Endangered Spaces

What you need to know before you start

in association with locality
Contents

Endangered Spaces.............................................................................................................3
  Together, we can save community spaces from extinction........................................3
  What can you do?.............................................................................................................3
What is a community space?............................................................................................5
  Motivations for saving a space.......................................................................................5
Finding your place in the community.............................................................................6
Finding Endangered Spaces ...........................................................................................7
Set your project goals.......................................................................................................9
  Putting it into practice....................................................................................................9
Understanding your community’s needs.........................................................................11
  Demand vs Need...........................................................................................................11
Getting people behind your project...............................................................................12
  What to ask your local community..............................................................................12
  Reaching your local community..................................................................................12
  How to talk to your local community..........................................................................13
  Keep people up to date about your project.................................................................13
Types of community ownership.....................................................................................14
  Community Asset Transfer (CAT)................................................................................14
  Community Right to Bid..............................................................................................15
  What is an Asset of Community Value?.......................................................................15
How does CAT differ from Community Right to Bid?....................................................15
Not ready to own a building?.........................................................................................16
Other ways to get involved in Endangered Spaces.......................................................16
Funding for early-stage community groups and projects.............................................17
  Starting grants............................................................................................................17
  Larger funds...............................................................................................................18
Taking on a community space is just the beginning, not the end.................................19
Your next steps to help save a space...............................................................................20
  Read the next Endangered Spaces toolkit...................................................................20
  Chat to your Co-op Member pioneer .........................................................................20
  Tell us about an endangered space and get advice.....................................................20
  Apply for funding for your space................................................................................20
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 offers funding to maximise spaces where people can connect and co-operate. Read more: 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:

- What is a community space?
- Setting your goals
• Finding Endangered Spaces
• Getting people behind your project
• Types of community ownership
• Simple ways to help Endangered Spaces
• Funding for community projects and groups
• 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 Endangered Spaces toolkit - Together, we can save community spaces from extinction.
• 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.
What is a community space?

Community spaces in this context are land and buildings that are valuable to a distinct community for social, economic or environmental reasons. They play a vital part in peoples’ lives, both now and for future generations.

They include parks, green spaces, sports pitches, allotments, libraries, community centres, theatres, civic halls, sports centres, etc. They can be brought into community management and ownership through several routes and can involve different organisational structures and terms.

Motivations for saving a space

There is a range of factors associated with saving a community space. They tend to be either sparked by the threat of losing a valuable community space or motivated by a desire to improve the local area.

Whatever the reasons behind your community space project, understanding your motivations will be important to get people interested.

The value of community spaces to the local community might seem obvious, but making the case for them should be pro-active and ongoing, not just when spending cuts are looming.

When an important community space is gone it’s gone forever, and that can be catastrophic for the local community affected.
Finding your place in the community

Community spaces are whatever the community feels are important to them. For example, people in your local area may want to help paint a classroom or take care of planters the council can no longer afford to manage.

The simpler the project, the less detailed planning will be required. If you want to hold a litter pick on your estate, it might only require arranging a date and being clear on who is doing what, e.g. getting insurance.

If you have a more ambitious idea like trying to take over and run a community centre threatened with closure, then this will require significantly more work.

Whatever you plan to do, we recommend that you talk to other people who have done something similar. In part three of our Endangered Spaces toolkit, we’ve listed many resources for you to read through, but nothing is more valuable than talking to someone with direct experience.
Finding Endangered Spaces

If you’re able to, mapping your community spaces can be a powerful tool to help you identify where your endangered community spaces are, like pools, libraries, parks, post offices, pubs, etc.

It is easy to do and doesn’t require any technical tools. Each community is free to decide for itself what it values, but there are three main reasons why a community space might be considered important:

1. It might be the land or building itself (e.g. a historic or iconic local building).
2. It might be the activities or services which are delivered from the community space (e.g. a library service supports education and skills, a civic building allows people to meet and fosters togetherness).
3. It might be the future potential of a site, i.e. what it could become in the future.

First, identify your community spaces and categorise them:

- Cultural or sporting,
- Civic/democratic spaces,
- Religious,
- Clubs/associations,
- Private (e.g. pubs, post offices, etc),
- Green spaces,
- Landmark buildings.

These are just suggestions; a community space might fall into more than one category.

When identifying these spaces, use your imagination about what is possible:

- What does the community want its local area to be like?
- Are there opportunities to create new community spaces or services?
- Is there anything missing or in short supply?

Potential community spaces might be:

- Derelict or currently unused,
- In use, but in need of refurbishment,
• Previously undeveloped,
• Only temporarily out of use.

Online maps can be a great way of sharing what is going on in your community. They can also help you to consult with your community better. Take a look at this presentation on mapping local community assets online to find out more about how to do it.

It is useful to check if any consultation or mapping work has been done already. If you are in England, has your area been involved in Neighbourhood Planning? If so, the community will have been consulted about their priorities, giving you information to build on.
Set your project goals

Every community spaces project is different. It’s shaped by the people who use it, what it’s for, and where it is. Before a detailed plan can be created for the journey ahead, you need to be clear what your end goals are. What exactly are you trying to achieve and why?

Putting it into practice

The Vision Plan template below will help you write down your vision, mission, goals and values.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vision Plan</th>
<th>Name of your organisation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Our vision is to:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our mission is to:</td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal 1</td>
<td>Goal 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal 3</td>
<td>Goal 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our values:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Depending on the context of your project, a general statement like “to save and improve a named building or a piece of land” may be all you have as a goal at the start. Goals can be worked on and changed as your project develops.

It’s easy to become caught up in the process of agreeing on every goal in detail at this stage, especially when a range of strongly held views exists. This doesn’t
mean that your goals will be set in stone and can’t change as new challenges and possibilities come along.

Having clear and easy to understand goals at the beginning, will help everyone involved know what you’re doing and why you’re doing it. It will also make it easier to get people to help you. If you need to change what you’re doing, people will know that your end goals are still the same.

It’s a good idea to agree which goals are easier to compromise on than others. As you start to look at all your possibilities in more detail (see Understanding local needs and demands below) you may need to allow for changes in line with any restrictions that come up later.

It’s best to use the SMART acronym to check that your goals are focused:

- Specific
- Measurable
- Assignable
- Realistic
- Time-related.

Your values are fundamental beliefs or ideals shared by those involved in your project.

You should refer to your Vision Plan throughout your project, to make sure you are still on track to meet your goals.
Understanding your community’s needs

All community projects must be based on a real understanding of local needs, for example, more childcare.

This will help you build a credible case for support. You can show the level of local support for your goal by door knocking, asking people for help or to sign a petition.

A more complex project is likely to need support from a lot of people, other organisations, and possibly funders. This type of project will require a clear understanding of local needs and demand.

Your local authority website will be a good source of publicly available data, but be clear about what you need and why before you approach them for additional information.

Have a look at national statistics about your area. For example, deprivation maps can help you understand what the priorities and trends there are locally. Health-related data might highlight issues that can affect health in different areas.

Statistical information may help you to:

- Paint a clearer picture of your area.
- Highlight the scale of an issue.
- Identify which issues are most important to focus on.
- Track changes in your area over time.

Demand vs Need

To run a long-term project successfully, you need to make sure that local people will use your space and/or service.

Demand shouldn’t be confused with need. There might be a need for more meeting space locally, but is there a demand that will pay for the meeting space at the price needed to keep it open?

In the early stages of your project, it’s unlikely that you'll know the demand for sure. Your research will help you understand if any of your original goals need to change.
Getting people behind your project

Building positive relationships between people creates powerful communities, and it’s important to have the backing of your local community when taking on projects like saving an endangered space.

You won’t be able to do a project like this alone, it’s important to get your community involved to help. They will have a variety of skills, knowledge and enthusiasm that will add real momentum to your project. You’ll need them to take on roles that you may not be able to do or have time for, and the more people behind you, the more you’ll achieve.

What to ask your local community

To achieve your goals, you need to reach out to your local community and listen to what they have to say.

Poor planning and actions can result in failure and serious consequences for your project. Before you start talking to your community, firstly you should decide:

• what you want to know,
• who are you going to ask about it,
• how will those people be involved?

Once you know the answers to these questions, you can start to think about how you’re going to contact them.

Depending on what you need from people, you might need to talk to them in different ways. Do you want to get ideas from lots of different people? Or do you want people to vote on something?

Use these guides from the Scottish Health Council and Liberating Structures. They outline lots of different techniques. You may need to combine digital surveys with door knocking to include as many people as possible.

Don’t limit yourself to a single example, do what you can to find out the information you need.

Reaching your local community

Think about where people might be who might have an interest in your project.

• Are they older people? They may be in libraries or local cafes.
• Are they parents? You might find them near schools or at the leisure centre.
• You could ask local spaces like pubs, or community cafes to put up posters or leaflets for you to get at the right people.
• Make sure you ask for relevant permissions before you set up a stand or leaflet.

How to talk to your local community

When you’re talking to the general public, it’s very important not to take some things for granted, such as whether someone:
• can read,
• can write,
• has a postcode,
• can leave their home,
• has time to spend talking with you,
• speaks the same language,
• is confident speaking to a stranger.

You may need to try different ways of talking to people so that you don’t exclude those who face additional barriers that prevent them from taking part. For example, use images and pictures when working with people whose first language is not English.

Locality’s resource on community consultation in Neighbourhood Planning has some case study examples that will help you think of ways to bring people together.

Don’t forget that the internet and digital tools are a quick and easy way to chat with a lot of people. You could use crowdfunding platforms like Spacehive and CrowdFunder, to get people involved and raise funding at the same time!

Keep people up to date about your project

Talking about your project with your local community is an ongoing process. It’s important to let people know how you used their responses, for example: ‘You said...’ / ‘So we did...’.

When you give people feedback, you can use it as an opportunity to keep them excited about your project, and another chance to get them involved.
Types of community ownership

In England there are two main ways that communities can own a community space:

• Community Asset Transfer (CAT),
• Community Right to Bid.

These are two different methods which have different uses and implications.
For more information on community ownership in:

• Wales, contact Development Trusts Association Wales.
• Scotland, contact Development Trusts Association Scotland.
• Northern Ireland, contact Development Trusts Northern Ireland.

Community Asset Transfer (CAT)

Community organisations have successfully owned and managed land and buildings for hundreds of years. However, it is only in recent years that more communities are owning their own spaces through Community Asset Transfer (CAT).

Under the General Disposal Consent Act (2003), local authorities can sell their land and buildings at below their market value to promote local economic, social or environmental well-being. However, the undervalue (real value) must be less than £2m.

While CAT has gained acceptance over the last decade, the process is not the same in every local authority. Locality’s 2018 FOI exercise revealed that:

“Less than half (41%) of councils have a strategy or policy in place for community ownership, yet 95% of local authorities surveyed expect the sell-off of publicly owned buildings and spaces to play an increasingly important role in the next five years.”

Locality’s guide for councillors provides local authorities with instructions and best practice to develop a CAT policy where they haven’t got one in place.

A CAT policy will vary from local authority to local authority, some local authorities are proactive and open to the possibilities - in other places it is a lower priority. If you apply for a CAT, it is not guaranteed that it will be granted. Each local authority will have its own decision-making process.

If your local authority publishes a policy, read it and think about how you will meet the criteria in it before making an enquiry for a CAT.
Your local authority will need to see that your local community is behind your project and that it represents the needs and demands of the local area. If you can’t show this, you may not be able to get a CAT.

Locality’s guide for community organisations provides information and advice about Community Asset Transfer and is based on current best practice.

**Community Right to Bid**

The Community Right to Bid allows communities and parish councils to nominate buildings or land for listing by the local authority as an ‘asset of community value’. If the asset comes up for sale, the community can ‘pause’ the sale and take up to six months to find the funding required to buy the asset.

**What is an Asset of Community Value?**

A building or land is an asset of community value if its main use has recently been or is presently used to further the social wellbeing or social interests of the local community and could do so in the future.

Assets of Community Value (ACV) form a part of the Community Right to Bid. It’s the first stage in identifying and nominating buildings or other spaces that have a main use or purpose of furthering the social wellbeing or social interests of the local community.

Once listed as Assets of Community Value with the local authority, the local community will be informed if they are listed for sale within the five-year listing period. The community can then enact the Community Right to Bid, which gives them a moratorium period of six months to determine if they can raise the finance to purchase the asset.

This scheme, introduced through the Localism Act 2011, aims to balance the wishes of communities with the rights of property owners. However, though communities may gather the necessary funds to bid for the community space, it is up to the owners of the property to decide whether they will accept that bid or not.

No one knows for sure how many ACVs there are nationally as local authorities are not required to keep their lists in a central place. It is estimated that there are around 5,000 ACVs, and the list is growing.

Your local authority’s website should contain your local ACV list.

**How does CAT differ from Community Right to Bid?**

CAT is sometimes confused with the Community Right to Bid. The important differences are:
• CAT is the transfer of management or ownership of publicly owned land or buildings, whereas the Community Right to Bid applies to some public and some privately-owned land and buildings.

• CAT is the transfer of management or ownership at less than market value. The Community Right to Bid allows a community organisation to buy on the open market.

• CAT is a voluntary process entered proactively by public bodies. The Community Right to Bid is a pre-emptive legal right for communities.

**Not ready to own a building?**

Other options do not involve full ownership, such as ‘meanwhile use’ or short leases and licenses.

The balance of power in these cases remains with the freeholder of the land/property and provides no legal right of tenure. However, it can be an important pathway towards full ownership and can allow communities to bring empty buildings into immediate use.

Important community spaces can be designated and included in a Neighbourhood Plan - over 2,000 local groups have developed one - which should give greater protection against a change of use in the future. Or, find out from your local authority’s website if an important community space has been listed as an Asset of Community Value.

**Other ways to get involved in Endangered Spaces**

The Endangered Spaces campaign is not just about new initiatives. There are many established community organisations which co-ordinate community action and own and manage community land and buildings.

These groups are usually run by dedicated volunteers who may need a helping hand. Your local community building may need volunteers to help with a refurbishment project, to organise fundraising events, or join the Board.

Some community action is short-term and fun – participating in a litter pick, clearing some waste ground or planting some flower beds. You may not have the time for a long-term commitment, but everyone has something to offer their local community.

**Simple ways to help your Endangered Space**

• Rent a room for a meeting or celebration,
• Volunteer your skills, such as painting, or speaking a second language,
• Start a local interest group and hold it at the space,
• Go to a class or a group activity,
• If they have a café or a shop, use it.

**Funding for early-stage community groups and projects**

People can often do things in their community without the need for funding. However, where there are costs there are ways of covering them:

Use local contacts and fundraise through activities such as:

• raffles (ask for prizes from local businesses),
• local donations of equipment/money,
• sponsorship,
• subscriptions,
• contributions.

Spend some time preparing a pitch so people know what the benefit will be to them and the community as a result of your project.

**Starting grants**

Micro-grants of a few hundred to £1,000 can be found from various places, some of which will be very local. These can be from local councillors, local authority discretionary grant pots or organisations such as Rotary clubs.

When you’re looking for funding, consider becoming an unincorporated association with a constitution. A constitution is a statement of what you are going to do and how you are going to do it. Your group may need to seek company/charitable status later on and become incorporated to access other funding.

There are many funding opportunities which open and close all the time, sometimes at short notice. Funders will often want to see that you have a track record and can spend their grant effectively. There will be more reporting requirements the more funding is required.

Funding opportunities can often be identified by your local:

• authority,
• councillors,
• support and development organisation are known as local infrastructure in England, and:
  o County Voluntary Council in Wales,
  o Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations,
  o Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Organisations.

These organisations can also provide advice on setting up an organisation.

**Larger funds**

Larger funders may be keen to see you apply for smaller grants of up to £10,000 before considering you for larger grants. The National Lottery Community Fund may encourage you to apply for ‘Awards for All’ before going to ‘Reaching Communities’.

Writing funding applications is a skill, but funders will be looking for the writer to tell their idea clearly and simply. Always get someone else to look over your application before sending it off.
Taking on a community space is just the beginning, not the end

This toolkit has been written to guide you through the first crucial steps towards saving, improving and supporting community spaces.

Managing a piece of land or running a building is a lengthy commitment, requiring on-going input from the whole of the community, not just a small group of volunteers.

It’s important that before you start your project, check if someone is doing the same thing in your area. It’s more effective to collaborate than to compete.

Where a suitable organisation already exists locally, they may be the natural body to take things forward. However, if it’s not appropriate or an organisation doesn’t exist, a new one will need to be set up.

Be assured that you are following in the footsteps of thousands of community organisations across the UK who are working to make their communities great places to live, work and do business.
Your next steps to help save a space

Read the next Endangered Spaces toolkit

Resources and Further Reading

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 has 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 Co-op Foundation funding

Co-op Foundation offers funding to maximise spaces where people can connect and co-operate. Read more: www.coopfoundation.org.uk.
Locality is a national network supporting community organisations to be strong and successful.

Unlock the power in your community with us.

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