

Endangered Spaces report

June 2019



It's what we do

in association with



Introduction



Everything we do is rooted in our members and their communities. In 2016, we relaunched our membership proposition, offering members a 5% reward for buying Co-op products from our businesses and giving 1% towards our Local Community Fund. We've already given more than £40m to over 16,000 community projects across the UK through the fund since 2016.

Our purpose is to "champion a better way of doing business for you and your communities" and we understand the importance of supporting communities, bringing people together, and empowering them to find new ways of co-operating. At a time when communities need our help more than ever, we're looking at what they need and how co-operation can help, through our Co-operate 2022 plan.

The Co-operate 2022 vision and activity plan was co-created by speaking with our members and communities and together we've identified three key areas that make communities stronger and places to live and work; community spaces, mental and physical wellbeing and skills. We know these are so important individually but even more so, collectively, as they also help to address other issues such as loneliness and isolation within the community.

An important outcome of this work has been the creation of the Community Wellbeing Index which covers 28,000 communities across the country and brings together a picture of the overall wellbeing of communities.

We also understand education plays an essential role in the wellbeing of communities. Through the Co-op Academies Trust, we're helping to transform the lives of children across the north of England. Founded on co-operative principles, our academies are dedicated to offering children a better education. One that isn't solely about qualifications, but also about inspiration and the value of working together - with their teachers, fellow pupils and wider community.

We continually develop our community work and support members to make a difference in their local area. Communities need common space to grow. Whether that's libraries, parks or leisure centres, they need spaces where people can come together to do the things that matter.

To support this over the next few years, we'll be focusing our efforts on these areas. We've launched a wide range of initiatives that will provide a framework for members and local causes so they can help a broad range of issues; from improving community spaces or helping school leavers learn life skills, to simply bring people together, to improve their own and others' wellbeing. We've also identified a number of like-minded organisations who we will work with to help deliver on this plan, such as our strategic partners Locality, where we will be building on the momentum of their existing Save our Spaces campaign. As well as Steel Warriors and a number of supporters such as Parks Alliance, Co-ops UK, Plunkett Foundation and Neighbourhood Watch.

Our own charity, the Co-op Foundation, will continue to invest in spaces to strengthen communities' capacity to overcome challenges. The Foundation has already awarded more than £1.4 million to help 20 community organisations grow their trading activities and secured £1 million of government funding to help more than 7,500 young people improve local spaces. Space to Connect, its new £1.6 million partnership with government, will build on this work.

To understand the importance of these spaces in communities, we, in partnership with Locality, are launching a new campaign to protect, support and improve areas that add value to a community.

Locality is a national network that supports community organisations to be strong and successful. Together we will identify the most at-risk spaces, empower communities and mobilise the necessary support to protect the spaces most important to our neighbourhoods.

Rebecca Birkbeck,
Director Community and Shared Value, Co-op





At Locality, we've known for some time that many of our important local buildings and spaces are being lost. These are our swimming pools and libraries; our parks and play areas; our community centres and town halls. Local authorities, who have been affected by austerity since 2010, have often found themselves struggling to keep them open, or have been looking for a short-term cash boost by selling them off to the private sector. These are the everyday places where extraordinary things happen, where local people come together, access vital services and support each other. Once sold off to private developers they are lost to us.

That's why we launched Locality's Save our Spaces campaign last June. Our Great British Sell Off Report showed that we're losing over 4,000 publicly owned spaces every single year.

All over the country thousands of local people are coming together in community organisations to step in, step up and fight to save these buildings through community ownership. And we want to see more of it. This is a solution that puts our much-loved buildings and spaces back at the heart of the community and protects them for generations to come. The community organisations in our membership network are transforming empty or underused buildings; taking control of the things that matter most to them and building community from within, based on existing strengths and skills.

That's why Co-op and Locality are working together to save our much-loved community buildings and spaces from being sold off for private use. We will protect, support and improve community spaces over the next three years, and beyond, demonstrating co-operation in practice.

Together we can save our community spaces. For all of us. Forever.

Tony Armstrong,
CEO Locality



Background

Endangered Spaces: Special Report

Co-op and Locality understand that unlocking the power of community is the key to creating a fairer society where every community thrives. We have spoken to people across the UK to find out how access to, and a lack of, community spaces were affecting them.

We're committed in helping our members to make a measurable difference and create true shared value in their communities. Over the past year, we've been talking to our members and people across the UK to find out what matters most to them and what could be improved in their local community, which has helped us to develop the Co-op Community Wellbeing Index.

This has been extremely valuable as we develop the next phase of our community programme. The Index has already given us an insight into what's important to people in their local communities, from the quality of education, housing affordability, and public transport - to the amount of green space and the number of community centres.

We've identified a link between improved wellbeing and areas where community spaces such as cafes, community centres and playgrounds are easy to access. The data also shows that in some areas where there is increased access to parks and green spaces, crime rates in the town centre decrease.

Findings from the Community Wellbeing Index demonstrate a positive link between social spaces and overall wellbeing in the UK. As the number of social spaces increases, higher wellbeing scores are recorded. Despite these positive effects, a recent report from Locality entitled 'The Great British Sell Off' shows the UK is losing over 4,000 publicly owned buildings and spaces every year.

And that's why we are taking action to protect these valuable spaces and help communities reclaim these assets. As part of this and in a bid to reverse the damaging effects that a loss of community hubs bring, Co-op is proudly partnering with Steel Warriors, a charity that takes confiscated knives, and turns them into outdoor gym equipment.

This creates a new space for the community to come together, learn new skills and improve physical and mental wellbeing. Over the next year, Co-op will support the construction of two outdoor gyms in deprived areas of the UK where youth crime is an issue. By 2022, together, Co-op and Steel Warriors aim to have created gyms in 20 locations. Each gym will also have a local mentor to run training sessions for different abilities every week. Local training instructors and sports groups will be invited to use the groups for free and Co-op will actively connect local youth groups to use the facilities.

Locality has also supported local communities to save and improve the spaces that matter to them for over 25 years. Helping people start campaigns for community ownership, to providing the business support to make these spaces thrive into the future.

These are brilliant examples of how we can support communities, but more needs to be done.

It's here in these everyday places where extraordinary things happen. Where local residents come together, access vital services and support each other. As a result, the importance of these community spaces cannot be underestimated.

As a result of these findings Co-op and Locality are working together to highlight the need to protect and preserve these spaces for the future through its Endangered Spaces campaign and are committing to protect, support and improve over 2,000 spaces by 2022.



Overview of Campaign

In London alone, 81 youth centres have closed since 2011¹, a figure that drastically increases when you look at the national number. Between 2014 and 2018, councils around the UK closed 373 playgrounds. This figure could rise to nearly 500 by the end of 2019².

Previous reports indicate that there is a link between the decrease in community spaces and the decrease in overall health, while both crime and unemployment rates go up. Together, this contributes to the pride of a community going down.

Endangered Spaces

We estimate that 16,000 public and community spaces will be under threat by 2022³. These endangered spaces include parks and green spaces, libraries, leisure centres, swimming pools and youth clubs. There are already thousands of people around the country coming together in community organisations, fighting to save these buildings through community ownership, fundraising and more, and we want to help them save as many spaces as we can.

Endangered Spaces is a campaign launched by the Co-op and Locality that supports people who want to protect, support and improve 2,000 of the most at-risk community spaces around the UK, making sure they are protected for future generations.

Bringing Co-operate 2022 to life

We want the public to join our mission and help identify spaces in need of funding. By simply visiting www.coop.co.uk/endedgerspaces spaces can be highlighted as in need of some help and have access to the following tools and resources. The webpage will include case studies, how to help and relevant videos to highlight the importance of the campaign.

Co-op Member Pioneers and Locality members based around the UK, who work tirelessly to help increase co-operation in local communities, will help drive this forward within the community. We already have 300 Member Pioneers on the ground and that figure is growing. By 2020 we'll have 1,500 working in the heart of their community

and their support will be invaluable in identifying spaces that need saving.

Co-op Member Pioneers will have access to toolkits and offer advice to communities on how they can help protect, improve or save a space.

Additional information can be found at www.coop.co.uk/member-pioneers

'Space to Connect' fund is a £1.6m match-funding partnership between the Co-op Foundation and Government to help strengthen communities by maximising the potential of spaces where people can connect and co-operate. Funding is available across England. Visit www.coopfoundation.org.uk for further information, and to apply.

Locality Hotline

Locality is the national network supporting community organisations to be strong and successful. Locality's team of local experts based across the nation will be available to answer questions and guide people to the resources and support that can help them save or protect a space they care about. Additional support also includes a dedicated free advice hotline from Locality, specialised toolkits and access to guidance for Co-op Member Pioneers.

¹https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2018_03_20_sb_londons_lost_youth_services_2018_final.pdf

²Freedom of information request from Association of Play Industries

³Locality's Great British Sell Off report

Endangered Spaces Findings

For our members and customers we represent community and fairness. A business that genuinely cares about the world around it. Contributing to the wellbeing of members and supporting the communities in which they live is at the heart of Co-op and what it stands for.

Research has been carried out to better understand how people across the country feel about their community spaces: how they use them, the reasons why these spaces are important to them and how these resources impact the happiness of the communities in which they sit. We found that more than half of those asked feel more needs to be done to protect community centres and spaces.

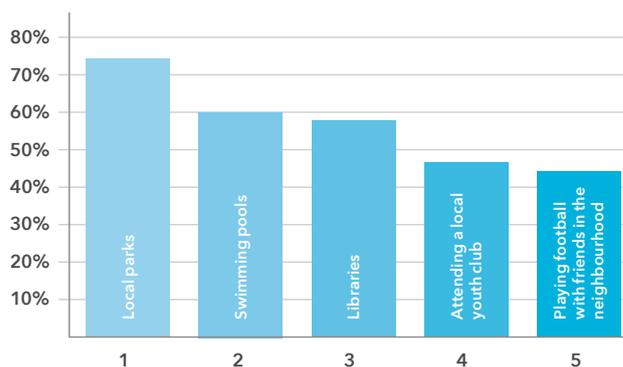
When asked why public spaces are important to their community, people gave us three main reasons why:

- **Gives people a safe space (48%)**
 - Having community spaces that are safe, where people from all ages and backgrounds can spend time without feeling intimidated, is essential
- **Helps people socialise and make friends (58%)**
 - For those over the age of 55 - over two thirds of whom use community spaces to meet people and make new friends
 - For those aged between 25-45 - three quarters have made new friends in a community space
- **Helps people exercise (50%)**
 - Half of all respondents say community spaces are essential in helping them exercise and stay fit. This becomes even more important to those over the age of 55 (58%), who say this is the most important factor after socialising
 - One fifth of 25-34 year olds use their local community centre to stay fit and maintain a healthy wellbeing

The average distance to community centres varies up and down the country. Londoners benefit most from the city's density, having to travel only 1.3km to the nearest community centre. This is significantly shorter than the national average 9.5km, and areas of Wales where people travel up to 10.8km.

An overwhelming number of those we surveyed said they had happy memories of spending time at community spaces with friends, family members or on their own. Three quarters of those asked look back fondly at times they've spent at their local parks, while nearly two thirds say they have happy memories at community swimming pools.

Community spaces that hold fond memories for locals across the UK:



The availability of community spaces in towns and cities around the UK has been proven to not only make communities stronger, but safer too. Unfortunately, almost half of those aged between 24-35 have witnessed the closure of a community centre, swimming pool or playing field. What's more, nearly three quarters of Brits could not identify if and where any investment in community spaces had taken place in their local area.

Regions with residents that have experienced closures within their community spaces:

1. Greater London (43%)
2. North East (39%)
3. North West (38%)
4. East Midlands (34%)
5. Wales (34%)
6. Northern Ireland (33%)
7. South West (33%)
8. Yorkshire and the Humber (33%)
9. West Midlands (32%)
10. Scotland (31%)
11. South East (28%)
12. East of England (19%)

The research reveals that the public believe their community spaces are at risk and more needs to be done to protect the spaces in their local area (56%). For some, visiting community spaces is their main method of socialising and keeping healthy, so making sure they stay open and in good condition is essential to keeping communities together.

For some, visiting community spaces is their main method of socialising and keeping healthy

We asked people which local spaces they think are important in their communities:

- Parks (66%)
- Playgrounds (59%)
- Libraries (57%)
- Leisure centres (53%)
- Youth centres (52%)
- Community centres (49%)
- Grass pitches (48%)

Top 5 cities where the community centre is most considered an important hub:

1. Belfast (70%)
2. Southampton (66%)
3. Bristol (65%)
4. Liverpool (64%)
5. Cardiff (61%)



Top 5 cities where the swimming pool holds a strong memory for residents:

1. Belfast (73%)
2. Brighton (68%)
3. Bristol (68%)
4. Plymouth (68%)
5. Cardiff (63%)

Top 5 cities where the local park holds a strong memory for residents:

1. Liverpool (84%)
2. Belfast (82%)
3. Birmingham (79%)
4. Bristol (77%)
5. Edinburgh (76%)

Top 5 cities where the library holds a strong memory for residents:

1. Belfast (66%)
2. Glasgow (64%)
3. Bristol (64%)
4. Sheffield (64%)
5. Southampton (60%)

Top 5 cities where the youth club holds a strong memory for residents:

1. Belfast (69%)
2. Glasgow (59%)
3. Sheffield (56%)
4. Edinburgh (54%)
5. Plymouth (48%)

Top 5 cities where the green space holds a strong memory for residents:

1. Sheffield (53%)
2. Glasgow (51%)
3. Newcastle (50%)
4. Cardiff (48%)
5. Leeds (47%)



Browsing the bookshelves of the library and finding interesting books and then disappearing to a corner and reading some of them and taking out others to read at home.

All the children in the street playing football.

Being together as a community and spending time together.

All the kids in our neighbourhood made our own entertainment with what resources we had.

Getting all kids together for picnics, meeting the queen at an opening party.

Being close to nature in parks, finding books that are full of magical adventures.



Green spaces

Recent research from Fields in Trust found that 2.5 million people do not have a local green space. Studies have shown that parks and green spaces have a positive impact on communities and have been proven to deliver health and wellbeing benefits. Within the same Fields in Trust report, researchers calculated that outdoor exercise delivered an estimated £2.2bn of health benefits to adults in England each year.

[5 http://www.fieldsintrust.org/research](http://www.fieldsintrust.org/research)

Grass pitches are really valued as community spaces and on average, people in the UK travel 1.4km to their closest one. Those in Northern Ireland need to walk only 15 minutes (0.6km) to their closest grass pitch, while some people in Scotland need to travel a much longer distance of 3.9km. In some town centres where green spaces are easily accessed by the community, there has been a reduction in crime rates which further shows just how important they are.

Most people use these spaces to spend time with family (63%) and friends (56%), but grass pitches are also commonly used by social and youth clubs for group activities. Those aged 16-24-years old are most likely to have made friends at grass pitches (65%)

As a result, almost 60% of people would be disappointed if their local grass pitch was no longer available to them, and 45% of people said they would be willing to spend their own personal time each week supporting the space.

- Cities where grass pitches are most considered an important hub: Glasgow (63%), Nottingham (63%), Bristol (62%)
- Regions where grass pitches are most considered an important hub: South West (62%), East Mids (61%), North West (59%)
- Greater London and Wales were most likely to say their local grass pitch was in need of help (35%), followed by Scotland (32%)
- Cities who said their pitches were most in need of help: Glasgow (39%), Cardiff (33%) Sheffield (32%)

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Libraries

Findings from the report indicate that as a nation, libraries are hugely valued in local communities. Half of us spend time at our local library each week, and over three quarters (77%) of parents with children living at home, say libraries are an important asset in their community.

Co-operators have always recognised the importance of education and it has remained one of the core Co-operative Principles since its birth. The founders of the Co-operative Group, the Rochdale Pioneers saw access to education as vital and arranged discussions and “self-improvement classes” for members and regularly ran library committees and gave meeting spaces in stores as reading.

A staggering 70% of those surveyed feel their local library could use extra funding or government support.

Those under the age of 24 spend the most time at the library and would also be the most willing to give up time to support it. While a third of people in this age group spend time at their local library to read or study, many visit as part of social clubs.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, London is the best served by libraries with Londoners travelling only 0.8km on average to their local resource centre. In fact, when looking at local authorities with the shortest average distance to the nearest library, six out of the top 10 are based in the capital. That’s not to say cities outside of London aren’t well represented, as parts of the East Midlands (Nottingham and Leicester) and the Eastern region (Norwich and Cambridge) also enjoy a high density of libraries.



Top 5 cities where a library is most considered an important hub:

1. Belfast (78%)
2. Bristol (77%)
3. Nottingham (76%)
4. Liverpool (76%)
5. Glasgow (74%)

Top 5 regions where a library most considered an important hub:

1. Northern Ireland (77%)
2. South West (75%)
3. Greater London (74%)
4. Scotland (73%)
5. South East (73%)

- Regions where libraries have been identified as most in need of funding and support: Greater London (33%), Scotland (30%), East Midlands and Northern Ireland (28%)
- Cities with libraries most in need: Sheffield (33%), Glasgow (33%), Plymouth (30%)
- Wales, Northern Ireland and South West are the areas who spend the most time in the library with friends each week- hotspots in the UK for library use



Leisure centres

Leisure centres have many uses and are considered incredibly important assets.

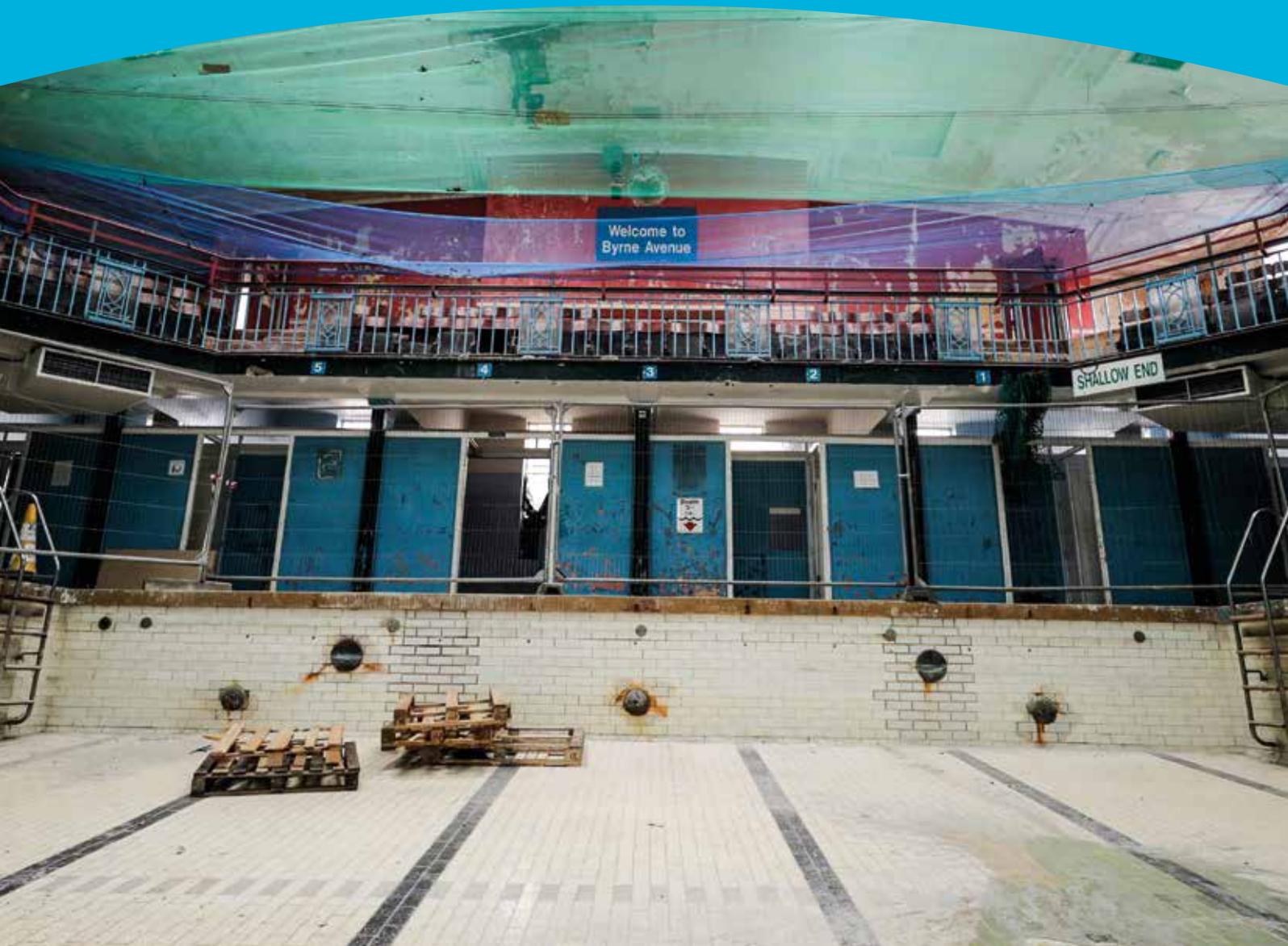
Almost two thirds (64%) of people surveyed revealed they have made friends while spending time at their local facility.

Over half of those with a leisure centre in their area said they would give up time to help support it, and over one fifth would spend up to two hours per week doing so - showing just how important these spaces are.

The average distance to the nearest leisure facility is low across all regions of the UK so they are easy to visit and are often enjoyed by communities around the country. The shortest average distance at regional level is recorded in London at just 0.01km, followed by Northern Ireland (0.1km), the South East (0.4km) and the Eastern region

(0.6km)

- Regions who are most likely to consider leisure centre an important hub: Northern Ireland (77%) South West (67%) and North West (65%)
- Cities who are most likely to consider leisure centre an important hub: Belfast (77%) Bristol (69%) and Plymouth (67%)
- Leisure centres most in need: Northern Ireland (37%), Greater London (33%) Wales (33%)
- City hotspots with leisure centres most in need: Belfast (38%), Cardiff (36%), Glasgow (30%). People in Brighton were significantly less likely to think this (11%).
- Northern Ireland, East of England and Wales are the areas who spend the most time in the leisure centre with friends each week



Case Studies



Stretford Public Hall is a Victorian Grade II listed hall built in the 1870s and has been used by the Stretford community for over a century. In 2014, the hall was put on the market for private ownership and we, the community,

rallied together to save it and retain it as a public asset. After a tireless year of campaigning, we won the tender and brought our beloved hall back into the hands of the community for a grand total of £9.

Today, Stretford Hall is home to an artist studio, offices for public and government use and a community space to host events and activities for local residents. We run annual art exhibitions and a weekly segment called Wellbeing Tuesday; where people can get together, pay what they can and enjoy an entire day of relaxation and light exercise. All voluntary contributions made are funded back into Stretford Hall.

The goal is to host bigger events and renovate the space into a more welcoming hub for the local community. Thanks to a £90,000 investment from Co-op's charity, the Co-op Foundation, this is finally within reach. The immense support has been so appreciated by all the people of Stretford as we look forward to preserving the Hall's rich history and making sure it's around for our future generations to enjoy.

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The Salop Road Pocket Park is a community project that was recently built by a Neighbourhood Watch group in East London. The once disused lay-by was attracting anti-social behaviour and became a hotspot for drug dealing, fly-tipping and

crime. Thanks to our local community who campaign for the area's regeneration, we received a sizeable donation from our local council to revamp the lay-by and convert it into a pocket park. The pocket park is maintained by the locals

here in Walthamstow. Our tight-knit community frequently band together when there's a collective concern in our neighbourhood. Together, we take care of each other and the area around us. It's become something our community is renowned for.

Our collective goal is to unite everyone in the community and run activities and events that bring people from all ages and backgrounds closer together. Thankfully, the team at Co-op have come on board to provide us with the support and guidance we need to make our dream for the area become a reality.



Built in 1931, **Byrne Avenue Baths** is a leisure centre and swimming pool based in Birkenhead. Unfortunately, 75 years after it opened, the venue was shut down unexpectedly. Many jobs were lost, families' routines heavily disrupted and

everyone in Wirral was heartbroken at the surprise closure. Five years on and we, the Byrne Avenue Trust, have finally begun work on repairing our historic baths of Rock Ferry, restoring the space that holds so much sentimental value to the community.

Today, we're continuing to work on refurbishing and reopening the baths. Our aim is to fully restore the building by 2020; a goal we now feel is achievable thanks to support from the Co-op and Locality. The people of Birkenhead are excited to return to our beloved community venue that had been the heart of our town for seven and a half decades.

Conclusion

Our communities are under pressure like never before and if we are to improve the wellbeing of the nation, we must tackle the physical environments within our communities. It needs to be recognised that community spaces, mental and physical wellbeing and skills are so important individually but even more so, collectively, help to address other issues such as loneliness. For more information, to highlight a space that needs support, or to find out more about the advice available visit coop.co.uk/endangeredspace or #SaveOurSpaces.

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It's what we do

