



Great Wilsey Community Centre

Business and Operational plan

August 2024

Contents

1. Introduction and purpose of the report
2. Background
3. Understanding the area and need
4. Centre operation: basic considerations & market testing
 - a. High-level outline
 - b. Operator activities
 - c. Opening hours
 - d. Operators options
 - e. Market testing of operators
5. Operational model
6. Business model
7. Governance
8. Recommendations

1. Introduction and purpose of the report

Great Wilsey Park is a new part of Haverhill – which will bring thousands of new families and individuals to build and grow the thriving town with new homes, public space, and amenities for all. In the middle of that new community will sit a centre which will engage, serve, include and reflect the full diversity of the new population.

The centre's offer will grow and change with the 2,500 households expected to move into the area, during the various phases of development and will become the beating heart of the area – a place to meet, play, work, socialise, learn, and for a community to come together and help define its future.

With the majority of the new homes being 3 and 4-bedroom properties, the expectation is for an influx of young and growing families, which will increase the demand for school places and childcare as well as the need for an attractive arts, leisure and sports local offer. With more adults aged 25 to 54 working from home, it's likely that there will also be an increase in demand for co-working spaces nearby, as is the case for socialising activities.

Looking forward to the completion of the first phase of Great Wilsey Park, it's easy to imagine a thriving community centre that serves the needs of new and established residents. The design of the Great Wilsey Community Centre provides exciting opportunities to activate the space and offer tailored activities for the growing community.

The centre will comprise several elements designed to meet the needs of the new community whilst offering opportunities for the rest of Haverhill. These are:

- A community centre with two multipurpose halls and meeting rooms
- A 6000 sqft, nursery, with 3 separate classrooms
- Workspace with capacity for 24 desks
- A café with indoor and outdoor sitting space.

The approved outline planning also includes a primary school south of the community centre, while convenience shopping and healthcare facilities are potentially forthcoming.

This report outlines an operational and business plan to ensure that the first of the approved Great Wilsey Community Centres becomes self-sustaining. It focuses on achieving financial resilience, flexibility, and strong governance to support the community and enhance the area. The proposal includes assumptions about space utilisation to secure sustainable income and suggests the creation of partnerships to support the vision for the area and the neighbourhood's growth.

Work for this report has included:

- Modelling of future population and needs
- Dialogue with existing communities
- Soft-market testing with sectors and potential tenants
- Engagement with potential future partners and local stakeholders

- Analysis of similar schemes and governance structures
- Business modelling based on likely scenarios.

It is worth noting that this modelling is based on the assumption that Phase 1 of Great Wilsey Park has been completed and 500 new families are living in the area.

2. Background

The Great Wilsey development, in the north-east of Haverhill, was granted outline planning permission to build 2,500 homes and associated infrastructure in 2018. The development offers a choice of homes for single occupancy and family accommodation, as well as two local centres, two primary schools and a country park: as a whole, it aims to foster a wide demographic and a mixed, thriving community.

While the first residential phase is underway – with [499 homes](#) being built by [Redrow](#) across three parcels of land- the first of the two local centres has been designed by Pollard Thomas Edward on Parcel D1. The centre, identified as local mixed-use, will support and expand Haverhill’s community infrastructure and evolving local needs, with a flexible offer that includes community, childcare, leisure, retail and health and well-being elements, whilst being financially viable.

This document is supplementary of the Reserved Matters Application for Great Wilsey Community Centre. A future application for the rest of Parcel D1 will come forward at a later date and may include additional facilities such as a convenience store. Creating a thriving and successful local centre supports the ambition of the West Suffolk Local Plan (2010) and Haverhill Vision 2031 (2013).

3. Understanding the area and need

Current population and growth¹

- Haverhill had 27,710 residents in 2021, making it Suffolk's fourth-largest town. It has a youthful demographic with a higher proportion of working-age individuals and a lower percentage of residents aged 65 and over. The population is expected to age by 2028, impacting health and care needs.
- In 2011, Haverhill had over 10,000 households. The Haverhill Vision 2031 Plan, projects 4,260 new homes by 2031, boosting the population to about 35,000 and increasing households by nearly 50%. This growth will require expanded infrastructure and offers opportunities for improved employment, education, and social opportunities for existing and new residents.

Housing developments

- Current and future housing developments by Redrow, Persimmon, and Taylor Wimpey in the north of the town are expected to increase the number of homes in Haverhill by nearly 4,195 over the next 10 years, creating a need for additional primary school spaces and jobs across various sectors.

Socio-economic profile and needs

- Deprivation: Approximately 12% of children in Haverhill live in low-income families, lower than the national and regional averages.
- Education and childcare: Haverhill has a deficit in nursery spaces and after-school care. The town's education facilities include seven primary schools and two secondary schools, with a significant demand for additional early years and wrap-around childcare.
- Employment: Haverhill's main employment sectors are manufacturing, retail, and health. The town has a higher proportion of full-time workers than the regional and national rates, with a significant number of self-employed individuals. New housing developments may increase demand for affordable workspaces either for those working from home or running their own business.

Community and leisure facilities

¹ [District and Borough council ward profiles](#) produced by the Suffolk Observatory; Integrated Neighbourhood profiles by the local [Integrated Neighbourhood Team](#) and Neighbourhood Place Based Needs Assessment (PBNA) from the [Healthy Suffolk website](#).

- Sports: Haverhill has sufficient sports halls but lacks gymnastics facilities and indoor tennis courts. Future demand for badminton courts is anticipated to grow.²
- Community facilities: The town offers various community centres, including The New Croft and Chalkstone Community Centre, as well as libraries and other hubs, some of them for specific needs.
- Retail and public amenities: existing amenities include high street shops, major supermarkets, and a business park. The growing population will need additional community infrastructure, including a retail and leisure offer such as cafes, restaurants, playgrounds and community spaces to serve new residents and attract the broader community.

Haverhill's anticipated growth will impact its infrastructure and services, and highlights the need for new leisure, community and sports offers.

Needs and aspirations - Engagement

During the design phase of the Great Wilsey Park Community Centre, PTE sought to reach as wide a group of stakeholders as possible, to secure a representative picture of the current opportunities and to identify unmet needs. They spoke to council and health officers, as well as community and sports organisations firmly rooted in the community.

Engagement during the pre-planning stages led to a face-to-face event at New Croft Sports Centre on 28 April 2024. Participants, aged 25 to 65+, discussed their hopes for the neighbourhood's future, community growth, and missing amenities.

The top three identified needs were health facilities, shops, and local food and drink outlets like cafes or pubs. Participants also emphasised the importance of social and leisure facilities, open spaces with play areas, and improved transport links, ensuring these amenities cater to all ages. Regarding health facilities, they highlighted the need for out-of-hours services, minor injury care for people who can't drive to a local hospital, a GP practice and a pharmacy.

² [Indoors Sports Facility Assessment](#) commissioned by West Suffolk Council, 2022.

4. Centre operation: basic considerations and market testing

a. High-level outline of Great Wilsey Community Centre operation

The Great Wilsey Community Centre will be a multi-purpose and versatile facility dedicated to serving the community with a wide offer, designed to cater for all age groups. It will use collaboration and local and regional partnerships to foster a cohesive and vibrant community in which people can support each other.

The centre will be a two-storey building, with a landscaped spill-out area. The plans for the ground floor feature a café, two multi-purpose halls, a multi-use community room, retail incubator units, and a large co-working space. The first floor will be entirely occupied by a nursery, which includes three classrooms, a multipurpose space, staff offices, and a kitchenette. Additionally, the nursery will have an outdoor play area overlooking the primary school and the square to be built opposite the centre.

b. Operator activities

As a result of the different types of activities that will take place at the centre, operations will include several tasks that demand specialist expertise, including but not exclusive to:

- Running a financially viable community cafe with an outdoor terrace.
 - Operating a 2300 sq ft co-working space, including promotion, bookings, day-to-day coordination, supplies, and communications and alignment with the general running of the centre.
 - Running a commercial nursery with 3 classrooms.
 - Managing the reception of the building: welcoming and signposting to the cafe, the community spaces, the co-working space and the nursery.
 - Managing the booking system for the halls and multi-use community rooms.
 - Programming activities.
 - Creating partnerships with groups and organisations to support and expand the centre's offer.
 - Liaising with contractors delivering goods and services to the building.
 - Liaising with the landlord.
 - Publicising the centre and its activities.
- Managing staff and/or external contractors.
Fundraising.

c. Proposed opening hours

With a keen understanding of both market demand and proximity to residential, and using local precedents, we have devised a proposed structure for the hours of operation for the community

centre. At this point, the opening times are only indicative. We recommend that they flex over time as the range of services and activities changes and grows.

Great Wilsey Community Centre opening hours	Monday to Friday	Weekends
Community cafe	9 AM to 6 PM	9 AM to 6 PM
Community centre (halls/meeting rooms)	8 AM to 9 PM	8 AM to 12 AM
Nursery	8 AM to 6 PM	Closed
Workspace	9 AM to 6 PM	8 AM to 6 PM

d. Operator options

Considering the multipurpose nature of the centre and the diverse activities it will host, we explored two different operational models:

- **Single Operator for the Entire Building**

Under this model, one company or organisation would be responsible for all activities listed under "Operator Activities" on section b. This approach requires the operator to have expertise in various areas, including food and beverage services, managing a profitable community café, operating a co-working space, coordinating multiple hall hires, running a regulated nursery and creating partnerships.

- **Separate Operators for Different Sections of the Building**

In this model, the centre is divided into three components, each under the management of different operators:

- Community centre and co-working space: managed by a single entity
- Nursery: externally operated
- Cafe: externally operated

This division ensures effective management of community spaces by those responsible for the overall facility, while the nursery and café benefit from the commercial expertise of external operators. The sustainability of the community centre relies heavily on the success of the nursery and café as commercial ventures, to generate revenue to finance the programming and operational costs. The Separate Operators' approach enhances efficiency and service quality while mitigating operational risks and providing a steady income for the community centre through annual leases.

Meanwhile, the co-working space, which is smaller compared to similar spaces in the area, could be initially managed by the same operator that coordinates hall hires in the centre. An experienced operator would be ideal, but the scale is unlikely to attract external interest. It is recommended to be flexible and reassess the approach as operational demands evolve and potentially require more dedicated resources.

- **Preferred option**

Our recommendation is to opt for **Separate Operators for Different Sections of the Building**. This approach will ensure sufficient income for the centre to thrive and fulfil its social and community purpose. If managed well, this model will enable Great Wilsey Community Centre to flourish by leveraging the expertise of specialised operators for the nursery and café, while the community spaces and co-working space are managed by those focused on the overall community offering.

e. Market testing of operator

Augarde & Partners carried out soft market testing with local and regional childcare providers, workspace operators and community facility operators, helping to build a picture of the current supply and demand for these types of enterprises.

- **Community centre operator**

Although there are examples of successfully run community or sports centres in the area, none combines the breadth or amenities that Great Wilsey Community Centre will comprise. It is unlikely that an operator based outside the geographical area will come forward with these levels of expertise although this could be tested on the next feasibility stage.

The New Croft leadership team, experienced in managing sports and community facilities, understands local needs and are interested in supporting the development and operation of the Great Wilsey Community Centre. Their community connections and commercial and management expertise could be valuable, but their involvement will largely depend on the chosen governance and operational model adopted.

- **Workspace**

There are several operators of workspace in the area, varying in size and price. The biggest is The Epicentre, in Haverhill Research Park with 30,000 sq ft of floor space. This facility caters for the high end of the market, offering large meeting rooms, large offices and co-working as well as a fully equipped research laboratory.

On the opposite end of the market are co-working spaces based on and around Haverhill High Road, with a more basic and affordable offer. The local co-working spaces are working close to capacity while the Epicentre has ongoing availability.

The key learning here, with ongoing shifting work patterns, is to be flexible with the offer – moving to the needs of businesses and individuals as they evolve. There is clear interest in the market, with an assumption that new populations especially will expect and utilise a level of local workspace provision.

- **Nurseries**

Augarde & Partners engaged with several nursery providers of varying sizes within the area, who painted a picture of a sector beginning to recover from a series of setbacks in the Haverhill area. One nursery is due to re-open in the Autumn, while another is in the pipeline for next year. Despite

these settings helping increase childcare provision there will likely continue to be a deficit in nursery places for all age groups.

Several operators expressed interest in expanding into the upcoming Great Wilsey Park area, with one provider, which operates 10 nurseries across Suffolk, keen to seal Heads of Terms agreement early in the process. They believe their extensive experience and ability to leverage economies of scale would benefit their business model in this new location. Other operators were understandably more cautious, considering the phasing of the development before confirming future interest.

There are currently 8 nurseries and pre-schools operating in Haverhill, with another one due to open in September and the council aiming to seek expressions of interest for a new childcare setting in Haverhill, next year.

In summary, there is already a need for more childcare provision in the area, and the demand will increase as the new housing development is completed and more families move in. Additionally, the lack of wraparound school provision (breakfast and afterschool clubs) presents an opportunity for the centre to develop complementary services.

5. Operational model

In designing an operational model, we have prioritised the centre's ability to flex to the changing community – staying relevant and connected, whilst building the capacity of local people and organisations. Based on having **Separate Operators for Different Sections of the Building**, the proposed operational model focuses on running a centre that uses spaces effectively to generate enough revenue to support its community programming, while creating and nurturing partnerships with businesses, organisations, community groups and local residents.

The proposed operational model is based on two pillars:

- Strong partnerships and collaborations
- A multiskilled management team

Partnerships are vital because they bring together diverse resources and expertise, enhancing the centre's ability to serve the community comprehensively. As a catalyst for community cohesion, Great Wilsey Community Centre will promote collaboration between statutory and non-statutory agencies whenever possible and develop a **volunteer strategy** that extends beyond the centre and its immediate grounds. Potential partners and collaborators include NHS community services, local sports and social clubs, artists, entrepreneurs, and local developers. Successful work with external partners will help increase footfall by attracting people to the centre to access specific services and enticing them to use the facilities.

The proposed operational model therefore relies on the existence of a **multi-skilled management team** to run the centre, comprising:

- A centre manager
- A partnership and programme development manager
- An administration officer
- A volunteer coordinator

6. Business model

Based on having **Separate Operators for different sections of the building**, the indicative business model forecasts how the community centre operation can generate revenue from each section of the facility, based on full-time opening hours. This has been evaluated against the estimated costs of operating the building and maintaining a robust community activity programme.

The proposed operation of the centre is based on a cross-subsidy model, where single leases and managed hires generate a surplus that funds the centre's operations and programming.

The centre will need to start generating hires immediately by attracting groups already active in the area. Additionally, it will need to build partnerships with organisations, residents, and new groups to generate activities that fulfil unmet needs and promote an exciting and flexible offer.

Building the programme, attracting footfall, and establishing a reliable and appealing array of activities for a new community centre will take time. So, it is anticipated that set-up costs will be needed for the first 2 years of operation, leading to a level of income and established activities that will make the centre self-sufficient by the 3rd year of operation.

To reiterate, this plan is predicated on having the Phase 1 of Great Wilsey Park completed (499 homes). Even then, this 2-year set-up subsidy will be required. If the centre was delivered earlier, it will be important to consider a Bridging Plan that incorporates an evolving business plan, operational structure and programming.

Income and expenditure assumptions

Conservative estimates have been used to calculate the potential revenue from the centre, in order to ensure viability. Calculations are based on partial rather than full occupancy from the start; with figures based on the centre opening 7 days a week.

Similarly, the centre's expenditure was modelled based on a building that is fitted out and ready for operations. Hence, the calculations are based solely on the cost of running the programme and managing the building.

The core expenditures are staff, programming and cyclical maintenance. Programming costs will be higher in the first couple of years, where the cost of some activities will be upfronted by the centre, to build clientele and reputation, and encourage local collaborations.

7. Governance

To realise the vision for the Great Wilsey Community Centre and ensure sustainable operations, it is crucial to establish a robust governance structure, a model of stewardship and management of spaces that ensures the place offer and identity is coherent, relevant, coordinated and financially sustainable.

The model of stewardship needs to consider that varied spaces will be delivered over time and that once all development is complete it will include 6,800 sqm of non-residential floor space and extensive public realm to complement residential and non-residential uses.

After the initial set-up, the body responsible will need to be able to operate self-sustainably without ongoing subsidy from the Pelly Foundation. It will need to ensure that it can serve the needs of the existing and new residents, the local business community, cultural and community groups.

The proposed arrangements will preserve the original vision for the community campus, fostering a connected community and taking into account other assets within the Great Wilsey masterplan, such as the forthcoming allotments and country park, which could contribute to building a sense of place.

Proposed governance structure

In designing a governance model for Great Wilsey, we have considered that it must have the following purpose:

- Delivering community, environmental, and economic opportunities, and activities at scale over the long term.
- Managing a diverse portfolio of commercial and community units, public spaces, and other non-residential areas, while minimising risks and maximising opportunities.
- Ensuring a self-sustaining financial model.
- Implementing community-relevant operations at a local level during Phase 1 and in subsequent phases.

Our analysis suggests the need for two distinct organisations to fulfil these purposes effectively, each of them attracting board members and officers with different skill sets and experience:

- One organization to manage long-term, large-scale operations, handle a diverse and growing portfolio, and negotiate the long-term strategy. This could be an overarching **Community Development Trust (CDT), established as a charity or community benefit society.**
- Another organization to oversee the local operational delivery of Phase 1 and beyond. This could be a **trading arm** of the Great Wilsey CDT, established as a **social enterprise** to deliver operational functions.

The alternative to a second separate trading arm or social enterprise, is an operator. We have reviewed the market for potential operators however and found no obvious solution

for an opportunity of this size and ambition. It is possible that in time a local organisation may grow to be able to deliver the Community Centre management (such as the nearby The New Croft), but at present we would propose the creation of a separate entity.

Both organisations must be financially self-sufficient to ensure long-term sustainability.

8. Key recommendations

Operational Model

- Structure the offer to fit the needs of the envisaged population – but maintain flexibility to suit the new, emerging community.
- Have specialist operators for commercial and community functions, to maximise effectiveness and secure revenue.
- Build strong partnerships and collaborations to diversify community offer and ensure a wide sense of agency.
- Invest in a multiskilled management team which can maximise the centre's impact.

Business Model

Implement a cross-subsidy model to generate income and make the centre financially sustainable

- Lease the nursery and café to external operators to generate secured income
- Use the revenue to subsidise some community programming and activities, with partners delivering the majority of the community offer.
- Supplement with income from space hires and partnerships to diversify revenue streams.
- Regularly review and adjust the model to maximise efficiency and impact.

Secure set-up funding and build partnerships which can support further funding development going forward

- Invest set-up costs for Years 0-2.
- Centre and partners to fundraise externally to support programme development and delivery

Be collaborative, connected, flexible and reflective

- Generate hires immediately by attracting groups already active in the area as soon as the centre opens.
- Build partnerships with organisations, residents, and new groups to create an attractive and flexible programme.
- Remain adaptable to the evolving needs of businesses and individuals,
- Utilise the café to support the centre's vision by enhancing the program of activities and creating a sense of place.

Governance Model

Build the right pieces of governance for the right job – one to deliver the wider place vision – one to run a Community Centre

A strong governance model is vital to support the delivery of a thriving centre – and at a wider level, build the sense of place and deliver the long-term vision for Great Wilsey Park: a beautiful place, with good quality homes and amenities, with a strong, connected community.

In practical terms, the right governance must:

- Deliver community, environmental, and economic opportunities for the community over the long term.
- Ensure a self-sustaining financial model for the community centre.
- Have the scope to manage a diverse portfolio of commercial and community units, public spaces, and other non-residential areas while minimising risks and maximising opportunities.
- Implement community-relevant operations locally during the development of Phase 1 of Great Wilsey Park and subsequent phases.

Proposed Trust structure

- Establish two distinct organisations to fulfil the purposes of the Trust effectively.
 - o One to deliver opportunities and financial sustainability at scale over the long term, manage a mixed and growing portfolio and negotiate the longer-term position.
 - o And another one to lead the hyper-local operational delivery of Phase 1 of Great Wilsey Park and beyond.
- Both organisations must be financially self-sufficient to ensure long-term sustainability and effective management and have different skills requirements because their functions are different.