

Needs Analysis of Creative Workspace in Bradford District.

By Rosie Freeman, commissioned by Bradford Producing Hub, March 2024.

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Introduction and Methodology

The lack of secure and affordable creative workspace in Bradford is a significant barrier to the creativity, growth, and sustainability of the sector. This is regularly and frequently acknowledged yet we have been missing data to back this up, and to better understand the needs of the sector.

Consequently, Bradford Producing Hub (BPH) commissioned this short needs-analysis from a set of survey data, plus additional information from 1-2-1 conversations with other practitioners and organisational representatives. The survey used a Google Form, filled out by 25 respondents (individual practitioners or individuals on behalf of organisations). The survey was shared via BPH communications channels, the Cultural Voice Forum, and BPH Visual Arts Social attendees.

In addition, we spoke to and gained input from strategic partners, including Bradford Council, East Street Arts and Bradford 2025.

This document has been compiled by Rosie Freeman (freelance), working alongside Alison McIntyre and Lisa Mallaghan (BPH) and other members of the BPH team in early 2024.

Context: where we are now

Most survey respondents are currently 'making do' with workspaces which are not fit for purpose. Conditions include spaces without lifts or ramp access (inhibiting physical access as well as creative practices which involved heavy goods), poorly ventilated space, spaces without heating and natural light, insufficient home-working set ups, 'borrowed' or in-kind set ups, cafe working, spaces which aren't lockable, which don't have running water, are damp, and/or are too expensive. But more than anything, respondents identify the insecurity of temporary spaces as having a negative impact on their work.

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For many, 'meanwhile' offers such as those facilitated through East Street Arts and Skipkko have provided much-needed workspace but on a temporary, insecure lease (e.g. two week notice period to vacate) which has restricted their long-term planning, fundraising, community and wealth building, audience development, and placemaking. On the positive side, these spaces have been affordable, allowing for those with low disposable income to have space, and the legal administration has been taken care of by a facilitating agency.

In some instances, 'meanwhile' spaces have become increasingly established cultural infrastructure where organisations have invested time and money, e.g. Common Wealth at Common Space, or Displace Yourself Theatre at The Place. However, many of these will soon be lost due to redevelopment, leading to wasted investment and increasing the demand for creative space.

East Street Arts are keen to continue to work with Bradford's creative sector - they are currently playing an important role in securing a new, permanent, space for Keighley Creative. However they also report facing barriers in contacting and liaising with landlords to open up new meanwhile use spaces.

A concerning proportion of Bradford's established cultural organisations need new homes urgently or within the next 2 years, including: All Stars, Bradford Music Education Hub, Common Wealth, Cecil Green Arts, Displace Yourself Theatre, Impressions Gallery, Shipley Print Studio, Tranquil Productions.

A number of potential new buildings and spaces have been viewed and discussed as part of this needs analysis and scoping exercise, including potential permanent and meanwhile use spaces:

- 26 Piccadilly (potential use by / for Bradford 2025, and 2026 / legacy)
- Sackville St (potential commercial let)
- Bingley Town Hall (medium-term meanwhile use feasibility study underway with CBMDC)
- Kirkgate Centre (meanwhile-use - existing ESA supported spaces, and remaining empty units)
- Bradford Resource Centre (scoping underway)
- Properties in the Heritage Action Zone
- Other empty spaces above shops

Developments that are already underway have not been included in this research, such as Keighley Creative and Bradford Arts Centre. It should also be noted that there have been a number of excellent examples of successful creative developments over the past 15 years, including South Square, Mind the Gap, Salt Works, Wharf St Studios. While these existing and new developments help meet need to some extent, the demand identified far outweighs the capacity that will be provided.

Feedback: what we need

The following is a summary of the findings from the survey and scoping meetings. The full data set from the survey is held by Bradford Producing Hub.

Specifications and uses

Although creative practices are myriad, a few different categories of spaces were identified:

- **Studio space for makers:** including darkrooms, ceramic work, painting. Appropriate sinks, ventilation and locks are all important here. Natural light is important for some, darkness for others.
- **Studio space for filming / photography.**
- **Big making space:** high ceilings, double doors, 1000 square ft.
- **Storage space:** for big and small items, important this isn't damp.
- **Public facing multi-use spaces:** for gallery, workshops, rehearsals, events, dance, other activities with kitchen facilities attached.
- **Small private offices and coworking space.**
- **Small meeting room / tuition style spaces.**

In addition, kitchen facilities, informal social space, outdoor areas, and reception space were all noted.

Accessibility is really important for many, in terms of physical access but also in terms of safeguarding and security. Lockable areas are needed for equipment and insurance. Public transport connections and nearby parking is also a factor, particularly for groups with complex access needs.

A number of established organisations are looking for new dedicated, permanent space, and have a clear spec / list of facilities required including BMDC Music Service, Capital of Cycling, Common Wealth, Impressions, Cecil Green Arts, and Summat Creative.

Terms of lease and access times

Most people are ready to move immediately or within the next 4 months. A few had a longer lead time and are beginning a search now, knowing they will be ready to move in the future and also knowing how long the search can take. Some organisations are flexible, such as those in Oastler Market who know they can stay until 2026, but would like to move sooner if possible.

There's a real mix in terms of when people and organisations want to access spaces. The nature of the sector is that people are often balancing other work and personal commitments, working hours can be varied and unusual, many people don't work 9-5. Secure 24/7 access would therefore be ideal. If a public facing gallery / workshop / event space can be secured, evening and weekend use would be essential.

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Rent and affordability

There is a real mix of budgets and expectations across the sector, reflective of the varied scales of creative work, stages of career and organisational development, and the legacy of lack of infrastructure. In addition, a reliance on meanwhile space can mean that people/organisations aren't budgeting for market rate rents and bills in their plans.

Some survey respondents are looking for / happy with using free / meanwhile use space, under £80/month, or occasional hires.

Individual artists tended to say they could afford between £80-200/month, some a bit more. For some it depends on securing external funding, for some it depends on if their facilities spec is met.

There are a number of individuals or small collectives who can afford about £300-500 per month.

There are at least 5 companies who can pay around £1000/month.

Finally, many expressed interest in daily hires for event/rehearsal space at around £50-100/day.

Potential Income Examples

Estimated Rental Incomes

These estimates have been kept intentionally low as they don't take into account heating and running costs of a building, which may add to the total cost for each of these examples.

- Individual artist studio or small office - £200/month
- Company - £750/month
- Rehearsal/workshop/public-facing event space (used 20 days/month) - £100/day (£2000/month)
- Meeting/tuition space (used 20 times/month) - £50/day (£1000/month)

Example Model	Monthly income	Annual income
1 company & 5 individual artists/small offices	£1,750	£21,000
15 individual artists	£3,000	£36,000
2 companies and hireable rehearsal/workshop/event space (used 20 days/month)	£3,500	£42,000
2 companies, 10 individual artists and hireable rehearsal/workshop/event space (used 20 days/month)	£5,500	£66,000

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Other feedback

Collective working - There was a clear articulation of the wish to be together, as part of a community, with social space, a coffee offer / kitchen facilities, and dog friendly spaces. A few people mentioned wanting to be part of collectives or cooperatives in order to establish suitable creative work environments. Two existing organisations/collectives are interested in this, other individuals expressed a wish to form new groups.

Locations - The need for increased and improved cultural infrastructure has been identified across the Bradford District. There is potential opportunity to 'zone' Bradford into distinct cultural areas or corridors, for example visual arts and print from Shipley / Saltaire to Keighley. It has also been clearly identified that Bradford City Centre is in need of more significant / high profile / high quality facilities, including more theatre / performance capacity and a contemporary art gallery.

Strategy and Benefits

Creative workspace is recognised in a variety of local strategies and organisations including those from Bradford Council, the West Yorkshire Combined Authority, People's Property Portfolio, and No Space Left to Play, to name a few.

Capital projects is one of Culture Is Our Plan's 10 targets:

<We need to> realise capital projects that will rehouse, reimagine and repurpose the District's culture and heritage assets.

We need to coordinate District capital projects to attract funds for levelling up and future prosperity. Opportunities include the Towns Fund, which will benefit Keighley and Shipley, and the government's levelling-up funds. A coherent capital plan could strengthen Bradford as a visitor destination. Creative workspaces can drive new projects, businesses and skills and training. They can also address the problem of inequality and access to culture. A capital strategy could also be a valuable part of the legacy plan for a UK City of Culture.

- From Culture is Our Plan, BMDC's 10 year cultural strategy.

Likewise, creative business is clearly identified as one of West Yorkshire Combined Authority's four themes in the Culture, Heritage and Sport Framework. Making sure that WYs is 'a place to grow creative businesses' is a pillar of the Framework, including 'supporting the creation of spaces for creative industry SMEs to locate and grow', and ensuring 'that a range of different models, including co-operatives, community interest companies (CICs) and social enterprises, can benefit from business support'.

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Community-led cooperatives such as the People's Property Portfolio are also trying to address the problem through cooperative community wealth-building.

The People's Property Portfolio was founded on the belief that places should and can work better for people.

Across the UK we see similar problems time and again: empty buildings, frustrated communities, and people being priced out of places that have grown in value because of what they have contributed to place and community.

Without owning the spaces they're working in, most people and small businesses struggle to survive in the property market. But what if the community owned the buildings? What if we could benefit from the social, environmental and economic value created?

- From peoplespropertyportfolio.co.uk

No Space Left To Play is a campaign and platform for reflection on, discussion around and action to change the trajectory of development in Leeds. It was founded as a response to the disappearing creative spaces in Leeds City Centre including The Tetley, Leeds Print Workshop, The Yarden on Sheaf Street, and other places. NSLTP have written and published on the benefits of independent creative spaces:

Growth and prosperity for independent creative initiatives are impossible without spaces where we can come together, build communities, learn, invest, and share what we do with audiences and future generations.

The presence of self-initiated, independent and often smaller-scale creative spaces is of fundamental importance to any city's creative, education and leisure sectors and its economic health. Such spaces contribute to our city in a multitude of ways, including:

- *Providing support structures for significant numbers of creative individuals, grassroots start-ups and micro-initiatives – the mainstay of the city's cultural sector. They generate and sustain communities, networks and spaces for person-to-person skills development and knowledge transfer that are critical to the development of creative practice and careers*
- *Offering unique opportunities for creatives to reach diverse and intergenerational audiences; for associated professional development; for paid employment as artists and in numerous allied roles including public engagement, marketing, design and catering; and provide essential spaces of friendship, allyship and care for cultural workers and audiences*
- *Bringing dynamic, nationally and internationally significant work that audiences would not otherwise encounter and help to grow the city's external networks and reputation*

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- *Creating points of local distinctiveness and making unique contributions to the city's cultural identity, providing content for marketing campaigns and attracting cultural tourists seeking the authentic culture of a place*
- *Drawing creative students to the city and helping to retain them post-graduation, contributing to the offer of our Further and Higher Education institutions and demonstrating to young people that they can forge viable careers here*
- *Providing alternative approaches to public engagement, offering informal spaces and facilities as an accessible, often free to access, entry point and counterpoint to more formal settings offered by our major cultural institutions*
- *Such spaces have little to no financial barriers, enabling everyone the right to access safe, warm and welcoming spaces – regardless of socio-economic background, ethnicity, class, gender, sexual orientation, disability or asylum/refugee status.*
- *In aiding the city to construct a unique and differentiated cultural identity, they further contribute to inward investment by providing employers with an attractive incentive for staff relocating from other cities*

- From nospacelefttoplay.org.uk

Summary

There is considerable potential for the development and increased impact of the cultural sector across the Bradford District.

Solutions need to be sought for the sector, with some needs being urgent due to imminent displacement of organisations due to changes in the District led by Bradford Council and private landlords.

Meanwhile use spaces remain useful, but the sector also urgently requires more permanent, fit for purpose space to achieve its full potential.

Organisations and individuals in Bradford District are looking for spaces with four key characteristics:

- **Flexibility** - multi-use, accessible by different people at different times of the day and week
- **Inclusivity** - access via lifts and ramps, rates are affordable to include those without significant disposable income
- **Community** - people want to be connected, part of wider network, generating local economies that will invested back into the city
- **Sustainability** - long to medium term leases which allow people to build their practice and community

Recommendations

1. **Connect** creatives and organisations with existing initiatives and opportunities, such as Heritage Action Zone and Business Improvement District.
2. **Make use of local expertise** - for example Mind the Gap, Bradford Arts Centre, South Square, People's Property Portfolio and Assembly Bradford have all led capital developments and have existing practices and business models that could be shared with the sector through advice, training and consultancy.
3. **Make use of regional support** - for example East Street Arts have offered to negotiate leases with landlords, connect with Future Arts Centres, and No Space Left To Play.
4. **Actively introduce people** who have similar interests in space - there's strength in numbers.
5. **Directly support collectives** who are ready to take on leases on fit-for-purpose spaces - e.g. PPP and CGA - and provide training, funding and mentoring to enable other people to take on space successfully.
6. **Bring together those with funds** - CBMDC Music Service, BPH, Bradford 2025, CBMDC - to discuss this report and make a detailed action plan.
7. **Act with urgency** - the cultural sector is being relied upon to deliver not only the successful UK City of Culture year, but also to deliver significant cultural change for Bradford as outlined in 'Culture Is Our Plan'. It is essential that this flourishing part of the Bradford economy is appropriately supported and enabled, through securing fit for purpose, long term 'homes' that will strengthen our organisations, increase audience reach, and secure long term impact.