CommonGround: Community-Owned Social Hubs

Deep Innovation Report

Executive Summary

A proposal for a co-operative framework establishing inclusive, community-owned cafes inside BCP's local libraries.

Designed to create vibrant multi-generational spaces that fund local programming while offering social connection and digital access.

The Better Everyday

How might our libraries evolve if they became the warm, self-sustaining living rooms of our neighbourhoods?

CommonGround is a co-operative cafe framework operating inside local libraries to create multi-generational social hubs.

In 2030, a student at Boscombe Library works comfortably alongside an older resident sharing local history.

People need reliable warmth, social connection, and digital access without the commercial pressure to spend constantly.

This model establishes a new expectation that civic spaces can actively fund local programming through community commerce.

Who It Could Matter To

A truly inclusive space bridges generations, turning daily routines into moments of mutual support.

The Remote Learner

A college student living in cramped shared accommodation in Lansdowne with no quiet study space.

They visit the cafe daily to use free Wi-Fi and work productively without feeling pressured to leave.

They gain an affordable workspace and feel connected to the wider community, reducing their isolation.

The Older Resident

An older pensioner living alone in Christchurch, seeking regular human contact and warmth during winter.

They visit the cafe weekly to chat with volunteers and meet friendly neighbours over low-cost tea.

They find a safe, welcoming environment that keeps them active, healthy, and socially engaged.

The New Parent

A first-time parent navigating isolation with an infant, looking for supportive spaces to meet others.

They bring their pram into the cafe after baby group sessions, seeking a spacious, welcoming venue.

They access peer support and accessible facilities without feeling like an inconvenience to other patrons.

What This Could Change for BCP

Strengthening towns requires spaces that foster year-round social resilience rather than just seasonal tourism.

This directly aligns with BCP Council's priority for sustainable, inclusive regeneration by revitalising local library spaces.

By retaining trade locally, surplus revenue stays within BCP neighbourhoods to fund grassroots cultural projects.

The trade-off requires balancing library space between quiet, traditional book browsing and bustling, social cafe environments.

Who Must Connect

Transforming public spaces requires close collaboration between local government, social enterprises, and active residents.

A local co-operative operator would manage daily cafe service, relying on volunteer coordinators for hospitality.

Local residents and library users would join the co-op, voting directly on how surplus profits are spent.

BCP Council would grant space licenses and provide the necessary physical infrastructure inside chosen libraries.

The service is sustained by coffee sales and room bookings, funding library events after initial startup costs.

Why This Fails

Even the best community spaces falter without clear operational boundaries and consistent local participation.

Volunteer burnout threatens long-term operations if a tiny group carries the entire daily workload.

Institutional friction occurs if library staff and cafe operators disagree over noise levels or cleaning duties.

Low summer patronage could drain financial reserves as residents spend their leisure time outdoors.

One Experiment to Start

Testing the local appetite for a co-operative cafe does not require a costly, permanent fit-out.

We must resolve whether local residents will actively volunteer and purchase drinks in a library-based setting.

Run a two-week pop-up cafe at Boscombe Library using borrowed domestic equipment and volunteer hosts.

We should proceed if volunteers cover all shifts and sales cover basic milk and coffee bean costs.

Next step: A local community organiser can pitch this pop-up trial to the Boscombe Library manager within 90 days.