

HTC Big Local



Hill Top and Caldwell Big Local Final Report

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Summary: HTC Big Local

It's 10 years since Big Local came to Hill Top and Caldwell. In that time, we have made some great achievements and undertaken some wonderful projects, all made possible through partnership with local people. Big Local in the HTC area formally comes to an end in March 2026 though Local Trust, our funder, wants us to finish our spending six months before that, so most of our activities will be coming to an end in September 2025. In light of this we thought it would be worthwhile to remind ourselves and share with you, our residents and partner organisations, some of the great things we have achieved together over these past 10 years.

What is HTC Big Local?

You will have heard the name and perhaps participated in some of events and activities, but you may have wondered exactly what Big Local is. Hill Top and Caldwell Big Local, or HTC Big Local for short, was launched in 2015 after a period of consultation and discussion about the appropriate priorities of the project. There have been 150 Big Locals nationwide and what they all have in common is that they were launched in some of the most disadvantaged communities in England, they all had a defined geographical area, and each had a grant of £1 million to spend over 10 years on projects and activities that could make a real and long-lasting change to those neighbourhoods. Grants were made available from a central organisation called Local Trust who have overseen and administered the programme nationally on behalf of the National Lottery Community Fund. What has made Big Local's different from other initiatives is that they are directly driven from within the communities they serve, all being led by a group of residents, called a Partnership, who receive expert support and help from a Locally Trusted Organisation (LTO) appointed by the residents themselves.

This Report

This report was compiled in the Spring of 2025 and is the result of conversations with residents, Partnership members and provider organisations. It is not meant as a definitive evaluation, but more a review of some of the highlights and an insight into some of HTC Big Local's lasting impacts and legacy.

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The HTC Big Local Area

Work on HTC Big Local started in 2012 when local organisations in Nuneaton, along with the Councils, worked together to apply for the money and to choose the exact geographical area. A Partnership group made up of residents was formed and work started to consult with residents to establish their priorities and to create the first plan which was formerly launched in 2015, marking the beginning of Big Local in the HTC area. Warwickshire and Solihull Community and Voluntary Action, better known locally as CAVA, were appointed as the LTO and have remained in this role throughout the project. As LTO they have been responsible for employing all staff and having an overview and responsibility for all contracts and every aspect of budgeting and finance management. Since the first plan there have been three more, each building on the achievements of the previous plans. The final plan was published in 2022, setting out the things we aimed to achieve before the culmination of the project in March 2026.



Vision and Priorities

Through engaging with residents and organisations working in the area the Partnership created a vision for the area and priorities based on people's aspirations and concerns and this formed the basis of a plan of action. Although the vision has developed over time the main priorities have remained consistent throughout the different plans.

The vision for the area produced as part of the final plan published in 2022 and which built on the previous vision was that:

Hill Top and Caldwell will be a place that its residents are proud of. Our beautiful green spaces will be used to their full potential to create an environment that enables our wellbeing and enhances our area. The area will be one where people from outside admire the community spirit. People will be enabled with wellbeing, learning and social opportunities in the community where they will be actively involved. Our young people, families and older people will be empowered to take advantage of and create activities and opportunities. The community will have a voice which is recognised as a force for positive change in the Hill Top and Caldwell area and community.

The priorities for Big Local growing out of our vision that have informed all the work we have done have been honed over time, but have focussed around the following areas:

- Community health and wellbeing
- Pride in the local environment and local area
- Children and young people
- The cost of living
- Skills and employability.

These priorities have helped us focus our plans and allocate money to projects which we went on to deliver and which we believed would make a difference.

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Hill Top and Caldwell Big Local Overview and Achievements 2015 - 2025

Priority Area 1: Community Health and Wellbeing

The last 10 years has been a particularly challenging time for the health and wellbeing of residents, especially with the cost-of-living crisis and the outbreak of Covid in 2020. Nevertheless, HTC Big Local has continued to prioritise health and community wellbeing throughout the life of the project and helped make significant steps forward for the area. Health and wellbeing was clearly identified as a priority for HTC Big Local right from the start of the programme. Compared with other areas in Nuneaton and across the West Midlands, people suffered from worse health and had a higher-than-average incidence of diseases associated with poverty and low incomes. Feedback from our early consultations also indicated that isolation and loneliness was one of the biggest mental health issues facing residents, while people's general health was being made worse by high levels of inactivity and lack of access to affordable high-quality food, meaning that many families were going hungry, especially in school holiday times.

These findings meant that from the beginning of our programme, we prioritised creating community connections. With events and shared activities such as informal social gatherings, celebratory events, coffee mornings, family activities and educational activities as well as offering opportunities for people to come together on social outings and trips, we thought these were some of the best ways of reducing isolation and promoting community wellbeing.

Where possible we included food as part of our programmes, and developed partnerships with specialist providers such as Ediblelinks and more recently the County Council's Holiday Activities Fund (HAF) and Welfare Funds to give local people and families access to cheaper sources of healthy food.

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Community events and projects have included Community Fun Days at George Eliot and Oakwood Schools (in 2015, 2019 and 2022), *"The Big Read"*, a community festival run with Warwickshire Library Service based at Wembrook Community Centre (2024), and *"Imagine Bamboo"*, a programme of arts in partnership with Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council and arts organisation Imagineer, which brought world class artists to work with local people to the HTC area (2024). Our last big event was a fun day celebrating 10 years of Big Local which took place on August 2025.

Acquiring The Hub in 2021 meant we were able to expand the range and quantity of activities, and we could think about establishing regular drop-in sessions as well as more specialist activities.

We have provided a range of food related projects such as cook and eat sessions and a slow cooker course and that have given residents access to the skills needed to eat healthily on a low budget. To get people more physically active we developed a range of activities designed to get people out of the house and doing more exercise such as our recent Mason's Mile project which aims to get people walking, and our partnership with the Pingles Leisure Centre in 2018 to promote the Passport to Leisure scheme, giving residents 6 months free access to health and fitness sessions. Working with health providers such as the Nuneaton Primary Care Network throughout 2024-25 has also meant we have been able to bring in health specialists to provide targeted health sessions to raise awareness, increase children's immunisations and provide targeted healthy heart checks.



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Key case study: Establishing the HTC Big Local Hub

In the first few years of Big Local all our activities were hosted in partner venues such as Wembrook Community Centre and All Saints Parish Church, however we realised that we needed to grow and expand the range, regularity and number of activities but we were hampered by not having access to venues that were available when we needed them. The Partnership realised that we needed to develop our own venue and centre of operations that could also act as a family oriented, welcoming space.

Situated in a former shop unit at the top of the estate on Donnithorne Avenue, The Hub has two community rooms as well as an office and a kitchen area. It opened in Spring 2021 and has provided the main venue for Big Local activities since then. According to Ann, a local resident volunteer and former chair of the Partnership, the Hub has been a *"lifeline"* to many and *"a place of sanctuary and friendship"*. She said that for herself it had been somewhere to come to break the isolation and loneliness and that it provided an opportunity to *"participate in projects that would otherwise have been out of reach"*. Many conversations we had while compiling this report have cited The Hub as being the single most important achievement of HTC Big Local. It has meant that we have been able to host regular social events such as *'Social Brew'*, our weekly coffee and chat session, and more recently the Monday morning *'Warm Hub'* giving residents a warm place to meet and socialise and enjoy a low-cost hearty breakfast.

Having access to The Hub has also meant that we have been able to respond directly to residents' requests and develop programmes of activities which people have been able to attend regularly. The comments of one resident and Hub regular, Steph, show how much people value having activities locally provided in a welcoming space. She said that as well as attending the weekly coffee morning on a regular basis, she had attended the Knitting Club, Chair Yoga, The Mason Mile and the slow cooker course, and that the sessions at The Hub had given her *"the confidence to get out of the house and meet people, to find out what is going on"*, and *"to get involved and help out"*. More importantly they had made a significant difference to her life. She said that for example, the slow cooker course had given her the confidence to try things out and to even save money *"I even made a loaf of bread for 42 pence!"*

One local resident and former Partnership member, Joanne echoes the words of many we talked to about the impact that The Hub has made. *"Before I discovered the Big Local, and the group at The Hub, I was cut off from the world. It has made a life changing difference for me; without it I would be stuck at home suffering depression".*

Key Case Study: Working with Think Active

Having access to The Hub has also meant that we have been able to attract partner organisations to have a base in the area which has significantly increased their impact as well increase opportunities for local people to improve their health and wellbeing. One of these organisations is Think Active, the physical activity development agency for Warwickshire and Solihull funded by Sport England. Since we funded them to work directly in the area in March 2024 their Partnership Manager for Northern Warwickshire, Matt McCarthy, has been based for one day a week in the HTC area. His main role has been to connect residents of the area with physical activity opportunities but just as importantly his role has been to engage with residents and to get them to think more widely about their health. One of his key engagement activities was his hosting of a monthly Think Active coffee morning at The Hub which he used as a showcase for lots of activities and opportunities. The highlight of the session was always the fun seated exercise session which started the class but from there, conversation would always lead into other things residents would like to try.

Matt says that the key to his success has been *"the chance to meet local people directly and listen to what they wanted and to respond to their needs...One thing people were saying is that they wanted a physical connection to their local NHS, so within my role, I contacted the local Primary Care Network, and George Eliot Hospital, and they brought the Healthy Heart Bus to one of the coffee mornings".* Another key role that Matt has had is to bring other physical activity providers into the area. *"National governing bodies of sport would often contact us with opportunities they could offer to priority areas such as Hill Top and Caldwell and through one such initiative we have been able to get the Warwickshire Cricket Foundation to work with several schools in the area offering tuition and coaching".* The result of the work with Think Active has been to significantly increase the opportunities to engage in physical activity. Many of the opportunities Matt has pioneered will continue after Big Local finishes and Matt will continue to be a link for community members in the area.

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Priority Area 2: Pride in the Local Environment and Local Area

One of the striking things about Hill Top and Caldwell is the level of pride people have in their community and particularly in its appearance. The Partnership has always prioritised investment in the local environment and has encouraged and organised community efforts such as litter picks to improve it. Community concern for environment and nature seems to have been strengthened as a reaction to recent building developments adjacent to the estate which residents believe has endangered habitats for animals and insects. People's experiences during Covid when they were able to make more use of green spaces was also a key factor and has led to a renewed interest and valuing of the local environment.

A survey we carried out with 176 people in 2022 showed that although people valued their green spaces they were concerned about threats to nature from new developments and about levels of litter. They overwhelmingly wanted to see improvements to their parks and play areas as well as opportunities to improve the natural environment and nature conservation.

Key Case Study: Sorrell Road Park Improvements

As a result of residents' aspiration for improved parks and green spaces, our final plan in 2022 confirmed the long-standing commitment to our green spaces with an allocation of £75,000 for enhancing our parks and green spaces, as well as money set aside to prioritise efforts to tidy up the estate and enhance nature areas.

We were always keen on putting a considerable investment into the enhancing of facilities for children in parks. Originally focussing on the Middlemarch Park and play area, our sights shifted to Sorrell Road on the advice of the Borough Council. As a result of our planned investment, Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough Council decided to more than match our spending commitment and promised a further £150,000 to the project from its UK Shared Prosperity Fund allocation; owing to underspend elsewhere we were able to increase our allocation to £100,000. According to Alison Thompson, Area Manager for the North area of CAVA, and LTO lead for the Big Local says, *"This was a huge achievement for us, as this is money that could have been spent anywhere in the Borough, but as a result of our commitment to the project, the Council decided to invest in the HTC area"*.

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It took considerable time to get the project underway as we were depending on the Council to manage the project and we had to work within their timescales. We started formulating plans for the enhancement in the play area from early on in our existence, and when we finally settled on the Sorrell Road Park, plans started to move forward fast.

In the summer of 2024, we hosted a public consultation at The Hub with Council colleagues and organised another consultation with young people at Wembrook Youth Club, where the final designs and layout were enhanced and agreed with local input. The new Sorrell Road enhancement with its brand-new play area and equipment was opened by Nuneaton's Mayor, ably supported by Amelia, one of our younger HTC residents in May 2025, at a community celebration held to celebrate the occasion.



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Residents who have been involved in the development are justifiably proud, as Joanne a local resident and a former Partnership member said, *"The park has made a massive impact on people, it has achieved everything that people wanted!"*.

And what about the young people who use it, what do they think? All the children we talked to have been extremely positive about it. One young park user said, *"I never used to come down to the park, but now I am here all the time!"* While another commented *"I really love the park, I come here with all my friends"*. And their favourite piece of equipment? Without hesitation, *"The Zip Wire!"* the group we talked to all shouted in unison.

Gary, a volunteer at The Hub and chair of the new Unity Community Association said *"The play area has been great – I have never seen so many kids using it! It's just choca all the time. It's the greatest change we have made to the area, and it's been very positive"*.

Key Case study: Working with Warwickshire Wildlife Trust

In recent years we have been aware of growing concern for the environment, not least because of the impact of industrial and housing development in the area, particularly the building of a brand-new warehouse on the edge of the neighbourhood.

As a result of these concerns and the wish of residents to do something to improve the situation for nature locally, we invited Warwickshire Wildlife Trust (WWT), the leading local conservation organisation dedicated to bringing people closer to nature, into the area in 2024 and commissioned them more extensively to work with residents to develop strategies to improve the environment.

Lee Copplestone, who works as a Community Organiser for WWT, spends a lot of time listening to people's concerns and talking to them about what they would like to see. *"Residents talk about the loss of bats, and badgers and foxes and how that's changed the landscape for them, but we have also tried to encourage them to value the wildlife they do still have, and the fact that some of it is still thriving, and to think about the actions they could take locally that would help nature thrive even more and to come back into their gardens and into the green space as they want them to. But the sense of loss is so strong"*.

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One of the initiatives that was successful was an evening 'Bat Walk' that attracted 18 local people, they have also done 'Water Vole Stakeouts', nature walks and recorded oral histories with residents about their memories of nature in the area growing up, as well as organise more direct action such as litter picks and a river clean up.

Alongside their work with adults we also commissioned WWT Education Team to run regular outdoor nature education and awareness sessions aimed at children and young families during holiday times. The 'Wembrook Explorers', named after the Wembrook woods where we run the sessions, have been running at Easter and during the half-term holidays for 3 years and in 2024 and 2025 this was expanded to include weekly sessions in the summer holidays. Through these sessions children and families have been encouraged to explore outdoors, take risks to learn further and have been given a deeper insight into the nature of the local area and what the local green spaces have to offer.

WWT Education Officer Katie Young said about the Explorers sessions, *"Our biggest successes have been having returning participants over our sessions, with local people commenting on how they had never strayed from the path over to the stream before. It has been a delight to encourage families to explore their local spaces fully and not just as a throughfare and show them that it is easy and simple to have fun in the outdoors"*.

Rosie Charter, the WWT Health and Wellbeing Officer and lead worker for the HTC area, reflected that it's a difficult job to motivate people to prioritise nature activities and that some of the activities that have worked best have been the ones where they were able to work with existing activities such as the Social Brew or the Warm Hub. But as Anna Wright the Health and Wellbeing Manager said, *"Engaging with people's concern about the decline in nature and then getting them to a position where they can take action for nature is a long process"*. She believes they have made some important steps, and she says that they intend to find a way to continue to build on them after HTC Big Local has finished.



Priority Area 3: Young People

Throughout the programme we have maintained our strong commitment to young people, as one former Partnership member commented, *"Young people are our future, and they deserve the best start we can give them"*.

At a time of reducing government budgets for youth work, we have maintained our spending on out-of-school activities for young people and families. For the younger age group, we have continued running fun activities in the holidays such as craft sessions and subsidised family trips as well commissioned targeted outdoor education holiday schemes through the Explorers programme.

For the older 8-16 age group we supported a weekly youth club at Wembrook Community Centre firstly run by Nuneaton and Bedworth Leisure Trust and more recently through community-based organisation, The Positive Impact Foundation who have expanded and extended the programme though accessing alternative funding. We have also supported Positive Impact to deliver holiday sports activities for young people and in 2025 they developed a girls youth club running at The Hub with our support. Over the last three years we were also able to commission local organisation Aspire in Arts to develop specialist arts-based holiday projects giving young people access to a range of activities, equipment and media.

Key Case Study: Working with Aspire In Arts

As a youth organisation based in Nuneaton, Aspire in Arts (AiA) have a strong commitment to the area and they run a Youth Arts Hub in Nuneaton town centre giving young people access to a range of arts and media activities and equipment, ranging from DJing to music and video production, digital media and visual arts and crafts.

Since 2023 HTC Big Local has been able to commission them to run arts-based youth activities from The Hub during holiday times and this year we were able to extend this for them to run sessions weekly from May half-term right the way through the Summer.

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In 2023 they ran a mainly visual arts projects from The Hub resulting in a mural in The Hubs courtyard; in 2024 we were able to bring a range of activities for the young people to try out including, t-shirt printing, decorating tote bags, DJing and even boxing, working with partner organisation Boxing Clever. In 2025 we wanted to invest in a longer project which would be able to have even stronger outcomes. As their Creative Programmes Director, Kirsty Lowrie explained, *"We wanted to do something different with them this year, so instead of running a programme with a range of separate arts activities we wanted to establish a group that would be able to work together on a collaborative project to produce a video celebrating the area. This would enable us to bring a range of arts workers in with different skills and potentially give the young people a more in-depth experience."*

And has the work with Aspire in Arts made a difference? In the early days we struggled to get young people to book into sessions and come along. As AiA youth worker Leyla Campbell explained *"We had to go out on the streets and bring young people in"*. According to Leyla lots of young people are put off by the word 'art' and lack confidence, thinking that it is not something that is meant for them.



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But once they get involved, they love it. *"So what we did was to go and recruit down the park, and do some work with them down there, and now they're queuing to come in before we even get there".* The arts sessions catered for a large age range of 8 to 16-year-olds, with the greatest majority being between 8 and 13. They have been popular, with many sessions attracting in excess of 20 young people every week. As Leyla commented, *"they love getting their hands dirty, doing arts and craft"* but what has been most important is their chance to talk and to be listened to. *"We always give them a chance to choose what they do, but talking while doing activity together gives us the chance to find out more about each other, what is going on at home, or at school, and if anyone has any problems, people can support them. They know the next week they know they have people to talk to."*

Kirsty explained that she believed the programme had been really successful and important for the young people attending and it would be great, going forward, if they could establish ongoing activity in the HTC area. But even if that is not possible, they have a new youth club starting at their youth arts hub in the town centre after the Big Local programme comes to an end aimed at the 8-13 age range, and she hopes it will be possible for at least some of the young people to attend there.

One parent whose child regularly attended AiA's session at The Hub over the past 3 years explained, *"What is special about Aspire in Arts is that they make all young people welcome, my daughter has just gained so much confidence in working with them".*

Key Case Study: Working with The Positive Impact Foundation

The Positive Impact Foundation (PIF) are a community-based organisation focussing on areas of disadvantage throughout Coventry and Warwickshire. Much of their work focusses on positive activities with children and young people in and out of school, although in the Hill Top and Caldwell area they have also developed work in Caldwell Lodge and The Grange Care Homes as well as running weekly sessions with adults in The Hub based on supporting and improving people's mental health and general wellbeing.

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"When we started working in the Big Local area in 2023 the youth club at Wembrook Community Centre had closed and there was no regular youth provision in the area", explains Leah Grant, Head of Foundation. "We were able to bring funding we already had from Warwickshire County Council which enabled us to reopen the youth club and run a weekly session for several months. When that funding ran out Big Local was able to step in with funding for several more months while we waited for the results of new funding applications from other sources, and they also agreed to fund us to run holiday activity sessions three days a week during the summer holidays in 2024".

They were so successful with their funding applications that when the money did come through, they were able to extend their youth club provision at Wembrook to two sessions a week, lasting until March 2026. They also now run 'summer camps' at Wembrook Community Centre during the summer holidays thanks to the County Council's 'Holiday Activities Fund' and in 2025 HTC Big Local were able to support them to repeat the sessions at Sorrell Road Park also. Thanks to funding from HTC Big Local they have also been able to run a girls youth club from The Hub once a week which started in February 2025. In 2025 they also started to run a Thursday wellbeing session from The Hub on the weeks when Think Active were not there.

Leah reflected that *"the work with young people has really gone very well and given us a chance to establish strong relationships with young people themselves as well as other youth providers such as Aspire in Arts and the local schools",* but what was unexpected was the developing relationship with adults who use The Hub as well. *"This has been a really nice journey for us on a Thursday morning which has led us to dropping in on sessions on Mondays and Tuesdays as well. It's nice to hear that is has been such a lifeline for some people. What started for us two years ago as mainly focussed on providing services for young people has led to us to building relationships across the community",* so much so that PIF are hoping to take over responsibility for The Hub when Big Local's lease runs out in September. *"This would be great for us as it would give us a base in the area, as well as the means for the local community to access the space to continue with their activities".* She wanted to assure residents that whatever happens with The Hub it will not change their commitment to the area. *"We feel really welcome here and we are really committed to continuing our work with young people and the wider community in the area for the foreseeable future."*



Priority Area 4: The Cost of Living

By any measure Hill Top and Caldwell is not a wealthy area. According to official statistics over 67% of residents are included in the indices of multiple deprivation as being in the top 30% of income deprived communities nationally, compared to the West Midlands average of 30%.

Throughout our programme we have recognised the cost of living is a huge issue for local people as well as a huge barrier to their participation in our programmes and social life in general. We have therefore always built this awareness into all our programmes, as well as specifically targeting initiatives which have aimed to keep costs down, such as giving people access to cheaper food through the Ediblelinks programme, the '*Family Food Bags for £1*' or supporting the weekly lunch clubs at Wembrook Community Centre in the early days of Big Local, and having a publicity drive for the Passport to Leisure, giving lower income families free or reduced cost access to the local leisure centres. Where possible we have provided free nutritious food as part of our events and with the introduction of the government funded HAF scheme we have been able to provide food as part of all our summer activity programmes for young people and families to counteract holiday hunger. In the early years of the programme, we were able to provide grants to families through our '*Helping Hands*' grants programme to enable them to make specific purchases which was really helpful to some struggling families. We also realised having access to free advice and guidance could be hugely beneficial to many of those struggling with debt or making applications for employment or welfare benefit, so we funded Bedworth, Rugby and Nuneaton Citizens Advice (BRANCAB) to come and run weekly advice sessions.

Key Case study: CAB Advice and Guidance

In 2021, as we emerged from the Covid pandemic we set up a partnership to work with Bedworth, Rugby and Nuneaton Citizens Advice Bureau (BRANCAB) to deliver advice sessions locally. This was a response to realising that as a result of changes in the way benefits were calculated and assessed, particularly Universal Credit and Personal Independence Payments, many people were not accessing the benefits or welfare support to which they were entitled. We also knew that Covid had specifically impacted on the lives and incomes of many local families, pushing them into poverty.

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In the four years of working with BRANCAB they have delivered regular advice sessions both at Wembrook Community Centre and at The Hub. In that time, they have supported 481 residents who directly accessed their services through these sessions, and the net worth of these activities in the HTC area has been calculated at over £500,000. This was the result of the reduction or removal of debt, through debt relief orders (DROs) or the increased amounts of benefits received. In 2024 alone the return on investment was £6.90 for every £1.00 of HTC funds used.

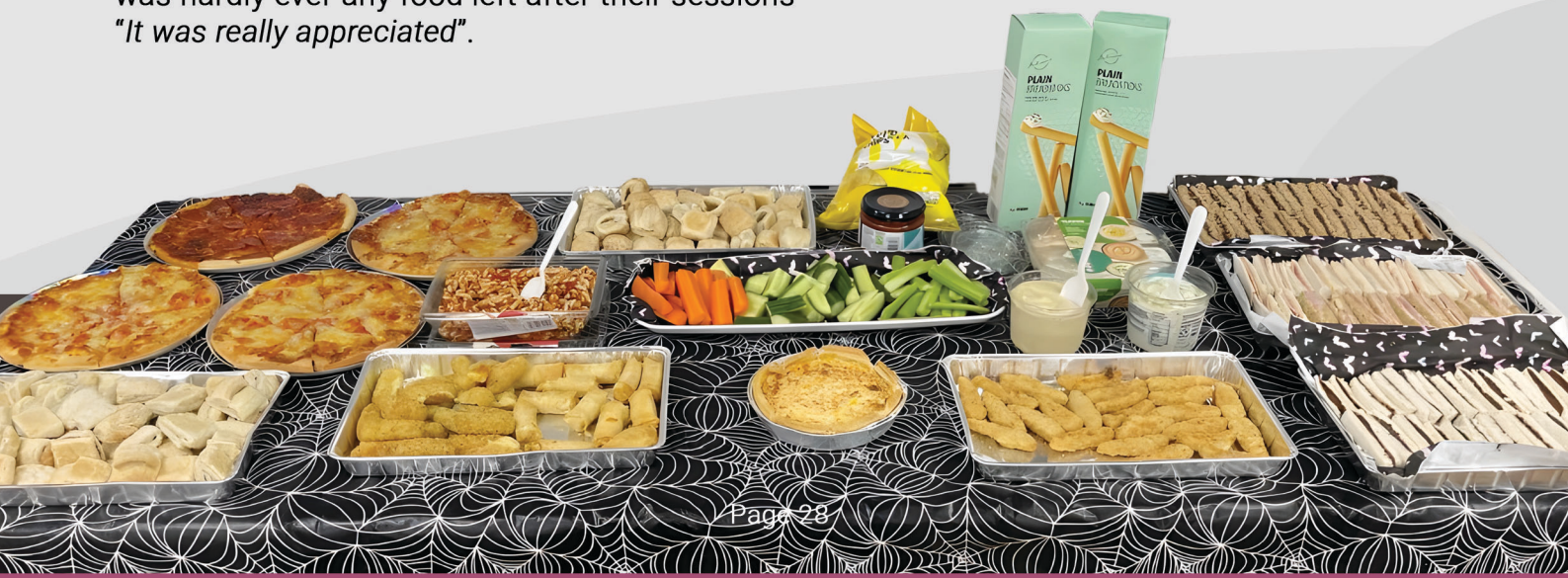
In 2023 they took over administering HTC Big Local's *'Helping Hands'* fund, meaning that grant support could be targeted directly to those most in need. Bill Basra, the Chief Executive of BRANCAB, said that basing the advice service locally as opposed to just running from an office in the centre of Nuneaton led to a huge rise in people accessing their service, as did linking their timetable to that of the Ediblelinks service and coffee mornings, so that people were able to access both services at the same time.

According to Bill one of the most significant impacts of the service has been on recipients' mental health, and emotional wellbeing. As Bill reflected, *"You can't underestimate how people's mental health and emotional wellbeing is affected by a degree of debt, it's the long-term benefit of feeling you have a grip on things, and you don't have to worry about the bailiff's knock on the door - that is the real impact of our service"*. Bill gave the example of three separate clients who, through debt counselling and support through *'Helping Hands'*, were given help to remove debts totalling £39,971. He also cited another case where a client was finding it hard managing on his state pension of £126 per week and asked if there was any other benefit he could possibly claim. A full benefit calculation was conducted with the client which showed he could be eligible for a pension credit top up; a claim was submitted and he was subsequently awarded £82 per week, resulting in an annual benefits increase of £4,264 per year. He also qualified for 100% council tax support, and as a result of being in receipt of pension credit he was also further awarded a £75 fuel voucher and a £60 shopping voucher from Warwickshire County Council.

Reflecting on the work over the last 4 years in the HTC area Bill commented on what he thought was one of the most significant impacts. *"I think the benefit to us has just been that ability to reach out to communities and probably in doing so, maybe engage in more preventative work as opposed to simply waiting for those issues to escalate when often it is too late"*.

Case Study: The Holiday Activities Fund

The Holiday Activities Fund (HAF) scheme is funded by the Department for Education (DfE) to provide young people who are in full-time education and eligible for benefits-related free school meals with access to enriching activities and meals, for free, during the three main school holidays. In Warwickshire, HAF funds a related scheme which enables organisations such as HTC Big Local to supplement their own funded activities during the summer holidays aimed at families and young people with free food where these activities are likely to include a majority of children eligible for free school meals. As a result of the HAF, we were awarded £5,300 in 2024 to supply packed lunches for families with children, and children and young people attending their projects throughout the summer, plus an additional £5,600 for that purpose in 2025. Alison Thompson, CAVA's LTO lead for Big Local commented *"Not only were we able to deliver freshly made food packs and picnic boxes directly to our project sessions which significantly impacted on reducing the effects of holiday hunger, we were also to get these made up and delivered by an small independent company based in the local area who themselves had a commitment to sourcing the ingredients from local suppliers where they could"*. Feedback from all our projects in response to the food packs was unreservedly positive. Katie Young, the Education Officer from WWT who ran the Wembrook Explorers sessions *"really appreciated being able to sit down together after the session to have a picnic, it really added to the experience"*, while Kirsty from Aspire in Arts commented that there was hardly ever any food left after their sessions - *"It was really appreciated"*.



Priority Area 5: Employability and Skills

One of the greatest legacies a programme like Big Local can leave after the programme has finished is the skills that people have learned through the project and the confidence and ability to continue to use them to further the interests of the community. Big Local as a national programme set out to empower local people to run their own Big Locals and where possible increase their voluntary capacity, utilising skills already in the community or supporting people to learn new ones. Where paid expertise has been deployed it has been to enhance or help residents to manage the process, not to take it over. Although *"Increasing opportunities for employment and skills"* was an early priority for HTC Big Local, *"Employability and capacity building"* has been built into the way Big Local runs, and working with residents to gain skills and confidence through volunteering with Big Local has continued throughout the programme and has been a bedrock in the way it has been delivered.

Gill Hutchinson, Local Area Advisor on behalf of Local Trust who manage the fund nationally explains *"It's about trying to expand the willingness and capacity to volunteer, and to foster that process"*. Throughout the programme volunteering has played a key role in making things happen, from the essential willingness to come to meetings to discuss strategy and make decisions to the willingness to get involved in the delivery of projects and in some cases even lead them.

Vivienne, a community member, volunteer and former Partnership member explained how the process had worked for her. *"I started coming to the coffee mornings and helping out and got involved like that. I was then asked to be on the Partnership, and I thought, why not? By being able to talk and put my own views across I was able to explain what the community wanted. It has given me confidence and connected me with more people. I used to be shy – but I'm not anymore"*. Viv explained how she attended the training for the Mason Mile, a project which aims to get local people to take the first steps towards physical activity and ended up volunteering to lead the guided walks, which she now does monthly. *"I would never have done that before, but it's given me the confidence to help people in the community"*.

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One testament to the effectiveness of the process in the HTC area is that residents are inspired to continue to work together to continue the work of Big Local. In 2025 the Unity Association community group was formed. Made up of several former Partnership members, Big Local volunteers and other community activists who were involved in HTC Big Local, Unity Association aims to continue hosting some of the activities that currently run at The Hub, such as the Warm Hub and Social Brew and also to develop a programme of events of their own.

As Sarah Deeming, HTC Big Local's Project Coordinator since September 2024 explained, *"There's a bunch of people who are energised through having worked with us, who just want to continue doing it because they're local people and they've got skills and confidence as a result of it"*.

The HTC Big Local Legacy

It was always important to the HTC Big Local Partnership that there would be a legacy for all their efforts. A legacy in terms of things they leave behind when the 10 years are complete but also a legacy in terms of the lasting impact the Big Local has made on the community.

Perhaps the most tangible legacy will be the Sorrell Road Park, thinks Alison Thompson. *"If it wasn't for Big Local committing the money to the Park in the first place the Council may not have invested that money in our area. But the fact that they did, means that residents have a fantastic facility in the area that will be there for many years to come"*.

Speaking to residents about what they think the legacy is, it's often the less tangible impacts they talk about such as the experiences they have had and the relationships they have forged, their learning and understanding from one another and their improved mental health through the support networks that have been established. As Jill, a Hub regular and former Partnership member said, *"It stopped me being lonely, it gave me a lifeline. I reconnected with friends I knew years ago, and I made new ones. It's been such fun; we have had some laughs!"*

HTC Big Local

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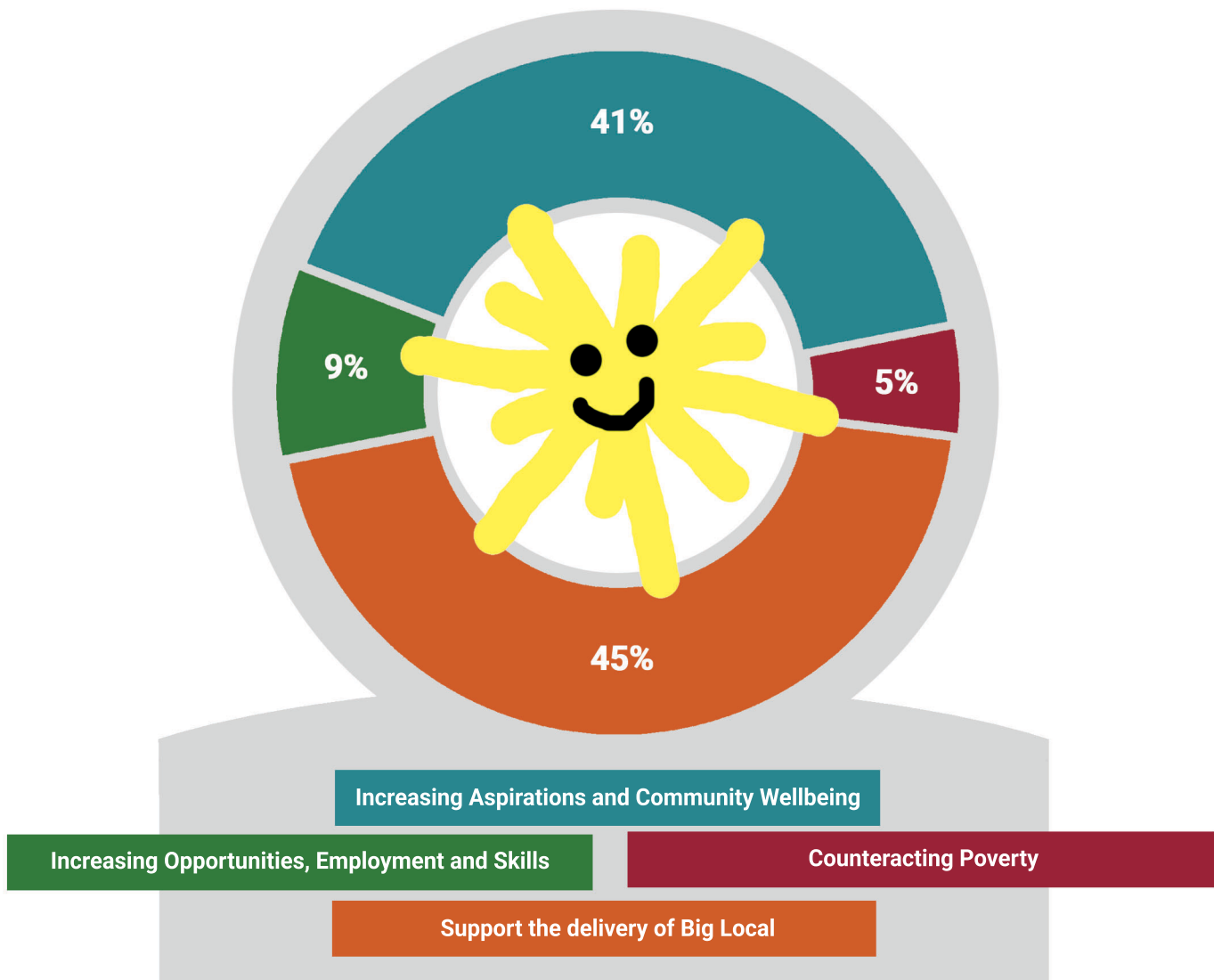
From a practical point of view some of the partnerships that have been made through the programme with service providers such as The Positive Impact Foundation, Think Active, Aspire in Arts and Warwickshire Wildlife Trust will leave a lasting legacy in terms both of the work already undertaken but also the possibility of future collaboration. Some of the work started during the Big Local is already continuing beyond the life of the project but more importantly the connections and conversations will continue, and new possibilities will emerge.

Equally as important however according to Gill Hutchinson, Local Area Advisor, is *"the changes that have been brought about in people themselves, and the hopes and ambitions that they still have for the area once Big Local has ended"*. One of these ambitions is obviously for a continuation of The Hub itself. Although the future of The Hub is yet to be confirmed, people feel very optimistic about the possibility. Gary, a local resident and newly elected chair for the Unity Association outlined their aspirations. *"We would like to keep things going at The Hub after Big Local finishes, it does depend on someone taking on the lease, but if it can continue, we will do our best to make it a success"*.

There is no doubt that if The Hub can continue, that in itself would be a great legacy for Big Local, but according to Sarah Deeming, Project Co-ordinator, the fact that there are residents who have the confidence to believe that they can take on running activities at The Hub and make a success of it *"is a tribute to the skills and confidence they have gained through being involved in Big Local."* Her thoughts were echoed by Gill Hutchinson. *"That's the legacy we are handing on, the potential for continuing some of the things that have been started or fermenting some of the things that can be built upon, that's the real legacy"*.

Big Local Spending 2015-2025

HTC Big Local Expenditure: August 2015 - September 2025



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Thanks

We would like to thank all of the volunteers, staff, partner organisations and elected members who have been involved in delivering the Hill Top and Caldwell Big Local. We would like to give particular mention to our core funder Local Trust and to Warwickshire and Solihull Community and Voluntary Action who have acted as our Locally Trusted Organisation throughout the programme.

Our Partner Organisations 2015-2025

All Saints Church	Mason Mile Foundation
All Saints School	Middlemarch School
Aspire in Arts	Nuneaton & Bedworth Borough Council: Communities
Barnardos: Riversley Park Children’s Centre	Nuneaton & Bedworth Borough Council: Parks & Green Spaces
Bedworth Rugby & Nuneaton Citizens Advice	Nuneaton & Bedworth Primary Care Network
Creation Station	Nuneaton & Bedworth Leisure Trust
Escape Arts	Nuneaton Foodbank
Everyone Active	Nuneaton Lawn Tennis Club
Feed the Hungry	Oakwood School
George Eliot School	P3
Hanover Glebe	Perfect Platters
Harry Shaw Coaches	Positive Impact Foundation
The Healthy Living Network	Reel People
Imagineer	STEM goes Wild
Little Saints Stay & Play	

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Sudden Impulse Theatre	Warwickshire Police
Sycamore Counselling	Warwickshire Welfare Rights
Think Active	Advice Service
Warwickshire Community and Voluntary Action	Warwickshire Wildlife Trust
Warwickshire County Council: Adult & Community Learning	Wembrook Community Centre
Warwickshire County Council: Communities	Wembrook School
Warwickshire County Council: Libraries	Wild Earth

Notes



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