



# Big Venture Community Centre, Wolverhampton



- Location**  
Wolverhampton
- Founded**  
2015
- Legal structure**  
Mutual benefit society
- Description of activity**  
Community hub, including a café, garden and bookable hall space
- Key assets**  
Big Venture Community Centre
- Staff and volunteers**  
Variable across the year, typically between 2 and 10

## Overview

The Big Venture Community Centre is located in North East Wolverhampton and is situated on the site of the closed Scotlands Adventure Playground, which was previously owned and managed by the City of Wolverhampton Council. The acquisition of the asset came about when the Adventure Playground was closed “due to city council cuts and the community decided they wanted to keep it.”

The Centre was opened in 2017 having been acquired from the council through an asset transfer. The centre is the sole asset of Big Local Venture Ltd, a mutual benefit society set up in 2015. The Centre provides a community hub, enabling the provision of a range of services, including: a community cafe, bookable spaces for events and a community garden.

The asset is on a 25-year lease, although efforts are currently being made to extend this to 99 years. The route to ownership was supported through the existence of a programme of Big Local funding (totalling £1m) in the Scotlands and Bushbury Hill area where the asset is located. This funding helped provide resources for the asset transfer and refurbishment of the building. It also helps fund two individuals from Community Action and Training Services (CAATS), a small Wolverhampton based social enterprise, to work directly for Big Local Venture Ltd for 20 hours per week to oversee the asset transfer and support the community in building the business operations of the asset.

Currently the asset is governed by a core group of five volunteer directors but day to day operations are undertaken by an ‘operational group’ that includes a volunteer manager, two individuals from CAATS (who will transition out of the organisation), and other regular volunteers. “The day to day running is left to the volunteers because obviously it’s their building and when we go they’ve got to be able to manage...and the sustainability [has] got to be there.”





## What difference community ownership makes

The closure of the Scotlands Adventure Playground occurred during a period where a number of publicly owned assets were closed. Community ownership has provided a new life to the building and land, and avoided it falling into disrepair. Given the size of the land it is likely that an alternative use for it might have been for housing. The Big Venture Centre provides a location where a wide variety of community focused activities and services are provided. The centre is responsive to local needs and tailors the services it seeks to offer accordingly. It does not presently provide any jobs beyond those of the CAATS team but it is anticipated that jobs will be created at the centre as it transitions from being led by the staff from CAATS to community led (this is planned to happen by 2021).

## Financial health

The financial health of the asset is regarded as being satisfactory, although given its nascence, there is a need to continue building levels of income and reserves to ensure on-going financial sustainability of the asset. The most significant source of financial support for the asset has been through funding from Big Local. However, this is due to come to an end meaning that it is pertinent for the asset to continue to build its revenue streams and ability to generate income through grants. The asset has been successful at attracting further grant funding in order to deliver services for the local community. For example, as part of a consortium, it secured £382,000 to deliver activities for Headstart across three locations (including Big Venture) across the WV10 postcode of Wolverhampton. The ability to attract funding that allows them to both provide services for the local community whilst also generating revenue for the building (e.g. through hiring out rooms to run the programme) is a valuable source of income. As one interviewee reflected *“it gives us a little bit of sustainability, because we can charge room hire and we can get the facilitators in so we’re providers and we’re also generating an income.”*

## Three key factors that have affected its development and financial health:

### 1. Scotlands and Bushbury Hill ‘Big Local’ funding

Prior to the Big Venture Community Centre being acquired, the local community benefited from a successful bid for a £1m ‘Big Local’ grant through The Big Lottery. This created the Scotlands and Bushbury Hill Big Local Partnership. The nature of this funding is to provide the community with greater opportunities to create change in their local areas; it is *“about people having a voice and being able to do their own thing and make their own decisions.”* This meant that when faced with the closure of the council-run Scotlands Adventure Playground, the community were able to secure the asset and develop a business case to run it.

Whilst the building itself was transferred over to the community through an asset transfer process, the funding enabled the community to undertake a significant investment to refurbish the building and create a usable space. This refurbishment cost approximately £180,000. The investment from the Big Local Partnership has also provided essential financial support to cover running costs whilst the community seek to create a self-sustaining social enterprise. It is clear that without this funding the Big Venture Community Centre would not have been possible.

### 2. Involvement of CAATS

The funding from the Big Local Partnership has also provided capacity for two staff members from CAATS to spend 20 hours per week with the asset, helping the community to develop it. When the building and land became available due to the closure of the Scotlands Adventure Playground, these two individuals were central to the asset transfer application and coordinating the efforts of the local volunteers. Since the asset transfer process was completed, they have remained and continue to provide support to volunteers. This has included writing bids for grant applications and helping to manage the budget. They regard the training of the volunteers as a key factor in ensuring the future sustainability of the asset and have sought to give over control to the volunteers, where possible, to help support the transition over to full community control.



### 3. Support from City of Wolverhampton Council

Despite closing the Scotlands Adventure Centre, the City of Wolverhampton Council recognised the value in the asset and agreed to transfer it into community ownership. This was at a time when a number of community assets were being transferred in the city. Although ultimately successful, the story of the asset transfer is very much one of two halves. Initially, progress with the transfer was slow and the Council did not engage fully with the process. The asset transfer process can be legally complex and a significant barrier for communities hoping to take assets into ownership. However, a change in personnel on the Council side, in particular the assistance from a key individual, helped to speed up the asset transfer. The Big Venture Community Centre regards this individual as instrumental in helping to enable the asset transfer and allow the community to navigate a complex process to ultimately take the asset into ownership.

### Future direction

The asset aims to continue to build its “offer” to the local community. It operates in an adaptive way, responding to community needs where these are identified by ensuring appropriate support services and activities are provided at the Centre. The overarching plan for CAATS is to successfully transition leadership over to the community volunteers; at present, there is significant support provided to volunteers.

For the Centre, the ambition is to develop a self-sustaining, social business that can create a small number of jobs, provide a range of essential services locally, and offer a community hub for residents.

### Financial information

The financial data is unavailable for Big Venture Community Centre.