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Community Co-Working

CONNECTED HUBS SCOTLAND

The case for a network of connected coworking hubs in Scotland

CONNECTED HUBS
Scotland

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INTRODUCTION

The way we work in Scotland is changing—rapidly, radically, and irreversibly. Driven by the rise of remote and hybrid working, a growing demand for flexible, community-oriented spaces has emerged across the country. Coworking is no longer a fringe concept limited to tech startups or urban centres; it is now an essential component of a resilient, inclusive, and future-ready economy and communities in Scotland.

Connected Hubs Scotland is a practitioner-led initiative responding to this shift with ambition and urgency. It brings together independent coworking spaces deeply rooted in their communities to create a network that supports not just productivity, but also well-being, collaboration, and local regeneration. These hubs offer more than shared desks—they serve as vital infrastructure for people and places, enabling individuals, businesses, and communities to thrive.

Some of these hubs are new, others are some of the oldest coworking hubs in the world. Scotland has long been a pioneer of good work, and Connected Hubs Scotland was launched in 2024 to connect and deepen the impact of independent, community responsive, place-based infrastructure. With a growing network of over 25 hubs, Connected Hubs Scotland is the driving force behind a new, connected approach for Scotland.

Inspired by the success of Ireland's Connected Hubs Network, this report makes the case for a uniquely Scottish approach—one that reflects the distinct character, challenges, and strengths of our urban and rural communities alike. By investing in this national network of connected, community-focused workspaces, Scotland has an opportunity to reshape its economic landscape and social fabric for the better.

CONNECTED HUBS SCOTLAND

Connected Hubs Scotland is a project founded by four independent, Scottish coworking hubs that aims to extend access to place-based workspaces and community hubs to everyone in Scotland. Connected Hubs Scotland launched in 2024 and now includes over 25 independent coworking hubs. The network has a growing online presence, where individuals, businesses and communities can find local hubs and learn more about the network's work.

Coworking is no longer a new concept: the provision of shared offices spaces for use by a range of organisations and enterprises under one roof has become common place and coworking spaces can be found in every city around the globe. But the spaces that comprise Connected Hubs Scotland go beyond the workspace, providing opportunities for resource sharing, community, experimentation and responsiveness to the needs of the local area, be that urban or rural.

Connected Hubs Scotland was inspired by the success of the Connected Hubs Network in Ireland. This began development in 2019 and since its launch in 2021 has grown to a network of over 350 hubs serving communities across Ireland.[1] Connected Hubs Scotland is adapting the lessons and successes from Ireland to the Scottish context, with a clear focus on independent coworking spaces with deep roots in their community. In Scotland this is a practitioner led endeavour.

To consolidate this work into a shared approach for this first stage of developing Connected Hubs Network the following vision, mission and objectives have been developed.

Vision

- ·A Scotland supported by a thriving Connected Hubs network in rural and urban places.
- A Scotland where every individual and business has access to high-quality, community-focused, independent workspaces.
- ·A Scotland enriched by hubs embedded in their local community that build inclusivity, safety, sustainability, and resilience.

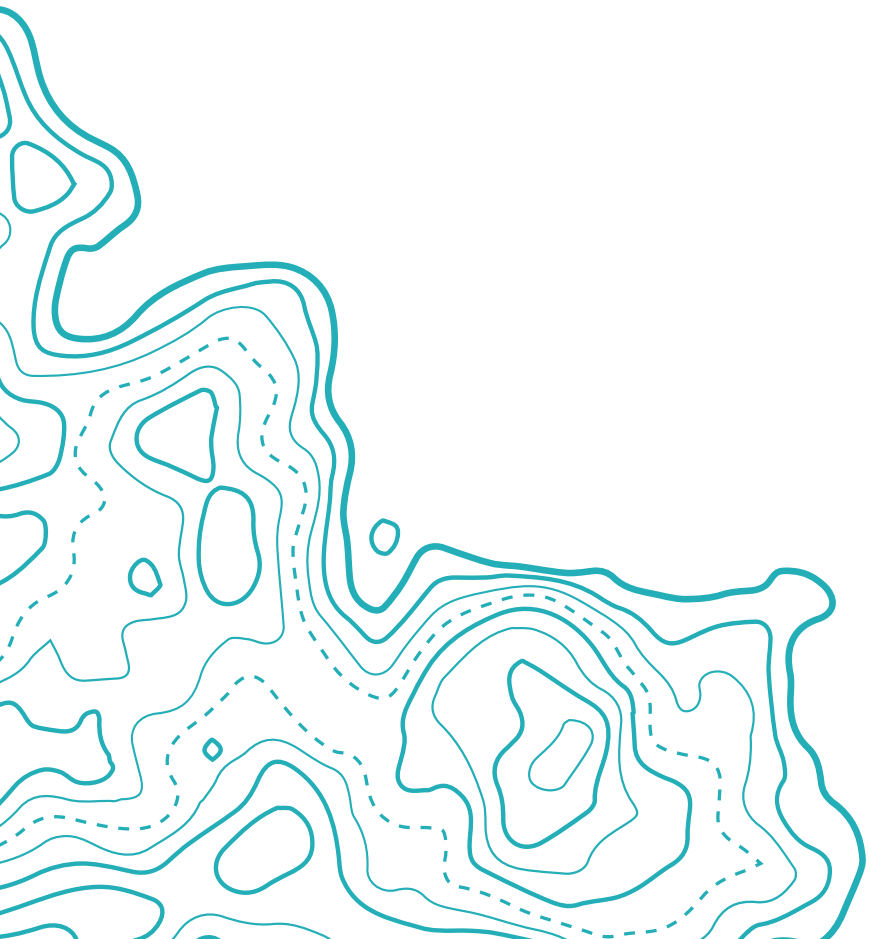
Mission

- To work with independent hubs embedded in their local communities and coworking spaces to build a Connected Hubs Network for Scotland.
- To develop a network that is greater than the sum of its parts—driving local economic development and social regeneration across Scottish communities.

CONNECTED HUBS SCOTLAND

Objectives

- To connect the operators of independent hubs across Scotland, enabling mutual support and collaboration.
- To design and implement a Connected Hubs Network tailored to the needs of hub operators—including its activities, resourcing, funding model, and legal structure.
- To cultivate a network with shared values and a consistent ethos, empowering hub operators to confidently refer users between spaces.
- To share best practices and proven approaches that support both commercial success and community / local impact.
- To develop a collective agenda that reflects the needs and ambitions of the whole network, rather than being driven by individual priorities.



THE POTENTIAL OF A CONNECTED HUBS NETWORK

To understand the potential of Connected Hubs Scotland we must first consider the context we are beginning from. The way we work has changed significantly over a very short space of time which has accelerated the need for the types of services and communities connected hubs have been offering in Scotland for nearly two decades. In this section we consider changes to working practices, the evidence on the benefits of coworking and the precedent of a Connected Hubs approach in Ireland.

Historic Changes To The Way We Work

Modern life has been punctuated by dramatic shifts in industry, technology, and culture and in response to global events that have transformed the way we work. A recent seismic shift is the transition to remote working that initially happened overnight during the pandemic and has now become the new normal.

The transition to remote and hybrid working arrangements has brought attention to the effect it can have on mental health, productivity, and job satisfaction. While flexible work options can enhance work-life balance and reduce stress, they also present challenges such as social isolation and anxiety.

The transition to remote and hybrid working has significantly impacted employees' mental health and well-being in Scotland. While many workers appreciate the increased flexibility and reduced commuting stress that remote work offers, concerns around social isolation have emerged. Research by the Scottish Government indicates that while some employees report improved mental health due to flexible work arrangements, others have experienced heightened anxiety and feelings of loneliness. The absence of in-person interactions can be particularly challenging for individuals living alone or lacking a strong support network, highlighting the need for workplaces to address mental health.[2]

The Office for National Statistics reports that 41% of UK businesses observed an increase in productivity attributed to remote work during the pandemic. However, this productivity boost is not universal, as a significant portion of organisations struggled with the challenges of remote collaboration.[3]

The hybrid working model emerges as a viable solution, allowing employees to benefit from focused work time at home while engaging in collaborative activities in the office. Research indicates that productivity peaks when employees can choose their working environment, balancing remote tasks with structured in-office collaboration days.[4]

According to the ONS, approximately 78% of individuals working from home expressed increased job satisfaction due to the newfound flexibility in balancing work and personal life.[5]

Historic Changes To The Way We Work

Flexibility is also important when it comes to retaining employees and maintaining high levels of job satisfaction. These arrangements allow employees to enjoy the benefits of remote work while providing opportunities for face-to-face collaboration and social engagement, which are critical for overall job satisfaction and improved workplace culture.[6]

According to data from the Office for National Statistics (ONS), the proportion of people working from home in the UK rose dramatically during the pandemic, increasing by over 200% between 2019 and 2022.[7] In Scotland, this rise was evident, with many employees and employers adopting home-based work for the first time. Prior to the pandemic, only around 14.5% of workers in the UK worked remotely, but by early 2022, this had more than doubled to 30.6%.[8] This shift is largely driven by sectors such as information technology and communications, which have more easily transitioned to remote working arrangements compared to sectors that require physical presence, like manufacturing and hospitality.

Hybrid working, a blend of remote and in-office work, has emerged as a dominant trend. A significant proportion of employees who worked remotely during the pandemic expressed a preference for continuing with hybrid models in the future. Around 85% of people who worked from home at least some of the time during the pandemic indicated that they expect to continue doing so, with higher-income workers being more likely to pursue hybrid work.[9] This trend has led businesses to rethink their office space requirements, resulting in many downsizing their physical offices or adopting flexible coworking spaces that cater to part-time office use and collaboration needs.

The rise of coworking spaces has been particularly relevant in the post-pandemic landscape. As businesses shift to hybrid models, the need for permanent, large-scale office spaces has decreased, with many opting for flexible, cost-effective solutions like coworking hubs. Coworking spaces offer businesses the flexibility to rent desks or meeting rooms as needed, providing an ideal setup for teams that only meet in person occasionally. This trend is aligned with the growing importance of flexibility in work environments, which allows employees to balance remote work with in-person collaboration.

In addition to reshaping office spaces, these shifts have also impacted commuting patterns across Scotland. As more workers remain at home or work locally, the demand for long-distance commuting has reduced. A 2022 ONS survey reported that there was a 29.8% drop in Scots commuting out of their local region for work, reflecting the broader trend towards more localised and flexible working arrangements.[10]

Historic Changes To The Way We Work

The pandemic has fundamentally altered the use of office spaces in Scotland, accelerating a trend towards remote and hybrid working. Businesses have responded by downsizing office spaces or shifting to coworking environments, in 2023 a study revealed that 63% of business leaders are taking steps to reduce their office footprint. Among them, 21% are planning to cut back on their own working space, while 37% are considering a switch to more flexible coworking spaces, and 7% have already made the move. Meanwhile, employees continue to favour the flexibility that remote and hybrid models offer. [11]

The Social Impact Of Connection

We know that humans are social creatures that require connection. Our work is important to our well-being and sense of self and has always had a social element. The increase in remote working should not be viewed as a threat to this, but an opportunity for revolutionising the way we work to better meet the needs of individuals and communities. Connected Hubs Scotland provides an opportunity to build community-led infrastructure that provides connection, convenience and community resources through place-based local projects.

In 2021 The Melting Pot published The Future of the Office report, a piece of research that set out to understand the impact of drastic changes to workspace on Scotland's social innovation community use in the wake of the pandemic and to present some predictions for the future of the office. The report shows a link between workspace and well-being, productivity and work satisfaction. It indicates there is an opportunity to use workspace infrastructure as a tool to drive the recovery through supporting individuals and social innovation.

The report suggests there are risks associated with such a dramatic shift in work practices that can only be negated by the combination of policy, ethical behaviour by employers and widespread access to person centred workspace infrastructure. It also outlines opportunities to use changes to workspace infrastructure as a driver towards optimised remote working and increased localised economic prosperity. The opportunities include:

- Well-being
- Reduced isolation
- Collaboration·
- Access to a wide network
- Professional development
- Informal interactions and social opportunities
- Increased social innovation

New research is deepening our understanding of the well-being benefits of coworking, particularly in rural coworking hubs. An empirical study examined these well-being effects through the lens of three key psychological needs: autonomy, competence and relatedness. This work found that all three of these key needs were met or improved upon, showing the power of rural connected hubs for building a new approach to professional infrastructure, particularly in rural areas where there are a disproportionate number of micro businesses, that serves our well-being as well as economy. [12]

Connected Hubs Ireland

The current focus on creating purposeful spaces and connected hubs in Ireland provides a valuable precedent for Scotland. Ireland's initiative in developing connected hubs has gained attention for supporting local economies and reducing urban migration. These hubs serve as vital infrastructure for remote workers, promoting both economic and social interactions in rural areas.

Ireland's Connected Hubs Network began in May 2021 as a response to the growing demand for remote workspaces, although several independent hubs had already been operating since the early 2010s in towns like Carrick-on-Shannon, Skibbereen, and Tubbercurry. Driven by a need for regional development, digital connectivity, and job creation, the network was initially supported by a £1 million feasibility study funded from the Dormant Accounts Fund in 2020. This effort aligned with broader national strategies like the Making Remote Work – National Remote Working Strategy (2021) and Our Rural Future (2020-2025), aiming to promote balanced regional growth and digital transformation.

Since its official launch, the Connected Hubs network has grown significantly, with 369 active hubs currently. These hubs collectively provide over 5,300 desks and 600 meeting rooms serving more than 14,000 customers, of whom 42% work in knowledge-based industries.[13] The impact of these hubs on local economies has been substantial, contributing an estimated €1 billion annually in gross value added (GVA).[14] By offering flexible workspaces, the hubs have attracted remote workers, facilitated regional business opportunities, and provided a much-needed boost to local economies, therefore helping to stem the tide of urban migration.

The Irish government's strategic framework and policy support were critical in the establishment and expansion of the Connected Hubs network. Policies like the National Broadband Plan (2019) [15] and National Development Plan (2021) [16] were instrumental in enhancing digital infrastructure, which is essential for the success of remote working facilities.

Connected Hubs Ireland

Additionally, local strategies, such as Kildare County Council's Hub Strategy (2022-2025), emphasised developing hub infrastructure, fostering community and business ecosystems, and promoting the network's growth. This structured approach ensured that the development of hubs was aligned with broader national and regional economic development goals.

The outcomes of the Connected Hubs network have varied, influencing both the economy and work-life balance. Economically, the network has created jobs and allowed for the diversification of regional economies by attracting new types of work and workers into rural areas. This shift has also alleviated pressure on urban centres, with nearly 63% of relocating workers coming from Dublin, choosing smaller cities or well-connected rural areas as their new homes. The hubs have also helped to improve work-life balance, offering flexible workspaces that reduce commute times and allow employees to spend more time with their families or take part in local activities.

The hubs have also increased community engagement by providing spaces where remote workers can connect, collaborate, and contribute to the local community. This has led to increased participation in local events, particularly in areas that had previously experienced population decline. However, some challenges remain, such as the need for long-term sustainability of the hubs, ensuring they are inclusive for all socio-economic groups, and addressing potential unintended consequences like gentrification and rising housing costs in rural areas.

Overall, Ireland's connected hubs initiative has provided a successful model for harnessing the potential of remote work to drive regional development. The focus on strategic planning, policy support, and active community engagement has enabled the network to deliver significant benefits to local economies while addressing the needs of remote workers. Connected Hubs is a Government of Ireland initiative, managed by the Western Development Commission in conjunction with the Department of Rural and Community Development and the Gaeltacht.

As Scotland looks to the future of work, the lessons learned from Ireland's approach offer a roadmap for creating sustainable, community-oriented workspaces that balance economic growth with social well-being.

A PICTURE OF CONNECTED HUBS SCOTLAND

The vision of Connected Hubs Scotland is a national network of hubs that serves every rural and urban area with high-quality, community-focused, independent workspaces Existing members of the Connected Hubs Scotland network already provide these crucial resources to their communities. These hubs are embedded in the local community and responsive to place-based needs, providing infrastructure for Scotland to build inclusivity, safety, sustainability, and resilience.

The vision is that this infrastructure becomes a national priority, understood to be crucial to workers across Scotland. For many rural communities, working close to home can make all the difference, allowing people to stay connected, cut down travel, and contribute locally. It's just as important to create local work opportunities and shared spaces as it is to build the roads and transport links that connect our villages, towns and cities.

The story, set-up and services will be unique to each space. This is the nature of independent hubs that are truly community-led. Connected Hubs Scotland is building a thriving network through connecting existing and emerging hubs of all kinds to share wisdom, resources and support. This is a bottom up, action driven approach led by practitioners who are used to rolling up their sleeves and getting things done.

"Every community in Scotland should have access to a space where they can try things free or at a very low cost, where they don't need to jeopardise their family situation." David, Glasgow Collective

In this section, to build a clearer picture of the diversity and potential of Connected Hubs Scotland we take a tour of the four founding hubs. These stories of building communities and sustainable hubs in different parts of Scotland shows what can be achieved through bold, place-based experimentation that responds to the needs of local areas.

Connected Hubs Scotland members are united by their values, in building places where people can experiment, connect and benefit from shared, placed-based resources. But what this looks like varies enormously. This is part of the strength of the Connected Hubs Scotland approach. Each hub meets specific needs, they are not in competition with each other, rather that they form a crucial ecosystem of support for Scotland's people, productivity and economy.

Dunkeld & Birnam

The Space

Dunkeld & Birnam Community Coworking is in the old GP's surgery in the heart of the town. It has:

- 8 private offices
- 5 coworking desks
- 3 sound-proof pods
- An accessible meeting room
- Superfast broadband connections. Our meeting room is on the ground floor and fully accessible

The Place

Dunkeld & Birnam are towns in Highland Perthshire. Dunkeld is one train stop away from Perth, the former capital of Scotland. It sits on the A9, Scotland's longest road that connects Central Scotland to Thurso in the far north via Inverness. There are around 1500 households locally, most in the larger towns of Dunkeld and Birnam as well as other smaller villages.

There is a small centre, where this community hub is found. The area has become a bit of a tourist hotspot due to its natural beauty, attractive villages and local food businesses, including a destination bakery run by Flora Sheddon who competed on the Great British Bake Off. The local community is socially conscious, most are working professionals.

Housing is an issue locally, as there is a high level of demand. People who grow up in the area and leave to attend university and develop their careers are often unable to return to the area to settle down due to this lack of housing. The local schools are at maximum capacity.

The Story

Dunkeld & Birnam Community Coworking was a project that emerged from the local community. There had been talk in the village of the need for a coworking space and several local residents began scoping the potential of setting one up. This led to them attending a workshop run by The Melting Pot, on how to set up a coworking space.

The lower level of the old GP's surgery became available, and the hub was set up as a Community Interest Company with 3 directors so it could open the doors as a coworking space. This was done in stages and on a shoestring led by Sally. The team sought in kind donations, like chairs, and a small grant from the Community Council to set up.

Dunkeld & Birnam

The Community

Dunkeld & Birnam Community Coworking is home to a diverse range of local businesses and workers. With the offices housing the local Development Trust, solopreneurs and local charities, including Support Choices who provide benefits support. The space allowed this project to be embedded in the Highlands, rather than in the closest city Perth. First Responders, local volunteers trained by the Scottish Ambulance Service to attend certain emergency call outs, use the hub for storage, training and meeting. This location is key to the service due to the position on the A9 road and required emergency response associated.

The space has become a key piece of infrastructure to the local community with users saying "what did we do before you were here?"

It allows charities to meet with their target beneficiaries, local businesses to deliver their work and benefit from company during the work day and for people to save on the significant expense of a commute. A return ticket from Dunkeld to Glasgow is £41.

The Membership Model

- Monthly rent of offices
- Half day, regular weekly and permanent rent of desk spaces in the coworking space both hot desks and fixed desks
- Meeting room hire
- Access to community facilities such as photocopier, scanner, printer and laminator

Glasgow Collective

The Space

Glasgow Collective houses its community in 21000 sq feet of space over 12 buildings in the East End of Glasgow.
They provide flexible, multipurpose, month to month space. It has:

- Full-time and part-time hot desks
- Dedicated desks
- Offices suitable for up to 12 people
- Private studios fitted to bespoke requirements
- Kitchen
- Boardroom and meeting pods
- Storage
- Car parking with a charging station for electric vehicles.

The Place

Glasgow Collective is spread across multiple buildings all in the area around The Barras Market, the iconic street and indoor market in the East end of Glasgow that has been trading for over a century.[17]

The local area Calton has high rates of poverty and deprivation and is often cited in relation to the so called "Glasgow Effect" which terms the low life expectancy in Glasgow, due to a 2008 World Health Organisation study that found the male life expectancy at birth in the Calton area of Glasgow between 1998 and 2002 to be just 54.[18]

This provides a grim headline, but the area has been evolving and diversifying, both for residents and local businesses, for several decades. There has been significant investment in social housing, a decrease in crime and local organisations like the Salvation Army Hostel continue to support people in the area facing homelessness. The area is a thriving community and cultural centre, that includes the world famous Barrowlands Ballroom music venue.

The Story

Glasgow Collective was founded 10 years ago by brothers David and John McBeth. The space became available, and they bought it and refurbished it themselves. This took about 18 months and even at this early juncture became a project led by its community. People joined them to support the renovations and decisions on how the space should be designed were made collectively. This needs-led approach has continued through this first decade of Glasgow Collective.

Glasgow Collective provides traditional coworking as well as studio space that is tailored to the needs of early stage businesses. This ranges from creative spaces to kitchens to bike repair shops.

Glasgow Collective

The Story

Glasgow Collective provides new businesses that need space and specific facilities with what they need to get off the ground. If these businesses thrive and expand they try to help them find somewhere local to expand into.

Every expansion of Glasgow Collective has been in response to increased demand and developed in response to the needs of the community and the people and businesses they have been approached by. They have recently taken on 3 additional floors in their original building, meaning they now own and operate the whole site.

The Community

Glasgow Collective is home to 30 businesses and 90 members across their studios, offices and coworking space. 64% of these are female led. The location and access to parking means they don't just service the East End, people travel from all over Glasgow and smaller towns in the West of Scotland.

The businesses range from think tanks and charities to cake designers, arts organisations, online newspapers, tea and coffee companies, campaigns and organic period product producers.

People join because of the flexibility of the space and the ethos of experimentation, whether this is a business taking advantage of a studio for an industrial process or someone using a desk in the coworking space. There might be the perception that it is a meantime space but many businesses have grown and adapted with support for their space-based needs from Glasgow Collective.

The Membership Model

Memberships and office spaces are all flexible and responsive. They are decided based on the needs to the person joining and the work that they intend to do. There is a very personal and tailored approach taken so you cannot just join online, the terms of the agreement are decided collaboratively from the start.

All memberships are based on month to month licences charged on an all inclusive basis to give certainty and flexibility to members.

Impact Hub Inverness

The Space

Impact Hub Inverness is based across two buildings in the centre of Inverness, covering 240sqm. The building on Castle Street provides coworking, meeting space and a fixed office, the second on Academy Street is fixed offices. They offer:

- Full-time and part-time hot desks for 20 people
- 5 permanent offices
- Private 1-2-1 meeting spaces
- Kitchen
- Meeting rooms
- Business advice
- Member events and space hosting
- Personal lockers and storage

The Place

Inverness is considered the capital of the Scottish Highlands and is the UK's northern most city. It is a key hub for connectivity within and to the Highlands and Islands. Inverness is the commercial and administrative centre for the region, with the HQ for the council, NHS and Highlands and Islands Enterprise located in the city. It is also the location of the University of the Highlands and Islands' main campus as well as being where one of its colleges is based. It is also a major year-round tourist destination and a launching point for visitors to the wider area.

Although based in the city, the space draws in people from the wider area and has members from across the Highlands and Islands who make use of the space when in Inverness.

The Story

Impact Hub Inverness emerged from the Highlands and Islands Social Enterprise Zone (HISEZ). HISEZ was set up as a pilot with the aim of supporting the development and growth of SMEs and social enterprises in the Highlands and Islands through providing training, advice and business support, networking opportunities, and signposting. This business support and consultancy has now been a crucial part of the Scottish ecosystem for over 20 years. They work predominantly in the Highlands and Island with rural social enterprises and community groups, but also with public and private sector organisations nationally and internationally.

The coworking space, Scotland's first Impact Hub, opened in 2018 after HISEZ purchased the Castle Street building. Impact Hub Global is a global network of purpose driven, place-based businesses. The first opened in Islington, London in 2005 and there are now 500,000 people using 120+ Impact Hubs around the world with 47,000 jobs created since 2012.

Impact Hub Inverness

The Story

The HISEZ team were inspired to have their coworking space as part of the Impact Hub ecosystem after a chance visit to an Impact Hub in Tokyo. This global connectivity to changemakers around the world is an asset to both the coworking community and consultancy.

The consultancy and business services remain a key part of the work of Impact Hub Inverness and gives them a deep connection to the needs of rural communities in the Scottish Highlands and Islands.

The Community

Impact Hub Inverness has about 60 coworking members and 5 fixed offices. Most of the members live within about 25 miles of the space but some come from far and wide, including the west coast of Skye and Stornoway.

A key principle of Impact Hubs is that the spaced is hosted, there are communal coffee mornings, and the kitchen is a key place for connection. This leads to collaboration, which is aided by the business advice provided by Impact Hub Inverness, although this is often done more informally in the context of the coworking community. Members include solopreneurs, charities, private businesses and social projects.

The Membership Model

There is a range of options for how you can access the space including:

- Day passes and pay as you go memberships
- Monthly memberships – 30, 60 or unlimited hours
- Permanent offices
- Meeting room hire

The Melting Pot - Edinburgh

The Space

The Melting Pot is based across three floors at 15 Calton Road directly behind Waverley Station, the second busiest train station in Scotland. They provide:

- Full-time and part-time hot desks
- Dedicated desks
- Two private offices
- Meeting pods
- Boardroom, meeting rooms and events space
- Kitchen
- Virtual Office Services
- Storage
- Bike storage

The Place

Edinburgh is Scotland's capital city, a centre for the nation's industry and home to Scottish Parliament and much of the Scottish Government. The city is also home to a vast number of charities, social enterprises and purpose driven businesses.
The Melting Pot's location on Waverley Station's doorstep makes it an accessible and convenient hub of activity for visitors to the city from across Scotland, primarily the central belt

The Story

The Melting Pot was the first coworking space in Scotland, opening its doors in 2007. It is Scotland's Centre for Social Innovation, founded by social entrepreneur Claire Carpenter for organisations with a social purpose. It aimed to reduce overheads and build a community that could provide connection, collaboration and peer support.

The Melting Pot was originally on Rose Street and built a strong community of people with shared values, largely comprised of people working on socially innovative projects. It changed home to the much larger Calton Road spaced during the pandemic. This was a collaboration with Foundation Scotland, an independent funder and community foundation who own the building. The Melting Pot community has grown significantly, showing an increased need for connection in Edinburgh's social innovation community.

Over 18 years The Melting Pot has developed services for organisations at all stages of development. From the Good Ideas incubation programme for emerging projects with a social purpose to consultancy for medium and large enterprises looking for people-centric solutions, place-based strategies and to boost innovation and productivity.

The Melting Pot - Edinburgh

The Community

The Melting Pot has over 400 members based around Scotland. Most of the coworking members live in Edinburgh or commute in from Glasgow or towns in East Lothian.

The Melting Pot has a dedicated hosting team that support members helping them make connections, delivering a social and educational events programme and running the venues.

The Melting Pot's social impact report showed that members build confidence as a result of being part of the community. That they pick up skills and knowledge from the formal and informal elements of their membership. They find inspiration form the work that others in the community do that translates into motivation for their own work and their well-being improves due to the social connections and routine their membership offers. [19]

The Membership Model

There is a range of options for how you can access the space including:

- Day passes and pay as you go memberships
- Part and full time hot desking
- Dedicated desks
- Permanent offices
- Meeting room, boardroom and event space hire

CONNECTED HUBS SCOTLAND BLUEPRINT

There are currently over 25 coworking hubs that make up Connected Hubs Scotland. The goal is to deepen the connectivity between existing hubs and support emerging spaces to establish themselves as sustainable local infrastructure.

As can be seen in the above case studies of the founding members, there are some key considerations for hubs, most crucially:

Ownership model:

There are significant advantages to owning the building a hub is based in. However, in urban areas particularly, this is a large investment. Community ownership is a compelling and powerful route for these hubs to take, particularly in rural areas where the spaces that become available are often of local significance such as former schools, doctors' surgeries and churches that communities are keen to keep as places that are for public benefit to local people.

Service diversification:

Beyond flexible coworking services it is key that hubs consider the services that are required in their local area and services that can be profitable to subsidise the community elements of the work they deliver.

Multipurpose spaces:

The spaces themselves benefit from being multipurpose, meeting the diverse needs of the local community. Meeting space and venue hire is almost always a component of this, but the possibilities are endless!

Community responsiveness:

A strong relationship with target communities is key to developing the hub to ensure it is meeting needs directly and accessibly.

A blueprint for a thriving Connected Hubs Scotland would see hubs of all shapes and sizes in every community in Scotland. From multi-purpose community hubs in rural areas to multiple spaces in larger cities that allow workers to benefit from a community hub within a 20-minute neighbourhood.

Connected Hubs Scotland Blueprint

This network of hubs and the convening work of Connected Hubs Scotland would lead to:

Supportive ecosystems: Places that enable experimentation and growth (individuals trying ideas, startups scaling). These are not just office spaces, but spaces for chance encounters, skills sharing, and support.
Opportunities for rural communities: Dependable infrastructure that allows workers to take advantage of the shift to remote working and remain in the towns and cities they want to live and work in, regardless of the geographic home of their work.
An increase in the founding of local, independent hubs: More hubs proliferate as the benefits become clear and confidence in building hubs that are viable and responsive to community need increases.
Shared knowledge and resource for hubs: Connected Hubs Scotland is the knowledge base, a community of practitioners and hosts key resources that are more sustainable to resource centrally than develop within individual hubs – for example marketing, social impact measurement and administration systems.

CONNECTED HUBS NETWORK FOR A THRIVING SCOTLAND

In this final section we look at the Connected Hubs Scotland as a crucial pillar to the economic regeneration of Scotland. Connected Hubs Scotland is a practitioner led project and staunchly advocates for the network to be built at the grassroots by people and organisations embedded in local communities. However, to be properly resourced and strategically positioned alongside national policy this work should be supported by national and local government, which was also crucial to the work in Ireland. Here we outline the priorities for the work of developing Connected Hubs Scotland and the strategies, outcomes and policies this work would help deliver on.

Investing in Connected Hubs Scotland

As was touched on in previous sections the activities of Connected Hubs Scotland would largely be the convening of practitioners to build shared knowledge and resources that increases the success and connectivity of hubs across Scotland. This practitioner-led approach allows the work to develop in the short term, bringing with it significant expertise from the people who have built hubs of all kinds. However, there is a need for investment in the Connected Hubs Scotland project. The work that has been identified as most crucial, and that would benefit from investment or in-kind support from public and private institutions include:

Storytelling and audience building - There is a powerful story of Scotland's innovative approach to work through the Connected Hubs Network that also spotlights the uniqueness of urban and rural centres across the country. This story can be most powerfully told through the network, to ensure that it reaches the right audiences that include people across Scotland who would benefit from using or founding a hub and visitors to Scotland.

Convening - Practitioners who run hubs in Scotland have limited capacity for any work outwith the delivery of their essential services. Although there is significant buy-in for the Connected Hubs Scotland project and commitment for driving it towards its objectives, there needs to be capacity allocated to the convening work. Both the coordination of the network's activities and support available for people to attend and participate in these.

Research – Hubs across Scotland are delivering economic and social impact and this is not currently being analysed effectively. Connected Hubs Scotland provides a powerful opportunity to gather data on the impact and most effective methodologies currently being used as it allows for cross comparison of hubs operating on many different scales. It is also more viable for the hubs themselves, who are unlikely to be individually resourced to commission this analysis.

Shared digital infrastructure - Connected Hubs Scotland could reduce expense and capacity allocation for individual hubs by providing some of this centrally, this could include booking software.

Investing in Connected Hubs Scotland

These initial priorities mirrors Connected Hubs Ireland's strategic approach that had four pillars infrastructure, technology, hub ecosystem/community and promotion & marketing. [20]

CONNECTED HUBS SCOTLAND AS A DRIVING FORCE FOR POLICY OBJECTIVES

The goal should be to make coworking a piece of national infrastructure providing motivating, inspiring and practical workspace within people's home communities. This should be as dependable and accessible to workers as the railways are for commuters. Connected Hubs Scotland has levels of benefit. A direct, practical benefit for individuals needing space to be productive. The benefit to local communities the development of a hub of activity and connection that is dedicated to a thriving local area. A national, macro level benefit to Scotland that results from this place-based work shifting working trends and building safer and more resilient communities.

Here we look at local, national and global frameworks that align closely with the outcomes Connected Hubs Scotland will deliver.

A Connected Scotland: Tackling Social Isolation And Loneliness

Scotland's Connected Scotland strategy, introduced in 2018, aims to tackle the growing issue of social isolation and loneliness, recognising its harmful effects on mental and physical health. By prioritising initiatives that strengthen social ties, this strategy lays the groundwork for the creation of community-focused coworking spaces that not only serve professional needs but also act as social gathering points. [21]

Coworking hubs can directly support these goals by offering structured opportunities for remote workers to connect, engage in professional networks, and participate in local communities. These spaces can also help address digital exclusion, particularly in rural areas where access to high-speed internet remains limited. Partnerships with technology providers like Vodafone, who have worked alongside the Scottish Government on projects aimed at reducing the digital divide, could further ensure that coworking hubs are digitally equipped and accessible. This collaboration is especially relevant when considering Vodafone's role in Ireland's Connected Hubs network, which has successfully established a national framework of coworking spaces that foster social and economic growth through digital inclusion.

Scotland's National Strategy for Economic Transformation (2022)

The National Strategy for Economic Transformation, launched in 2022, sets out Scotland's plan to create a more prosperous, inclusive, and sustainable economy by 2032. This strategy emphasises entrepreneurship, digital infrastructure, and regional development, making it relevant to the development of coworking hubs. The strategy's focus on remote working as a tool for economic recovery post-COVID highlights the importance of building infrastructure that supports flexible work models, making coworking hubs a crucial part of the future work landscape.

One of the central goals of the strategy is to upskill the workforce and foster innovation, which directly aligns with the purpose of coworking hubs as spaces that encourage collaboration and knowledge-sharing. In addition, the focus on regional economic development provides an opportunity to support coworking hubs in both rural and urban settings, driving local enterprise and innovation. By embedding coworking hubs into the strategy's goal of achieving a well-being economy, Scotland can promote workplaces that not only support productivity but also foster community well-being and social inclusion. [22]

Rural Delivery Plan

The Scottish Government Rural Delivery Plan that is currently in development will act as a framework to assess the breadth of policy being delivered in the rural context. It looks at agriculture, marine, land reform, transport, housing, social justice, population, skills, digital connectivity, economic development, and health and social care. [23]

This work is currently in development led by a ministerial working group and support from The Scottish Rural Network (SRN), and there is a commitment to delivering the plan within this parliament. There is a strong case to be made for investing in Connected Hubs Scotland and considering the diverse utility of local, rural hubs as part of this plan.

Local Place Plans (LPPs)

Local Place Plans (LPPs) empower communities to shape the future of their local areas by creating their own development visions. These plans, which must align with broader local authority planning frameworks, provide a powerful tool for ensuring that coworking hubs are developed in a way that meets the specific needs of local communities. LPPs promote community-led initiatives, focusing on the use of local assets and resources for social and economic benefit. [24]

By incorporating coworking hubs into LPPs, communities can transform underutilised spaces into vibrant centres for work and collaboration, addressing both social and professional needs. This bottom-up approach ensures that coworking hubs are tailored to the needs of local residents, whether in rural villages or urban centres. Moreover, the emphasis on inclusivity within LPPs supports the creation of spaces that are accessible to all members of the community, including marginalised groups such as the elderly, youth, and those with limited access to traditional workplaces.

Community-led Action Plans (CAPs)

Community-led Action Plans (CAPs) are led by local people, organisations, groups and community councils to produce detailed plans for the local area. They differ from other local planning processes, including Local Place Plans, as they are entirely community led. This has advantages in that they are truly scoped by the local community, but they have a looser relationship to statutory processes and therefore may not be taken into account. [25]

Community-led Action Plans could play a key role in the development of Connected Hubs Scotland, ensuring that communities are engaged and feed into the development of local hubs. They complement other, similar local planning processes by ensuring that communities are able to define the scope of local aspiration, rather than this being limited by the process available to them.

National Performance Framework (NPF)

The National Performance Framework (NPF) serves as a comprehensive framework for measuring progress towards a well-being economy in Scotland. [26] By incorporating coworking hubs into the NPF we can ensure that these spaces contribute to broader societal goals, enhancing the overall quality of life for its residents. The NPF emphasises key indicators such as social connection, economic fairness, and community resilience, all of which align with the objectives of coworking hubs.

Coworking hubs support economic fairness by providing accessible work environments. They can drive local economic development by offering essential infrastructure and opportunities for growth. Incorporating coworking spaces into the NPF not only aligns with Scotland's commitment to economic development but also enhances the overall quality of life for residents. This synergy reinforces the idea that coworking hubs are vital components of a thriving, inclusive community, contributing to both individual and collective well-being.

Community Wealth Building

Community Wealth Building is an approach to economic prosperity that prioritises the economic and social power of locally rooted organisations. [27] The Community Wealth Building (Scotland) Bill was introduced in March 2025 and creates a strategic foundation for community wealth building in Scotland. [28] It focuses on ensuring that economic wealth is generated, circulated and retained in local communities.

This bill poses an opportunity for Connected Hubs Scotland and the local communities that build and benefit from the hubs that comprise it. Hubs provide fit for purpose infrastructure for the place-based delivery of a national community wealth building approach.

Community Ownership

Community ownership of assets and property that is essential to the delivery of connected hub activities is a powerful opportunity to ensure the work is truly democratic, responsive and of economic benefit locally. Scottish Government primarily support community ownership of land and land assets through the Scottish Land Fund which offers communities practical support and grants of up to £1 million to take ownership of land and buildings. [29] Support has also been offered through the Empowering Communities Programme, the Investing in Communities Fund targets our most disadvantaged communities to deliver projects, services and activities that address poverty and disadvantage on their own terms. [30]

It is key that coworking and connected hubs are seen as viable and desirable uses of community owed spaces. Also, that Connected Hubs Scotland is able to support individual hubs to explore their options in relation to community ownership, perhaps through strategic partnership with organisations like Development Trusts Association Scotland.

Sustainable Development Goals, Goal 11: Sustainable cities and communities

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) "were adopted by the United Nations in 2015 as a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure that by 2030 all people enjoy peace and prosperity". [31] Goal 11 focuses on making cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable. There are a number of targets that global and local progress towards this goal can be measured against including "By 2030, enhance inclusive and sustainable urbanization and capacity for participatory, integrated and sustainable human settlement planning and management in all countries". [32]

Dunkeld & Birnam Community Coworking have applied these goals to the concept of coworking hubs, urging them to consider themselves as "Goal 11 Spaces" that aim to deliver on four key principles for their communities:

- Safe - A place where people feel themselves free from unfair bias, conflict, criticism or threatening actions.
- Inclusive - A place striving to offer equality of access and use to all members of our community, particularly those who otherwise could be marginalised.
- Sustainable - A place that positively considers how it meets the needs of today's community without compromising the needs of our community of tomorrow.
- Resilient - To have the resources and strength to thrive today and provided foundations for our shared future. [33]

Pathways: A New Approach for Women in Entrepreneurship

In 2022, Kate Forbes the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and the Economy commissioned an independent review into female entrepreneurship in Scotland.[34] Despite being half the population only on in five of Scotland's entrepreneurs are women and start-ups founded by women in Scotland receive only 2% of overall investment capital. This participation rate has remained constant over many decades and this review not only looked at the causes of under participation but sought to make recommendations to fundamentally transform female entrepreneurship in Scotland. There are 31 specific and actionable recommendations including:

- Bringing start-up incubation, education and support to where primary carers are.
- Supporting under-represented founders through the Concept and Journey Funds.
- Integrating entrepreneurial education within Scotland's education system.
- Clarifying Access Pathways into Entrepreneurship.
- Addressing the underlying sexism at the heart of under-participation.

Connected Hubs Scotland could play a key role in the actioning of these recommendations. As place-based infrastructure that are responsive to community needs they could, for example, host the start-up incubation, education and support in a location that is convenient to primary carers or in a mixed-use space that also has childcare available. For hubs to play this role they need to utilise the insights and recommendations presented in the Pathways report to ensure their activities and their methods of engaging their local communities have gender equality in entrepreneurship at their heart. Connected Hubs Scotland can help deliver this by providing support, resources and accountability to member hubs regarding gender equality and entrepreneurship.

POLICIES TO CONSIDER

One key medium-term policy goal is the implementation of a Right to Request Remote Work in Scotland, similar to the Employment Rights Bill being discussed in the UK.[35] This policy, which mirrors Ireland's Right to Request Remote Work, would give employees the legal right to request flexible work arrangements from their first day of employment. This would significantly increase the demand for coworking spaces as more people opt for remote work closer to their homes. Such a policy would ensure that flexible work options are not limited to urban areas but extend into rural communities, driving the development of coworking hubs across Scotland.

Another emerging trend is the shift towards a 4-day working week. The UK 4-Day Week trial, conducted with over 60 companies, showed that reduced working hours could maintain or even improve productivity while enhancing employee well-being.[36]

Policies To Consider

If adopted more widely, a 4-day working week would likely increase the demand for coworking spaces, as employees seek professional environments for focused work during shorter weeks. Policymakers could integrate these trends by supporting the development of coworking hubs as vital components of the flexible working ecosystem. This would not only support workers who need professional workspaces but also bolster local economies by reducing the need for long commutes into major cities.

To encourage the growth of coworking spaces, the Scottish Government could introduce tax incentives for businesses that support local coworking initiatives. Subsidies for employees to access these spaces, particularly in rural areas, would help ensure that everyone benefits from the growing trend towards flexible work.

In the long term, Scotland could explore policies that require employers to cover the costs of coworking spaces for employees who choose to work remotely. This aligns with existing health and safety legislation, which obliges employers to provide safe and adequate working conditions. Just as companies must ensure ergonomic standards in traditional office settings, a similar responsibility could be extended to remote workers using coworking spaces. This would make these spaces more accessible to a broader range of workers, ensuring that all employees, regardless of their geographic location, can access professional, high-quality work environments. Additionally, a long-term policy goal could include establishing the right to access coworking hubs. This would ensure that both rural and urban areas are equally served by a nationwide network of coworking spaces. Such a network would foster inclusivity, providing professional workspaces that are accessible to all socio-economic groups. By integrating coworking spaces into Scotland's broader regional and national development plans, the government could support the creation of hubs that act as centres for innovation, learning, and social engagement.

Scotland's future policies should also build upon existing health and safety regulations to ensure that coworking spaces meet high standards of safety, accessibility, and inclusivity. By doing so, employees would be assured that these work environments are conducive to productivity and well-being. Employers, in turn, would benefit from having healthier and more engaged workers.

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