

Endangered Spaces

Together, we can save
community spaces from
extinction



It's what we do

in association with

locality

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Endangered Spaces

At Locality, we've known for some time that many of our important local buildings and spaces are being lost. Our swimming pools and libraries; our parks and play areas; our community centres and town halls are being sold off for private use.

These are the everyday places where extraordinary things happen, where local people come together, access vital services and support each other. Once sold off to private developers they are lost to us, forever.

All over the country thousands of local people are coming together to step in, step up and fight to save these buildings and spaces through community ownership. This is a solution that puts our much-loved buildings and spaces back at the heart of the community and protects them for generations to come.

Together, we can save community spaces from extinction

That's why Co-op and Locality are working together to **help** save our much-loved community buildings and spaces from being sold off for private use.

We'll protect, support and improve 2,000 community social spaces over the next three years, demonstrating co-operation in practice.

Co-op's Member Pioneers will work with Co-op members and customers to identify endangered spaces and raise awareness of the importance of community spaces.

Co-op Foundation is inviting community organisations to apply for funding from Space to Connect - a new £1.6 million partnership with government - to maximise the potential of spaces where people can connect and co-operate.

Apply for funding to improve your community space (England only):
www.coopfoundation.org.uk

What can you do?

We have created three Endangered Spaces toolkits to give you an introduction to how you can save a space at risk.

Whether you want to save a local building from demolition and closure, or would like to see a well-used space continue to thrive, this toolkit gives you the information and confidence to get involved further.

We talk about:

- Why community spaces are endangered.

- The need to save community spaces.
- Government policy across the UK.
- Successfully saved spaces.
- Your next steps to help save a space.

These toolkits have been designed to introduce you to the key ideas, approaches and resources to save, improve and support community spaces.

It's meant to be an introduction to what can be a complex subject. As a result, more in-depth guidance has been referred to throughout this guide. You can get further help by:

- Reading the Endangered Spaces toolkit - [What you need to know before you start](#)
- Reading the Endangered Spaces toolkit - [Resources and Further Reading](#)
- Chatting to [your local Co-op Member Pioneer](#). Co-op Member Pioneers help bring people together to increase co-operation in local communities.
- [Registering an Endangered Space through the Advice Form](#) - open from Friday 28 June 2019 - Thursday 18 July 2019. Please note, these dates may change.

16,000 public and community spaces will be under threat by 2022

Locality's ['The Great British Sell Off'](#) report shows the UK is losing over 4,000 publicly owned buildings and spaces every year. We estimate that 16,000 public and community spaces will be under threat by 2022.

[In London alone, it was reported that 81 youth centres have closed since 2011](#), a figure that drastically increases when you look at the national number.

The Association of Play Industries found that [since 2018, councils around the UK closed 373 playgrounds](#). This figure could rise to nearly 500 by the end of 2019.

Communities suffer when spaces are lost

Co-op talked to people across the UK to find out what matters most - and what could be improved - where they live and work. The result is the [Community Wellbeing Index](#), the first measure of community wellbeing at a neighbourhood level across all four nations of the UK.

The index shows a link between the loss of spaces and increasing illness, unemployment, crime and poverty. Together, this contributes to the pride of a community going down.

More social spaces improve wellbeing

The [Community Wellbeing Index](#) identified a link between improved wellbeing and areas where community public spaces such as cafes, community centres and playgrounds are easy to access. The data also shows that in some areas where there is increased access to parks and green spaces, crime rates in the town centre decrease.

When asked why public spaces are important to their community, people gave three main reasons why:

Gives people a safe space (48%)

- Having community spaces that are safe, where people from all ages and backgrounds can spend time in without feeling intimidated, is essential.

Helps people socialise and make friends (58%)

- For those over the age of 55 - over two-thirds use community spaces to meet people and make new friends.

- For those aged between 25-45 – three quarters have made new friends in a community space.

Helps people exercise (50%)

- Half of all respondents say community spaces are essential in helping them exercise and stay fit.
- This becomes even more important to those over the age of 55 (58%), who say this is the most important factor after socialising.
- One-fifth of 25-34-year olds uses their local community centre to stay fit and maintain healthy wellbeing.

Community spaces build stronger communities

We believe that every community deserves access to a range of community spaces that meet their needs. Well-run and well-used facilities can produce many benefits for the users, the community organisations running them and the wider community.

We know from Locality members that when spaces are publicly owned by community organisations, they:

- Build more united and stronger communities.
- Provide better and connected services, such as group activities, social support, public information, and other vital services.
- Transform existing, unused buildings.
- Provide a focus for community-led regeneration which puts the needs of the community first.
- Benefit the local economy.
- Create long-term, stable community organisations.

Community organisations which have best adapted to the impact of the recession run community spaces which generate revenue, including renting buildings or hosting new services, according to the [National Council of Voluntary Organisations](#).

Government policy across the UK

England

The public sector is selling off significant amounts of public spaces, sped up by government policy and spending cuts. The government expects that local authorities should seek the highest price, supported by policies which favour commercial sale by allowing local authorities to reinvest the profits in their decreasing budgets.

Large reductions in the grants given from governments to local authorities mean that community spaces' financial support is under threat.

The Bureau of Investigative Journalism in 2019 found that more than 12,000 public spaces have been lost since 2014/15. You can search the Bureau's map to see which public spaces have been lost in your local area.

At the same time, successive governments introduced new initiatives which are meant to give citizens a greater say in decisions that matter to them. New laws such as the 'Community Rights' in the Localism Act 2011 were an important milestone in the shift in power from the state to citizens. However, their practical limits and lack of impact have been mentioned in the 2015 Commons Select Committee report and Locality's Commission on the Future of Localism.

The government's 2018 Civil Society Strategy also emphasised the need for empowerment and investment for local communities, of which transferring community spaces to communities will continue to play a key part.

Wales

Local authorities in Wales can sell community spaces to community groups under the General Disposal Consent (Wales) December 2003 provisions under the Local Government Act 1972. Welsh Government has also produced Guidance on selling community spaces to community groups in Wales for Public Bodies and others.

There are no dedicated grant funds for communities to buy public spaces in Wales at present (except smaller scale loan funds) but the Welsh Government has a fund for Community Facilities and Activities.

The People and Places programme from the National Lottery Community Fund covers some elements of community space ownership and management.

The Ebbw Vale Institute (the oldest institute in Wales) is a great example of community ownership.

For more information on Welsh Government policy, contact: Development Trusts Association Wales.

Scotland

Over recent years, an increasing number of communities in Scotland have been saving public land, buildings and other spaces for the benefit of local people. This has generally been achieved by communities taking on the management of spaces through a lease arrangement, or more commonly, through the sale of the space into community ownership.

The [2015 Community Empowerment Act](#) introduced a community right to buy. Importantly, this right applies to all public spaces and it favours communities. The public bodies must justify why a sale to the community shouldn't happen. This mechanism has been supported by an increase in the [Scottish Land Fund](#) to support community ownership.

[A Heart for Duns](#) is a great example of community action.

For more information on Scottish Government policy, contact: [Development Trusts Association Scotland](#).

Northern Ireland

There aren't any current funding opportunities in North Ireland. Without an Executive at Stormont (at the time of writing), Civil Servants are reluctant to introduce new programmes.

However, lobbying is taking place about the potential for new investment to focus on both community ownership and [cooperative development](#) or in land and community housing trusts.

Stormont is starting to look at how community organisations can access and re-purpose redundant or under-used public land and buildings that have not been declared surplus. There might be many opportunities in the future for communities to step in.

[Ballymacash Sports Academy](#) is a great example of success in Northern Ireland. The sports academy has also received support from Co-op Foundation to help [build a more sustainable future](#).

For more information on Northern Ireland legislature contact: [Development Trusts Northern Ireland](#).

Community ownership is growing

The appetite, ambition and potential for community ownership are growing. Research from [Power to Change](#) suggests that there are 7,800 community businesses, up from 6,600 in 2017. While these figures do not all relate to community spaces, they are a further indication of its growth and potential.

Local communities are being asked to do more, alongside growing demand from communities to shape and own their valued community spaces in the face of wide-scale sell-offs. Therefore, community space ownership looks set to remain in the front line of public policy and funding debates.

Successfully saved spaces

There is a range of community organisations with a long history of developing community spaces who can offer inspiration and practical guidance as a result of going through the process.

The variety of community spaces in community ownership is enormous, including:

- workspaces,
- industrial buildings,
- heritage and art facilities,
- visitor centres,
- sports facilities and swimming pools,
- shops, cafes, and pubs
- cinemas,
- car parks,
- community centres,
- nurseries,
- woodlands and nature reserves,
- and land which has the potential for development for community use, including housing.

Community ownership can take many forms. For example, residents might establish a [Community Benefit Society](#) to take ownership of a community space. Or a [Community Land Trust](#) might be established to pursue community-led housing. To get more inspiration about the possibilities, see these [case studies](#).

Want to take on a community space?

An important thing to recognise is that not all land and buildings are financially viable. Some cost more money to run than they will bring in.

From repair costs to public safety considerations, the management or ownership of a community space can present a community with a lot to think about. With your community, you need to plan carefully before you start.

This journey can take a long time and can feel daunting. It is important for people to take it step by step and build everyone's confidence. There are a few guides that cover the whole process of community ownership, including finding and working with advisers. A good guide is [To Have and To Hold](#). Dip in and out of it at the relevant stages in the process to keep yourself informed.

Your next steps to help save a space

Read the next Endangered Spaces toolkit

[What you need to know before you start](#)

Chat to your Co-op Member pioneer

Co-op Member Pioneers help bring people together to increase co-operation in local communities.

If there's something that really matters to you, like improving a shared space or getting something started to help local people, or you just want to get involved in something in your community, then [why not contact your local pioneer?](#)

They can put you in touch with like-minded people, offer practical advice, and help get you started.

Co-op already have 300 member pioneers around the country and are constantly adding to them – by 2020 they aim to have a Member Pioneer in every one of Co-op's 1500 communities. [Find your local Member Pioneer today.](#)

Tell us about an endangered space and get advice

Highlight community spaces you know of that need support. You can do this through the [Endangered Spaces Advice Form](#).

Apply for funding for your space

Space to Connect is a £1.6 million partnership between Co-op Foundation and government to maximise the potential of spaces where people can connect and co-operate.

Apply for funding to improve your community space (England only):
www.coopfoundation.org.uk

Locality is a national network supporting community organisations to be strong and successful.



It's what we do



Unlock the power in your community with us.

Locality

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