Farm Luxury Glamping

Trelan Farm Luxury Glamping has diversified from a traditional beef and sheep enterprise to offering cabin accommodation. They currently have four cabins and, after hearing about the grant through a family member, were keen to use the funding to expand their cabin offerings.

As part of the grant they were able to add an additional cabin to their site and improve existing facilities, in particular laundry facilities which meant they no longer had to outsource this service. Since expanding the number of cabins, they have seen an increase in bookings, which they felt has had a knock-on positive impact to local businesses through increasing footfall in the area. The site now employs a full-time, local cleaning service, highlighting another positive economic impact for the area. They have also made environmental contributions like planting hedges around the cabins for natural screening.

***"The project has enabled us to advance our business plan by a year, and increased our revenue potential by having the extra cabin which allows for larger group bookings."***

## 4. Outcomes & impact

### Progress against outcome targets

As shown in Table 4.1, the project has surpassed the set outcome targets across various indicators. Firstly, the creation of jobs has been notably successful, with 15.5 jobs created as a result of the support, exceeding the target of 13. This indicates a strong positive impact on employment and suggests that the funded initiatives are effectively fostering job growth. Moreover, the number of jobs safeguarded is much higher than anticipated, with 117 jobs protected compared to the target of 52. This more than doubling of the target highlights the substantial role the support has played in maintaining employment stability and preventing job losses.

Additionally, the initiatives have encouraged innovation and improvement within enterprises. A total of 36 businesses have adopted new or improved products or services, surpassing the target of 26. This demonstrates the project's effectiveness in driving business development and enhancing the competitiveness of businesses. The project successfully attracted an increased amount of investment, exceeding the original target of £195,000 to £198,227. The larger than expected number of businesses supported (see Table 3.1) may have also contributed to the project exceeding its outcome targets.

**Table 4.1: Progress against planned outcomes**

Outcome indicator	Target	Actual
Jobs created as a result of support	13	15.5
Jobs safeguarded as a result of support	52	117
Number of enterprises adopting new or improved products or services	26	36
Increased amount of investment	£195,000	£198,227

*Source: Flintshire Supporting Tourism Business and Sector Key Fund - SPF claim form February 2025*

### Impact of the funding

The success against the outcomes targets was corroborated through the survey of grant recipients, with the primary impacts identified by grantees noted below:

- Increased sales/business (23)
- Increased productivity (8)
- Improved quality of product (5).

Other impacts reported by grant recipients included increased employee satisfaction, more efficient business processes and staff learning new skills.

***"I feel like the Flintshire Tourism Growth Fund really cares about small businesses and understands the importance and the impact that small tourism businesses have on the local economy."- Grantee***

Interview feedback provides further detail about the varied impacts of the funding on participating businesses:

- **Providing business stability:** The funding provided a financial cushion that allowed businesses to weather economic and seasonal fluctuations and unforeseen challenges.

***"The funding enabled us to operate throughout winter, providing business stability and an income revenue stream throughout the typically more challenging months." – Grantee***

- **Increasing revenue:** The funding helped businesses to increase and diversify their service or product offer, leading to higher sales volumes and, consequently, increased revenue streams.
- **Increasing profitability:** By optimising operations and scaling up production, businesses were able to reduce costs and improve profit margins. The funding enabled investments in technology and infrastructure that streamlined processes and enhanced efficiency.
- **Engaging a new clientele:** The financial boost allowed businesses to diversify their offerings and tailor products or services to attract new customers. This expansion into new markets broadened their customer base.
- **Expanding into other geographical and business areas:** The funding facilitated geographical expansion, enabling businesses to enter new regions and tap into previously inaccessible markets. Additionally, it supported diversification into new business areas, reducing dependency on a single revenue stream.
- **Increased employment opportunities:** The financial support allowed businesses to offer more stable employment opportunities. Part-time staff were transitioned to full-time contracts, and new employees were onboarded, providing job security and career growth prospects.

#### Case study 4 – The Craft Shack

With the funding provided by the Flintshire Supporting Tourism Business and Sector Key Fund, the business was able to buy embroidery machines. This enabled them to offer their own embroidery service, something they previously outsourced. The new machines also enabled them to create their own 'Welsh-designed' jumpers which were popular among tourists. As a result, they had seen an increase in sales and in turn, an increase in revenue.

There was evidently a clear need for the grant funding within the Flintshire tourism business community. Feedback gathered through surveys and interviews suggests the funding was highly valued by the participating businesses, with survey respondents rating the value of the funding to their organisation as either 'very important' (30/35) or 'fairly important' (5/35). Many interviewees reported that they would not have been able to deliver their projects without the funding, due to having no or limited other funding available and/or no other external funding sources being available. Some highlighted that it would have been possible to fund the investment themselves, but over a long period of time. Securing the grant funding therefore enabled them to accelerate their business plan. Together, these findings suggest a high level of additionality and that the project filled a clear gap in funding availability for SMEs in Flintshire.

### **Impact on Welsh language**

The qualitative interviews with grant recipients revealed a modest yet meaningful contribution to the promotion of the Welsh language among the funded projects. One business expanded its educational offerings to include Welsh language activities, enhancing cultural engagement. The Craft Shack increased its production of Welsh language items, which have been selling well. Additionally, a few businesses introduced bilingual signs and marketing materials. Although these contributions are small, they play a significant role in raising awareness of the Welsh language among tourists.

### **Impact on net zero**

Interviews with grant recipients revealed a small number of projects that made an impact on progress towards net zero, with these projects improving energy efficiency by upgrading machinery and retrofitting buildings. While the changes made by these grant-funded projects may seem small individually, they collectively contribute to Wales' broader ambition of achieving net zero emissions.

### **Impact on equality of opportunities**

The fund has significantly contributed to equality of opportunities by providing targeted financial support to micro and small tourism enterprises. By offering grants of up to 70% of project costs, the fund has enabled businesses with limited resources to innovate and grow. This support has been crucial in levelling the playing field, allowing smaller enterprises to compete with larger businesses. Additionally, the spread of grant awards across varied sub-sectors and geographical areas has ensured that the benefits of tourism growth are widely shared across different sectors and demographics. In addition, one business was able to support more activities for children with autism, providing a safe glamping experience for families that typically struggle in a campsite setting, whilst others have enhanced their education offer (see below case study).

## Case study 5 – Park in the Past

Park in the Past is a community interest company located near Wrexham. They have transformed an abandoned quarry into a 128-acre country park with a 35-acre lake and Britain's largest reconstructed Roman auxiliary fort. The organisation focuses on recreation, heritage education, and events.

The project involved building an "Earth House" based on a prehistoric footprint to host various activities and generate income. The Flintshire Tourism Fund grant funded 70% of the roof cost while the business self-funded other parts of construction. The short timeline of the project was challenging due to complex groundworks and weather conditions, but the communication and support from the project officer ensured all the requirements were met despite obstacles faced along the way.

The key benefits of the project include increased capacity for educational programs (related to both Roman history and the natural world) and hosting workshops for adults, such as eco-therapy sessions. This will help diversify their revenue streams through hiring out the space for corporate days or public events, ensuring financial stability going forward. The success of the project will also support them with further funding bids, particularly to the National Lottery.

### **Delivery against UKSPF aims and local policy**

#### **Alignment with the UKSPF Ambitions**

The Flintshire Supporting Tourism Business and Sector Key Fund aimed to support the following UKSPF aims, linked to the supporting local business priority:

- Creating jobs and boosting community cohesion, through investments that build on existing industries and institutions, and range from support for starting businesses to visible improvements to local retail, hospitality and leisure sector facilities.
- Increasing private sector investment in growth-enhancing activities, through targeted support for small and medium-sized businesses to undertake new-to-firm innovation, adopt productivity-enhancing, energy efficient and low carbon technologies and techniques, and start or grow their exports.

Through the impacts described above, it is evident that these aims have been achieved, with the project resulting in the creation of 15.5 new jobs and £198,227 in increased private sector investment. Businesses across Flintshire and from a range of tourism sub-sectors have also reported improvements to facilities, services and products, with a subsequent positive impact on revenue, business sustainability, productivity and the visitor experience.

#### **Alignment with Flintshire Local Government Policy**

The Flintshire Local Development Plan (LDP)<sup>2</sup> outlines the strategic vision for the county's development from 2015 to 2030. The Flintshire Supporting Tourism Business and Sector Key Fund aligns with the LDP in the following ways:

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<sup>2</sup> [Flintshire Local Development Plan](#)

- **Economic growth:** The LDP emphasises the importance of economic growth and diversification. The project supported this by providing financial assistance to tourism businesses, encouraging innovation, and attracting private sector investment.
- **Community development:** The LDP aims to enhance community cohesion and quality of life. By supporting local tourism businesses, the project contributed to the development of community amenities and services, improving the overall quality of life for residents.
- **Sustainable development:** The LDP promotes sustainable development practices. Some of the supported projects focused on improving energy efficiency and reducing carbon emissions, aligning with the LDP's sustainability goals.

In addition, Flintshire's Economic Regeneration Strategy<sup>3</sup> aims to revitalise and broaden the local economy, stimulate employment opportunities, and support high-value sectors such as manufacturing and tourism. The Flintshire Supporting Tourism Business and Sector Key Fund aligns with this strategy by:

- **Supporting SMEs:** Providing grants and support to small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the tourism sector, fostering innovation and growth.
- **Job creation and retention:** Creating and safeguarding jobs, contributing to employment stability and economic resilience.
- **Enhancing tourism:** Improving tourism infrastructure and visitor experiences, which boosts the local economy and attracts more visitors.

The project also aligns with the FCC Tourism Destination Management Plan<sup>4</sup> by focusing on creating high-quality places that attract visitors and investment. This plan emphasises the importance of managing key destinations to ensure positive visitor experiences, which in turn supports local businesses and the wider community.

Lastly, the project supports the ambitions outlined in Welcome to Wales: Priorities for the Visitor Economy 2020-2025<sup>5</sup>. This strategy aims to grow tourism earnings in Wales by 10% or more by 2025 through promoting the brand, developing products, and enhancing visitor experiences. By improving tourism infrastructure and supporting SMEs, the Key Fund project contributes to these goals and helps position Flintshire as a competitive and attractive destination.

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<sup>3</sup> Regeneration Strategy 2009-2020

<sup>4</sup> Tourism Destination Management Strategic Plan

<sup>5</sup> Welcome to Wales: priorities for the visitor economy 2020 to 2025

## 5. Conclusions and recommendations

Management of the Flintshire Supporting Tourism Business and Sector Key Fund has been highly effective across all areas of delivery. Successful delivery has been enabled by a strong partnership between Cadwyn Clwyd, Business Wales and Flintshire County Council and the wide-ranging and strong connections that the partners have with local businesses.

Cadwyn Clwyd's model of wrap-around support has added significant value to the grant management process. Grantees have clearly valued the support provided during the application process and throughout the delivery of their projects. This support has enabled smaller businesses, with limited experience of grant applications, to access the funding.

The project has exceeded its target SPF outputs and outcomes, in part due to the high demand for the grant funding leading to a greater number of lower value grants being awarded than initially intended. The Flintshire Supporting Tourism Business and Sector Key Fund had a positive impact on the local economy and community. Businesses reported increased sales, productivity, and product quality. The funding provided stability, allowing businesses to operate smoothly and grow their revenue by diversifying their offerings and attracting new customers. Investments in technology and infrastructure helped reduce costs and improve profit margins. The funding also enabled businesses to expand geographically and into new areas. Additionally, the funding helped to create more stable employment opportunities.

Overall, the funding was highly valued by businesses, filling a gap in funding availability for SMEs in Flintshire and enabling them to achieve many positive outcomes.

### Recommendations

Based on the findings detailed in this report, we would recommend consideration of the following for any future business grant projects:

- Reviewing the application process to ensure that application forms are as streamlined as possible, with consideration given to creating shorter application forms where smaller amounts of funding are being requested.
- Review communication of the guidance document to ensure understanding by grantees, plus subsequent reminders and follow-ups, including providing good practice examples.
- Maintain communication with smaller businesses about the constraints of public procurement associated with the grant to help manage expectations. Review arrangements for interim claims to help smaller businesses with limited cash reserves to engage without feeling financially exposed to the extent that this is possible.