

# Appeal launched to set up Co-op history centre

**A community group in West Lothian has launched an innovative funding appeal to help open Scotland's first discovery centre dedicated to the Scottish Co-operative movement.**

West Calder & Harburn Community Development Trust (WCHCDT) is working with Community Shares Scotland to launch a community share offer which will allow people to buy shares in the new project, with a fund-raising target of £250,000.

The Scottish Co-operative Discovery Centre will be housed in a former Edwardian Co-operative bakery building, an iconic and much-loved local landmark in West Calder which has lain derelict for a decade.

It will be the first development of its kind to celebrate and explore the importance of the co-operative movement in Scotland. The Trust was recently granted planning permission for the project to start.

Almost £5 million has been raised so far through the National Lottery Heritage Fund and The Scottish Government Regeneration Capital Grant Fund among others to help bring The Scottish Co-operative Discovery Centre to life. The goal is to create a new hands-on, family-friendly heritage attraction and discovery experience that will reinvigorate the local community.

Gavin Henderson Chair of West Calder & Harburn Community

Development Trust said: “The Scottish Co-operative Discovery Centre project has been designed and led by our community to deliver what our community said they wanted: somewhere with good food for families to enjoy, a place which creates jobs and opportunities, particularly for young people. It will be a celebration of our heritage, a supportive resource for our community and a boost for local businesses.”

Matt Pearce, Trust and Project Manager said: “This project has been a long journey but achieving planning consent and launching the share issue are huge milestones for it. We are excited about what next year brings.”

He added: “The history of the co-operative movement is important to our community, as well as to others across the country and yet there is currently no dedicated museum in Scotland which explores and celebrates the role that the movement played in creating the society we know today. The former Co-operative bakery building in West Calder provides the perfect space to create such a resource.”

West Calder Co-operative Society was founded in 1875 by a group of miners who had grown weary of being forced to spend their wages in the local mine-owner’s shop. It went on to become a central part of cultural and economic life in West Lothian. The Discovery Centre aims to celebrate and share that ethos of co-operation in a fun and play focussed way. “Inspiring Co-operation for a better future” is the project motto.

With the support of Community Shares Scotland, WCHCDT has set up a new Community Benefit Society to run the Centre after launch. People are invited to support the Centre by investing in shares to help the new business become sustainable and deliver benefits to the community. It is hoped that investors will be offered interest when the company is trading securely in the future and any profits will be invested back into the centre or be used to deliver community and co-operative

projects.

The minimum investment for Local Members (those who are resident in the West Calder & Harburn Community Council area) is £10 and the maximum is £25,000 (10% of optimum target). Shares are £1 each for the local membership share issue. For organisations and those outwith the West Calder area, the minimum investment is £250. The fund-raising target is £250,000.

Craig Meek, a ward councillor said; "The Discovery Centre will really put West Calder back on the map. It is a huge achievement by the local community, and I am proud to support it."

Kirsteen Sullivan, depute council leader, and a Labour and Co-operative councillor, said; "The Discovery Centre will have a huge positive impact, both locally in the community and nationally for the co-operative movement. It embodies the values of co-operation, and it is exciting to see it take shape."

Emma Peattie, West Lothian Museums Service Manager, commented: "The story of co-ops and co-operation is deeply embedded in Scottish working-class life and is a story that has so much modern relevance in terms of some of the challenges we face such as poverty and climate change. Our exhibition and education programme aims to share and explore that."

Douglas Westwater, Chair, Social Enterprise Scotland said; "The Discovery Centre is a fantastic example of an ambitious community-developed social enterprise. With the focus on changing the nature of Scotland's economy to one that is rooted locally and is based on well-being as well as economic drivers, the Discovery Centre will be front and centre of where social enterprise, and the Scottish economy, needs to be over the next generation."

Clare Alexander, Head of Co-operative Development Scotland said: "This is an exciting project not only marking the importance of the co-op movement in Scotland but also as a live example of a co-op delivering for the community and its residents. Additional fund-raising from the share offer will further strengthen ties to the community and help achieve the project aims."

<https://www.westcalder.org/scottish-co-operative-discovery-centre>.

Community Shares Scotland, an initiative set up with funding from The Scottish Government and the National Lottery Community Fund to support the raising of money through community shares, has supported in the region of 600 community groups since the programme launched in 2014.

The organisation has launched 62 community share offers over the past 10 years, totalling over £19m worth of investment from over 17,000 community members, which has been match funded by £27m from other sources.

Morven Lyon, Programme Manager at Community Shares Scotland, said: "Community shares have helped to launch a wide range of thriving community businesses and the ambitious Scottish Co-operative Discovery Centre Ltd will join an increasing network of community-led enterprises bringing tangible social and economic benefits to their area. This innovative enterprise taps into a national appetite for socially conscious projects and investment models which deliver a renewed sense of social benefit and democratic control."

by Stuart Somerville, Local Democracy Reporter.

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The Scottish Co Op Discovery Team with a model of the new discover centre. Left to right: Emma Peattie (West Lothian Museums Service Manager), Matt Pearce  
Picture phil wilkinson



The Old Co Op bakery building is one of the largest of the many Co op buildings in West Calder. Copyright WCHCDT. Picture Phil Wilkinson