

# The use of temporary spaces as artists' studios

ACCORDING TO GOVERNMENT STATISTICS there are currently 90,000 empty shops in Britain (February 2009) as a result of the current economic downturn. The government has introduced an easing of legislation and a fund of £3 million to help facilitate creative uses for empty shops. These uses include community centres, hubs for education and information, exhibition spaces and artists' studios. In addition, there is a great deal of other empty commercial property, between uses or awaiting redevelopment, which could be put to cultural use.



Former Woolworths Store, Peckham, London

NFASP encourages the use of temporary space for artists' studios where it paves the way for a longer-term strategy for integrating artists into a development, regeneration scheme, or town centre, and where the presence of artists underpins and contributes to local strategies and arts development. NFASP particularly recognises the benefit for early career artists to establish themselves in these spaces without making a major financial or time commitment.

These guidance notes are for artists, local authorities, property owners, developers - anyone with an interest in how an empty property can be used as affordable artists' workspace. It considers the benefits of these schemes and some of the steps necessary in setting up studios in empty shops and other vacant property. Examples of good practice are provided, as are links to useful documents and further reading.



Project champion Wayne Hemingway (left) with Leader of Gateshead City Council Mick Henry



© GREEN CLOSE STUDIOS

'Viva Mexico' workshops at Green Close Studios, Lancashire



© BOW ARTS TRUST

Artist Julie Fagin in her live/work space, Bow Arts Trust, Poplar HARCA, East London

## BENEFITS

Using temporarily empty spaces as artists' studios has many benefits: for the artists, for the owners of the building, and for the local community and economy.

### Places for artists to work

Affordable studio spaces, especially for early career artists, are always at a premium. The benefits to using empty spaces are manifold:

- artists have access to affordable workspace not previously available
- for early career artists, having access to a studio, even for a short period of time, provides investment in their future, making the best of their education and creative ambitions
- a community of artists is created, working individually and together on new projects, forging new collaborations, sharing skills, experience and expertise
- the studios can be a centre for training, learning new skills, running education projects, critical discussions, creative and professional development and community engagement opportunities
- there is the potential to generate income from sales of the artists' work (if part of the studio is set aside as a gallery), or through leading education workshops

### Fewer empty buildings

Empty buildings are eyesores, magnets for vandalism and crime; they can make an urban area, town centre or high street depressing, and discourage people from visiting. Using these empty buildings as artists' studios has the following benefits:

- the presence of artists in the buildings avoids the problems of vandalism and anti-social behaviour often associated with empty sites
- occupation helps to maintain the buildings, keeping them active and in good working order, therefore reducing security costs, as well as the costs of re-fitting them when they are to be reopened for commercial use
- the artists' studios will generate activity in the area, bringing more people to the town centre and revitalising the local economy, thus expediting the building's return to its former use

## Bringing art into the heart of the community

In hard times it's even more important to work for community cohesion; artists' studios set up in empty properties such as high street shops that would otherwise be boarded up, can bring new life and cultural activity into the centre of town. Benefits include:

- opportunities for learning for all ages, and for communities to engage with visual art, inspiring them and giving them access to information about the creative industries and creative professionals
- activities can be facilitated for the benefit of members of the public, for example workshops for individuals or specific groups, open studios, studio tours, or a public gallery with changing exhibitions
- generating employment opportunities for artists so that they can work within their own local communities

## A cultural legacy

Piloting centrally located cultural provision will raise the profile of visual art, and demonstrate the value of and need for a long-term cultural infrastructure. Possibilities include:

- provision of permanent, affordable, accessible artists' studios
- giving artists new skills through the creation of artist communities
- retaining graduates and other creative individuals
- inspiring and exciting members of the public of all ages about art
- a visual reminder of the impact of the arts at the heart of a community, such as temporary and permanent artworks in the public realm



© NICK STRUGNELL

*The Harlow Temple of Utopias by Roman Vasseur, Market Square, Harlow, Essex*



© ART SPACE PORTSMOUTH

*'Orbital' by John Thompson installed in Havant Park, Hampshire*

**GUIDANCE NOTES: TEMPORARY SPACE****POLICY AND PLANNING**

There are a number of reference points in national and local government Planning Policy Statements (PPS) which support using temporarily empty buildings, such as shops, as artists' studios.

The points that follow can be used in strengthening applications to funders, planning departments, local councils, and in supporting business plans.

**Planning policy and guidance***PPS1: Delivering Sustainable Development*

The Government is committed to developing strong, vibrant and sustainable communities and to promoting community cohesion in both urban and rural areas.

This means meeting the diverse needs of all people in existing and future communities, promoting personal well-being, social cohesion and inclusion and creating equal opportunity for all citizens.

*PPS4: Planning for Prosperous Economies (Revised consultation document published May 2009)*

Urban centres are not only the engine of the country's economy ... but are also the hub of community life, helping to stitch together communities through cultural, leisure, social and educational facilities.

*PPS6: Planning for Town Centres*

Where existing centres are in decline, local planning authorities should assess the scope for consolidating and strengthening these centres by seeking to focus a wider range of services there, promote the diversification of uses and improve the environment. ... This may include allowing retail units to change to other uses, whilst aiming, wherever possible, to retain opportunities for vital local services, such as post offices and pharmacies.

[www.communities.gov.uk/planningandbuilding](http://www.communities.gov.uk/planningandbuilding)

**Consultation Documents**

The *Looking After Our Town Centres* document, published by DCMS (the Department for Culture, Media, and Sport) and the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills, details the government's commitment to regenerating town centres and supporting small business and arts ventures during the economic downturn.

[www.communities.gov.uk/documents/planningandbuilding/pdf/1201258.pdf](http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/planningandbuilding/pdf/1201258.pdf)

The Quirk Review conducted in 2007 recognises the benefits of transferring assets, both permanently and temporarily, to community management. One of the Review's recommendations is to enable communities to become 'empowered, inspired, and transformed' by enabling and simplifying the process of Asset Transfer to public ownership.

[www.communities.gov.uk/documents/communities/pdf/321083.pdf](http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/communities/pdf/321083.pdf)



*Former bed showroom awaiting conversion to artists' studios, Gateshead*

© GATESHEAD CITY COUNCIL

## Local Development Frameworks (LDFs)

LDFs are a set of guidelines and policies for building and regeneration of areas. The Frameworks can include a Simplified Planning Zone:

An area in which a local planning authority wishes to stimulate development and encourage investment. They operate by granting a specified planning permission in the zone without the need for a formal application or the payment of planning fees.

Also included in the LDFs is a Statement of Community Involvement (SCI). This document details the consultation process that local government must undertake with their communities, and also seeks to 'actively encourage the contribution of ideas and representations from the community.'

[www.planningportal.gov.uk](http://www.planningportal.gov.uk)

## Culture and Sport Planning Toolkit

Aimed primarily at planning and regeneration professionals working in local authorities, private sector consultancies, developers and housebuilders, the Cultural Planning Toolkit is a practical source of information and advice for all practitioners involved in culture and planning. Developed by the Living Places programme, it provides a plan-led and plan-together process for addressing culture and delivering cultural and sporting resources through planning for culture and sport.

[www.living-places.org.uk/culture-and-sport-planning-toolkit/about-the-toolkit](http://www.living-places.org.uk/culture-and-sport-planning-toolkit/about-the-toolkit)

## Arts Council England

In Arts Council England's 'Great Art for Everyone' three year strategy, the visual arts are one of four development priorities. The strategy includes reference to: 'supporting artists through a number of workspace, market and career-development initiatives.' In May 2009 the Arts Council announced their support of the Town Centres Initiative with a fund of £500,000 to which artists can apply for grants to help them undertake creative projects in empty shops. Further details are to be announced later in 2009 and full details will be on the NFASP website.

[www.artscouncil.org.uk/plan/visual-arts](http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/plan/visual-arts)

Both the Arts Council and NFASP are clear that temporary studio spaces must be used with an eye to the future, and that this temporary solution should be instrumental in demonstrating the need for the provision of long-term workspaces for artists, and a legacy for artists and the arts in community spaces.

Whilst short-term space provides an opportunity for artists, it is worth noting, that most of the space artists' studio groups occupy is temporary and has been since the sector became established some forty years ago. An England-wide survey of studio providers, published by Acme Studios in 2005, showed that 80% of the artists' workspace was rented, with a significant amount on short-term leases that might expire within five to ten years.

Having played a major part in regeneration, artists' workspaces have been squeezed out of many urban areas. The current availability of vacant property offers a major opportunity to re-establish an infrastructure to support artists working at the heart of our communities and for artists' studios to become a vital ingredient in the new vision for our town and city centres.

## LEADERSHIP

Whether a group of artists, a property owner with an empty building, or a local authority - anyone can initiate or lead on a project to set up affordable artists' studios in temporarily empty spaces.

When identifying an appropriate building several factors should be taken into consideration, including:

- review as many suitable properties as possible - talk to the land registry, local authority property services, commercial property surveyors and commercial estate agents
- consider their condition, suitability for the intended use, likely cost of reinstating services, likely running costs, and length of lease available
- research the uses of neighbouring buildings
- utilise local knowledge to decide if the building is a suitable site for artists' studios

Once a building has been identified various steps are necessary before artists can move in:

1. a feasibility study and a business plan, including a budget
  - a feasibility study should consider the condition of the building, its original purpose and use, its planning designation, the compatibility of artists' studios with the use of neighbouring buildings, the current layout, usability, state of repair, and accessibility
  - keep in mind the potentially hidden costs: even if the property is to be given rent free there will still be insurance, security, utilities, maintenance, administration costs, business rates and possibly legal fees. Depending on the status of the organisation running the studios (if it is a charity or not), there may be business rate relief
2. plan any refurbishment or adaptation of the building and add those into the budget
3. risk assessments and health and safety assessments
  - buildings left empty may need electrical and other system certificates and possibly re-wiring or plumbing repairs
  - security risks and measures should also be considered and costed in
4. possible applications to appropriate council departments for change of use in line with planning regulations
5. facilitate relationships between the landlords, the local authorities, and community groups
6. fundraise
7. draw up a contract between the artists' group and the landlord
  - consider the duration of the agreement, the minimum period and break clauses for both parties, the notice period, service charges, buildings insurance and maintenance responsibilities, hours of access and terms of use, and the type of lease agreements
  - consider how you are going to guarantee vacant possession at the end of the term, particularly in the relationship between any managing organisation and the individual artists using the studios
8. project management, including appointing a financial / administrative manager for the duration of the building's use as studios.

## MORE INFORMATION AND SUPPORT

### Studio providers

Studio providers (listed on the NFASP website by region) will have the knowledge and connections with appropriate local authority officers to help facilitate and broker partnerships between artist groups, property owners, various authorities, and funding bodies to help in setting up temporary studios.

[www.nfasp.org.uk/membership\\_studiomembersdirectory.php](http://www.nfasp.org.uk/membership_studiomembersdirectory.php)

### Asset Transfer Unit

The Asset Transfer Unit helps to empower local people and organisations to transform land and buildings into vibrant community spaces. They provide advice, guidance and support concerning the transfer of under-used land and buildings from the public sector to community ownership and management, helping organisations to develop those assets and deliver long-term social, economic and environmental benefits. The ATU website includes a very useful project planning tool ([www.atu.org.uk/Support/AssetMap](http://www.atu.org.uk/Support/AssetMap)) which takes the user through the stages of getting started, getting ready to invest, taking a stake in an asset, property development, and premises management.

[www.atu.org.uk](http://www.atu.org.uk)

### Creative Workspace

Creative Workspace (to be relaunched as 'Inhabit' later in 2009) has developed a planning toolkit, which includes information on, amongst other things, planning, asset transfer, business modeling and funding sources. It is another extremely useful resource.

[www.creativeworkspace.info](http://www.creativeworkspace.info)

[www.isimodev.co.uk/index.php](http://www.isimodev.co.uk/index.php)

### The National Federation of Artists' Studio Providers (NFASP)

NFASP is a professional membership body giving voice to over 300 artists' studio organisations providing affordable workspace for over 6,000 artists in the UK. Funded by Arts Council England, NFASP supports the work that studio providers do and campaigns to secure, improve and increase affordable studio provision for artists. NFASP offers impartial advice and support to those who are currently running affordable artists' studios, or are part of, an artists' studio group and are happy to share information and advocacy on setting up studios in an empty building.

More information, including fact sheets, and helpful links on their website:

[www.nfasp.org.uk](http://www.nfasp.org.uk)

## GOOD PRACTICE EXAMPLES

A number of pilot schemes have been brokered by NFASP and other partners, including property specialists, community partnerships, and studio providers and artists' groups. These schemes are most effectively conceived and managed when certain aspects are taken into consideration from the outset, including: the artists and practices to be supported, the extent of community engagement, the exit-strategy and the legacy of the project for culture, communities and the artists.



Artists from Wandsworth Art Village and the Chair of ACAVA in the project's gallery space

### **Wandsworth Arts Village - working with the community**

A pilot project run by ACAVA (Association for Cultural Advancement through Visual Art – NFASP member), using a single building containing empty units at Wandsworth Business Village in South London to provide affordable, first studio spaces and creative engagement with the local community. Forty early career artists are enabled to develop their practice and use it to undertake creative and cultural projects for members of the public inside and outside the building. These include working with local schools and community groups, holding open studios, and taking part in Wandsworth Arts Festival. There are ongoing conversations with local authorities and other interested partners about future projects.

[www.nfasp.org.uk/page.php?id=166#village](http://www.nfasp.org.uk/page.php?id=166#village)

[www.acava.org](http://www.acava.org)

### **Stroud Valleys Artspace (NFASP member)**

Stroud Valleys Artspace (SVA) is an artist-led group based in Stroud providing studios for more than 25 artists. Their Site Festival in 2009 exhibits the work of 300 local artists in 83 sites across the Stroud Valleys, including exhibitions in seven empty shops in Stroud. Whilst the shops house exhibitions rather than studios, SVA has negotiated the leases, and obtained 100% rate relief on the properties.

[www.sva.org.uk](http://www.sva.org.uk)

### **Gateshead City Council: Starter for Ten project**

Starter for Ten is a pilot project set up by Gateshead Council to provide temporary workspace for creative people. The council is working with top designer Wayne Hemingway to refurbish a building on the high street, which is due to be demolished in two years time (2011), with an aim to help revitalise the town centre ahead of its planned redevelopment. The scheme is aimed at early career practitioners who will progress in their creative practice or business by taking part in the project.

[www.gateshead.gov.uk/Business%20and%20Industry/support/starter4ten.aspx](http://www.gateshead.gov.uk/Business%20and%20Industry/support/starter4ten.aspx)

### **Essex County Council (NFASP member): Space to Work and Harlow Renaissance**

Space to Work is a strategy led by Essex County Council in collaboration and consultation with artists across the county to promote Essex as a place for artists to live and work. The strategy identifies a demand across the county for studios and access to specialist facilities, equipment, services and storage. County council officers are committed to working with artists to offer training and business development opportunities, as well as facilitating links between artists and community groups. They also encourage planners and developers to consider the inclusion of arts facilities and studio spaces through local development frameworks and section 106 planning gain applications. As part of the Harlow Renaissance project the council has worked with artist Roman Vasseur to identify a group of artists, offering them space in some of the many empty shops and buildings.

[www.essexcc.gov.uk/vip8/ecc/ECCWebsite/dis/gui.jsp?channelOid=13835&guideOid=113661](http://www.essexcc.gov.uk/vip8/ecc/ECCWebsite/dis/gui.jsp?channelOid=13835&guideOid=113661)

[www.harlowrenaissance.co.uk](http://www.harlowrenaissance.co.uk)



*Roman Vasseur outside his Harlow Temple of Utopias*



*Poplar HARCA artist live/work space, managed by Bow Arts Trust*

### **Bow Arts Trust (NFASP member): Live/Work with Poplar HARCA (Housing and Regeneration Community Association)**

Poplar HARCA are social landlords committed to working with local communities to make Poplar a better place to live. Artists inhabit and work in homes that are awaiting refurbishment or redevelopment as part of longer-term plans. The rent is affordable, with a third going into a community arts fund, delivering sustainable projects for local people throughout the borough. The Trust works with up to 20,000 disadvantaged young people, generating millions of pounds worth of income for projects and opportunities for artists to work on arts education and community programmes, commissions and residencies.

[www.bowarts.org](http://www.bowarts.org)

### **Yorkshire Artspace Society (NFASP member): Porter Brook**

Established in Sheffield in 1977, Yorkshire Artspace provides affordable workspace for artists and craftspeople. The premises provides studio space for 70 practitioners, supporting and nurturing a broad range of diverse and innovative professional practice through the provision of affordable and sustainable studio space, professional support, facilities and services. Following advocacy work conducted with Sheffield City Council, Yorkshire Artspace was offered a two-year lease on some empty council offices adjacent to Persistence Works, the organisation's main site. Temporary and affordable accommodation will be provided for 20 to 24 artists who do not currently have access to studio space.

[www.artspace.org.uk](http://www.artspace.org.uk)

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