

Meanwhile Use for Artists

An Introduction to Temporary Art Spaces

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 the crippling business rates which leading 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.

This leaflet is produced by SVA, an artist led organisation based in Stroud, Gloucestershire, which works with artists, landlords and property agents to set up projects in empty shop properties.

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 centres as a whole.

'Meanwhile Use' is the temporary use of vacant buildings or land for a socially beneficial purpose until such a 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 or 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.

Business Rates Relief

The £500m of rates increases over the past three years has contributed to retail administrations and one in seven town centre shops being left vacant. Businesses are looking for all possible ways to avoid being liable for this massive hike in rates. Local Authorities pay 80% mandatory rates relief to charities. Research the latest information on business rates with your local authority to find out what relief is possible for your project.

SVA's use of empty shops and Meanwhile Leases

SVA is an artist led project for the promotion of contemporary arts, providing studio space for professional artists, an innovative and diverse artistic programme and the annual Site Festival in May which involves over 350 local, national and international artists. We organise a number of exhibitions and events during the festival, some of which take place in empty shops in Stroud Town Centre.

Since 1997 we have taken on over 30 properties as temporary spaces for exhibitions and events, working with local property owners and property agents. SVA has been using Meanwhile leases since 2009 and currently have three Meanwhile leases on shops in Stroud. There has been national press interest as seen in the Guardian feature on SVA and our use of empty shops in Stroud for the annual Site Festival.

For more information contact:

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www.sva.org.uk

www.sitefestival.org.uk

Useful Links:

www.aliasarts.org

emptyshops.wordpress.com

www.meanwhile.org.uk

www.meanwhilespace.com

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