



## COMMUNITY WEALTH BUILDING PRACTICE

# West Lothian Council and West Calder and Harburn Community Development Trust – The Coop Discovery Centre

## Context

West Calder and Harburn Community Development Trust (WCHCDT) is a community-led charity. It was established in 2013 with support from the Community Regeneration Officer at West Lothian Council.

The Trust exists to deliver on the Community Action Plan, which is shaped by local residents. It also serves as a Community Anchor Organisation for West Calder and surrounding areas.



The Trust was created to help regenerate the area – one of several post-mining communities - and tackle economic and social challenges. The Trust receives some funding from local windfarm community benefits.

They focus on three main priorities:

- Jobs and opportunities
- Economy and identity
- Place-making and community

Since 2013, WCHCDT has worked closely with West Lothian Council. Together, they have delivered projects that address local needs and support regeneration more widely.

## Community Impact to Date

The Trust runs a range of projects that strengthen the local community and improve quality of life.



Key achievements include:

**COVID-19 Support:** Delivered more than 60,000 fresh two-course meals during lockdown. This was done in partnership with West Lothian Council and Braid House Day Centre.

**Community Woods and Garden:** Established in 2013 by two local mothers to protect green space for children. It is now managed by The Trust, has part-time staff and supplies fresh produce to the Community Shop at Polbeth Hub and the Brunch Club at West Calder Hub.

**Annual Community Events:** Organises West Lothian's largest free-entry fireworks display, attracting over 4,000 people. Also runs the Santa Parade, Christmas Markets, heritage and Remembrance Day events.

**Good Connections Wellbeing Service:** Helps residents connect to services and activities that improve health and social links. A Community Wellbeing Link Worker provides one-to-one support.

## The Cooperative Discovery Centre Project

The Old Bakery Building has long been a landmark in West Calder and it was identified in the Community Action Plan as a priority for regeneration. Designed by William Baillie, an architect with a strong connection to West Calder, the building operated as a bakery in 1909 and ran successfully for over 70 years.

The building was once the jewel in the crown of a successful local co-operative society with 16 branches and which went on to become part of Scotmid Co-op.

There were many such societies across Scotland. In this case, it was created by a mining community as an alternative to

the exploitative mine-run shops. Later, the building became a hub for small community businesses. The trust chief executive noted that most locals have some connection to this building.

WCHCDT wanted to preserve this cooperative history. Their plan was to own the building on behalf of the community and create a Scottish Co-operative Discovery Centre.

Funding came from several sources including:

- Regeneration Capital Grant Fund (Scottish Government)
- Place-Based Investment Funding



- National Lottery Heritage Fund
- Historic Environment Scotland
- UK Government Community Ownership Fund

### Ownership model

WCHCDT took ownership in 2020. The new Discovery Centre will be run by The Scottish Co-operative Discovery Centre Ltd a locally controlled Community Benefit Society (a co-op in its own right). This company will lease the building from the Trust and return any profits to support community projects.

### Expected Outcomes and Benefits

The Discovery Centre will deliver benefits in employment, learning, and community facilities.

Planned outcomes include:

- Creation of 65 construction jobs during the build phase.
- Creation of 22 permanent jobs once open.
- Training for more than 150 students each year, both on site and through outreach.
- A flexible events and learning space for the community.
- A social enterprise gift shop featuring local crafts.
- A large, accessible café kitchen suitable for wheelchair users and catering interns.
- Supply links between the café kitchen and the community growing space.
- Educational partnerships with local schools and colleges for enterprise and food tech.
- Creation of a community owned and run asset.
- Creation of a mechanism to create and retain income locally.
- Local supply chains.

### Co-production and Inclusive Design

The Discovery Centre's design was shaped by consultation with people with additional support needs. Consultation and engagement highlighted that in many renovated older buildings, lifts are hidden at the back or hidden away, creating a separate and less welcoming experience for those needing to use them. In response, the Coop Discovery Centre places lifts at the heart of its staircases, with matching wall displays, so every visitor shares the same route and experience.



## Challenges and Learning Points

### Taking ownership of the building

WCHCDT's route to acquiring the former bakery building was complex and required overcoming multiple barriers. When the group first formally pursued ownership in 2018, only one Community Asset Transfer (CAT) had been successfully completed in West Lothian, and the process was still in its infancy.



With support from the [Community Ownership Support Service \(COSS\)](#), the group submitted a comprehensive CAT request. However, their initial RCGF application was unsuccessful, leaving them without the funds needed to progress the transfer. After securing funding from the National Lottery and resubmitting their CAT request, WLC received interest from a private buyer.

A cooperative arrangement was reached whereby the private buyer purchased the property from WLC at a rate taking account of the potential community benefit, then sold the main building to WCHCDT. The buyer retained the adjoining stading for office use, enabling both parties to coexist amicably.

This unconventional route to ownership offered some advantages:

- Full ownership of the asset, allowing greater flexibility in its use.
- Strong neighbour relations, particularly with the local ventilation company using the office space, which is now installing the building's ventilation system and plans to use the space for apprentice training.

WCHCDT emphasises the invaluable support provided by WLC throughout the funding and ownership process.

### Funding

Securing the required level of funding for a project of this scale, particularly during the early stages, was a significant challenge, including requiring support from West Lothian Council to submit a Regeneration Capital Grant fund application

The COVID-19 pandemic struck during the funding phase, prompting the Trust to pause development of the Discovery Centre and redirect resources to large scale community support. This swift and effective pandemic response demonstrated the group's capacity



and capability, which later strengthened their position in securing further funding.

## Working with West Lothian Council

The support received from WLC has been wide-ranging, involving multiple service areas. Examples include:

- Regeneration Officer – initial Community Action Plan and support establishing the trust
- Community Wealth Building Team - assisted in securing place-based investment funding and bringing resources into the area. This team has worked both internally to change perceptions as well as externally bringing in funding.
- Heritage Officer – currently safeguarding the Discovery Centre’s collection during building works. As an accredited museum, WLC can oversee the collection until The Scottish Cooperative Discovery Centre Ltd obtains its own accreditation.
- Secretariat support for a local development trust forum where the local development trusts meet quarterly to share learning and support one another.

*“We would not be where we are without the support of West Lothian Council.”*

**Matt Pearce, Chief Executive, WCHCDT**

## Key ingredients to the success of the discovery centre

### 1. Strong governance and sustainable staffing

The Board’s expertise in community development has been critical. Community benefit funds from a local wind farm help finance a core post, providing sustainable, long-term staffing. This stability has allowed the Development Trust to focus on thorough project planning rather than constantly seeking short-term funding. A skilled and supportive core team have been essential to the development of the project.

### 2. True partnership working

Strong partnerships have been central to the successful development of the project. As outlined earlier, collaboration with West Lothian Council has been pivotal, providing vital support at multiple stages. The Trust also worked closely with neighbouring businesses to secure ownership of the asset, demonstrating the value of cooperative problem-solving.

Partnerships with local colleges and schools have played a significant role in shaping learning materials and facilities that will support skills development for the community. Working with Scotmid, the Trust created an engaging and playful educational environment, while collaboration with local food growing initiatives has established a sustainable supply chain for the on-site café.

These relationships have embodied the principles of cooperation, enabling WCHCDT to work productively with a diverse range of specialists. This collaborative approach has not



only broadened the project's reach but has also strengthened its foundations for long-term sustainability.

### 3. Embeddedness in the community

The project originated from a community action plan, ensuring that its objectives are firmly rooted in local priorities. WCHCDT has continued to actively engage with residents throughout the project's development, ensuring it meets community needs and expectations.

The Trust's strong visibility in the community, through well-known and loved events such as fireworks displays and Santa parades, has built significant local goodwill. This presence also enabled the Trust to address and dispel misconceptions that the refurbishment of the old bakery was funded by public money diverted from other essential services. Once residents understood that funding had been secured externally and would bring clear benefits in terms of job creation and tourism, community support strengthened even further.

#### Key Community and Stakeholder Engagement Activities

- 2018 Community Survey – 132 responses, informing initial priorities.
- Project-Specific Survey – 446 responses, focusing on the bakery development.
- Public Consultations – two major events reaching 188 attendees.
- Resident Focus Group – involving 13 households adjacent to the site.
- Stakeholder Engagement – with over 11 organisations, including community groups, local businesses, schools, and West Lothian Council departments.
- Feasibility and Design Reports – development of comprehensive Options and Feasibility and Design reports.
- 10-Day Cooperative Heritage Festival – providing opportunities for public feedback on proposed designs and uses for the building.

While this thorough approach to engagement has been time-intensive, it has been a critical factor in the project's success, ensuring both strong community support and stakeholder backing.

### Conclusion

This project stands as a leading local example of Community Wealth Building in action within West Lothian. It has successfully channelled new resources into the community, secured community ownership of a significant local asset, and prioritised local economic benefit through large-scale procurement with a local supplier as the main contractor. It has also mobilised community investment through local shares, created fair employment and training opportunities, and embedded the principles of co-operatives at its core—celebrating both the history and future of local co-operative enterprises.



A central aim of the project is to raise the profile of co-operatives and Inclusive and Democratic Business Models (IDBMs), demonstrating that these models are not niche or peripheral “community projects,” but are in fact long-standing and successful business structures found across many sectors: from football clubs to architecture firms. Increasing awareness and understanding of these models is vital to growing the social economy, enabling more wealth to be generated, retained, and shared within the local area.

