

Investing in Creative Communities

RENOVATING BUILDINGS FOR ARTISTS' STUDIOS

A Guide for Local Authorities, Planning & Regeneration Professionals and Developers



nfasp



Krowji, Redruth, Cornwall, former Grammar School renovated to provide studios, workspaces, offices, cafe and meeting rooms.

Photo: Kirsten Prisk Photography.

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This guide has been put together to help the local authority and developer communities understand how affordable artists' studios present an ideal solution to the challenge of dealing with empty buildings.

It sets out the benefits of locating artists' studios in disused or 'hard to fill' buildings and shows representatives from local authorities, the developer community and private landlords who may have properties like this under their ownership, how such buildings can be renovated at relatively low cost and in quick time. Most importantly, it highlights the plethora of benefits that renovation projects for artists' studios can bring to communities and to the various partners involved.

It has been produced by the **National Federation of Artists' Studios Providers** (NFASP), the professional

body which supports, connects and represents all those who manage and develop affordable studio space for visual artists.

The guide forms part of an advocacy project sponsored by Arts Council England's Grants for the Arts programme. It is one of five documents in a suite of guidance notes for local authorities, planning and regeneration professionals, housing specialists and developers. The other titles are:

- Financing Artists' Studios
- Artists' Studios and the Housing Sector
- Work/Live Space for Artists as Facilitators of Creative Communities
- The Provision of Affordable Artists' Studios: A Role for Spatial Planning

More information, advice and case study examples, developed by NFASP, may be found at www.nfasp.org.uk

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Renovating Old Buildings: Why artists' studios?

What are affordable artists' studios?

They are buildings which are used for artists to develop their artistic practice and produce art in their chosen field. Buildings are divided into individual studios and/or shared, open plan studio space for artists to use for this purpose. Many include communal areas for artists to meet and collaborate. Some have public access space such as galleries or cafes. Studios provide affordable space for artists where it is otherwise unavailable. Studio providers are sometimes able to buy or occupy buildings at attractive rates, for example by taking over buildings that are a liability to their owners, or are being held as a long term asset. In these circumstances, the studio providers can meet special needs, for example providing space for new and emerging artists including recent graduates. More established practitioners also make use of affordable studios - and regularly collaborate with new artists to help them develop their practice.

ACAVA's Grange Walk Studios under construction in former office building. Photo: Ben Eastop.

Why choose artists' studios?

Fundamentally, locating artists' studios in old buildings can provide creative solutions to a whole range of challenges. These solutions speak to various agendas and can bring benefits to all those involved.

For building owners and landlords it makes financial sense to bring such buildings back into use, particularly if they have been empty for some time. Properties can often be adapted very quickly, at low cost and bring rental income in from what can otherwise be a costly asset. It is sometimes possible to sell buildings to larger, more established studio providers or developers; this is a good option where it is difficult to secure a good price on the open market for old/hard to use properties.

For local authorities, there is a whole host of ways that affordable artists' studios can support a council's strategic objectives by:

- Satisfying the planning requirement to keep former industrial/office buildings for employment use.





Krowji, Redruth, Cornwall, artist Siobhan Purdy in her studio.
Photo: Kirsten Prisk Photography.

- Forming a central part of regeneration projects, such as revitalising town centres, renewing neighbourhoods, regenerating communities and improving the public realm.
- Supporting cultural, creative, leisure and tourism strategies (e.g. linking into local/regional arts festivals); this is especially pertinent to the formation of creative hubs or clusters, where artists' studios can sit alongside other creative businesses, social enterprises and arts/culture organisations.
- Acting as a social catalyst in communities, particularly in rural areas, bringing local people

into contact with public art and helping them to access community programmes led by artists' studios.

- Supporting partnerships with education through schools workshops, support for art & design graduates and adult learning programmes.
- Adding a new and interesting layer to the local business base.

Renovating buildings for this purpose can bring good financial returns on investment for property owners or developers, particularly in a depressed market. It is also good publicity for local authorities and other key partners to be associated with successful studios in local communities. Businesses, education providers and other local organisations can also gain mutual benefit from the 'brand' of artists' studios and their contribution to employment, culture, creativity and regeneration of localities. Their presence can help foster improved community relations by opening up access to public art and revitalising previously disused buildings. All of this helps to create and strengthen partnerships between all interested parties; the success of artists' studios can breed success across large areas, not just the immediate locality.

Rationale for affordable artists' studios: some examples

Supporting Cultural Vision – Platform Arts, Middlesbrough

Middlesbrough Council, alongside the Platform Arts team, was instrumental in setting up the Platform Arts Studio in Middlesbrough railway station. Having successfully completed the landmark Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art, the Council was keen to support new arts projects. The Council has a strong vision for art and culture in Middlesbrough and was proactive in seeking out locations for affordable artists' studios as part of their plan. They were proactive in getting Platform Arts off the ground; they identified the derelict building on the station premises, leased the building from the train operator, did the initial feasibility and design work and employed the building contractors. The Council was also instrumental in working with Platform Arts and others to assemble the funding package. The project was four years in the making – and opened in 2008. An adjacent building has since been incorporated as a gallery space, opening in 2011. The presence of the studios and gallery on the station platform makes a strong statement about the aspiration to make art as accessible as possible to the public and demonstrates the Council's commitment to achieving this.

Creative cluster within town centre regeneration programme – Krowji, Cornwall

Krowji, Cornwall's largest creative cluster location, is based in a former grammar school building in Redruth town centre. The presence of Krowji is a major contributor to the regeneration of the town centre; it is home to around 60 creative practitioners including graphic artists, furniture makers and jewellery designers. In addition

to the artists/makers, there are another 50 or so people located on site working for arts agencies, website companies and other creative industries. Krowji is a key component of the Cornwall Arts Centre Trust (ACT), funded by the Arts Council and Cornwall Council as a strategic client. ACT delivers a wide portfolio of programmes including Rural Touring, Community Arts and various European programmes (e.g. Creative Skills CPD programmes). The Trust model helped to secure purchase of the freehold of the old school and to use this as the focal point for both renewing the town centre and establishing a strong creative industry presence alongside affordable artists' studios.

Rural & social development through the arts – Green Close Studios, Lancashire

Established 16 years ago, Green Close has built up its reputation not just as a studio facility for artists, but also as a place that is rooted in the local community, providing rural and social development opportunities through arts and culture. Having started out as affordable studio space for artists, an organisational review in 2005/6 led to a deliberate shift in focus from relying solely on artist rental income to attracting funds to work with communities in schools. Green Close aims to be the social catalyst for other art projects, using its network of 50 artists to work right across the local area. The relationship with Lancashire County Council is key to achieving the social, artistic and cultural aims of both organisations. The County Council has helped Green Close to negotiate European funding applications and to work with local districts to access other funding pots. Several new projects have been developed with the Council to be delivered right across the County including international residencies, family workshops, artist commissions, poetry and walking tours. Green Close is also a key venue during the annual Bowland Arts Festival.



What Works? Finding and designing the right building

Working with artists' studios providers to get it right

Established artists' studio providers have lots of experience of renovating previously unused buildings and adapting them to the needs of artists. Providers are the best source of advice on deciding whether a building is right and can help with assessing buildings and suggesting designs.

Every project is different and there are many examples of types of building in various states of repair that have been renovated successfully in the past. Artists tend not to look for anything too sophisticated – so keeping building layouts and interior design simple is the best approach. But there are some common factors on specification to bear in mind if you have empty buildings in your property portfolio and are considering whether they are suitable for conversion into artists' studios.

Green Close Studios, Melling, Lancashire, formerly a smithy.
Photo: Duncan Smith.

- Building should be structurally sound, unless there is a big budget for renovation (e.g. to fix roof and any other major structural works); old industrial buildings (factories and workshops) and office buildings are popular options.
- Property should be easily divisible into individual studio units – ideally a rectangular building with no irregular shapes or tricky spaces – by adding simple stud walls to the interior space.
- Studios can come in a range of sizes – 200 sq ft to 800 sq ft depending on use. The average is usually around 300 sq ft.
- Good ceiling heights are desirable, as is good natural light.
- Some communal space will be needed including kitchen/wash up areas/toilets. Space for informal networking is also popular.
- Building should be easily accessible either by public transport or by offering car and cycle parking on site. Full access for the disabled is becoming more standard.
- 24 hour access is a must – and buildings should have good security.
- Local amenities are not essential, but it can be helpful to have shops and cafes nearby.
- Locations with good public access can be important, particularly if the aim is to include a

gallery alongside the studios, or if engagement with communities and education is part of the plan.

In essence, whatever type of property you start with, the end goal is to have a structurally sound building that complies with Health & Safety legislation and Building Regulations and provides clean, white, reasonably sized studio space for artists to work in at affordable rents. Sub-market rates will vary according to location, but a good rule of thumb is one third of the normal commercial rate.

Temporary vs long-term solutions

Historically, studio providers have often been forced to take on buildings (often of very poor quality) on a temporary basis (1-2 years maximum). This has been driven by the general lack of available studio space for artists, especially affordable studios. The temptation to lease anything that's available is understandable – even if the property is in a bad state of disrepair – as a way of getting on the studio 'ladder'.

But while the temporary option can serve artists well in their early careers, especially new

graduates, it is not ideal for studio providers to have to move around too often. Temporary leases mean that renovations tend to be done at the lowest possible cost as providers need to consider the costs of moving to new premises at a later date. There is also no vested interest for providers and artists to really commit to a particular location or community if there is a likelihood they will be forced to move elsewhere within a short timeframe.

It is becoming increasingly common for studio providers to seek out longer term options; it makes more sense for all parties in terms of recouping the initial renovation investment and helps to support more sustainable communities. Some larger providers have sufficient assets and/or borrowing capability to buy properties outright. For those where leasing is the only option, a minimum lease of 5 years is becoming the norm, with many seeking 10 year terms. If local authorities, developers, planning and regeneration professionals are serious about embedding art and culture into sustainable communities, longer leases will help studio providers make a more meaningful investment that delivers benefits over a longer timeframe.

Finding the right artists' studio provider

If you own a building, or know of other properties that might be suitable for adapting into studios, it makes sense to work with established studio providers to help move projects forward. Many will come to you, particularly those with a good knowledge of the area already and who have seen the potential in specific buildings to meet local demand. Local authorities and developers should also be proactive in seeking out artist groups and studio providers they can work with. Tapping into artistic networks in your area is a good starting point. Council arts & culture officers know the landscape well and can generate good leads.

NFASP has a list of studio providers in its Directory of Members. They can also put you in touch with your regional network; some regions also have regional champions to lead and co-ordinate the artist studio community in parts of the UK.

To find out more, visit the NFASP website at www.nfasp.org.uk.

Making Studios Successful: Relationships, roles and responsibilities

Key players

Local authorities

- Regeneration
- Arts & Culture Teams
- Planning Officers (including building control)
- Housing teams
- Economic/business development
- Senior management
- Elected/Cabinet members

Other agencies

- Developers
- Private landlords
- Schools, Art Colleges, University Art & Design Departments
- Other planning professionals

How key contacts can support renovation projects

There are many ways to support renovation projects for artists' studios including direct funding, finding ways to keep renovation and running costs low, giving advice and guidance, supporting through relevant strategies and policies and helping to publicise projects. These are covered in more detail below.

● ***Including projects in key strategies and planning documents***

Local authorities can actively support local and affordable studio provision by incorporating provision into relevant strategies and policies. This is most relevant to core planning documents such as the Local Development Framework Core Strategy, Infrastructure Delivery Plan, Area Action Plans and Supplementary Planning Documents.

There is also scope to include studio provision in Section 106 agreements as part of planning gain. This can help to secure long term provision of affordable studios in renovation projects (and other developments). Clauses on maintaining affordability are particularly pertinent.

A companion NFASP guidance document '*The Provision of Affordable Artists' Studios: a role for spatial planning*' provides more detail on this.

Local strategies such as regeneration, economic development, culture, creative industries, leisure and tourism also support this agenda and should be used alongside statutory planning documents to illustrate the contribution artists' studios can make to the economic growth and cultural health of local communities.



ACAVA's short term Grange Walk Studios in converted office building awaiting development by local council. Photo: Duncan Smith.

- **Gifting buildings/rent free lease terms**

Some landlords/owners of empty, hard to rent properties have 'gifted' buildings to providers. Others have agreed a rent free period up front (say for the first six months) to allow providers the flexibility to fund the initial renovation, get tenants into the studios and generate some income before having to pay any rent themselves. Both these options can be attractive to private and public landlords or owners. Many buildings are still costing them money when empty and offer little prospect of income by any other means. Passing on the responsibility for renovation and other costs to experienced providers is a good solution, particularly for local councils. In some cases, large studio providers with a strong asset base, proven track record in bringing renovation projects in, and borrowing potential, are in a position to buy properties. This can be attractive to owners who wish to dispose of their building assets but have no prospect of selling on the open commercial market.

- **Providing funds for renovation**

The funding landscape has altered considerably in recent times. The economic downturn has

Favourable lease terms to help finance renovations: case study

Elysium Gallery, Swansea

The Elysium Gallery has moved around various buildings over the years and has mostly been able to self fund renovations through a combination of negotiating good deals on lease arrangements and juggling the timing of receiving rental income. Landlords have provided a rent-free period (usually of 6 months) in return for improving a previously unusable building. This effectively 'buys some time' to complete and finance renovations. In turn, Elysium charged new tenants three months rent up front to contribute to the renovation costs. Artists are then given three months rent-free once they have moved into the building.

led to spending cuts across local authorities and the winding up of regional development agencies (RDAs). Lottery funding was diverted to focus on the Olympics, although in time it is anticipated lottery funding for the arts will slowly start to re-appear. The Arts Council too has been hit hard, particularly in terms of funding capital projects.

East Street Arts, Leeds

East Street Arts (ESA) accessed a range of different funding sources to meet different but complementary sets of objectives relating to their new Patrick Studios. Renovated from a social club building next to an old church, ESA and Leeds City Council had the ambition to create a flagship, high specification building for artists' studios, specialist facilities for artists/makers and project space for public events. The funding package was a combination of ACE capital fund, Leeds City Council (regeneration funds via SRB) and ERDF (with a job creation focus). The Council has also previously helped to support other ESA renovation projects through LEGL funds. This includes the expansion of an existing studio facility to provide additional studio space plus a new ceramics centre.

Public sources of assistance are therefore increasingly difficult to come by for this type of project, although there are still some recent examples worth noting.

Developers and private landlords are another possible source. They have a vested interest in getting projects moving quickly and can see good returns on their investment through working with experienced studio providers. Clearly, achieving good returns is more difficult during straitened

times; studio providers need to be mindful of how to meet the terms of commercial deals with private landlords/developers and bring the level of return expected.

- **Keeping costs low**

Local authorities can help in other ways to keep running costs low and maintain affordability levels. Exempting studios from business rates is a common example. Some studio providers automatically qualify for rate relief through their constitution (e.g. those with charitable



Hot Bed Press, Salford, printmakers' studio. Photo: Hot Bed Press.

status). For others, it will be at the discretion of the relevant local authority as to whether studio providers have to pay. Councils should give serious thought to this; often the amount raised is small and makes very little difference to the overall business rate uplift. For providers and their artists, particularly smaller ones, it can have a disproportionate impact on rent affordability.

Developers, landlords and local authorities can also assist in finding contractors to do renovation work. Many will have lists of builders, architects, designers and other professional service companies they use for their own contracts. Using known and trusted contractors gives peace of mind to studio providers that works will be done on time and to high standards. It may also be possible to secure some services at low or even zero cost by using existing procurement frameworks of key partners in the renovation project.

● ***Offering competitive leases***

As mentioned earlier, providers looking to lease properties (as opposed to purchasing) will be keen to secure a lease of at least 5



ACAVA's Cannizaro Studios, London, converted from potting sheds in collaboration with local authority. Photo: Duncan Smith.

years. This makes the initial investment more viable and gives security of tenure to the studio providers and the artists themselves. Working together to keep rental levels affordable means that both providers and artists will be committed to the project, more likely to stay in the area and become an integral feature of the local community. The vast majority of studios across the UK are over 90% occupied; 100% occupancy rates are not uncommon and



Bow Arts Open Studios. Photo: Jeremy Clarke

demand for space is very high. Many studios have waiting lists. Leases of 5-10 years help to keep rents affordable and occupancy rates high.

- **Publicising studios in your area**

The benefits of having affordable artists' studios in a locality are well documented. Studio providers will be responsible for marketing and promoting their studio space through various means including websites, local adverts, networking events and word of mouth. Resources tend to be limited for this

type of work, so anything that local authorities, developers and others can do is an added bonus. Local authorities in particular can use their own networks (through Arts & Culture for instance) to publicise studios and help find suitable tenants.

Renovation projects for artists' studios make good news stories and are ideal opportunities for local councillors or MPs to publicise flagship properties in local communities and encourage people to engage with the different activities on offer to them.

Councils, developers and landlords can also use their own communication channels (websites, newsletters, property listings etc) to showcase studios.

- **Advising and mentoring projects**

There are many ways developers, local authorities, planners and others can get involved with studio providers in an advisory capacity to influence renovation projects.

Wasps, The Briggait, Merchant City, Glasgow, redevelopment of the historic building to create artists' studios, creative and cultural business offices, exhibition and public space. Photo: Andrew Lee.



On a formal level, joining Boards of Trustees or Steering Groups for studio providers is quite common giving the opportunity to directly influence the direction of projects and provide the types of assistance listed in this document.

It is also possible to advise projects informally by, for example, mentoring studio providers on funding bids for renovations or helping groups to forge new partnerships to bring income

into the studios. Partnerships with education are becoming increasingly common; local authorities can help bring schools, colleges and universities into studios for workshops (often linked to gallery tours) or to hire studio space for example. Providing adult learning services and selling specialist training courses are other ways that studios can generate income to offset renovation costs and keep rents low.

Phasing renovation: building the evidence of what works

A-Space, Southampton

Having spent 5 years moving between temporary and makeshift premises, A-Space studios and gallery were looking for a more permanent location that could provide affordable studios for emerging artists, supported by gallery space for exhibitions and access to a programme of continuing professional development (CPD). A-Space worked in partnership with Southampton City Council and SEEDA to find something suitable. The Council/SEEDA searched their property portfolio and offered up the Arches building, a former storage facility under the city's Central Bridge. With funding from the Southampton Partnership, SEEDA and assistance from the Council, the Arches opened the first of its studios in 2004. The structure of the building (effectively four separate spaces contained within the four distinct arches of the building), lent itself well to a phased build. One of the arches was developed first of all into 10 affordable studios. All partners wanted to be clear there was demonstrable demand for this type of space; detailed performance reports against various criteria were provided to partners over the course of 4 years. On the back of this successful first phase, the remaining 'arches' were renovated. They now provide 23 affordable studios with the fourth arch rented out to the University during term time. At other times, this space is rented to tenants for workshops and other short-term activities. A new lease 5 year lease was negotiated on the building from 2012.

Funding the Renovation of Artists' Studios

This document has already set out some examples of how organisations can help fund studio renovations directly or advise on cost effective ways of getting projects off the ground.

In the current economic climate, phasing the renovation process is an attractive option, especially if public funds are involved – and if the building lends itself to a phased build. It gives time to demonstrate that projects are effective and for funding partners to gather additional funds for later phases.

Further help and advice

NFASP is the professional membership body for all those engaged in developing and managing affordable studios for artists in the UK. For further help and advice, visit the National Federation of Artists' Studio Providers (NFASP) website:

<http://nfasp.org.uk>

On the website, you will be able to access the following help:

- Perform a site search related to your enquiry.
- Access an extensive library of resource and guidance documents.
- Review the Frequently Asked Questions section.
- Join NFASP and access tailored support for members.
- Use the members' pages to ask a question online, or secure advice via the local and national networks.



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Cover:
Construction of ACAVA's Hythe Road Studios, London.
Photo: Michael Cubey.