



**SPORT
ENGLAND**



FURNESS VALE FIELD

COMMUNITY ASSET CASE STUDY

IN BRIEF



Name: Furness Vale Field

Type: Levelling and drainage of full size grass football pitch and installation of activity trail.

Type of Organisation: Charitable Incorporated Organisation – Furness COGS (Community Organising Green Space).

Sports: Football, Hockey, Rounder's, General exercise, School sports & Activities

Website and social media: whaleybridge.com/history-of-furness-vale-field-cogs/

Overall cost: £173,000

Sport England contribution / fund: £80,382

Other significant funding:

WREN Recycling £47,000

Tesco £12,000

BIG £6,195

Derbyshire County Council £5,000

High Peak Borough Council £2,850

PEOPLE AND PLACE

Category

ONS Urban / Rural

Top tier classification	Urban
Second tier classification	City and Town

Geographical setting

Location description:	A village located on the edge of a major conurbation.
Local Authority Population	91,662 ¹

Local Authority and Region

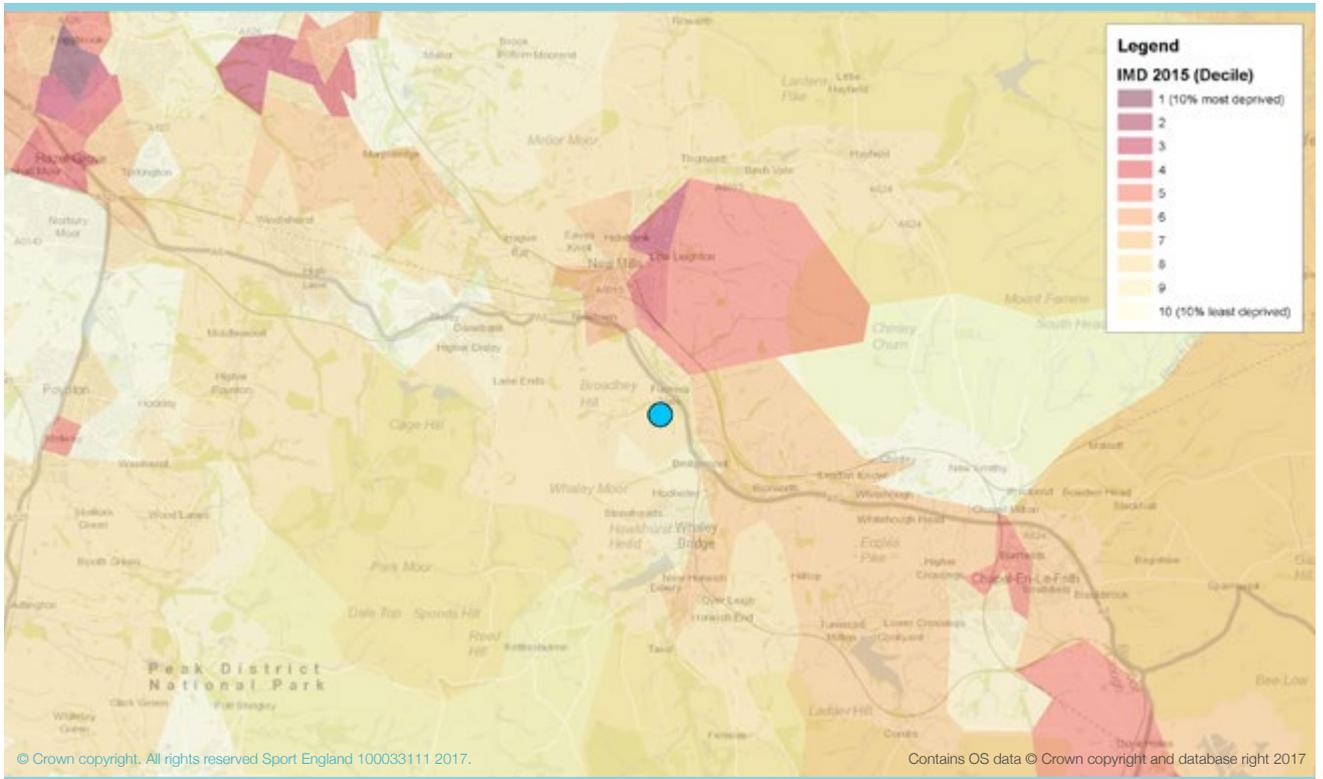
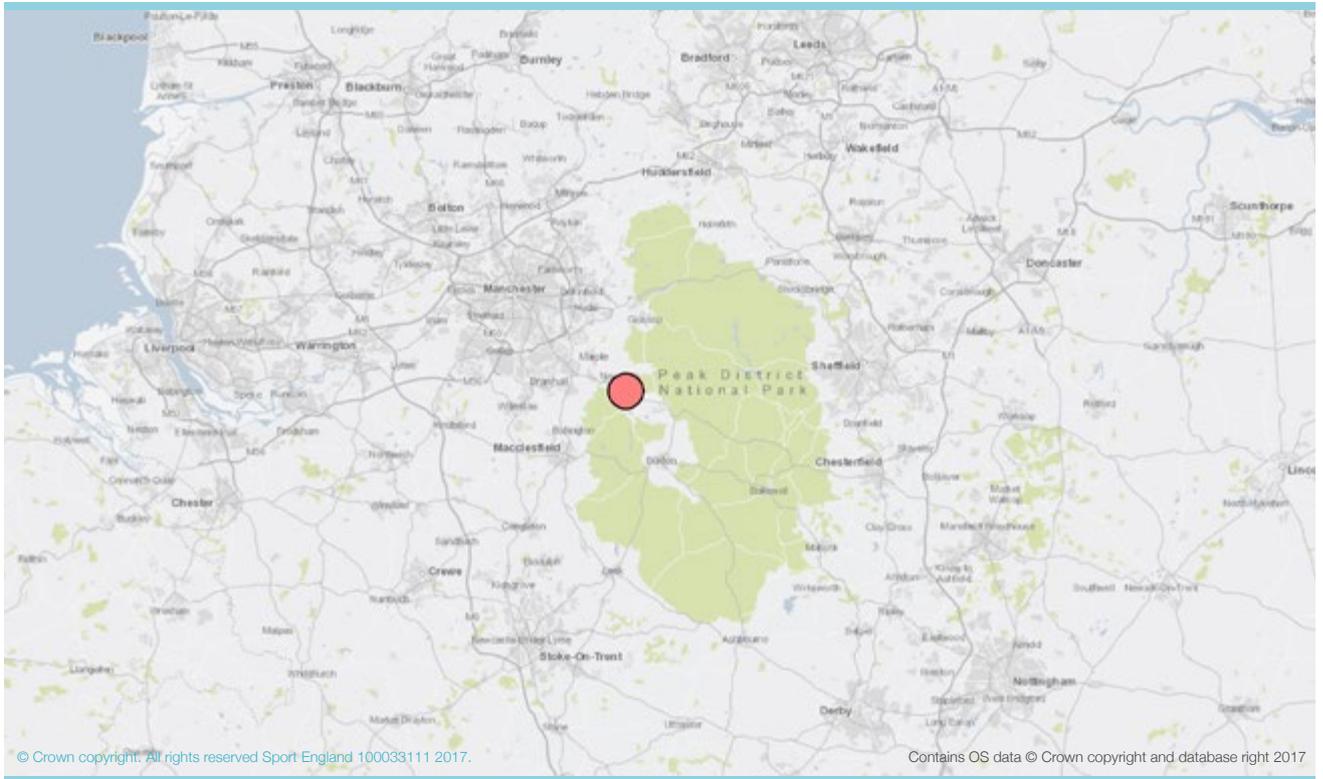
Local authority	High Peak
Region	East Midlands

IMD

LSOA ranking position	23,334 ²
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¹ Source: Mid-Year Population Estimates 2016, ONS

² LSOA = Local Super Output Area. Each LSOA is ranked out of 32,844 LSOAs in England; where 1 is the most deprived



RESOURCES



PROJECT COST:

Total project cost: c. £150,000

Purpose: Levelling and drainage of full size grass football pitch; installation of activity trail.

SPORT ENGLAND CONTRIBUTION

Protecting Playing Fields: £80,382

OTHER GRANT FUNDING

- **£6,195** from the Big Lottery for a celebratory launch event
- **£5,000** from Bernard Sunley Charitable Foundation
- **£1,400** from High Peak Council's Initiative Fund
- **£1,250** from Fields in Trust from the QE2 initiative to protect playing fields
- Councillors Initiative Fund donations of **£750, £500** and **£150**.

The Sport England funding was the cornerstone that made everything else possible. Whilst the project was initiated on the basis of local grants and self-funding the capital works could not commence or indeed be completed without Sport England funds.

OTHER SOURCES OF FINANCE

- **£47,000** from Wren Recycling for the perimeter pathways, gym equipment and benches
- **£12,000** from Tesco for picnic tables, flower beds and landscaping through 'Bags of Help' scheme
- **£20,000** was raised by Furness COGS (self-funding) from its own community fundraising activity since the project began in 2010. They organize an annual 'Field Day' with activities taking place on the field itself which raises around £2,000 and other activities such as comedy nights, discos and dances at the local social club which raises a further £1,000 per annum.





OTHER SUPPORT

Most significant: The main contribution has come in the form of volunteer time. The project has been complicated and lengthy, requiring local people to show great perseverance, effort and determination. The importance and value of this cannot be overstated.

Local authority: After some complications the project benefited from a community asset transfer of the field from High Peak Borough Council with a 40 year lease. They also put in additional access to an adjoining field to overcome a boundary issue with another landowner. Other help: High Peak Community Housing provided the initial landscape designs on a pro-bono basis based on the outcome of the local consultations.

Political: COGS has consistently benefited from the involvement of current and former elected members from the parish and borough councils which has facilitated connections with council officers and other parties. In particular this helped them to negotiate the lease of the land in the face of a planning restriction.

“IT HAS BEEN VERY USEFUL TO HAVE HAD THE EXPERIENCE OF BEING A COUNCILLOR AS I ALREADY HAD A CONNECTION WITH THE PARKS DEPARTMENT AND I ALSO HAD A DIRECT ROUTE TO HIGH PEAK.”

COUNCIL.’ SUZANNE LOMAS

Professional: Local residents and users of the site with professional skills in fundraising, construction, legal documentation, accounting and sports development made themselves known to and became involved with the project, providing a strong team of mutually supportive volunteers.

Local Community: COGS is itself entirely volunteer led and run with all of its members long-standing residents in the local area.



THE JOURNEY

KEY EVENTS AND MILESTONES

Date	Event
2007	Furness Vale Field Day Committee
	Agreement in principle to Asset Transfer
July 2010	Community Consultation Event
2010-2013	Lease negotiations and objections
May 2013	Sport England Protecting Playing Fields Funding
Aug 2013	QE2 Status granted
Oct 2013	COGS secures charitable status
2013-2014	Construction problems identified with rock, pipeline and tree roots
2015-2016	Construction progressing
June 2016	Funding from Wren Recycling for pathways and equipment
Sept 2016	Seeding of pitch
Nov 2016	Additional funding secured from Sport England
Sept 2017	Drainage installation completed
Sept 2017	Celebration Match
Oct 2017	Furness Vale FC to use the pitch for home games on an ongoing basis

FIRST IDEAS

The original driver for the project came from two former players at Furness Vale FC. Their home pitch had become unfit for purpose years earlier due to its pronounced slope and poor drainage. The football club had stopped using it once it was deemed unfit by the football league they played in meaning they had to play all their games outside the village. Following various meetings with the council over a 20 year period to seek improvements no action was forthcoming and so they decided to take it into their own hands.

The Spark: Players at Furness Vale had become tired of using unfit pitches and wanted to re-establish pitches which they were proud to play on.

“FURNESS VALE PITCH HAS ALWAYS BEEN A RUNNING JOKE WITHIN THE LOCAL TOWNS AND FOOTBALL TEAMS”

ANDREW MURRAY

Knowledge of the audience: The Board included representatives of the key audience. Including: Les Footitt, a former player and committee member of Furness Vale FC; Terry Watson (Chair) also a former player and the chair of the football club is also on the board.



The location: The immediate community had a deficit of usable green space and an extremely busy road infrastructure. This meant that there was a real need to introduce a community open space.

“FURNESS VALE MAIN ROAD (THE A6) HAS 20,000 VEHICLES PER DAY GO THROUGH IT. MANY OF THE HOUSES IN FURNESS VALE HAVE NO GARDEN SO HAVING THIS NEW SPACE WILL BE SOMEWHERE THAT’S SAFE FOR KIDS TO GO AND PLAY AWAY FROM THE ROADS”

LES FOOTITT

FIRST STEPS

Furness Vale Field Day Committee was formed in 2007 in response to concerns raised by local residents about the lack of recreational facilities and open space playing areas in the village. After committee members attended a series of meetings with local authority officers to take these concerns forward a local Liberal Democrat councillor got behind the campaign and managed to secure a £5,000 donation from the councillor’s community fund. This helped to get the ball rolling as other parties and the local MP got behind the campaign.

The idea was then floated that a community group be set up to take ownership of the land from the council and manage the project which the council supported in principle. To support this idea:

- An extensive consultation on the future of the field was organised, with the annual Field Day in May 2010 being used as an opportunity to gather opinions.

- Questionnaires were completed by 143 residents with a separate arts based consultation gathering views from 31 local children.
- The results were presented in a report delivered at an Open Meeting in July 2010 which revealed that the field was greatly valued by local people but not used to its full potential due to its condition and sloping nature. The highest number of responses (55%) prioritised football facilities with other sporting facilities also attracting a high level of support (48%).

Whilst broadly supportive of an asset transfer, a planning restriction providing for a school to be built on the land from the 1960s delayed progress. Meanwhile the group got on with surveying the site, drawing up plans, having a 3D model made and costing the development.

Once the planning objections were addressed this put the group in a good position to secure the initial Sport England funding.

FORMATION

An informal group, the Furness Vale Field Day Committee was formed in 2007 to draw attention to the community’s concerns for the field. They were formally constituted as COGS following the consultation in 2010. Recognising the additional fundraising potential it would bring they applied for and achieved charitable status and became a Charitable Incorporated Organisation in October 2013.



CAPACITY BUILDING

From the start the group has benefited from the contribution of local people with specialist skills which were only brought together through a shared interest in seeing the field protected and developed. This gave the group a good skill set to develop plans and provide robustness. These included:

- Sandy Schofield, who provided the administrative backbone and fundraising know how to keep the project moving
- The political savvy and connections of former councillor Suzanne Lomas
- The construction experience of Philip Lomas
- The legal and local authority planning knowledge of Peter Green
- The accounting skills of local parent Andrew Wild
- Hilda Shepley's horticultural knowledge
- Links to the school provided by Phil Gray and links to the football club of Chair Andrew Murray
- Continuing inspiration and determination of Les Footitt and Terry Watson from whose conversations the project emerged.

FUNDING

The project's capacity to generate funds ran in tandem with the growing maturity of the organisation itself. It had to become constituted and establish itself as a credible entity in its own right before it could secure significant funds. The initial contribution from the local authority helped by providing the funds to organize a consultation that demonstrated community interest and needs and, in turn, the basis for a constitution.

The main obstacles to securing funds were planning issues (lease transfer and length, access-related objections) that led to delays in Sport England funding sign off and temporary loss of funding from Wren. Further problems emerged once the development encountered construction problems which were overcome through the support of Sport England who were able to increase their funding to keep the project on track. Sport England's funding and support was the foundation for the project and, for the Chair of COGS Terry Watson this bore out Sport England's comment at the outset that:

“THIS IS ONLY THE START, EXPECT TO COME ACROSS PROBLEMS ON THE WAY.”



Pathways installed around the pitch can be used by the whole community

DEVELOPMENT

There were a number of delays to the development:

- When the plans were presented in 2011 the Education Authority objected on the basis that there was a historic 'notification' that earmarked the land for a possible school playing field tied to the 'footprint' for a new school. This was withdrawn in 2012 once 1500 square meters was identified for a school should the need arise.
- A dispute through 2013 over the appropriate length of lease which also impacted on Wren's ability to support the project from its current funding round.
- Efforts to secure QE2 status that were only realised in August 2013 and impacted on the granting of the lease.
- An objection from a local landowner – who acquired the neighbouring field and insisted that he had access rights across the proposed development site – and who adopted an aggressive approach which threatened the whole project for a period of time until the local authority built an alternative access route at its own expense.

Further challenges included: an initial excavation revealing extensive rock lying beneath the sub soil; a supposedly defunct pipeline carrying a live signal which had not been revealed by surveys; and searches and roots from protected trees requiring the building of a gabion wall.

Adjustments to overcome these issues inevitably impacted on the cost of the development which could not have been met without the understanding and support of Sport England who were able to meet the shortfall and allow the field to be levelled. Even after this, progress was delayed by drainage issues – although this had a silver lining in that a new Wren Recycling's funding round became open which helped fund landscaping and path building.

“OBSTACLES WERE COMING UP ONE AFTER ANOTHER”

LES FOOTITT

BUSINESS PLANNING

The project benefited from extensive community consultation and the building of partnerships with various organisations who are keen to make use of the facility. The target is to have over 12,000 users in the first three years of operation, based on:

- Two adult teams and one junior team using the pitch in year one with an additional junior team in year 2.
- School usage figures are based on four classes accessing the field twice a week for an hour of curriculum PE and an hour after school / lunch time PE for 15 weeks of the year particularly after Easter when weather is better.
- Additional casual usage of the pathways and gym equipment surrounding the field as well as community field days.

This will be supported by a mixture of ongoing fundraising activity and commercial revenue related to rental of the field at a rate of £50 per game for senior matches and £30 per game for junior matches generating income of £700 from one senior and one junior team's use of the pitch in a season.

The local school, as a prime user of the field will also hopefully be making a contribution towards maintenance costs, which will assist with ongoing sustainability whilst COGS itself will continue its successful programme of fundraising in order to support the maintenance and further development of the site.

As the site is only part operational and there will be a 12 month period after the work is completed when only light use will be made of the new pitch to enable the turf to fully bed in this will provide an opportunity to refine the business plan, income and expenditure projections and future development plans.

INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT

The main institutional support for the project came through local authority support for the planning application and helping to negotiate both the initial asset transfer and subsequent access rights.

THE FUTURE

COGS hope the site will open at the end of October although a 'community celebration' and launch exhibition football match is planned for autumn of 2017 and some occasional community events may take place before formal operation begins. In the meantime it is hoped that the pathways and exercise equipment will be used by the wider community. To support the site in the future, there are tentative plans for the development of changing facilities.

USP

The Furness Vale Field project stands out because of the sheer determination of its backers to see the job through in the face of what at times must have seemed like unrelenting obstacles. The seemingly simple task of levelling a field has taken ten years to come to fruition. It would not have done so without the commitment, goodwill and community spirit of those that had a vision and saw it through.

"SINCE THE PROJECT STARTED IN 2007, ANOTHER 10 YEARS HAVE PASSED AND ANOTHER GENERATION OF CHILDREN HAVE BEEN AND GONE THROUGH FURNESS VALE WITHOUT ANY SPORT FACILITIES."

TERRY WATSON



An activity trail gives local residents access to exercise equipment, right on their doorstep



OTHER STRATEGIC OUTCOMES

Participation – Target Groups:

The development helped meet the local open space, sport and recreation strategy by transforming it from tier two, 'low quality provision'; helping to create junior provision – a strategic priority for the council and FA; and supporting dual use with local schools. The development will help to address these issues by providing local capacity for both senior and junior participation in football, PE and other physical activity that simply didn't exist before.

Health and Well Being: As well as the general health and fitness benefits that all participants will obtain from exercise on the site the provision of open green space with opportunities for social engagement provided by park furniture and exercise equipment will help to encourage an active lifestyle and appreciation of green space which has been shown to improve levels of well-being.

Personal Development: This project has been driven by local people who have taken on a range of important leadership roles with significant responsibility that have at times led to the learning of new skills and generated fresh experiences. COGS remains an entirely voluntary and local group that provides opportunities for personal growth beyond the sporting opportunities that the Field will deliver.

“CHALLENGE OF TAKING ON AUTHORITIES AND PROVING THAT WE CAN DO IT AND BEATING “BIG BROTHER.”

LES FOOTITT

Economic Development: Committed to use local contractors where possible.

NEW WAYS OF WORKING

The project has been characterized from the start by the commitment and vision of local people who had an interest in the site and the potential for its wider usage. Whilst this began with a desire amongst former football players to bring the pitch back into use the building of support through the annual Field Day enabled people with different interests to become involved and for the purpose of the project to be widened beyond football.

NEW TYPES OF ORGANISATION

COGS is a genuine community led organisation that was inspired by local hopes, aspirations and needs. It is that local interest that has sustained it.

INNOVATIONS

The building of a pathway that circumnavigates the pitch to enable those who do not play football to make use of the site whether to walk their dogs, make use of the personal exercise equipment or tend the flower beds. In this way the football pitch has become a catalyst for both community involvement but also wider increases in physical activity.



LEARNING FROM FURNESS VALE

WHAT OTHERS CAN LEARN

- Expect the unexpected
- The need for commitment of a good group of people with specialist knowledge

“KEEP GOING - EVERY PERSON WHO HAS BEEN INVOLVED HAS RETAINED THE PASSION EVEN THOUGH THE PROJECT HAS BEEN GOING ON FOR 10 YEARS.”

SUZANNE LOMAS

WHAT THEY WOULD DO DIFFERENTLY

- “Don’t do it... haha!”
- Be better prepared for local authority bureaucracy
- Align contractor payments to Sport England payments especially initial payments
- Where possible and practical more detailed surveying/test drilling

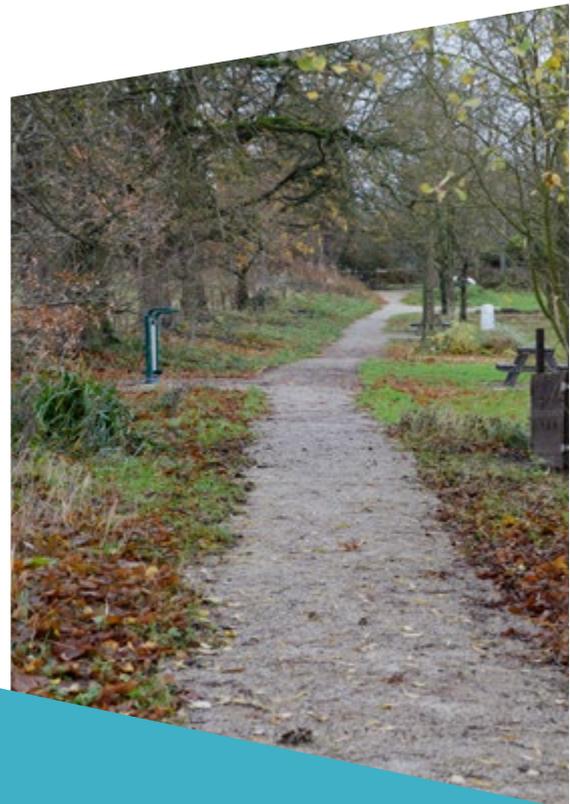
GOOD PRACTICE

- Get as many other people as possible involved/diverse group with depth of knowledge
- Important to attend council meetings and get opposition councillors on board. Use local knowledge / influence to your advantage
- Get the community involved and let them know the impact that it will have

LEARNING FOR ENABLERS

Sport England

- Better to provide guidance on tender processes/contractor selection than to provide list of approved contractors.
- Granting the money and saying ‘there you go, it’s going to be a long journey’ was good and wise counsel. If it is possible to give more assurances from the outset with regards to extra (financial) help being available to address major unforeseeable problems, would have helped further support the project. This may also soothe the concerns of other groups who may have reservations/uncertainties.
- Provide funds for physical feasibility survey/test drilling for playing field sites
- Don’t focus on the organisation driving the project but the people around it and whether they are in for the long haul.



Sport England
21 Bloomsbury Street
London WC1B 3HF

[sportengland.org](https://www.sportengland.org)