

Artists Access to Empty Spaces: Fact Sheet

The Artists access to empty buildings event (Weds 4 Feb, 2015) explored ways in which artists and artist led projects access empty spaces. This fact sheet draws together some of the key areas discussed and hopes to offer advice and guidance for artists hoping to work with empty spaces.

1. SHORT TERM LETS IN EMPTY SHOPS.

pros:

- › Spaces tend to be more informal (not slick, white cube) which can be useful for testing ideas and trying things out without the pressure of gallery standards.
- › Opportunity to show work in a 'non art' environment
- › A great way to experiment with new work in a public environment
- › There is minimal financial outlay
- › Visibility enhancing to audiences, businesses, potential clients and customers
- › A way of developing new artist groups and communities
- › Artists can potentially ask landlords for 50% of their business rates savings, thereby supporting heating, water and other costs.

cons:

Artists have to be prepared that they will be given little to no notice confirming that they can have use of an empty shop, meaning that you can't forward plan or advertise your event well.
There is also red tape to navigate – business rates, insurance, planning permission etc

pros for the letting agent:

It's important to remember that landlords benefit from artists making use of spaces whilst they are not being commercially let, you can discuss these benefits with them when trying to negotiate access:

- › Shops otherwise sitting empty, with the landlord having to pay rates

- › A busy, vibrant area and active use of a space, increases the possibility of the space getting commercially let. All of the spaces that SVA (Stroud Valley Arts) have used, have gone on to be rented commercially.
- › landlords may receive reduced insurance costs whilst the building is occupied/in use.
- › having spaces occupied reduces security risks
- › using meanwhile leases protects the commercial value of the landlords property, although if change of use is required through planning permission this may have an impact.

"Artists have a long established reputation for injecting creative energy into run down, redundant and empty properties in town and city centres. Over the last three years we have seen a much faster growth of the Pop Up phenomenon across the country due to crippling business rates which has led to the demise of the High Street and many town centre shops being left vacant.

This Pop Up success is due not only to the inspired DIY approach of artists but also through supportive council's discretionary rate relief schemes for arts and community use. In addition there is now an increased awareness in the commercial property world that landlords can save money through rate relief by allowing temporary use of their properties. However more recently, new changes to some local authority discretionary business rates relief schemes, means that some artists are finding it more difficult to continue to occupy temporary spaces within towns and cities"

Jo Leahy, Stroud Valley Arts

top tips:

- › Try to set an agreement up with a letting agent, landlord, or the local council, that once you have had one building they will help you to find another
- › Make use of government issued leases
- › Try to find an organisation who you can work with who will take on the risks and liabilities of business rates, or if you are a charity you can use the rate relief as part of your negotiation on terms.
- › Carefully photograph the empty space when you are given access to demonstrate the state of the venue, any existing damage etc so you can not be charged for damage you have not caused.
- › Make sure you maintain an excellent relationship with the landlord to ensure they trust you and in turn will trust other artists to work in this way
- › Renting from private landlords can be a much quicker and flexible process then working with councils
- › Business rates are not payable for the first three months that a property is empty, after this period the owner is liable to pay full empty property rates. The property has to have been in use for a minimum of a six week period before becoming empty in order for the owner to receive this 'rate free' period.
plymouth.gov.uk/movingoutofbusinesspremises

"Empty shops, buildings, disused garages, abandoned spaces have long been used by artists, makers and curators for exhibitions, studios, artistic experiments and performances. At best they have the potential to propel an artist's career into stardom (think of Damien Hirst's trajectory after putting on Freeze in an disused warehouse), increase the economic value of an area (ditto the value of said warehouse area) and create a new creative focus and interest. I used an old motor repair shop to curate one of my first exhibitions back in 2001, and this provided the perfect springboard to launch my own curatorial career. But finding out how to access a building and how to negotiate its use can be a daunting challenge. We've put together some tips, advice and useful resources to help you navigate the changing systems of taking over empty properties, with particular reference to the schemes and support available in Plymouth. We hope it will help you to try out something new and look forward to seeing a Plymouth 'facelift' soon, with a burst of creative activity."

Grace Davies, Director, Visual Arts South West

2. NON ART SPACES IN THE PUBLIC REALM

using existing public spaces such as parks, town squares, tourist attractions, car parks, shopping centres etc that have an existing, passing audience.

pros:

- › excellent footfall (ready made audience) and opportunity to engage with a wide public
- › less permissions involved in using 'transient' spaces

cons:

- › can require a lot of ringing around and coordination to find out who is in charge of making decisions about the spaces you might want to use.



Bristol Biennial by Stephanie Elizabeth Third

RESOURCES:

The Plymouth Plan - 2011-2031

The Plymouth Plan is the long term strategy for the city including the Council, the Health and Wellbeing Board, the Culture Board and other key organisations. It might be helpful to show how your project is contributing to the Plymouth Plan when applying for funding or when talking to decision makers in the Council about your plans.

(Policy 37)

'Delivering a distinctive, dynamic cultural centre of regional, national and international renown'.

The city will support a thriving arts and cultural sector and promote Plymouth's reputation at a national and international level by:

1. Developing a major international cultural programme stimulating trade and investment with cities in Europe, the US and China.
2. Establishing three cultural hubs in the following general locations:
 - › Royal Parade, Hoe and historic waterfront (to include Royal William Yard, Millbay and the Barbican)

- › North Hill / Tavistock Place (including the area around Plymouth University, Plymouth College of Art, Museum and proposed history Centre).
 - › Devonport (centred around Devonport Guildhall, market building and Plymouth Music Zone and Music Hub).
3. Supporting the cultural hubs and the places that connect the hubs as locations where it will be easier for people to occupy temporarily vacant spaces for artistic and cultural ventures and to develop and provide more music venues for local and underground talent, seeking to build on opportunities to stimulate further cultural opportunities across the city.
 4. Raising the profile of key cultural assets, including the Theatre Royal, National Marine Aquarium and Plymouth Arts Centre.
 5. Investing in the delivery of major new cultural assets, including the Plymouth History Centre.
 6. Delivering public art through key infrastructure and development proposals at key gateway locations.

Your Space

“Plymouth Your Space is about opening up opportunities to use vacant space, buildings and areas of land on a temporary basis. Ideas could range from pop-up shops, art galleries, temporary cinemas, outside dance events, floating restaurants, temporary salons to bike repairs or other good ideas which can draw a crowd”.

To submit an idea and for more information see:

plymouthyourspace.co.uk
yourspace@plymouth.gov.uk

Public Liability Insurance:

Public and Products Liability insurance cover is included with Artist + AIR membership with artist newsletter (a-n). “Specifically tailored to meet the needs of practising visual or applied artists based in the UK who require insurance against their legal liabilities to pay compensation arising out of injury to third parties and damage to third party property, which result from their activities as artists.

Membership - £36 per year.
www.a-n.co.uk/register-artist

Meanwhile Use for Artists

Extract from ‘Meanwhile Use for Artists: An introduction to temporary art spaces’, published by SVA:

What are Meanwhile Spaces?

As a policy Meanwhile was a key aspect of the Government’s ‘looking After Our Town Centres’ document, launched on 14 April 2009 which asserted the need to facilitate vibrant interim uses of empty property to generate increased activity and footfall thereby benefiting surrounding businesses and urban centre as a whole. ‘Meanwhile Use’ is the temporary use of vacant buildings or land for a socially beneficial purpose until such time that they can be brought back into commercial use again. It makes practical use of the ‘pauses’ in property processes, giving the space over to uses that can contribute to quality of life and enhanced places whilst the search for a commercial use is ongoing. Meanwhile spaces can be any type of empty property including shops, offices or industrial warehouses.

Benefits of a meanwhile space:

- › low cost commitment with a quick and easy way to create a new project.
- › create a space to test out new ideas in a public space to get feedback

- › profile raising with greater level of visibility
- › meeting new people and building new partnerships
- › generate income to get a project up and running onto more secure level.

What is a meanwhile Lease?

Meanwhile leases were established by the Department for Communities and local Government's (DCLG) Meanwhile Project to encourage the temporary occupation of empty town centre retail premises by non-commercial occupiers, who will be able to contribute to town centre vitality but who would otherwise be unable to afford normal commercial rents. The logistics of Meanwhile Use leases are that a tenant occupies a vacant property for an agreed short term period of until a commercial tenant is found. The tenant does not have the right to occupy and the lease can be terminated at any time (with a short notice period). Temporary occupiers might include voluntary or charitable groups, information centres, artists, musicians etc

An example Meanwhile Lease:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/meanwhile-use-lease-and-guidance>

USEFUL LINKS

www.vasw.org.uk/resources/meanwhile-leases.php
www.aliasarts.org
emptyshops.wordpress.com
www.meanwhile.org.uk
www.meanwhitespace.com

National Federation of studio Providers
<http://nfasp.org.uk/>

How to Pop Up
<http://wiki.emptyshopsnetwork.co.uk/index.php/>

HowToPopUp
 Empty shops workbook
<http://artistsandmakers.com/images/emptyshopsworkbook1.pdf>

Community right to challenge:
<http://www.plymouth.gov.uk/communityrighttochallenge>

Community Asset Transfer:
http://www.plymouth.gov.uk/community_asset_transfer_policy.pdf

Social Enterprise Fund:
<http://www.plymouth.gov.uk/socialenterprises.htm>

POINTS OF CONTACT

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