
Building a sustainable data ecosystem around community assets in England

Keep It In The Community: Discovery findings

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Executive summary

Research from Power To Change shows that Assets of Community Value (ACVs) and community-owned places and spaces constitute a vitally important and rapidly growing economic force in the UK, adding nearly £220 million to the UK economy every year.

Over 2018–2019, [Keep It In The Community](#) (KIITC) was developed as a prototype of a service that could aid in the growth and monitoring of this sector.

In this discovery project, we aimed to test the assumptions present in that early prototype – to identify whether there is a role for a database of ACVs and community spaces within the community assets sector, how this database might be updated, and whether it would benefit actors within the sector.

We spoke to a wide range of organisations and community groups, including representatives from national and local government, research bodies, funders, and the volunteers behind a number of ACVs and community spaces across the country, to understand their needs around the availability of information in this space.

We identified a number of potential interventions a service like KIITC could make in the journey towards community ownership, such as five-year reminders about expiring ACV listings and easier monitoring of the community spaces available in an area, for local development planning or social enterprise support. We've outlined these ideas in the Recommendations section at the end of this report. There is also a clear opportunity for more standardised data collection/publication around ACVs.

However, while conducting the research, we also uncovered increasing evidence of an ACV process unfit for purpose, and a community sector struggling to fill the gaps in social service provision brought about by local authority budget cuts.

Ultimately we find that a service like KIITC cannot be considered in isolation, and we'd encourage policymakers in this sector to think carefully about improvements to both the ACV process and also to funding provisions for community spaces, if we are to enable real growth in the number of community assets finding their way, sustainably, into local hands.

Project purpose

This discovery project, funded by Power To Change, had a primary goal of better **understanding the needs, benefits, and user journeys** of the stakeholder groups who might list ACVs. It aimed to inform changes to the Keep It In The Community (KIITC) service that would make its data pipeline more sustainable and ensure the service is actually useful to community groups who may submit ACVs.

We focused particularly on residents, community groups, town and parish councils and national bodies, investigating questions like:

- What are the benefits of ACV listing? Who nominates ACVs, and why?
- How do individuals get involved with campaigning for a local ACV? How do they find/build a community to start the registration process?
- Are there great case studies of ACV or community ownership success stories?
- What are the challenges or limitations of the current ACV process?
- What are the wider challenges around bringing an asset into community ownership?

As the discovery project progressed, and we spoke to more and more people on the front lines of the ACV process, it became clear that our findings could also prove valuable in **informing future legislative change**, especially around problem areas like the length of the ACV moratorium period, and the decentralisation of ACV applications and reporting.

The discovery project also served a secondary purpose of laying the groundwork for **potential future partnerships** that would enhance the visibility, accessibility and depth of the resources available via KIITC, and encouraging increased and more widespread listing of ACVs – for example, it was important to consider the overlap between Locality’s [My Community](#) site (which is currently being redeveloped) and KIITC. Our recommendations would be shaped by what MyCommunity were offering, and how visitors could be sensibly guided between the two services to help them find the support they need.

Methodology

We used a series of 30–60 minute phone interviews with participants to give us a better understanding of the needs of organisations of different sizes, in relation to ACVs and community assets.

In total we spoke to people from almost 30 organisations including:

- Organisations running community assets like community pubs, village halls, and community green spaces, and people involved more generally in local community-focused social enterprise.
- National bodies and funders with an interest in data on community assets – such as MHCLG, Locality, Power To Change, and Plunkett Foundation.
- National support organisations working in this space – such as ACRE, NAVCA, Sporting Assets, Open Spaces Society, and Community Energy England.
- Researchers with experience of working with community asset data – including Sheffield Hallam University, and Centre for London.

See the Appendix for a full list of our interview participants.

For each group, we set a series of smaller research goals.

- For the community groups – how did they find out about ACVs or community ownership? Why did they, personally, get involved? What were the challenges they faced? How did they build support for their project, and who did they themselves go to for advice or support?
- For the support organisations – we wanted to understand what they do in relation to ACVs and community ownership. What support do they offer, and who to? What challenges do they, and their users, face? And did they know of any community asset success stories?
- For the researchers and data users – why are they interested in this data about ACVs and community assets? What do they do with it, and how frequently do they need it to be updated?

Alongside this, we did a literature review of prior research into the challenges of saving and managing community spaces, including:

- Power To Change’s [‘Our assets, our future’ \(2019\)](#) report
- Co-op’s 2019 [‘Endangered Spaces’ \(2019\)](#) report
- Joseph Rowntree Foundation’s [‘Community organisations controlling assets: A better understanding’ \(2011\)](#) report

We also attended Locality's annual convention in November 2019, to network and learn more from the real experiences of organisations at various stages of the community asset journey; we're very grateful to all the community groups who took the time to speak to us there, in particular Jane from Byrne Avenue Baths, and the team behind Stretford Public Hall.

Assets of Community Value

The Localism Act (2011) defines an Asset of Community Value (ACV) as a building or land that “furthers the social wellbeing or social interests of the local community”.

Once a space is approved as an ACV, it gains a small number of protections that are intended to help it pass into community ownership. We’ll discuss these protections in the “Benefits” section, below.

ACVs must be nominated by a local voluntary or community body – such as parish council, a neighbourhood forum, a charity or Community Interest Company, or simply a body of 21 members (usually local residents and business owners).

ACV status lasts for five years, after which the status automatically lapses. If the community body wishes to renew the status, they must nominate the space again.

Keep It In The Community currently holds data on around 6,000 ACV applications, of which around 4,300 were approved, and 1,200 rejected.

Who makes use of ACVs?

In our experience, most often the sponsors of an ACV application will be locals who hold fond memories of a building or space, and who want to see it protected in some way, or recognised as an important asset for the area.

Plunkett Foundation’s community pub network, supported by Power To Change, has been a major proponent of ACV registrations, and ACV status has been recommended as a route towards community pub ownership by organisations like CAMRA. So it’s no surprise to find that community pubs are amongst the most common ACV listings on KIITC.

We were told that local councillors and members of Local Council (Town & Parish Council) boards might come across ACVs as part of their work on Neighbourhood Development Plans. NALC has recently been running a campaign to get every Local Council to register at least one ACV in their area, but realistically there isn’t much incentive for them to do so.

Ultimately, our research suggests that ACVs are still poorly understood concept, even amongst people involved in running or renovating community spaces. There was significant confusion between “assets of community value” and “community owned assets”. Some people knew ACVs by the moniker “Community Right to Bid”, perhaps because that phrase is more prevalent in documentation from Locality.

It's worth noting that Locality, and the My Community website, were frequently described as the leaders in this space, and the resource that support organisations would often refer people to when they had any questions about ACVs, Right to Bid, or community ownership. We spoke to the Locality team about their plans for a new version of My Community, and we're encouraged to see them doing some really excellent user-centred design around reformatting the service as a search-first experience, and then signposting visitors to authoritative sources of information and services from *other* providers – services such as KIITC.

How do individuals campaign for a local ACV?

Campaigns around ACVs—and community ownership in general—usually spread through word of mouth. It appears they'll typically start with one or two local community members who value the building or space, and who use in-person networks, small-scale local promotion, social media such as Facebook groups, and local media like newspapers, to build momentum behind their campaign.

The most effective campaigns will build links with other local community or heritage groups, or tap into the existing users of a community space, to increase the supporter count and open up funding opportunities. In our research, we saw one space that had applied for ACV listing and was working with a local school to get input on how the space could be renovated as a community hub, and another space—a community pub—which had built a sustainable business model through collaboration with a local school.

Benefits

Officially, ACV status brings with it a handful of benefits.

The most well-known is that, if the current owner wants to sell the space, they must notify the local authority – who will then notify the relevant community body and, if the community body wishes to prepare a bid, the local authority will enact a six month moratorium on the sale, to give the community body time to prepare the funds to make a bid on the property.

ACV status also counts as a material consideration when it comes to planning applications – for example, applications for demolition, or change of use. This can mean a lot to residents, in a planning system where they often feel like they have very little control.

More generally, we heard a few times during our research that ACV status presents a way for communities to enact some sort of control over the future of buildings that matter to them – even if the actual material protections of the status never come into play. ACV can act as a stepping-stone towards more permanent community ownership arrangements

such as Listed Building status, community asset transfers, or purchases through a community share offer.

Challenges

The benefits of ACV status, however, are balanced by a number of challenges. During the course of our research, our respondents outlined a few:

The **six month moratorium period** is commonly highlighted as a shortcoming of the law. While one person we spoke to wondered whether maybe the time pressure might actually *help* organisers solidify support around a time-sensitive campaign, the majority of the people we spoke to felt the period was simply too short to gather sufficient funds. Community bodies felt they almost needed the funds to be ready to go *before* the property owner even announced their intention to sell, but it's hard to maintain that state of readiness for a long time when you don't even know if the property will come up for sale any time soon.

The way that **successful ACV listings expire after five years** was also mentioned as a significant challenge to getting properties into community ownership. This is made even more problematic by the fact that there's no mandated reminder process or notifications that an ACV is about to lose its status. It appears there is a real danger of people thinking an asset is "protected" when in reality the original sponsors have disappeared, and the ACV has lapsed.

We heard from a few organisations that it's hard for community groups to justify the effort of the ACV process, when at the end of it, **all it buys you is a little time, and no guarantee of getting the asset**. Some of the organisers we spoke to had secured their assets before the Localism Act came into force, and they couldn't see the benefit of ACV registration as a strategy, compared to, for example, setting up a charity or trust, and persuading the local council to lease or transfer the asset.

Finally, we should note that ACVs can also be a challenge for private owners of properties, and even for local authorities themselves. They worry that not only will ACV status introduce a six month delay in any upcoming sales process, but that its influence as a material consideration in future planning applications **will reduce the resale value**, as buyers will have less flexibility around expansion or change of use.

While this tension probably can't be avoided, it nonetheless often creates an antagonistic relationship between the community body and the property owner. Even worse, in the case of local authorities, it can introduce a **conflict of interest** where a local authority must balance its duty to the Localism Act against its desire to sell the property more quickly (and potentially more lucratively) in the future. We spoke to two community

organisers who were convinced that their local council had refused ACV applications on council properties for exactly this reason. Sadly, the opacity of the ACV decision process, and the lack of a third-party appeals process for applicants, mean we'll probably never know how common this situation is. But it's clearly already damaging the reputation of ACV as a tool for bringing local authority assets into community ownership.

Recommendations

We would recommend the following considerations for those looking to improve the ACV process for community groups:

1. Extend the moratorium period. As discussed above, the majority of support organisations we spoke to suggested that community groups struggle to raise the money required to buy a property in just six months. People do feel that a deadline on the moratorium process is useful to provide momentum for raising funds or gathering support, but that the current process is simply too short. An extension to 12 months seems sensible.
2. Either extend the ACV listing period or standardise a reminder process around the end of an ACV's listing period, to reduce the chance that an ACV will drop off the register without the local community's knowledge.
3. Consider upgrading the "right to bid" to a "right to buy". It is a shortcoming of the law that a community body can follow all the rules, register their asset, collect the required funds and submit a bid once the property comes onto the market, only to have the bid rejected by the seller. Even just the possibility that this could happen discourages community groups from using ACV legislation.
4. The Assets of Community Value (England) Regulations 2012 define an appeals process for property owners wishing to challenge an ACV being granted on their property, but it's not clear what the equivalent process is for community bodies wishing to challenge refusal of their ACV applications. There needs to be a clear appeals process for community bodies to challenge local authority decisions, especially in regard to ACV applications on local authority-owned assets.
5. Recommend a common format for ACV data publication – or, even better, a central location for the data to be published to, such as KIITC. It's fairly clear that the aim of the Localism Act was for data on successful and unsuccessful ACV applications to be published in a way that it could benefit a wide range of users, including researchers and national membership bodies for community organisations. But the Act failed to specify a data format, or central location, to help standardise the discovery and use of these lists of ACVs. If local authorities could be encouraged to

publish in a standard way, and at an expected location, the community sector could build on the data to provide additional services – such as, for example, the reminder service mentioned in recommendation 2.

6. Introduce support for local authorities to both find and record assets they own. Local authorities' lack of knowledge about empty spaces *in their ownership* came up a number of times in our research. Many of these buildings will have been in the local authority's ownership for decades, perhaps even centuries, and the papertrail of ownership might be hard to find. But community groups are desperate for spaces like these, and helping local authorities to uncover what assets they already own is the first step in enabling them to work on a strategy for getting them into local community hands.

The community assets sector

Keep It In the Community isn't just limited to ACVs – it's also home to details of over 9,000 community owned assets, added as part of a collaboration with Power To Change in 2019.

In this research project, we wanted to understand the relationship between ACVs and other forms of community asset, with a view to understanding whether a focus on ACVs is actually useful to a service like KIITC, or whether dealing more with community assets in general would open up the service to a wider audience of users.

How ACVs sit within the sector

Our research clearly showed that ACVs are only a small part of the community assets sector. ACVs are effectively a stepping stone from private ownership to community ownership – in an ideal world, ACVs would exist only temporarily, while community groups were waiting for properties to come onto the market.

More than that, though, we were surprised to find that ACV listing is a tool that is often either bypassed or quickly discarded. One person we spoke to told us how they tried to apply for ACV status for a community space, which was rejected and they instead followed the route of setting up a charitable trust and applying for Listed Building status instead.

Another interviewee, from a support organisation, commented that there had been a rush of interest in ACVs when the Localism Act was first passed, but that they are now rarely asked to provide advice on the process to community groups. One interviewee from a group who provides support to community asset owners said that often, for them, the process is completely bypassed as their members go straight for the ownership process, or already have historic ownership.

We came across a number of examples of groups beginning the process of community ownership not with an ACV application, but with a community share offer – perhaps after having come to an agreement with the current owner to sell the property, or in the case of a local authority, to assign it on a long lease or perform an asset transfer on it.

We had trouble identifying the role of ACVs as part of other seemingly complementary initiatives like Neighbourhood Development Plans and the Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012. A Neighbourhood Development Plan, for instance, should surely include some level of investigation around the assets that have already been identified by the community in the given area – but it appears that in practice, if neighbourhood forums even attempted this research, they ultimately found it difficult to get information about what assets there were in their area, which assets had been listed as ACVs, which were

community owned, and how they might fit into the wider plans for development and social good being created.

Challenges

A core challenge across the whole sector is the **increased onus on community initiatives to provide social services**, such as social care and mental health care, which would previously have been provided by the local authority or local NHS Trust but which have since been cut by austerity measures. Finding a space to run these initiatives, often on a very limited budget, is a real challenge – but something that ACVs and the Localism Act should clearly be helping with.

Perhaps surprisingly, given their limited funds, not all local authorities seem keen on selling or transferring their assets into community hands. We heard from a number of people who'd had **trouble persuading their local authority to release assets**, even ones that had lain unused for decades. In one example, the council didn't even know they owned the building in question until a community group approached them to enquire about either a long lease or a transfer – but once the ownership was confirmed, the local authority found it hard to justify selling this asset, in a deprived but regenerating area, when they could instead just sit on it in the hopes that the value would increase over time. This sort of behaviour is hard to square against the increasing push for councils to consider social value in other aspects of their business – for example, when commissioning public services.

Another set of challenges we were told about centred around people. In the early stages of setting up a community asset, **finding the right mix of people** to support the various legal and logistical aspects, while operating on a limited budget, can be very difficult. Local Community and Voluntary Services (CVSes) are regularly approached to help with this, but still many projects will find themselves put into a holding pattern while the one or two originally motivated founders attempt to find collaborators with the skills they need, willing to work at risk to get the project up and running.

Even once a community space is running, **finding and keeping volunteers**—especially younger volunteers—is a perennial challenge. The problem seems especially pronounced for those working to bring rural assets like village halls, village shops, and community post offices into community hands. One of our interviewees commented that “*young people use the halls, but they're not interested in being on the committees*”, and another, the treasurer for their local hall, noted “*Finding volunteers is extremely challenging. We put notices up in the village shop, and adverts in the local newsletter. But we've had nothing so far.*”

Meanwhile, the wider movement of the charitable sector, from providing grant funding to loan funding, has meant a **shift in the skills that asset owners and volunteers now need to master**. Assets are increasingly taking on mixed funding sources, many of which will be brand new to trustees or treasurers of long-established local charities. Relying more on loan funding has a psychological impact, and requires a board that's comfortable with adopting the extra risk that an investment—rather than a grant—entails. This, again, can limit the pool of suitable volunteers to help take a local asset into community hands.

For the sorts of community groups who start out with an idea for a service or enterprise that'll benefit the community—rather than an asset that needs saving—it can be a **major challenge finding a suitable space** to run that service or social enterprise from.

Community groups will often want to be close to other, like-minded organisations. Their finances will often be incredibly tight, so they'll be looking for flexible or understanding landlords, or below-market prices. They might be looking for a space in a very specific geographic area, to service a particular community. Or they might need facilities for only a small amount of time each month.

The discoverability of spaces seems to rely on word of mouth and local knowledge. The CVSes we spoke to said that questions about places to run initiatives, or places to volunteer at, are some of the most common questions they're asked. When answering, they often find themselves relying on the potentially outdated, informal knowledge of a member of staff, or referring the local organisation to a national support organisation like Locality or Co-operatives UK – despite those organisations lacking the data or connections around local spaces.

There is a chance that “meanwhile use”, the use of a space while it is waiting to be redeveloped or sold, of these sorts of spaces may offer a mutually beneficial solution—to both community group and property owner—but the temporary nature of such tenures will of necessity only suit a certain type of social enterprise. It's worth mentioning that our participants hadn't heard of “meanwhile use” schemes outside of London yet, and even in the capital it's a very new concept.

Partnerships between two or three organisations might be one solution to finding and making viable larger, more permanent spaces – as for example, when a local school partnered with a brewery to buy and renovate The Swan in Clewer, Windsor, to serve as both a community-owned pub and a space for running educational courses and outreach programmes. We saw how community groups hoping to breathe new life into previously council-owned civic spaces, like gyms and swimming pools, can benefit immensely from partnership with other local groups or service providers, like athletics clubs, yoga or fitness instructors, parent and toddler groups, or even film clubs and arts groups. But

brokering these partnerships is hard – it currently relies mostly on word of mouth, and a lot on pure luck.

Finally, there is a **systemic under-reporting** across the community assets sector – most likely caused by uncertainty over what actually counts as a “community” asset. Assets might be managed and run by community organisations, but not owned by the community – are they community assets? One person we spoke to described a community asset as “*like that old saying about pornography – you know it when you see it*”. But this means many organisations which could be benefiting from support around building management, funding, capacity building, etc, are missing out because they’d never consider themselves to be running community assets.

Recommendations

Overall, we’d note that looking at the sector as a whole wasn’t the original purpose of our research, so our conclusions will be necessarily limited. But our findings *have* indicated that more research really should be done on this sector. The role of community assets in the lives of local residents is only going to increase, and the current patchwork of funders and support organisations is crying out for a deeper understanding of the needs of community asset founders, maintainers, and users. This is a sector that has, thus far, flourished in the face of adversity, but now is the time for some real financial and strategic support. And, we’d suggest, that must begin with more research.

Aside from that, we would make a few recommendations for organisations looking at making a difference in this area:

1. An increased focus on peer support. We were encouraged by the instinctive cooperation, collaboration, and willingness to share knowledge that pervades this industry. So many of the asset owners we spoke to had already either been the providers or beneficiaries of free, informal peer support with other asset groups. Both Locality and the Co-op run mentorship programmes that aim to help with knowledge sharing. We’d like to see more initiatives aimed at bringing together community asset groups to share best practice. Collecting and sharing better data on the locations of community assets and the people/organisations behind them would no doubt help here.
2. Reduced jargon. No community group would naturally use the term “asset” to describe the building or public space they cared about. It was interesting to see that organisations like Power To Change and the Co-op have started referring to “places and spaces”, rather than “assets”, in an attempt to make the legislation more approachable, but they are still in the minority. As it stands, community

groups are missing out on support because they assume “community assets” don’t include them, and that’s a lost opportunity for the sector as a whole.

3. An increased willingness to fund repairs on community assets. This is a tough problem to solve, but so many asset owners are struggling under funders’ propensity to fund only new and shiny projects, or their requirements to demonstrate newly-generated public outcomes – when, in reality, assets live or die on whether their existing infrastructure can be maintained and repaired. In many cases, with community initiatives running in old or historic buildings, these repairs can be especially costly. But vanishingly few funding sources are willing to help asset owners cover these costs. This is a mindset that must change.
4. Sharing more examples of “outside the box” sustainability models. Every asset is different, and every asset needs a business plan to match. Building these plans is a skill in itself, but inspiring communities on the options available to them might be one step towards helping this happen. This might be documenting more examples of shared spaces – like community groups that come together to jointly run a space that wouldn’t have made financial sense to be run by either group individually. Or it might be demonstrating the alternative funding models available to a community asset, from social investment, to crowdfunding, to community share offers. Right now this knowledge passes mostly through word of mouth. We’d like to see it promoted more widely, to people thinking of running, or already running, their own community assets.

A future role for KIITC

The original purpose of this report was to discover whether there was a role for a database of ACVs and community spaces within the community assets sector, how this database might be updated, and whether it would benefit actors within the sector.

When thinking about the future role KIITC could take, it's useful to look at the main needs we identified across the user groups we studied in this project:

Central government, national organisations, and researchers

Central government currently lacks a single, national view of ACV uptake across all councils. Data is fragmented across individual local authority websites, and this makes it hard for those forming policy to identify patterns in the usage of ACV legislation. There is no standard or schema to which local authorities could publish their ACV data for maximum reusability, even if they wanted to. And there is nothing in the legislation around ACVs that would compel local authorities to publish data in a reusable format.

Our research, however, did suggest that some sort of unified database of ACVs would be of value to a number of users both inside and outside of government – even if it were only updated annually. **KIITC is clearly well placed to act as this central database.**

A central database of ACVs (potentially expanding, carefully, to include other types of community asset, including community-owned spaces, or private spaces that are still vital to their local communities) would also be valuable to national organisations like Locality, NALC, and Power To Change, and to researchers in this space, for similar reasons – understanding the shape of the community and voluntary sector, comparing the spread of community assets to other national demographic datasets such as the Indices of Multiple Deprivation, and monitoring change in the sector over time.

National membership bodies, meanwhile, such as NAVCA and ACRE, would benefit from better data on the community spaces operated by their members. The federated structure of these organisations often means data from local members isn't visible to the national, decision-making body, which limits their effectiveness. Scouts and Girl Guides were given as two examples of national voluntary organisations that would value better data on the community spaces that host their members' meetings, so they could spot gaps in service provision, and compare coverage against other national demographic datasets.

The challenge, however, is in enabling and incentivising local authorities to publish their ACV data in a dependable, reusable manner.

How it could work: a central database of ACVs

KIITC would require very little modification to enable this use-case. The challenge is in establishing a sustainable process for the collection of data over time.

We might, for example, develop a draft schema or data standard to which local authorities could publish their ACV data, and then push for secondary legislation to either encourage or enforce its use across the local government sector.

If legislative change isn't forthcoming, the next most viable solution would likely be annual or six-monthly manual updates—an “audit” of sorts—either by staff within the organisations that find this data useful (MHCLG, Locality, Power To Change, etc) or by a third party working on their behalf. This would involve significant time and effort once or twice a year, but we expect tools could be built to assist somewhat in the large-scale checking and updating of the data.

With more recently updated data available, the website should be updated to make the data easier to preview and download, to encourage re-use.

Community groups

Community groups are the primary users of the ACV process: however, they highlighted a number of limitations around current legislation, some of which could potentially be addressed through a service like KIITC.

A reminder service, for when an ACV is about to reach the end of its five year term on the local authority's list, is one example. ACV listings don't include the contact details of the nominating group, so it is likely that we'd have to encourage community groups to register for a reminder themselves. Groups could register their contact details at any point in the ACV's lifetime – whether that's the nominating group setting themselves a reminder immediately after the ACV is confirmed, or local groups or individuals subscribing for reminders about an existing ACV they've just discovered. In terms of product design, this presents a fairly delayed pay-off for users, but maybe if it's low enough friction, and it's recommended by sources on My Community, they'll use the service. Combined with KIITC's existing capability to quickly add new ACVs to the database, this could help build not only a dataset of ACVs across the country, but also an indication of the number of ACVs with active interest/support from the local community.

How it could work: a reminder service for expiring ACVs

Community groups would be encouraged (through CVSEs and services like My Community) to provide their contact details to KIITC at the same time as submitting their ACV application to the local authority.

Since many community groups *won't* do this, we'll still need a way to send reminders about expiring ACVs for which we don't hold any contact details. Contacting the local Town & Parish Council feels like a useful alternative here, so we'd need to find sources for both the geographical boundary data for Local Councils in England, and also contact details for those Local Councils. We'd probably look to organisations like NALC to help us on both counts.

The reminder emails themselves should link to the Locality/My Community advice pages on how to register or renew an ACV listing.

Moving beyond ACVs, our research showed the importance of CVSEs as a source of advice on community spaces. Despite chronic underfunding, these organisations regularly connect local voluntary groups and social enterprises to suitable venues and spaces in their areas. But our research indicated they do this mostly from memory, or through personal contacts, which leaves the service vulnerable to staff turnover. There is potential that **a tool which helps CVSEs monitor the community spaces available in their areas** could help here – even more so if it enabled the CVS to broadcast interest from members looking for space, to the spaces that could potentially host them. Again, this would require the collecting of contact details for spaces, but it would be worth investigating whether the dataset could be bootstrapped out of the CVSEs' existing contacts in their areas.

Community groups themselves might value KIITC as a platform to find venues for community activities, or to advertise their existing space – although there is already at least one service attempting to provide this: ShareSomewhere.org, so it would make sense for KIITC to collaborate rather than compete in this space.

Local government

In our research, we heard how local authorities often have trouble identifying and sharing which assets they own.

If asset data could be uploaded in a standard format by local authorities, KIITC could **help those authorities track what assets they own**, and eventually make plans for their

transfer/sale. We expect this data would be especially interesting to local councillors who currently don't have easy access to a list of local authority assets in their ward.

Setting aside whether KIITC's data could come directly from local authorities, or through contributions from the community themselves, it's worth noting that any sort of dataset showing the level of usage and support that assets are getting from their local community would be very useful to local authorities when planning service provision or shaping development strategies in their areas. **A version of KIITC that lets the community highlight what they're doing in the spaces they care about**, could help local authorities understand the community/voluntary sector in their area—for example, seeing what services are being provided and what gaps are being filled—and also help the council's customer-facing teams to signpost residents to the services operated out of these spaces. This could have a particularly transformational effect in the most deprived areas of the UK, where social enterprises and informal community support groups currently fly under the local authority's radar.

How it could work: a showcase for community spaces

The KIITC user experience would need to be re-focused around promoting and celebrating the community uses of the listed spaces. Messaging on the site should emphasise the benefit of recording the usage that your space gets – as a promotional tool, and also as supporting material for funding applications.

It's not hard to imagine how the FixMyStreet commenting system could be repurposed to allow users of a space to post about how/why they value the space, TripAdvisor-style. Equally, we should investigate whether there are other complementary tools we could provide to the operators of spaces, such as a way to advertise volunteering vacancies.

Finally, we found that data on local assets—whether ACVs, or community owned, or anything else—would be useful to Local Councils (aka Town & Parish councils) when they're shaping Neighbourhood Development Plans. It's unlikely that most Local Councils would have the budget or resource to contribute in a large-scale way to the data on KIITC, but they *are* in an ideal position to act as curators of new data arriving about the assets in their local area.

Recommendations

In conclusion, while the community assets sector is vibrant and growing, we find the current legislation is not as useful as it could be to groups who are looking to take assets into community hands. Community groups also face challenges ranging from lack of funding to difficulties recruiting and keeping volunteers. Though these are not the sort of systemic issues that a database like KIITC can solve, they are still relevant to considering how KIITC might be used and kept up to date.

Bringing together our findings on the challenges of the ACV process, the shape of data around community assets, and the ways that a service like KIITC could evolve into a useful resource for the community assets sector, we can summarise the following recommendations for future work:

Future directions for KIITC

- A central database for ACVs, populated by local authorities – assuming the local authorities can be encouraged to publish their ACV lists in a standard, structured format. This is likely to require legislative change, but mySociety are ideally placed to investigate and encourage the design of a standard schema for ACVs, across the entire country, that could benefit both KIITC and other future research projects and end-user tools.
- A reminder service for community groups or individuals supporting an ACV to be notified before the ACV reaches the end of its five-year listing period.
- A tool which helps CVSEs monitor the community spaces available in their areas, bootstrapped through existing informal knowledge at the CVSEs, and through collaboration with national bodies like NAVCA.

Considerations for policymakers

- Consider improvements to ACV legislation – including an extended moratorium period, and “Right to Buy”, and a clear appeals process for ACV nominees wishing to challenge the local authority’s decision.
- Recommend a common format for ACV data publication – or even better, a central location for the data to be published to, as open data, such as KIITC.

- Introduce support for local authorities to both find and record assets they own, and/or support for town & parish councils to collect more local data on the assets used by their local communities.
- Increase the availability of funding for maintenance and repairs on community assets.

Appendix: who we talked to

Community groups

- Acknowledging Youths, London
- Arnos Vale Cemetery Trust, Bristol
- Bayston Hill Parish Council, Shropshire
- Byrne Avenue Baths, Birkenhead
- Fabric District CIC, Liverpool
- Inclusive Economy Liverpool
- Ovingdean Village Hall, East Sussex
- The Swan in Clewer, Windsor

National bodies & funders

- Co-op Foundation
- Locality
- MHCLG
- PICNIC
- Plunkett Foundation
- Power To Change

Community support sector

- ACRE (Action within Communities in Rural England)
- Community Energy England
- Community 360, Essex
- The Mix (ShareSomewhere.org)
- NALC (National Association of Local Councils)
- NAVCA (National Association for Voluntary and Community Action)
- NCS (National Citizen Service)
- Open Spaces Society
- Shared Assets
- Sporting Assets
- Young Citizens

Researchers

- Centre for London
- Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research, Sheffield Hallam University
- FarNearer.org