

MORECAMBE BIG LOCAL



WE FAILED...

West End Morecambe Big Local REVIEW 2016-2026

Local Trust | Big Local



...TO ACHIEVE THE IMPOSSIBLE



Aerial photo of the West End,
the best end of Morecambe.

4. Big Local
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Welcome

You might find the title of this final review a little more provocative than you'd expect at the end of a ten-year community project. Surely, West End Morecambe Big Local (WEM) should just celebrate what it has achieved and put the rest down to learning? Well yes, WEM has done some sterling work, and much of its funded activity in the last six years has delivered positive, important, and impactful outcomes for the community. We are very proud of the projects that have worked and you can read about them here in the review. However, putting everything else down to learning too easily ignores the lessons learned, especially when some of the lessons have been as tough as what we've experienced.

The original goals of Big Local were to identify local needs and take action in response to them, to increase resident skills and confidence, and make a difference. The ultimate aim being that we will feel that the area 'is an even better place to live'. We honestly can't say if we have achieved that final goal and we wonder if it was ever possible for us to do that given the challenges faced.

So, whilst we absolutely celebrate what WEM has actually done we feel it's even more important to highlight what we've learnt. Some of that might be a bit awkward to hear, but it's vital to understand if we want to see progress and not waste the next opportunity that comes along – or one that is already here.

WEM may not have achieved the impossible, but we've achieved a great deal, helping others realise the possible along the way. Our thanks to all those who contributed along the way with ten years of effort and learning.

The WEM partnership

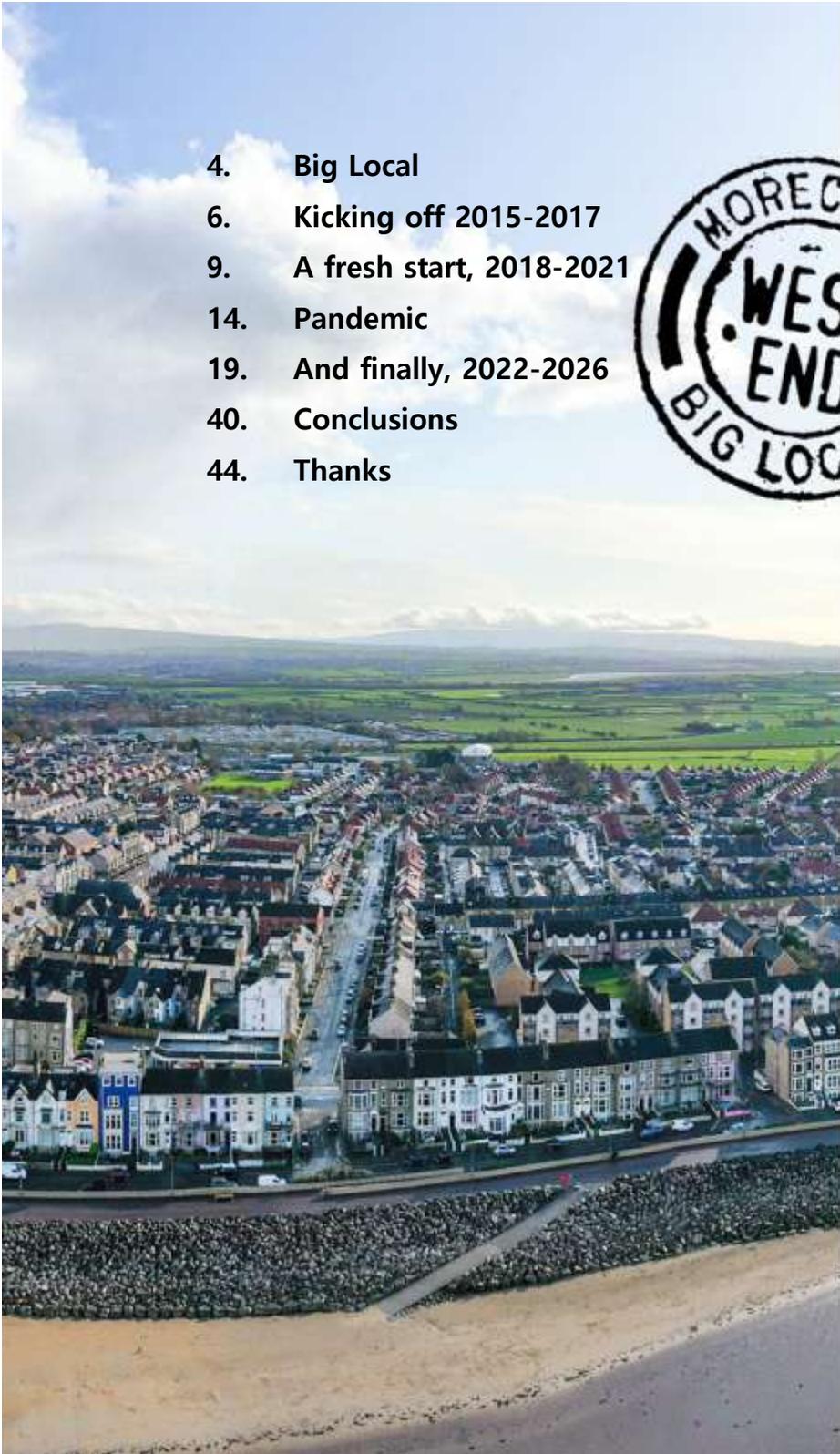


Image: JCDDRONES / West End Morecambe Big Local (WEM)



Big Local

West End Morecambe Big Local (WEM) has been one of 150 resident-led Big Local partnerships across the UK. Funded by the National Lottery, and overseen by Local Trust, the governing body. Each partnership was granted funding of £1.1 million, spread over ten years, to be delivered through Action Plans, developed by the partnership and approved by Local Trust. Each partnership received support from a Big Local representative, who attended meetings and offered advice. Support was also given by a Local Trusted Organisation (LTO) who were chosen by the partnership and paid a fixed % to oversee and administrate the finances.

Partnership members were responsible for agreeing to a shared vision based on needs in the community, creating an Action Plan to prioritise its work. The ethos always being to work collectively and to build positive relationships with others. One challenge faced by WEM from the start was the tension between finding a collective vision, based on resident's needs, and ambitions to get funding for individual interests – some almost feeling it was an inalienable right to have money.

It's fair to say that West End Million (and the later West End Morecambe Big Local) were just seen by the some as a pot of cash. The early years and grant giving presented the most challenging side of this. Morecambe's Big Local was not the only partnership to run into such challenges. Learning from what didn't work shifted WEM to commissioning work, based on the mandate of its Action Plan. That enabled far more successes, some of which you can read about later on.



By the start of 2026 West End Morecambe Big Local (WEM) has, amongst other things...

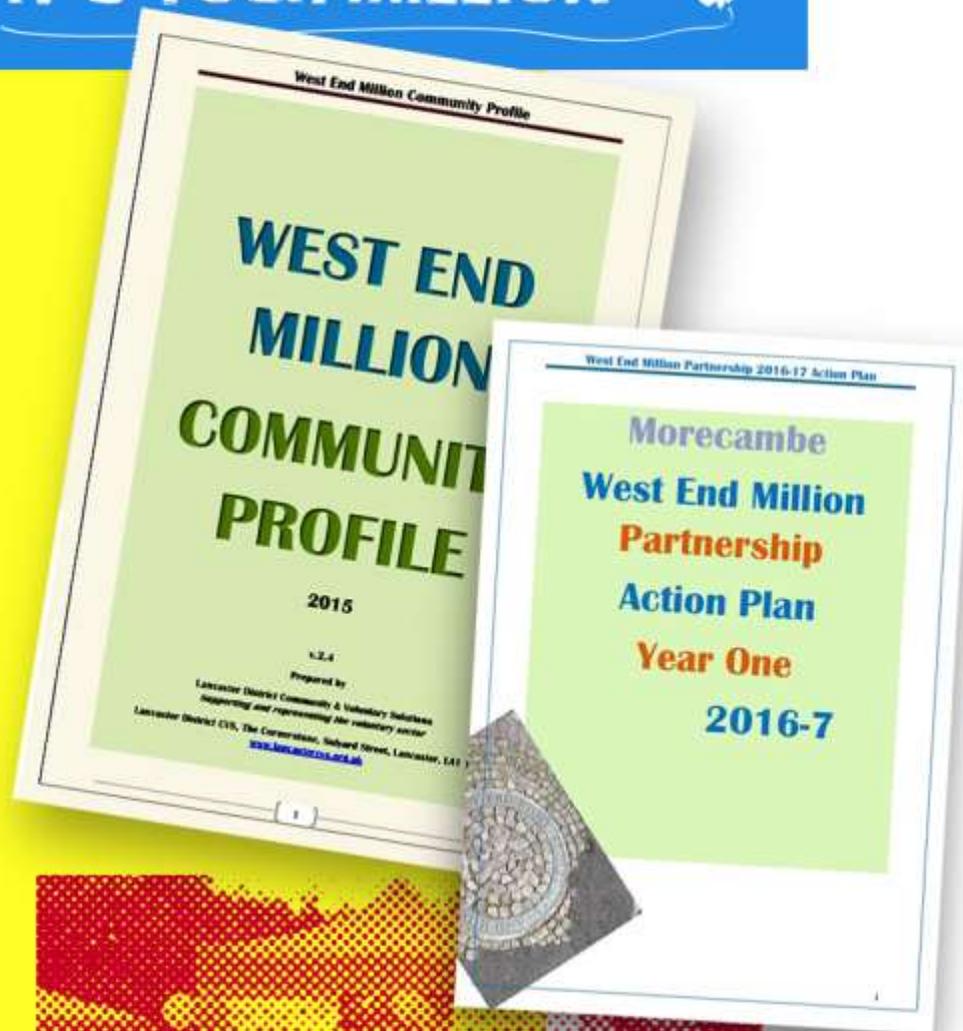
- **Helped 550+ children and families with home school computers.**
- **Brought in over half a million pounds additional funding to the West End.**
- **Initiated Morecambe's first Youth Conference.**
- **Funded mental health activity helping over 200+ people and seven youth organisations.**
- **Linked Morecambe & Lancaster College into the West End.**
- **Brought the West End's largest Community Centre into local ownership.**
- **Enabled children & young people to influence £67,000 of funding.**

- **Created a unique children's Eco-Garden project.**
- **Supported 100s of small grants to local groups and organisations.**
- **Delivered essential strategic support during Covid**
- **Achieved complete spend of its allocated funds on time.**
- **Aimed to reduce the fragmented local dynamic.**
- **Quietly helped with over 1600 Christmas dinners.**
- **Funded 1 squirrel**

But also...

- **Had 15% of our schedule drained by poor behaviour from less than thirty individuals & organisations**

IT'S YOUR WEST END,
IT'S YOUR MILLION



Kicking off

2012, December, applying to get Big Local

A steering group involving community partners began to draw together consultation and conversations in order to apply for a Big Local programme. Finding a clear direction took some time, but by July 2015 the group had put together a large 'Community Profile' and a proposal for delivering Big Local. The steering group did a lot of work and was eventually given the go-ahead from Local trust.

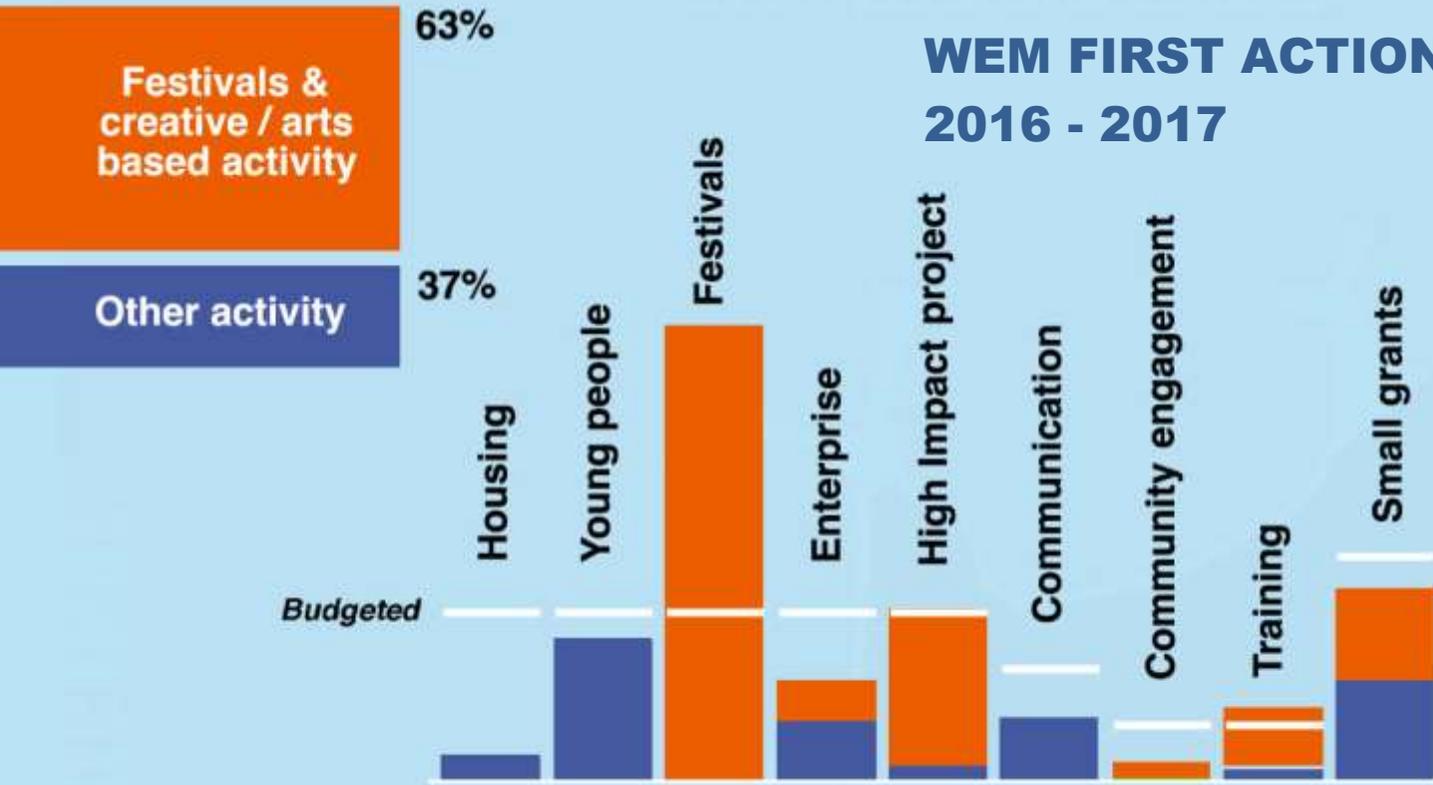
WEST END MILLION

2015, September, West End Million partnership formed

2015, September, West End Million partnership formed
With the steering work done, a new partnership was formed and named West End Million (WEM). It involved local residents as well as representatives from notable West End community organisations. Together, with support from the Big Local rep and the LTO, they invested a great deal of time and effort into creating the first WEM Action Plan, which was agreed in March 2016. The four themes of the first Action Plan were: Housing; Young People; Festivals and Enterprise.

Accompanying this were budgets for training, communication, a small grants fund, and a 'High Impact' project looking to raise the profile locally. Several working groups were set up to take things forward.

WEM FIRST ACTION PLAN 2016 - 2017



This led to some positive work with many small successes. However, dynamics within the partnership led to a significant drift away from what the Action Plan set out to achieve. By the end of the first year, community engagement activity was underspent by 53% and housing by 86%. Yet festivals were overspent by 168% with most of the high impact budget and 87% of the community engagement budget, 40% of enterprise and 47% of small grants also spent on creative activity. A whopping 63% of the total year's spend had gone towards creative arts and event activity. This was despite the original Community Profile only having noted a handful of suggestions to use art and creativity to enhance the West End.

Issues also arose around nearly zero visible credit being given to WEM itself or Big Local funding, and next to no evaluation being sought or returned. A review showed a case where a £1000 grant renovated a shop front which the owner then planned to sell. A similar amount bought equipment for a creative business immediately before they left the West End. A second year proposed more of the same but Local Trust was unclear as to the methodology used to justify this, so funding was put on hold. A later review found that while there were small successes, the widely held opinion was that the organisation had largely failed, with infighting and obvious conflicting interests damaging wider trust across the

community. It was felt that some had taken advantage of the fragmented nature of the partnership, whilst a lack of guidance had contributed to the dysfunction. The nature of the partnership, being made of those that live and work in the West End, meant many were fearful of being open, honest or challenging of bad practice from people who were their neighbours.

When disagreements did surface, they were perhaps inevitably more heated - one incident involving the threat of throwing a chair. Most notably was concern that festivals and creative activity had articulated an approach that overran the agenda, offering outwardly positive work but little in the way of long-term impact on the community itself. There was even a feeling from local people that the creative sector was disenfranchising the voice of the resident community.

All change

In October 2017 a new Local Trust rep came onboard. It was agreed to accept past mistakes and move on. The partnership went through a number of internal changes, with many partners leaving and the Local Trusted Organisation stepping down.

Even so, the self-inflicted damage done to WEM in its first year and a half left a reputation which the organisation battled to overcome for a long time - oddly even facing later criticism from some of those involved in its initial failure. It does seem that everyone has an opinion on what happened, but few were willing to accept collective responsibility.

“There is almost no recognition that WEM may have any obligation to seek strategic benefits rather than just fund projects that regard themselves as needed.”

“There have been some small but meaningful successes through elements of the small grants funding but WEMs activity has been largely overshadowed by potential conflicts of interest which may have encouraged bad practice, but which certainly has left a legacy of mistrust.”

“In future [WEM] may wish to consider using its’ influence to; disincentivise bad practice whenever possible, to constructively challenge as much as support new works.”

A review of WEM’s first year. April 2018



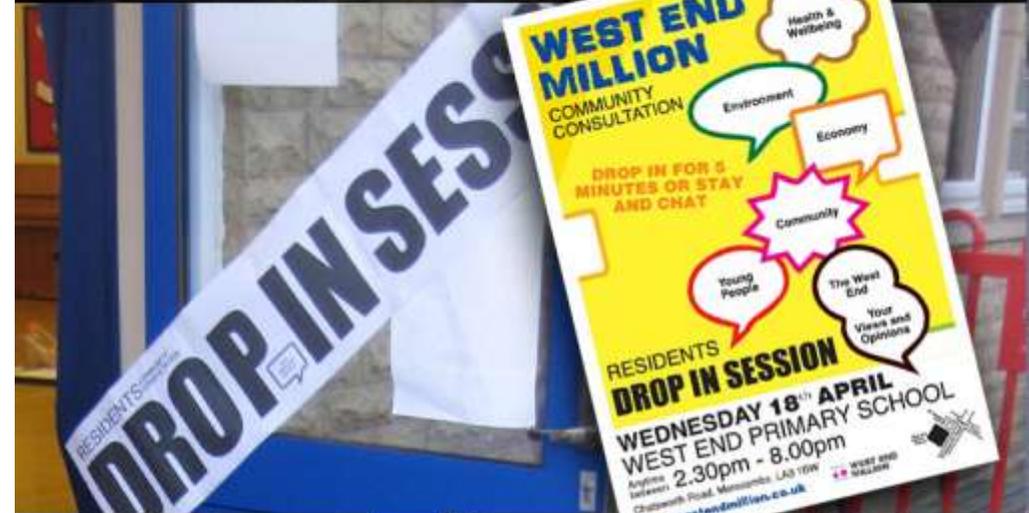
A Fresh Start

January 2018, a new partnership and a new Action Plan

Looking for a fresh start WEM took on two part-time staff. A Secretary and a Partnership Development Worker. Both now helped the partnership work towards change especially as a new Action Plan was being written. This process was heavy on volunteer time, but enjoyable and positive. Disagreements were constructive and all felt engaged. Lancaster District Community & Voluntary Solutions (LDCVS) were chosen to be the new LTO, and by June a new Action Plan was submitted to Local Trust. It was met with enthusiasm and fully endorsed. With a launch in November, progress began immediately with the healthy take-up of community chest grants, and some larger projects.

Community Chest Grants £500 to £2,000

One of the smallest grants of just £250 allowed a new casting company developed by a West End businesswoman to take on local extras. At least five local people were then enabled to appear in The Bay on ITV, Coronation Street, and a Sky television series. The business said "It is hard to access funds for start-up businesses in this area, but a small amount of money makes a big difference to the lives of those who receive it". Other early grants included £500 to a charity which supports LBTQI people in Morecambe to help set up a website to promote the first Morecambe Pride festival which took place in 2019. A similar grant helped provide accessible seating for those attending More Music's Seagull Café - a weekly music making project that ran before the pandemic. Further Community Chest grants supported a local directory published by West End Impact. Other grants funded a portable cinema at West End primary school, training for staff at Home-Start, support with Flu



vaccinations at Stanley's Community Centre, and various activities with the Alhambra Friends Group, Grace Ministries, and the Melting Pot. West End & Heysham North Allotments had £2,000 towards the building of a new community hub for the allotments which provide growing space for the local community. West End Primary School also received around £2300 towards a giant initiative to take the whole school on a visit to see some live theatre.

Regent Park £20,000

The 2018-2021 Action Plan laid out a series of themes that WEM wanted to develop, and links were made with various partners to try and work in a way that met the outcomes we'd set. The first large project had to be agreed quickly in order to meet the deadline for an extra £25,000 from the government's Pocket Parks Plus scheme. The funding was vital in improving Regent Park and led the park to receive a Green Flag and being nominated for a national award. According to Stefanie Gray, Lancaster City Council's engagement and development officer, "The funding transformed the park" and residents could still take advantage of this space during lock-down..

Stanleys Community Centre £20,000

Stanleys Community Centre has provided a wealth of activity over the years but in 2019 the group running it was set to close. Staff and volunteers put together plans to set up a brand-new Stanleys to build on previous work but with the major change of becoming a registered charity. It was a period of high risk for sustaining the centre. WEM provided £20,000 funding to support them and bring security for a year of major change, providing them with a solid foundation to take Stanleys forward and then access other funding. The support helped Stanleys to fully establish themselves as an independent charity and the centre has now built up a portfolio of work to help achieve their goals.

“WEM spring-boarded the rest of our success because of the fact that without that support we wouldn't have made it through the first years. The impact of that initial investment is just starting to be seen now - we are really grateful for their support and the trust they showed in us.”

Robyn Thomas, Stanleys Community Centre

Smaller Work

Not all the smaller projects WEM looked at were grants and we tested some other initiatives such as supporting hanging baskets with the Town Council and working with the Credit Union to offer free membership to residents living in the West End. Enable, a chronic health group for residents, received £1,500 for running a self-care course for members. Another unique initiative was a pilot for a children's forum held in 2019. Recognising that roughly 17% of the population in the West End are under twelve years old we set up a pilot Children's Forum to look at engagement with local children to influence and shape the work of WEM. The pilot was extremely successful and placed a marker for the Eco Garden that arrived in WEM's third Action Plan. In terms of organisational communication WEM completely overhauled its website in late 2018 and re-launched it alongside the 2018-2021 plan. The site has been the mainstay of communicating WEM's activities, increasing users from 2500 to 8300 within three years.



- Five months Chest grants have been awarded to:
- Out in the Bay, £500 toward Morecambe Bay Casting, £418 toward helping West End residents to join in safe gun casting, £500 toward a new premises development.
- Stanley's Youth & Community Centre, £500 for a grant to produce 3000 free 'Help in Morecambe' training volunteers in safe gun casting.
- Enable chronic illness group, toward helping West End residents to join in safe gun casting, £500 for a grant to produce 3000 free 'Help in Morecambe' training volunteers in safe gun casting.
- Friends of the Alhambra & Carleton Primary School, £500 for a grant to produce 3000 free 'Help in Morecambe' training volunteers in safe gun casting.
- West End Primary School, £500 for a grant to produce 3000 free 'Help in Morecambe' training volunteers in safe gun casting.
- Home Start Morecambe, £600 for training volunteers in safe gun casting.
- Bay Casting, £418 toward helping West End residents to join in safe gun casting, £500 for a grant to produce 3000 free 'Help in Morecambe' training volunteers in safe gun casting.
- West End Impact, £500 to produce 3000 free 'Help in Morecambe' training volunteers in safe gun casting.
- Regent Park Studio, £500 toward a new premises development.
- Melting Pot, £140 toward a new premises development.
- West End Community Choir, £555 toward the group's activities.
- More Music, £500 towards accessible chairs for 'Seagull Cafe' production.
- West End Primary, £2300 'theatre for all' visit.
- More Together produced another community play, this was supported with £1300.
- Grace Ministries...



A return of problems

Despite this positive start and the highly collaborative and enthusiastic engagement in developing the new plan, WEM's progress became bogged down again in micro-politics, roots of which lay in the early years of WEM. The atmosphere in meetings became poisonous. Progress was effectively stalled for a good portion of the year. It came down to a handful of partners stalling the delivery of the whole Plan. This was only resolved by three members being obliged to leave. Thankfully Local Trust and LTO were fully supportive.

Whilst the problems were eventually resolved, a huge amount of time and energy had been given to sorting out the dispute. The knock-on effect was to severely delay our work. However, there was also a silver lining. The challenge pushed WEM to take its final step toward commissioning activity, a move that would better ensure the needs we meet are shaped by the community rather than smaller interests. To seal the deal WEM also dropped the 'million' from our name as it simply emphasised the focus on cash – some even enthusiastically pluralising the amount and calling us West End Millions. We changed our name to West End Morecambe Big Local



In May 2019 Local Trust, who manage Big Local, launched Creative Civic Change, a three-year programme open to 14 communities around the UK. Its aim to use creativity to generate meaningful civic change, with £20,000 start up and then £200,000. Critique of the West End's creative sector previously highlighted too much focus on the sector's own interests rather than community need, with often aspirational rather than objective outcomes. Creative Civic Change gave an opportunity to change this and for creatives to prove their metal. Members of WEM worked with Good Things Collective and others to secure the fund, then locally called Creative West End. The project ran independently of WEM, being managed by a steering group of local partners and creative organisations. They developed a plan with four goals.

- Supporting a range of community-led and inspired creative projects, aimed to change how people see the West End.
- Collaboration with a creative community Market.
- Establishing a Creative West End Network, with chances to visit other places and learn new knowledge and skills.
- Part invest in creation of a community hub in the former Coop department store on Regent Road.

Some of the earlier projects included a furniture project from West End Impact, and two virtual festivals from Good Things Collective and More Music in 2022. Other small initiatives included creative signwriting, a DIY print club, an eco-project, food project, Raku pottery, artwork in an old pet shop, digital workshops, sculpture made from recycled waste, and a promenade walking tour. A range of other activities took place in later months. The creative market for

the West End proved to be popular, particularly when it moved onto West End Gardens. However, aspirations for it to become financially self-sustaining never came to fruition. The creative network was a busy part of the project but developing a creative hub in the old Co-op building fell through. That budget was reallocated to more creative projects via Good Things Collective and More Music. The spend at the end of the project in September 2023 was £220,000.

£60,000	Facilitating a creative network, including marketing and website.
£29,000	Creative West End market, including stalls,
£66,000	Creative projects.
£55,000	Hub – reallocated to creative project delivery via Good Things Collective and More Music.
£10,000	LTO for financial administration.
£220,000	Total

Creative West End offered a flourish of activity, delivered in spite of the challenges presented by the pandemic. Yet, as with previous creative activity, it is hard to fully know what it delivered in terms of change. The original national brief suggested that residents should lead every step of the way 'whatever the local priorities, the programme will help these communities use creative methods to achieve them.' Whilst residents were involved in Creative West End its felt that creative interests again led the conversation, investing in creatives rather than residents setting the agenda for creatives. Activities like the markets were popular yet, again, evaluation was somewhat lacking. The majority of Creative West End activity ended with the funding, and a legacy company set up at the end closed after a year.



COVID-19 OUTBREAK



WEM INFORMATION



LOCAL EMERGENCY FUND PUBLIC HEALTH

Pandemic

WEM was prepped and ready to start anew in January 2020. Just a few weeks later there followed a greater challenge that no one expected. The nightmare of Covid, which tried everyone in every way. In terms of Big Local nationally, some partnerships paused their work, others jumped in, and WEM managed somewhere in-between. We were heavily restricted, with limited capacity, but with the help of digital meetings we still managed to deliver two major projects as well as support a Covid emergency fund. As Covid restrictions eased up we then managed to start on other initiatives including a major partnership with the Eggcup food project.

School Education Packs £7000

As well as supporting the local urgent response fund for the Covid-19 crisis, WEM agreed an important partnership with West End and Sandylands Primary schools to provide education packs for over 600 local children. The packs were delivered in a leather backpack-for-life with pencils, pens, notebooks, scissors, glue and everything needed for schoolwork at home. Allison Hickson, Head teacher at Sandylands Primary, said "The children needed the correct equipment to complete their work. Support from West End Morecambe Big Local has enabled our children to be equipped to continue with their learning at home during the crisis. It will also enable them with learning from home after the return to school as well."

Covid Emergency Fund £10,000

When Covid struck WEM was aware that it's normal procedures wouldn't work but we immediately stepped in with £10,000 worth of support for the local emergency fund. The fund was facilitated Lancaster District Community & Voluntary Solutions (LDCVS) who



9:00am - Noon 07399 08 55 08

New Food Hub's Recipe For Success

News Home More from Local News

Plans for a food hub are being cooked up in an effort to tackle food poverty in the West End of Morecambe.

Lancaster District Food Poverty Alliance and Eggcup, working closely with Stanleys Community Centre in Morecambe, have received backing from West End Morecambe – Big Local (WEM), Sustain and Lancaster City Council for the project which will offer support to those struggling to pay for food.



WEM works with very closely. Their chief executive, Yak Patel said: “We knew there would be financial pressures on groups in the West End so another challenge was to get money to them so they could continue operating. WEM immediately understood what the difficulties were going to be, and their support was 100%.”

WEM’s contribution to the emergency fund will have supported all or in part various local emergency activity, including.

- Morecambe Bay Food Club access to food
- More Music supporting vulnerable people
- Prop Up, contacting their service users
- Stanleys Community Centre, support and buying PPE
- West End Impact, free meals, and local support
- Wise Up workshops, mental health support
- A youth programme of activities and support

School Computers initiative £27,000

An ongoing issue of digital exclusion had been in WEM’s sights for some time, but the Covid lock-down raised its urgency, particularly for families of primary school children. Talking with over 170 local families, parents were asked about existing resources and challenges they faced with online schoolwork. Some were doing okay but many were struggling with online access and lack of a usable computer. One family only had a single smart phone in the house and with three children trying to share that phone to do homework. WEM’s staff worked with Sandylands and West End Primary schools to develop a project to buy £27,000 worth of computers, the equivalent of one for every year six child in both schools. The equipment was to be handed down to each new year of children, therefore benefitting the school for at least five years and maybe more. WEM’s support was described as ‘amazing’ by the deputy head of Sandylands.

“We would like to thank you, everyone – it’s hard to put into words what an impact this funding has had on our children and their families.”

Penny Lupton, deputy head of Sandylands

When the children returned to school, baseline assessments were carried out and reading results were more or less in line with where the pupils should be for the start of a new year. Teachers believe this was a direct impact of accessing home learning on the laptops. The schools felt the project had engendered a sense of collective pride in West End children. Parents also benefited with a number of training sessions looking at a mental health and well-being facilitated with computers loaned out to families

Food Club Shop £32,000

Food poverty had long been a priority for WEM and the pandemic again put even greater emphasis on the issue. Linking with the local food poverty alliance WEM developed a project involving Eggcup and Stanley’s Community Centre and provided £32,000 to help establish a new community food outlet in the West End. The project helped draw down another £25,000 from other sources and the shop proved a great success. The club uses surplus food, donated mainly by supermarkets, and for a weekly fee, distributes it via their own members at the shop outlet in Albert Road. They work with other groups including Stanleys and the Olive Branch food bank as part of a buying co-operative to supply additional food to members and service users. Different to a foodbank, the food club provides a shopping experience and allows members to choose the food that works for them. The new outlet has enabled Eggcup to increase its number of memberships available for the community by over 200, equating to 462 individuals including 154 children.

WEST END BIG LOCAL

Key to themes 2018 - 2021

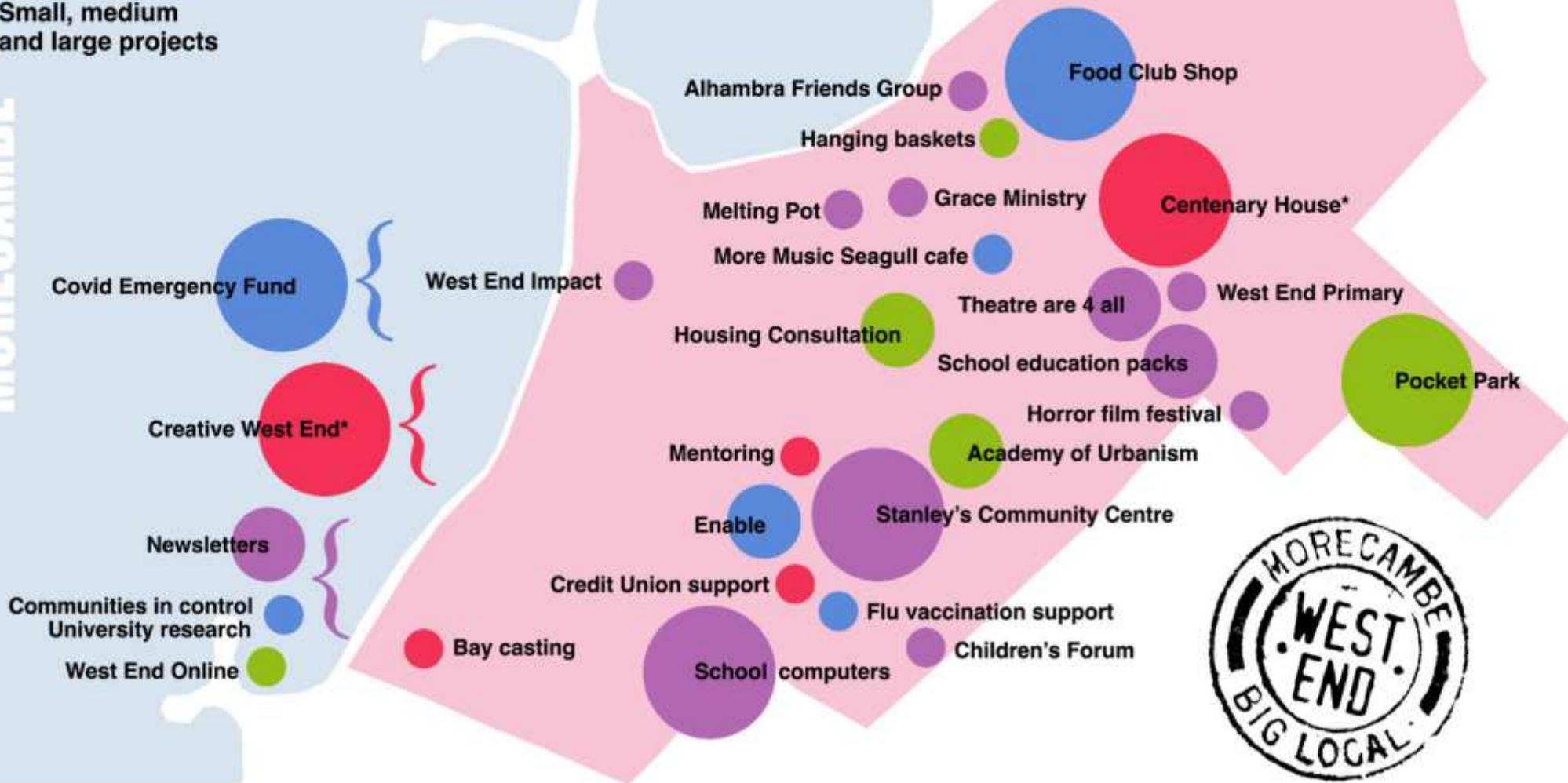
- PLACE
- HEALTH & WELLBEING
- ENTERPRISE & ECONOMY
- COMMUNITY

Small, medium and large projects

WEM ACTION PLAN 2018 – 2021 & PANDEMIC ACTIVITY

- Out in the Bay
- Homestart staff training
- West End Allotments

MORECAMBE



Membership numbers were heading toward the work becoming largely self-sustaining. A survey at the time showed almost all participants felt that Eggcup had made a significant difference to their personal finances. Almost 80% said they felt like a member of Eggcup as opposed to feeling more like a 'customer'. A significant number of members are interested in, or already volunteering with Eggcup which increases their confidence and has other benefits..

“WEM were fundamental to getting this off the ground. From the outset they understood our vision for the project and were excited by it like we were. Our relationship has been really honest which is often the hardest thing to achieve - the conversations we had made us confident in working together.”

David France, Eggcup project manager

Mentoring £2,000

In July 2021 a small parcel of funding was targeted at helping Stanleys develop its long-term future, this included a programme of mentoring support for the Centre's director, helping look at personal practice as well as strategic management, bid writing, and growing the trustee board. The mentoring continued until Oct 2024.

Centenary House £100,000

The Co-op building on Regent Road, also called Centenary House, has long been empty and is owned by the Council. We partnered up

with the Council and Good Things Collective (GTC) who were looking to develop the property as a major creative community enterprise hub. In February 2020 WEM earmarked £100,000 contribution toward Phase 1 building works with our contribution helping draw in over £350,000 additional monies and in-kind resources. The final Centenary House investment was projected by some to eventually exceed one and a half million pounds. WEM brought in a specialist to link with GTC and to review their business plan. Some issues around viability arose but our questions were not well received. In the end we were advised that despite the amount of financial and other support offered, Good Things Collective did not evidence that they were capable of managing the project. We unfortunately withdrew from the initiative in July 2022. GTC's Centenary House project continued but later folded. The Council have since looked at bringing in a developer to restore the building.

Other conversations

As well as funded projects WEM has worked to develop strategic conversations and plans. We worked with LDCVS to encourage networking on health issues and WEM initiated a special network session with a national group called Academy or Urbanism. It brought in key players together in the West End to look at improving housing and the built environment.

Covid presented many challenges, but one of the few silver linings to the slowdown was that it enabled WEM to look in far more detail than before about its next Action Plan. This has several benefits.

- A much higher level of specific targeted projects
- Some projects ready to roll out almost immediately
- Greater confidence over delivery and spend
- Work that is notably strategic
- A mandate to avoid negative community politics

This simpler and tighter focus for the future partnership set a strong foundation for WEM's final 2022 to 2025 Action Plan.



Projects 2022 - 2025

Project	Q1/2	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total
West End Online					
Stanleys centre					
Mental health work					
Food wraparound	£9,000				
Housing		£7,500			
Children's environmental project		£15,000	£15,000	£10,000	
Community network & Unity projects	£2,000	£14,000	£30,000	£4,000	£2,000
Family mentoring & support		£10,000	£10,000	£7,500	£7,500
Celebrating community	£1000	£6,500	£6,500	£2,000	£2,000
Additional initiatives		£24,000	£24,000	£24,000	



And Finally

July 2022, a new Action Plan 2022 – 2025

WEM evolved with each action plan, and this final plan had a much tighter focus on the work we would deliver, and now commission. We chose to avoid getting bogged down in grant giving and the micro politics which had dogged previous years, choosing to get on with the job rather than waste more time responding to the unfair expectations of others. Underscoring this was learning from previous years' work and a need to successfully meet our obligations to Big Local. Recognising our delayed spending and confidently making it up to fully commit all spend within the programme. The spread of work in the new plan covered work that had been developed over months of discussion and consultation with partners in the community. Some work was ready to roll out almost immediately while other work is primed to begin development.

The budgets set out in the 2022 plan changed almost immediately when we withdrew from the Centenary House project. That added an additional £100,000 which was slowly reallocated to other existing budgets or supported some new initiatives that evolved during the three-year life of the plan.

“This is a magnificent effort - which manages to both reflect our collective debate and yet add value to it.”

Sian Jay, Big Local Representative



- 3 **Stanleys - the organisation and i**
- 3.1 Vision, mission, values and strategy
- 3.2 Structure
- 3.3 Finance
- 4 **Stanleys and capacity building**
- 4.1 Overview
- 4.2 Progress made
- 4.3 Commitment to improvement
- 4.4 Strength through partnership
- 5 **LDCVS and Stanley**
- 5.1

Stanleys Community Centre

This strategic purchase of Stanleys Community Centre is the only example raised by any West End community organisation other than the Centenary House project. In simple terms this was an economically sound idea, as ten year's rent to the existing private owner came to well over £100k. More importantly it meant Stanley's could justify investment in refurbishing the property, which was long overdue. Due to WEM's status we would be unable to own the building ourselves and initial conversations agreed the Stanleys group itself didn't yet have the capacity to own and run the building itself. So, a partnership was created between WEM, Stanleys, and LDCVS, the latter agreeing to take ownership of the building on behalf of the community.

Stanleys Community Centre	
Goal: Taking a property into permanent community ownership	
Budget £150,000 + £20,000	ACHIEVED

A price of the building was agreed with the private owner, and an additional £20,000 set aside to pay for the technical and legal needs as well as management time. It has to be said that the process of writing a business plan for this project was a bit of a nightmare. Local Trust appeared not to trust the partnership's ability to do this without us accepting two separate consultants to back up the proposal, which they did. Nearly a year afterward we finally got down to business and LDCVS, working with Stanleys, pulled together everything needed to purchase and partly renovate the building. WEM was also approached about building on the success of the project with the support of an additional £75,000 from Lancaster City Council's UK Shared Prosperity Fund, a government-led initiative established to support local communities, businesses, and economies. That money focused on refurbishing the property. The relationship between Stanleys and LDCVS means

the building can be handed over to Stanleys when they agree a level of necessary capacity has been reached.

“We would also like to thank WEM for persisting in what has been a long running project. We can now all look forward to making this dream a reality together.”

Cary Mathews, Stanleys Community Centre

“This space belongs to everyone in the community, and we're excited to see it become a place where ideas are shared, support is given, and our community truly thrives.”

Paul Jebb, Chair of LDCVS

“It's taken time and a lot of work to get all the pieces in place, but now it's done WEM is proud to have helped make this happen.”

Joe Robinson, WEM Development Worker



Food Poverty Wraparound

The success of Eggcup in fulfilling WEM’s aspiration on tackling the issue of food poverty led us to consider ways in which the service could be further sustained or enhanced. Talking with various partners has also made it clear that now is the time to engage with other related issues such as fuel poverty and home finances. We will therefore be enhancing our previous support and aiming to link activity with these other issues.

Food Poverty Wraparound	
Goal: Expanding on successful Food Club shop	
Budget £18,000 + £20,000	ACHIEVED

Unfortunately, in December 2024 the organisation hit a crisis. By pure coincidence the Family Mentoring & Support project had just been withdrawn, and there was pressure from Local Trust to reallocate funding swiftly. A proposal was put forward to offer an emergency support package to Eggcup (balanced at the same level as given to Stanleys during its transition in 2019) and unanimously agreed. The criteria was on the basis that others would match the support £1 for £1 in cash. With the help of fundraising and assistance from the City Council that goal was achieved.

Season’s greetings

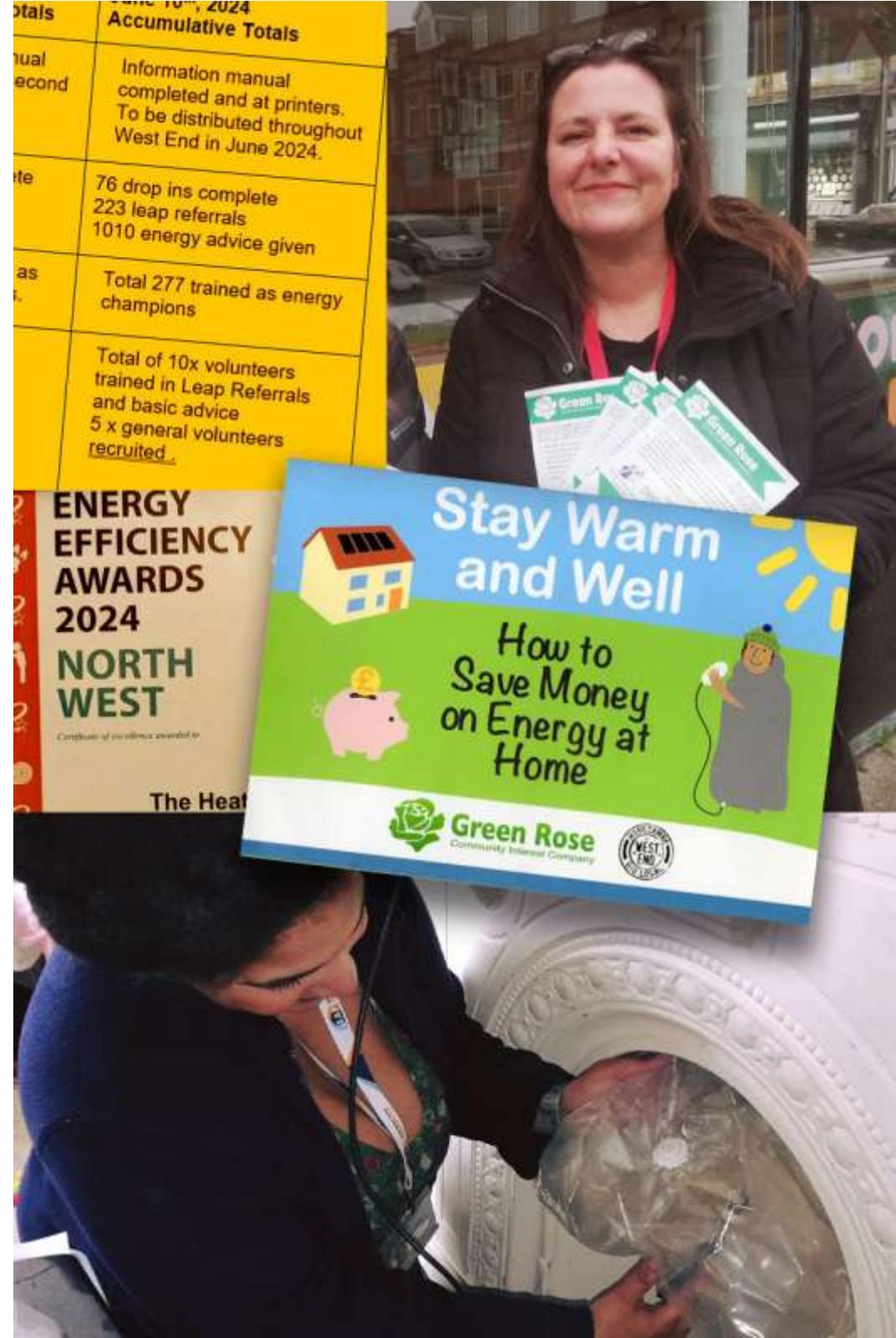
Something else that WEM quietly did was look to offer individual support for members of the area’s primary food support clubs, making a per-head contribution in 2022, 2023, 2024 and 2025 to Eggcup and Stanleys food club Christmas lunches. This added up to a lot of turkeys and stuffing, with around 1640 dinners and support over four years totalling £9,135.

West End HEAT project

WEM has never had the role, resources, or capacity to respond to emergency situations but under exceptional circumstances, such as the pandemic, we were able to affect some work which related to urgent need. By the end of 2022 issues around fuel poverty and cost of living had fast become an emergency on a national scale. Tackling such issues was not in our immediate Action Plan and WEM was not in a position to do hand-outs. Yet there was some middle ground in terms of offering support through advice and low-level home improvements. We quickly worked with a non-profit energy advice company called Green Rose CIC to deliver a bespoke twelve project in the West End.

West End HEAT project	
Goal: Supporting residents in the energy cost crisis	
Budget £27,000 + £11,500	ACHIEVED

The project had several basic goals. Employ a part-time West End energy officer. Produce a home energy advice manual. Training of volunteer 'energy champions. Drop in events. Support installation of basic level heat saving devices and help residents access financial support where available. The work was so successful that WEM agreed to fund a six-month extension. The duration of the whole project saw 21 drop ins reach 273 individuals, with 223 LEAP energy referrals and 20 fuel bank vouchers arranged. Over a thousand people were given face to face energy advice, with fifteen volunteers trained in Leap referrals and basic advice. 500 heat advice manuals were distributed, and in February 2024 the Heat project also won a commendation at the Northwest Energy Efficiency Awards. Even better news came afterwards when Green Rose informed us, they'd cemented new funding to carry on the project independently.





Mental Health Work

The West End has multiple partners involved in supporting mental health. The contribution they make is unquestionable but existing activity is often uncoordinated with agendas sometimes skewed by the interests of individual organisations. Evidence of actual need is patchy and often generic, with some activity indistinguishable from general community activity. With so many groups delivering 'mental health' activity the greatest issue might be the lack of any common measure of need or outcomes.

Mental Health Work	
Goal: Supporting community mental health and improved delivery	
Round 1: Budget £31,500	PARTLY ACHIEVED
Round 2: Budget £0	NOT ACHIEVED
Round 3: Budget £32,500	ACHIEVED

Our goal then was to deliver some direct mental health activity but also attempt to address some of these strategic issues. We succeeded on the first of these but failed on changing much strategically. Our first round on this work looked at an open commission. It attracted applications of £188,000 for a budget of just £50,000. Many of the applications looked to deliver more of their normal organisations' services. Ultimately WEM settled on two small independent activities, delivering over two years. One offering half-day sessions to residents as well as volunteers and staff from local organisations. The second delivered a series of six-week courses. The total committed to these was £31,500 but one project ran into delivery issues, so part of that funding was reallocated. To complete our goals, we attempted a second round of work, looking to recruit a Young People's Mental Health Support Worker.

Despite a robust recruitment process, interest in the job was close to none. We then took an alternate approach, setting up a grant-making process where young people would commission some mental health services that they would like to see made available. Round three appointed LDCVS to bring a representative group of young people together to design and run a commissioning programme. They delivered this over one year, with the young people calling themselves 'Minds Within the Bay'. They successfully launched a grant scheme in the Autumn of 2024, then chose seven of nine applications for small-scale mental health activity.

£4,000	SAFE, Prop Up Project
£1,579	Cancer Care Counselling sessions
£3,318	Wise Up Workshops
£3,850	Life Skills sessions
£4,000	More Music, School holiday sessions
£1,000	Stanleys, Mind Escape Kits project
£2,200	Bee Adventures, out of school club
	Out in the Bay, LGBTQ+ Youth Group.

“I am in awe of their enthusiasm and commitment to making a positive difference in the community where they live.”

Catherine Westwell, LDCVS

“We’re incredibly grateful for the support of Minds Within the Bay, who have helped us to directly support young people in the West End.”

Alison Stainthorpe, Chief Executive, Cancer Care NL&SC



Children's Eco project

Children up to twelve years old make up roughly 17% of the West End population. More progressive activity would regard this large part of the community as having an important voice in shaping improvements to the community. WEM agreed enough that they initiated an innovative Children's Forum project in 2019 where local issues were discussed by a representative group of young children from the West End. We were committed to expanding on the engagement of children in decision making on a real time project and that focused on points raised by the children under a topic of environment.

Children's Environmental Project	
Goal: Developing children's environmental ideas into a physical project	
Budget £50,000	ACHIEVED

This then aims to transform an unused outdoor space into a vibrant, sustainable learning eco-garden. Designed and built with pupils, staff, and community volunteers, it will promote hands-on learning about nature, food growing, biodiversity, and climate care. The garden will become an outdoor classroom where children can explore science, literacy, numeracy, and wellbeing activities. Helping them to connect with nature and each other.

This project was delayed, first by the Pandemic and then being let down by delivery partners from outside of the area who struggled with the project's goals. Eventually it was sorted and much to everyone's relief it will be finished within the Big Local timeframe. The project also has more potential for the future, to enhance the site and the environment work in the community. If Eden North wants to see how to do things they might now want to pop by and visit our own Eden West End.

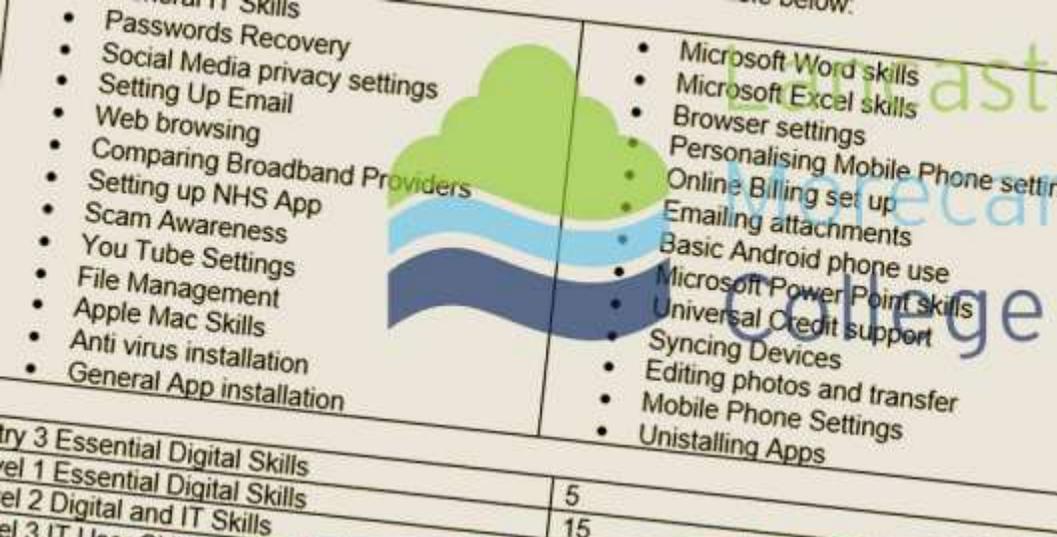
West End Online

Our 2022 Action Plan looked to commission a project that worked with residents who may be struggling with digital skills. Providing support that that avoided the anxiety of traditional education settings. We also aimed to link existing resources, such as training through higher education, with people in the West End. WEM commissioned Lancaster & Morecambe College to deliver a digital inclusion project for residents, seeking to help those unable to access such support outside of their local area. The college started the project in September 2024, the initial goal being to work with 110 residents and aim to encourage 10% to take up some further study or perhaps a starter qualification. To date the project has engaged with 84 individuals, each completing a digital assessment with nearly 50% of them attending for more than ten hours on learning.

“[I] was apprehensive about large class numbers and lots of younger people that have been in a learning environment, where I hadn't been at school for 30+ years - I came and found it perfect for me.”

Brendan (parent / grandparent), Level 2 Award & Level 3 Certificate

A demonstration of the positive engagement was evidenced in 39% of them going on to gain a recognised qualification, including 15 people gaining their Level 1 essential digital skills. The flexibility of the sessions, held at The Link, allowed learners to work around other commitments, such as childcare.



Skills acquired covered everything from setting up emails, file management, using Microsoft Word and Excel to setting functions on mobile phones or using online banking Power or accessing things like Universal Credit online. Involvement on WEM's commission also provided the College with further opportunities to link with key partner agencies in the West End.

West End Online / digital exclusion	
Goal: Tackling digital social exclusion in the West End	
Budget £40,000	ACHIEVED

Additional School Careers Initiative

In 2025 WEM also initiated a smaller project with the college, commissioning them to deliver a Future Careers event for pupils from the West End of Morecambe. Both Sandylands and West End Primary schools took part in two days of activities, with interactive workshops in each school and then a day exploring Lancaster & Morecambe College campus. The sessions sparked curiosity, challenged stereotypes, and looked at future career skills. All tailored to inspire young people about their futures. An example of one session was how maths, English & science helps everything from budgeting to baking, or weather forecasts to engineering. The work also gave an opportunity for parents and carers to discuss the adult community-based learning on offer locally. The event was so successful a second year's event was scheduled in before the Big Local programme finished in 2026.

"I liked learning about video game jobs. I didn't know you could do that in Lancashire!" Year 5 Child, Feedback

The LINK

The LINK was established to provide a welcoming and accessible space in the West End, to bring people, services and community activity together under one roof. The initiative grew outside of WEM but formed the perfect synergy with the work we were doing with both LDCVS and the College. WEM chose to boost the project with funding and even suggested a suitable venue.

Since opening, the Link has become a trusted base for community meetings, advice sessions, volunteering and partnership work. Strengthening connections between residents, groups and statutory partners. The venue enabled the college to deliver WEM's digital inclusion project in the West End and the hope is this foundation creates more opportunities that will benefit West End residents on their doorstep.

The LINK (bringing LDCVS into the West End)	
Goal: Tackling digital social exclusion in the West end	
Budget £10,000	ACHIEVED

“The £10,000 investment from West End Big Local was essential in making this possible [helping] create a sustainable neighbourhood asset that supports engagement, collaboration and community-led action.”

Yak Patel, Chief Executive Officer, LDCVS

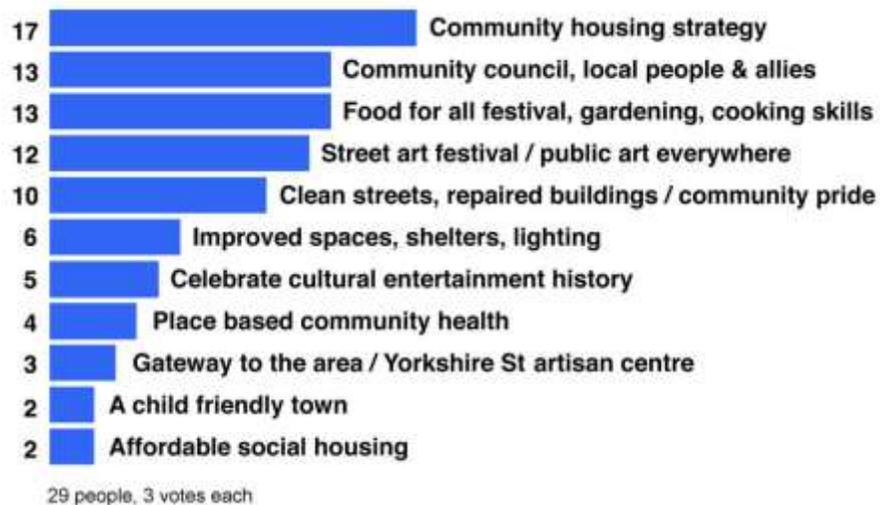
Community Networking & Unity

In 2022 it was widely acknowledged that the gap between the differing levels of personal and organisational capacity in the West End was significant. Despite best intentions most local groups tend to be inwardly focussed and don't often share knowledge, skills or capacity with neighbouring groups. This reflects the need to compete over funding but also a lot of micro-politics locally. Residents also range from those with the skills to be proactive and others with passion but no experience of how to get involved. The lack of strategic work between different groups is not for want of trying. LDCVS ran both a Morecambe Inter-Agency (MIG) group and a brief Health Action Network. Scores of organisations and individuals came together in 2017 for the Art of Hosting, followed by a short-lived movement linked to a local health crisis. Even WEM itself, with its partnership and attempts at networking through initiatives like Academy or Urbanism, helped prove that simply bringing people together does not always fix things.

Experience increasingly suggests that more established and more confident individuals and groups dominate the wider community conversation. In effect creating their own top-down approach which risks disenfranchising residents who are not part of a group, or who might lack the capacity to argue against more established voices.

Solving this required a radical shift, so we prioritised a major final project with the aim of building the capacity of individuals within the voluntary sector and empower residents to better address issues within their community. It was felt that Lancaster District Community & Voluntary Solutions (LDCVS) were the obvious organisation to see this through so WEM commissioned them to deliver the project. The key to the initiative was for local residents to be more actively involved in delivery than being delivered to. As Yak Patel, head of LDCVS, said 'It's not about the often heard but about the seldom heard - about really getting to people that we need to listen to.'

Despite the best of intentions WEM still had doubts as to whether things could change. As one partnership member put it 'I would just hate to see WEM support history repeating itself, even if it's by default'. Nevertheless, it was important to try and LDCVS acknowledged the challenge. The project was allocated £39,000 for delivery with £30,000 as a bespoke fund to initiate some projects. The first Unity event took place in June 2025, with over thirty individuals and organisations attending. Roughly one quarter of these were residents, although some were also involved with local groups. Over two long days they discussed local priorities and decided what the £30,000 might best be used for. A vote narrowed down the topics, with the top five being chosen for working groups to turn into projects that would then compete for the funding in a public vote.



Monthly meetings and support sessions for the working groups took place at The Link. At the due time only three applications were received, their total equaling the available funding. Following discussion within the LDCVS team, it was agreed that, as a

competitive process had not emerged, a public voting exercise would not be meaningful. So instead, a Unity celebration event was held to showcase and celebrate the funded projects and community collaboration. Partners offered the opportunity to be critical friends on the projects chosen. The three projects were.

West End Community Forum., Stanleys Community Centre: £8,700

Aiming to set up a community forum and bring together a wide range of people from across the West End to ensure everybody's voice is heard. The starting point for this will be a consultation (carried out by Stanleys community Centre and More Music) to gather information and encourage participation in the forum.

WE Green and Tidy. More Music: £6,300

To support local pride through employing a gardener to maintain the garden spaces around More Music and Alexandra Park. Along with a big clean-up day in advance of the Lantern Festival, and three further community clean up sessions.

Sea Change. More Music: £15,000

Bringing people together to make art which can be displayed around the streets, bringing colour to the West End, and commissioning some local artists to create their own designs. Altogether creating 13 pieces of street art and holding a celebration event.

The Unity project started six months late, which increased the pressure on delivery in the closing year of Big Local. We can't evaluate the three projects yet, but the Unity project had delivered its 'process' which we can consider. More optimistically we might say that while not all ideas progressed, the process brought people together, strengthened relationships, and built shared ownership of priorities. Several groups began shaping these ideas into practical

proposals with LDCVS guidance on governance, funding and volunteer mobilisation. The work could then offer a long-term foundation for community leadership, partnership working and help shape a more resilient, vibrant and inclusive West End. Less optimistically (and acknowledging the late start and time pressure) there is some feeling that the Unity project did not avoid the pitfalls which previous engagement activity suffered from. We know the announcement of the government's £20 million in the West End, in Sept 2025, adjusted some later thinking. Certainly, the hope on the Community Forum is that it in some way influences Pride in Place, and the excitement stimulated the Unity's project's own collective group, now called the West End Community Action Network.

LDCVS invested a lot in the process, and their work was unquestionably positive and engaging. Yet somehow the agenda and part of the funding again drifted on to activity that has consistently not been a priority for residents. That the Unity group evolved into a community network and yet also funded setting up a separate community network is also confusing. WEM's doubts about history repeating itself did then, in part, come true. We don't criticise those who have worked tirelessly to delivery this, but we might better consider what happens here so we can better learn from it. Being stricter on identifying residents in a community, as distinct from community groups, would help. Empowering each sector separately (residents, voluntary sector, businesses, public, even politicians) before bringing their voices together would also help. Independent facilitation also seems key, to provide checks and balances on soft and hard power and avoid the mission creep that slowly shifts agendas and funding toward other interests.

Community Networking & Unity project	
Goal: Potential to support small strategic initiatives	
Budget £69,000	PARTLY ACHIEVED

Youth Conference

Youth Conference	
Goal: A Morecambe wide start to consulting with young people	
Budget £9,000	ACHIEVED

WEM has aimed to empower the voice of young people, and in 2025 used some spare funding to initiate a Morecambe wide youth conference. Its aim, to enable young people living locally to share their priorities for creating a better Morecambe. We again commissioned LDCVS to do this and their event in September featured young people showing off their skills and talents, with breakout groups for discussing their priorities. Those views will feed into strategic planning for Lancaster District Young People's Foundation with an ambition of transforming outcomes for young people across the district. The event was attended by 200 people including roughly 100 young children. A brief summary of their priorities, in order, were (1) more local, affordable, youth-friendly things to do. (2) Cleaner streets, parks, and respect for nature, (3) more stores, improved buildings, better hangout spots, (4) visible policing, safer public spaces (5) nicer people, less anti-social behaviour, (6) affordable, frequent, accessible transport. WEM also left a nest egg of £1500 for a second conference in future.

“Setting aside funding for a future conference creates real potential to build on this momentum in 2026 and deepen youth influence locally.”

Yak Patel, Chief Executive Officer, LDCVS



Housing

WEM spent many months sharing ideas on housing. A topic that's fundamental to the social fabric of our community in terms of well-being, health and economy. Our ability to create significant change was constrained by the sheer scale of the issues. So, our 2022 plan simply looked to equip tenants and homeowners to determine what happens in their individual and shared spaces. This would include tenants' rights (including homeowners) and perhaps some lobby activity on housing and on the public realm. We went through various discussions with different organisations and finally looked at employing a housing worker for the community. Despite much stated interest it proved hard to pull together any coherent partnership that would lead on the initiative. As months dragged by it became increasingly clear it was not going to happen. With time running out and with no suitable framework in place it was decided to shift the project's focus to something new. We talked with Calico Housing and contracted their film making unit, called Bad Kamra, to produce a short film working with local people. Where residents talked about how they saw the West End. The object was to capture a sense of place which would hopefully inform any future project looking into housing, litter and other concerns around residents' personal and immediate environment.

Housing	
Goal: Contributing to underlying housing issues and relationships	
Budget £27,000	REALLOCATED

Family Mentoring support scheme

In 2022 we proposed a pilot project for a community support scheme, using a total of £44,000 for help which would go directly to families in need, working then with an assistant to act as a kind of

personal adviser. It was based on an approach that is being tested in a number of places in the UK. Professionals linked to Eggcup worked on an initial scoping exercise, with other key organisations invited to take part. The scoping exercise provided interesting opportunities, but the partnership looked to revise aspects of the proposal. This hit at a moment where there was huge pressure from Local Trust to make spend decisions and the project ran out of time. The partnership shelved the idea and reallocated the remaining funding between the **Solidarity Fund** and emergency support for the **Eggcup** food project.

Family mentoring & direct support scheme	
Goal: Pilot project looking at empowering families in poverty	
Budget £2,000	DROPPED

Celebrating community

Parts of the West End are blessed with a rich mixture of creative enterprise, in part the reason we supported the application to the Creative Civic Change program. Despite the value this brings there is some feeling of a gap between the social value it brings outside of the value to the creative sector itself. Nevertheless, we set aside £50,000 to potentially expand on the Civic Change activity or other creative opportunities. Ultimately nothing suitable arose and WEM divided the funding amongst other activities, some of which might be described as celebratory, including the youth conference.

Celebrating community	
Goal: Resident focussed creative activity that celebrates community	
Budget £50,000	REALLOCATED

Frontierland / Horizon Initiatives

The Frontierland site is the empty brownfield location of the old theme park which has become almost emblematic of both the physical and emotional challenges faced by the West End. The Council have recently acquired the site, and hopes are now that something can finally be done to heal this wound. The question is what and, most importantly for WEM, how the process of redeveloping the site will involve local people. WEM is perfectly placed to help consult local people and we agreed to help the Council with a community survey on Frontierland, carried out at the end of 2023. The Council were especially keen to hear the views of residents of the West End and we published a full spread of information in our irregular community newsletter, which goes to 4000 households. The area covered by our newsletter had the highest response rates to the consultation, at approx. 28%, which was encouraging in terms of local opinion being reflected. As this was part of our normal work the project cost for was nothing.

Frontierland & Horizon initiatives	
Goal: Influence and seed fund for future activity	
Frontierland: £0	ACHIEVED
Baylight: £11,000	ACHIEVED
Credit Union: £10,000	ACHIEVED

In 2022 we recognised there would be some other small initiatives on the horizon, each with some potential strategic benefits to the West End. WEM worked with Morecambe Sparkle on their Baylight initiative and contributed £11,000 toward bring towards bringing elements of their festival into the West End with new illuminations along Regent Road in Feb 2024.



We agreed a second smaller package of additional support with £5,000 to enhance the existing Regent Road winter lights at the end of 2025, which for some strange reason included a small, illuminated squirrel. This latter support was twinned with funding from the Town Council. All those lights are now stored and ready to be rehung each season, perhaps to grow and expand in the future.

“It feels like one of the things Baylight was always supposed to be helping deliver.”

Richard Ryan, Baylight

The local Credit Union provides an often-overlooked service to residents linked to finance, household management and mental health. It helps over 200 members in the West End. The project has limited capacity beyond its basic service and is not a vocal partner amongst other community projects. WEM had had a long-term aspiration to support the Credit Union which it never managed to accomplish until its closing year. However, at that point we managed to step in with a timely package of £10,000 to provide assistance. Community credit unions have had a tough time as the cost-of-living crisis puts members under pressure. WEM’s support will boost the credit union’s core capital for the future and fund modernisation so that it can appeal to more people.

“This investment in the future of Morecambe Bay credit union means that the spirit of West End Big Local lives on. A very big ‘thank you’ to WEM for enabling this to happen.”

Tim Hamilton-Cox, Chair of MB Credit Union

BAYLIGHT
Morecambe Bay
Credit Union
mb
credit union

WEST END NEWSLETTER
FRONTIERLAND NEWS
NEED STRONG REDEVELOPMENT PROCESS
THINK PEOPLE MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT NUMBER: 100 100 2
WWW.WESTENDBIGLOCAL.COM

PAY WEEKLY*
£ 6.69
PAY FORTNIGHTLY*
£ 13.42
PAY MONTHLY*
£ 20.00

Solidarity Fund

Solidarity Fund	
Goal: Helping Individuals in severe need.	
Budget: £20,000	ACHIEVED

A Solidarity Fund was agreed as a partial replacement for the WEM family support project. Such funds help residents in need by providing small financial support packages between £50 and £250. Criteria would be simple, fair, and reasonable, with the process relying heavily on trust, with voluntary groups knowing their users / members enough to understand the need was genuine and then help individuals apply. WEM met with Lancaster Food Poverty Alliance about delivering such a fund in the West End, and ultimately LDCVS offered to facilitate the scheme on their behalf. LDCVS will deliver the Solidarity Fund with alliance and community organisations in the West End making applications on behalf of beneficiaries. The scheme took a little time to take off and up to Feb 2026 had delivered

Total	Applying agency	Individuals helped
£500	Polish School	2
£1,358	Lancaster CVS	6
£200	The Well	1
£5,253	West End Impact	22
£1,114	CAP Debt Centre	5
£4,538	Lancaster City Council	(19)
£2,500	Sandylands School	(10)
£1,000	L & M College	(4)

Figures up to end of Feb 2026. Brackets indicate estimates based on a parcel of collected support.

Clerical error

The process of drawing down funding from Local Trust was a frequently confusing and convoluted process, often forcing delays on the partnership completely outside of our control. The role of the LTO in managing the finances was likewise not easy. Unfortunately, a clerical error in that process led to the late discovery of £21,000 unspent. This happened so close to the end of Big Local that there was no time to do much. It was felt that simply dividing it up amongst existing projects lacked purpose or impact, so we looked to find something meaningful for everyone. Having viewed the bay for so many years we noted part of it belongs to the West End. With this in mind WEM decided to invest in two speedy initiatives. The first, a £10,000 contribution to the Royal National Lifeboat Association. As a valuable volunteer organisation they save lives, and we knew of locals who'd both volunteered and been saved by the local RNLI. We've also hooked up that donation with a water safety scheme linked to our two primary schools. The second idea looked out at the Bay literally. We decided to fund a special disabled friendly promenade telescope. A completely free one that doesn't need a 50p coin to use. This will be installed by the Council and is built for both standing and wheelchair users to look out across Britain's most beautiful seascape.

“If that money saved one West End life it would be worth every penny.”

Chris Price, Chair of WEM

Clerical Error	
Goal: Non WEM related clerical error	
Clerical error: £21,000	SORTED



lifboats

Underspend & Citizen's Advice

When small pieces of funding remained during the course of the programme we often dropped it into existing interests, for example the West End HEAT project received a small top up of £1500 toward heated blankets and radiators for residents. £2200 has paid for a large school visit to our nation's parliament, and £500 also went to Connect Play Learn (who support families with Learning disabilities and autism). The WEM partnership's own final tally, in the last month of ten years' work, came in with a little over £7,000 leftover. It should be noted this is less than 0.7% of the full £1.1 million budget. To achieve this full spend on delivery is a significant accomplishment for a community partnership, especially when some, even a few in Local Trust, implied it wouldn't be done.

We already had prepped for this situation with a contingency agreement reached within the limited time remaining to deliver spending. The funding was offered to Morecambe Citizen Advice Bureau (CAB). The West End area has the joint highest numbers in terms of support CAB give, working with nearly 500 people in our area annually on thousands of cases. We'd already supported the CAB with £1500 toward specific staff support in the West End in 2025, and the remaining underspend funding has now paid for the purchase of essential IT equipment used with clients.

Underspend	
Goal: Overall programme underspend	
Underspend: £7,200	SORTED



WEM organisation & management

Unlike some Big Locals it was decided at the start to keep the organisational costs of WEM at a very low level. WEM did not have an office and only took on two part-time staff (totalling 3 days per week). Some Big Locals invested most of their funding on staff or buildings, some with great success and others less so. We were lucky enough to recruit very experienced staff, and they worked tirelessly for the partnership and the West End. The strength of this team, under the direction of the partnership, was key to the successes WEM had. This approach offered a reasonably stable platform by which to oversee projects whilst meeting day to day needs. It did present limitations that were not always understood externally, some imaging we had full time staff and a base. Over the last Action Plan the running costs averaged out at around £42,000 per year. This spending varied between half to two-thirds on staff. The rest covering contracted work, events, room hire, newsletters, website and everything else it took to run a small organisation.

WEM organisation & management	
Goal: Basic running of West End Morecambe Big Local	
Budget £149,000	ACHIEVED

The Local Trusted Organisation (LTO) who support the financial oversight of WEM receive a fixed fee of 5% of the project spend, but this was separate from the £1.1 million. It was released only as the partnership committed and spent the funding, so we have to acknowledge the patience shown by LDCVS during periods when delays led to a very inconsistent payment coming in. Our relations with the national Local Trust were sometimes mixed. The strengths and weaknesses of their process is something that will be measured outside of anything we might add here, but we should acknowledge none of these projects would have happened without Big Local.

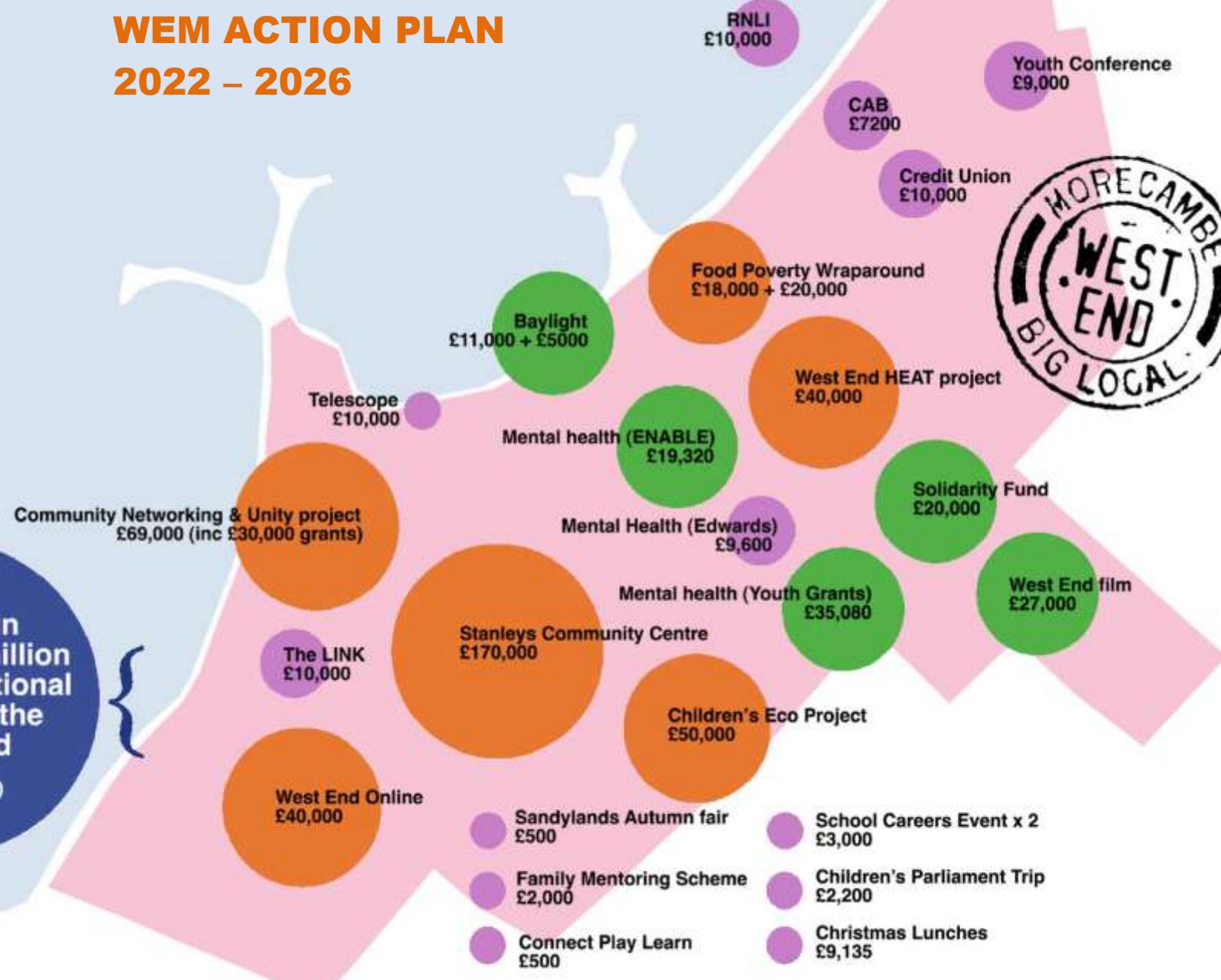
WEST END BIG LOCAL

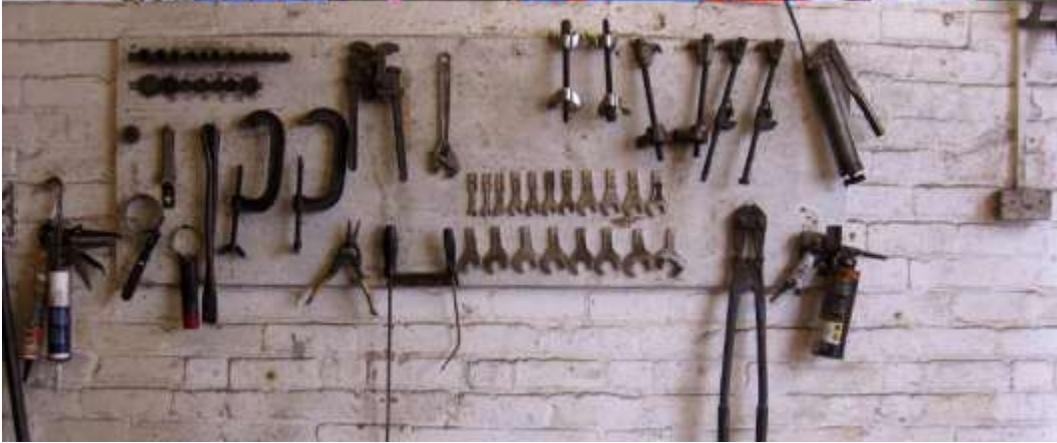
WEM ACTION PLAN 2022 - 2026

Projects 2022 - 2026

- small
- medium
- large

Brought in
over half a million
pounds additional
funding to the
West End
(2018 - 2026)





Conclusions

“As in most community groups, the big challenge for WEM was the learning aspect in which mistakes naturally happen. What we have learnt should therefore be a key measure alongside what we have achieved.”

Chris Price, Chair of the WEM Partnership

The challenges within the national Big Local programme have largely been overlooked in the desire to promote its positives. Over the years that sometimes left West End Morecambe Big Local feeling rather disconnected, although we later discovered that behind the scenes other partnerships had struggled as much as WEM had, and possibly more. Dropping £1 million into a disadvantaged community, with the hope they'd achieve the impossible, was always more aspirational than inspirational. The funding, split over ten years, gave roughly £100,000 a year. That's one fifth of More Music's annual budget, and one third of Stanleys community centre. That our first mental health commission generated £188,000 of interest for a £50,000 budget paints the challenge we faced. The original rush to control the money then led to problems and a wasted start for WEM. Yet, from that rocky foundation we slowly learnt what worked, and what didn't. Leaving the impossible behind we did then have the resolve to do what was right, and through that succeeded in delivering some valuable work. From such experience 3 key points stand out in terms of learning.

(1) Success was rarely about the money. Success came where the focus was on building successful relationships between WEM and partners who were willing to listen and be prepared to look beyond their own interests. A relationship where trust was kept and where WEM was not looked upon as simply a funder. Aside from louder critics we came across many more people - residents, voluntary organisations, businesses, public sector staff, and even a few politicians - who shared the same aspirations as we did. Many shared the same frustrations, putting up with voices who, despite their volume, were often more interested in themselves than any wider community.

(2) Adhering to firm principles and good practice, walking the talk and not succumbing to scores of small compromises offered in order to make life easy. From the start the challenge was the focus on money. This was not unique to WEM or to Big Local, but it has been an uphill struggle to move away from simply using an Action Plan to justify getting money and seeing it as a mandate worth delivering. Ultimately almost every conflict we dealt with stemmed from the desire to get funding, or to say who should / should not get it. In its time WEM has had to face blackmail, threats, double counting (seeking funding for something already funded), unfeasible business plans, private lobbying campaigns, lies, gossip, and suggestions of scandal. What was most shocking was the sense of entitlement to money by some, as if the community partnership did not have any right to say 'No'. Individuals then suggested we were prejudiced when we didn't fund them or felt 'disenfranchised' when asked to step off the partnership if they wished to apply for funding. The biggest problem by far was those who simply ignored anything we said, about our Action Plan and what and how we could fund things. One example, from a significant local organisation, was indicative. Knowing we only commissioned projects they still sent in a speculative request.

"I would be grateful if you could make sure this is submitted for consideration by the board at the next meeting. I'm still not certain if

this is the way the process works but I understand that the partnership has been distributing funding recently, so thought I'd take [a] chance."

We consistently worked on the principle that the primary purpose of the million pounds was to improve the lot of the West End community, not fill gaps in funding or satisfy private interests. This was rarely popular, but we held off responding to the gossip which appeared to replace reading information openly available on our website. WEM's successes then came about through the hard work of volunteers on the partnership, and our small staff team, who together tried to do what was right despite the constant pressure to compromise.

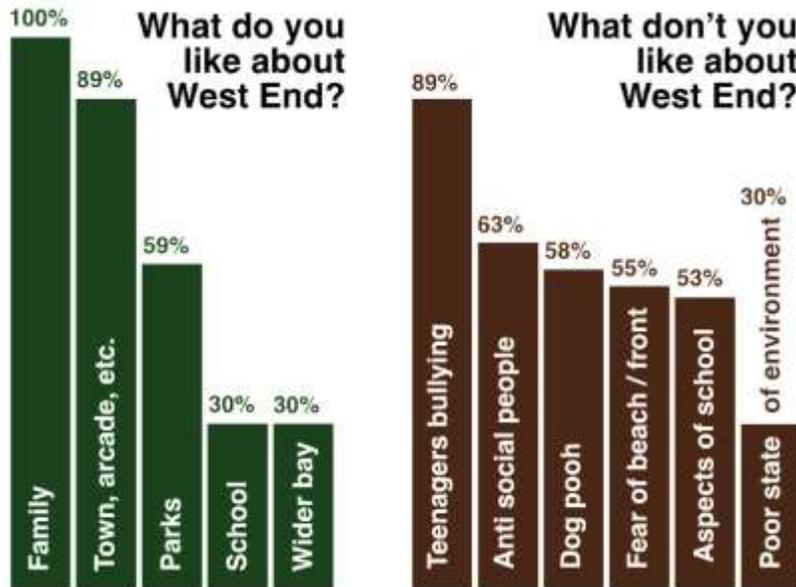
(3) The West End is far from a unified community. Having experienced decades of neglect and deprivation the collective and cohesive aspects of what might unite resident, voluntary groups, business, and politicians, have been steadily eroded to a degree where the cracks have become established. Some people are proud of the West End. Other people just live here and nothing more. There are smaller elements that live in quiet-parallel to the larger whole. That community groups are forced to compete against each other for funding is a fact, but it is not the only reason that local groups don't get along or fail to coordinate for the betterment of all. The challenge with all this is how do we reflect the needs and the voice of residents, rather than a 'community' agenda shaped by other interests – voluntary, creative, business, or public sector. WEM carried out various consultations over the years and matched these with a final survey in February 2026. They offer a robust description on the common priorities of local residents.

Comparing these to the priorities developed in the initial Unity event (see page 31), where residents were roughly one quarter of those attending, shows how other voices then shift any agenda. Shifting how we identify needs and how we better work together to meet common interests might be the most important lesson from WEM's ten years. Future activity might be stricter on identifying residents in

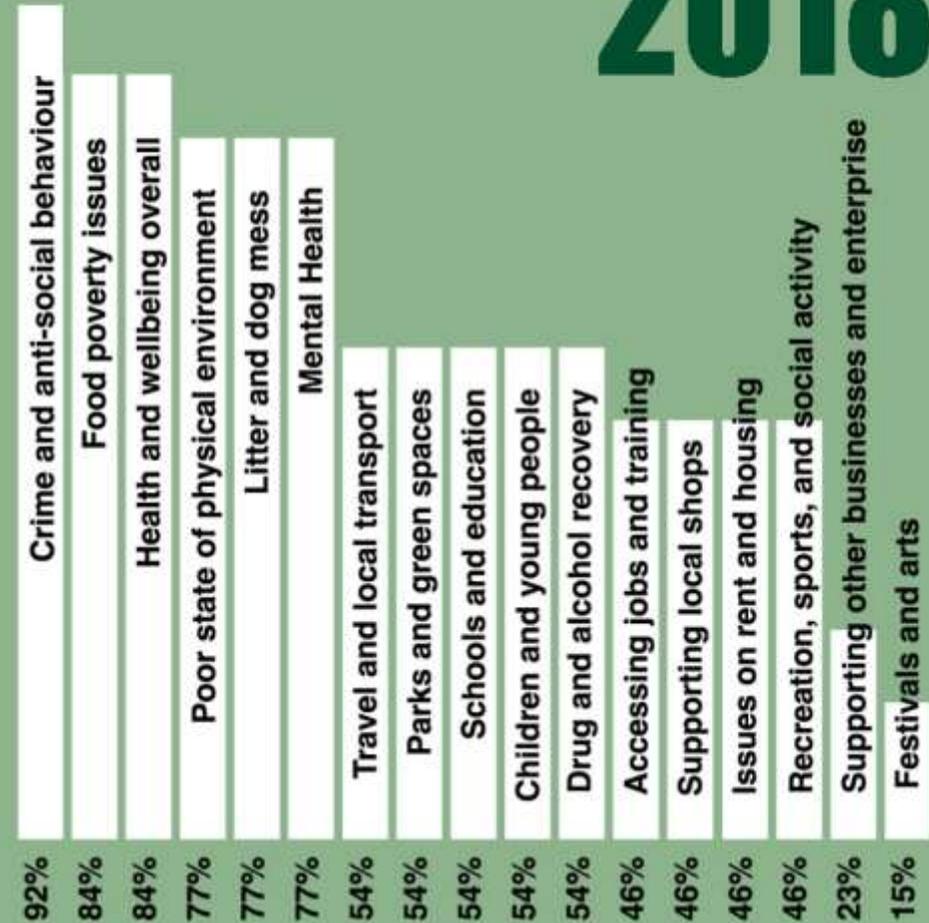
a community, as distinct from community groups. Empowering each sector separately (residents, voluntary sector, businesses, public, even politicians) before bringing their voices together to find unity, would also seem wise.

Independent facilitation seems key, to provide checks and balances on soft and hard power and avoid the mission creep that slowly shifts agendas and funding toward individual interests. Facilitation then, that is willing to constructively challenge and, ultimately, be willing to be unpopular when doing what's right. In remembering that Big Local was a ten-year programme, we also wonder if starting with the universal voice of the West End's children might have been an even more interesting place to start. Residents, and other sector voices then built on top of that. Seeing their voice shape an Action Plan would be an amazing thing to see and do.

Below: What children liked / did not like about the West End. WEM survey 2019



2018



RESIDENT

PRIORITIES



Each survey used slightly different parameters, and other issues were recorded but did not feature enough to warrant listing. Children / young people / schools likely scored higher in the latter two surveys due to the nature of those being surveyed. The results are not offered as definitive but certainly reflect the robust views of residents as a single cohort rather than a diluted conversation.



In conclusion

It's ironic that WEM raised the idea of using the last year of Big Local, and our last pieces of funding, to create a legacy Action Plan and apply for another million pounds for the West End. This was not for WEM to continue but to set up a new organisation that would have learnt from WEM's mistakes. There was no interest. Exactly a year later the promise of £20 million arrived in the West End and suddenly everyone is talking about the voice of the community and Pride in Place's first task will be to create an Action Plan.

Understanding mistakes was an ethos promoted by Local Trust in Big Local, so it feels right that we have been open about the trials and tribulations woven into WEM's experience. We have presented them here, along with our successes which are plain to see. It's important to learn from both. As such, we can say 'we failed to achieve the impossible' with our heads held high, and in the knowledge that we did have the resolve to succeed in many other ways. Those same challenges faced by WEM will be multiplied twenty times for the new £20 million Pride in Place initiative. We hope they can learn from WEM's experience and legacy and achieve even more.

In final terms WEM got a lot right, and you know you're doing something okay when (in relation to building the Eco Garden that stemmed from conversations with children) the finance officer at the school sends an email with the gleeful excitement of one of their own year five students, declaring...

“The poly-tunnel has arrived!!!!”

School Business Manager, Sandylands School

Thanks

WEM has had its ups and downs, with people getting along, but at other times falling into conflict. Nevertheless, those who were not committed to what they believed was right for the community have been few. As such we want to acknowledge the time, both short or long, given by all those on the partnership.

There are just too many others to thank. Many can be seen in all the projects listed in this review, but there are scores of others behind the scenes who contributed, offered advice, or helped make things happen on the ground. There are the hundreds of residents that also got involved over the years, sharing their time, views and opinions about everything West End. WEM's success is as much down to all of them as those who featured more publicly. A special thanks to the children and young people who took part in decision making.

Gratitude goes to our staff. Joe Robinson, whose years of experience in community renewal paid dividends to our work. Johnny Bean, whose knowledge and varied skills were invaluable. Both worked tirelessly, often in the toughest of community situations. Thanks also to Yak Patel, Nick Smith and colleagues at LDCVS who helped as both WEM's Local Trusted Organisation, and in many other ways. We also thank those members of Local Trust who worked to help Morecambe's Big Local function, particularly Sian Jay and Niamh Goggin.

Thanks to those who supplied information and images for WEM publicity, and this report, including JC Drones. Design & layout J. Robinson. All information was held to be accurate at the time of printing. Our sincere apologies if any mistakes have crept in. West End Morecambe Big Local (WEM) March 2026. AGGMVCGJITB

www.westendmorecambe.co.uk

WEM Partnership Member 2015 - 2026

P. Colley	2015	C. Rothwell	2016 - 17
J. Makinson	2015	M. Sharples	2016 - 17
R. Thomas	2015	J. Ainscough	2016 - 17
G. Lloyd	2015 - 16	K. Baughan	2016 - 18
O. Treasure	2015 - 16	D. Spencer	2016 - 22
C. Rothwell	2015 - 16	M. Panesh	2017 - 18
L. Graydon	2015 - 16	M. Houghton	2017 - 18
J. Hampson	2015 - 16	D. Crisp	2017 - 19
T. MacGregor	2015 - 17	V. Brunsden	2017 - 25
M. Korzeniowski	2015 - 17	C. Price	2017 - 26
O. Thomas	2015 - 17	Y. Patel	2018 - 26
S. Das	2015 - 17	A. Crisp	2018 - 20
A. Galland	2015 - 17	L. Reeve	2018 - 22
M. Treasure	2015 - 17	N. Thomas	2019 - 22
K. MacDonald	2015 - 17	K. Hilton	2019 - 26
M. Barr	2015 - 19	C. Downs	2022
G. Taylor	2015 - 19	P. Blundell	2022
P. Williamson	2015 - 19	J. Safari	2022 - 24
S. Coghlan	2015 - 19	G. Duckett	2022 - 25
J. Bambrough	2015 - 20	J. Edwards	2022 - 25
K. Stewart-Clarke	2016	Y. Appleby	2022 - 26
D. Fleet	2016 - 17	C. Greenwood	2024 - 26
T. Marshall	2016 - 17	V. Carter / C. Rawes	2024 - 26
L. Engle	2016 - 17		
K. Engle	2016 - 17		
E. Das	2016 - 17		
J. Stephenson	2016 - 17		

With sincere apologies for any errors or names missed.

“Being on WEM has been a roller coaster ride, I have taken real pleasure in the successes whilst helping to manage some of the difficulties and failures. Sometimes, and confusingly, these were all at the same time. Throughout I've been struck by how carefully both have been navigated and always with the partnership at the heart of any decisions. The West End was always valued realistically as an important community with a lot of potential, not a sad case that needed propping up. Whilst the start was very shaky WEM grew over the years finding a way to deliver real benefits to the West End. It is a legacy that WEM, and all those who have been involved should be proud of, both the local successes and the limitations of what was a national project.”

Yvon Appleby, partnership member



**...BUT
MIRACLES
STILL
HAPPENED**





West End Morecambe Big Local REVIEW 2016-2026



Local Trust | Big Local | COMMUNITY FUND

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