

**CASE STUDY: THE SHED GATESHEAD****The Shed : a Gateshead Council initiative to develop temporary artists' workspace**

THE SHED, NOW A THRIVING TEMPORARY ARTISTS' WORKSPACE, was transformed from an empty furniture shop in Gateshead. On its launch in November 2009, it was home to 11 creative practitioners and artists and now, 25 more are about to move in (July 2010).

As part of an initiative to revitalise the town centre and build sustainable workspaces for creative practitioners in the North East, Gateshead Council is providing artists, craftspeople and designers with temporary workspace rent-free at The Shed.

**BACKGROUND**

Developed with design guru Wayne Hemingway, The Shed is the pilot project for Gateshead Council's Starter for Ten initiative. The Project has two key aims: to address the demand for creative workspace in Gateshead, and to revitalise the High Street South area of Gateshead town centre. As the first Starter for Ten project, The Shed is a vital piece of research which will inform Gateshead's long-term strategy for supporting the development of sustainable, creative workspace. The Council has already begun investigating other vacant Council and privately owned property across the borough for further Starter for Ten developments. A priority will be to identify a follow-on space for the users of The Shed when the time comes for the building to be demolished.

Along with other town centre properties, The Shed is due to be demolished to make way for new development. Originally, it was earmarked for demolition in the next two years. However, due to the economic climate, the timescale for this is now uncertain but is not expected to be within the next five years.



*The Shed from the outside*

**KEY OUTCOMES**

- 36 artists and creative practitioners have been given an opportunity to firmly establish their practice and businesses over a three-year period, through the provision of rent and rates-free workspace, and through subsidised professional development opportunities.
- The Shed has had a positive effect on the regeneration of central Gateshead, by bringing a redundant building back into use and feeding into the cultural life of the wider region.
- The premises are managed by an established and experienced provider of affordable artists' workspace.
- Creative tenants of The Shed are actively engaging with the local community through arts activities for and with the public including open studios, exhibitions and classes.

## CASE STUDY: THE SHED GATESHEAD



Wayne Hemingway opens The Shed with councillor Mick Henry

## THE RATIONALE

Gateshead Council recognised that despite massive investment in the local creative and cultural infrastructure – including developments such as The Sage Gateshead and the Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art – the lack of available creative and artistic workspace was an issue for the long-term sustainability of the arts industry. This conclusion was supported through research and consultation events undertaken in the Gateshead creative and cultural sectors.

Gateshead Council understood that the creation of the right support and infrastructure for the creative sector should be an important strand of its plans to regenerate the city centre.

The creative industries are a significant contributor to the UK economy – accounting for over 7% of GDP in 2008, and in the last decade growing at twice the rate of the rest of the economy. The Government's 2008 *Creative Britain Strategy*<sup>1</sup> highlighted the importance of the creative economy and directly linked it to the development and growth of urban centres. It states: "The vision is of a Britain in ten years time where the local economies in our biggest cities are driven by creativity."

## FUNDING

The refurbishment of The Shed was funded through Gateshead Council's capital programme and the running costs are paid for by the Council. The first stage of the development was to refurbish the ground floor of the former bed shop; as these costs were higher than anticipated, the first floor refurbishment was delayed until the following capital programme. This has now come to fruition and space is available for up to 25 more artists.

The project was headed up by Gateshead Council's Economic Development Manager Alan Jones, who drew

*We'd been working with a number of creative and cultural sector businesses across Gateshead for many years and we always saw how Gateshead was promoting big public pieces of art but wasn't that good at promoting indigenous, small creative businesses.*

**ALAN JONES, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT MANAGER,  
GATESHEAD COUNCIL.**

on specific expertise from external sources. He discussed the idea with Arts Council North East and, whilst they were unable to invest funds into the project, they supported the idea and offered an experienced secondee, Samantha Peace, to help develop the initiative. Gateshead Council paid for Samantha's project management role.

"The Arts Council was supportive because it's a workspace project and there is strong evidence that there is a high demand for workspace for arts businesses across the country and there's a particularly high demand in the city centres of Newcastle and Gateshead.

"In the light of other developments such as the Sage Gateshead and the Baltic, it was obviously a gap there. The other side of it is that we wanted to develop a working partnership with the local authority where we've got shared aims." Samantha Peace, Relationship Manager, Arts Council England North East.

## MANAGEMENT

Gateshead Council invited Nick James to manage the building on a paid basis, due to his unique expertise in setting up affordable artists' space Mushroom Works in Newcastle-upon-Tyne in 2005. The building is leased to the Mushroom Works Community Interest Company, which provides licences to the individual occupants. The Shed is run on a day-to-day basis by Development Manager Yvette Hawkins, whose post is funded through the Northern Rock Foundation.

The Shed's creative practitioners and artists are provided with the workspace free of charge (including

<sup>1</sup> Creative Britain: New Talents for the New Britain', DCMS publication in partnership with the Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform (BERR) and the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS), February 2008

## CASE STUDY: THE SHED GATESHEAD

full business rate relief from the Council), with each tenant paying an equal share of the utility bills – water, electricity, broadband - which comes to around £40 a month per tenant.

As it stands, tenants are on an annual licence offering easy-in, easy-out terms, with a month's notice required from either party to vacate. However, the Council is developing a policy to determine what the length of tenancies should be in the future.

Alan Jones explains: "We're looking at that now because what we don't want is those [creative and cultural] businesses to go in [to The Shed], become successful and for them just to stay there because it's rent and rate-free. We need to make sure there is space for them to go to in Gateshead.

"We are looking at agreeing a policy on tenancy lengths soon. One option is that the businesses stay for two years free of charge, and after that they pay 50% of the market rate for a year and in the third year they're expected to move on."

### MAIN ACTIVITIES

The Shed provides workspace for a wide range of arts professionals, including visual artists, a performance artist, graphic designers, fashion designers and an architect.

A lot of consideration goes into selecting the creative practitioners who will be given the opportunity to develop their business through working at The Shed. Only those who cannot currently pay a commercial rent elsewhere are eligible. The number of applications for the workspace has been high - the first phase receiving 60 applications for just 11 spaces.

In selecting the tenants, a brief is circulated and the shortlisted applications go to a panel consisting of members of the Council and arts professionals. Shortlisted applicants are interviewed about what they hope to achieve by participating in the initiative and what they feel they can bring to the space. The quality of their work and ambitions for their practice are important considerations when their applications are being assessed. As Development Manager Yvette Hawkins says: "Obviously we want businesses that are going to be sustainable in the long run and hopefully stay within Gateshead as well."

### COMMUNITY BENEFITS

Despite only opening in November 2009, the artists at The Shed are already developing strong ties with the local community. Christoph Oschatz, an architect, runs sculpture workshops with Creative Partnerships for two schools in County Durham, whilst Jennifer Douglas, a visual artist, recently had a solo exhibition at the Durham Light Infantry Museum, as part of which she was contracted to run workshops with local schools in the area.

Some of The Shed artists are planning to set up a life drawing class due to growing interest and demand from the public to learn this skill.

Yvette says: "Now that there are another 25 businesses moving in, we're definitely looking at developing even more community projects in the future."

The Council is now developing an Empty Shop Scheme, which installs art into empty shops to make the town centre more visually appealing and bring it to life. Part of this project will include a focus on developing community awareness and engagement and The Shed tenants are a key part of this.

With its highly visible location, The Shed is already starting to intrigue passers-by. Laura Jane Vest, a fashion photographer and tenant says: "In the beginning we did get a few locals knocking at the door thinking that we were some sort of a garden centre because of the actual shed we have in the foyer area. Now we get passers-by peering in between the vinyl window decorations to see what we're up to and what's new. There is a bus stop right outside and I love seeing the passengers' faces staring in when it makes a stop, especially when I am in the middle of a photo shoot. It's like a quick glimpse into my world, then the bus takes off down the high street."

### BENEFITS TO CREATIVE PRACTITIONERS

Whilst the positive impacts of The Shed are already evident in the local community, Yvette says the creative businesses are also seeing significant benefits. "What's special about The Shed is that it covers the whole of the creative industries and collaborations have been formed that people might not normally have thought about.

"We did an exhibition to showcase all the businesses that are in The Shed recently and it coincided with quite a large event that takes place in Newcastle and

## CASE STUDY: THE SHED GATESHEAD

Gateshead called The Late Shows. We were really worried that nobody would know about The Shed, let alone want to come, but we were delighted that over 250 people came down to the event over the course of four hours. There was a real buzz around The Shed."

The Shed is working closely with Northumbria University, which offers a module in professional development for the creative practitioners and artists to help them develop their businesses. The three-month module includes looking at business plans and future goals and how the artists can progress towards their goals.

### WHAT NEXT?

Commenting on how The Shed will build on its achievements so far, Alan Jones said: "What The Shed project has done is create a real interest in making sure that we give support to the creative industries across Gateshead and Newcastle. We have now set up a city development company called 1NG. This is 12 companies working across Newcastle and Gateshead who've seen the success of The Shed and what it can do and are now developing a study to look at how best to support the creative sector in the region."

### TWO OF THE SHED'S CREATIVE PRACTITIONERS:

**Aether & Hemera** is a lighting design and new media architecture partnership, set up in 2008, specialising in art installations and lighting schemes. Originally, from Italy they recently completed a fellowship at the Institute of Digital Innovation, University of Teesside. For this they created a prototype for an interactive 'Mood Chair' which changes colour in response to the sitter and the environment.

**Kate Eccles, Molly Barrett and Verity Quinn** are a group of visual artists and theatre practitioners whose specialisms include costume and textiles, puppetry, animation, theatre design, site-responsive installation and performance.



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*The Shed at night*

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