



Cambridgeshire Outdoors **Impact report 2026**



Welcome



Edward Groome (on the right)

Business Development Manager
Grafham Water Center

What stands out to me about Grafham Water Centre is its ability to make opportunities available to people who might otherwise miss out. Practical barriers such as cost, transport or individual support needs can limit access to outdoor experiences, so creating genuinely accessible opportunities is an important part of the Centre's social value.

For many young people who come to Grafham, it may be their first trip away from home and their first opportunity to try activities such as paddling, sailing, high ropes, climbing or archery. These experiences are about far more than simply learning a new activity. They give young people opportunities to develop confidence, independence, resilience, teamwork and communication, while discovering what they are capable of in a supportive environment. Exposure to new experiences can also help raise aspirations and introduce young people to new possibilities, skills and passions.

Grafham can also provide a space for families and groups to spend meaningful time together away from everyday pressures. Shared experiences outdoors can encourage new connections, strengthen relationships and give people greater confidence to access outdoor spaces in the future. For me, that wider community benefit, opening doors, building skills, creating connections and making these experiences accessible to more people, is a really important part of what Grafham contributes.



Edward Vennelle

Deputy Head of Centre
Burwell House

Having spent many years as a teacher and now helping run an outdoor learning centre, I have seen first-hand the transformational impact that outdoor learning can have on young people. Many children arrive feeling nervous, homesick or unsure of themselves, often on their first experience away from home. They leave with greater confidence, stronger relationships with their peers and teachers, and a genuine sense of achievement.

Centres like Burwell House provide opportunities for young people to step outside their comfort zones, connect with nature and discover strengths they never knew they possessed. The impact extends far beyond the visit itself, supporting children's personal development, strengthening school communities, bringing families together through positive experiences, and helping to build healthier, more resilient communities for the future.



History of Grafham Water Centre

From Jurassic clay foundations to over five decades of outdoor education

- **156–165m yrs ago Jurassic landscape** — Warm, wet conditions; abundant life and fossil-friendly clay.
- **1086 Buckden recorded** — Nearby Buckden appears in the Domesday Book as a trading village.
- **1530–1534 Tudor connection** — Katherine of Aragon stayed at Buckden Towers before moving to Kimbolton.
- **1805–1950 Before the reservoir** — Farms and villages shaped the landscape before Grafham Water was built.
- **1960–1965 Reservoir construction** — Grafham Water was built as a major drinking-water supply for the region.
- **1970–present Outdoor education era** — The residential centre opens and runs school, water sport and outdoor courses.

Source: Grafham Water Centre — “History of GWC”



Today

Learning outside the classroom, residential visits, water sports and adventure activities turn this long local history into confidence-building experiences for young people.

2011 note: the centre records Grafham as England's first "killer shrimp" invasion site; it says they are harmless to visitors.

GRAFHAM HISTORY TIMELINE

CAMBRIDGESHIRE OUTDOORS

History of Burwell House

 230+ Years of Living Heritage

Historic manor house & residential grounds **Burwell, Cambridgeshire**

1787**Original Construction**

Built by local landowner Salisbury Dunn.

1800s**Victorian Expansion**

Substantially enlarged by Edward Ball MP.

1964**Council Acquisition**

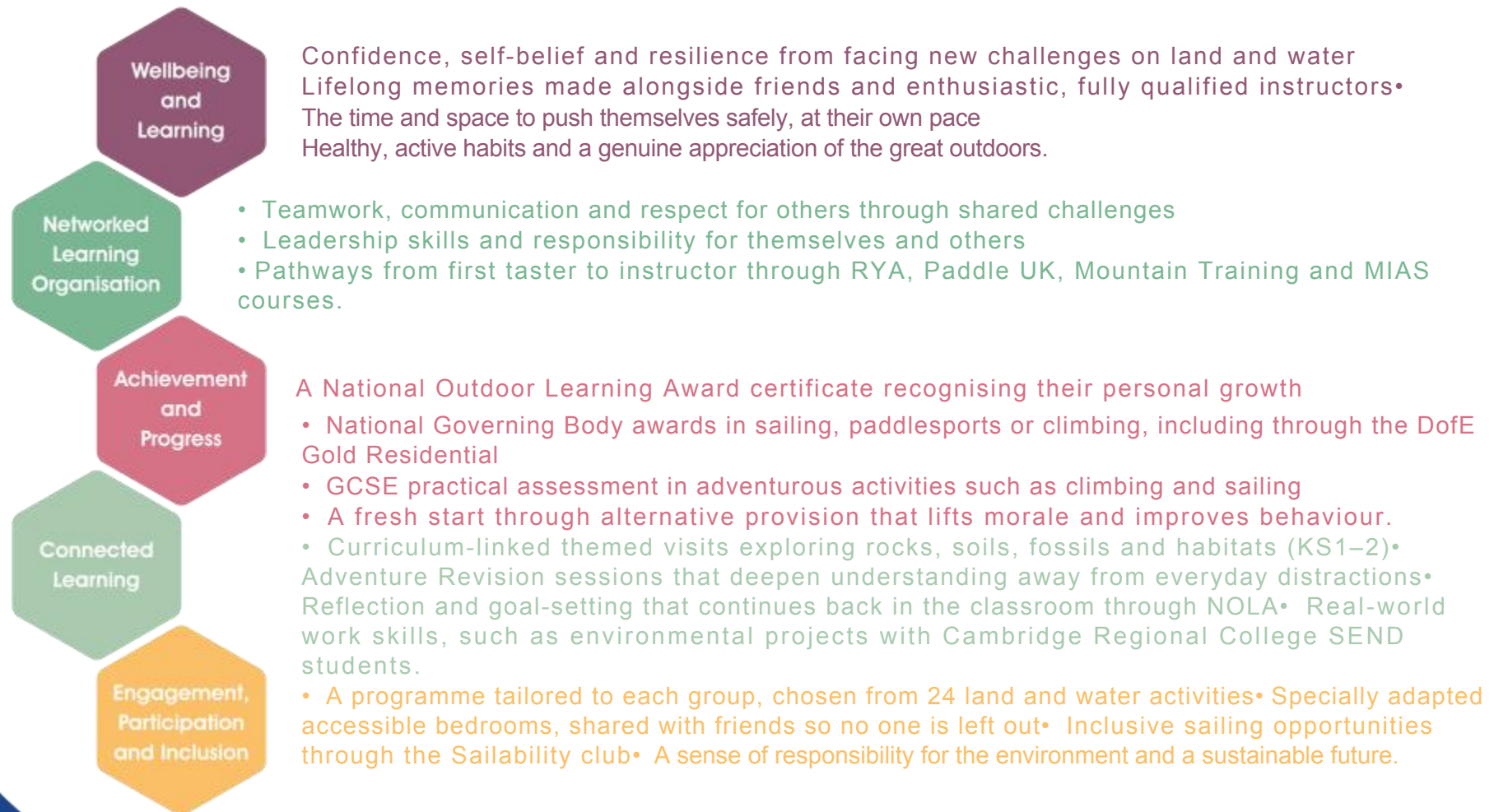
Purchased by Cambridgeshire County Council.

Today**Outdoor Education Centre**

A thriving residential base for schools and learning.

What Our Learners Achieve

Networked Learning Organisation:



Residential experiences

Residential visits to Grafham Water Centre support learning across the National Curriculum, from Key Stage 1 to GCSE, as young people experience a new place, build relationships and challenge themselves on the water and on land.

Away from home, young people are encouraged to take responsibility for their belongings, equipment and each other. They make decisions about their food, manage risk, and learn to live and work together. All this builds a deeper connection with peers and school staff.

As a result of these unforgettable experiences in new environments – and completing tasks they thought were beyond them while learning from mistakes – they return home and back to school with a sense of pride and a new awareness of their own abilities. Embedded into the experiences for children and teachers are topics such as climate change, sustainable development, global citizenship, biodiversity and pollution.

The curricular gains of a residential are broad. Visits can support National Curriculum learning in:

- physical Education
- English
- Science
- Mathematics
- Geography
- History
- PSHE and Citizenship
- Design and Technology



we love all the staff they were amazing. Thank you so much for having us we have had an amazing time and 100% are leaving full of happiest of memories.

FUSION Group, Feb 19-26 2026

Thank you so much Dom, Katie, Olly and James and the rest of the team. You guys have really bossed this! The kids loved you all it was a fun filled few days and I appreciate all the effort you all put into giving our school the best experience

Meadow Primary School, May 01-26 2026



WHAT OUR VISITORS TOLD US

This summary of 2025–26 visitor feedback shows how highly groups rate our food, catering staff and customer service. It also shows where we most need to improve: our ageing accommodation and facilities.



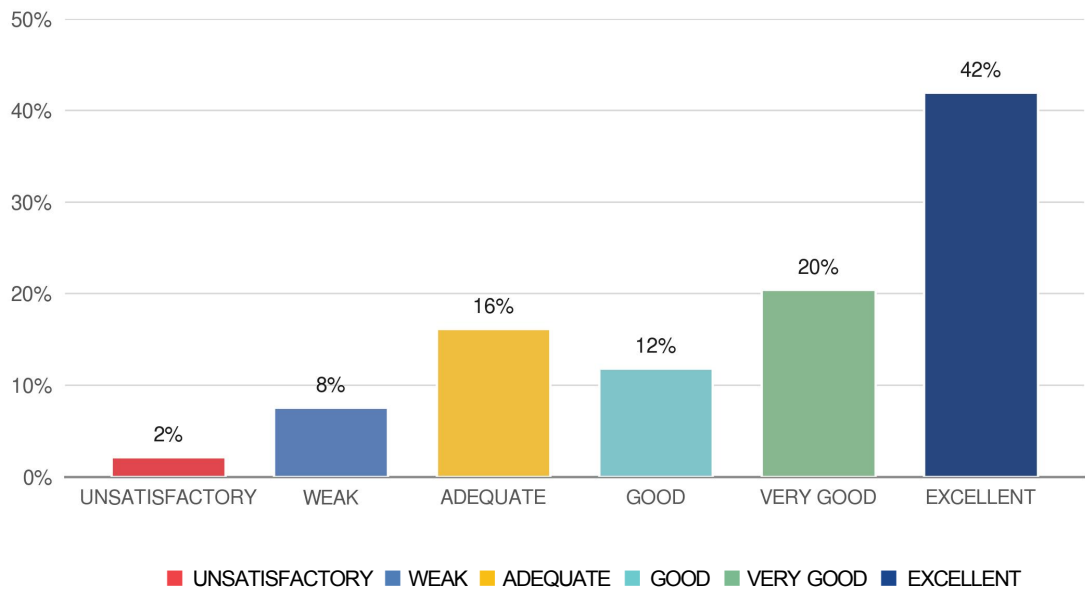
Ben loves Discovery Club during the summer holidays! He always comes back with his face filled with smiles, with so many new memories. Its the perfect opportunity to meet new friends from different schools and it gives him a sense of independence. The club runs flexibly so I can drop him off and then go to work and collect him on my way home! Thank you again to all of the Grafham Water Centre instructors that make my sons school holidays memorable!

Marie DickinsonHuntingdonParen



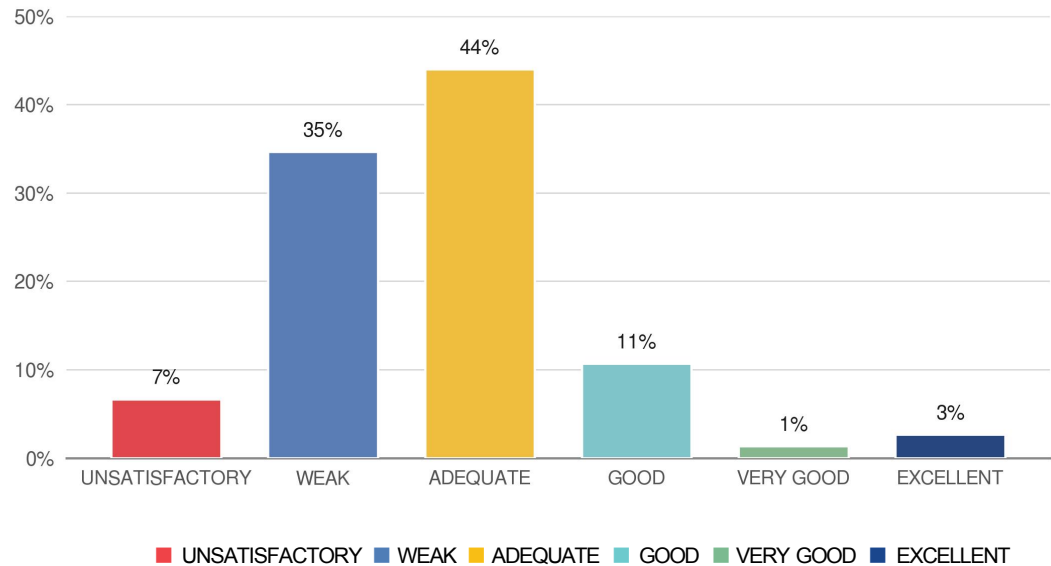
Visitors' ratings of the hospitality

Share of 93 written feedback comments, Sep 2025 – Aug 2026



Visitors' ratings of the facilities

Share of 75 written feedback comments, Sep 2025 – Aug 2026



BUSINESS GWC: BOOKING, COMMUNICATION AND SUPPORT

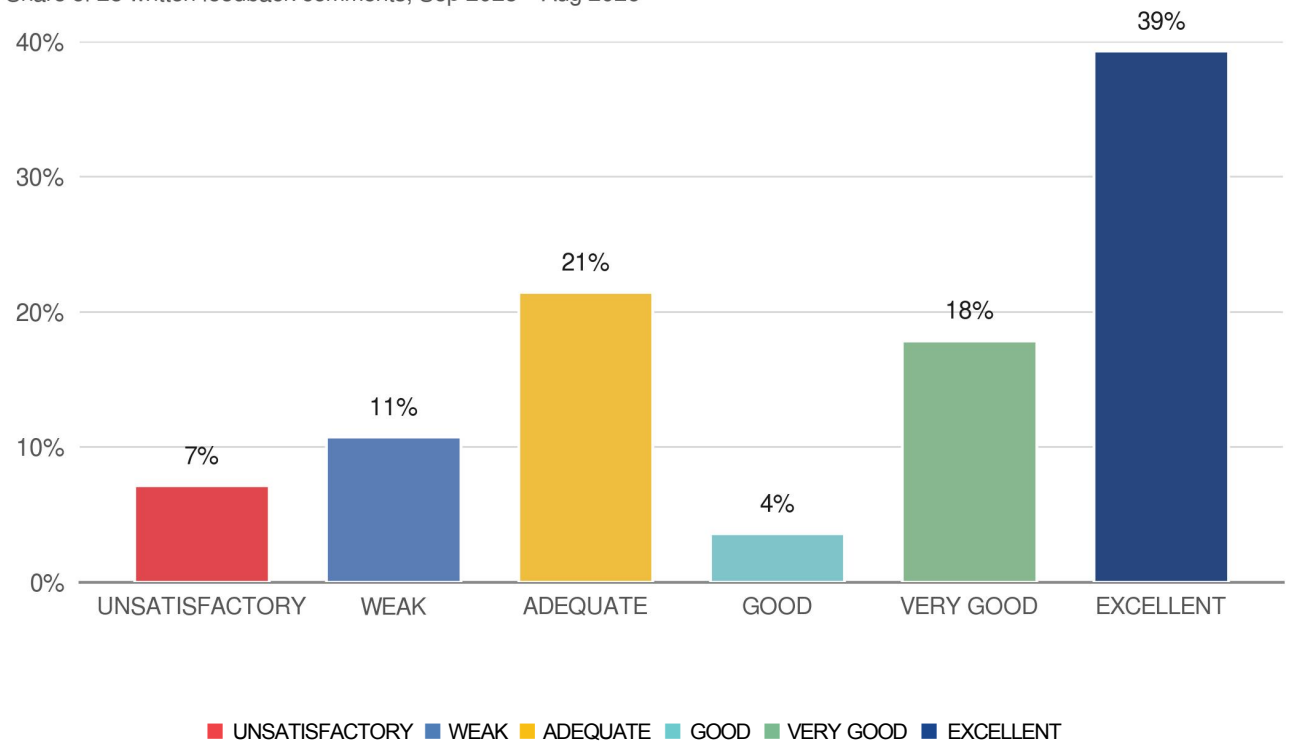
Visitors rated how easy we are to deal with, from the first enquiry and booking to the welcome on arrival and support during their stay. 57% of comments were Very good or Excellent. Groups valued our flexibility and friendly staff, and the feedback also shows where our communication before arrival can be clearer.

“Great day as always, particularly appreciated the flexibility of Andrew and the Centre in letting us do an extra activity when we had some spare time. The booking process was also seamless, and Ed booking our transport for us made things very streamlined.”

PETERBOROUGH VIRTUAL SCHOOL, AUGUST 2026

Visitors' ratings of Business GWC

Share of 28 written feedback comments, Sep 2025 – Aug 2026



Collaborations and partnerships

Grafham Water Centre works with partners across education, business and the community to help young people and adults become confident, capable and active citizens. That includes leadership programmes with Rotary, work experience for SEND students, and team development and conference days for local organisations.



50+

years of
collab

3

community
clubs
based at
the
centre:r

CAMBRIDGE REGIONAL COLLEGE PARTNERSHIP

Grafham Water Centre is proud of its partnership with Cambridge Regional College. SEND students visit the centre for environmental work experience projects. Working outdoors in a safe, supportive setting, they build the confidence, independence, teamwork and work ethic they need for their next steps into employment and adult life.

15+

partner organisations,
including Anglian
Water, Sea Cadets,
Decathlon and
Grafham Water Sailing
Club

7-day

RYLA leadership
residential with
Rotary for young
people aged 14–30

4

national training
bodies: RYA, Paddle
UK, Mountain
Training and MIAS

2

marquees plus flexible
lounges for conferences and
team days



**CAMBRIDGE
REGIONAL COLLEGE**
GREAT CAREERS START HERE

Conclusion

Rising concern about young people's mental health, the ongoing cost of living crisis and the climate emergency make for a challenging operating environment. These same challenges make the experiences Grafham Water Centre provides, outdoors, together and away from screens, more valuable than ever.

For over 50 years Grafham Water Centre has adapted to changing times. Today we host more than 15,000 children every year. The credit belongs to our instructors, catering, housekeeping and office teams, whose care shows in the feedback we receive. Visitors praised our food, our flexibility and staff who "go the extra mile", with most hospitality comments rating us Very good or Excellent.

We know many young people arrive carrying anxiety and low confidence. That is why we give every learner the time and support to push themselves safely, from a first paddle to a climb they never thought they could complete. Teachers describe "life changing moments of confidence and self belief".

However, there is always more to do. Visitors have told us clearly that our accommodation is showing its age. Heating, ventilation and room temperatures, cleaning standards and tired lounges are our priorities for improvement, alongside clearer information for groups before they arrive.



“ So many strengths! The grounds were brilliant. Activities were appropriately pitched and all staff were kind and communicative”

Thorndown Primary, Cambs



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