

HOW TO

...rescue a ruin

SUPPOSE YOU'RE READING THE LOCAL PAPER when you see that a building near you—a crumbling hall, old school or abandoned church, for instance—will be pulled down to make way for a superstore. Do you mutter that the area's going downhill and turn the page...or reach for the phone, start a campaign and spend years of your life trying to save it?

You can see why most people don't take the second option, but Bob O'Neill is one of the few. In 2004, he heard of a deal to demolish the open-air lido in Reading where he swam as a child and decided to protest. Six years on, the Kings Meadow Baths are still mouldering but still there, and he has 18 months left to restore them. If you're prepared to fight to save a local landmark, here's the path to follow.

1. **Contact local press to alert people and mobilise support.**
2. **Organise a public meeting and a petition.**
3. **Put together a detailed history of the building.** There should be a conservation officer at the local council who can tell you if it meets the criteria for listing. If there are grounds, apply to English Heritage, with supportive comments from experts.



Clinging to the wreckage: the Kings Meadow Baths in Reading

4. **Start a PR campaign.**
5. **Draft a community offer to take over the building.**
6. **Form a Building Preservation Trust**—it gives you charitable status and access to grants from organisations such as the UK Association of Preservation Trusts (ukapt.org.uk) and The Architectural Heritage Fund (ahfund.org.uk).

If you'd rather restore a ruin for yourself, *Live or Let Die*, £15, published in June by Save Britain's Heritage (savebritainsheritage.org), covers hundreds of at-risk buildings. Details are also available online if you stump up £25 for membership, and joining the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (£36, spab.org.uk) gives you access to their list, too. SPAB also runs courses for wannabe homeowners. Take a look before you commit to that charming but frankly derelict farmhouse in the hills.