



## *Creating Creative Enterprise Hubs: A Guide*

Marcus Westbury

A guide for community groups, artists and governments to creating creative enterprise hubs in otherwise unused spaces based on the Renew Newcastle experience.

*ewcastle*

<b>BACKGROUND</b>	<b>4</b>
International Context	4
About the Renew Newcastle project	4
<b>PART 1: THE NEWCASTLE MODEL</b>	<b>6</b>
The History of Renew Newcastle	6
How Renew Newcastle Works	7
What benefits does this approach create for artists and creative enterprises?	8
How have Renew Newcastle's projects evolved?	8
What benefits does this approach create for property owners?	9
What benefits does it create for the wider community?	9
<b>PART 2: GETTING STARTED IN YOUR OWN COMMUNITY</b>	<b>11</b>
Identifying appropriate empty buildings	11
Getting a wide cross-section of the community involved	12
Understand the legal issues	13
What will it cost?	13
<b>PART 3: STRUCTURING YOUR PROJECT</b>	<b>15</b>
Create or find a reputable structure	15
Approaching Property Owners	16
Development and planning issues	16
Managing the Risks	18
<b>PART 4: FINDING AND SELECTING PROJECTS</b>	<b>19</b>
Finding artists to be involved	19
Selecting the right kinds of projects	20
Match the Spaces to Projects	21
<b>PART 5: OTHER TIPS AND TRICKS</b>	<b>22</b>

<b>Keep it simple</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>Embrace temporariness!</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>It's not about the grand plans</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>Be transparent</b>	<b>22</b>

## Background

### About the Renew Newcastle project

Renew Newcastle began in late 2008 as an attempt to get artists and creative projects into some of the growing number of empty shops and offices within the Newcastle CBD. Despite the high number of empty spaces there was still a comparative lack of affordable spaces in which creative projects and initiatives could get started.

By the end of its first year Renew Newcastle had initiated more than 40 creative enterprises and projects in what had been empty buildings. These included art galleries, artist studios, web and graphic design businesses, small publishers, film and video studios, retail shops for locally made arts and crafts, fashion designers, a jewellery workshop, a milliner, and two photographic studios and galleries.

By the end of 2009 Renew Newcastle had about 25 formerly empty spaces under management. Just as importantly it had been the catalyst for renewed commercial investment in the area around Newcastle's formerly dilapidated Hunter Street Mall. Renew Newcastle had widely been cited by property owners, business groups, media and politicians as having been responsible for a turnaround in a formerly rundown area of the city. Commercial tenants had returned to the area for the first time in years and Renew Newcastle was gradually moving into other parts of the CBD.

Due to its innovative approach Renew Newcastle was also becoming a model that other cities and creative communities wanted to emulate. The clear success and the widespread publicity had led to over a hundred enquiries from people across NSW, around Australia and around the world who were interested in undertaking similar types of initiatives. This guide has been developed by the founder of Renew Newcastle Marcus Westbury as a resource for those groups wishing to undertake similar projects.

### International Context

Renew Newcastle was initially inspired by but not directly based on models that encourage artists and community organisations to utilise unused and vacant spaces in other countries. In Europe in cities such as Berlin and Amsterdam there is a strong history of legal, semi legal and illegal occupation of artists in vacant spaces. In Berlin, the role that artists and creative enterprises such as cinemas, bars and venues played in revitalising the city after the fall of the Berlin wall is often cited as an example that other cities could follow.

In the United Kingdom the situation more directly parallels the Australian experience. Industrial cities in northern England and Scotland (such as Manchester, Liverpool and Glasgow) have been transformed in recent years from manufacturing centres to places with rich and often cited cultural activity due to both informal and formal low budget the schemes for artists.

In many of these centres councils offer council tax exemptions to property owners who lease otherwise empty spaces to charities and not for profit groups – including arts groups. This creates strong incentives to make otherwise empty spaces available to artists and acts as a very cost effective means to stimulate a wide variety of cultural activities.

In the current recession – which has seen as many as 100,000 shops vacated in the UK main streets as the result of the collapse of several major national chains - the British Government has attempted to formalise and stimulate some of this activity across the country. The government there has invested about 3 million pounds in an initiative called “Meanwhile Space” which aims to “support individuals and organisations to bring buildings and land that have become temporarily redundant into constructive use.” There are also grass roots networks such the Empty Shops Network that coordinates activity and share expertise between groups on the ground across the UK.

While these examples are useful ones for governments to look at in the *absence* of the resources and incentives that they provide they are not ones upon which Renew Newcastle has been directly based.

# Part 1: The Newcastle Model

## The History of Renew Newcastle

At the beginning of 2008 Newcastle had been hit badly by a large-scale version of a problem that was evident in many old main streets and town centres across Australia and around the world. The old CBD of Newcastle had developed as a commercial precinct in the era of trams and public transport. The rise of cars and the construction of suburban shopping centres now meant that the old “city centre” had ceased to be desirable as a retail destination. Businesses had left the old city centre in favour of growing commercial shopping centres and office parks in outer suburbs. Many buildings were empty and many development projects were either stalled by the financial crisis or simply not viable. The city was emptying out and the old Newcastle CBD could no longer compete with the suburbs.

The biggest symptom of this problem was that there were approximately 150 visibly empty buildings in the Newcastle city centre. The sheer volume of empty spaces had reached the point where the decline had become self-perpetuating. It was attracting vandalism, violence and street crime. New businesses were reluctant to open in areas that had been in a spiral of visible decline for more than two decades.

The not for profit company Renew Newcastle was founded to make some of these spaces available on an interim basis to artists, creative enterprises and community groups. In theory this would benefit the projects that occupied those spaces and act as a catalyst for activating the city again. Despite a high level of interest from creative enterprises in accessing vacant spaces and examples overseas having shown that this could be a catalyst for urban renewal the process had not begun organically in Newcastle. Artists and creative entrepreneurs reported that while there were high levels of vacancies it was still comparably difficult to rent vacant spaces as the costs were prohibitive and the terms available did not match their way of working.

The Renew Newcastle model was developed in response to this problem. Artists’ patterns of working and the overheads involved in even long vacant buildings meant that the kind of initiative evident in the community was not matching the reality of the commercial property market. The market value of many of the buildings had fallen below the cost to their owners to use them. In many cases buildings were worth more to their owners as losses and deductions than as going concerns. An ordinary commercial lease – even a peppercorn one – created obligations and burdens on a property owner so great that it meant that there was a considerable cost in allowing low cost activity despite the obvious benefits to the city and ultimately to the property owner.

Renew Newcastle identified issues such as liability and insurance, tax and accounting ramifications (property values are assessed based on lease values so cheap leases can “devalue” a property on paper), and increased maintenance costs as key reasons why these

properties had become unleaseable for the kinds of market values that people were willing to pay for them. Effectively, the rental values had fallen below an artificial floor below which they could not be viably rented. By putting in place a structure that brokered access to these spaces cheaply Renew Newcastle was able to bring nearly 40 new creative projects and enterprises – both temporary and ongoing – back to the city in the first 12 months.

Within the first year, the first area of the city targeted by Renew Newcastle – the Hunter Street mall – was transformed from an empty area in the city to a busy centre of creativity and activity. By the end of 2009 many new commercial tenants were opening and activity and interest was returning to the mall at a level not seen in decades.

## How Renew Newcastle Works

Renew Newcastle is a not for profit company limited by guarantee. Renew Newcastle describes itself as “a permanent structure for temporary things.” Essentially Renew Newcastle borrows buildings while they might otherwise be sitting empty and makes them available to artists, creative projects and community groups. To date Renew Newcastle has worked directly with private property owners and not through government or with government owned buildings. It was founded independently of but is now supported by both State and Local government.

A key feature of the Renew Newcastle approach is that it is ongoing and temporary. Renew Newcastle does not try to permanently occupy buildings only to use them while they are empty. All projects are inherently temporary – although some can and do continue indefinitely – which means that the Renew Newcastle is not suited to building permanent arts infrastructure or facilities. It works best as a means of incubating new ideas and activities rather than for permanent projects.

Importantly Renew Newcastle legally doesn't lease the buildings but rather negotiates a license agreement (a contract) that allows the projects to access them. The analogy often used is that Renew Newcastle asks for similar terms as those used when someone puts a mobile phone tower or a billboard on a building – the right to access it for a particular purpose on agreed terms. Legally, this is important as it does not trigger the statutory obligations, rights, costs and responsibilities on either party that would go with a lease and are not required for this purpose. As a result the agreements are much easier for the property owner as Renew Newcastle asks for a lot less in the way of rights (and therefore causes a lot less in the way of hassles) than a normal leaseholder would.

Renew Newcastle drafts specific agreements for each property and allows the property owner to ultimately decide what kind of projects and which specific projects they will host. While it can vary in different circumstances, the default license agreement allows the “custodian” (each creative project) to use each building on a rolling 30 days basis. At any

time the owner can give each project 30 days notice should they receive a better offer. This solves concerns of property owners about having to miss out on taking a commercial offer or selling the property should an offer come along. Renew Newcastle has no “opportunity cost” to the property owner from participating in the scheme.

Legally Renew Newcastle, the property owner, and the project are all parties to a license agreement that clearly specifies each party’s responsibilities that vary from property to property. In most cases: the property owner agrees to provide the property for a nominal sum until they have a better use for it; Renew Newcastle agrees to hold the relevant insurance (always including public liability insurance but in some cases this could include some property insurances), contribute to taking care of the space and act as a manager of the space or spaces; and the occupier agrees to keep the space clean and presentable, pay all outgoings associated with them being there (such as water, gas and electricity bills), to keep it open as required, and to take care of the building until the owner wants it back. Any party can cancel the agreement with the appropriate notice. There is something in it for everyone.

### **What benefits does this approach create for artists and creative enterprises?**

Access to a space to work from, to sell work, to rehearse or to create is of immense value to creative projects that typically begin without much money. Renew Newcastle has opened nearly 40 new creative projects and initiatives in the Newcastle CBD since the project commenced in late 2008 and in most cases these would simply never have got off the ground if Renew Newcastle hadn’t created the opportunity. In virtually every case Renew Newcastle has given an artist, a small creative business, or a creative community the opportunity to take a major step forward in what they are doing. They are often realising a long held dream to open a shop, start a gallery or set up a studio or take their work to the next level.

### **How have Renew Newcastle’s projects evolved?**

Renew Newcastle is limited in what it can do and all projects are effectively temporary. As Renew Newcastle does not promise access to a permanent subsidised space the main thing it offers is a chance to test out a new idea or to try something without a lot of risk attached. Not all projects will succeed. There is an element of chance about which ones are there for the long term or not as it depends in most cases on the vagaries of the commercial property markets. As of the end of 2009 some Renew Newcastle projects had been there for nearly a year and look like continuing indefinitely, others have lost access to subsidised spaces after a period of months as new tenants have moved in.

Renew Newcastle's aim is to give projects long enough to determine if what they are doing is viable. Experience shows that realising that something isn't viable in a way that doesn't cost a lot can be highly valuable to fledging creative initiatives. Of the first group of Renew Newcastle projects, after 12 months some had closed, some had been relocated to other subsidised spaces under the scheme, while one had moved on to paying commercial rent. Other projects had evolved: one shop owner had long enough to realise that the shop they had opened was not successful but the classes that they were running from there were. After several months they decided to close the shop and continue with the classes from another Renew Newcastle venue. Many projects – such as short-term exhibitions and events – are only intended to be short term in any case.

As an indicator of turnover Renew Newcastle had initiated about 40 projects and currently had about 25 of those under management as of December 2009.

## **What benefits does this approach create for property owners?**

Property owners can benefit from Renew Newcastle as much if not more than the creative projects that use their spaces.

Having someone in the property provides immediate benefits for the property owner: it reduces vandalism, squatting and other problems associated with empty buildings; it can lower or even eliminate some maintenance costs; and it can lead to lower insurance costs as occupied properties are generally cheaper to insure. Depending on what the outgoings on the property are and how they are structured these can be real costs that are taken on by the occupier that the owner would otherwise have to pay.

More importantly for many property owners, the presence of activity in an area grows the medium to long term value of their property. Active shopfronts lead to increased traffic in area, attracts new interest and as the example in Newcastle has shown can lead to renewed interest from commercial tenants. Several of Renew Newcastle's shops and many others around them have found paying tenants in the last 12 months.

## **What benefits does it create for the wider community?**

The greatest benefits of an approach like this are not for any one group but for the community as a whole. Many of the creative projects that Renew Newcastle stimulates are small businesses – they create jobs, spend money in the city, generate economic activity, and make a city a more desirable place to live in, move to or do business.

For the city Renew Newcastle projects have generated a new story and brand of the city both to the local community and further afield. Stories about Renew Newcastle and promoting the Newcastle CBD as a distinctive and interesting place have appeared in international magazines, web sites, newspapers and travel publications. On a more immediate level the presence of more people on previously empty streets contributes to passive surveillance, improves safety and grows the long term value of the area.

## PART 2: Getting started in your own community

### Identifying appropriate empty buildings

The whole idea of a “Renew” project is to use spaces that are temporarily empty. It’s not about trying to create permanent arts centres or enduring infrastructure. It’s about reusing and recycling temporarily empty spaces to create hubs, clusters and pockets of interesting new things and catalysts for new creative activity. In your community it could be one building, a cluster of buildings or a whole street of them. The best candidates are places that have been or are likely to be temporarily empty for some time.

The key element of this approach is that it requires underutilised spaces. Typically underutilised spaces can be found in:

- Regional centres that have seen periods of economic decline and recession;
- Old main streets that have been losing out to major shopping centres or changing retail patterns;
- Stalled or partially consolidated development sites – where a developer or landowner has bought up a lot of land while planning for a development that is not yet ready to proceed;
- Transitional government land such as old schools, hospitals, community facilities or other places that might be sitting empty for a period of time until their long term use is resolved, they are sold, or larger schemes are funded.
- Upper floors of CBD office buildings with high vacancy rates or no tenants.
- Anywhere else there has been a market failure and property is sitting temporarily empty.

Suitable sites can be either privately or publicly owned. To date Renew Newcastle has worked with private property owners but government sites are also potential candidates if governments are willing and able to make them available on appropriately flexible terms.

In order to secure a property, the biggest single factor is the ability to communicate directly with property owners or someone empowered to make a decision on their behalf. Each project needs to involve a genuine dialogue between the owner and those who would seek to activate or use the building. While many similar schemes have targeted Real Estate agents Renew Newcastle has found that as a general rule real estate agents are often unwilling or unable to assist with this as it falls outside their normal operations and responsibilities.

While it is certainly desirable to target high profile sites or iconic buildings, it is often easier to target a group of buildings or an area rather than putting all your energy into activating a specific one. This offers more flexibility and options should a property owner not be

interested. It also offers the chance to create small scale examples rather than diving straight into complicated and potentially expensive sites. Ultimately though choice is determined via availability of suitable sites and in some regional centres or geographic areas choices of sites may be severely limited.

## Getting a wide cross-section of the community involved

“Renew” projects work best if they involve more than just the arts community or one part of the arts community. The level and ease of success will often be defined by how wide a group of people are actively supporting, representing and advocating the idea.

A good place to begin is by talking to local businesspeople, councils, artists, community groups, political leaders and others to gauge the level of interest. It is not necessary to have all these individuals and groups actively involved but it is important that a wide range of people know about and support the idea. While many people may not be particularly interested in the idea those that are can provide vital contacts, networks and support.

Unless you are targeting one particular site or building you will not be dependent on a particular public or private sector partner to succeed. There are many potential allies and strategies that may be effective. Don't spend too much energy convincing those that aren't interested but invest it instead in talking to and building up networks of those who are. Each part of a community may have a different reason to be involved in such a scheme and it is important that each understands what they can and cannot benefit from. Newcastle demonstrates that it is possible for business, the arts, and the wider community to all benefit.

In Newcastle, the project that became Renew Newcastle had the support of everyone from the regional Chamber of Commerce, to key people at the University, people within the local media, the body that represents inner city business groups and of course the local arts community even before the Renew Newcastle company itself was formally founded. When the company was created several of these people were invited to hold positions on the board.

An easy mistake to make is not engaging with the whole community. A project like this will not work if it is just about a local council, or arts or business trying to push an agenda through. While it mustn't be trying to please all the people all the time it must have the respect and engagement of all stakeholders and a clear reason and mechanism for them all to be involved.

## Understand the legal issues

These projects are not to be undertaken lightly. While there is an inevitable amount of trial and error involved it is vital to dot your i's and cross your t's at the beginning. A property – even an empty one – is a big responsibility. No one will trust you with an empty space unless you can show you're serious about it. Renew Newcastle got pro bono lawyers involved early to assist with planning the project, establishing the company, drawing up our license agreements and the other paperwork involved. Being able to refer property owners to credible solicitors when they asked legal questions also makes it much easier for owners to take the idea of lending their property seriously.

Whoever is planning and negotiating the use of the space understands the details of insurance, who would do what, and how and when to vacate the properties if a commercial tenant came along. Renew Newcastle's pro bono lawyers Sparke Helmore have developed great model license agreements for that organisation. These are now available to other projects and groups courtesy of the Arts Law Centre of NSW and the NSW State Government but we would stress that these are no substitute for getting your own legal advice – only a place for your own lawyers to start.

## What will it cost?

Unfortunately there is not simple answer to this question. The beauty of this kind of approach is that is VERY cheap for the amount of opportunities it provides and activities it generates.

The biggest factor cost wise is labour and professional services. Fortunately it is also the easiest to reduce if you have committed and skilled volunteers. Renew Newcastle went from nothing to managing more than a dozen spaces using only volunteer labour. Now that it is managing more than twenty spaces and is actively dealing with many property owners it has two part time staff members – a role that could be undertaken by volunteers if the number of spaces involved were less.

The key costs involved in establishing something like a Renew Newcastle project are:

- Labour and management time – this can be volunteer or professional depending on the scale of the project and the people who are around and able to help. Some of this can also be seconded from other roles (such as council staff, regional arts workers, etc) if costs are tight.

- Legal and professional advice –a good pro bono lawyer, accountant and/or auditor can save a lot of money here but if you have to pay for legal advice it could prove expensive.
- Insurance – at a minimum you will need to take out public liability cover for the spaces that you occupy. In Renew Newcastle’s case the policy cost a few thousand dollars to set up and a few hundred dollars for each property added. Other insurance will depend on the requirements of partners and property owners but may include property insurance.
- Company registration or incorporation fees. To establish a company costs about a thousand dollars. An incorporated association costs less.

Costs such as marketing, outgoings, and expenses will largely be determined by how you choose to operate. Renew Newcastle projects each pay the outgoings on their premises and a \$20 a week participation fee that goes towards the costs of the maintenance of the properties.

## Part 3: Structuring your project

### Create or find a reputable structure

No one is going to trust you with property if you can't show you are capable of managing and maintaining it and to do so you need to have a responsible legal entity overseeing the process.

Renew Newcastle was established as a not-for-profit company specifically to manage temporarily empty buildings. This allowed Renew Newcastle to custom design its own structure for this purpose and it is probably the best way to go if you are planning on managing multiple spaces or setting up a city or region wide scheme.

The key features of the Renew Newcastle structure are that it is:

- A not for profit company limited by guarantee. It is seeking but has not yet received deductible gift recipient status that would allow it to take tax deductible donations.
- Focussed on the specific brief of activating empty spaces for creative projects.
- A non government entity. It is not bound by the often quite constricting policies and procedures that would be required to follow managing spaces as a government managed and run entity.
- Respected by all the stakeholders from property owners through to the local business community and to artists.
- It is independent and not for profit. It does not seek to make money out of what it is doing. It is broadly independent from too much influence from those who might benefit from its activities including both property owners and tenants.
- It is a legal entity capable of being a party to a contract.
- Has diverse representation on its board of people with professional skills and stakeholder connections. Examples of relevant skills includes people from the arts, architects and urban planners, representatives of local business groups, accountants and lawyers and others with a genuine stake in the success of the project and skills and contacts to contribute.
- It is seen as an honest broker and not stakeholder. This is mainly due to the fact that it is not in itself a developer, a political lobby group or a group that is seeking to take over the buildings for its own purposes. It is also due to the fact that it is making no long term claim on the properties.
- Not engaging with polarising issues such as debates about development or long term plans. Individuals on the board, occupying the spaces, working for the organisation

or otherwise involved are welcome to have their own opinion but as an organisation Renew Newcastle remains neutral.

These are all good principles to keep in mind if you are thinking of establishing a structure.

In other places – particularly where the community is smaller and the properties involved are few – it may not be necessary to establish a separate structure. For only one or two properties a local arts council, business group, not-for-profit organisation or others may be able to take on the management role. If this is the case though, it is important to ensure that the arrangements are clear and transparent and that everyone involved has a clear understanding of what they are.

## **Approaching Property Owners**

Before approaching anyone with a property that might potentially be suitable it is wise to be clear about what you are asking for and what you are offering. It pays to be flexible enough to respond to the needs, constraints and desires of property owners but it is also best to do this from a position of being clear about what you want and are proposing.

Renew Newcastle negotiates directly with property owners. As a rule it finds them through networks of contacts, through direct approaches, through media and publicity, through inviting them to talks and events and in some cases they have approached us.

Renew Newcastle asks them for the right to access their otherwise empty building on a rolling 30 day basis for a suitable project. It is explained up front that the agreements offered ensure that there is no opportunity cost should someone want to use the building. If they want to sell or someone wants to move in, Renew Newcastle projects will move out. The agreements are license agreements (essentially direct contracts) rather than as leases to ensure that they are as tax and hassle friendly as possible to the property owner. Renew Newcastle generally likes to take the time to listen to the owners' long term plans and allow them to be involved in selecting the projects from a shortlist that we propose to them.

## **Development and planning issues**

Perhaps the hardest part to manage about temporary projects is the legal issues that are associated with any kind of development or use of property. Although “renew” type projects are temporary they must generally comply with the same rules, regulations and costs that would accompany a permanent development or any other kind of change of use.

This is an area where a local council can go a long way to make things either easy or difficult. A sympathetic council or even just the right person in planning and compliance can help you

work through practical issues and find ways to do things. An unsympathetic approach can create cost, complexity and confusion so quickly that it can kill of short initiative before it even gets started. Unfortunately, the rules vary from state to state, from council to council and in some cases even from street to street – depending on what the local plans allow or whether the area is under a heritage order for example.

As a result specific advice can be difficult to provide in a document like this. However, there are a few principles that tend to make things a little easier if they are followed. They include:

- Match projects to pre-existing uses. In most places any building will have an approval that has already been granted for a certain kind of use. It is much easier to continue this than to try to do something new. For an empty shop that was previously selling clothes for example it should not be too difficult to convert it for use as a retail outlet for local designers, as a gallery (which is often legally just a shop for art) or some other kind of comparable retail use. Many commercial offices can easily be converted into artists' studios if the work the artists are doing is similar to what was being undertaken before. Converting spaces and getting permissions for a whole new kind of use can be costly and expensive and may not be able to be justified if you think a project may only have 30 days in the space.
- Some types of projects are harder than others to get permission for. Anything involving noise, live performance, alcohol, heavy equipment or large crowds is harder to get permission for than simply retail, office, or exhibition type projects. This is not to say that you shouldn't try and do them but it is likely to take a lot longer and cost a lot more and should not be entered into lightly.
- Match projects to available spaces. While it would be great to be able to find space for every last good idea that someone has it works a lot better to find which spaces are available and then place in them the things that they are suitable for. This works better than starting with projects and looking for spaces particularly if the projects have very specific requirements. A photography gallery could potentially suit a wide variety of spaces relatively easily while a recording studio may take quite some time to find the right space for. "What can we do here?" is generally a much more practical place to start than "where can we find a space with...?" or "wouldn't it be great if?"
- Start with the low hanging fruit. Rather than beginning by taking on difficult projects it is better to begin with relatively easy ones and work towards more complex ones. Establishing good relationships with councils, property owners, and others is much easier when you have the runs on the board than when you are trying to open up

the first space. Build your reputation, your credibility, experience and track record before tackling the ambitious schemes.

## Managing the Risks

Risk management is a major issue with doing “Renew” projects. The risks in the world and the laws that apply to them do not change simply because a project is temporary. However, it can help to think about how to deal with them a little differently than might normally be the case in permanent projects.

The biggest risk management issue is safety. Safety outcomes when doing any project involving the public, or the use of space or anything else where there is a danger of people getting hurt are non-negotiable. However it does help to remember that in projects where budgets are tight, spaces are impermanent and time is of the essence that some safety outcomes can be achieved in a variety of ways. For example, you may not need to occupy the entirety of every space you use – if there are floors or parts of a building that aren’t up to scratch it can make a lot more sense to section them off than to spend the money required to fix them up. Spaces that are open to the public will have different rules and standards than those that are only open to people who work there so it may be possible to think about how to use spaces and not simply what needs to be done to them.

Choosing how to allocate spaces and what you use them for is a great way of allocating and managing risks. The aim should be to find ways to use places and spaces in a safe way rather than trying to spend money and time that you may not have to use them in particular way. The support of a local council and the advice of skilled professionals can be crucial in making these judgements but it is best to seek out people with a “can do” approach rather than simply a rule book.

Other kinds of risks can also be handled a little laterally. It does help to recognise the unique qualities of temporary projects. Most other non safety related risks are proportional to the scale and impact of what you are doing. The fact that projects aren’t permanent and can be ended with 30 days notice means that it makes sense to embrace the idea of experimentation much more than would be the norm for permanent projects. In many ways these kinds of projects are about experimenting with ideas that may not work – so expecting and managing how they might fail is part of the process.

When dealing with property owners, councils, and other stakeholders it is also extremely important to remember that utilising spaces temporarily does not simply create new risks but it reduces existing risk. It is always important to remind the people you are talking to measure the risk of doing something against the reality of doing nothing. In many cases the status quo includes vandalism, destruction, decay, crime, falling social cohesion (and underperforming property values) in our cities, towns and suburbs.

## Part 4: Finding and selecting projects

### Finding artists to be involved

“Renew” type projects work best if there are a wide range of artists and creative people involved. It is important that an initiative about the community represents a good cross section of the creative community and not simply a small clique and their friends. Reactivating a city or town works better if it gives a wide range of people a reason to go there and not just a small group of people have a place to hang out.

Renew Newcastle has experimented with and explored a range of approaches to finding the artists and creative people who have undertaken our projects. The methods you use will inevitably impact upon the quality and success of the projects. Renew Newcastle has sought projects by strategies including:

- Promoting the idea of Renew Newcastle, the calls for submissions and ultimately the projects themselves in the local and national media.
- Holding several open public meetings and information nights for potential applicants and supporters to find out more and ask questions.
- Using social networking sites such as Facebook (The Renew Newcastle Facebook group now has over 3000 members) and tools such as twitter to promote projects, deadlines, ideas and events.
- Using the internet and websites such as Etsy.com to identify and contact directly artists and craftspeople in the local community who make and sell creative wares.
- Visiting and/or talking to the organisers of local markets to identify suitable people and discuss proposed projects.
- Directly contacting local artists, designers and craftspeople to promote the opportunity to be involved.
- Holding regular public calls for submissions and promoting them through the web site.

The exact format of the call for submissions and the selection process for projects will depend on your needs.

Renew Newcastle has at various times had both open calls and specific deadlines for applications depending on the availability of projects and the length of waiting lists. All applications are reviewed and prioritised by the management of Renew Newcastle. They are prioritised primarily depending on their suitability for spaces available based on the written applications and face to face discussions with a short list of project proponents. Final go ahead is only given after meeting with the applicants and putting their proposals to interested property owners. Renew Newcastle’s experience has been that projects need to be curated and carefully selected due to the sheer range of factors, interests and stakeholders involved.

## Selecting the right kinds of projects

There is no right answer to the question “who are the right kind of people to take up these spaces?” The needs of a small city like Newcastle are very different from those of a country town, or of an empty suburban school. While an out of town site might benefit from clustering many similar things together and giving a small group of people a reason to go out of their way to get there, a dead city street will more likely benefit from a more diverse mix that will give a wide range of locals something to check out.

Ultimately it comes down to a combination of judgement, taste and what is being proposed from the local community. However there are some points beyond simple artistic criteria to consider that will apply when selecting projects:

- Try to think beyond either Arts OR Business. Renew Newcastle is neither an industry development scheme nor a straight arts projects. It works by allowing people to do whatever they are passionate about rather than forcing them into rigid category guidelines. Projects must be capable of succeeding on their own terms: if they need to make money they should be capable of it, if they need a community behind them they should be capable of demonstrating that, if they need a lot volunteers they should be able to show how they will get them. The most successful projects in Newcastle have ranged from the purely not for profit to quickly thriving businesses – each is capable of bringing people to the city and leaving a valuable lasting legacy.
- Look for “initiativists.” “Renew” type schemes are for people willing to take the initiative and make their passions happen. Most arts projects tend to concentrate on the funded arts sector but the temporary and uncertain nature of this approach does not particularly suit organisations who need long lead times and planning certainty. The ideal projects come from an individual or a small group who are passionate. Passionate people that want to make something happen and are willing to put in the hard yards to realise it are the best candidates. They are also not often effectively catered to by many more formal arts projects or business development schemes. This kind of approach rewards passion as much as “professionalism” in the bureaucratic sense.
- Look for people with a sense of responsibility. This is the flipside to the previous point – while passion is a great thing, you also need to ensure that people will be responsible and respectful of the opportunity they are being given and the property they are being entrusted with.
- Not entirely reliant on passing trade. If you are in a downbeat part of town encouraging people to open shops to cater for a passing trade may be a recipe for failure. The best projects are ones that will either bring people out of their way to visit them (such as a niche gallery for example), ones that have a secondary audience

or market elsewhere (such as on the internet or supplying their wares to other markets, galleries or retailers), or ones that have not much need for a passing trade at all (such as artist studios or creative services like writing or editing that can be done from anywhere).

- Think temporary. If projects only have a guaranteed 30 days in a space it is very important that they don't put into them more than they are willing to lose in 30 days. Encouraging people to put too much work into a space that they could soon lose risks generating a lot of bad will for the project. Selecting projects that need more security than that to be successful or that need to spend a lot of money up front to get started is a recipe for trouble.
- Projects that are not competing with existing businesses. This is the last but probably the most important point when it comes to keeping the local business community onside. There is no point subsidising and supporting new people to move into an area if all they are going to do is kill off what is already there. One of the key aims is to create a cluster of interesting new things that cannot be found elsewhere. The aim is to grow activity rather than simply compete for it.

## Match the Spaces to Projects

Matching the artists and creative initiatives to the right spaces is important part of getting the project right.

Some properties lend themselves to certain kind of uses – a big open space with large walls makes a great gallery, a small pokey shopfront probably doesn't but would make a great space for a local jeweller or craftsperson. Someone who makes their own small wares needs small spaces while a sculptor for example might need a large one.

Also think about how the public will react to different kinds of work and what the passing audience is likely to be. Putting a gallery of confrontational images next to a toy shop or a school is asking for trouble. As a rule the more prominent a space the more important it is to ensure that it is not merely managed responsibly but seen by the public to be managed responsibly. Each project is at least partially an advertisement to potential projects, property owners and the wider community – getting it right is the best promotion you can get.

## **Part 5: Other Tips and Tricks**

### **Keep it simple**

Once you start down the path of working with artists and spaces or place making and renewal there can be a lot of temptation to complicate and add to the project. At its core, these strategies work best when kept simple: matching ideas to available spaces. The decision to chase funding for non-core things or to move into other areas should only really be made if you are confident that the core operations can remain simple and efficient. It's the simplicity of the scheme that allows so many new things to access it. The most you complicate the process, the criteria, extend the timelines or otherwise detract from its simplicity the more you shrink the pool of potential projects and applicants.

### **Embrace temporariness!**

There is always a lot of temptation and pressure to expand from doing temporary projects into creating permanent facilities, schemes or structures. The whole point of this approach is to activate the temporary and embrace the ephemeral. If you or elements of your community want to take on permanent ownership, or build ongoing infrastructure this may prove to be a bad way to go about it. It is vital that long term plans, agendas and discussions are kept separate from temporary uses: nothing would destroy credibility sooner than temporarily using a building or a space and refusing to move out of it or agitating against the owners long term plans. No one will lend you a property again if you do that!

### **It's not about the grand plans**

It helps to think of this kind of approach as an exercise in thinking small rather than a grand vision. It is best to be guided by the question of "how do we make this space/ city/ community work well for the needs of creative people with limited resources?" rather than trying to implement a grand vision. If you get the small scale and bottom up aspect of the scheme right the bigger picture will take care of itself. There are no lack of great grand schemes but if the motivated people necessary to realise it can't be found it is probably not going to get anywhere fast.

### **Be transparent**

Everyone involved needs to know what they are signing up for and where they stand at all times. Schemes like this are largely based on trust and they rely on everyone giving a little bit so that they can gain a lot. There are limits to how much people can be expected to do

with the resources they are being offered and people need to always understand the constraints. The key thing for all involved is to be transparent about the terms being offered and what is being expected – there is no need to mislead anyone or overpromise things you can't deliver. Give people all the information so that they can make informed decisions.