HearthHood: Hyperlocal Neighbour Network

Deep Innovation Report

Executive Summary

HearthHood is a neighbourhood-centric platform designed to foster real-world connections, joyful community events, and mutual aid in BCP neighbourhoods.

By shifting focus away from global noise and towards street-level interactions, it creates a secure, trusted space for collective action and mutual support.

The Better Everyday

What if digital networks did not pull attention to the global stage but grounded people deeply in the lives and needs of those living next door?

HearthHood is a hyper-local street-level platform designed to coordinate joyful community events, organise mutual aid, and facilitate simple welfare checks. Inspired by the simple, warm gesture of a street Christmas light switch-on, it replaces the friction of modern coordination with a secure, map-based interface dedicated entirely to one block or neighbourhood.

On a crisp December evening in Boscombe, families gather on their street corner as a neighbour presses a button to illuminate a shared tree and festive street-lighting display. No one had to navigate bureaucratic paperwork or spam-filled messaging apps to organise this; they simply marked their participation on HearthHood and pooled resources weeks in advance. Vulnerable residents on the street look out from warm living rooms, knowing they are connected and that their neighbourly wellness checks are active and respected.

People have an enduring human need for safety, belonging, and spontaneous mutual aid within their immediate physical community. Currently, neighbours rely on noisy, commercial social media platforms or fragmented chat groups that suffer from toxic arguments, privacy concerns, and lost notifications. These digital workarounds fall short because they prioritise engagement over action, leaving residents feeling more connected to global drama than to the person next door.

HearthHood could establish a new expectation that hyper-local communication should be quiet, high-trust, and focused entirely on physical-world collaboration. Once residents experience the simplicity of organising a street party or checking on a neighbour via a dedicated local map, they will expect the same level of trust and clarity from parish councils, municipal services, and local utilities.

Who It Could Matter To

This platform transforms daily life by turning nearby strangers into a coordinated network of mutual support and shared joy.

The Working Parent

A busy mother of two living in Christchurch, juggling a remote marketing job with school runs and household chores.

She opens the platform in early November to see if anyone on her street wants to organise a joint Halloween or Christmas decoration display for the kids.

She finds a secure way to collaborate with five nearby households, coordinating a safe trick-or-treat route without sharing sensitive personal contact details.

The Isolated Retiree

A retired widower in Westbourne who lives alone and has limited mobility, making him feel disconnected from his changing neighbourhood.

He opts in to a simple weekly welfare check-in on the platform, indicating he would welcome a brief doorstep chat or help with his bins.

He receives regular, low-key visits from a trusted neighbour, restoring his sense of security and belonging within his immediate street.

The Community Champion

A proactive resident in Boscombe who loves bringing people together but feels overwhelmed by the admin of managing local street events.

She uses the platform to map out a street-wide garage sale, sending automated invitations and collecting small voluntary contributions for street-side refreshments.

She easily delegates small tasks to willing volunteers, reducing her personal burnout and ensuring the event runs smoothly.

What This Could Change for BCP

By fostering deep-rooted street networks, BCP can build resilient neighbourhoods that thrive year-round, independent of seasonal tourism.

BCP is composed of distinct, historic neighbourhoods like Boscombe, Westbourne, and Christchurch, each possessing its own unique community identity and local pride. HearthHood builds directly on this decentralised structure, allowing each neighbourhood to cultivate its own distinct network rather than forcing a single, generic identity across the entire region.

The platform would directly strengthen local social cohesion, leading to a measurable increase in community-led initiatives, street-level events, and informal care networks. Residents would feel a renewed sense of pride and ownership over their public spaces, transforming quiet streets into vibrant, active micro-communities.

This widespread neighbourhood organising could spark a ripple effect, encouraging local independent businesses to sponsor neighbourhood micro-events or offer hyper-local discounts. Over time, this could reduce the burden on public social care services as informal mutual aid networks naturally handle low-level assistance and welfare checks.

While active streets would enjoy richer social lives, quieter or less digital-savvy neighbourhoods might risk feeling left behind, requiring careful outreach strategies. Communities would need to decide how to manage disagreements or differing expectations around public space use, such as noise levels during street events or the placement of shared decorations.

Who Must Connect

A successful neighbourhood network relies on a careful balance of civic coordination, trusted technology, and local leadership.

A local non-profit community group or neighbourhood trust would act as the lead operator, partnering with a regional digital agency from BCP's established creative and tech sector to develop the lightweight, secure mapping platform. The agency brings technical expertise, while the non-profit ensures the platform remains mission-driven and focused entirely on community well-being.

Active street champions and neighbourhood associations would shape the platform's features, ensuring it reflects the real-world needs of diverse communities rather than top-down assumptions. They would co-design the guidelines for safe communication, event planning templates, and mutual aid requests.

BCP Council would act as a key enabler by providing streamlined, digital permissions for temporary street closures, play street initiatives, and community light switch-ons directly integrated with the platform. This relationship removes the daunting administrative barriers that currently discourage residents from organising local events.

Funding could be sustained through a hybrid model where local independent businesses pay for highly targeted, non-intrusive local sponsorship slots, alongside small grants from regional housing associations that benefit from stronger tenant communities. This keeps the platform free and ad-light for residents while ensuring continuous maintenance and moderation support.

The critical missing link is the relationship between neighbourhood street champions and the council's event licensing team, as these two groups rarely interact until formal, complex paperwork is submitted. A local community coordinator must make the first move, bringing both parties together to co-create a fast-track, pre-approved framework for low-impact street events.

Why This Fails

Even the most well-intentioned community networks can collapse if they fail to maintain trust, ease of use, and long-term participation.

Champion burnout occurs when a single, enthusiastic resident carries the entire burden of organising street events and managing the local platform without shared responsibility. The early warning sign is a sharp drop-off in platform activity and event postings after the first successful winter light switch-on.

Siloed engagement happens if younger, digitally fluent residents dominate the platform, leaving older or less tech-literate neighbours excluded from vital mutual aid and social updates. You would notice this first if the welfare check-in features remain entirely unused while event planning boards are flooded with high-tech coordination.

Loss of trust manifests if the platform becomes a venue for petty neighbourhood disputes, unmoderated complaints, or commercial spam, ruining the warm, constructive atmosphere. The warning sign is a steady decline in daily active users and a sudden increase in reported posts or blocked accounts.

One Experiment to Start

Testing the human appetite for street-level coordination requires a small, low-risk pilot focused on a single shared event.

The most important uncertainty is whether neighbours are actually willing to transition from passive online observation to active, real-world collaboration and mutual support. If people are too hesitant or suspicious to engage with their immediate neighbours in a structured way, the entire digital infrastructure becomes useless.

Run a simple, paper-and-digital pilot across two residential streets in Westbourne over a single fortnight, focused on organising a coordinated festive doorstep light display. Residents receive a simple flyer with a QR code leading to a basic, temporary interactive map where they can pin their house and pledge a specific decorative contribution.

Keep going if more than half of the households on both test streets pin their homes on the map and actively coordinate their lighting displays. Stop or rethink if residents ignore the map entirely or express privacy concerns about showing their participation status to their immediate neighbours, indicating a need for greater anonymity.

Next step: A local neighbourhood association representative in Westbourne should draft a simple one-page project brief and present it to the local ward councillors within the next 90 days to secure support for the pilot street trial.