

#MakeSpaceForMusic - Briefing Paper

Leisure-time music groups positively impact the health and prosperity of their communities. To do this, they need affordable and accessible community spaces. But it is now harder for them to find spaces to sing and play music. Our campaign aims to protect and support these essential community assets. #MakeSpaceForMusic

Who are Making Music?

Making Music is the UK association for leisure-time music, with 4,000 music groups in membership, comprising around 230,000 hobby musicians. Members range from orchestras and choral societies, to brass or samba bands, gospel choirs, barbershop groups, jazz or folk ensembles and more.

What spaces do groups use to make music?

For their regular activity (usually once a week, to meet, rehearse, learn etc – not perform)

- 54% of our members use churches, church halls or other places of worship
- 21% use schools and other educational establishments
- 15% use community or village halls
- 3% use a Local Authority venue
- 2% use a cultural venue not run by a Local Authority (e.g. arts centre)
- 1.5% use a private club / hall (e.g. scout hut, dance studio)
- Other spaces include institutional residences e.g. care homes, hospitality venues e.g. pubs

(Survey of Making Music members 2022)

The **key considerations** for groups hiring spaces are:

- **Size** – Number of participants is between 10 and 200 in a group (62 average). Instrumental groups need more space, for instruments and seating.
- **Price** – Space hire costs are often a group's largest expenditure, covered by the fees people pay to take part, so need to be reasonable to ensure access and inclusion.
- **Accessibility** - Many groups have participants with access needs and all strive to be inclusive. Disabled access and facilities are essential.
- **Noise and Acoustics** – Some (not all) groups are loud, which is not always welcome. Others need acoustics to suit music making (churches are usually great) and not all spaces are designed for this.
- **Storage** – Sheet music, music stands, instruments, steel pans... half of our groups need storage.

What are the threats to this infrastructure?

High utility costs – Community Matters reported in 2023 that a third of the community spaces had an increase in utility costs of 60% or higher. This resulted in nearly 20% reducing the availability of their community space. <https://www.community-matters.uk/Docs/community-building-barometer.pdf>

Church closures – The Church of Scotland is closing up to 700 churches by 2030. There is a trend of closures across the UK: the National Churches Trust reports the number of churches open falling from 42,000 to 39,800 in ten years. [The Future of the UK's Church Buildings | National Churches Trust](#)

Heavier regulation – Village, community and church halls are often managed by volunteers. The numbers of people engaged in volunteering are falling [Community Life Survey 2021/22: Volunteering and charitable giving - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#), while the responsibilities volunteers have to take on increase, such as those proposed in the draft Terrorism (Protection of Premises) legislation.

Local authority budget constraints – The Local Government Association reports councils in England face a funding gap of £4 billion in 2024/25, increasing the pressure to public assets, such as community spaces. [2024/25 Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement | LGA](#) . Since 2022, Community Leisure UK have been reporting that Culture Trusts are at ‘crisis point’ with buildings closures inevitable – [Landscape Report: Spotlight on Culture - Community Leisure UK](#).

Why do we need music making in our communities?

Health and Wellbeing – Taking part in music activity has tangible benefits [UCL report links participating in arts and culture to longer, healthier lives - SBRG \(sbbresearch.org\)](#). Those impacts are not just for those taking part in specific music for health activity: singing in a choir, playing in a band, and listening to live music for enjoyment also has a positive impact. Leisure-time music groups provide the opportunity to do this weekly, locally, affordably and throughout people's lives.

Economic value – the sector is worth £180m annually (direct spend). In addition (indirect spend), groups hire venues, pay teachers, buy instruments, their concert attendees use public transport, eat in local restaurants, etc., contributing to the local economy. [Making Music Big Survey 22 - Group income](#)

Place-making - Music creates places that people want to live in, work in and visit. Street carnivals, Christmas carolling, bandstands, concerts in small or large venues; to have these, communities need spaces for music to be rehearsed and performed. [Making Music, Making Communities - University of Sheffield report](#)

What would make a difference?

We have a huge and successful music making culture in the UK, operating out of the existing infrastructure of community spaces. Although new places need new spaces, current activity only needs those spaces groups already use to be preserved.

The overall aim of action is to stop the erosion of such spaces, via these suggested local and national actions:

Fund essential maintenance – the (often small) investment needed to maintain older buildings is becoming more difficult to find, but closure or sale creates a harder to solve long term problem.

Embed spaces for music in neighbourhood planning – Local Authority local plans can include spaces for music making in their vision for the future, prioritising upkeep and enabling new building.

Support communities to manage and take on their buildings – Volunteers who manage buildings or take on more responsibility for buildings e.g. through community asset transfer need to be supported.

Ensure new legislation takes this sector into consideration – Regulation can sometimes have an inadvertent negative impact. New legislation must be proportionate.

For more information on the campaign: [Make Space For Music](#)

For more statistics on Making Music and our members: [The Big Survey 2022 data](#)

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“A healthy ecosystem sets in train a virtuous cycle: more high-quality artistic activity inspires more engagement, which further increases the impact of the arts. But neglect the ecosystem’s health, and the effects can be just as powerful. The loss of an arts venue in a local community, for example, could prevent its next generation of creative leaders from emerging and weaken its social fabric. Small stimuli can have a far-reaching impact on the ecosystem.” [Implications for UK arts organisations | McKinsey](#)