

Charles Burrell Centre

The former school site increasing job and skills opportunities in rural Norfolk



Organisation type:

Community hub

Location:

Thetford, Norfolk

Award date:

2017

Award amount: **£112,500**
Ownership: **Community Benefit Society**

Grant purpose

Transform unused space in an old school building into a rentable space for the local community, voluntary groups, local businesses and independents to help improve skills development, tackle social isolation and foster community cohesion.

Broad community impact

With more immigration to the area, the Charles Burrell Centre works hard to strengthen community relations. They run a Portuguese newspaper and Polish language school amongst other things.

Improved social inclusion

The Charles Burrell Centre aims to address skills deprivation in the rural Norfolk market town by opening job opportunities, training and support for local businesses.

Helping other community businesses to thrive

Saved from demolition, the former school building is home to over 40 organisations including a foodbank, an affordable toy library service, to the office of the local MP.

Thetford, a small market town in rural Norfolk, is rich in history and environmental assets, made famous as it was the filming location for the popular 'Dad's Army' TV series, which often brings tourists along to the town. However much of Thetford sits within the top 10% most deprived in the UK, wages are low and skills attainment is a particular issue for local people. Most jobs opportunities locally are low skilled and low paid, with agriculture and manufacturing jobs dominating. Transport is also tricky, with the nearest city Norwich being 30 miles away, leaving many residents disconnected and far from employment opportunities.

This gap intensified when the local population increased dramatically in the 50s and 60s, with London overspill turning Thetford from a sleepy 4,000 strong market town to near 30,000. Immigration to the area has also seen an increase too, with many residents from Portugal and Eastern Europe, which has increased tensions over an already scarce job and resource market.

That's why the aim of [Charles Burrell Centre](#) has always been about creating opportunities through jobs, support for local businesses and developing valuable skills. Formerly a school for over 50 years, the Charles Burrell Centre is a well-known and loved location. When local people, including many ex-students, heard the site was due to be demolished in 2013, they rallied together and lobbied Norfolk County Council to make the site available for community use. They successfully secured a 30-year lease in 2014 and since its 85,000 square feet of space has accommodated 40 organisations, playing fields and tennis courts and welcomed local people.

Power to Change awarded a £112,500 grant to transform unused and unoccupied parts of the old school building, including former changing rooms and library, into small affordable rentable units for local businesses. This will increase the range of employment opportunities in the local area and increase the income of the business. Since the refurbishment, the number of bookings for the main hall have significantly increased, and the centre also managed to raise £2,500 through their innovative idea of sponsoring a chair.

Making a difference to real people

The Charles Burrell Centre aims to make a real difference by creating employment and skills opportunities for local people. It is estimated that over 100 jobs have been created or ring fenced to the centre and its tenants, and over 400 adults have completed courses in higher education since the centre opened.

On top of this, the centre offers valuable services to those who are feeling the effects of poverty. The Thetford Toy Library offers a low-cost toy loan service for local families and daily low cost stay and play sessions for parents, and there is a foodbank on site, meeting rising demand in the local area.

Community Control

You can become a member at the centre for £1. This membership allows everyone in the community a vote to elect their board of directors at the AGM, making sure there are always three representatives from the local Town Council, three tenant representatives and three people appointed with specific skills and local community representatives.