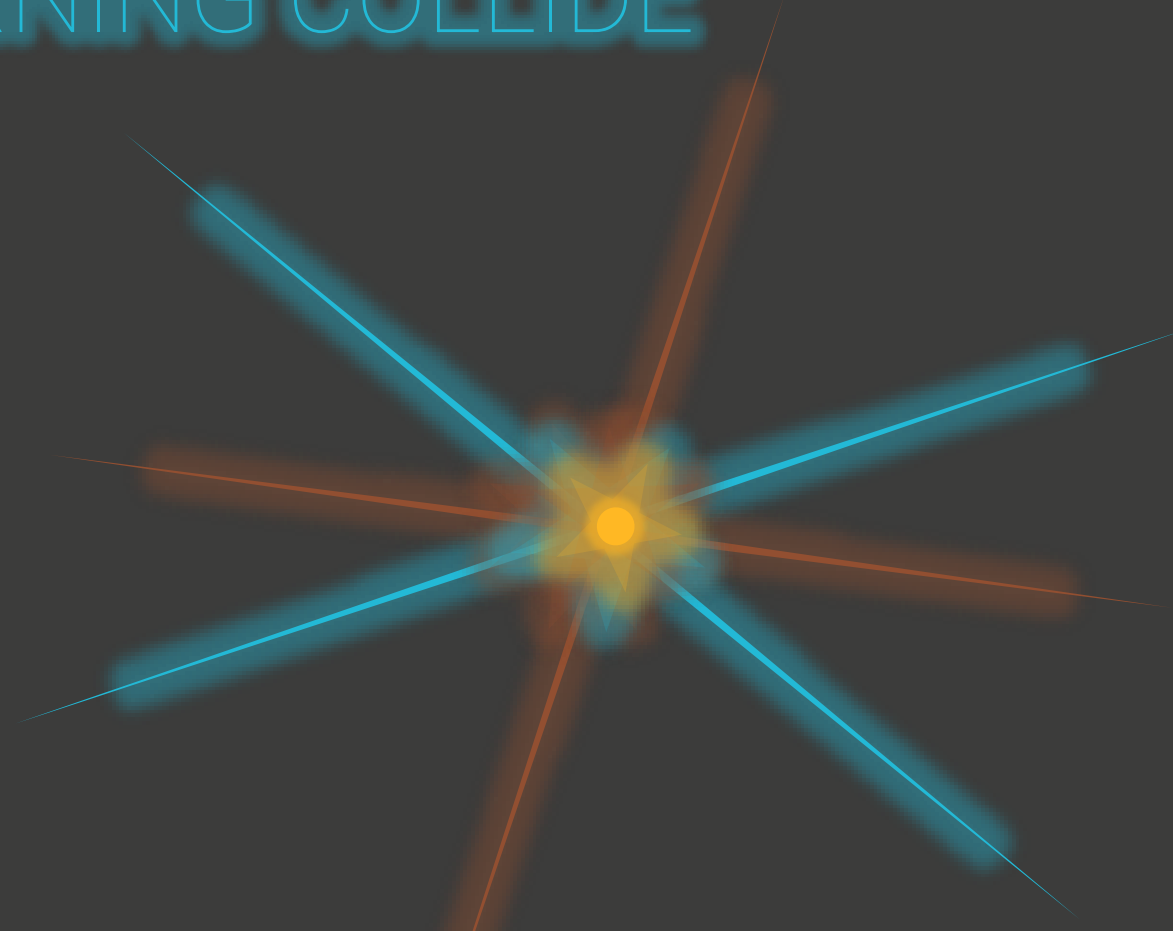


LEVELS WHITEHAVEN, WHERE
ESPORTS, VIRTUAL REALITY GAMING
& IMMERSIVE LEARNING COLLIDE

A **BEC** development





Hello World

Gemma Leadbetter
Commercial Lead





Agenda

- BEC
- Evolution
- Challenge
- Proposal
- Funding
- Timeline
- Digital
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- Start
- Level 1
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- Level 3
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- Want to play?



Build Extraordinary Communities
that make a difference for
people, places and partners,
creating value and unlocking
the potential in our local
communities through
sustainable and responsible
action.

Evolution



Pre-1890's
Davis' Chusan Tea
Warehouse



Post 1890's
Davis Tea and
Coffee shop



C.1960 J. Whittle &
Son Ltd



2021 Acquired by BEC.

No. 6 was built in the 1880's and the site was fully developed as we see it today by 1900. Acquired in May 2021 from J Whittle & Son Ltd the property is a 10,500 sq. ft. Grade II listed building set in Whitehaven Town Centre Conservation Area with a high visibility return frontage to Duke Street and Tangier Street and a unique anchor position at the end of King Street.

Challenge



Having suffered severe weather penetration and structural disrepair with significant failings to the stucco on the external façade, smashed panes and boarded up shopfront windows and the complete failure of one of the dormer windows the building was in desperate need of interior and exterior repairs.

Proposal



To fully restore the external façade and refurbish the interior, retaining where possible the residual internal features and bring this heritage asset back into use, for the community as a digital and gaming hub and café.

Funding

LEVELS

A **BEC** development



Atos

LEVELS will be a transformative project for our community, equipping our young people with the skills and ambition to grasp the limitless opportunities of the digital economy. I'm grateful to all the partners who continue to show that our impact is multiplied when we work together on the issues that matter to our communities."

Eirini Etoimou, Head of Corporate Sustainability & Supply Chain Development, Sellafield Ltd

The redevelopment has been made possible thanks to £3.3m funding from Sellafield Ltd Social Impact Multiplied, £800,000 from BT, £30,000 from Atos and the remaining c. £500,000 from BEC.

Timeline

Sep 2018

Whittles Furniture Store closed. Building in poor condition with +£1m backlog maintenance.

Aug 2021

BEC announces plans to create “a hub that supports the aspirations of young people, creating opportunities for employment and skills development.”

Jan 2024

Our funding partnership with Sellafield SiX and BT is announced.

Jan 2025

VRGateway are announced as our primary delivery partners bringing expertise in business management, ICT, training delivery, and applied VR in a commercial environment for education and entertainment

May 2021

BEC acquired the Whittles building for c£170k.
The Bus Station opened.

Nov 2021

Planning approval secured. Design and business case development starts. Lots of research and consultation.

Nov 2024

Thomas Armstrong are appointed as our main contractor for the redevelopment.

Jan 2026

LEVELS Whitehaven opens!



But why **Digital** and
Gaming?





Digital Skills Gap – the Headlines

Nationally:

82% of job vacancies require some form of digital skill

(Source: UK Digital Skills Report, 2022)

11.3 million UK adults lack basic digital skills

(Source: Good Things Foundation, 2023)

Closing the UK's digital gap could add £12.8 billion/year to the economy

(Source: Good Things Foundation + CEBR, 2023)

In Cumbria:

22% of working-age population lacks basic digital skills

UK average: 18% (Source: UK Digital Skills Report, 2022)

Only 35% of businesses have staff with advanced IT skills

UK average: 50% (Source: Open University, 2023)

45% of in-work employees lack sufficient basic digital skills

(e.g., office software, comms tools) (Source: Open University, 2024)

42% of businesses face challenges recruiting digital-skilled staff

Up from 35% in 2023 (Source: Open University Business Barometer, 2024)



Challenges

Only 40% of secondary schools in Cumbria offer comprehensive digital literacy programmes

(Source: Cumbria LEP, 2023)

Fewer than 25% of students pursue advanced IT courses

(Source: Cumbria LEP, 2024)

Just 30% of educators feel confident teaching advanced digital skills

(Source: Tech Partnership UK, 2022 – National Statistic)

45% of teachers require further professional development in digital skills

(Source: Cumbria LEP, 2024)

Opportunities

60% of jobs in Cumbria will require advanced digital skills by 2030

(Source: Cumbria LEP, 2024)

The need for data-related roles projected to rise by 50% in 5 years

(Source: Tech Nation, 2023)

Predicted shortfall of 1,000 software developers in Cumbria by 2025

(Source: Cumbria Chamber of Commerce, 2023)

Education should learn from
the positive side of **gaming** –
reward, accomplishment,
and fun.

Sebastian Thrun

Computer scientist, engineer, educator, and serial
entrepreneur.





Gaming ...

Why Digital and Gaming Belong Together 🎮

Engagement and motivation

Gaming is a huge interest area for young people – it **grabs their attention** in a way traditional “digital skills” classes don’t.

By engaging with young people in a way that already excites them we can create a **natural pathway to learning** broader digital skills.

Gateway to Careers

The UK gaming industry is worth **£7bn+** annually and growing fast.

Careers in gaming often overlap with coding, animation, design, software engineering, cybersecurity, and digital marketing.

Levels will showcase career routes in tech, creative industries, and esports.

Bridging Fun and Future

Framing LEVELS around both **play and learning** helps young people see digital skills not just as schoolwork, but as part of their lifestyle and future opportunities.



Transferrable Skills

Gaming builds teamwork, problem-solving, and strategic thinking. Skills like adaptability, creativity, collaboration, critical thinking, and communication are **essential skills for future careers**.

Content creation (podcasting, editing, design) develops practical digital literacy and gives young people a way of sharing their voice and ideas building their confidence and communication skills.

Digital Inclusion

Not every young person will attend a coding class — but they'll happily come to play games.

Gaming provides an **inclusive entry point** for people who might otherwise feel left out of digital opportunities, especially in rural/deprived areas.

Gamified Learning

LEVELS turns education into an adventure. With gamified learning we take the elements that make games engaging — points, levels, challenges, rewards, and competition — and apply them to education and training.

It's not about "playing a video game to learn," **its using game mechanics** to make **learning more interactive and motivating**. People can build real world skills in LEVELS – making progress fun, competitive and rewarding.

Gaming provides the **spark**;
digital skills provide the
substance.

Together, they make learning fun,
accessible, and directly linked to
real opportunities.





START



SOCIALISE

LEVELS café is a space to recharge and refuel!

Open to the public and serving local produce for people to enjoy, LEVELS café doubles up as the audience zone for esports competitions and offers insight into other activities and career pathways via digital display screens and viewing window into the Demo area.

Want to try an immersive experience?

You can book taster sessions on the demo VR unit or jump right into a crash course and try out the Aviation Simulator!



ESPORTS

LEVELS features a 10 player esports arena - one of Cumbria's first e-sports arenas.

Local teams will compete against the best students in the UK in the British esports Student Champs and have fun and make friends playing in LEVELS local leagues.

LEVELS offers the Esports Leadership Programme for people as young 11 - opening up new opportunities and inspiring future careers linked to an educational pathway.

This stand-alone accredited Level 1 and Level 2 industry-recognised qualification is a partnership between the Leadership Skills Foundation and the British Esports Federation.

Did you know? The Olympic Esports Games commence in 2027 and the national Gaming and Esports Arena is currently being built in Sunderland and is set to open in March 2026!



V VIRTUAL REALITY

LEVELS is packed with state-of-the-art equipment and offers a range of cutting-edge immersive VR experiences for both entertainment and education.

With 6 single player VR stations, 4 player free roam arena, 4 motion simulators and haptic feedback kit you can step into new worlds with VR – fly through space, explore ancient cities and go on epic adventures.

VR gaming takes play to the next LEVEL. Step into new worlds, take on epic challenges, and connect with friends like never before. It's fun, active, and creative – helping you build teamwork, problem-solving, and digital skills that go beyond the game.



LEVEL 3

L LEARN

The 31-person learning suite features a range of immersive educational equipment and content, with trained staff and tutors available to support groups and local schools.

The dedicated editing and recording suite is perfect for creating and refining audio and video content with opportunities for young people to join podcasting workshops hosted by industry professionals and to host LEVELS esports podcast.

VR learning brings lessons to life. Whether you're exploring the human body, walking through history, or designing your own world, VR makes learning immersive, exciting, and unforgettable. It builds confidence, creativity, and future-ready skills — while making education feel like an adventure.



LEVELS dedicated tech-free zone is a multi functional space for traditional games, socialising and relaxing.

This space is all about in person connection — a place to relax, chat with friends, and enjoy classic games like chess, cards, or board games.

Whether you're taking a break from digital adventures or just want some quiet time, the Tech-Free Zone offers a calming environment to uplug.

LEVELS is the place for schools, startups, and companies to access the latest in immersive technology and software development tools.

Play is our brain's favourite
way of learning.

Diane Ackerman

Writer, poet and naturalist.





Squad up with LEVELS

LEVELS is a social impact development addressing root cause issues here in West Cumbria and aims to offer educational opportunities at low and no cost to under 18's.

Collaborating multiplies the investment by funders and gives your organisation opportunities to engage with and inspire young people and shape the offer at LEVELS.

Could LEVELS support you in delivering your social impact agenda?

LEVELS have opportunities available for local businesses from £500 to £30,000 which will enable the delivery of esports training, school visits and educational content development.

We can also offer bespoke opportunities aligned to your business aspirations and budget.

Email sponsor@levelswhitehaven.co.uk or visit www.levelswhitehaven.co.uk and complete the online form to register your interest and find out more.



Help people LEVEL up

Do you have experience delivery Key Stage 3+ or adult education?

Would you like to help people get to the next level?

We're looking for experienced Tutors to support workshops and immersive educational delivery for young people and adults – in person and remotely.

Visit www.levelswhitehaven.co.uk/jobs for more information and to register your interest.



Sign up - all LEVELS welcome

Know a young person aged 11-18 who'd like to get involved in LEVELS esports leagues?

Registration is open now. We'll be playing **Rocket League** in the first season and other titles in the future.

Training and taster sessions start early November 2025 with the British Esports Student Champs starting in January 2026.

Visit www.levelswhitehaven.co.uk/esports for more information and to register your interest.

The next esports superstar could be right here in Cumbria!



Unlock the first LEVEL?

So are you ready to play?

We're hosting taster sessions at Ingwell Hall, Westlakes Science Park. You can test out all the equipment that you'll find in LEVELS and meet our delivery partners and members of LEVELS crew.

- Friday 31 October 2025 – For Business and Industry
- Saturday 1 November 2025 – For Educators, Families and Young People

If you're interested in attending email info@discoverbec.com.

Follow [@levelswHITEHAVEN](#) on LinkedIn, Facebook or Instagram to stay connected!



השנה
החדשה
החלה