



Bury Village Greens Co-op

Village Greens are a community-owned co-operative, set up in 2014 in the heart of Prestwich Village. They offer an alternative to large supermarkets – providing local organic produce to help the Prestwich community lead healthy, happy and sustainable lives. Village Greens endeavour to trade honestly and ethically with all growers, producers and suppliers, sourcing organic, local and fair-trade goods from sustainable sources where possible, including local artisan producers. They are currently owned by over 600 members.

In addition to the shop, through their Community Fridge they have collected and redistributed over 57,000 meals to local residents, helping to tackle food poverty and making a CO2 saving of 90 tonnes from food diverted from landfill.

Since setting up in 2014 until June 2025, Village Greens had their shop site at the Longfield Centre in Prestwich Village. However, due to the upcoming demolition and major £100m redevelopment of the Longfield Centre site, Village Greens had to find a new home or face closing the business. The Board proposed to members that it was the right time to try and find a larger premises to expand the business. Members voted in favour of the move.

Village Greens set their hearts on a newer, larger premises very nearby in Prestwich Village and mobilised an impressive volunteer workforce through their membership to support staff with the move. They successfully crowdfunded £17,000, but with contractual delays, higher than expected legal fees, expensive problems discovered with the flooring and having to pay 3 months rent upfront left them with a significant financial shortfall and the very real risk that they might have to close the business. Owen from the Bury VCFA Capacity Building team reached out to Rachel from Village Greens board to look at potential solutions.

E26 Thematic Areas:

Thematic area of support: Financial Support, Collaborative Networks and Innovation

Type of delivery: Access to Specialists, Collaborative Networks and Innovation

Initially, Village Greens were hoping to secure a large grant to cover the shortfall but this was not a realistic option, particularly with the added pressure of a tight timeframe. Owen advised Village Greens to consider applying for social investment to help them access the finance they needed to bridge the gap, explaining the application process and what it would entail. After getting the green light from Village Greens, Owen facilitated an introduction with the social investment team at KeyFund who worked with the management team at Village Greens to develop an ultimately successful funding application. In June, Village Greens were delighted to receive an investment of £65,000 (£50,000 repayable loan and a £15,000 grant).

With this vital financial support, Village Greens managed to complete their move to the larger premises, which includes a café space, a larger shop floor and also a welcoming Community Space for local community groups to run workshops, meetups, talks and classes.

At Bury VCFA's November AGM, as part of a showcase of local social enterprises supported through the E26 Social Economy Support Programme, we invited Village Greens to come and present to a packed room of over 100 VCFA members, talking about their journey as a co-op, moving to the larger premises, the support they'd had from Bury VCFA, KeyFund, and their future plans.

Following the AGM, we were very privileged to be the first booking in the newly completed Community Space at Village Greens, where we hosted a successful networking and learning event for 12 Bury-based social economy organisations. This event had a food and drink theme, with Village Greens providing the catering and sharing their story of making the leap to the larger premises, and also spotlighting a local social enterprise in Ramsbottom selling low/no alcohol drinks. The event provided a space for local organisations to develop collaborative relationships and explore opportunities for innovative partnership work.



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We have also supported Village Greens to gain access to a refurbished laptop through Bury Council's digital inclusion team, to help with administering and managing their Community Fridge and Meeting Space. We are now signposting local VCSE organisations looking for meeting space in Prestwich to Village Greens, supporting the development of the Community Space as an innovative and collaborative space for community organisations to make use of. Going forwards we will continue to work collaboratively with Village Greens to help them build volunteer capacity through our training and support them to develop a vibrant community hub at their new and improved premises in Prestwich Village.

E26-specific outcomes:

- 5 part-time (2 FTE) roles safeguarded through supporting them to access social investment at a critical time when the business was at risk of having to pause or close its operation

Wider non E26-specific outcomes:

- Raising awareness and profile of Village Greens in Bury through inviting them to present at Bury VCFA's AGM to an audience of 100+ VCSE organisations and collaborating with them to host a social economy networking event at their store
- Supporting Village Greens to access a refurbished laptop to enable them to manage and administer their community offer (fridge and the meeting space)

Insights and Lessons:

Challenges of moving premises and the likelihood of costs coming in higher than expected in the current climate. But there is always a leap of faith with this kind of thing. If Village Greens had known the full costs before starting, would they have gone ahead with the move in the first place?

Consider a wide range of funding initiatives – besides the reserves Village Greens have built up as a co-op social enterprise, they successfully leveraged a Crowdfund campaign and also raised social investment to help them get the move over the line and keeping the business going.

Reflections:

"Thanks so much to Owen and the team at Bury VCFA for all the support this year, helping us through a very challenging time with the premises move. If we hadn't been connected to KeyFund through VCFA and secured that crucial investment funding, the financial shortfall would have put the business at serious risk. Now that we're fully up and running in our new space, we look forward to working together on future events, developing our community offer and building capacity internally for our staff and wonderful volunteers"

Link: <https://www.village-greens-coop.co.uk/>

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