



## Case Study The Bridge Ore Valley

**Tackling deprivation and addressing social neglect not only needs external investment, it must tap into the unlikely resources of the community. This requires a big shift in everyone's perception. That is exactly what the Bridge Centre sets out to achieve.**

Neighbouring two estates, Farley and Halton in the Ore Valley of Hastings, the Bridge is sited in a ward whose statistics show it to be one of the worst deprived in England with challenging issues such as child poverty and long-term unemployment. What the statistics don't show is that there is also a community activism that can pull in over £1.5 million, including £350,000 from European Objective 2 funding, to build a community facility that is fit for purpose and a bold architectural statement.

From the very beginning, the Bridge has firmly focused on sustainability, including renewable materials and clean energy. From a timber frame constructed from Wealden laminated chestnut and insulated with wool and flax, to the sedum plants and solar panels on the roof making the most of the fact Hastings is England's sunniest town, this is building that intends to stand the test of time.

Environmental sustainability is one thing, economic viability another. The Bridge will only earn income if it meets local need. On top of this it stands as an example to the users of the centre so they understand how to access funding and earn income too. To ensure these two principles, a new community enterprise directed by local people will manage the building. Four months in and another Community Interest Company for under 11 provision has just been incorporated.

At the heart of the Bridge is also a popular café which serves healthy food at reasonable prices, a real alternative to fast food for local people. The café, which employs local residents and trains them in catering and food preparation, also has ambitious plans to become a successful catering business, offering sandwiches and buffets to large local organisations and businesses. If this service becomes financially viable, it will be another boost to local people who have been involved in the project every step of the way.

If nothing else, the Bridge shows that this community has already decided perceptions are going to change.

**Hastings Trust Executive Director, Christine Goldschmidt said:**

*"During the construction of the Bridge, we had calls from local people saying that they were looking out for the site – particularly at night. They felt that the centre belonged to them, and they didn't want it vandalised like so many of the buildings nearby. You have to appreciate that the Bridge was built opposite a house where drugs were being openly sold for example, so it's a fantastic sign that the site was left virtually undamaged."*



**Centre manager James Leathers said:**

*"Objective 2 funds have really helped us create The Bridge Centre, but just as important has been the involvement of local people. The whole project is about local people choosing their own future, rather than having those decisions made for them."*

