The Community Counts Report.
The importance of a strong community has been a continuous theme throughout 2020, with the COVID-19 pandemic putting into focus the role those we live closest to can play in our lives. We’ve seen neighbours food shopping for the elderly and those shielding, people getting together to Clap for Carers and mark VE day, the creation of WhatsApp neighbourhood groups and general acts of kindness from door to door. Equally those without close neighbours have found themselves isolated like never before.

At Halifax, we wanted to understand the true value of neighbourhood ties within Britain today. What are the social, emotional and financial benefits of having a strong community in the toughest of times?

We asked more than 4,000 people from across the UK about their experiences to understand the power of our communities and discover how our feelings towards our neighbourhoods and communities have changed this year.

We can reveal that the nation is saving almost £6 billion every year by getting help from our neighbours, whether that’s looking after pets, providing transport or helping with DIY.

We found that the benefits of being close to the people we live near are significant. For the majority of us (71%) good neighbours have a positive impact on our mental health and particularly those aged 18-34 are making new, solid friendships among their neighbours.

In this report, we unveil the key findings of our study and explore what they say about Britain’s neighbourhoods. We’ve teamed up with TV personality Alison Hammond, who moved home in the midst of the pandemic, to hear about her new neighbourhood and what community means to her. In addition, we’ll be sharing views from people from up and down the country about how their experiences reflect our findings.

Community Counts has been created to help us understand the importance of a strong community network. We want to recognise the value of those already playing instrumental roles in neighbourhoods throughout Britain and provide inspiration to people who may want to further contribute to their community.
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Brits save £5.8 billion each year thanks to neighbourly help.

Almost nine in ten Brits say they have a ‘good relationship’ with their neighbours or local community.

One in four say their relationships with their neighbours have improved since lockdown in March – more so for men (28%) than for women (22%).

Half of over-55s want a neighbour they can call on in a crisis.

A third of 18-34-year-olds say their relationship with their neighbours has improved since lockdown.

Over half feel they can count on their neighbours more than at the start of the year.

Two in five value good neighbours more than at the start of 2020.

A quarter say that talking to a neighbour has been beneficial to their mental health during the pandemic.

Two-thirds say they will make an effort to support their neighbours and local community once the pandemic is over.

One in six 18-34-year-olds have set up a community WhatsApp group during the pandemic.

Key findings.
1. The rising importance of your neighbour.

Having a good relationship with our neighbours and local community is important on many levels; there are financial, social and emotional benefits to getting along, which we will explore in this report.

The vast majority of Brits (86%) have a ‘good relationship’ with their neighbours or local community. This rises to 93% of over-55s. The type of community you live in also has an impact on the strength of your relationship with your neighbours, with people living in a village (93%) more likely to have a good relationship than those living in a city (84%).

What’s more, a quarter (25%) say their relationship with their neighbours or local community has improved since lockdown, and this is more so for men (28%) than women (22%).

Just three percent of Brits reported a worsening of relations with their neighbours during this period.

Our research finds that neighbourly relationships have improved most since the first lockdown in March 2020 in:

- **East Midlands**: 38%
- **London**: 33%
- **South East**: 30%

18-34-year-olds in particular have got to know their neighbours better during the COVID-19 pandemic. People in this age group are twice as likely to have improved their relationship with their neighbours since lockdown (34%) than over-55s (17%). For younger people, having a strong community around them is even more important than before the pandemic began.

Overall, almost three-fifths (58%) now consider their neighbours to be friends, improving by 13% since the start of the pandemic and this number growing the most among 18-34-year-olds (25%).

`32%` of people would have found it harder to cope during the pandemic without their neighbours

What has brought us together during the pandemic? For more than a quarter (26%) of people, chatting over fences has helped them to get to know their neighbours, while a similar amount (24%) say that Clap for Carers at 8pm every Thursday at the beginning of lockdown brought them closer to their local community.

Many of us (34%) are interacting a lot more with our neighbours or local community as a result of the pandemic, rising to nearly half (49%) in the East Midlands and 43% in London.

Residents of Edinburgh (58%) and Plymouth (58%) are most likely to describe their neighbours as 'considerate', which is a trait we hold in high regard amongst those who live locally.
A closer look at Londoners

43% are interacting more with their neighbours and local community than before the pandemic.

31% checked in on people more than they usually would during the pandemic.

51% agree that having a strong community around them is important, the highest in the country.

These connections are important to us at a time of national emergency. A third (32%) of people would have found it harder to cope during the pandemic without their neighbours. Again, this is most prevalent among 18-34-year-olds (38%).

More than a third (35%) of Brits would now call a neighbour in a crisis, where before they may not have done, with this figure rising among 18-34-year-olds (42%).

And it looks like this renewed sense of community is here to stay. Two-thirds (65%) intend to make an effort to support their neighbours and local community once the pandemic is over, and the number is the same for both men and women.

Alison Hammond
Campaign ambassador and TV personality

“As someone who moved home during lockdown, I’m familiar with the variety of emotions that come with settling into a new community. At first I was nervous about meeting my new neighbours as my old neighbours had been like family to me, but we soon got chatting over the garden fence and it was only a matter of time until we became great friends!

The Community Counts report from Halifax is a brilliant reminder of all the wonderful acts of kindness that bring local people together, from the little things like taking a parcel in or putting the bins out, to knocking on the door to check you’re okay. I’m a big believer in the power of community and as this research shows, we all benefit from a friendly face next door.”

Which parts of the UK have good relationships with their neighbours?

98% Northern Ireland
91% Yorkshire and Humberside
92% Wales

A closer look at Londoners

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There is a significant economic upside to having good neighbours, with people being better off due to the financial savings that result from acts of kindness in the community. These include things like taking a neighbour’s dog for a walk, sharing a lawnmower, and watering plants.

By getting help from a neighbour with small acts rather than hiring a professional, Halifax has calculated that Brits will have saved an average of £165 each this year alone. Across the nation, the money neighbours help each other save equates to £5.8 billion per year.

The highest savings come from those we live near looking after our kids (£313 per year), helping out with cleaning (£276) and pet-sitting (£248). The most common neighbourly deeds that save Brits money include picking up the shopping (12%), watering plants (10%) and looking after pets (8%).

On average, people get help from their neighbours three times a month. More than half (52%) have their neighbours taking in parcels for them and more than a quarter (27%) get help with taking their bins out.

Nearly one in eight (12%) has had a lift from a neighbour when they’ve needed one and more than one in ten (11%) has had a neighbour look after their pet. One in twenty (five percent) have had a neighbour look after their children.

Brits save £1.2 billion a year in pet care fees thanks to their neighbours looking after them

On average, the activity that Brits spend the most time helping their neighbours with is DIY work (42 minutes).

The types of tasks that neighbours help out with have changed since the pandemic began. People are 3% more likely to get support from neighbours picking up shopping, but less likely to need help watering plants as more stay at home (down 4%). Collectively Brits are saving an estimated £108 million each month by having friendly neighbours pick up groceries for them rather than paying for a social worker to do this.

Cheryl Johnston
Glasgow

“Having good neighbours is like having a second security system. They are always available when you need them - whether it be a loan of a household item, a cup of sugar, or car troubles. Kindness is never far away from my door.”

There has been a change in attitudes towards neighbours as a result of the pandemic, with local bonds getting stronger and a greater emphasis placed on neighbourhoods when choosing a home.

More than half of Brits (56%) feel they can count on their neighbours more now than at the start of the year. In addition, more than four in ten (43%) agree that they value good neighbours more now than at the start of 2020.

People aged 18-34 are more likely than older groups (47%) to say that having a strong community around them is more important to them than before the pandemic began.

While nearly three-quarters (72%) would chat with their neighbours before the pandemic, 13% have started talking to their neighbours since the pandemic hit, with this figure doubling to 26% for 18-34-year-olds.

Good neighbours also have an impact on where we choose to live. More than seven in ten (72%) agree that if they were looking to buy a new home, having good neighbours and a strong community would be an important factor in their decision. This rises to eight in ten (81%) in people aged over-55.

The top quality in a neighbour for both women (67%) and men (51%) is that they are considerate.

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Good neighbours are a deciding factor in where we choose to live.

- 61% of Brits are more likely to stay at their current address because they like their neighbours and/or local community
- 58% would be hesitant to move to a new area in case their new neighbours weren’t as good as current ones
- 78% say bad neighbours would make them inclined to move home

Nearly half (48%) of respondents would miss their neighbours if they moved home, with people in the East Midlands most likely to agree (55%).

Fortunately, more than half (56%) of Britons believe they can count on their neighbours for support when they need it, rising to nearly two-thirds (64%) for those aged over 55.

As well as relationships improving with our neighbours on a human level, we’re supporting our local businesses more too now. Since the first lockdown in March 2020, 15% of Brits now make a conscious decision to support local suppliers.

Christopher Tilbury
Halifax Customer Adviser, Gloucester

“When I moved to my village last year, I immediately hit up a friendship with my next-door neighbour, Betsy. She helped us settle in and gave us tips on the best places to go.

So, when COVID-19 hit and Betsy had to self-isolate, I didn’t think twice about helping out with her shopping. When times are tough, community comes together - I couldn’t be happier that we chose to live where we do.”
Young People (18-34-year-olds)

34% say their relationships with their neighbours have improved (more than any other age category)

47% believe having a strong community around them is more important than when the pandemic began

50% say that a neighbour/member of their local community has made them feel less lonely during the pandemic

42% would call on their neighbour during a time of crisis

26% have started talking to their neighbours since the pandemic (but didn’t before)

25% now consider their neighbours as friends

Sharon Murphy
Halifax Bank Manager, Streatham, London

“*I live five minutes from where I work and it’s an amazing community. If I walk down the street at the weekend with my kids I often see my customers and we’ll always have a chat! COVID-19 has brought our community even closer together and I’ve met people I never knew before the pandemic. We started up a local WhatsApp group because one of our neighbours was shielding and we’ve been keeping an eye out for each other ever since, dropping off supplies to anyone who needs them. We’ll definitely keep the group going - why wouldn’t we? We have a real laugh too!*”
How does your neighbourhood compare?

Scotland
Scots make the most considerate neighbours, with 57% of respondents in Scotland describing their neighbours as considerate.

North West
42% agree that their local community is more important to them now than before lockdown.

Northern Ireland
Northern Irish people are most likely to enjoy good relations with their neighbours (98%).

West Midlands
64% will make an effort to continue to be supportive to neighbours after the pandemic.

Wales
Welsh people are the most likely in the UK to consider their neighbours to be friends (86%).

South West
68% value considerate neighbours most, second in the UK after Wales.

London
Londoners record the most marked improvement in their relationships with their neighbours (33%).

North East
People in the North East of England are the most likely to have got to know their neighbours during Clap for Carers at 8pm on a Thursday night (29%).

Yorkshire and Humberside
91% enjoy good relations with their neighbours.

East Midlands
Most likely to miss their neighbours if they moved out of the area (55%).

East of England
75% say a strong community is an important factor when choosing where to live.

South East
74% agree that a strong community is important for their mental health and wellbeing.
Having a good neighbour has a positive effect on people's wellbeing. Overall, a large majority (71%) agree that living in a strong and supportive community has a positive impact on mental health and wellbeing. Four in ten (40%) say that their neighbours have been an important part of keeping up morale during the pandemic.

A quarter of Brits (25%) believe talking to a neighbour or member of their local community has been beneficial to their mental health. This is more important for over-55s (32%) than 18-34-year-olds (20%).

Personal connections really matter to people at this time. A third (32%) have had a neighbour help them with their mental health since the pandemic began, for 18-34-year-olds this figure rises to one in two (50%).

People aged between 18-34 are more likely to check in more frequently with neighbours (27%) than over-55s (18%) and, overall, nearly half (44%) say they have gone out their way to make sure a neighbour isn’t lonely.

Four in ten (43%) value having good neighbours more since the pandemic hit than they did at the start of the year and 45% agree that having a local community group to support wellbeing is important.

### Communities count for mental health and wellbeing

- **71%**
  - agree that a strong community has a positive impact on mental health and wellbeing

- **45%**
  - of Brits say having a local wellbeing group is important

- **44%**
  - have checked on a neighbour during the pandemic to make sure they’re not lonely

- **32%**
  - have been helped out by a neighbour with their mental health or wellbeing

- **38%**
  - say that a neighbour/member of their local community has made them feel less lonely during the pandemic (rising to 50% for 18-34 year olds)
People are at the heart of the community

We understand that people are at the heart of communities up and down the country. What our Community Counts report demonstrates is that people across Britain are stepping up to help their neighbours at a time of national crisis.

We’re helping each other get through the day-to-day, being more considerate of those we live near and being increasingly there when they need us.

Seemingly small acts of kindness are reinforcing our sense of community and are essential to helping with people’s mental health at a very challenging time. As well as helping build stronger local bonds, we’re saving each other money at a time when many are under financial pressure.

Younger people, in particular, are benefiting from getting to know their neighbours better and, positively, people want to build on the momentum of community spirit that they have started up since the pandemic struck.

When it could have proven to be a source of division, the challenges of 2020 have brought us closer to our local communities, something many of us will hold on to when thinking about where we want to call home.

Russell Galley
Managing Director at Halifax

44% have gone out their way to make sure a neighbour isn’t lonely this year

65% have pledged to continue supporting their local community when the pandemic is over

63% feel reassured that their neighbours will be there for them in the future

13% of Brits have started taking part in a community activity since the pandemic

Chanel Ambrose
Yorkshire

“Moving to a new area can be daunting, but we couldn’t be happier. It’s very different from city living where everyone is too busy to stop and say hello. Here we go for walks and stop and chat to our neighbours. We even have a neighbourhood WhatsApp group. If I ever needed a cup of sugar or an extra potato and the shops are closed, I just need to ask.”
Before the pandemic, a third (32%) of Brits were not on first-name terms with their next door neighbour. Since the first lockdown, this has risen by 12%, meaning four in five (80%) of us now know our neighbours by their first name.

More than four in ten (42%) say having a strong community around them is more important than when the pandemic began. London and the East Midlands come out top in this with more than half (51%) agreeing.

Brits are also helping out their elders with their shopping: before the pandemic, seven percent of over-55s said their neighbours helped them with shopping. This has more than doubled to 16% since the pandemic.

To support their neighbours at this time, 16% of 18-34-year-olds have set up a community WhatsApp group during the pandemic.

The importance of community continues to shine through as millions of Brits face uncertainty. A third of people (35%) would now call on their neighbours in a crisis, where they may not have done before, rising to 42% in 18-34-year-olds.

Has the pandemic changed us to make us more conscious of those in our community and their needs? One in five (21%) have checked in on people more than they usually would during the pandemic, rising to 31% in London.

And this new community spirit seems set to stay. Two-thirds (65%) pledge to continue supporting their local community when the pandemic is over, and 63% feel reassured that their neighbours will be there for them in future lockdowns.

A third (32%) say that without their neighbours they would have found it harder to cope during the pandemic. This is most prevalent with the 18-34-year-olds (38%).

16% of 18-34-year-olds have set up a community WhatsApp group during the pandemic.

Shakeel Choudhry
Halifax customer services consultant, Blackburn

“I really believe that if neighbours work together they can do great things that benefit the whole community. When the pandemic began, a few of us got together to deliver hot meals to vulnerable people and since then the whole community has come together. My neighbours were heavily involved in raising money to provide 2,500 free meals to kids over the school holidays. This is an amazing achievement and I’m proud to have led this initiative.”
6. Research and methodology.

The research was conducted by Opinium Research between 29-31 October 2020 via online survey. The survey field was 4,009 nationally representative respondents aged over 18, supported by desk-based research from Opinium. Average hourly wages were obtained from ONS data for seven tasks that can also be carried out by neighbours. These were combined with survey results on the use of support, frequency and length of time by task to generate national figures.